

**On Arrival**

What does diversity do? What are we doing when we use the language of diversity? These questions are ones that I pose *in* this book as well as *to* diversity and equality practitioners working in universities. These questions can be asked as open questions only if we proceed with a sense of uncertainty about what diversity is doing and what we are doing with diversity. Strong critiques have been made of the uses of diversity by institutions and of how the arrival of the term “diversity” involves the departure of other (perhaps more critical) terms, including “equality,” “equal opportunities,” and “social justice.” A genealogy of the term “diversity” allows us to think about the appeal of the term as an institutional appeal. We might want to be cautious about the appealing nature of diversity and ask whether the ease of its incorporation by institutions is a sign of the loss of its critical edge. Although this book is written with a sense of caution about diversity, I am also interested in what diversity can and does do. The more I have followed diversity around, the more diversity has captured my interest.

How did I come to be following diversity around?

Every research project has a story, which is the story of an arrival. The arrival of this book is a significant departure for me as it is the first book I have written that draws on qualitative empirical research. There are at least two ways of telling the story of the arrival of this book: one focuses on research practice, the other on institutional practice.

The first version: I had previously written about questions of race and difference, although, thinking back, it took time for me to get to the point when I could write about race. My initial research was on feminist theory and postmodernism. When I was working on my doctoral thesis in 1993, I remember searching for an example to ground the chapter I was writing on subjectivity. I can recall actually looking around the room, as if an object, one that I might find lying around, could become my subject.<sup>1</sup> At this moment of looking around, I recalled an experience, one that I had “forgotten.” It came to me as if it were reaching out from the past. The very reach of the past shows that it was not one I had left behind. It was a memory of walking near my home in Adelaide and being stopped by two policemen in a car, one of whom asked me, “Are you Aboriginal?” It turned out that there had been some burglaries in the area. It was an extremely hostile address and an unsettling experience at the time. Having recalled this experience, I wrote about it. The act of writing was a reorientation, affecting not simply what I was writing about but what I was thinking and feeling. As memory, it was an experience of not being white, of being made into a stranger, the one who is recognized as “out of place,” the one who does not belong, whose proximity is registered as crime or threat. As memory, it was of becoming a stranger in a place I called home.<sup>2</sup>

Why had I forgotten about it? Forgetting has its uses; unpleasant experiences are often the ones that are hard to recall. I had not wanted to think about race; I had not wanted to think about my experiences growing up, as someone who did not belong. Allowing myself to remember was a political reorientation: it led me to think and write about the politics of stranger making; how some and not others become strangers; how emotions of fear and hatred stick to certain bodies; how some bodies become understood as the rightful occupants of certain spaces. Throughout the course of my writing, I have tried to write from this experience of not

belonging, to make sense of that experience, even when it is not the explicit subject of recall.

One of my aims in this book is to show that to account for racism is to offer a different account of the world. I thus do not begin with the category of race but with more apparently open terms. The racialization of the stranger is not immediately apparent—disguised, we might say—by the strict anonymity of the stranger, who after all, we are told from childhood, could be anyone. My own stranger memory taught me that the “could be anyone” points to some bodies more than others. This “could be anyone” only appears as an open possibility, stretching out into a horizon, in which the stranger reappears as the one who is always lurking in the shadows. Frantz Fanon ([1952] 1986) taught us to watch out for what lurks, seeing himself *in* and *as* the shadow, the dark body, who is always passing by, at the edges of social experience. In seeing the stranger, we are most certainly seeing someone; in some cases, we are seeing ourselves.

We can think from the experience of becoming a stranger. A stranger experience can be an experience of becoming noticeable, of not passing through or passing by, of being stopped or being held up. A stranger experience can teach us about how bodies come to feel at home through the work of inhabitation, how bodies can extend themselves into spaces creating contours of inhabitable space, as well as how spaces can be extensions of bodies (see Ahmed 2006). This book explores the intimacy of bodily and social space: it develops my earlier arguments about “stranger making” by thinking more concretely about institutional spaces, about how some more than others will be at home in institutions that assume certain bodies as their norm.

There is another story of arrival. I became co-director of the Institute for Women’s Studies at Lancaster University in 2000. I began to attend faculty meetings. I was the only person of color at these meetings.<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that I noticed this: whiteness tends to be visible to those who do not inhabit it (though not always, and not only). During the discussion of one item at a faculty meeting on equality, the dean said something like “race is too difficult to deal with.” I remember wanting to challenge this. But the difficulty of speaking about racism as a person of color meant that I did not

speak up during but after the meeting, and even then I wrote rather than spoke. Saying that race is “too difficult” is how racism gets reproduced, I put in an email to the dean. The belief that racism is inevitable is how racism becomes inevitable, I pointed out. (One of the favorite arguments made by senior management was that the university was “very white” because of geography—and that you can’t do anything about geography.) Do something about it, he replies. It shouldn’t be up to me, I answer.

How quickly we can be interpellated! My correspondence with the dean took place in 2000 just before the Race Relations Amendment Act came into effect, which made race equality into a positive duty under law, and required all public institutions to write a race equality policy. The dean spoke to the director of human resources. She got in contact with me, offering an invitation to become a member of the newly formed race equality team responsible for writing our university’s race equality policy. There were two academics on the team, both people of color. There are problems and pitfalls in becoming a diversity person as a person of color. There is a script that stops anyone reading the situation as a becoming. You *already* embody diversity by providing an institution of whiteness with color.

It is certainly the case that responsibility for diversity and equality is unevenly distributed. It is also the case that the distribution of this work is political: if diversity and equality work is less valued by organizations, then to become responsible for this work can mean to inhabit institutional spaces that are also less valued.

We can get stuck *in* institutions by being stuck *to* a category. This is not to say that we cannot or do not value the work of these categories. But we can be constrained even by the categories we love. I had experienced already what it can mean to be “the race person.” Indeed, both academic positions I have held in the United Kingdom were advertised as posts in race and ethnicity, the first in Women’s Studies, the second in Media and Communications. In both cases, the experience felt like being appointed by whiteness (even if the appointment was intended as a countering of whiteness). There we can find ourselves: people of color being interviewed for jobs “on race” by white panels, speaking to white audiences about our work. In both cases the experience was one of solidarity with

those who have to face this situation. Whiteness can be a situation we have or are in; when we can name that situation (and even make jokes about it) we recognize each other as strangers to the institution and find in that estrangement a bond. Of course, at the same time, I should stress that we do want there to be posts on race and ethnicity. We also want there to be more than one; we want not to be the one. Becoming the race person means you are the one who is turned to when race turns up. The very fact of your existence can allow others not to turn up.

Although being part of the race equality group made me uneasy for these reasons, the experience of being in the group was nevertheless inspiring. I learned from our conversations, and they provided me with a framework I later developed in the research project on diversity upon which this book is based. What was important and reorienting for me was the experience of working closely with practitioners from human resources. The conversations we had about how to write our race equality policy taught me about what it means to pose questions strategically: to think, for example, about words as tools for doing things, and to think of strategy not as the absence or bracketing of thought (as strategy is often thought) but as the unfolding of thought. The experience of working “on” the institutions “at” which I worked also brought my own thinking closer to home.

At this point I had no intention of writing about those experiences. If anything I welcomed being involved in institutional work that was not related to my academic scholarship. The imperative to transform all experience into writing can reduce the value of an experience by treating experience as a means to this end (though, as I have suggested, writing as a prompter for recollection can be reorienting). Doing this kind of work allowed me to think more about my relationship to institutional worlds. I had imagined that my task as an academic in the race equality working group was to bring a critical vocabulary into the wording of the document. I realized very quickly that critique is not something that academics bring; those employed to write policies and frameworks can be just as (if not more) critical given their very involvement in policy worlds. I realized how the presumption of our own criticality can be a way of protecting ourselves from complicity. As Fiona Probyn-Ramsey has observed, com-

plicity can be a starting point; if we start with complicity, we recognize our “proximity to the problems we are addressing” (2009: 161).

I also came to realize that documents, once written, acquire lives of their own. In my previous work I had offered close and critical readings of multicultural policy documents (see Ahmed 2000, 2004). I began to appreciate the importance of focusing not so much on what documents say but what they do: how they circulate and move around. Indeed, when I began the research, one of my questions was about a diversity and equality policy published in Australia in 1996.<sup>4</sup> I asked the first practitioner I interviewed about it. She described it as “an amazing document.” But she then said, with an intonation that gave the impression of qualifying the value statement: “We changed government and it got buried; it’s virtually never been dealt with that I know of in any arena I know.” The document thus acquires no force. It ceases to have an official existence, even if it still exists in electronic and paper form. To read the document for what it is saying would be to miss this point by making it the point.

In this project I ended up following diversity documents around. But it still took time to get to this point. How did I end up doing an empirical study of diversity work? As with much research, the story of an arrival is a story of our encounters. I began to work more closely with scholars from the Management School at Lancaster University. It happened that Elaine Swan, based in the Management School, was involved in a major bid with colleagues to be the research arm for a new center being set up by the Department for Further Education and Skills on leadership in the Further Education sector (what became the Centre for Education and Leadership). So much research is premised on the “hap” of a happening! They were successful in the bid, which meant they had a budget to support a number of research projects on leadership. Elaine asked me if I would be interested in working with her on a project on leadership and diversity. I saw so much potential in this opportunity: to talk to diversity practitioners across a range of institutions about what they do, to support the Institute for Women’s Studies by bringing research funding into it,<sup>5</sup> and to work with a team of feminist and critical race theorists on a project about institutional change. The story of what happened to the project is part of the story of this book. It unfolds, as the book does.

## The Research Project

My aim in this project was to talk to diversity practitioners about their experiences of doing diversity work within the higher education sector.<sup>6</sup> Overall, I conducted twenty-one interviews, including ten semi-structured interviews in Australia in 2003 and 2004 and eleven in the United Kingdom (all of these took place in 2004 and 2005, except for the eleventh, which I undertook in 2009).<sup>7</sup> All of these interviews took place in the office of a diversity practitioner based in a higher educational institution, except for two interviews with those working at a policy level: in Australia, with one member of staff responsible for equality policy from what was then the Department for Education, Science and Training, and two staff members from the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), which has responsibility for overseeing equality in higher education in the United Kingdom. For all semi-structured interviews, I arranged to meet and interview an individual person. However, in Australia, three of the interviews ended up being with two people; in the United Kingdom, four interviews ended up being with two people, and one with three. My decision in all cases was to “go with the flow” and make explicit my willingness to listen to anyone who wanted to talk to me. I actually learned a great deal from conducting interviews with more than one person, as it gave me the opportunity to listen to the ways diversity gets talked about. Where possible, I have tried to preserve the conversational flow of a group discussion in my use of data from these interviews.

My project was originally framed as a comparative study of diversity work in higher education in the United Kingdom and Australia. I soon realized that a properly national comparison would require more interviews than I would be able to complete myself. The project became reframed about the experiences of practitioners in a range of different universities: my aim was to ensure that the data set included old and new universities, urban and rural, and research-led and teaching-led. I was particularly keen to speak to practitioners in institutions that had diversity as central to their educational missions and those that did not.

My experiences of doing the research in Australia and the United Kingdom were quite different, which could be because of the timing of the

research, as well as the contrasting national environments.<sup>8</sup> My early interviews in Australia were very much focused on questions of language and strategy, as my own starting points in the research (chapters 1 and 2). In the United Kingdom, the focus became more on the relationship between diversity, equality, and performance culture; my interviews took place after the process of writing race equality policies as a result of a change in legislation (chapters 3 and 4).<sup>9</sup> Changes in legislation instituted what I call a “new equality regime” premised on the redefinition of equality as a positive duty. The Race Relations Amendment Act (RRAA) of 2000 was followed by the Disability Discrimination Act (2005), the Equality Act of 2006 (which introduced gender equality as a positive duty), and most recently the Equality Act of 2010, which requires that all public institutions have a single equality scheme.<sup>10</sup>

Together these acts have changed in significant ways the kind of labor involved in doing diversity work: in effect, since 2000, practitioners in the public sector in the United Kingdom have been writing documents to comply with the law. We can ask about the relationship between the new equality regime and what the sociologist Joan Acker calls “the inequality regimes”: the “interrelated practices, processes, action and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender and race inequalities” (2006: 443). To pose this question as an open question requires not only that we do not assume that an equality regime is necessarily aimed at the overcoming of an inequality regime but also that we recognize that an equality regime *can be* an inequality regime given new form, a set of processes that maintain what is supposedly being redressed.

My interviews in the United Kingdom offered an opportunity to reflect with practitioners on the experience of this process and address the question of what the effects of this new equality regime are. The experience of this process offers us the opportunity to “thicken” our description of institutions. The philosopher Gilbert Ryle suggests that “thicker descriptions” require more than describing an action; it would locate an individual action in terms of its wider meaning or accomplishment. He suggests that a thin description of what a person is doing (such as doodling) requires thickening “before it amounts to an account of what the person is trying to accomplish” (Ryle 1971: 498).<sup>11</sup> This book is premised on the



assumption that we can thicken our description of institutions by offering an account of what diversity practitioners are trying to accomplish.

The experience of conducting the interviews was quite nerve-racking: as a text-based researcher by training, I found working with “living subjects” a challenge. Texts can and do talk to us, but their voices are less audible. At the same time, I loved doing these interviews: they became opportunities to have a dialogue with practitioners, to hear their voices. I learned so much from practitioners in both Australia and the United Kingdom who, in giving me their story, also gave me the story of their institutions. As I have already suggested, in arranging the interviews, my explicit aim was to speak to practitioners from different kinds of institutions (a project on diversity needs to think from and with a diversity of institutions). And indeed, unsurprisingly, in most of the interviews, practitioners related their work directly to the kinds of institutions they work in: diversity work often involves “working out” what works given the workplace. I became particularly interested in how diversity workers aim to associate the word “diversity” with the terms that are already valued by organizations. The story of diversity thus becomes a story of diversity’s inclusion into the terms of an institution.

For me, the experience of doing the research was as much about visiting different universities to conduct the interviews, which gave me an opportunity to attend to the different kinds of spaces they offer. In my field notes after my first interview, I noted the following:

This is a very different environment than Sydney University [where I was based on sabbatical]. There is no sandstone. Somehow that goes with the kind of bodies that populate its lawns and buildings. There are lots of black and brown bodies; I can really see the difference. In the student union, the atmosphere is lively. The socialist workers are visible outside, and posters cover the walls about women’s space, queer groups and anti-violence campaigns. Although we can’t stick all of this together (buildings, bodies, politics) somehow it goes together.

The process of visiting different university campuses in Australia and the United Kingdom allowed me to revisit my arguments about the politics of diversity and think more about how diversity becomes associated with

certain bodies, shaping how the university comes to appear *as* body. Although I feel at home in the body of the university, entering it as a researcher of the environment was a new experience. The university reappears when you see it from the viewpoint of a stranger, as someone who is looking “at” rather than “from” its environment. I do not intend to privilege my own vision here, or to imply that a view from a stranger is necessarily more objective. But I suggest that the research process is a process of estrangement, which creates an orientation in which some things come into view that had previously been obscured.<sup>12</sup>

Given that this study involved a relatively small number of interviews, it is important for me to note that I cannot generalize my findings. The research was never intended to generate the kind of findings that can be generalized. The desire for findings can even reduce or limit what can be found. Practitioners across the public sectors repeatedly said to our diversity team that too much research in this field is premised on findings that institutions *want found*: from toolboxes to good practice. Too much research thus becomes translated into mission speech, turning stories of diversity and equality into institutional success stories. There is much less research describing the complicated and messy situations in which diversity workers often find themselves. When description gets hard, we need description.

It was thus very important to guarantee anonymity for both the interviewees and their institutions. Anonymity was necessary to create a certain freedom within the interview to discuss institutional failures and bad practice. I noticed in some of the interviews how accounts of bad practice “came out” gradually: to work for institutions, as practitioners do, can require that you develop a habit of talking in mission talk, what we can call “happy talk,” a way of telling a happy story of the institution that is at once a story of the institution as happy. Over the temporal course of the interview, the happier languages seemed to wear out, and a very different account of the institution was generated. We need space that is not designated as institutional space to be able to talk about the problems with and in institutions.

The research process helped me to think more about the difficulty of equality as a politics: of how in legislating for equality (and against in-

equality), it can be assumed that equality is achieved *in the act*. As I explore in more detail throughout this book, it is as if having a policy becomes a substitute for action. To challenge this substitution (which can work to conceal the inequalities that make the law necessary in the first place), I began to think more explicitly about social action. I came to ask whether there is an investment in both law and policy as “performatives”: as if they do what they say, as if they bring something into existence. If what they do depends on how they get taken up, then the action of policy (as law or letter) is unfinished.

Recognizing the unfinished nature of a social action can be thought of as a methodological challenge. In meeting this challenge, I wanted not only to talk to diversity practitioners about diversity but also to inhabit the world of diversity, to offer an ethnography of this world.<sup>13</sup> In addition to my interviews with diversity practitioners, I draw on my participation in what we can describe as “the diversity world” (meetings, conferences, and workshops on diversity and equality within higher and further education, as well as some events run by the then Commission for Racial Equality [CRE]<sup>14</sup> that were aimed at all the public sectors) and my own experiences as a diversity practitioner. An ethnographic approach to diversity is necessarily “multi-sited” given that the diversity world is a world of mobile subjects and objects, of the networks and connections that are necessary for things to move around. As Mark-Anthony Falzon observes, “the essence of multi-sited research is to follow people, connections, associations, and relationships across space” (2009: 1–2; see also Marcus 1998).

In reflecting on diversity within the university, this book provides a different lens through which to see the environment of the university. I have been influenced by the work of the social anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (2000, 2004, 2006), who draws on her own experience as a university administrator to consider the university as a field of knowledge. The book could thus be considered part of a growing body of literature that offers an ethnographic approach of the university (see also De Bary 2009). To provide such descriptions of the university as a field site is a way of bringing academic knowledge “back home.”

To describe a world that is emerging and to account for the experience of that world from the points of view of those involved in it are the tasks of

ethnographers who participate in worlds they also observe. In writing from and about my involvement, I am both an insider and outsider to the world I am describing. As an academic, I am at home in the environment of the university in a way that many diversity practitioners are not; as someone who has been involved in equality work (as a member of a race equality group, as a participant in equality and diversity committees, as well as my experience as “diversity champion” for my department), I experience the institution in ways that I share with those appointed as diversity practitioners. This is why the task of description became for me not only about giving an account of what practitioners are doing but also to show how much the experience of practitioners can teach us about how we inhabit institutions, what we can simply call “institutional life.”

I should note that in inhabiting this rather vast and fuzzy world of diversity, many of my accounts are premised on “fleeting encounters” with individual actors rather than the more lasting encounters we (rightly) associate with ethnographic research. Perhaps a more precise description of my methodology would be “an ethnography of texts.” To ask what diversity does, we need to follow diversity around, which is to say, we need to follow the documents that give diversity a physical and institutional form. Following documents is also about *following the actors who use these forms*. The question of what diversity does is also, then, a question of where diversity goes (and where it does not), as well as in whom and in what diversity is deposited (as well as in whom or in what it is not). The book draws on the conversations I have had at conferences and meetings on diversity and equality in the past ten years, which taught me a great deal about what does and does not tend to “come up” when diversity and equality are the explicit objects of conversation. It also draws on my own experience of equality and diversity committees at the two institutions in which I have worked, including some description of the conversations we had, when I think it is legitimate to do so (legitimacy becomes an important question when the anonymity of the institution and thus of participants cannot be guaranteed).

By following diversity around, my aim is certainly to describe the world that takes shape when diversity becomes used as a description. It is also important for me to locate this study in terms of intellectual worlds. I con-

sider this book part of the specific tradition we can call, following Heidi Mirza, “Black British feminism.”<sup>15</sup> I was very lucky in the early 1990s to meet Mirza and have one of my first academic essays be included in the collection she edited, *Black British Feminism* (1996). To be part of a collection can be to become a collective. Working as women of color in British higher education does provide us with a shared political and intellectual horizon.<sup>16</sup> To borrow Nirmal Puwar’s (2004) wonderfully evocative expression, we share experiences of being treated as “space invaders,” as invading the spaces reserved for others. We might even experience ourselves as space invaders, a way of experiencing spaces as if they are not reserved for us (and, indeed, they are not).

Yet it might be noticeable to readers that this book does not systematically address the gendering of institutional processes and organizations.<sup>17</sup> In what ways, then, can this book be thought of as a feminist project? Feminist theory has generated a body of knowledge of gendering as social process. However, that does not mean that feminism is necessarily *about* gender; as Judith Butler has argued, gender does not provide feminism with a proper object (2004: 181). In reflecting about gender as a relation, feminist theorists offer critical insight into the mechanisms of power as such and, in particular, how power can be *redone* at the moment it is imagined as *undone*. This book offers a set of feminist reflections on the subtle and not-so-subtle forms of institutional power.

Feminists of color have offered some of the most cogent critiques of the language of diversity (Davis 1996; Carby 1999; Bannerji 2000; Lewis 2000; Mohanty 2003; Puwar 2004; Alexander 2005; Anzaldúa and Keating 2009). Feminists of color have explored the relationship between diversity and power by showing how diversity is incorporated by institutions: “diversity management” becomes a way of managing or containing conflict or dissent. In particular, Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s *Feminism without Borders* and M. Jacqui Alexander’s *Pedagogies of Crossing* are important precursors to *On Being Included*. In these books, Mohanty and Alexander attend to the grammar of diversity and offer substantive critiques of diversity as a practice within educational institutions (Mohanty 2003: 208–16; Alexander 2005: 133–44). Mohanty shows how diversity is a discourse of “benign variation,” which “bypasses power as well as history to suggest a harmo-

nious empty pluralism” (2003: 193). Alexander explores how diversity documents have an ideological function in the “manufacture of cohesion” and create the impression of “more diversity” than “actually exists” (2005: 135). Following both these authors, this book interrogates diversity as a set of practices, asking how diversity can participate in the creation of an idea of the institution that allows racism and inequalities to be overlooked.

Furthermore, feminism of color provides us with a ways of thinking through power in terms of “intersectionality,”<sup>18</sup> to think about and through the points at which power relations meet. A body can be a meeting point. A concern with meeting points requires that we attend to the experiential: how we experience one category depends on how we inhabit others. It is important to note that the language of intersectionality is now associated with diversity. As Rachel E. Luft and Jane Ward observe, “the distinction between intersectionality and diversity remains blurry” (2009: 14). We need to think about how this blurriness can do things, such that the terms, in pointing to each other, can also obscure each other. If, as I have suggested, the focus on intersectionality within feminism of color meant a concern with the points at which power relations meet, then it is worth noting that these points often recede from view. This is why when we attend to intersectionality we are actually making a point. There is labor in attending to what recedes from view.

We can ask: what recedes when diversity becomes a view? If diversity is a way of viewing or even picturing an institution, then it might allow only some things to come into view. Diversity is often used as shorthand for inclusion, as the “happy point” of intersectionality, a point where lines meet. When intersectionality becomes a “happy point,” the feminist of color critique is obscured. All differences matter under this view. Yet diversity in the policy world still tends to be associated with race. The association is sticky, which means the tendency is reproduced by not being made explicit. This book investigates what diversity does by focusing on what diversity obscures, that is, by focusing on the relationship between diversity and racism as a way of making explicit a tendency that is reproduced by staying implicit.

My concern with what recedes from general view also signals the importance of phenomenology to this project. I would not describe the

research itself as phenomenological, although I do make a case in my conclusion for thinking about diversity work as a phenomenological practice. Nevertheless, phenomenological models have shaped some of my orientations, including my concern with orientation (Ahmed 2006), as well as my concern with describing how the most ordinary aspects of institutional life are often those that are least noticeable. Phenomenology provides a critical lens through which to think about “institutional life.”

This book can be read in relation to the interdisciplinary literature on diversity, which includes scholarship in education, sociology, management, and organizational studies. I was struck in reading this academic literature by how little research into diversity has involved speaking to diversity and equal opportunities practitioners.<sup>19</sup> We have important studies of equal opportunities from the 1980s and 1990s that focus on the costs and difficulties of doing this kind of organizational labor, including Cynthia Cockburn’s (1991) pioneering work, as well as Sarah Neal’s (1998) study of equal opportunities within British universities. More recently, Gill Kirton, Anne-Marie Greene, and Deborah Dean (2007) conducted an interview-based study of diversity practitioners from private and public sector organizations within the United Kingdom.<sup>20</sup> They suggest that the shift from the framework of equal opportunities to that of diversity has involved a corresponding change in how practitioners understand their relationship to institutions. Kirton, Greene, and Dean argue that as diversity becomes more professionalized, practitioners are less likely to mobilize an activist framework. They suggest that diversity practitioners have an *ambivalent* relationship to institutions, as captured by their use of the phrase “tempered radical” to describe the attitude of practitioners (2007: 1981), a term they borrow from the earlier work of Deborah E. Meyerson and Maureen A. Scully (1995).<sup>21</sup> My interviews are full of similar accounts of ambivalence. We learn from this ambivalence about institutions and the ways practitioners can simultaneously experience themselves as working “for” and “against” them (see chapter 2).

It is important for me to address the politics of location in terms of the location of the research project. The study is of diversity practitioners based in Australia and the United Kingdom, two countries in which I have lived and worked myself. However, the arguments and accounts have a

wider relevance. I argue that the languages of diversity are mobile, and the story of diversity's inclusion within and by institutions is transnational. We could take as an example the group Diversity in Organizations, Communities and Nations. They organize a conference (which in 2012 will be in its twelfth year), a journal, and a book series and function (in their terms) as "a knowledge community" that is "brought together by a shared interest in diversity in one or another of its manifestations, in organizations, communities and nations."<sup>22</sup> Although the significance of diversity can be described as international, the means by which diversity manifests itself will be local. We need to have conversations with each other from our specific locations. An example of this kind of conversation about diversity is offered in the edited collection *Doing Diversity in Higher Education* (Brown-Glaude 2009) in which faculty based in universities in the United States talk about their experience as diversity leaders within different kinds of institutions. When diversity becomes a conversation, a space is opened up. I have indeed learned from my conversations with academics and practitioners who are "doing diversity" across a range of locations.

I should note that although this book is very much a conversation with diversity practitioners, we should not assume that practitioners form a single community of actors. They do not. Although in both Australia and Britain there are professional associations for diversity practitioners in higher education, not all practitioners participate in these associations.<sup>23</sup> My conversations with practitioners both in interviews and informally at meetings or conferences gave me a very clear sense of the many different biographical as well as social routes into diversity work.<sup>24</sup> My task has been to engage with and analyze how practitioners describe the work they do.

### **Organization of the Book**

The first chapter reflects on the institutional nature of diversity work exploring how practitioners aim to embed diversity such that it becomes an institutional given. I reflect on the relationship between diversity and institutional whiteness. I also ask what happens when the language of institutional racism becomes institutional language. In the second chapter, I turn to the significance of the word "diversity" itself, asking how practitioners use (or do not use) the term. The chapter aims to explain what



appears as paradox between, on the one hand, the ubiquitous use of diversity as an official language by institutions and, on the other, how practitioners experience those institutions as resistant to their work. I am especially interested in how practitioners describe diversity as a tool that allows them to do things. These first two chapters are concerned with how practitioners describe their own work and with the strategies and tactics used for getting messages through to different actors within an institution.

As I have suggested, a key purpose of this book is to offer an account of the changing equality frameworks in the United Kingdom in terms of their effect on practice. The third chapter reflects specifically on the impact of the new equalities regime on what gets counted as equality and diversity, which includes a discussion of equality as a system for counting. In particular, I discuss some of the problems that follow when equality becomes a performance indicator. In the fourth chapter, I turn specifically to the question of commitment as that which is described as missing when diversity and equality become “paper trails.” I offer a thesis that statements of commitment are non-performatives: they do not bring about the effects they name.

The final chapter offers a reflection on some of the consequences of diversity becoming a form of public relations. I reflect on how racism is heard as an injury to an institution and as damaging to an institutional reputation for “being diverse.” I suggest that diversity can be offered as a narrative of repair, as what allows us to “recover” from racism by recovering the very signs of injury. In exploring the risks and necessity of speaking about racism, as both my starting point and conclusion, my aim is not to suggest that we should stop doing diversity, but that we need to keep asking what we are doing with diversity. If diversity is to remain a question, it is not one that can be solved. Indeed the critiques offered in this book are critiques of what follows when diversity is offered as a solution.

What is an institution? I want to start my reflections on racism and diversity within institutional life by asking what it means to think about institutions as such. We need to ask how it is that institutions become an *object* of diversity and antiracist practice in the sense that recognizing the institutional nature of diversity and racism becomes a goal for practitioners. Diversity work is typically described as institutional work. Why this is the case might seem obvious. The obvious is that which tends to be unthought and thus needs to be thought. We can repeat the question by giving it more force: what counts as an institution? Why do institutions count?

These questions are foundational to the social sciences. Emile Durkheim's definition of sociology is "the science of institutions, of their genesis and functioning" ([1901] 1982: 45). If the institution can be understood as the object of the social sciences, then the institution might be how the social derives its status as science. Durkheim's description was derived from Marcel Mauss and Paul Fauconnet's 1901 contribution on sociology to *La Grand Encyclopédie*

(see M. Gane 2005: xii). The history of sociology is indeed a history of institutional thought.

Durkheim's innovative sociological method suggested that social facts can be approached as things. Arguably, treating institutions as an object of sociological inquiry, as social facts, can risk stabilizing institutions as things. We might stabilize institutions by assuming they refer to what is already stabilized. Within the humanities, the turn to thinking on the question of institutions has been predicated on a critique of sociological models. Samuel Weber's *Institutions and Interpretation* (2001), for example, cites with approval the work of René Lourau, who suggests that the sociological theories of institutions tend to assume their stability. Institutions, Lourau suggests, have been:

increasingly used to designate what I and others before me have called the *instituted* (*l'institué*), the established order, the already existing norms, the state of fact thereby being confounded with the state of right (*l'état de droit*). By contrast, the *instituting* aspect (*l'instituant*) . . . has been increasingly obscured. The political implication of the sociological theories appears clearly here. By emptying the concept of institution of one of its primordial components (that of instituting, in the sense of founding, creating, breaking with an old order and creating a new one), sociology has finally come to identify the institution with the status quo. (Weber 2001: xv)

This reading of sociological work on institutions could be described as presuming the stability of its object (can all "sociological theories" of institutions be reduced to this identification?). Across a range of social science disciplines, including economics and political science as well as sociology, we have witnessed the emergence of "the new institutionalism," concerned precisely with how we can understand institutions as processes or even as effects of processes. Indeed, Victor Nee argues that the new institutionalism "seeks to explain institutions rather than simply assume their existence" (1998: 1). To explain institutions is to give an account of how they emerge or take form. Such explanations require a "thick" form of description, as I suggested in the introduction, a way of describing not simply the activities that take place within institutions

(which would allow the institution into the frame of analysis only as a container, as what contains what is described, rather than being part of a description) but how those activities shape the sense of an institution or even institutional sense. The organizational studies scholars James G. March and Johan P. Olsen suggest that a thick approach to institutions would consider “routines, procedures, conventions, roles, strategies, organizational forms, and technologies” (1989: 22). The new institutionalism aims to think through *how* institutions become instituted over time (to “flesh out” this *how*): in other words, to think how institutions acquire the regularity and stability that allows them to be recognizable as institutions in the first place. Institutions can be thought of as verbs as well as nouns: to put the “doing” back into the institution is to attend to how institutional realities become given, without assuming what is given by this given.<sup>1</sup>

The new institutionalism allows us to consider the work of creating institutions as part of institutional work. Although this chapter does not engage with the “new institutionalism” literatures in a general sense, I consider how phenomenology can offer a resource for thinking about institutionality.<sup>2</sup> My arguments thus connect with some of the sociological literature on institutions insofar as the new institutionalism in sociology has been influenced by phenomenology.<sup>3</sup> Phenomenology allows us to theorize how a reality is given by becoming background, as that which is taken for granted. Indeed, I argue that a phenomenological approach is well suited to the study of institutions because of the emphasis on how something becomes given by not being the object of perception. Edmund Husserl (often described as the founder of phenomenology) considers “the world from the natural standpoint” as a world that is spread around, or just around, where objects are “more or less familiar, agreeing with what is actually perceived without themselves being perceived” ([1913] 1969: 100). To be in this world is to be involved with things in such a way that they recede from consciousness. When things become institutional, they recede. To institutionalize  $x$  is for  $x$  to become routine or ordinary such that  $x$  becomes part of the background for those who are part of an institution.

In his later work, Husserl ([1936/54] 1970) came to denote the “world of the natural attitude” as “the life-world,” the world that is given to our

immediate experience, a general background or horizon, which is also a world shared with others. To share a world might be to share the points of recession. If the tendency when we are involved in the world is to look over what is around us, then the task of the phenomenologist is to attend to what is looked over, to allow what is “overed” to surface.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter, I hope to offer this kind of attention. My primary aim is to offer an ethnographic approach to institutional life that works with the detail of how that life is described by diversity practitioners. Diversity work could be described as a phenomenological practice: a way of attending to what gets passed over as routine or an ordinary feature of institutional life.<sup>5</sup> We could even say that diversity workers live an institutional life. Dorothy E. Smith suggests that an institutional ethnography “would begin in the actualities of the lives of some of those involved in the institutional process” (2005: 31). Diversity workers work from their institutional involvement. Diversity practitioners do not simply work *at* institutions, they also work *on* them, given that their explicit remit is to redress existing institutional goals or priorities.

This chapter considers why institutions matter for diversity practitioners and explores how an *explicit* attention to institutions teaches us about their *implicit* significance and meaning. I want to think specifically about institutional life: not only how institutions acquire a life of their own but also how we experience institutions or what it means to experience something as institutional. We might also need to consider how we experience life within institutions, what it means for life to be “an institutional life.” If the life we bracket as our working life is still a life, we need to attend to the form of this life by attending to what is bracketed by becoming institutionalized.

### **Institutionalizing Diversity**

A typical goal of diversity work is “to institutionalize diversity.” A goal is something that directs an action. It is an aiming for. However, if institutionalizing diversity is a goal for diversity workers, it does not necessarily mean it is the institution’s goal. I think this “not necessarily” describes a paradoxical condition that is a life situation for many diversity practi-

tioners. Having an institutional aim to make diversity a goal can even be a sign that diversity is *not* an institutional goal.

We could say that practitioners are given the goal of making diversity a goal. In most of my interviews, practitioners began their story with the story of their appointment. In the U.K. context, the appointment of officers is often about the appointment of a writer, of having someone who can write the policies that will effectively institutionalize a commitment to diversity.<sup>6</sup> Let's take the following account: "I came to [xxx] three and a half years ago and the reason that they appointed someone, I think, was because of the compliance with the Race Relations Amendment Act . . . you come into a position like this and people just don't know what kind of direction it's going to go in, you're not sort of, there's nobody helping to support you, this job does not have support mechanisms and you know maybe you're just there, because if you're not there then the university can't say that its dealing with legislation." An appointment becomes a story of not being given institutional support, as if being "just there" is enough. An appointment of a diversity officer can thus represent the absence of wider support for diversity.

The institutional nature of diversity work is often described in terms of the language of integrating or embedding diversity into the ordinary work or daily routines of an organization. As one practitioner explains, "My role is about embedding equity and diversity practice in the daily practice of this university. I mean, ideally I would do myself out of a job but I suspect that's not going to happen in the short term, so I didn't want to do that and I haven't got the staff or money to do it anyway." The diversity worker has a job because diversity and equality are not already given; this obvious fact has some less obvious consequences. When your task is to remove the necessity of your existence, then your existence is necessary for the task.

Practitioners partly work at the level of an engagement with explicit institutional goals, that is, of adding diversity to the terms in which institutions set their agendas—what we might think of as an institutional purpose or end. To agree on your aims is to offer an institutional attitude: a set of norms, values, and priorities that determine what is granted and how. Edmund Husserl suggests that "an attitude" means "a habitually fixed

style of willing life comprising directions of the will or interests that are prescribed by this style, comprising the ultimate ends, the cultural accomplishments whose total style is thereby determined" ([1936/54] 1970: 280). To define or agree on the ends of an institution can thus shape what is taken for granted by it and within it. A phenomenology of institutions might be concerned with how these ends are agreed on, such that an individual accomplishment becomes an institutional accomplishment. An institution is given when there is an agreement on what should be accomplished, or what it means to be accomplished.

An institution gives form to its aims in a mission statement. If diversity work is institutional work, then it can mean working on mission statements, getting the term "diversity" included in them. This is not to say that a mission statement simply reflects the aims of the university: as Marilyn Strathern has shown, mission statements are "utterances of a specific kind" that mobilize the "international language of governance" (2006: 194–95). Giving form to institutional goals involves following a set of conventions. This is not to say that mission statements are any less significant for being conventional; the aim of a convention is still directive. When I participated in an equality and diversity committee, some of our discussions were based on how to get "equality" and "diversity" into the university's mission statement and other policy statements that were supposed to derive from it. We aimed not only to get the terms *in* but also to get them *up*: to get "equality" and "diversity" cited as high up the statement as possible. I recall the feeling of doing this work: in retrospect or in abstract, what we achieved might seem trivial (I remember one rather long discussion about a semicolon in a tag line!), but the task was still saturated with significance. The significance might be thought of as a distraction (you work on something you can achieve as a way of not focusing on—and thus being depressed by—what you cannot) but could also point to how institutional politics can involve the matter of detail; perhaps diversity provides a form of punctuation.

However, institutionalization was not simply defined by practitioners in terms of the formal or explicit goals, values, or priorities of an institution. Many spoke about institutionalization in terms of what institutions

“tend to do,” *whatever it is they say they are doing or should be doing*. The very idea of institutionalization might even denote those tendencies or habitual forms of action that are not named or made explicit. We can thus think of institutions in terms of how some actions become automatic at a collective level; institutional nature might be “second nature.” When an action is incorporated by an institution, it becomes natural to it. Second nature is “accumulated and sedimented history,” as “frozen history that surfaces as nature” (Jacoby 1975: 31).<sup>7</sup> When history accumulates, certain ways of doing things seem natural. An institution takes shape as an effect of what has become automatic. Institutional talk is often about “how we do things here,” where the very claim of a “how” does not need to be claimed. We might describe institutionalization as “becoming background,” when being “in” the institution is to “agree” with what becomes background (or we could speculate that an agreement is how things recede). This becoming background creates a sense of ease and familiarity, an ease that can also take the form of incredulity at the naiveté or ignorance of the newly arrived or outsiders. The familiarity of the institution is a way of inhabiting the familiar.

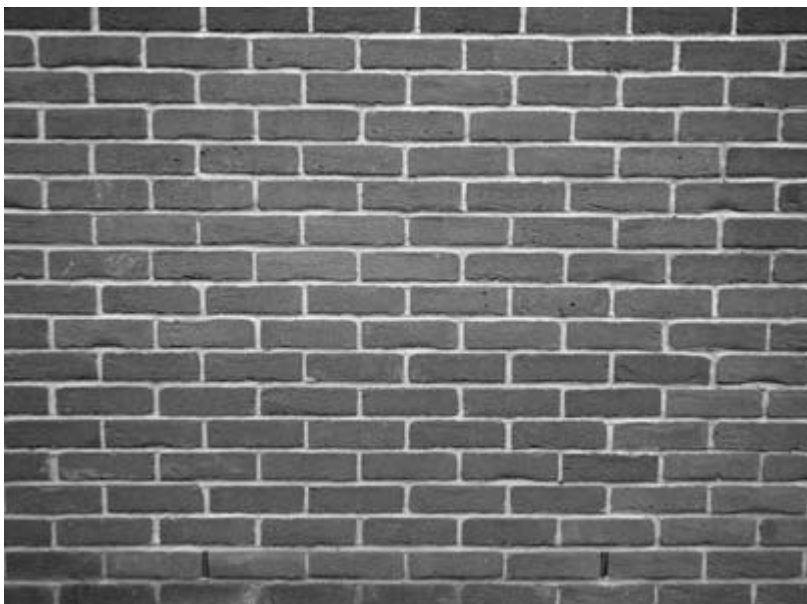
Institutionalization “comes up” for practitioners partly in their description of their own labor: diversity work is hard because it can involve doing *within* institutions what would not otherwise be done *by* them. As one interviewee describes, “You need persistence and I think that’s what you need to do because not everyone has an interest in equity and diversity issues, so I think it needs to be up there in people’s faces, well not right in their faces, but certainly up there with equal billing with other considerations, so that it’s always present, so that they eventually think of it automatically and that it becomes part of their considerations.” The aim is to make thought about equality and diversity issues “automatic.” Diversity workers must be persistent precisely because this kind of thought is *not* automatic; it is not the kind of thought normally included in “how institutions think,” to borrow an expression from the anthropologist Mary Douglas (1986). Or as Ole Elgström describes in a different but related context, such thoughts have to “fight their way into institutional thinking” (2000: 458). The struggle for diversity to become an institutional thought requires



certain people to “fight their way.” Not only this—the persistence required exists in necessary relation to the resistance encountered. The more you persist, the more the signs of this resistance. The more resistance, the more persistence required.

The institution can be experienced by practitioners *as* resistance. One expression that came up in a number of my interviews was “banging your head against a brick wall.” Indeed, this experience of the brick wall was often described as an intrinsic part of diversity work. As one practitioner describes, “So much of the time it is a banging-your-head-on-the-brick-wall job.” How interesting that a job description can be a wall description (see figure 1). The feeling of doing diversity work is the feeling of coming up against something that does not move, something solid and tangible.<sup>8</sup> The institution becomes that which you come up against. If we recall that most diversity practitioners are employed by institutions to do diversity (though not all: some have “equality” and “diversity” added to their job descriptions), then we can understand the significance of this description. The official desire to institutionalize diversity does not mean the institution is opened up; indeed, the wall might become all the more apparent, all the more a sign of immobility, the more the institution presents itself as being opened up. The wall gives physical form to what a number of practitioners describe as “institutional inertia,” the lack of an institutional will to change.

Perhaps the habits of the institutions are not revealed unless you come up against them. When something becomes a habit, as the psychologist William James shows, it saves trouble and energy ([1890] 1950: 105):<sup>9</sup> you do not have to attend to something, it does not have to command your attention. In a classical work on the sociology of knowledge, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann identify the origins of institutionalization in the very mechanisms of habituation: “by providing a stable background in which human activity may proceed with a minimum of decision-making most of the time, it frees energy for such decisions as may be necessary on certain occasion. In other words, the *background* of habitualized activity opens up a *foreground* for deliberation and innovation” (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 71; emphasis added).<sup>10</sup> We can see the immediate difficulty of diversity work: to persist by making diversity into an explicit institutional end, by bringing diversity to the foreground, stops



**Figure 1.** A job description.

diversity from becoming habitual. While habits save trouble, diversity work creates trouble.

Diversity would be institutionalized when it becomes part of what an institution is already doing, when it ceases to cause trouble. Some universities in the United States now have “offices of institutional diversity.” We need to stay surprised by this; we need the fact of such offices to be surprising. We need an account of the conditions in which such offices of institutional diversity make sense. In this formulation, the institutional is an adjective, as if institutional diversity is a particular kind of diversity. Such offices are also where institutional diversity happens: they institute institutional diversity. How does the institutional diversity get instituted? There is no doubt there is work involved. An example:

A commitment to diversity is an integral part of the University’s educational mission. The institution’s mission statement says in part that the University “endeavors to prepare the university community and the state for full participation in the global society of the 21st century.

Through its programs and practices, it seeks to foster the understanding of and respect for cultural differences necessary for an enlightened and educated citizenry.” The mission of the Office of Institutional Diversity is to lead a focused institutional effort to evaluate existing programs and develop new initiatives to support diversity and equity at the University. The Office of Institutional Diversity seeks to ensure a University where people of many different backgrounds and perspectives join together to actively advance knowledge. As a community dedicated to scholarship, research, instruction, and public service and outreach, we recognize the importance of respecting, valuing and learning from each other’s differences while seeking common goals. The Office of Institutional Diversity will provide the leadership to establish the University as a national and international model in creative ways to address diversity and equity issues in an academic setting.

Note how this statement directly quotes from the mission statement that describes the purpose of the institution. The Office of Institutional Diversity is set up by the institution to institute its commitment to diversity, proving leadership, shaping values, and enabling conversations. The office promotes a culture in which diversity is valued as part of an educational mission. The fact of this office is both an expression of the institution’s commitment to diversity and how that commitment will be expressed. The office will “lead a focused institutional effort.” To institutionalize diversity requires institutional effort within an institution. We might even say that the university *as* an institution will do diversity through what the office does; it provides the “institutional” in “institutional diversity.”

To embed diversity within an institution involves working with the physicality of the institution: putting diversity into the organizational flow of things. I noticed how diversity practitioners often use the metaphor of the institution as an organic body. This metaphor has a long history as the idea of the social body (see Poovey 1995). The institution, in being imagined as an organic body, is understood as a singular entity made of multiple interrelated parts, all of which contribute to the health or well-being of that body.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, organic and mechanical metaphors are used simultaneously as ways of describing the institution. Both metaphors work to

convey an entity that is made up of parts, where the communication between parts is essential to an overall performance. Structures of governance make an institution into a body or machine: there is a system of distribution, with paths that transfer materials to each part, each assumed to have their own function or purpose, each participating in the overall health of the body or machine. Practitioners do not simply aim for diversity to become part of an organizational body or machine; they want diversity *to go through the whole system*.

Diversity practitioners thus develop techniques for embedding diversity or making diversity given. As one practitioner described to me: “There are different ways that you can make diversity a given because it’s actually part of the way you do things. Before it becomes that you have to recognize the value of it and I suppose that’s what I mean by it becoming a given: the university is aware of the value of it on a range of levels and that it wants to benefit from the community of voices that can be heard and act through that diversity.” This comment might remind us that all givens must become given. Perhaps when givens are given, we can forget about this becoming; to quote from Hannah Arendt, when something is given it “loses the air of contingency” (1978: 30).<sup>12</sup> If the task of embedding diversity is to find ways to make diversity become given, then diversity has an “air of contingency.” Note as well that to make diversity a given requires achieving institutional recognition of the value of diversity. Such recognition involves an appreciation not only of the value of the term but also of a “community of voices.” To value diversity is to value those who can “be heard and act” under its name.

To recognize diversity requires that time, energy, and labor be given to diversity. Recognition is thus material as well as symbolic: how time, energy, and labor are directed within institutions affects *how they surface*. Diversity workers aim to intervene in how the institution surfaces. Doing diversity work can mean passing “diversity” around, both *as* a word and *in* documents, as I discuss further in the following two chapters. As one practitioner describes, “I have a general circulation that goes to a diverse group of people, and if it doesn’t get through one way it will get through another, by using about two or three different strategies of the circulation pool, in the end it must get there.” Diversity work is about getting diver-

sity into circulation, such that it can reach diverse people. Circulating diversity can be the aim of diversity work, which of course can bypass the question of what is being circulated. You get “it” out one way or another. Doing diversity requires expanding one’s means of circulating information; for practitioners, diversity work is often about developing diverse communication strategies. We might even say that diversity workers *are* communication workers. You do diversity by working out how to circulate the matter of diversity around.

The importance of circulation systems to diversity work should not be underestimated. Arguably all institutional work involves the gradual refinement of systems for getting information through to those employed by the institution. My discussions with practitioners taught me that communication becomes an end as well as a means for certain kinds of work within universities. When your task is to get out information that is less valued by an organization, the techniques for moving information around become even more important. You have to persist because there is a resistance to the information getting through: to refer back to an earlier quote, “You need persistence and I think that’s what you need to do because not everyone has an interest in equity and diversity issues.” This practitioner usefully describes diversity work in terms of getting it “up there.” Other practitioners talk about diversity work as putting stuff or material in the right places: “She is vigilant about constantly putting the stuff up on the table, so she is raising the awareness and putting it on the executive agenda so it’s being seen to be part and parcel of university, so that I think is an extraordinarily important thing.” To be part of the university requires tabling: diversity workers have to put stuff “on the table.” I consider how the language of diversity offers a way of getting people to the table in the following chapter.

Organizations can be considered as modes of attention: what is attended to can be thought of as what is valued; attention is how some things come into view (and other things do not). Diversity work involves the effort of putting diversity into the places that are already valued so that diversity can come into view. Because “looking at equity groups is something that doesn’t grab people’s attention,” practitioners suggest you have to “promote it” so that “it is about being cognizant of the diversity in front

of you in a whole range of ways.” One practitioner based in the United Kingdom describes her main problem as “competing for institutional attentions, the RAE<sup>13</sup> has been right in front of people’s faces.” Institutions have faces not simply in the sense that they are pictured but also in the sense that they have a direction; to have a direction is to face a certain way. To make diversity given thus requires institutional redirection.

Practitioners also describe their task as finding out who within the organization will speak up for diversity as a way of getting it into institutional conversations: “We’ve got some people on the senate, which is our governing body, and they have been interested in diversity. I don’t think previously they ever saw it as particularly part and parcel of the central business of the university, so there’s a combination of things that have happened. Since I’ve been here I’ve also totally restructured the university’s equity and diversity committee structure. That has involved people at the senate level and debate at [the] senate about the university’s equity and diversity strategies. That’s put equity and diversity on the agenda for [the] senate in a way that it’s never been before.” Putting equality and diversity on the agenda can be about getting or keeping certain people in the important committees, as well as getting important people on the diversity committees. Having diversity people—those interested in diversity—in the governing bodies of the institution allows diversity to become “part and parcel” of what the institution is doing, to become “central business.”

Diversity workers thus spend a lot of time identifying the people in an organization who are willing to speak up about diversity in meetings. They have to be very mobile: willing to speak to all university employees, willing to attend any meetings, at any time. One practitioner describes this labor in a vivid way: “Well you do, you do, and that’s one of the things about our sort of jobs is that you are traveling around the university and you are in and out of many, many different forums and talking to all sorts of people, going to meetings that involve the vice chancellor or running a training program for teachers, you go across the whole range of the university and it can be quite challenging. . . . It is a unique position within the university, there’s no other section of the university that is across the whole university in quite the same way that we are. You get sick of driving between campuses.” Diversity work thus requires an intense form of phys-



**Figure 2.** Diversity Weeks have become part of the official calendar of events. Graphic produced for the University of Queensland Diversity Week 2010. DESIGN BY JENELLE PHILLIPS, FROM THE UNIVERSITY'S OFFICE OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS.

ical and institutional mobility. To keep diversity moving, diversity workers have to be on the move.

Diversity workers thus align their own offices (if they have an office), and their own bodies, with the official lines of the institution. Diversity becomes physically embedded within the university through these multiple alignments: in some cases, leading to diversity weeks, prizes, and events becoming part of an official calendar of events (see figure 2). Diversity workers have to work with the organization as a physical body, working out the mechanisms of distribution through which it reproduces the conditions of its existence. This is why diversity workers are often extremely knowledgeable about how universities work, where things go, and where things get stuck. I am referring here not only to knowledge about the nature or character of specific institutions (which I discuss in more detail in the next chapter) but also to a more practical knowledge about the informal mechanisms and influences that allow some things to become institutional priorities rather than others. As one practitioner described, “There are informal influences that act as blocking agents that stop conversations from even taking place.” Diversity workers are institutional plumbers: they develop an expertise in how and where things get stuck. Diversity strategies could be described as techniques for unblocking institutional blockages. The mechanical aspect of diversity work is revealed most explicitly when the institution is working: when diversity is blocked, institutional conversations stop diversity from becoming part of the conversation.

### **Institutional Whiteness**

We learn from the pragmatics of organizations: how they circulate matter is a reflection of what matters. Diversity work is thus pragmatic work: you work with the very matter of an institution when you institutionalize diversity. How does diversity work relate to the project of challenging institutional whiteness? Nirmal Puwar argues that diversity has come “overwhelmingly to mean the inclusion of people who look different” (2004: 1). The very idea that diversity is about those who “look different” shows us how it can keep whiteness in place. If diversity becomes something that is added to organizations, like color, then it confirms the whiteness of what is already in place. Alternatively, as a sign of the proximity of those who “look different,” diversity can expose the whiteness of those who are already in place. To diversify an institution becomes an institutional action insofar as the necessity of the action reveals the absence or failure of diversity.

Our diversity research team noticed this: the organization we worked for wanted to picture our team in picturing the organization. When our team was their picture, it created the impression that the organization was diverse. Arguably this was a false impression: the other teams were predominantly white. On the other hand, when our team was pictured, it helped expose the whiteness of the other teams. Even if diversity can conceal whiteness by providing an organization with color, it can also expose whiteness by demonstrating the necessity of this act of provision.

We need to think about the relationship between diversity and what we might call “institutional whiteness.” We can think about how diversity involves a repicturing of an institution. The institution might not have an intrinsic character, but it is given character in part by being given a face. Diversity might create a new image of the institution or even a new institutional face. In the diversity world, there is a great deal of investment in images. Diversity might even appear as image, for example, in the form of the multicultural mosaic, as Elaine Swan (2010b) has carefully analyzed. An institutional image is produced in part for external others. The investment in diversity images might teach us about the importance of diversity



as a way of managing the relationship between an organization and external others (as I explore later, diversity becomes a form of public relations).

Organizations manage their relation to external others by managing their image. This management can take the form of what speakers in a 2005 conference organized by the Commission for Racial Equality referred to as “perception data,” that is, data collected by organizations about how they are perceived by external communities. In one interview with staff from a human resources department, we discussed such a research project:

It was about uncovering perceptions, um, about the [xxx] as an employer. . . . [xxx] was considered to be an old boys’ network, as they called it and white male–dominated and they didn’t have the right perceptions of the [xxx] in terms of what it offers and what it brings to the academia. I think most of the external people had the wrong perceptions about the [xxx].

And I mean, quotes, there were such funny quotes like librarians, they were sitting there with their cardigans you know. They were shocking reports to read, really, about how people, external people, perceive the [xxx] so we have to try to achieve. We have to try to make the [xxx] an attractive employer.

There are issues of perception amongst certain communities, which are stopping them from reaching us.

Diversity work becomes about generating the “right image” and correcting the wrong one. I was quite interested that they were shocked by this image, given what I knew of the staffing profile of this university. What organizes this shock is the presumption that the perception is the problem. According to this logic, people have the “wrong perception” when they see the organization as white, elite, male, old-fashioned. In other words, behind the shock is a belief that the organization does not have these qualities: that whiteness is “in the image” rather than “in the organization.” Diversity becomes about *changing perceptions of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of organizations*. Changing perceptions of whiteness can be how an institution can reproduce whiteness, as that which exists but is no longer perceived.

I think the final comment, “there are issues of perception amongst certain communities, which are stopping them from reaching us,” is particularly suggestive. The “certain communities” is an implicit reference to communities of color: race often appears under the euphemism of community, an appearance that is a disappearance (see Ahmed et al. 2006: 30). The implication is that the institution does not reach such communities—it does not include them—*because* they perceive the institution as excluding them. The problem of whiteness is thus redescribed here not as an institutional problem but as a problem with those who are not included by it.

What would it mean to talk about whiteness as an institutional problem or as a problem of institutions? When we describe institutions as being white, we point to how institutional spaces are shaped by the proximity of some bodies and not others: white bodies gather and create the impression of coherence. When I walk into university meetings, this is just what I encounter. Sometimes I get used to it. At one conference we organized, four Black feminists arrived. They all happened to walk into the room at the same time. Yes, we do notice such arrivals. The fact that we notice them tells us more about what is already in place than about “who” arrives. Someone says, “It is like walking into a sea of whiteness.” This phrase comes up, and it hangs in the air. The speech act becomes an object, which gathers us around.

When an arrival is noticeable, we notice what is around. I look around and re-encounter the sea of whiteness. I had become so used to this whiteness that I had stopped noticing it. As many have argued, whiteness is invisible and unmarked, as the absent center against which others appear as points of deviation (Dyer 1997; Frankenberg 1993). Whiteness could be described as a habit insofar as it tends to go unnoticed (Sullivan 2006: 1).<sup>14</sup> Or perhaps whiteness is only invisible to those who inhabit it or those who get so used to its inhabitation that they learn not to see it, even when they are not it.

If we get used to inhabiting whiteness (it can be a survival strategy to learn not to see it, to learn not to see how you are not reflected back by what is around), it does not mean whiteness does not still affect us. One of the pleasures of doing this research was going to policy events on equality and diversity where I did *not* encounter a sea of whiteness.<sup>15</sup> I encountered

a sea of brownness. I am well aware of the dangers of what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls—in the context of a critique of the assumption of the “transformativity” of global feminism—“the body count” (2000: 128, see also Alexander 2005: 135). But numbers can be affective. It can be surprising and energizing not to feel so singular. When you inhabit a sea of brownness as a person of color, you might realize the effort of your previous inhabitation, the effort of not noticing what is around you. It is like how you can feel the “weight” of tiredness most acutely as the tiredness leaves you. To become conscious of how things leave you is to become conscious of those things. We might become even more aware of whiteness as wearing when we leave the spaces of whiteness.

The labor required to leave whiteness is also worth noting: in some institutional contexts, it is hard work not to reproduce the whiteness of events. I attended a conference on sexuality in 2011 that was a very white event (this is not unusual for academic events in the United Kingdom—whiteness is the norm). So, yes, I looked around the audience and encountered a sea of whiteness. The event was also structured around whiteness; all the plenary speakers were white. I had pointed out the problem with having all white plenary speakers to the conference organizers in advance of the event, hoping they might do something about it (but as I note in my conclusion, being asked to make up numbers after an event has been advertised can be a problem: we need not to be in the position of making such points or making up the numbers in the first place). When I turned up at the event, all the plenary speakers were white (is there a “still” before this “white”? Is whiteness something that can be described as “still”?). I was relieved that a black caucus had been set up by someone in the organizing team who was an activist of color; at the same time, I was cautious. Did giving the people of color a space allow the event to stay white? The caucus was explicitly framed as a space for all participants of color; whatever my caution, I was relieved to have the space when the time came; it can be tiring, all that whiteness.

What happened? Who turned up? All in all, ten people came to the black caucus, four of whom identified themselves as white. The organizer handed out a description of the event that made explicit that it was for people of color. No one left after reading the description. For understand-

able reasons, the organizer did not want to insist on anyone leaving. We sat in a circle and took turns speaking about why we had come to the event. I was very uncomfortable. I had expected this time and space to be a chance to talk to other people of color. It felt as if the one space we had been given—to take a break from whiteness—had been taken away. From the accounts offered, there were clearly different ways that white people had given themselves permission to turn up at a black caucus: being interested in questions of race; a sense of solidarity, alliance, and friendship; a desire to be at a workshop rather than a traditional academic session; a belief that race didn't matter because it shouldn't matter. Those of us of color tried hard—in different ways—to speak about why we wanted this event to be a person of color event. Someone mentions that it was interesting that a black caucus would have 40 percent white people; she used percentages, I think, because numbers can be affective. I talked about the relief of entering queer space after the fatigue of being in straight space as a way of making an implicit analogy, an appeal for recognition. Eventually, a white person left in recognition—and gave recognition—that we needed a space of relief from whiteness. A second person followed, but aggressively, saying we had made her unwelcome, forced her to leave. One by one the white people left, each offering an account of leaving, and a different account of why they had come. When the black caucus became itself, such joy, such relief! Such humor, such talk! What I learned from this occasion was the political labor that it takes to have spaces of relief from whiteness. I also realized the different ways that whiteness can be “occupying.” Although the aggressive way of leaving was the most obviously difficult to deal with, we also need to account for the more sympathetic or caring ways of leaving the space. They may help us explore how whiteness can be occupying through or as care (what we might call simply a caring whiteness or even a sorry whiteness). I was struck how apology can be a form of permission: how apologizing for turning up at a person of color event as a white person might be a way of giving oneself permission to do so. The struggle against the reproduction of whiteness is a struggle against these forms of permission.

When bodies gather, it creates an impression. We can think of the “convene” in convention. A convention is a meeting point, a point around

which bodies gather. Whiteness is a name we give to how some gatherings become conventions. Nirmal Puwar describes in *Space Invaders* (2004) how white bodies become somatic norms within spaces and how nonwhite bodies can feel “out of place” within those spaces. An institutional norm is a somatic norm when it takes the form of a white body. Institutional norms can refer to the explicit rules or norms of conduct enforced by an institution (through a system of awards and sanctions). If we think of institutional norms as somatic, then we can show how by assuming a body, institutions can generate an idea of appropriate conduct without making this idea explicit. The institute “institutes” the body that is instituting, without that body coming into view. If institutional whiteness describes an institutional habit, then whiteness recedes into the background.

Researching diversity involved me in lots of conversations about whiteness as a kind of surround or just as what is around. You can feel estranged from an around. In an informal conversation, one practitioner talked about her sense of alienation from her college. She talked about the experience of being surrounded by whiteness: “It’s not just the people here now. They even name the buildings after dead vcs [vice chancellors].” Acts of naming, of giving buildings names, can keep a certain history alive: in the surroundings you are surrounded by who was there before. A history of whiteness can be a history of before.

This practitioner also talked about a decision made by her institution to include photographs of the senior management team on the university website. The photographs were all of white men of a certain age. She relayed how when she was looking at the website, a friend of hers looked over her shoulder and asked, “Are they related?” When she told me this story, we couldn’t stop laughing. There is a lot of humor in sharing the world of diversity, based on the shared recognition of and alienation from what is reproduced as an institutional given. An institutional logic can be understood as kinship logic: a way of “being related” and “staying related,” a way of keeping certain bodies in place. Institutional whiteness is about the reproduction of likeness. Whiteness is a form of likeness that is not always revealed: precisely given that whiteness is often individuated or made “quirky.”

Institutions are kinship technologies: a way of “being related” is a way

of reproducing social relations. They also function to generate what we might call likability. It is not just a question of “being like” what an organization is like. It is not just an appearance of likeness that shapes the terms of an appearance. In an equal opportunities workshop I attended, someone made a comment that stuck with me. She said how a common talk during appointment panels is about whether such-and-such a candidate would “fit in” with the department. The measure of fitting in is indicated by the expression “the kind of person you could take down to the pub.” Wanting to work with those who can inhabit a shared social space might seem like a rather ordinary aspiration. But the very desire for a shared social space can be a desire that *restricts to whom an institutional space is open* by imaging a social space that is not open to everyone. The likable candidate (the one we would like to “hang out” with) might be determined as a relation of likeness. In turn, the reference to a leisure space as a measure of recruitability shows how organizational habits are revealed in casual and informal conduct. When the rules are relaxed, we encounter the rules.

The institutionalization of whiteness involves work: the institution comes to have the form of a body as an effect of this work. It is important that we do not reify institutions by presuming they are simply given and that they decide what we do. Rather, institutions become given, as an effect of decisions made over time, which shapes the surface of institutional spaces. Recruitment functions as a technology for the reproduction of whiteness. We can recall that Althusser’s model of ideology is based on recruitment:

ideology “acts” or “functions” in such a way that it “recruits” subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or “transforms” the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by the very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: “Hey you there.” (1971: 163)

The subject is recruited by turning around, which immediately associates recruitment with following a direction, one that takes the line of an address. To recruit can suggest both to renew and to restore. The act of recruiting new bodies can restore the body of the institution. Becoming

part of an institution, which we can consider as the demand to share in it or have a share of it, requires not only that one inhabits its buildings but that one follows its lines. We might start by saying “we”; by mourning its failures and rejoicing in its successes; by reading the documents that circulate within it, creating vertical and horizontal lines of communication; by the chance encounters we have with those who inhabit the grounds. To be recruited by an institution is not only to join up but also to sign up: to inhabit is to turn around as a return of its address.

Furthermore, recruitment creates the very idea of the institution, what it imagines as the ideal that working there means working toward. When we begin to think about the institutionalization of whiteness, we are asking how whiteness becomes the ideal of an organization. As scholars in critical management studies have shown us, organizations “tend to recruit in their own image” (Singh 2002: 3). One of the diversity workers I interviewed in Australia spoke directly about cloning as an institutional logic. As she describes: “Cloned groups are the people where we actually want to replicate ourselves and are only employing people who are like us because of our comfort zone and familiarity because we believe they are the same as us with that whole projecting stuff when actual fact they probably aren’t—people do grow to be similar or more alike.” The “hey you” is not just addressed to anybody: some bodies more than others are recruited, those that can inherit and reproduce the character of the organization, by reflecting its image back to itself, by having a “good likeness.” There can be comfort in reflection. Note that there is an invitation in proximity—to become more alike, to acquire a better likeness. The word “comfort” suggests well-being and satisfaction, but it can also suggest an ease and easiness. Comfort is about an encounter between bodies and worlds, the promise of a “sinking” feeling. If white bodies are comfortable it is because *they can sink into spaces that extend their shape*.

To inhabit whiteness as a nonwhite body can be uncomfortable: you might even fail the comfort test. It can be the simple act of walking into the room that causes discomfort. Whiteness can be an expectation of who will turn up. A person of color describes: “When I enter the room there is shock on people’s faces because they are expecting a white person to come in. I pretend not to recognize it. But in the interview there is unease

because they were not expecting someone like me to turn up. So it is hard and uncomfortable and I can tell that they are uneasy and restless because of the way they fiddle and twitch around with their pens and their looks. They are uncomfortable because they were not expecting me—perhaps they would not have invited me if they knew I was black and of course I am very uncomfortable. I am wondering whether they are entertaining any prejudice against me” (cited in Ahmed et al. 2006: 77).<sup>16</sup> They are not expecting you. Discomfort involves this failure to fit. A restlessness and uneasiness, a fidgeting and twitching, is a bodily registering of an unexpected arrival.

The body that causes their discomfort (by not fulfilling an expectation of whiteness) is the one who must work hard to make others comfortable. You have to pass by passing your way through whiteness, by being seamless or minimizing the signs of difference. If whiteness is what the institution is oriented around, then even bodies that do not appear white still have to inhabit whiteness. One person of color describes how she minimizes signs of difference (by not wearing anything perceived as “ethnic”) because she does not want to be seen as “rocking the boat” (cited in Ahmed et al. 2006: 78; see also chapter 5). The invitation to become more alike as an invitation of whiteness is about becoming more comfortable or inhabiting a comfort zone.

Bodies stick out when they are out of place. Think of the expression “stick out like a sore thumb.” To stick out can mean to become a sore point, or even to experience oneself as being a sore point. To inhabit whiteness as a not-white body can mean trying not to appear at all: “I have to pretend that I am not here because I don’t want to stick out too much because everybody knows I am the only black person here” (cited in Ahmed et al. 2006: 77). When you stick out, the gaze sticks to you. Sticking out from whiteness can thus reconfirm the whiteness of the space. Whiteness is an effect of what coheres rather than the origin of coherence. The effect of repetition is not then simply about a body count: it is not simply a matter of how many bodies are in. Rather, what is repeated is a very style of embodiment, a way of inhabiting space *by the accumulation of gestures of “sinking” into that space*. As George Yancy describes, “white bodies move in and out of these spaces with ease, paying no particular attention to



their numbers or looking for bodies that resemble their own. They are at home” (2008: 40). If whiteness allows some bodies to move with comfort, to inhabit that space as home, those bodies take up more space.

It might seem problematic to describe whiteness as something we “pass through.” Such an argument could make whiteness into something substantive, as if it has an ontological force of its own, which compels us and even “drives” action. It is important to remember that whiteness is not reducible to white skin or even to something we can have or be, even if we pass through whiteness. When we talk about a “sea of whiteness” or “white space,” we talk about the repetition of the passing by of some bodies and not others. And yet nonwhite bodies do inhabit white spaces; we know this. Such bodies are made invisible when spaces appear white, at the same time as they become hypervisible when they do not pass, which means they “stand out” and “stand apart.” You learn to fade in the background, but sometimes you can’t or you don’t.

That the arrival of some bodies is more noticeable than others reveals an expectation of who will show up. The word “expect” derives from the Latin verb *spectare*, “to look.” An expectation of who will turn up is not only an expectation of how they will look but also a looking for or a looking out for. An expectation can be hopeful and directive. If you expect such-and-such to turn up, and they turn up, an expectation has been met.

Diversity can also involve a “looking out for.” A typical statement in a job advertisement for public sector organizations is “women and ethnic minorities encouraged to apply,” although this mode of address is increasingly changing to a tagline such as “xxx is an equal opportunities employer,” or even “xxx promotes diversity.” I suspect, however, that the tagline preserves the implication of the address it replaces, conveying without naming the minority subject. The logic exercised here is one of “welcoming,” premised on a distinction between the institution as host and the potential employer as guest. To be made welcome by an explicit act of address works to reveal what is implicit: that those who are already given a place are *the ones who are welcoming* rather than welcomed, the ones who are in the structural position of hosts.

The logic often used when diversity is institutionalized could be described in terms of “conditional hospitality” (Derrida 2000: 73; Rosello

2001): the other (the stranger, foreigner) is welcomed with conditions or on condition.<sup>17</sup> Rauna Johanna Kuokkanen describes how the academy “presents itself as a welcoming host but not without conditions” (2007: 131). When diversity becomes a form of hospitality, perhaps the organization is the host who receives as guests those who embody diversity. Whiteness is produced as host, as that which is already in place or at home. To be welcomed is to be positioned as the one who is not at home. Conditional hospitality is when you are welcomed on condition that you give something back in return. The multicultural nation functions this way: the nation offers hospitality and even love to would-be citizens as long as they return this hospitality by integrating, or by identifying with the nation (see Ahmed 2004: 133–34). People of color in white organizations are treated as guests, temporary residents in someone else’s home. People of color are welcomed *on condition* they return that hospitality by integrating into a common organizational culture, or by “being” diverse, and allowing institutions to celebrate their diversity.

I am speaking of whiteness at a seminar. Someone in the audience says, “But you are a professor,” as if to say when people of color become professors then the whiteness of the world recedes.<sup>18</sup> If only we had the power we are imagined to possess, if only our proximity could be such a force. If only our arrival could be an undoing. I was appointed to teach “the race course,” I reply. I am the only person of color employed on a full-time permanent basis in the department. I hesitate. It becomes too personal. The argument is too hard to sustain when your body is so exposed, when you feel so noticeable. I stop and do not complete my response.

When our appointments and promotions are taken up as signs of organizational commitment to equality and diversity, we are in trouble. Any success is read as a sign of an overcoming of institutional whiteness. “Look, you’re here!” “Look, look!” Our talk about whiteness is read as a form of stubbornness, paranoia, or even melancholia as if we are holding onto something (whiteness) that our arrival shows has already gone. Our talk about whiteness is read as a sign of ingratitude, of failing to be grateful for the hospitality we have received by virtue of our arrival. This very structural position of being the guest, or the stranger, the one who receives hospitality, allows an act of inclusion to maintain the form of exclusion.

## Institutional Racism

Institutional whiteness can be reproduced through the logic of diversity. To recognize the institutionality of whiteness remains an important goal of antiracist work, as does the recognition of institutional racism. We need to keep alive the question of why institutionality is something that needs to be recognized. We also need to ask what is being recognized in such recognition.

The struggle to recognize institutional racism can be understood as part of a wider struggle to recognize that all forms of power, inequality, and domination are systematic rather than individual. The critique of the psychologizing of racism made by antiracist scholars and activists over generations is thus part of the struggle to recognize institutional racism (see Hesse 2004). In other words, racism should not be seen as about individuals with bad attitudes (the “bad apple model”), not because such individuals do not exist (they do) but because such a way of thinking underestimates the scope and scale of racism, thus leaving us without an account of how racism *gets reproduced*. The argument can be made in even stronger terms: the very identification of racism *with* individuals becomes a technology for the reproduction of racism *of* institutions. So eliminating the racist individual would preserve the racism of the institution in part by creating an illusion that we are eliminating racism. Institutions can “keep their racism” by eliminating those whom they identify as racists.

The definition of institutional racism that is widely accepted in the United Kingdom is offered in the Macpherson Report (1999) into racism within the police force, the product of an inquiry into how the police handled the murder of a black male teenager, Stephen Lawrence. That the police handling of the murder became the occasion for the recognition of institutional racism is crucial: the report argues that how the police responded to the murder was not simply a product of racist attitudes held by individual police but was the result of racism within the police force *as such*. To quote from the report, institutional racism amounts to “the collective failure of an organization 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” (1999: 28; see Solomos 1999).

A politics of recognition is also about definition: if we recognize something such as racism, 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 recognizes as given. In this report, the definition of an institution as racist involves recognition of the collective rather than individual nature of racism. But it might also foreclose what is meant by “collective” by finding 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 want to consider racism as a form of doing or even a field of positive action, rather than a form of inaction. For example, we might wish to examine how institutions become white through the positing of some bodies rather than others as the subjects of the institution (for whom and by whom the institution is shaped). Racism would not be evident in what we fail to do but in what we have already done, whereby this “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 nonwhite others because of their difference.

We might notice how a 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 recognized as racist only through being posited as *like an individual*, as someone who *suffers* from prejudice and who can be treated, so that he or she can act better toward racial others. If the institution becomes an individual, then the institution can also *take the place of individuals*: the institution 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. Les Back observes, "There is something in the blanket assertions of institutional racism that is somehow comforting for its speakers" (2004: 4).

We can be comforted by blankets; they provide us with a cover. Back (2004) and Shona Hunter (forthcoming) focus on the problem of the use of the adjective "unwitting." Even if "unwitting" is used to make sense of how racism often bypasses individual consciousness and intentionality (by thinking about whiteness as a habit formation), the language of unwitting can also allow individuals to refuse responsibility for racism. Back suggests that "the unwitting notion of racism somehow abrogates responsibility like a racist playground spat 'I didn't mean anything by it'" (2004: 4). In the case of higher education, I suspect that the risks of disidentification are particularly high: disidentification from racism can take place via disidentification from "the institutional." It is not only that individuals can respond by saying "I didn't mean anything by it," but they also might not see themselves as involved "in it" at all. This refusal might take place given that individuals already tend to disidentify from institutions: if the institution is the racist subject, then tolerant and liberal academics can easily imagine that they are not. The recognition of institutional racism can become a technology of reproduction of the racism of individuals.

Solutions to problems can create new problems. There is more to say about the consequences of institutional racism becoming an "institutional admission." I am uneasy about what it means for a subject or institution to admit to racism. If racism is shaped by actions that are not seen by those who are its beneficiaries, what does it mean for those beneficiaries to see it? We could suppose that the definition restricts racism to what we can see: it claims that racism "can be seen or detected" in certain forms of behavior. I suggest the declaration might work 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. We say "we are or have been rac-

ist,” and insofar as we are witting about racism (and racists are unwitting), then we show “we are not racist,” or at least not racist *in the same way*.

We are witnessing some of the paradoxes that follow when institutional racism becomes part of institutional language. Indeed, I argue that the recognition of institutional racism can easily be translated into a form of *institutional therapy culture*—where the institution becomes the sick person who can be helped by receiving the appropriate treatment. When institutions recognize institutional racism, it is as if they are making a confession. The institution, “having confessed” to racism, might be understood as on the road to recovery. A recovery from racism can even be a way of “re-covering” racism, as if admitting to racism is a way of getting over it.<sup>19</sup> Admission implies “getting over it,” or even “being over it.” I develop this argument further by thinking through how diversity offers a language of reparation in chapter 5.

The problems of recovery narratives are evident if you consider comments made by Trevor Phillips on institutional racism on January 19, 2009, during an interview with the BBC to mark the tenth anniversary of the Macpherson Report. Phillips said: “The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry was a great shock to the system. It shook people out of their complacency and meant that we had new laws and a new attitude and that meant for example that the police have changed their behaviour quite dramatically. Nothing’s perfect, there is still a lot of work to do, but we are in a different place than we were before.”<sup>20</sup> The recognition of institutional racism becomes shock therapy, leading to the adoption of new attitudes and new behavior. The institutions are “shocked” out of racism, “shaken” out of complacency. Phillips offers what we could call a before-and-after narrative: the very recognition of institutional racism offered in the report means that we are no longer in that place it described; we are in a new place. In other words, the institution in being shocked into recognizing its racism is no longer racist. For Phillips, “the we” of the police slides immediately into “the we” of the nation: “We are in a new situation. Britain is a modern diverse country. Britain is the best place to live in Europe if you’re not white.” The “shock” of recognizing institutional racism is what allows us to recover from racism.

Note also how the recognition of institutional racism is converted into

an expression of pride: diversity pride as national pride (a “modern diverse country” that is “the best place to live in Europe if you are not white”). In an essay on multiculturalism published in 2008, Trevor Phillips suggests that diversity is indeed a national attribute, such that when racism occurs the nation is acting “out of character.” As he describes: “Historically we are diverse, open-minded, and anti-racist. But every now and again we forget our true character.” When diversity becomes a view of the nation, racism not only recedes but becomes understood as a distortion of the truth (it does not express our truth).

In this narrative, racism is projected onto strangers; racists are estranged from national character (if we are racist, then we are unlike ourselves). Racism also becomes understood as accidental (as if every now and then, it just happens) as well as being anachronistic, a sign of a time that is no longer, as that which plays no part in contemporary British experience or even as that which was never British. In the BBC interview about the police and racism, Phillips suggested that most people in Britain are not racist because they “wouldn’t have a problem” having a person with a different ethnicity as their neighbor. Thus, he said, “the blanket accusation ‘institutional racism’ no longer quite helps us to understand what is going on.” For Phillips, any racism within an institution is explained as not really “going on,” even when it is ongoing: “In many of our institutions, there are still old-fashioned attitudes that don’t really catch up with where modern Britain is at and how British people today feel. That’s the next task that we’ve got to tackle.” In this description, racism becomes what is “old-fashioned” *as if it lingers only insofar as institutions are not expressing what is in fashion*. Institutional racism becomes what is out of fashion, no longer a description of where we are or where we want to be. We learn from this: if we recognize the institutional nature of racism, this recognition is not a solution. Institutionality can simply be redefined such that it no longer refers to the processes it was introduced to describe.

I have spoken of “institutional racism” primarily in terms of what an institution might recognize. The language of institutional racism can become part of institutional language without being offered as a form of recognition. One diversity practitioner I interviewed in the United Kingdom mentioned that the phrase “institutional racism” was adopted in her

organization's race equality policy. She spoke of getting the term into the policy as an achievement:

I think that it's very useful that the university formally signs itself up to the Macpherson definition of institutional racism.

Does it define itself as institutionally racist?

We don't say that, we just say the university supports that definition. And a definition of a racist incident, those definitions are there. So in that sense they are useful that they are available where there is a difficult situation.

If the organization "supports the definition," then the definition can give support in situations of organizational trouble. The use of the definition within the university's own documents allows practitioners to have a reference point when dealing with racism in particular situations. In other words, the inclusion of the definitions allows the phrase "institutional racism" to be adopted in "difficult situations" when racism comes up.

This was the only interview in which "institutional racism" was brought up. At one level, this is not surprising: even to name racism is to describe a series of actions that the organization is not allowed to permit. To bring up racism is to bring up the issue of compliance and even suggest a failure to comply. This means that the term "institutional racism" brings up as well as describes a difficulty. Perhaps the unease with this term persists *despite* this culture of institutional admission, such that it is not a term exercised with much consistency in institutional self-description or in the descriptions of practitioners.

Researching diversity is attending to what does and does not come up in accounts of institutional life. It means showing *how* institutions matter. My task in the following chapters is to consider what the institutionalization of diversity means for those employed as diversity workers (*doing diversity*) or those whose arrival is coded as a sign of diversity, such as people of color (*being diversity*). What does it mean to have a body that provides an institution with diversity? I have begun with the question of what it means to institutionalize diversity. My aim has been to show that institutions should not be treated as the social actors. Institutions



provide a frame in which things happen (or don't happen). To understand how "what happens" happens, we actually need to narrow (rather than widen) the frame: to think about words, texts, objects, and bodies, to follow them around, to explore what they do and do not do, when they are put into action.