

WOMEN AND MIGRATION(S) II



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20. Joy Gregory: A Woman on the Go! *Cheryl Finley*



Fig. 1 Joy Gregory, *Bridge of Miracles*, Venice, 1997–2001. Image copyright the author. All rights reserved.

West Indian emigrants, such as my parents, traveled [to Europe] with the hope that both worlds might belong to them, the old and the new. They traveled in the hope that the mother country would remain true to her promise that she would protect the children of her empire. However, shortly after disembarkation the West Indian migrants of the fifties and sixties discovered that the realities of this new world were likely to be more challenging than they had anticipated. In fact, much to their dismay, they discovered that the mother country had little, if any desire to embrace her colonial offspring.

Caryl Phillips, *The Atlantic Sound*

Slavery here is a ghost, both the past and the living presence; and the problem of historical representation is how to represent the ghost.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*

The journey to Elmina Castle, Ouidah, or Gorée Island is first and foremost a way of commemorating slavery at its purported site of origin, although one could just as easily travel to Portugal or visit the Vatican.

Saidiya Hartman, *The Time of Slavery*

On the twentieth anniversary of photographer Joy Gregory's seminal series *Cinderella Tours Europe* (1997–2001), let us take a moment to consider how ahead of her time this globe-trotting artist was, offering a series of photographs that recast fairytale notions of home and belonging, race, gender and nation, suggesting new roles within the ever-moving global economy of desire. In *Cinderella Tours Europe*, Gregory photographed famous buildings, monuments, and cities associated with the construction of a popular image of Europe, such as the famed Sagrada Familia Church by Antoni Gaudí in Barcelona or the Eiffel Tower in Paris. The places that Gregory chose to record on film comprise a list of the classic sites of memory on any tourist's photographic itinerary. Many of these sites have long held a place in the popular imagination of Europe, like the Alhambra in Granada or the city of Venice, itself a magical mirage of twelfth-century buildings floating on water. Other sites are associated with more recent historical and political narratives, such as the Palais des Nations or the 1936 Olympic Park in Berlin. But Gregory's images are anything but your typical tourist photograph. While she employs many of the conventions of tourist photography, from the use of vibrant color film to the conscious choice of the most advantageous angle, the one thing that is missing from each photograph is the tourist body itself, which has been replaced by a pair of very self-possessed golden slippers, both referencing the classic Cinderella fairytale and literally standing in for contemporary Caribbean people, for whom the possibility of such a grand tour is becoming more and more difficult. The result is something distinctly of the artist's making, a reengineered notion of the tourist snap, layered with a twenty-first century sense of diasporic memory.

Cinderella Was Black

Most of us know Cinderella from the children's storybook fairytale or the animated Walt Disney film.¹ The young woman that we picture has fair skin, blond hair, and blue eyes. She is rescued from a life of servitude by a little bit of magic, a pair of gold (or glass) slippers, and a handsome prince. Cinderella embodies a child's hopes and dreams and her literal rags-to-riches story symbolizes the classic battle of good over evil. Gregory's re-visioning of this popular fairytale imagines a post-colonial life for Cinderella in a global economy of tourism, labor and commodities, while trying to make sense of the past and present. In the fairytale,

The poor child had to do the most difficult work. She had to get up before sunrise, carry water, make the fire, cook, and wash. To add to her misery, her stepsisters ridiculed her and then scattered peas and lentils into the ashes, and she had to spend the whole day sorting them out again. At night when she was tired there was no bed for her to sleep in, but she had

1 *Cinderella Tours Europe* is based on the Grimm Brothers' version of *Cinderella*, first published by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, Kassel, 1812 (the English translation was published in 1857). The Grimms' version features a gold slipper, not a glass slipper, and Cinderella's stepsisters cut off pieces of their feet (toes and a slice of a heel) in attempts to fit the shoe. The most popular version of the Cinderella narrative, *Cinderella, or the Little Glass Slipper*, first appeared in Charles Perrault, *Histoires ou Contes du Temps Passé* (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1697), with the alternate title *Contes de Ma Mère l'Oye* (*Mother Goose Tales*). The classic Disney animated film was based on the Perrault version. See: Brothers Grimm, *Grimm's Complete Fairy Tales* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1993), pp. 80–86. *Cinderella*, dir. Wilfred Jackson; Hamilton Luske, Clyde Geronimi (Walt Disney Studio/RKO Radio Pictures, 1950). The animated sequel, *Cinderella II: Dreams Come True*, was released direct-to-video in 2002; see *Cinderella II: Dreams Come True*, dir. John Kafka (Walt Disney Pictures, 2002). A musical film version was released in 1964 with a score by Rogers and Hammerstein, starring the brown-haired, brown-eyed Lesley Anne Warren as Cinderella and Ginger Rogers as the Queen; see *Cinderella*, dir. Charles S. Dubin (Samuel Goldwyn, 1964). In 2003, a musical film version of *Cinderella* produced by the Wonderful World of Disney and Whitney Houston presented the first multi-racial cast, starring the pop music and television star Brandy as Cinderella, Whitney Houston as the fairy godmother, Whoopi Goldberg as the Queen and Paulo Montalban as the Prince; the Cinderella fairytale also has been adapted as a popular horror film based on a novel by Stephen King (*Carrie*, dir. Brian De Palma, United Artists, 1976), and as an urban love story (*Are You Cinderella?*, written and dir. Charles Hall, A fat-daddy-loves-you production, 1999).

to lie down next to the hearth in the ashes. Because she was always dirty with ashes and dust, they gave her the name *Cinderella*.²

As a young woman forced to slave away for an evil stepmother and two tortuous stepsisters, she could represent the ancestors of contemporary Caribbean people who were once enslaved by Europeans and over whose freedom and humanity a battle of good and evil ensued for centuries. The enchanted journey that Gregory documents with *Cinderella's* golden slippers envisions the ability of Caribbean people to transgress the borders of Europe from which they are increasingly restricted.

Caribbean-European (Dis)Connections

The impetus for *Cinderella Tours Europe* grew out of research that the artist was conducting in Europe and her former colonies in the Caribbean for the two critically acclaimed projects *Lost Histories* (1997) and *Memory and Skin* (1998).³ Over five months, Gregory traveled extensively in Belgium, Holland, France, Spain, Portugal, Cuba, Jamaica, Panama, Trinidad, Guyana, Surinam, and Haiti. Probing for evidence of the contemporary and colonial relationship between Europe and the Caribbean, she conducted interviews with people while collecting artifacts, recording sound, and photographing important sites of memory.

One of the paradoxes Gregory noticed about the people she met in the Caribbean was their strong connection to, and affinity for, Europe as a motherland, despite the fact that some were the (partial) descendants of enslaved Africans forcibly brought by Europeans to the so-called new world to work the sugar cane, rice, and tobacco plantations. The fruits of their labors helped to build Europe while stripping the Caribbean and Africa of valuable natural and human resources. Today, many of the

2 Brothers Grimm, p. 80.

3 *Lost Histories* was commissioned by the National Gallery of South Africa, Cape Town, where it was first exhibited in 1998. The exhibition of twenty salt prints also traveled to the Durban Art Gallery, South Africa, in the same year. *Memory and Skin*, Gregory's first installation of photographs, sound, video, sculpture and artifacts, has been shown widely in the United Kingdom, appearing at the Huddersfield Art Gallery (1998), the Fruit Market Gallery in Edinburgh (1998), and at the Royal Photographic Society in Bath (1999). See Joy Gregory, *Memory and Skin*, 1999 (exhibition catalogue); *Continental Drift: Europe Approaching the Millennium* (Edinburgh: Fruit Market Gallery and Edinburgh College of Art/Edinburgh Projects, 1998), 16–23.

world's poorest nations are located in these regions, including Haiti and Sierra Leone, to name just two.

Considering the effects of the transatlantic slave trade and subsequent ravages of colonial rule, it should come as no surprise that the familial bond between Europe and the Caribbean is complicated, to say the least. On the one hand, Europe symbolizes the evil stepmother of the Cinderella fairytale; on the other hand, it represents the free, happily-ever-after lifestyle that the handsome prince offers. Many Caribbean residents were lured to mother Europe during the post-war era with the promise of employment, better education, and the benefits of being at the epicenter of the empire, even in its decline. Gregory's parents emigrated from Jamaica to England more than forty years ago, settling in Britain's Home Counties, near the city of Leeds in Yorkshire.⁴ They represent the West Indian emigrants that Caryl Phillips spoke of in his novel, *The Atlantic Sound* (2000), who "traveled [to Europe] with the hope that both worlds might belong to them, the old and the new. They traveled in the hope that the mother country would remain true to her promise that she would protect the children of her empire."⁵

For those that remained in the Caribbean, Europe still represents a mythical, faraway place, a fantasyland and an unattainable dream, according to many of the people that Gregory interviewed. She asked them, "Where would you go, if you could?"⁶ Many responded with the name of a European country or city: England, France, Spain and Portugal were the popular countries, while London, Paris, Venice and Lisbon were the favored cities. The people that Gregory spoke to were very knowledgeable about Europe, from the colonial ties that bind them as well as from articles in the press, grade-school history and geography

4 Leeds now boasts a significant Caribbean population, mostly from Jamaica. The city center is approximately twenty-five minutes from Harewood House, an opulent English stately home built on 4,000 acres of rolling countryside in the late eighteenth century by the Lascelles family, who had considerable interests in sugar plantations in the Caribbean. Harewood House is one of the most popular national tourist destinations in the Midlands, where a sense of Englishness (read 'European') and national pride are bestowed upon the visitor with little mention of its historical and contemporary ties to the Caribbean. Present efforts on the part of the Heritage Lottery Fund and local scholars, activists and cultural workers are trying to make connections between the intertwined histories of Harewood House and the Caribbean more integral to public history.

5 Caryl Phillips, *The Atlantic Sound* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000) 20–21.

6 Interview with Joy Gregory, London, 9 June 2003.

classes, and their relatives who went there some fifty years ago or less. One person explained her dream of going to Europe: "My mother left us here and went to England in 1962; she never came home."⁷ Certainly, today's residents of most Caribbean nations rarely have the means to go to Europe to visit family or for medical treatment, let alone to take a vacation. Not to mention the fact that even if they did book a holiday, access is now restricted: they are required by some mother countries to have a visa, which is often difficult to obtain. For example, the United Kingdom now requires Jamaicans to carry a visa.

As a first-generation Jamaican English woman, Gregory has a special understanding of the complicated relationship between Europe and the Caribbean. She still has familial ties in Jamaica and is acutely aware of how freely she can travel there with her British passport, and how difficult it is for her Jamaican relatives to visit her in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe (and around the world). The artist also notes how painfully ironic it is that the people whose ancestors labored to build Europe are increasingly shut out (of her borders) and unacknowledged. Their fate seems to be part of a larger trend, or backlash, if you will, borne out of fears stemming from the globalization of labor, commodities and tourism, on the one hand, and of the formalization of the European Union, on the other. Timely in the making, *Cinderella Tours Europe* was completed at the close of 2001, just months before the European Union introduced the Euro in February 2002, and significant discussions about the consequences of a global economy began in the major news media and in artistic and academic circles.⁸

Many scholars and artists have commented on how the borders of Europe seem to be shrinking, becoming less accessible, and how the

7 Joy Gregory, *Objects of Beauty* (London: Autograph, 2004), 78. This scenario was not uncommon. Many Caribbean immigrants to the United Kingdom and European nations still find it challenging to return to the Caribbean, either to pick up the lives they left behind or to bring children and relatives to join them in Europe. After post-war Europe met its needs with the new workforce it had beckoned from the Caribbean, immigration laws were tightened, foreclosing the possibility of return for many.

8 *Cinderella Tours Europe* was commissioned by the Organization of Visual Arts (OVA), London in 2001 and first exhibited as *Cinderella Stories* at the Pitshanger Manor Gallery in London the same year. In 2003, *Cinderella Tours Europe* was exhibited at Archivo del Territorio Histórico de Álava, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain.

nation-states that comprise Europe are becoming smaller and smaller.⁹ In turn, identity is becoming more sharply defined both within and outside of these nation-states. As curator Gilane Tawadros has pointed out, “The most recent phase in the process of globalization has not dispensed with the categories of race and nation as defining identity within the public and private realms.”¹⁰ With globalization comes the fear of shifting populations and homogeneity. Yet as Tawadros explains, “the reality is that many of us now occupy the grey expanse that is international, inter-racial, and inter-linguistic.”¹¹

Cinderella Wore Prada

The shoes that have a starring role in Gregory’s *Cinderella Tours Europe* caught the artist’s eye in a shop window in Panama City. Hardly the designs of Prada, Manolo Blahnik, or Pedro Garcia, they are flashy, gaudy, and sexy nevertheless. An obvious allusion to wealth, the shimmering, faux-snakeskin shoes reference the contemporary yet age-old style of many Caribbean people, who proudly don showy gold jewelry and ornamentation as a status symbol.¹² This cultural practice stems from pre-Columbian times when gold was abundant and worn in elaborate designs, as part of headdresses, clothing accessories and body adornments. Indeed, it was this overstated opulence that attracted early European explorers, such as Christopher Columbus and Sir John Hawkins, who first made it big in the Caribbean after finding vast resources of gold there in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The exploitation of native Amerindian, and later imported African, labor

9 See, for example, the critically acclaimed exhibition and book, *Unpacking Europe*, which questioned the historical and contemporary meaning of Europe in light of the introduction of the Euro, stricter immigration policies, increasing xenophobia, and the project of globalization. Salah Hassan and Iftikhar Dadi (eds), *Unpacking Europe* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and NAI Publishers, 2001).

10 *Ibid.*, 10.

11 *Ibid.*

12 This fashion is not exclusive to Caribbean people; rather it is highly prevalent in hip-hop culture and urbanized global culture, as well as in parts of Africa where gold production is still a primary economic industry, such as in Ghana. In some poorer parts of the world, including the Caribbean, many people wear imitation gold, gold plate, and hollow gold jewelry, an indication that the resources that their lands once had have been all but depleted or that the highest quality goods are reserved for export.

made it possible for countries like Spain, Portugal, and England to reap vast amounts of wealth, while stimulating a demand for enslaved African labor. In the mid- to late nineteenth century, Chinese laborers were brought to many parts of the Caribbean, including Jamaica, where the declining numbers of formerly enslaved laborers had slowed the plantation economy. Gregory made three separate journeys to complete *Cinderella Tours Europe* and these took their toll on the shoes she took as her companion. "Each time I came back, I had to re-gild the shoes. I poured glitter over them and let them dry and shook them and then took them on the next journey in the same shoe box that I brought from Panama."¹³ Indeed, the performative nature of the artist's process demands consideration here. Gregory's three journeys, involving multiple trips and re-gilding of the shoes, on the one hand recalls the travel routes of the colonial explorers mentioned above (and even reinscribes a diasporic, post-colonial existence), and on the other hand, suggests the impracticality of (real) golden shoes and highlights their artifice.

Yet, Gregory's golden high-heeled pumps are not ashamed to be desirable. They are sexy and self-conscious, posing and acutely aware. On the steps of the gardens of Versailles, they seem to pause, as if waiting for someone to notice them, before running off, disappearing to catch a carriage that is destined to turn into a pumpkin. Like other artists before her, Gregory is also playing on the fetishistic quality of women's shoes, which, in classic Freudian analysis, stand in for and allude to sexuality and genitalia. In her extensive essay on the work of Lorna Simpson, art historian Kellie Jones has written about the relationship between the shoe, the body, and sexuality, calling the shoe "the ultimate fetish and substitute for the missing sexual organ."¹⁴ In Lorna Simpson's homage to Sartje Baartman, *Unavailable For Comment* (1993), the ghost of the famed Hottentot Venus breaks into the Musée de l'Homme to take back her labia, and leaves behind her shoes in their place. Simpson's black and white photograph shows a pair of suede pumps amidst the remnants of a shattered glass jar that had contained Baartman's dissected private

13 Joy Gregory, *Objects of Beauty* (London: Autograph, 2004), 124–25.

14 Kellie Jones, "(Un)Seen and Overheard: Pictures by Lorna Simpson", in *Lorna Simpson* (London: Phaidon Press, 2002), 51. Other notable works by Simpson that use the symbolism and fetishistic quality of the shoe include: *Bio* (1992); *Practical Joke* (1992); *Combination Platter* (1992); *Magdalena* (1992); *Landscape/Body Parts I-III* (1992) and *Shoe Lover* (1992).

parts. In *Cinderella Tours Europe*, the golden shoes remain empty and Cinderella is effectively disembodied, an act that allows viewers to imagine the body(part) of another in her place and tempts their desire to see themselves in her shoes. For example, in *Zaanse Shans*, Netherlands, Gregory's golden shoes, photographed in the extreme foreground, appear to straddle three classic Dutch windmills barely visible across the water. With the thoughtful positioning of the shimmering new shoes against the picturesque Dutch landscape, the artist seems to suggest the Caribbean woman's power over man, technology, the elements, and tradition.

For Gregory, the golden shoes symbolized the sum total of her experience in the Caribbean, as she put it, "becoming a personification of all the relationships and conversations struck up during four months of traveling."¹⁵ They became her muse and with them she entered the world of make-believe, embarking on a post-colonial Grand Tour around Europe to familiar landmarks that were significant to the people she came to know in the Caribbean. She took her golden slippers, among other places, to the city of love and lights, Paris, and to the Olympiastadion in Berlin, where in 1936 the black American athlete Jesse Owens won a record-breaking four gold medals.¹⁶ His victory, in the midst of Hitler's control of Nazi Germany and America's continued segregationist policies, symbolized a triumph over fascism and racism, both on the American home front and internationally. Almost imperceptibly, then, Gregory layers personal narratives of Caribbean longing and public narratives of the notable historic sites, thus relating the public to the private and the global to the local.

Cinderella, a Woman on the Go!

Gregory is a consummate traveler. She has set foot on nearly every continent and is aware of how deeply tourism affects the global economy. For *Cinderella Tours Europe*, she traveled as a tourist herself,

15 Interview with Joy Gregory, London, 9 June 2003.

16 Jesse Owens was the first American in the history of Olympic Track and Field to win four gold medals in a single Olympics. The significance of his victory is especially meaningful as he defied the racially scientific claims of biological inferiority that Adolph Hitler's Nazi regime was trying to assert against blacks, Jews, homosexuals and others.

photographing clichéd sites of memory in a style reminiscent of nineteenth-century European adventurers on the Grand Tour, who brought back photographs of the exotic, the native, and the so-called other. Instead of pyramids, colorful markets, and grinning natives, her golden slippers are posed in front of the docks at Antwerp, the Reichstag in Berlin, and the geyser at Lake Geneva. With this strategy, the artist shrewdly asks the questions: what is foreign, who is other, and from whose perspective are these determined? Exercising a bit of role reversal, Gregory took the workers/servants of the tourist economies of the Caribbean (symbolized by the golden slippers) on a tour of Europe and gave them a taste of what it might be like to be photographed as a tourist in the presence of monuments, sites, and cities that have deep, albeit complicated, significance to their past. Gregory has stated that in *Cinderella Tours Europe*, "Tourism is turned on its head as the viewed becomes the viewer, and the feared are rendered harmless."¹⁷ Thus she posed her subjects in ways that reference this complicated relationship, using distance and blurring to suggest their sense of belonging or disorientation.

The artist studied post cards, street maps, and city guides to determine the best view, angle, or location from which to take each photograph. Her method is as calculating as the marketing masterminds at Kodak, who designed a series of *Kodak Picture Spots* at Disney World and other amusement parks that direct tourists to the best vantage points from which to take pictures of loved ones in front of memorable sites that are guaranteed to be perfect souvenirs (the Disney Castle, for example).¹⁸ But Gregory uses this methodology to different design and effect. Aside from having a pair of golden shoes take center stage in the place of a person or a family group, there is often something slightly off, eye-catching, or out of place in this series of photographs.

For example, in the image of Cristo Rei taken in Lisbon, the famous, towering statue of Christ is shrouded in scaffolding, only recognizable by his small head, which peers out from the top. Virtually eclipsed by the restoration efforts, his block-like appearance with long, rectangular legs brings to mind a stiff robot or a small toy figure that a child might build from Lego. Placed in the extreme foreground, as if walking out

17 Interview with Joy Gregory, London, 9 June 2003.

18 See David T. Doris, "It's the Truth, It's Actual: Kodak Picture Spots at Walt Disney World", *Visual Resources*, XIV/3 (1999), 321–38.

of the left corner of the image, is the pair of golden shoes—confident, alluring, taking a stand. In fact, if one were to imagine the figure of a Caribbean woman standing in them from that point of view, she would overshadow the imposing statue of Cristo Rei, perhaps asserting her right to be there. As playful and girlish as the fairytale itself—filled with magic and mystery, Gregory’s photographs sometimes involve a game of hide and seek, where the viewer strains to find the pair of golden slippers in the image. Such is the case in another photograph taken in Lisbon, in which the pair of golden shoes is barely visible in front of the tourists gathered before the blinding, white-marble monument to Vasco da Gama on the shores of the Atlantic.¹⁹ That monument, in the shape of a stylized ship, celebrates the achievements of the sixteenth-century explorer, which heralded Portugal’s entry into the slave trade and preeminence as a world colonial power. During that period, a tenth of the people living in Lisbon came from Africa. Both the Cristo Rei statue and the Vasco da Gama monument to the ‘discoveries’ are framed so as to be in conversation with her former colonies in the new world, facing out across the Atlantic, pointing and looking westward. Together, Gregory’s photographs pay homage to the African presence in Portugal, while recognizing the power of Christianity as a medium of faith as well as a colonizing force.

In several photographs in the series, the golden shoes are placed in front of, behind, or hanging from wrought iron fences, bringing to mind historical associations of black people with being kept out or kept in: slavery, imprisonment, and denial of entry.²⁰ In Gregory’s photograph of the Palace of Westminster, the golden shoes are positioned on a granite pillar between wrought iron spikes, which were placed there to keep unwanted people (and pigeons) from sitting, loitering, or sleeping. The Palace of Westminster appears as a foggy mirage in the distance across the Thames, perhaps suggesting the outsider status of Caribbean people traveling to and within the United Kingdom.

Gregory’s photographs of the Alhambra in Granada and the Plaza de España in Seville are reminders that at one time North Africa conquered Spain. The Moorish conqueror Al Tariq invaded Spain in the

19 The 25 de Abril Bridge, celebrating the 1974 Carnation Revolution, is in the background.

20 See, for example, the works *Palace of Westminster*, *The Alhambra*, *The Geyser*, and *The Docks at Antwerp*.

eighth century, calling it Al-Andalus. The Moors remained in power, especially in the south, until about the fourteenth century, when they were forced back into North Africa. The ways in which they influenced art and culture in Southern Europe can still be felt today. Gregory's golden shoes stand outside of an iron fence that encloses the Orange Garden at the Alhambra. Once the headquarters of the Caliph during the Arab rule of Spain, the ornate palace is the finest example of Moorish architecture in Europe. Perched on a ledge of the Plaza de España, the golden shoes seem to interrogate that monument to national pride and accomplishment. Constructed primarily of colorful mosaic tiles called azulejos, themselves a symbol of Spanish identity, it is rarely noted how their origin and design was influenced by artistic traditions of North Africa. Both images reflect the aesthetic contributions of the Moors to Spanish art and architecture.

Becoming Cinderella

Joy Gregory is among a group of black British artists who came of age in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, which Stuart Hall has identified as the "second generation" of black diaspora artists.²¹ Many of these artists, the children of Caribbean, African and South Asian parents, who immigrated to the cosmopolitan centers of London, Leeds, Birmingham and Manchester in the 1950s and 1960s, were poised to fight for educational and exhibition opportunities that artists of the previous immigrant generation, whom Hall identifies as the "first generation", did not have. Many of these artists who came to Britain in the post-war period, including Aubrey Williams, Frank Bowling and Rasheed Arareen, worked in abstract and conceptual modes, creating pieces that often recalled physical and political aspects of the homeland they left behind, if not a spatial, metaphorical notion of diaspora itself, which Hall has referred to as "a landscape in the process of becoming abstract". The artists of Gregory's "second generation", including Keith Piper and

21 Hall's "first generation" of black diaspora artists was born abroad in Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia in the 1920s and immigrated to the United Kingdom in the 1950s and 1960s. The "second generation" was born in the 1950s (in Britain) and began to exhibit there in the 1970s and 1980s. Stuart Hall, "Three Moments in the History of Black Diaspora Visual Artists", The Raphael Samuel Memorial Lecture, Conway Hall, University of East London, November 19, 2004.

Ingrid Pollard, fashioned works in conversation with the turbulent 1980s, a period of civil rights struggle for black people in the United Kingdom, where the body and its signifiers of identification were often at center stage. Their works were characterized formally by photography, graphic arts and documentary styles that utilized autobiography, portraiture, and other strategies of visualizing the black body and issues related to gender, politics, and sexuality.

The experiences of women were also at stake for artists of the second generation, and Gregory was a pioneer in that regard. From *Autoportrait* (1989) to *Objects of Beauty* (1992–1995) to the *Handbag Project* (1998) to the *Amberley Queens* (1999) and *Girl Thing* (2002), Gregory has steadfastly honed a feminist approach to art making, infusing her narrative series with a form of activism that brings to the fore the concerns, desires and overlooked histories of black women. Key to her visual practice are aesthetic strategies that illuminate women's work, strengths, bodies, and complex identities. Gregory's obsession with fashion magazines as a teenager and her training in Communication, Art and Design at Manchester Polytechnic, and in Photography at the Royal College of Art, made her acutely aware of the visual devices of advertising, especially as it puts photography to work against (the image of) women. Her concern with the craft of photography has yielded prints of extraordinary beauty, delicacy and intimacy, and she often uses rare, hand-made papers to realize difficult nineteenth-century printing processes, such as the calotype and cyanotype, which are printed outdoors using available sunlight. Thus the artist shrewdly harnesses both the sensuousness of the photographic print and its unique visual language to turn advertising photography on its head, or as she describes, "to reveal the constructed nature of femininity and the feminine."²²

Gregory relies upon the (promise of) real and imagined possibilities of narrative fiction to create new works of visual urgency that question the very processes of looking, and are part autobiography, part performance, part ritual process. Gregory's particular brand of autobiographical work enlists her own personal archives of family photographs, self-portraits, vintage pocketbooks and designer shoes. More than just props, they say something about the artist to make larger claims. Hers is a form of

22 Joy Gregory, *Objects of Beauty* (London: Autograph, 2004), p. 123.

self-representation in which the self is visually absent, removed from the frame.

Gregory's now classic *Objects of Beauty* (1992–95), a series of twenty-one hand-pulled calotypes of the devices and trimmings that are used to define, shape and enhance women's physical appearances—literally their bodies and body parts—references the female body without picturing it. These alluring yet specimen-like images of stockings, false eyelashes, combs, bustiers and hair nets resituate for a contemporary audience the ways in which women like Baartman were subjected to scientific study and humiliating public exhibition in their lifetime. Emulating an ethnographic-scientific style, Gregory photographed tape measures with corsets and bustiers to reinforce this constant struggle with public perceptions of beauty and the pressures of conformity. A critique of the fashion industry and its promotion of unattainable and unhealthy ideals of beauty, Gregory argues for the normalcy of the full-figured woman, and *Objects of Beauty* could be an unacknowledged homage to the legacy of Baartman and the countless other women who have suffered in her wake. As Gregory explains: "People in different societies and historical periods have pursued radically different ideals and many of the most remarkable women of history have been well built, middle aged or elderly. Yet in contemporary western society the issue of beauty negatively affects almost all women, young and old regardless of race or social position."²³ The viewer is left to imagine the physical and psychic constraints that these objects of beauty conjure up. In similar fashion, Gregory has positioned a pair of golden slippers in *Cinderella Tours Europe* to stand in for the necessarily *make-believe* journey of the diasporic (post-colonial) woman returned home. For, as Stuart Hall reminds us, "diaspora always involves dissemination, but not necessarily a return home, to go back." As he reiterates, "it is a one-way journey, where home is a place of the imagination, a place to understand the current trauma and globalization of Africa (of home) and the cosmopolitan centers of Europe and the West."²⁴

Cinderella Tours Europe is a combination of two aesthetic processes, Gregory admits: collecting data and using that data to create a visual

23 Gregory, p. 28.

24 Stuart Hall, "Three Moments in the History of Black Diaspora Visual Artists", The Raphael Samuel Memorial Lecture, Conway Hall, University of East London, November 19, 2004.

narrative, or, in other words, listening to, witnessing and recording the desires of others and drawing upon their stories to create counter narratives. These processes create a tension between the public and the private, the local and the global, the personal and the group, fact and fiction. Cinderella's fictional European odyssey is thus a mixture of Gregory's personal location as a black British woman of Caribbean ancestry and the stories told to her by other Caribbean people of African, Amerindian, Asian and European descent. Performing fairytale magic of immense political dimensions for Caribbean people, she travels for those who cannot transgress the borders of Europe, her golden slippers symbolically performing their modest desires to visit a landmark or historical monument. This artistic performance/practice of fulfilling the hopes and desires of others resonates with the series *Where We Come From 2001/2003*, by the Palestinian-American artist Emily Jacir, who has traveled across the treacherous Israeli-Palestinian border at the Gaza strip to perform small deeds for Palestinians who, living under occupation, lack the proper documentation, such as a passport, to visit loved ones. One person asked her, "Go to my grandmother's grave in Jerusalem on her birthday and place flowers there and say a prayer." Presented as testimonials documented with photography and text, these small acts also include attending a sports event of a relative or having dinner with a friend.

The Location of Blackness

While firmly grounded in feminist practice, the issues raised by *Cinderella Tours Europe* also address the problems of mobility for post-colonial subjects in the present, not only because of border and visa restrictions, but also due to the painful ironies of the contemporary tourist trade. The traditional colonial economies of the Caribbean relied upon slave labor and the plantation system, which are now replaced with a service economy in which tourism and its ancillary businesses employ many working residents. The tourist industry markets the Caribbean as a place of white sandy beaches, water sports, relaxation, and service eliding the not-too-distant history of the slave/plantation economy. The people of the Caribbean are constantly bombarded with not only tourist advertising, but also the desires of North and South American as well as European tourists who propel tourism as a thriving business.

In other words, the interactions of tourists and service providers enact and bring to life the fantasies pictured in the ads, if not the fantasy of tourism itself. Caribbean workers are part of the marketing program: they appear as servants in advertising photographs, and in their roles as service providers actually perform (act out) the desires of visiting tourists. Yet while laboring in an economy driven today by tourism to the Caribbean, most Caribbean people can barely afford to travel as tourists themselves outside of the Caribbean. In this context, their wishes to travel as tourists to Europe's most recognizable tourist attractions may not seem that farfetched. In the same way that white sandy beaches may seem desirable tourist destinations, the sites and monuments of Europe are enviable attractions for Gregory's interviewees.

On many levels, *Cinderella Tours Europe* questions the very location of blackness, arguing for the presence of Caribbean people within Europe's borders. By re-visioning their place in the world, the artist offers alternative ways of being that engender a novel sense of mobility for Caribbean people and redefine fixed histories often secreted in the landscapes that hold symbolic markers of national memory. Gregory thus reorients our spatial imagination of Europe by inserting her magical gold slippers—markers for absent black bodies—into the landscape.

With this gesture, she enters into a rich dialogue with other black British artists of her generation, including Ingrid Pollard, Roshini Kempadoo, and Isaac Julien, whose works of photography, web-based media and film call for the recognition of a black presence in national, transnational and global landscapes. In the series *Pastoral Interludes* (1986), Pollard used hand-colored, black and white photographs and text to question the notion of Englishness by placing black Britons in pastoral settings away from the urban centers they are presumed to inhabit. Kempadoo's web-based series *Sweetness and Light* (1996) combines documentary photography with the layering possibilities of computer-based media to suggest the relationship between colonialism, ethnographic research and the contemporary realities of tourism in the Caribbean. Julien's three-channel digital video installation *True North* (2004), an homage to the unacknowledged legacy of Matthew Henson, goes beyond the troubled binary that charts the complicated social effects of post-colonial migration between Britain and her former colonies seen in his film *Paradise* (2002) to imagine a space for black people in a barren, ice covered landscape spatially and ontologically outside of

that oft-charted binary. Like Gregory, these works also question the relationship of the black body to histories of tourism, exploration and exploitation.

Rewriting, Reclaiming History

Gregory has taken children's fairytales, such as Cinderella, or popular historical narratives to update them with diasporic African figures, women and others who are frequently left out of the picture. With such a gesture, she asks, why can't a Caribbean woman occupy the happily-ever-after fantasy life of Cinderella? And why can't Gregory rewrite Cinderella's fantasy to include a tour of Europe and the places that have significance for the Caribbean people she interviewed? This isn't Gregory's first foray into rewriting popular narratives; rather, that contemporary art practice is central to her manner of working. In a similar fashion, in 1999, Gregory reinterpreted the Amberley Panels, a group of eight sixteenth-century paintings at Pallant House in Chichester, England, which depict the Amazon queens, noted historical figures, warriors and scholars. Gregory used contemporary women from diverse economic, social and ethnic backgrounds as her (role-) models and incorporated text in order to make the narratives of the queens relevant and accessible to today's audiences. In the resulting series of portraits called the *Amberley Queens*, Gregory photographed contemporary women of various racial and ethnic backgrounds as well as shapes, sizes and ages in roles traditionally portrayed with the image of white European women. Like photographers and installation artists Carrie Mae Weems, Renée Cox, Fred Wilson and Terry Adkins, Gregory can be counted among a group of artists working today who regularly create works of redemptive memory.²⁵

To Travel in Her Shoes

Gregory's interest in tourism has been shared by other contemporary artists of note, including the late photographer Tseng Kwong Chi, who,

25 See Cheryl Finley, "The Mask of Memory: African Diaspora Artists and the Tradition of Remembrance", in Daniell Cornell and Cheryl Finley, *Imaging African Art: Documentation and Transformation* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 2000), pp. 9–12.

from 1979 until 1990, made the *Expeditionary Series* (also known as *East Meets West*), the acclaimed body of self-portraits in front of famous monuments and sites of the world, calling attention to the fleeting nature of his physical self in the face of AIDS and the seeming permanence of the monuments. In addition, the conceptual artist Ken Lum in *There's No Place Like Home* (2000/2001), a billboard project installed at the Kunsthalle in Vienna in 2000 and at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam in 2001, took the famous words spoken by Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz* to confront the plight of immigrants and asylum seekers in Europe.²⁶ Also of note is work by the multimedia artist Keith Piper, whose digital collages of postcards, passports and city views followed the comings and goings of a make-believe post-colonial tourist in the urban centers of Europe in *A Fictional Tourist in Europe, 2001*.²⁷

In *Cinderella Tours Europe*, Gregory proposes an unconventional and little considered itinerary for *roots tourism*, a form of "travel-related identity-seeking by culturally specific groups to monuments, historic sites, museums and places of interest that aim to give a sense of their origins", also named in part after Alex Haley's popular novel *Roots*.²⁸ Instead of venturing "back to" Africa, to the slave forts and castles of Cape Coast and Elmina in Ghana or Gorée Island in Senegal, she takes her golden slippers to Europe, suggesting a less considered origin of slavery, implying a different notion of home. This is precisely Gregory's point. As Saidiya Hartman notes, "The journey to Elmina Castle, Ouidah, or Gorée Island is first and foremost a way of commemorating slavery at its purported site of origin, although one could just as easily travel to Portugal or visit the Vatican." Gregory's post-colonial Caribbean subjects have as much of a claim to Europe as they do to Africa.²⁹

26 See Salah Hassan and Iftikhar Dadi (eds), *Unpacking Europe*, 362–67.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 386–91.

28 Cheryl Finley, "The Door of (No) Return", www.common-place.org, 1.4 (July 2001). See also Cheryl Finley, "Authenticating Dungeons, Whitewashing Castles: The Former Sites of the Slave Trade on the Ghanaian Coast", in Brian MacLaren and D. Medina Lasansky (eds), *The Tourism of Architecture/The Architecture of Tourism*. (London: Berg, 2004), 165–88.

29 Saidiya Hartman, "The Time of Slavery" *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101.4 (2002), 757–77 (p. 764).