The Blank Slide of Decolonization

We are a student and a teacher from UWE's Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology. Melissa is doing her doctorate research on how black women's subjectivity is structured within psychotherapeutic training contexts, and Miltos is keen to learn from that. In the piece below, we try to capture our experience of co-facilitating a BLM process group, first as part of the curriculum and subsequently as an optional space open to all staff and students on the program. Our co-authored piece speaks to the origins, process, and desired outcomes of this initiative. While we are conscious of our separate voices, we tried to write it collaboratively. We dedicate this piece to Sula.

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It all started with a blank slide…

Never has a blank slide shined so black or fully. We are a black woman student and a white male teacher. Three descriptors suggesting a chasm of privilege and experience, oppression and inexperience. Tricky words: we are more than that and sometimes less. Learn more about us and the illusion will fade as our identities intersect and more mis(fortunes) become visible.

It did not happen in a vacuum. It absolutely didn't and perhaps it might never had if less benign eyes were cast upon us. If the social ecology was arranged differently. If the filter-less pixie hadn't spread some dust. If one of us got up on the wrong side of the bed that morning. If we let offence and 'please and thank you' dictate the space between us. Holding that space together. A black woman student and a white male teacher. Collaboration. Solidarity. Humility. A hint of cautiousness and critical reflection; are we missing something?

The first time we had no idea what would happen, humbled as we were by what participants brought. They filled the space with affects, stories big and small, silences and guilt. Did everyone feel as energised and demolished at the same time?
The second time, we entered it more knowingly. Bring the discomfort we wished. Were we too naïve? Flattened hierarchies, bodies connecting; or at least trying to. The wish to know history before slavery. Families and neighbourhoods; the first with secrets the latter without hoods.

We will do it again. A drop in the ocean as we whisper : Black Lives Matter.

And the whisper becomes an echo and the echo a song. A song we haven't heard yet. A song we have forgotten…

Entanglements. Enmeshments? Let's try something else.

For me this was about exploring the unknown and I felt excitement at the prospect of having some autonomy in understanding my intersectional existence.
I am me. I am Black but who's version of Black? Sometimes this is everything, sometimes this is nothing - enforced binary.
A moment of recognition sparked on a canvas of Nothingness – an acknowledgement that was intangible and unspoken, witnessed by many but understood only by a few – spiritual soul-talk.

I see you ; you see me.

The unchecked truth of an authentic moment in what can be an inauthentic space can inspire uncomfortable personal honesty. Is this what we hold? Did we spark revolution? The expulsion of convention and social performance? Did we provide a peek behind the curtain before the lights go on? Inviting others to take part backstage. Will they? And if so, how?