

Dementia, ageing and inscribing glamour on the black female body

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My mother Beatrice is 89. She can no longer remember me as her daughter. I am just someone who has the name of a child she once had. Like many others with dementia my mother remembers the past with great clarity, but the present, remembering to eat and who everyone is remains elusive, fleeting. What is intriguing though is her continuing insistence on glamour through make-up and hair.

Glamour was first used in the 19th century when it meant sorcery or magical charm and men, women, places, things and objects can be called glamorous (Dyhouse, 2010). During the 20th century glamour was linked with American cinema between the 1930s and 1950s and the screen and still photography of female movie stars. However, women like Dorothy Dandridge and Lena Horne were ambiguously located within Hollywood's regime of glamour because of 'race' and the 'tragic mulatta' space in which they were positioned. They performed glamour for Black women restricted to a mimicking of white women because of the racialized Hollywood space in which they found themselves (Tate, 2012). Glamour as artifice, performance and sophisticated feminine allure, is subject to changing ideas about femininity, consumerism, popular culture, fashion and celebrity (Dyhouse, 2010). Furthermore glamour can offer a route to a more assertive and powerful female identity (Dyhouse, 2010). In insisting on glamour –hair dyed black, pencilled brows and red lipstick-my mother could be said to resist her generation's idea that beauty comes from within and that artifice is a clear sign of vanity which must be avoided. In reaching for another body through glamour, one that does not 'look too old', could an old woman with dementia be asserting the right to still be

able to occupy the space of beauty? How does this make us see current beauty culture with its age, class and 'race' specificities?

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