

Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism

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This paper examines six different modes for declaring whiteness used within academic writing, public culture and government policy, arguing that such declarations are non-performative: they do not do what they say. The paper offers a general critique of the mode of declaration, in which 'admissions' of 'bad practice' are taken up as signs of 'good practice', as well as a more specific critique of how whiteness studies constitutes itself through such declarations. The declarative mode involves a fantasy of transcendence in which 'what' is transcended is the very 'thing' admitted to in the declaration (for example, if we are say that we are racists, then we are not racists, as racists do not know they are racists). By investigating declarative speech acts, the paper offers a critique of the self-reflexive turn in whiteness studies, suggesting that we should not rush too quickly beyond the exposure of racism by turning towards whiteness as a marked category, by identifying 'what white people can do', by describing good practice, or even by assuming that whiteness studies can provide the conditions of anti-racism. Declarations of whiteness could be described as 'unhappy performatives', the conditions are not in place that would allow such declarations to do what they say.

1. It has become commonplace for whiteness to be represented as invisible, as the unseen or the unmarked, as a non-colour, the absent presence or hidden referent, against which all other colours are measured as forms of deviance (Frankenberg 1993; Dyer 1997). But of course whiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it. For those who don't, it is hard not to see whiteness; it even seems everywhere. Seeing whiteness is about living its effects, as effects that allow white bodies to extend into spaces that have already taken their shape, spaces in which black bodies stand out, stand apart, unless they pass, which means passing through space by passing as white. Writing about whiteness as a non-white person (a 'non' that is named differently, or transformed into positive content differently, depending on where I am, who I am with, what I do) is not writing about something that is 'outside' the structure of my ordinary experience, even my sense of 'life as usual', shaped as it is by the comings and goings of different bodies. And so writing about whiteness is difficult, and I have always been reluctant to do it. The difficulty may come in part from a sense that the project of making whiteness visible only makes sense from the point of view of those for whom it is invisible.

2. This difficulty might explain my reluctance to embrace whiteness studies as a political project, even in its critical form. At the same time, I am aware that we can construct different genealogies of whiteness studies, and our starting points would be different. My starting point would always be the work of Black feminists, especially Audre Lorde, whose book *Sister Outsider*, reminds us of exactly why studying whiteness is necessary for anti-racism. Any critical genealogy of whiteness studies, for me, must begin with the direct political address of Black feminists such as Lorde, rather than later work by white academics on representations of whiteness or on how white people experience their whiteness (Frankenburg 1993, Dyer 1997). This is not to say such work is not important. But such work needs to be framed as following

from the earlier critique. Whiteness studies, that is, if it is to be more than 'about' whiteness, begins with the Black critique of how whiteness works as a form of racial privilege, as well as the effects of that privilege on the bodies of those who are recognised as black. As Lorde shows us, the production of whiteness works precisely by assigning race to others: to study whiteness, as a racialised position, is hence already to contest its dominance, how it functions as a 'mythical norm' (1984: 116). Whiteness studies makes that which is invisible visible: though for non-whites, the project has to be described differently: it would be about making what can already be seen, visible in a different way.

3. Whiteness studies is after all deeply invested in producing anti-racist forms of knowledge and pedagogy. In other words, whiteness studies seeks to make whiteness visible insofar as that visibility is seen as contesting the forms of white privilege, which rests on the unmarked and the unremarkable 'fact' of being white. But in reading the texts that gather together in the emergence of a field, we can detect an anxiety about the status or function of this anti-racism. The anxiety is first an anxiety about what it means to transform whiteness studies into a field. If whiteness becomes a field of study, then there is clearly a risk that whiteness itself will be transformed into an object. Or if whiteness assumes integrity as an object of study, as being 'something' that we can track or follow across time and space, then whiteness would become a fetish, cut off from histories of production and circulation. Richard Dyer for instance admits to being disturbed by the very idea of what he calls white studies: 'My blood runs cold at the thought that talking about whiteness could lead to the development of something called 'White Studies' (1997, 10). Or as Fine, Weis, Powell and Wong explain: 'we worry that in our desire to create spaces to speak, intellectually or empirically, about whiteness, we may have reified whiteness as a fixed category of experience; that we have allowed it to be treated as a monolith, in the singular, as an "essential something"' (1997, xi).

4. The risk of transforming whiteness into 'an essential something' might be a necessary risk, for sure. We have to choose whether it's a risk worth taking. But the risk does not exist independently of other risks. The anxiety about transforming whiteness into 'an essential something' gets stuck to other anxieties about what whiteness studies might do. One of these anxieties is that whiteness studies will sustain whiteness at the centre of intellectual inquiry, however haunted by absence, lack and emptiness. As Ruth Frankenburg asks 'why talk about whiteness, given the risk that by undertaking intellectual work on whiteness one might contribute to processes of recentering rather than decentering it, as well as reifying the term, and its "inhabitants"' (1997, 1).

5. Another risk is that in centering on whiteness, whiteness studies might become a discourse of love, which would sustain the narcissism that elevates whiteness into a social and bodily ideal. The reading of whiteness as a form of narcissism is of course well established. The 'whiteness' of academic disciplines, including philosophy and anthropology has been subject to devastating critiques (see, for examples, Mills 1998; Asad 1973). For example, a postcolonial critique of anthropology would argue that the anthropological desire to know the other functioned as a form of narcissism: the other functioned as a mirror, a device to reflect the anthropological gaze back to itself, showing the white face of anthropology in the very display of the colour of difference. So if disciplines are in a way already *about* whiteness, showing the face of the white subject, then it follows that whiteness studies *sustains the direction or*

orientation of this gaze, whilst removing the 'detour' provided by the reflection of the other. Whiteness studies could even become a spectacle of pure self-reflection, augmented by an insistence that whiteness 'is an identity too'. Does whiteness studies function as a narcissism in which the loved object returns us to the subject as the origin of love? We do after all get attached to our objects of study, which might mean that whiteness studies could 'get stuck' on whiteness, as that which 'gives itself' to itself. Dyer talks about this risk when he admits to another fear: 'I dread to think that paying attention to whiteness might lead to white people saying they need to get in touch with their whiteness' (1997, 10). Whiteness studies would here be about white people learning to love their own whiteness, by transforming it into an object that *could be* loved.

6. Dyer is right, I think, to feel such dread. Whiteness studies is potentially dreadful, and scholarship within the field is full of admissions of anxiety about what whiteness studies 'could be' if it was allowed to become invested in itself, and its own reproduction. We should I think, pay attention to such critical anxieties, and ask what the enunciation of such anxieties is doing. In terms of the constitution of the field, for example, the anxiety is not so much that the borders will be invaded by inappropriate others (as with traditional disciplines), but that the borders will themselves be inappropriate. But at the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, the anxiety about borders works to install borders: whiteness becomes an object through the expression of anxiety about becoming an object. The repetition of the anxious gesture, that is, gestures toward a field. Fields can be understood, after all, as the forgetting of gestures that are repeated over time. Is there a relationship between the emergence of a field through the enunciation of anxiety and the emergence of a new form of whiteness, an anxious whiteness? Is a whiteness that is anxious about itself – its narcissism, its egoism, its privilege, its self-centeredness – better? What kind of whiteness is a whiteness that is anxious about itself? What does such an anxious whiteness do?

7. Such an anxious whiteness would be different to the 'worrying' whiteness that Ghassan Hage critiques in *White Nation* (1998) and *Against Paranoid Nationalism* (2003). This worrying whiteness is one that worries that 'others' may threaten its existence. An anxious whiteness would be one that is anxious about such worrying: this white subject would come into existence in its very anxiety about the effects it has on others, or even in fear that it is taking something away from others. This white subject might even be anxious about its own tendency to worry about the proximity of others. So let's repeat my question: is an anxious whiteness that declares its own anxiety about its worry better, where better might even evoke the promise of "non-racism" or "anti-racism"?

8. Before posing this question through an analysis of the effects of how whiteness becomes declared, we could first point to the placing of 'critical' before 'whiteness studies', as a sign of this anxiety. I am myself very attached to being critical, which is after all what all forms of transformative politics will be doing, if they are to be transformative. But I think the 'critical' often functions as a place where we deposit our anxieties. We might assume that if we are doing critical whiteness studies, rather than whiteness studies, that we can protect ourselves from doing – or even being seen to do – the wrong kind of whiteness studies. But the word 'critical' does not mean the elimination of risk, and nor should it become just a description of what we are doing over here, as opposed to them, over there.

9. I felt my desire to be critical as the site of anxiety when I was involved in writing a race equality policy for the university at which I work in the UK, where I tried to bring what I thought was a fairly critical language of anti-racism into a neo-liberal technique of governance, which we can inadequately describe as diversity management, or the 'business case' for diversity. All public organisations in the UK are now required by law to have and implement a race equality policy and action plan, as a result of the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000). My current research is tracking the significance of this policy, in terms of the relationship between the documentation it has generated and social action. Suffice to say here, my own experience of writing a race equality policy, taught me a good lesson, which of course means a hard lesson: the language we think of as critical can easily 'lend itself' to the very techniques of governance we critique. So we wrote the document, and the university, along with many others, was praised for its policy, and the Vice-Chancellor was able to congratulate the university on its performance: we did well. *A document that documented the racism of the university became usable as a measure of good performance.*

10. This story is not simply about assimilation or the risks of the critical being co-opted, which would be a way of framing the story that assumes 'we' were innocent and critical until we got misused (in other words, this would maintain the illusion of our own criticalness). Rather, it reminds us that the transformation of 'the critical' into a property, as something we have or do, allows 'the critical' to become a performance indicator, or a measure of value. The 'critical' in 'critical whiteness studies' cannot guarantee that it will have effects that are critical, in the sense of challenging relations of power that remain concealed as institutional norms or givens. Indeed, if the critical was used to describe the field, then we would become complicit with the transformation of education into an audit culture, into a culture that measures value through performance.

11. My commentary on the risks of whiteness studies will involve an analysis of how whiteness gets reproduced through being declared, within academic texts, as well public culture. I will hence be reading Whiteness Studies as part of a broader shift towards what we could call a politics of declaration, in which institutions as well as individuals 'admit' to forms of bad practice, and in which the 'admission' itself becomes seen as good practice. By reading Whiteness Studies in this way, I am not suggesting that it is a symptom of bad practice: rather, I think it is useful to consider 'turns' within the academy as having something to do with other cultural turns. The examples are drawn from the UK and Australia, as the two places in which my own anti-racist politics have taken shape. My argument is simple: anti-racism is not performative. I use performative in Austin's (1975) sense as referring to a particular class of speech. An utterance is performative when it does what it says: 'the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action' (1975, 6).

12. I will suggest that declaring whiteness, or even 'admitting' to one's own racism, when the declaration is assumed to be 'evidence' of an anti-racist commitment, does not do what it says. In other words, putting whiteness into speech, as an object to be spoken about, however critically, is not an anti-racist action, and nor does it necessarily commit a state, institution or person to a form of action that we could describe as anti-racist. To put this more strongly, I will show how declaring one's whiteness, even as part of a project of social critique, can reproduce white privilege in ways that are 'unforeseen'. Of course, this is not to reduce whiteness studies to

the reproduction of whiteness, even if that is what it *can do*. As Mike Hill suggests: 'I cannot know in advance whether white critique will prove politically worthwhile, whether in the end it will be a friendlier ghost than before or will display the same stealth narcissism that feminists of color labeled a white problem in the late 1970s' (1997, 10).

Declaration 1

I /we must be seen to be white

13. I am going to start here, with this declaration that is often made within texts that are part of the genealogy of 'critical whiteness studies', as its one that's familiar. Let's take Richard Dyer, whose work has been important and crucial: 'Whites must be seen to be white, yet whiteness consists in invisible properties, and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen' (1997, 45). This 'must be seen' is a curious form of utterance. Partly, it is pointing to how whiteness rests on the very existence of white bodies, which 'can be seen' as apart from other bodies. So Dyer shows us a paradox: there must be white bodies (it must be possible to see such bodies as white bodies), and yet the power of whiteness is that we don't see those bodies as white bodies. We just see them as bodies: the history of whiteness can be traced through its disappearance as a bodily or cultural attribute. But the utterance not only describes a paradox, it also functions as a declaration that takes the form: 'Whites *must* be seen to be white'. As a declaration, this sentence would operate as a call for action: we *should* see whites as whites. You only call for an action when the action is not something that occurs in the present. So the statement is also a claim about the present: whiteness is unseen, and this invisibility is how whiteness gets reproduced as the unmarked mark of the human.

14. This book, which is, after all, white (by name and in colour) is about 'seeing' whiteness in cultural forms such as cinema. So we could say it 'sees' what it describes as 'unseen'. The claim to see whiteness works through a description of whiteness as having properties, as a colour: 'whiteness consists in invisible properties'. Whiteness as a racialised position becomes 'like' the colour white: an absence of colour in itself. The transformation of invisibility into a property clearly involves reification. It is easy and not necessarily very helpful to point out where texts reify the categories they seek to critique. What we need to ask here is what are the effects of the reification; is the transformation of whiteness into that which 'is' (invisible) an effect of how whiteness is being declared? In other words, does the request that we see white people as 'being white' ironically make whiteness 'invisible', or at least maintain this invisibility? I can repeat a sentence I used in my opening paragraph: *Whiteness is only invisible to those who inhabit it*. To those who don't, the power of whiteness is maintained *by being seen*; we see it everywhere, in the casualness of white bodies in spaces, crowded in parks, meetings, in white bodies that are displayed in films and advertisements, in white laws that talk about white experiences, in ideas of the family made up of clean white bodies. I see those bodies as white, not human.

15. The declaration that we must see whiteness, which could even be described as foundational within whiteness studies, assumes that whiteness is unseen in the first place. It is hence an exercise in white seeing, which does not have 'others' in view, those who are witness to the very forms of whiteness, daily. Of course, *White* does not claim not to be an exercise in white seeing. But by transforming what it sees into

a property of things, the power of this gaze seems to disappear from its view. Calling for whiteness to be seen can exercise rather than challenge white privilege, as the power to transform one's vision into a property or attribute of something or somebody.

16. I would also argue that if whiteness is defined as 'unseen', and the book 'sees' whiteness (in this or that film), then the book could even be constructed as not white (or not white in the same way). In other words, the argument that we must see whiteness because whiteness is unseen can convert into a declaration of not being subject to whiteness or even a white subject ('if I see whiteness, then I am not white, as whites don't see their whiteness'). Perhaps this fantasy of transcendence is the privilege afforded by whiteness, as a privilege which disappears from sight when it has itself in view. Now, it is important to state here that I am not locating the fantasy of transcendence in this book, which is one that avoids transforming whiteness into 'another identity'. Rather, I would suggest that when Dyer's text is read as a declaration ('we must see whiteness'), and indeed when whiteness studies becomes a declaration *about* whiteness, then it constitutes its subject as transcending its object in the moment it sees or apprehends itself as the object (*being white*).

Declaration 2

I am/we are racist

17. This might be a less familiar mode for declaring whiteness. But it is an intriguing mode. In the UK, the language of institutional racism has become part of institutional language. We can see this 'taking in' and 'taking on' of institutional racism within the Macpherson Report (1999) into the police handling of the murder of Stephen Lawrence. The Macpherson report is an important document insofar as it recognises the police force as 'institutionally racist'. What does this recognition do? A politics of recognition is also about definition: if we recognize something such as racism, then we also offer a definition of that which we recognize. In this sense, recognition produces rather than simply finds its object; recognition delineates the boundaries of what it recognises as given. As other social commentators have pointed out, the Macpherson report not only involved definitions of what is a racist incident (Chahal 1999), but also in defining the police as institutionally racist offered a definition, albeit hazy, of institutional racism (Solomon 1999). To quote from the report, institutional racism amounts to: 'The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people'.

18. The language of institutional racism of course was not, of course, invented by the report. The push to see racism as institutional and structural comes out of anti-racist and Black politics: it is a direct critique of the idea that racism is psychological, or that is simply about bad individuals. In this report, the definition of an institution as being racist does involve recognition of the 'collective' rather than individual nature of racism. *But it also forecloses what is meant by 'collective' and institutional by seeing evidence of that collectivity only in what institutions fail to do.* In other words, the report defines institutional racism in such a way that racism is *not seen* as an ongoing series of actions that shape institutions, in the sense of the norms that get reproduced or 'posited' over time. We might wish to 'see' racism as a form of doing

or even a field of positive action, rather than as a form of inaction. In other words, we might wish to examine how institutions become white through the positing of some bodies rather than others as the subjects of the institution (who the institution is shaped for, and who it is shaped by). Racism would not be evident in what 'we' fail to do, but what 'we' have already done, whereby the 'we' is an effect of the doing. The recognition of institutional racism within the Macpherson report reproduces the whiteness of institutions by seeing racism simply as the failure 'to provide' for non-white others 'because' of their difference.

19. We might notice as well that the psychological language creeps into the definition: 'processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping'. In a way, the institution becomes recognised as racist only through being posited as *like an individual*, as someone who *suffers* from prejudice, but who could be treated, so that they would act better towards racial others. To say 'we are racist' is here translated into the statement it seeks to replace, 'I am racist', where 'our racism' is describable as bad practice that can be changed through learning more tolerant attitudes and behaviour. Indeed, if the institution becomes like the individual, then one suspects that the institution also *takes the place of individuals*: it is the institution that is the bad person, rather than this person or that person. In other words, the transformation of the collective into an individual (a collective without individuals) might allow individual actors to refuse responsibility for collective forms of racism.

20. But there is more to say about the effects of this declaration, and what it does when institutional racism becomes an 'institutional admission'. How would we read such declaration? I am uneasy about what it means for a subject or institution to posit itself as being racist. If racism is shaped by actions that don't get seen by those who are its beneficiaries, what does it mean for those beneficiaries to see it? We could suppose that the declaration restricts racism to what we can see: after all the definition also claims that racism 'can be seen or detected' in certain forms of behaviour. But I would suggest the declaration might work both by claiming to see racism (in what the institution fails to do) and by maintaining the definition of racism as unseeing. If racism is defined as unwitting and collective prejudice, then the claim to be racist by being able to see racism in this or that form of practice is also a claim not to be racist in the same way. The paradoxes of admitting to one's own racism are clear: saying 'we are racist' becomes a claim to have overcome the conditions (unseen racism) that require the speech act in the first place. The logic goes: we say, 'we are racist', and insofar as we can admit to being racist (and racists are unwitting), then we are showing that 'we are not racist', or at least that we are not racist in the same way.

Declaration 3

I am/we are ashamed by my/ our racism

21. To declare oneself as being racist, or having been racist in the past, often involves a cultural politics of emotion: we might feel bad for one's racism, a feeling bad that 'shows' we are doing something about 'it'. But what does declaring one's bad feeling do? For example, what would it mean to declare one's shame for being or having been implicated in racism, which may or may not take the form of shame about being white? In Australia, the demand for recognition of racism towards Indigenous Australians, and for reconciliation, takes the form of the demand for the nation to express its shame (Gaita 2000a, 278; Gaita 2000b, 87-93). This demand

has of course been refused by Howard and his wittingly racist government. It might seem like an odd strategy, but I want us to think a little about the political consequences of the action that has been refused: that is, what would it mean for the nation to declare its shame for being racist? Let's recall the preface to *Bringing them Home*:

It should, I think, be apparent to all well-meaning people that true reconciliation between the Australian nation and its indigenous peoples is not achievable in the absence of acknowledgement by the nation of the wrongfulness of the past dispossession, oppression and degradation of the Aboriginal peoples. That is not to say that individual Australians who had no part in what was done in the past should feel or acknowledge personal guilt. It is simply to assert our identity as a nation and the basic fact that national shame, as well as national pride, can and should exist in relation to past acts and omissions, at least when done or made in the name of the community or with the authority of government (Governor-General of Australia, *Bringing them Home* 1996).

22. In this quote, the nation is represented as having a relation of shame to the 'wrongfulness' of the past, although this shame exists alongside, rather than undoing, national pride. This proximity of national shame to indigenous pain may be what offers the promise of reconciliation, a future of 'living together', in which the rifts of the past have been healed. The nation posited here as 'our identity', in admitting the wrongfulness of the past, is moved by the injustices of the past. In the context of Australian politics, the process of being moved by the past seems 'better' than the process of remaining detached from the past, or assuming that the past has 'nothing to do with us'. But the recognition of shame – or shame as a form of recognition – comes with conditions and limits. In this first instance, it is unclear 'who' feels shame. The quote explicitly replaces 'individual guilt' with 'national shame' and hence detaches the recognition of wrong doing from individuals, 'who had no part in what was done'. This history is not personal, it implies. Of course, for the indigenous testifiers, the stories are personal. We must remember here that the personal is unequally distributed, falling as a requirement or even burden on some and not others. Some individuals tell their stories, indeed they have to do so, again and again, *given* this failure to hear (see Nicoll 2002, 28), whilst others disappear under the cloak of national shame.

23. Indeed, white people might only appear within the document as 'well meaning people', people who would identify with the nation in its expression of shame. Those who witness the past injustice through feeling 'national shame' are aligned with each other as 'well meaning individuals'; if you feel shame, then you mean well. Shame 'makes' the nation in the witnessing of past injustice, a witnessing that involves feeling shame, as it exposes the failure of the nation to live up to its ideals. But this exposure is temporary, and becomes the ground for a narrative of national recovery. *By witnessing what is shameful about the past, the nation can 'live up to' the ideals that secure its identity or being in the present.* In other words, our shame shows that *we mean well*. The transference of bad feeling to the subject in this admission of shame is only temporary, as the 'transference' itself becomes evidence of the restoration of an identity of which we can be proud.

24. National shame can be a mechanism for reconciliation as self-reconciliation, in which the 'wrong' that is committed provides the very grounds for claiming national identity. It is the declaration of shame that allows us 'to assert our identity as a

nation'. Recognition works to restore the nation or reconcile the nation to itself by 'coming to terms with' its own past in the expression of 'bad feeling'. But in allowing us to feel bad, shame also allows the nation *to feel better or even to feel good*. This conversion of shame into pride also shapes the Sorry Books, which have been posted on the web as a virtual form of community building. Sorry Books work as a form of public culture; individual postings are posted, and together form the book. Each posting works as an apology for the violence committed against Indigenous Australians, but they also work as a demand for the government to apologise on behalf of white Australia (for a consideration of the apology as a speech act see Ahmed 2004. All Sorry Book websites accessed 13/12/2002).

25. Take the following [utterance](#). 'The failure of our representatives in Government to recognise the brutal nature of Australian history compromises the ability of non indigenous Australians to be truly proud of our identity'. Here, witnessing the government's lack of shame is in itself shaming. The shame at the lack of shame is linked to the desire 'to be truly proud of our country', that is, the desire to be able to identify with a national ideal. The recognition of a brutal history is implicitly constructed as the condition for national pride: if we recognise the brutality of that history through shame, then we can be proud. As another message puts it, 'I am an Australian citizen who is ashamed and saddened by the treatment of the indigenous peoples of this country. This is an issue that cannot be hidden any longer, and will not be healed through tokenism. It is also an issue that will damage future generations of Australians if not openly discussed, admitted, apologised for and grieved. It is time to say sorry. Unless this is supported by the Australian government and the Australian people as a whole I cannot be proud to be an Australian' ([see link](#)) .

26. Such utterances, whilst calling for recognition of the 'treatment of the indigenous peoples' does not recognise that subjects have unequal claims 'to be an Australian' in the first place. If saying sorry, leads to pride, who gets to be proud? I would suggest that the ideal image of the nation, which is based on some bodies and not others, is sustained through this very conversion of shame to pride. In such declarations of national pride, shame becomes a 'passing phase' in a passage towards being as a nation. Nowhere is this clearer than in the [message](#): 'I am an Australian Citizen who wishes to voice my strong belief in the need to recognise the shameful aspects of Australia's past — without that how can we celebrate present glories'. Here, the recognition of what is shameful in the past — what has failed the national ideal — is what would allow the white nation to be idealised and even celebrated in the present.

27. Such expressions of national shame are problematic as they seek within an utterance to finish an action, by claiming the expression of shame as sufficient for the return to national pride. In other words, such public expressions of shame try to 'finish' the speech act by converting shame to pride: *it allows what is shameful to be passed over in the very enactment of shame*. Declarations of shame can work to re-install the very ideals they seek to contest. As with the declarations of racism I discussed in declaration 2, they may even assume that the speech act itself can be taken as a sign of transcendence: if we say we are ashamed, if we say we were racist, then 'this shows' we are not racist now, *weshow that we mean well*. The presumption that saying is doing — that being sorry means that we have overcome the very thing we are sorry about — hence works to support racism in the present.

Indeed, what is done in this speech act, if anything is done, is that the white subject is re-posited as the social ideal.

Declaration 4

I am/we are happy (and racist people are sad)

28. A paradox is clear. The shameful white subject expresses shame about its racism, and in expressing it shames, it 'shows' that it is not racist: if we are shamed, we mean well. The white subject that is shamed by whiteness is also a white subject that is proud *about* its shame. The very claim to feel bad (about this or that) also involves a self-perception of 'being good'. There is a widely articulated anxiety that if the subject feels 'too bad', then they will become even worse. This idea is crucial to the idea of reintegrative shaming in restorative justice. A reintegrative shame is a good shame insofar as it does not make subjects 'feel too bad'. In John Braithwaite's terms, reintegration 'shames while maintaining bonds of respect or love, that sharply terminates disapproval with forgiveness, instead of amplifying deviance by progressively casting the deviant out' (1989, 12-13).

29. Shame would not be about making the offender feel bad (this would install a pattern of deviance), so 'expressions of community disapproval' are followed by 'gestures of reacceptance' (Braithwaite 1989, 55). Note, this model presumes the agents of shaming are not the victims (who might make the offender feel bad), but the family and friends of the offender. It is the love that offenders have for those who shame them, which allows shame to integrate rather than alienate. As such Braithwaite concludes that, 'The best place to see reintegrative shaming at work is in loving families' (1989, 56). The idea that shame should re-integrate is dependent on the fantasy of happy families; what 'bad others' are integrated into a social form that still depends on the exclusion of other others. The presumption here is that the family (and we could extend this to the nation as family) is good, and that bad feelings can only be good if they returned by an allegiance to social form.

30. It is hence no accident then that racism has been seen as caused by bad feelings. For example the reading of white people as injured and suffering from depression is crucial to neo-fascism: white fascist groups speak precisely of white people as injured and even hurt by the presence of racial as well as sexual others (see Ahmed 2004). But it has also been made by scholars such as Julia Kristeva, who suggests that depression in the face of cultural difference provides the conditions for fascism: so we should eliminate the 'Muslim scarf' (1993, 36-37). For Kristeva, cultural difference makes people depressed, and fascism is a political form of depression: so to be against fascism, one must also be against such visible displays of difference. There is more sophisticated version of this argument in Ghassan Hage's *Against Paranoid Nationalism* (2003), which suggests that continued xenophobia has something to do with the fact that there is not enough hope to go around, although of course he does not attribute the lack of hope to cultural difference. Despite their obvious differences, the implication of such arguments is that anti-racism is about making people feel better: safer, happier, more hopeful, less depressed, and so on.

31. It might seem that happy, hopeful and secure non-racist whites hardly populate our landscape. So we really should not bother too much about them. But I think we should. For this very promise – this very hope that anti-racism resides in making whites happy or at least feeling positive about being white - has also been crucial to the emergence of pedagogy within whiteness studies.

32. Even within the most 'critical' literature on whiteness studies, there is an argument that whiteness studies should not make white people feel bad about being white (Giroux 1997, 310). Such arguments are made in the context of right-wing dismissals of whiteness studies as being 'about' making whites ashamed. They may also respond to the work of bell hooks (1989) and Audre Lorde (1984), who both emphasise how feeling bad about racism or white privilege can function as a form of self-centeredness, which returns the white subject 'back into' itself, as the one whose feelings matter. hooks in particular has considered guilt as the performance rather than undoing of whiteness. Guilt certainly works as a 'block' to hearing the claims of others in a re-turning to the white self. But within Whiteness Studies, does the refusal to make whiteness studies be about 'feeling bad' allow the white subject to 'turn towards' something else? What is the something else? Does this refusal to experience shame and guilt work to turn Whiteness Studies away from the white subject?

33. I would suggest that Whiteness Studies does not turn away from the white subject in turning away from bad feeling. Instead, I would even suggest that Whiteness Studies might even produce the white subject as the origin of good feeling. Ruth Frankenberg has argued that if whiteness is emptied out of any content other than that which is associated with racism or capitalism 'this leaves progressive whites apparently without any genealogy' (1993, 232). The implication of her argument is in my view unfortunate. It assumes the subjects of Whiteness Studies are 'progressive whites', and that the task of Whiteness Studies is to provide such subjects with a genealogy. In other words, whiteness studies would be about making 'anti-racist' whites feel better, as it would restore to them a positive identity. Kincheloe and Steinberg make this point directly when they comment on: 'the necessity of creating a positive, proud, attractive antiracist white identity' (1998, 34). The shift from the critique of white guilt to this claim to a proud anti-racism is not a necessary one. But it is telling shift. The white response to the Black critique of shame and guilt has enabled here a 'turn' towards pride, which is not then a turn away from the white subject and towards something else, but another way of 're-turning' to the white subject. Indeed, the most astonishing aspect of this list of adjectives (positive, proud, attractive, antiracist) is that 'antiracism' becomes a white attribute: *indeed, anti-racism may even provide the conditions for a new discourse of white pride.*

34. Here, antiracism becomes a matter of generating a positive white identity, an identity that makes the white subject feel good about itself. The declaration of such an identity is not in my view an anti racist action. Indeed, it sustains the narcissism of whiteness and allows whiteness studies to make white subjects feel good about themselves, by feeling good about 'their' antiracism. One wonders again what happens to bad feeling in this performance of good, happy whiteness. If bad feeling is partly an effect of racism, and racism is accepted as ongoing in the present (rather than what happened in the past), then who gets to feel bad about racism? One suspects that happy whiteness, even when this happiness is *about* anti-racism, is what allows racism to remain the burden of non-white others. Indeed, I suspect that bad feelings of racism (hatred, fear, pain) are projected onto the bodies of unhappy racist whites, which allows progressive whites to be happy with themselves in the face of continued racism towards non-white others.

Declaration 5

I/we have studied whiteness (and racist people are ignorant)

35. This declaration is a reminder that we should not forget the 'Studies' in 'Whiteness Studies'. That word is also making a claim. Many have commented already on how whiteness is right at the center of intellectual history, but it is an absent centre: it is not studied explicitly, as it were. As Michele Fine has argued, 'whiteness has remained both unmarked and unstudied' (1997, 58). Her article appears within an excellent collection of essays, *Off White*. As Fine astutely observes, 'paradoxically, to get *off* white, as the title of the collection suggests, first requires that we get on it in critical and politically transformative ways' (1997, 58).

36. The organizing impulse within Whiteness Studies is that the studying of whiteness will be critical and transformative, quite understandably, and even quite rightly. But it might be opportune to question even this most founding assumption. The project of critical Whiteness Studies is about showing the 'mark' of the unmarked, about seeing the privilege concealed by the universality of 'the human'. But what I want to question is whether learning to see the mark of privilege involves unlearning that privilege. What are we learning when we learn to see privilege? (Of course this question reminds us that the project of 'learning to see' is addressed to privileged subjects.)

37. Of course, if you live and work in the world of education, then you are likely to assume that learning is a good thing; we would probably share a resistance to defining learning as the achievement of learning outcomes, but have a view of learning as the opening up the capacity to think critically about what is before us. But one problem with being so used to the learning = good equation, is that we might even think that everyone should aspire to such learning, and that the absence of such learning is the 'reason' for inequality and injustice (cf. papers by Aveling and Nicoll in this issue). There is of course a class elitism that presumes university is the place we go to learn, let alone to think. This is the same elitism that says that those who don't get to university, have failed, or are deprived. The aspiration of 'university for all' offers at one level a vital hope for the democratization of an elite culture, but at another, sustains the bourgeois illusion that others 'would want' the culture that is constituted precisely through not being available to all.

38. Now, this elitism has specific implications for racism. It is often assumed that if people learnt not just about whiteness, but about the world as such, then they would be 'less likely' to be racists. As Fiona Nicoll (1999) and Ghassan Hage (1998) have argued, the discourse of tolerance involves a presumption that racism is caused by ignorance, and that anti-racism will come about through more knowledge. We must contest the classism of the assumption that racism is caused by ignorance – which allows racism to be seen as what the working classes (or other less literate others) do. How does this classism travel into the subject-constitution of whiteness studies?

39. I suspect it does, or at least that it could do. Phil Cohen for example has suggested that whiteness has 'in the last few years, undergone a radical reinvention'; 'it is a self-conscious and critical, not taken for granted or disavowed' (1997, 244). He is talking about whiteness here, rather than whiteness studies. But who is being addressed in this affirmation of a new whiteness? This idea of a new whiteness, which is 'self-conscious and critical', is about a particular kind of white subject, one that is not equally available to all whites, let alone any others. I have already suggested that the term 'critical' functions within the academy to differentiate

between the good and the bad, the progressive and the conservative, where 'we' always line up with the former. The term 'critical' might even suggest the production of 'good knowledge'. The term 'self-conscious' has its own genealogy; its own conditions of emergence. A self-conscious subject is one that turns its gaze towards itself, and that might manage itself, or reflect upon itself, or even turn itself into a project (Rose 1999). Such a self-conscious subject is classically a bourgeois subject, one who has the time and resources to be a self, as a subject that has depth which one can be conscious about, in the first place (Skeggs 2004). The term 'self-conscious' might even suggest the production of a 'good subject', one who has positive attributes.

40. The fantasy that organises this new white subject/knowledge formation is that studying whiteness will make white people, 'self-conscious and critical'. This is a progressive story: the white subject, by learning (about themselves?) will no longer take for granted or even disavow their whiteness. The fantasy presumes that to be critical and self-conscious is a good thing, and is even the condition of possibility for anti-racism (see also paper by Westcott in this issue). I suspect one can be a self-conscious white racist, but that's beside the point. The point is that racism is not simply about 'ignorance', or stereotypical knowledge. We can learn about racism and express white privilege in the very presumption of the entitlement to learn or to self-consciousness. We could even recall here the Marxian critique of self-consciousness as predicated on the distinction between mental and manual labour, and as supported by the concealment of the manual labour of others (Marx and Engels 1969). Indeed, if learning about whiteness becomes a subject skill and a subject specific skill, then 'learned whites' are precisely 'given privilege' over others, whether those others are 'unlearned whites' or learning or unlearned non-white others. Studying whiteness can involve the claiming of a privileged white identity as the subject who knows. My argument suggests that we cannot simply unlearn privilege when the cultures in which learning take place are shaped by privilege.

Declaration 6

I am/we are coloured (too)

41. My final declaration returns us to the question of 'the colour' of whiteness. As Dyer's work (1997) points out so beautifully, whiteness is often seen as the absence of colour: colour is what other people have (blackness as 'coloured'). To learn to see whiteness as a colour rather than an absence of colour is crucial to the marking of whiteness.

42. But the declaration that whiteness is a colour (too) can actually function as a return address that exercises white privilege. For example, the turn towards the language of diversity within Australia and UK is often made through the adoption of the language of colour. Race becomes a question of surface, of different colours, where in being a colour, whiteness becomes *just* a colour, along with other colours. In other words, the transformation of whiteness into a colour can work to conceal the power and privilege of whiteness: as such, it can exercise that privilege. This is 'the rainbow' view of multiculturalism, or multiculturalism as a 'colour spectrum' (Lury 1996). In particular, I am interested in exploring how the rainbow view involves a claim of whiteness as an 'alongsideness'.

43. This neutralization of the difference of whiteness can operate without reference to colour. In the UK, it is now common to say equality and diversity are 'not just for minorities', they are 'for everyone'. White people are included in this 'everyone'. Now

at one level this inclusion is useful: it stops equality being seen as simply a project for minorities: white people too have a responsibility in the struggle against inequality and racism. Racism does in this way affect everybody, including those whom it gives privilege, and hence the responsibility for anti-racism should be 'everyone's'. But 'the everyone' is ambivalent: it can also imply that white people are part of the everyone, not only in the sense of sharing responsibility (which is of course a hope rather than a social given), but also in the sense that they suffer discrimination. The 'everyone' can work to conceal inequalities that structure the present. When whites, amongst others, are including in 'the everyone', then they can become present as 'just' another minority.

44. The consultation document produced by the Women and Equality Unit in the UK, *Equality and Diversity: Making it Happen*, states: 'We need to move beyond the idea that discrimination legislation is only about protecting minority groups, important though that this. It is now very much about providing protection for everyone'. Here, everyone needs protection, *not just minority groups*. As such, everyone suffers discrimination. Being a colour amongst other colours becomes a claim to being discriminated against along with others. We need to read this neutralization of hierarchy with care. The declaration 'I am/we are a coloured' does have, in its form, the bracketed 'too'. The 'too' often evokes a pronoun, even when the pronoun is not used: the speech act takes the form of a 'me too', or 'we too'. Me too, I have suffered; we too, we have suffered. It is almost as if the white subject suffers from being 'left out' of what gets put in place to deal with the effects of white privilege.

45. So, although the 'we are all colours' language does not necessarily take the form of a language of injury, it provides the conditions for the use of such language: here, everybody might be injured, might be victims of discrimination, even racism, *whatever your colour*. Within fascism the claim is stronger: the white subject is the one who is injured by others and needs to be protected from others. Here, the claim is that the white bodies are injured *along* with the bodies of others, and need to be protected *along with* others. The declaration 'we are coloured too' hence allows the disappearance of the privilege of whiteness, or *the disappearance of the vertical axis*; the ways in which white bodies aren't simply placed horizontally alongside other bodies. To treat white bodies 'as if' they were bodies alongside others is to imagine that we can undo the vertical axis of race through the declaration of alonsideness.

Conclusion

46. I must admit to my own anxieties in writing about such declarations as non-performative. It feels a bit smug to be critical of whiteness studies, and even critical of 'critical whiteness studies', given that I have already 'admitted' that I do not identify with this field. So where am I in this critique? There I am, you might say, writing race equality policies that get used by my university as an indicator of its good performance. The critique I am offering, as a Black feminist, is a critique of something in which I am implicated, insofar as racism structures the institutional space in which I make my critique, and even the very terms out of which I make it. In the face of how much we are 'in it', our question might become: is anti-racism impossible?

47. Given that Black politics, in all its varied forms, has worked to challenge the ongoing 'force' of racism, then to even question whether anti-racism is possible seems misguided and could even be seen as a denial of the historical fact of political agency. Surely the commitment to being against racism has 'done things' and

continues to 'do things'. What we might remember is that to be against something is precisely not to be in a position of transcendence: to be against something is, after all, to be in an intimate relation with that which one is against. To be anti 'this' or anti 'that' only makes sense if 'this' or 'that' exists. The messy work of 'againstness' might even help remind us that the work of critique does not mean the transcendence of the object of our critique; indeed, critique *might even be dependent on non-transcendence*.

48. So our task might be to critique the presumption that to be against racism is to transcend racism. I hence would not follow critics such as Paul Gilroy in suggesting anti-racism needs to go beyond race in order to avoid the reification of race (2000, 51-53). I am very sympathetic to the logic of this argument. But for me we cannot do away with race, unless racism is 'done away'. Racism works to produce race as if it was a property of bodies (biological essentialism) or cultures (cultural essentialism). Race exists as an effect of histories of racism as histories of the present. Categories such as black, white, Asian, mixed-race, and so on have lives, but they do not have lives 'on their own', as it were. They become fetish objects (black *is*, white *is*) only by being cut off from histories of labour, as well as histories of circulation and exchange. *Such categories are effects and they have affects*: if we are seen to inhabit this or that category, it shapes what we can do, even if it does not fully determine our course of action. Thinking beyond race in a world that is deeply racist is at best a form of utopianism, at worst a form of neo-liberalism: it imagines we could get beyond race, supporting the illusion that social hierarchies are undone once we have 'seen through them' (see also paper by Haggis in this issue).

49. For me, the task is to build upon Black activism and scholarship that shows how racism operates to shape the surfaces of bodies and worlds. I am not saying that understanding racism will necessarily make us non-racist or even anti-racist, although of course I sometimes wish this was true. But race, like sex, is sticky; it sticks to us, or we become 'us' as an effect of how it sticks, even when we think we are beyond it. Beginning to live with that stickiness, to think it, feel it, do it, is about creating a space to deal with the effects of racism. We need to deal with the effects of racism in a way that is better. Racism has effects, including the diminishing of capacities for action, which is another way of describing the existential and material realities of race. Living with racism would be finding a way to be less diminished by its effects. This is not to posit racism as the origin of everything, which would be to create a new metaphysics of race. Racism is a way of describing histories of struggle, repeated over time and with force, that have produced the very substance or matter we call inadequately 'race'.

50. This might sound like an argument about the performativity of race. I am sympathetic with the idea that race is performative in Judith Butler's (1993) sense of the term: race as a category is brought into existence by being repeated over time (race is an effect of racialisation). I have even argued for the performativity of race myself (Ahmed 2002). But throughout this paper I have insisted on the non-performativity of anti-racism. It might, seem now, a rather odd tactic. If race is performative, and is itself an effect of racism, then why isn't anti-racism performative as well? Is anti-racism a form of 'race trouble' that is performative as it 'exposes' the performativity of race, and which by citing the terms of racism (such as 'white') allows those terms to acquire new meanings? I would suggest the potential 'exposure' of the performativity of race does not make 'anti-racism' performative as a

speech act. As I stated in my introduction, I am using performativity in Austin's sense as referring to a particular class of speech, where the issuing of the utterance 'is the performing of an action' (1975, 6). In such speech the saying is the doing; it is not that saying something leads to something, but that it does something *at the moment of saying*. It is important to note here that, for Austin, performativity is not a quality of a sign or an utterance; it does not reside within the sign, as if the sign was magical. For an utterance to be performative, certain conditions have to be met. When these conditions are met, then the performative is happy. This model introduces a class of 'unhappy performatives': utterances that would 'do something' if the right conditions had been met, but which do not do that thing, as the conditions have not been met.

51. I would hasten to add that in my view performativity has become rather banal and over-used within academic writing; it seems as if almost everything is performative, where performative is used as a way of indicating that something is 'brought into existence' through speech, representation, writing, law, practice, or discourse. Partly, I am critiquing this 'banalisation' of the performative, as well as how performativity as a concept can be used in a way that 'forgets' how performativity depends upon the repetition of conventions and prior acts of authorization (see Butler 1997). I am also suggesting that the logic that speech 'brings things into existence' (as a form for positive action) only goes so far, and indeed the claim that saying is doing can bypass that ways in which saying is not sufficient for an action, and can even be a substitute for action.

52. My concern with the non-performativity of anti-racism has hence been to examine how sayings are not always doings, or to put it more strongly, to show how the investment in saying as if saying was doing can actually extend rather than challenge racism. Implicitly, I am critiquing a claim that I have not properly attributed: that is, the claim that anti-racism is performative. I would argue that the six declarations of whiteness I have analysed function as implicit claims to the performativity of anti-racism. The claim to the performativity of anti-racism would be to presume that 'being anti' is transcendent, and that to declare oneself as being something shows that one is not the thing that one declares oneself to be. It might be assumed that the speech act of declaring oneself (to be white, or learned, or racist) 'works' as it brings into existence the non- or anti-racist subject or institution. None of these claims I have investigated operate as simple claims. None of them say 'I/we are not racists' or 'I/we are anti-racists', as if that was an action. They are more complex utterances, for sure. They have a very specific form: they define racism in a particular way, and then they imply 'I am not' or 'we are not' that.

53. So it is not that such speech acts say 'we are anti-racists' (and saying makes us so); rather they say 'we are this', whilst racism is 'that', so in being 'this' we are not 'that', where 'that' would be racist. So in saying we are raced as whites, then we are not racists, as racism operates through the unmarked nature of whiteness; or in saying we are racists, then we are not racists, as racists don't know they are racists; or in expressing shame about racism, then we are not racists, as racists are shameless; or in saying we are positive about our racial identity, as an identity that is positive insofar as it involves a commitment to anti-racism, then we are not racists, as racists are unhappy, or in being self-critical about racism, then we are not racists, as racists are ignorant; or in saying we exist alongside others, then we are not racists, as racists see themselves as above others, and so on.

54. These statements function as *claims to performativity* rather than as performatives, whereby the declaration of whiteness is assumed to put in place the conditions in which racism can be transcended, or at the very least reduced in its power. Any presumption that such statements are forms of political action would be an overestimation of the power of saying, and even a performance of the very privilege that such statements claim they undo. The declarative mode, as a way of doing something, involves a fantasy of transcendence in which 'what' is transcended is the very thing 'admitted to' in the declaration: so, to put it simply, if we admit to being bad, then we show that we are good (see also paper by Hill and Riggs in this issue). So it is in this specific sense that I have argued that anti-racism is not performative. Or we could even say that anti-racist speech in a racist world is an 'unhappy performative': the conditions are not in place that would allow such 'saying' to 'do' what it 'says'.

55. Our task is not to repeat anti-racist speech in the hope that it will acquire performativity. Nor should we be satisfied with the 'terms' of racism, or hope they will acquire new meanings, or even look for new terms. Instead, anti-racism requires much harder work, as it requires working with racism as an ongoing reality in the present. Anti-racism requires interventions in the political economy of race, and how racism distributes resources and capacities unequally amongst others. Those unequal distributions also affect the 'business' of speech, and who gets to say what, about whom, and where. We need to consider the intimacy between privilege and the work we do, even in the work we do *on* privilege.

56. You might not be surprised to hear that a white response to this paper has asked the question, 'but what are white people to do'. That question is not necessarily misguided, although it does re-center on white agency, as a hope premised on lack rather than presence. It is a question asked persistently in response to hearing about racism and colonialism: I always remember being in an audience to a paper on the stolen generation and the first question asked was: 'but what can we do'. The impulse towards action is understandable and complicated; it can be both a defense against the 'shock' of hearing about racism (and the shock of the complicity revealed by the very 'shock' that 'this' was a 'shock'); it can be an impulse to reconciliation as a 're-covering' of the past (the desire to feel better); it can be about making public one's judgment ('what happened was wrong'); or it can be an expression of solidarity ('I am with you'); or it can simply an orientation towards the openness of the future (rephrased as: 'what can be done?'). But the question, in all of these modes of utterance, can work to *block* hearing; in moving on from the present towards the future, it can also move away from the object of critique, or place the white subject 'outside' that critique in the present of the hearing. In other words, the desire to act, to move, or even to move on, can stop the message 'getting through'.

57. To hear the work of exposure requires that white subjects inhabit the critique, *with its lengthy duration*, and to recognise the world that is re-described by the critique as one in which they live. The desire to act in a non-racist or anti-racist way when one hears about racism, in my view, can function as a defense against hearing how that racism implicates which subjects, in the sense that it shapes the spaces inhabited by white subjects in the unfinished present. Such a question can even allow the white subject to re-emerge as an agent in the face of the exposure of racism, by saying 'I am not that' (the racists of whom you speak), as an expression of 'good faith'. The desire for action, or even the desire to be seen as the good white

anti-racist subject, is not always a form of bad faith, that is, it does not necessarily involve the concealment of racism. But such a question rushes too quickly past the exposure of racism and hence 'risks' such concealment in the very 'return' of its address.

58. I am of course risking being seen as producing a 'useless' critique by not prescribing what an anti-racist whiteness studies would be, or by not offering some suggestions about 'what white people can do'. I am happy to take that risk. At the same time, I think it is quite clear that my critique of 'anti-racist whiteness' is prescriptive. After all, I am arguing that whiteness studies, even in its critical form, should not be about re-describing the white subject as anti-racist, or constitute itself as a form of anti-racism, or even as providing the conditions for anti-racism. Whiteness studies should instead be about attending to forms of white racism and white privilege that are not undone, and may even be repeated and intensified, through declarations of whiteness, or through the recognition of privilege as privilege.

59. In making this prescription, it is important that I do not rush to 'inhabit' a 'beyond' to the work of exposing racism, as that which structures the present that we differently inhabit. At the same time, it is always tempting to end one's work with an expression of political hope. Such hope is what makes the work of critique possible, in the sense that without hope, the future would be decided, and there would be nothing left to do. Perhaps its time to 'return' to the 'turn' of whiteness studies, by asking where else we might turn. If 'whiteness studies' turns towards white privilege, as that which enables and endures declarations of whiteness, then this does not simply involve turning towards the white subject, which would amount to the narcissism of a perpetual return. Rather, whiteness studies should involve at least a double turn: to turn towards whiteness is to turn towards and away from those bodies who have been afforded agency and mobility by such privilege. In other words, the task for white subjects would be to stay implicated in what they critique, but in turning towards their role and responsibility in these histories of racism, as histories of this present, to turn away from themselves, and towards others. This 'double turn' is not sufficient, but it clears some ground, upon which the work of exposing racism might provide the conditions for another kind of work. We don't know, as yet, what such conditions might be, or whether we are even up to the task of recognizing them.

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