

Conversation with Andrea Fraser, Connie Butler, and Ikechuku Onyewueni

Background and Structure

Andrea Fraser: We should begin by talking about how this project developed.

Connie Butler: We started out wanting to show all your works from the Hammer's collection. Then, for reasons of logistics and space, we decided to focus on *Men on the Line: Men Committed to Feminism, KPFK, 1972* [2012/2014], which we presented in fall 2019. You hadn't made a performance or a performance video in a while, and we started to discuss that. I thought that it would be really exciting to provide a framework and a platform for a new performance.

AF: I was thinking about a performance based on museum galas that I would do in the Hammer courtyard. Then COVID happened, and a live performance became unfeasible. Then George Floyd was murdered, and the movement for Black lives took on a new force. I was chair of the UCLA Department of Art and was involved in developing a plan of action against anti-Black bias and white supremacy in the department. A component of that plan, like a lot of the plans that a lot of organizations were trying to develop at that time, was antiracist trainings. I had participated in a few antiracist trainings, including the Undoing Racism workshop with the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, which I took in New Orleans in 2014 when I was working on my performance for Prospect 3, *Not Just a Few of Us* [2014].

CB: We talked about the possibility of bringing that performance here, and it didn't make sense, I think, because the context shift was too much, and to remake it for L.A. seemed too much of a conceptual stretch.

AF: That performance is based on a city council hearing from the early 1990s debating an ordinance that would require the desegregation of carnival organizations and private clubs, some of which had been segregated by race and also by gender, religion, and ethnicity since before the Civil War. I edited the nine-hour hearing down to sixty minutes and performed twenty of the participants: half Black, half white, and mostly male. For that piece I was looking for a recording of an interracial discussion

of race relations in New Orleans, which turned out to be incredibly difficult to find. In the process I also thought about generating material by convening a discussion. I reached out to an antiracist group for white people affiliated with the People's Institute in New Orleans called European Dissent. I met with them and asked them to entertain the idea of recording conversations. They weren't into it. That was in 2014.

Ikechukwu Onyewuenyi: So, Andrea, you've been trying to gather the kind of material that we encounter in *This meeting is being recorded* [2021] for a while.

AF: Yes, that's true. And not long after that, in the spring of 2015, as a member of the Artist Council at the Hammer, I proposed bringing in the People's Institute or another organization to lead an antiracism workshop at the museum. The museum ended up bringing Crossroads, and I participated in that workshop.

CB: Yes, we started having conversations at the Hammer, at the instigation of the Artist Council, in the wake of the 2014 Made in L.A. biennial and the perception that it was not diverse enough. In response to that criticism, the Artist Council strongly suggested that instead of staging public conversations, we should start to do antiracism work internally with our boards and staff. We hired Crossroads to lead a one-day workshop with some members of the Artist Council, board, and staff. Anyone from those three groups could attend, and it was very productive. That was in 2015, and it started a conversation. What it made clear was the need to articulate DEI [diversity, equity, and inclusion] goals. It was the beginning of truly committing to doing the internal work of examining systemic racism within the institution, and that impetus came from the Artist Council, even if the conversations were happening among the staff on an individual level. I do remember one of the big takeaways was the very different ideas, just among our own staff and board, of where we sat vis-à-vis antiracism and diversity goals. Some people thought we were a completely woke organization, aware of these issues. There was also the opposite end of the spectrum, which came, as I recall, from the more diverse ranks of our staff, like security and frontline, public-facing staff, who clearly felt that there was a huge amount of work to do. This divide made a powerful impression on all of us and made clear

the need to continue the conversation. We've since learned that this range is typical in museums.

AF: I think the People's Institute and Crossroads are two of the oldest organizations in the United States offering antiracism trainings that are racial justice oriented and focused on political education. Now there are many, many more. But probably the most prevalent antiracism trainings in organizations are framed in terms of diversity or bias. The UC system mandates trainings in ethics, cybersecurity, and sexual harassment prevention for all faculty and most staff. Bias trainings are mandated only for search committees and, recently, also for participating in admissions reviews. Most of these kinds of trainings seem to be developed within the frameworks of a kind of cognitive behavioral social psychology with a bit of neuroscience mixed in. They attribute bias to our "brain hardware" or describe it as a kind of "bad habit of the mind" produced by "social pollution." They focus on self-monitoring behaviors while emphasizing, "Don't judge yourself. It's normal." Maybe you had to do some of these.

CB: We had a second workshop because the staff had a strong desire to continue the work, and so we got a different facilitating group.

IO: In the second workshop I recall we did some implicit bias exercises, specifically the Implicit Association Test that assesses how readily we associate concepts with particular valuations, like good or bad. I remember a senior manager at the time, a woman of color, discussing her surprise and shock at her results, which were indicative of negative implicit attitudes toward people of color. Similarly, I thought I had no bias, but this cognitive behavioral test suggested otherwise. Now the IAT is not without its critics, which buttresses your implied point that antiracist frameworks that spout, "Oh, don't be hard on yourself. We all have these biases," don't necessarily get us anywhere. Because even search committees and admissions reviews are riddled with bias in spite of these trainings.

AF: Absolutely. So I was looking for alternatives. In spring 2020, after the murder of George Floyd, I also was very aware of the call by antiracist activists and educators for white people to work on their racism among themselves. There were a number of publications making this call that shot to the top of the best-seller lists during this period, like *How to Be an Anti-Racist* by Ibram X. Kendi and *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo.¹ I wanted to take that up. But I also had an acute sense of my anxieties about being a white woman in a position of leadership talking about race and trying to move forward an antiracist program at UCLA. Those anxieties were getting in the way of the work that I wanted to do politically and institutionally. And I felt that I wasn't going to be able to

look at those anxieties or work through them in the kinds of antiracist trainings that I had experienced, which focused either on political education or on behavioral manifestations of "implicit bias." I put "implicit bias" in quotes because I think that language represents a repression of the *unconscious* psychological and emotional underpinnings of racism, which I don't believe can be overcome by intellectual analysis or conscious self-monitoring. I kept thinking of that old Bob Newhart parody of cognitive behavioral therapy, in which a woman starts telling him about her problems and he just says, "Stop it!" I felt that I needed something like an antiracist psychodynamic process group. I saw that not as a substitute for political education or activism but as a way to address the anxieties and defenses that can get in the way of political work. But I also do believe that unconscious psychological and emotional structures play a central role in the production and reproduction of structural racism. So I turned to psychoanalytic theory and to group relations.

IO: For those who aren't familiar, can you elaborate on group relations? I think understanding the methodology might be valuable for those engaging the performance in *This meeting is being recorded*.

AF: Group relations is a field that applies psychoanalytic theory and practice to the study of unconscious dynamics in groups, organizations, and social systems. The basic framework is a kind of conference that eschews lectures and panel discussions and instead creates opportunities for experiential learning in groups of different configurations, with the task of studying unconscious dynamics as they emerge in the "here and now" of the groups. I've been involved with group relations since the mid-2000s. In the spring of 2020 I became the president of the board of a group relations organization called Grex, which is the West Coast Affiliate of the A. K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems. In that role I reached out to people in the group relations community to consult to the Grex board on white supremacy within that organization. While group relations focuses primarily on leadership and authority, in the United States there has also been a lot of work on social identity and race. A few organizations, like Group Relations International in San Diego and Insight for Community Impact in Toronto, are trying to develop that work further.

One way of reading group relations theory about social identity suggests that, in some ways, social identity as *social* identity is actively produced in the here and now of every group by the projections that constitute the psychological dimension of the group. I do think that's a valuable idea. It accounts for how social identity can function, if not exist, very differently depending on the composition of the group and how different members are seen by

the others. And then one can expand on that beyond a small group to consider how that works in organizations and is institutionalized in society as a whole.

From a group relations perspective, every group forms with certain internal dynamics that are based on what individual members bring and how they're perceived by the others. Another premise of group relations is that when any group of people come together, that process activates intense primal anxieties about difference just because the other people are not you. Even if you look exactly like me, you're different. When you bring two or more people together, there is difference, and there is anxiety about difference. That anxiety tends to fasten on the most visible differences, like those of race, gender, and age. When those differences carry histories of violence and trauma for the members of a group, then those anxieties are going to be even more intense, because they activate the fear of harming others or of being harmed again.

IO: One of these readings you gave us, a case study, speaks to that point of difference operating across age and intraracially. It was a Black man negotiating the violence his Black father inflicted on him as a child. And I want to add that this violence involved the father dragging his son into the bath and beating him so as to wash away the Blackness. Maybe we can come back to this intraracial injury as it relates to *This meeting is being recorded*. But I appreciate how you weave individual and group dynamics with primal anxieties around differences. More importantly, though, as you note, when such anxieties are left unmanaged, it can result in racial violence.

CB: Is that in the Kathleen Pogue White essay, "Surviving Hating and Being Hated"??

AF: I think Ike is referring to "Understanding the Trauma of Racial Violence in a Black Patient," by Narendra Keval, who also wrote an important book called *Racist States of Mind*.³

IO: I'm still trying to learn about group relations. By the way, Group Relations International in San Diego has an amazing suite of podcast episodes that walk folks through the methodology.⁴

AF: There's also a great paper by people affiliated with Insight for Community Impact in Toronto comparing antiracist and diversity training methods with group relations methods.⁵

IO: The way you broke it down was quite helpful—perceived difference can lead to anxieties of exclusion, feeling outside the group and even oneself.

AF: Yes, and it also can activate mechanisms to defend against

that anxiety, especially fantasies of omnipotence and the splitting of parts of the self or group into what is good and bad, idealized and demonized. These good and bad parts then often are projected into other people and groups, who are used to contain them or even compelled to enact them. My reading of psychoanalytic theory is that initially infants don't realize that other people exist. They imagine their mothers are part of their own bodies. When infants realize that there's an external world that they didn't create, can't control, and are completely dependent on, that realization can precipitate massive existential anxiety. It's also a huge narcissistic blow that can create a fundamental hatred of difference. Infant development is theorized as a gradual process of stripping away the fantasy of omnipotence that supports a sense of safety and security and control so that the child can relate to an external world of other people without being traumatized. As infants become aware of their families, that may become a safe group, while what's outside of the family is seen as threatening. Then maybe the community or ethnic or racial group becomes a safe group, and the fear of difference, along with everything else experienced as bad and threatening to the security of the self and the safe group, is projected into what's outside of that group. From a psychoanalytic perspective, these dynamics are more or less universal. Centuries of racial capitalism and colonialism and slavery and its legacies have, however, created superhighways for projection that collect and channel these psychological structures into patterns that reproduce structural racism and white supremacy.

I think omnipotence is the psychological correlate of white supremacy as it exists in the social sphere. White dominance supports an infantile fantasy of omnipotence in white people. We are not forced to give it up. That is also how I understand the psychological dimensions of "white fragility" and white rage.⁶ They are rooted in the structurally fragile narcissism of white people, who are enabled to hold their fantasied omnipotence under white supremacy. But it's a narcissistic bubble that is easily shattered to elicit a sense of woundedness or defensive narcissistic rage. The psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut writes powerfully about the archaic rage activated in the narcissistically vulnerable by others who are perceived as flaws in a narcissistically projected reality.⁷ The meritocratic ideologies of racial capitalism also add to these narcissistic vulnerabilities. For white people, both narcissistic benefits and narcissistic deficits are privatized as individual successes and individual failures rather than being collectivized for a larger group or understood in terms of social forces.

All of this contributes to why I think psychoanalytic perspectives are so important to understanding white supremacy: not just for the account they offer but because the unconscious itself implies that we can never be all-powerful or all-knowing. We are not even

masters of our own minds. From this perspective, political education and theory and cognitive behavioral self-monitoring can function as a kind of defensive intellectualization that can bolster white omnipotence, even as it aims to serve antiracist goals.

IO: I know you wanted to take up that call for white folks to work on anti-Black racism in their own in-groups. At the same time I'm interested in the ricocheting of projections—how they can emerge across race, age, gender, and class—and whether by focusing on a group of self-identified white women in *This meeting is being recorded* you were also thinking about creating a container that you can control to an extent. And I stress “to an extent” because you did welcome women of different ages. Why not set out to create an interracial group? Or was that introducing too many variables of difference? I think part of this question circles back to your experience in New Orleans—that is, not being able to find recordings of interracial discussions of race relations in New Orleans.

The Script and Performance Video

CB: Before we get to those questions, perhaps we should talk about how you constituted the group and set the terms for the meetings and the performance script that would eventually emerge from them.

AF: In August 2020 I began reaching out to white women in the group relations community to form a group that would apply group relations methods to a study of our internal racism and our roles in white supremacy. In part, I wanted to take up the call for white people to work on our racism among ourselves and not burden and potentially retraumatize people of color in the process, as often happens in interracial groups. A central component of that is examining whiteness and not reproducing the projection of race as such onto people who are thus racialized, which is one of the basic operations of white supremacy. Mostly I set out to convene a group that I thought could do the work I wanted to do. I wanted to be in a group of people willing and able to engage with the unconscious psychological and emotional dimensions of racism so I could learn about and work through some of the anxieties and defenses that I was experiencing. My group relations experience taught me that mixed-gender groups often end up getting stuck on gender dynamics, so that's part of the reason I reached out only to women. I also think that white women experience and hold white privilege differently from white men because we are also subject to male supremacy. Most obviously, that can lead to a misidentification of gender domination with racial dominations or to the use of white supremacy as a kind of compensation for gender subordination, including the narcissistic wounds it creates.

Both of these dynamics were evident in the group I convened. I was also thinking of the phenomenon of white women taking up antiracist work in ways that white men have not to the same degree. I think *White Fragility* is, in many ways, addressed to white women, and from what I've read, many of the workshops that DiAngelo leads are attended mostly by white women. One of the women in the group I formed attended a DiAngelo workshop the day before our first meeting. I also became aware of antiracist groups of white women that had formed in the art field.

So the group I convened ended up being an intergenerational group of seven white women, including myself. In addition to the generational range, from the thirties to the late seventies, I intentionally invited women from across the United States, so there are two who grew up in the South, three who currently live in the Midwest, and three on the East Coast. And while all the women have significant group relations experience, all but two of us are very much outside the cultural and intellectual milieus of the art world. The fact that I had committed to developing a new piece for the Hammer brought my interest in being in such a group together with the idea of working with the material it might generate. When I invited the women to join the group, I let them know that I wanted to record the meetings and that I might want to use the transcripts for a performance. That complicated the group, but the initial agreement, which included permission to record our meetings, did not give any of us the right to use or distribute the recordings. It was important to have a solid container for the work that we were doing. I wasn't at all sure that at the end of it they *would* give me permission to work with the material. I was open to just working with the group and not ending up with the piece.

CB: The material obviously is heavily edited, but it presents their speech and yours essentially verbatim, right?

AF: Yes. We had six ninety-minute meetings, so that generated nine hours of recorded material, which generated a sixty-two-thousand-word transcript. I edited that down to a ten-thousand-word script, basically condensing what unfolded over the six meetings into one. I do see it as a kind of narrative in three acts. For the first thirty minutes or so, which are based mostly on the first meeting, we seem to be engaged in our task of reflecting on racism and on white supremacy. From a group relations perspective, however, what we are also doing is managing our anxieties about differences within our own group, especially intergenerational differences and the primal mother-daughter dynamics they activated. Unconsciously the group tries to manage those anxieties by evoking maternal figures that are split into good and bad, caretaking and threatening, and by projecting those figures onto women of color outside of our group. When we take some of those projections back

and locate those figures within our own biographies, they reappear within the group itself, manifesting in conflicts between group members that lead one member to leave temporarily and another member to leave permanently. Finally, we start to recognize both the hatred and the longings within the group itself, which finally leads us back to our primary task of examining racism and white supremacy, hopefully in a way that is not about using race to relieve the group of what we can't tolerate in ourselves, which is one of the most basic operations of racism. I think ultimately the work is an examination of how white women manifest and manage their vulnerability, shame, guilt, and longings under white and male supremacy and the role those mechanisms play in the perpetuation of systemic racism.

There were two places where I wrote things for myself to say that I did not say and one instance where I did that for someone else. The things that I added linked the focus on group dynamics toward the end of the piece to the task of working on our internal racism and our roles and white supremacy. That actually happened after the feedback from the Hammer's Diversity and Inclusion Group, when I restructured the ending.

CB: We did show the script of the piece before you had performed it to our DEI group at the Hammer—called DIG, or Diversity and Inclusion Group—which formed in 2014 and has often acted as a sounding board for exhibition-related content. There was a very strong reaction to it. After the fact I thought we had actually made a mistake by sharing the script and not the final work because I think it is so very different performed for video. I think you would have gotten some different feedback on the video versus the script.

AF: I got some other challenging feedback at that time and had a crisis about the piece. I started to wonder if I was creating something so irredeemably hateful and shameful that it shouldn't exist at all, or at least not in public. But I think hiding these conversations, as well as these shameful and hateful parts of ourselves, is one of the defensive maneuvers that keeps white supremacy in place.

CB: At that moment, to be fair to you, I also was fearful. It was the same moment that across the museum field, groups of white women were forming to talk about the crisis in the field but also to talk about whiteness and with many of the same goals that you were setting out for your group. I anticipated that your work, before reading it and seeing it, was going to ring all too true to many of the things that I was experiencing in the context of my museum, led by white, feminist women, myself included. The backlash against white feminism had already begun and is important to mention as part of the context, at least in the United States, in which

this work lands. This is also how structural racism and patriarchy conjoin, right? The turning against each other. Of course there are very good reasons to interrogate white feminism and its historical exclusions. I have a lot of complex feelings about it.

AF: And the script did reflect some of what you've been experiencing, right?

CB: Well, it does, because how could it not? It was exactly at the moment when the demonization of white feminists within our field was starting to gain traction. That was the moment when you decided to focus on this, and I wondered why you were doing this. Of course that's exactly why.

AF: That's exactly why, yes. And somehow white men seem to—

CB: Get off the hook all the time!

AF: There is a structure at work in that, which I think has to do with the roles white women are socialized to take up. There are reflections in the piece about how white women are made vulnerable and how that vulnerability is used to uphold white supremacy. Another part of that is how white women tend to take on guilt and shame and how that can contribute to aversive racism. But I think it also can lead white women to attempt a kind of reflective and reparative work that can contribute to racial justice.

CB: Your work is different in many ways, too, from what I was experiencing in the field. I'm no longer scared of it.

AF: When did you stop being scared of it?

CB: When I saw the video. Having read the script, my anticipation of what it was going to be was very tied to the many painful things that the women say and how implicated I might be as a white woman. It was hard for me to imagine how you could abstract or manipulate it enough to make it not comfortable but receivable, even viewable. I think part of that has to do with the transformation of the text through the performance of it. Obviously your performance of the text mediates the material in a way and allows a certain kind of manageable distance, at least for me.

IO: Reflecting on the writings of the performance theorist Herbert Blau, I'm thinking of the distance that you speak of, Connie, as a type of theater or performance in your consciousness of comfort.⁸ Thanks to Andrea's performance, perhaps you're given that distance to get comfortable with interrogating how your whiteness performs or shows up. I say all this to say that it also took me a while to read the script. It was a tough read. Even the performance video itself

took a few watches for me to get “comfortable.” And I never really got comfortable. I think not knowing the workings of group relations, coupled with having this expectation of how the conversation would unfold since these were women versed in group relations, added to the difficulty of getting through the text. At the same time I understand the contradiction here in not knowing group relations but still expecting that their familiarity with it might engender something revelatory. I guess that difference in expertise left me wanting to see something different on the page when I was reading it. But what I was reading was a group of white women struggling to come to terms with the topic at hand. Over time, though, and through our very tough artist-curator conversations, I started to think about what it was like not only convening the group but also participating in it and then editing it. I had to check myself and take stock of my projections and how they were showing up for better or worse. All in all, though, it was tough to read it, and I read it very slowly, not to find comfort but so the emotions would not overwhelm me.

CB: I never got comfortable either. I had to confront the fact that I wanted—and I still don’t know what to make of this—but I wanted some distance from my own complicity given my identity as a white woman. I feel like I’ve worked so hard, for many years actually, to undo certain parts of my own identification with whiteness, privilege, that part of my identity that it—

AF: That the work pushes back at that.

CB: Yes, it pushes back, yes.

AF: So it had to do with how you saw yourself in the women? Or how it forced you to think about engaging in that kind of conversation and what would emerge for you?

CB: Yes. I identify the most with your character and your articulation of a lot of the really painful things that rang true for me, that I didn’t want to think about. Which is why I have also stayed away from these groups of white women. I realize that my own desire to work on systemic racism in myself and in my institution—I have not wanted to do it with that kind of group. I have chosen to do it in a different way, with BIPOC colleagues, friends, through personal relationships in which there is trust. What you’re getting at is extremely important work, which is work among white people, white allies, white women. But it is not a group I want to sit around and talk to. Really, I have to examine why that is.

IO: I think these conversations have to happen with people who identify as white, but I think, on my end, there’s a palpable lack of patience around some of the racist thinking I encountered in

the conversation. I thought the conversation should have gone a certain way, but knowing that I’m a curatorial voice on this project, I had to sit with these feelings and expectations and work through the text. I got there by finally accepting the fact that people are at different stages with their unconscious reckoning with racism. Their unconscious is in a place where . . . well, I don’t know that place. Because first and foremost I don’t even know mine completely. I first realized I was Black or pejoratively different, I should say, when I was called a Black boy by a white girl in a grocery store in Sydney, Australia. I was about five and had just moved from Nigeria. I remember the mother of the young girl, who was sitting in the shopping cart, not saying anything. She just kept pushing the shopping cart the girl was seated in, oblivious to this child mockingly pointing at me, remonstrating, saying, “There’s a Black boy,” as if my presence was in opposition to the space.” Afterward I was met with a violent response at home for not standing up for myself. So I learned, early on, that if I was racially abused, I had the green light from my parents to fight. I eventually had to unlearn that because I was running into disciplinary issues at school. I think this work for white folks is going to take a lot of uncomfortable unlearning. So to expect these seven women to have unlearned a substantive amount after six sessions was asking a lot. I don’t even know what I exactly expected. Just like I didn’t know what I expected in that grocery store. Perhaps I thought the women would have been . . .

AF: Further along?

IO: Yes. I had to remind myself—who was that the woman in Central Park with the dog incident?

AF: Amy Cooper.

IO: One of the consequences she faced was that she had to do five therapy sessions focused on racial identity.

AF: Five?

IO: Yes, after which the charges against her were dropped. She’s now on the talk show circuit saying she was “scared” and so called the police. I think some of that was coming up for me. I mean, how many sessions do we need?

AF: Yes, it certainly came up in the group, too. By the end of the six meetings, we’d lost one member. We’d almost lost another member. I think there were definitely some members who would not have continued if that had been suggested and who saw it through only because of their initial commitment. But I think there was also a clear sense that we needed to take this on for a year,

for five years, that it's a long-term project. So, on the one hand, you have the culture of the quick fix that's part of the phenomena of antibias and antiracist training in institutions—

CB: Right, you have a one-day package, a three-day package.

AF: And it will fix your institutional racism. It becomes a product that's being sold by an industry, and it's buying into a fantasy and desire that someone can just take care of the problem.

IO: Is that part of the privatization bit that you mentioned?

AF: Yes, and I think there's also an aspect of omnipotence in that, which is part of white supremacy. It's also very much part of the art world, where you have incredibly grandiose claims made, for example, for a five-minute video that's going to change the world and going to force people to rethink this and that. We spent nine hours in that group, and it was not enough. And those nine hours were cut down to ninety-nine minutes, which is very long for an art video, but it is not enough. But there's the desire, and it becomes an expectation, for something that makes you feel like you've resolved something and moved forward. This piece doesn't give that.

CB: Can you talk about how you end the performance, how you close the conversation?

AF: The way the video ends is also how the six meetings of the group ended, with one of the members expressing despair about the possibility of ever moving past "the histories we carry" of racial trauma and violence. She ends up saying, "Where do you begin?" And that's how it ends. Where do you begin? A number of people have said they find the end really frustrating.

CB: It's absolutely the right ending.

AF: Then I say, "See you next week." That's one of the things I added because I didn't say that at our last meeting. People at screenings have told me that that was a moment when they really felt pulled into the group and found themselves thinking, "Wait a minute, wait a minute, I haven't agreed to come back next week!"

IO: I like that line. It's reflexive.

CB: That makes me think to ask you about the presumed viewer. We have talked about whether the presumed viewer is a white woman. I don't feel that's necessarily the case. To me, that is a question. But then it's true that you use direct address by performing directly to the camera.

AF: The magic of the lens is that wherever you're sitting in a room in relationship to a projected image of a person, if that person is looking at the camera, they're looking directly at you as a viewer. I think all artworks implicitly project a viewer, but in a piece like this, which includes direct address to the camera within a multivoiced performance, the viewer is very explicitly put in the position of whomever is being spoken to at that moment. Because it's a group of white women, the viewer is thus positioned as a white woman. But then part of the structure of engaging with art is that we're always encouraged to step outside of the direct experience and to reflect on it. Then the question becomes what is the position of reflection that the piece structures outside of that direct address. At the same time part of my intention with realizing the script the way that I did was to foreclose an outside position. That's part of what group relations does. If you're in a group and there's a matrix of projections that are flying all over the room, there's no position outside of it. The goal is to try to reflect on those dynamics in order to learn about them and, hopefully, gain some freedom with respect to them. But you're always also in it. You can't be outside of it, but you're still trying to reflect on it. That is one of the core competencies that group relations ideally develops.

IO: There's a utopian affect there with what we want from the here-and-now dynamics of group relations. I think that's where some of my expectations were coming from. Maybe this is me engaging in some type of transubstantiation. How do we work with these projections flying about and extrapolate those constellations of thoughts, feelings, and attitudes toward how we engage with difference, racial and otherwise? José Esteban Muñoz talks about the "here and now" as akin to a prison equipped with a totalizing representation of reality.⁹ It's quite different from how the phrase operates in group relations. In a way, this immediate reflection that you speak of—that we have to be *there*, in that "here and now," but *then* take on these other competing dynamics not from a place of safety, voyeurism, but one of honest reflexivity—asks a lot of the person: they always need to mull over the inside, the outside, and the possible freedom on the other side of all of this work. Where does that freedom reside, though? Thinking again with Muñoz, he also talked about the "then and there," which was an elusive utopia, one that is "no-longer-conscious" but propels us into the imaginative space, to make sense of what's missing, what's "not quite here" yet.¹⁰ As I was gingerly reading the script, I kept asking myself what was missing from this conversation that left me frustrated and wanting not to engage.

In posing that question, I'm thinking about a moment in a DIG meeting here at the Hammer [Museum] when one of our staff members, a woman of color, said, and I'm paraphrasing: "I don't want to watch this piece when it's made. I think it's best to be used

as an educational tool for white women and exclusively white women. It should just be for pedagogy but not an artwork." But an artwork can do both—push imagination and educate. The struggle, I think for a lot of people, myself included, and hence my initial difficulty getting through the script is "How do I occupy those multiple positions?" It demands more than just sitting with the "here and now." Eventually I was able to get there by thinking about the different challenges and emotional spaces that you and the other women are working through. To be able to occupy these other (*different*) spaces and sit with those reflections, that's a utopia for me. To be simultaneously in that "here and now" and "then and there." I guess it's this concomitant work I have to do to be able to be patient with this process, your process, with imagining beyond myself. But it's this concomitant work that a lot of Black folks do on a daily basis. And it can be exhausting.

CB: Andrea, I think there is something in your performance that actually does allow you to be, even as a white woman, outside the group, but maybe that's a fantasy on my part. Obviously there's a privilege involved with the presumption that one can be separate somehow because you can't, but there is something about the performance that formulates a self-contained universe. I felt implicated for sure, and I felt uncomfortable, but I felt like I could both be directly addressed and also be separate. I think it does both things.

IO: Was that because you couldn't find yourself in the conversation? I think in watching how the conversation was unfolding with this all-white group and attending to my own feelings, I couldn't help but think about who was in that self-contained universe and wondered whether we should we have made it a mixed group. I think that's why I understand the DIG staff member wanting no part of this work.

CB: I actually did see myself in the group in a lot of what Andrea said. If I found myself at all, it was there somehow.

AF: When I perform all the members of the group, it does let everybody else off the hook of embodying those positions publicly. But it also emphasizes a group identity that white people often reject or try to escape. As one of the other members says, "As white people, we don't like to be lumped together as a group. We like to be seen as individuals." But in the performance I am lumping myself in this group as an identity group.

IO: I have a theoretical question about "here and now." You've spoken about intergenerational traumas. Within your understanding of group relations and psychoanalysis, is there space within the "here and now" to address some of them? I think about people,

like folks in right-wing media, saying that we—that is, the left, although I'm hesitant to use that political nomenclature, so let's say culture as a whole—are always going back to the past. The focus on the "here and now" can open a door for people to ignore the past in a way. How do you make space for it? I think the script does this very well. It makes space for people to reflect on their past vis-à-vis the "here and now," which I liked, but at the same time it was challenging. How do you think about all that?

AF: Group relations, like psychoanalysis, works in the here and now but works on what is reenacted or repeated from the past in the here and now. Psychoanalysis focuses on the repetition of emotional and relational patterns. Group relations extends this to the reproduction of social structures. I think both believe that the most effective point of intervention in those patterns of repetition and reproduction is in their enactment in the here and now. I prefer to use the term *enactment*, not *reenactment*, because as those patterns play out interpersonally or intersubjectively, they're always new in some sense. But they carry their histories with them and do so differently for each party in the enactment. So while social identity may be actively produced in the here and now of any group, there is also what we carry internally, which is rooted not only in our own lifetimes but also in the histories and traumas that our parents carried. But different aspects of identity can exist very differently in different contexts and get mobilized very differently in different groups. I've had a couple of really striking experiences in group relations in which I was mobilized as a Latina.

IO: If I remember correctly, the group of women in *This meeting is being recorded* make a comment about you being Puerto Rican and not white.

AF: Yeah. In the first meeting, I told the group that my mother is Puerto Rican and that, growing up in a very white suburb, I was seen as brown. And then we moved, and I started going to a Black-majority school, where I was seen as white. I realized toward the end of our meetings that the group was holding the fantasy that I wasn't really white and that I was using the other members as white people, which came as a big surprise to me.

IO: Clearly you've been thinking about this for a while, and since this conversation about racialization came online for you, well before this project, you've been trying to find a way to eke out this performance. I know for me this project was a different type of curatorial process—deeply challenging in that I wondered, often, and shared with close friends whether I could get through it. I'm reminded of James Baldwin's opening notes for his first play, *The Amen Corner* [1954], in which he suggests that in the effort to "go the distance," we might be emboldened to "try something we've

never tried before.”¹¹ I think you’ve also gone the distance here, Andrea.

AF: It’s something I’ve been trying to deal with in my work and in my life for a very long time.

CB: Also, at the moment that the piece came to fruition, as you’ve said, there was almost nowhere else to go. You had to address whiteness. You couldn’t address it interracially in a group. It was like almost like the parameters just narrowed and narrowed and narrowed until you had to address the thing right there.

AF: Yes, well, I joke that one of my mottos as an artist is that if it doesn’t make me acutely anxious, I can’t imagine that it will have an impact on others, so I think it’s not worth doing. This is a very fraught work. I hope it was worth doing.

¹ See Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Anti-Racist* (New York: One World, 2019), and Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard to Talk to White People about Racism* (Boston: Beacon, 2018).

² Kathleen Pogue White, “Surviving Hating and Being Hated: Some Personal Thoughts about Racism from a Psychoanalytic Perspective,” *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 38, no. 3 (2002): 401–22.

³ Narendra Keval, “Understanding the Trauma of Racial Violence in a Black Patient,” *British Journal of Psychotherapy* 18, no. 1 (2001): 34–51, and Keval, *Racist States of Mind: Understanding the Perversion of Curiosity and Concern* (London: Karnac, 2016).

⁴ See *Beyond the Boundaries: A Group Relations Podcast*, <https://www.grouprelations.org/podcast>.

⁵ Janelle Joseph, Barbara Williams, and Tanya Lewis, “The Exploring Difference Workshop: Group Relations Methodology to Deepen Anti-racist Education in Toronto, Canada,” *Organizational and Social Dynamics* 21, no. 1 (Summer 2021): 40–55.

⁶ See DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, and Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).

⁷ The other, “who calls forth the archaic rage of the narcissistically vulnerable is seen . . . not as an autonomous source of impulses but as a flaw in a narcissistically perceived reality. He is a recalcitrant part of an expended self over which he expects to exercise full control and whose mere independence or other-ness is an offense.” Heinz Kohut, “Thoughts on Narcissism and Narcissistic Rage,” *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 27, no. 1 (1972): 360–400.

⁸ Herbert Blau, *The Audience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 86–87.

⁹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

¹⁰ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1–12.

¹¹ James Baldwin, “Notes for *The Amen Corner*,” in *The Amen Corner* (New York: Dial, 1968), xv.