

Taking (white) space. Reflections from a queer-of-colour Gestalt therapy trainer

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Abstract

In this paper, the author, a queer-of-colour professor of Gestalt therapy, reflects on how race and racism emerged and was explored during a training workshop at the Norwegian Gestalt Institute. The student group, as is quite often the case in the Gestalt world, was majority white. The exploration became heated, but there was also movement through the crises. The author makes sense of the experience by reflecting on racism as a field phenomenon, the need to increase awareness of power and privilege, and the importance and difficulty of balancing challenge and support in these situations. The paper ends with a short reflection on the importance of self-care and a joyful poem.

Keywords

racism, microaggressions, BIPOC, Gestalt therapy training, group experiment, online

Dare I write this?

In a relative, historical – and very real – dimension of reality, I'm a queer, middle-class, able-bodied cis man with dual Indian-Norwegian background based in Norway. Another dimension and reality is hinted at in the concluding poem of this paper. I have many privileges, and I face forms of oppression and discrimination in certain contexts. Often it's mixed and messy. As a BIPOC person (black, indigenous person of colour) I experience racist microaggressions in majority white contexts (see Sue, 2010; for a short, elegant introduction to microaggressions, see Fusion Comedy, 2016). Sometimes the microaggressions are obvious, sometimes very subtle; sometimes so subtle I'm not even sure it's happening or ever happened. I experience them with white strangers as well as with my white best friend Martin and my beloved white husband Daniel. Microaggressions also happen in Gestalt therapy contexts, of course. Here I want to reflect on an experience from my teaching practice. It has stayed with me. I have wondered about it. I'm not exactly sure what was going on, nor how well I dealt with it. I invite you to wonder with me as I share some tentative reflections.

In 2021, I was teaching a two-day workshop for therapy students in their first year at the Norwegian Gestalt

Institute. Out of the fourteen students in this particular class, two were BIPOC. At some point, as you will see in the narrative in the next section, something happened that felt important to me, it became figural, as Gestalt therapists say, and I invited us all to explore it. I took time and space to do so. I'm still unsure whether I can and want to call it racism. When I end up using the term here, I do so tentatively. Moreover, it is one lens to try to understand; it cannot fully capture and explain the group process. In this paper I zoom in on that particular process. More than a paper about the workshop as a whole, this is a reflexive and personal piece about racism, diversity and power.

Three students who were particularly involved in the process have consented to my writing this paper and have had a chance to read and comment on it. I don't use their real names here. These students have also joined me in a form of participatory research. We have been meeting monthly since the workshop, and our research will eventually result in a separate paper in Norwegian. While I'm influenced by our joint research process, in the present paper I first and foremost present my own experience and reflections, inspired by the methodology of reflective practice research (Lindseth, 2017).

As I write this paper, I can feel some fear and hesitation. The majority of Gestalt therapy publishers, editors, peer reviewers and readers are white. Most theory development and research has been done with and by white people. Most Gestalt therapists are white. All the other teachers at my own institute are white. This is institutional and structural whiteness; it's a problem if you're BIPOC, and it's definitely a problem if you're BIPOC and want to talk about race and racism. As you'll see, this may be a parallel to what happened during the training workshop.

Still, a range of other privileges and resources enable me to write, not least my position as a professor at the Norwegian Gestalt Institute. I also feel increasing support in the Gestalt field and community. I'm very glad to see white Gestalt therapists (see especially Jacobs, 2005; 2014; 2016) becoming aware of, and taking responsibility for, their whiteness and sharing reflections on this. I'm glad to see other BIPOC Gestalt therapists writing and speaking about their experiences and reflections, and increasingly given and/or taking space and platforms where they are heard (see for example *New Gestalt Voices'* race and racism workstream; see also *British Gestalt Journal* 30.1 which includes an interview with Carmen Joanne Ablack and a review by Angela Barrows). But I want to be clear: there are white Gestalt therapists in positions of power who still seem very unwilling to do the necessary work with regards to whiteness and racism. As with any true change, this too will take time and there will be resistance.

In the following, I first describe the process that occurred during the March 2021 workshop, how race and racism became figural and the exploration that followed. Then I reflect on some themes based on the experience: racism as a field phenomenon; power and privilege; and support and challenge. I end the paper with a poem.

Race and racism during a training workshop

In March 2021, I met fourteen therapy students for a two-day workshop on Teams, a digital platform, due to COVID-19. The topic was group processes and dynamics. An experiment we often do during this workshop involves an exploration of who takes more and less space in the group. Around midday, adapting this to the digital platform, I called our attention to the fact that there were now some students who were visible in the gallery on Teams – those who had spoken recently – while others were represented as more anonymous bubbles at the bottom of the screen. Nina

and Elisabeth were among the students in the gallery. Nadia was not.

This was merely a snapshot of the group. I asked the students whether, and to what extent, they felt this accurately represented how they saw themselves and the group more generally. I also invited them to share any other observations and reflections from the short experiment. Some students, who had been represented as bubbles, spoke and became visible in the gallery. A few related the issue of taking space to childhood and family experiences. I then invited everyone to reflect on whether membership in dominant groups might also affect taking (and giving) space, here and/or elsewhere. I mentioned as an example that I've become increasingly aware that I'm a cis man and patriarchy may influence the fact that I take space with ease in many situations, while being BIPOC may mean that I'm more sensitive about whether and how I take space in majority white contexts. A white, female student shared experiences and reflections about gender and race, not least her own white privilege. Following up what she had said, Nadia briefly described some of her own experiences of sexism and racism, thereby also becoming visible in the gallery. Then Nina and Elisabeth continued speaking. Nina used the term 'victim' while speaking about some experiences of her own. Elisabeth continued by saying, 'I'm not trying to compete for the victim role, but...,' and then described the pressure of gender norms as a single woman. I wondered about the use of the terms 'victim' and 'victim role' here, but decided to not say or do anything for now. Nadia was silent.

Towards the end of the day, Nadia spoke again: 'I didn't mean to be a victim...' I invited her to pause for a moment, if that was ok for her, and be curious about what was happening now. She did. I invited everyone else to also be curious. Nadia was unsure about what was happening. I think I shared an observation/interpretation quite early on: Nadia, a BIPOC woman, had spoken briefly about racism in a white majority group, followed by others using the terms 'victim role' and 'victim', had then remained silent, and was now trying to explain herself and perhaps even apologise. I wondered aloud if there might be some processes at work here and now that we could explore further. 'It was not my intention to make you feel this way,' Elisabeth said to Nadia. I said, 'I urge us all to also be curious about impacts, not just intentions.' Nina and Elisabeth started explaining/defending themselves, eventually more directed at me than Nadia.

I described how I understand and explore issues such as racism as field phenomena. To model, and to help address possible shame in Nina and Elisabeth, I also described several instances when I'd become aware of my own privileges, prejudices or unintentional support of oppressive structures, sometimes through the feedback of others – and how uncomfortable it often was.

At one point, there was a discussion about what had actually happened. Another student tried to share how they remembered the course of action. I said I needed to focus on Nina, Elisabeth and Nadia now, and wanted us to stay focused on the here and now. It was already becoming complex and almost overwhelming. I myself was also becoming unsure of what had actually happened – and I still am as I write this.

I felt I had a responsibility to not let the incident just pass, let Nadia apologise and then end the day. And I thought this could be a good learning situation for everyone. But I also felt activated. I was shaking, my neck and shoulders tensing. I was afraid of being wrong, afraid of talking about race and racism in a predominantly white group, afraid I'd seem partial and unprofessional. At one point, I suggested we all look away from the screen, pay attention to our own breath, turn the focus back on ourselves and then reflect on our own possible group privileges and power. Some of the other students then shared something. I think I shared more about my own awakening to various privileges and power. I think this is when I also recommended Project Implicit where one can test one's implicit bias regarding gender, race, sexual orientation and more, something I myself have done – uncomfortable but important. I think Nina had some tears in her eyes at this point. It was already late, so I said that I was aware we had some unfinished business and I wanted to continue exploring this the next day, but we had to end for the day.

In the evening, by myself, I felt bad and wondered if I'd done something wrong. I was particularly concerned about how Nina, Elisabeth and Nadia were doing after we ended the day.

I got up early on day two and meditated. This grounded me and gave me a sense of more spaciousness and compassion for myself and others. Then, as part of the check-in, I asked all the students to rate how safe they felt on a scale from one to ten. Elisabeth said six; Nadia, four; and Nina, three. After asking them if it was ok, I continued the process with Nina, Elisabeth and Nadia while everyone else turned off sound and camera and

became observers, creating a kind-of online fishbowl. At some point, Nadia stopped up before saying 'white people', and I made us aware and reflected together with her about that. Nadia, Elisabeth and I talked about the term 'victim role' and its possible functions and effects. I said that it can be very uncomfortable when someone points out that we may have contributed to oppression and suffering; and to sit with discomfort, increase awareness and reflect is a big part of Gestalt therapy training. Elisabeth asked, 'Have I understood you correctly that you think I participated in a racist structure unknowingly and unintentionally?' I said, 'I honestly don't know for sure. Perhaps it's something you can explore and reflect on a bit more.' She wanted to do that. Nina kept quiet throughout. At some point, she said she was doing so intentionally, trying to make amends, giving Nadia space and listening now.

After a while Nina wanted to speak with me and we continued a conversation while Elisabeth and Nadia joined the observers in the background. Nina said she'd been angry with me but was mostly sad now. I appreciated her telling me, and said that our relationship matters to me. She continued saying that another incident from her life had come to mind, an incident when she might have done something wrong: a 'stain' on her life. She spoke, and I listened. I felt and expressed compassion, spontaneously placing a hand on my heart. At the end, I said that, in line with field theory, I think that there are always a number of different factors mutually influencing each other, that I didn't see the incident as a 'stain' on her life.

I gradually invited the other students to be more active again, first to give Nina feedback, then to share any further reflections on their own group privileges and power (some had taken the Project Implicit tests last evening and shared how this had already helped awakening them to bias), and finally to reflect theoretically on our processes so far.

We inter-are

Many of us are stuck much of the time in an individualistic and dualistic paradigm. We think and act as if we have a core self, independent, and concerned with being right and good. Anything undesirable is repressed and/or projected onto the other. We should be without any 'stain'. This is also seen as a main challenge in anti-racist education (McIntosh, 1989; Monk, Winslade & Sinclair, 2008; DiAngelo, 2018). In a group dominated by white people and this paradigm, it's difficult to raise issues of race and racism. Any mention of racism by a BIPOC person may be seen as a personal

accusation. White group members may feel personally attacked or insulted that someone would even place them in the group 'white', sometimes even insisting that they themselves are 'colour blind' and see everyone as individuals. This is one way of understanding my hesitation when using the terms 'white' and 'racism' on day one and Nadia's hesitation when using the term 'white people' on day two.

The relational and field paradigm of contemporary Gestalt therapy is radically different from the individualistic and dualistic paradigm (Parlett, 2005). As zen-master and poet Thich Nhat Hanh (2014) puts it, we 'inter-are', for good and for worse. We're intimately connected and there are always innumerable factors mutually influencing each other and the whole situation. I believe that framing oppressive structures such as racism as field phenomena or forces is not only ontologically true but also strategically smart if we want to do transformative work. The fact that it can also appear as internalised racism in BIPOC people illustrates how complex and porous any one of us are. Today racism is increasingly understood, at least academically, as processes and structures that are implicated in the reproduction of racial inequality in diffuse and often subtle ways, including implicit bias and unintentional actions (Clair & Denis, 2015).

In the 'Agreements for Multi-Cultural Interactions' (EBMC, 2017), which I've become aware of after the workshop as part of a mindfulness teacher training I'm taking, we find much that should be familiar to Gestalt therapists but also some less familiar guidelines that we could benefit from in our training and practice. One guideline is 'Understand The Difference Between Intent & Impact: Try to understand and acknowledge impact. Denying the impact of something said by focusing on intent is often more destructive than the initial interaction.' This should also be in line with Gestalt therapy's method and goal of increasing awareness of how we affect and are affected by others, not least through dialogue. When Elisabeth first insisted on her good intentions, which is a very common response, of course, I encouraged us all to also be interested in impacts.

Working with racism as a field phenomenon may still involve discomfort, but less than when we over-identify with it as a character trait due to individualism and dualism. Again and again, I tried to describe and model this in the group. Perhaps Elisabeth moved towards an understanding of this sort when asking me on day two whether I thought she might have participated in a racist structure unknowingly and unwillingly. When

we're not so caught in individualism and dualism, real exploration and change becomes possible. Just as racism is a phenomenon and force in the field, so too are understanding, wisdom and liberation.

Of course, I'm not exempt from the individualistic, dualistic paradigm either. It pervades everything, not least language. Reflecting on this experience, I have wondered if the term 'racism' itself is too associated and linked, for most of us, to an individualistic and dualistic paradigm to be useful if transformation is what we truly want (rather than accusing/defending and feeling wrong/right). Perhaps this is one reason why I feel so uncomfortable using the term here at all. 'Ally' is another term in general usage that I feel very uncomfortable with. The war metaphor, which we base so much on, surely involves dualism; it is exhausting and sometimes actually does kill us. Perhaps we can better do the necessary transformative work by using other words. At the same time, I don't want to gloss over what is very real oppression and suffering.

During and after this particular workshop I could at times get overly critical of myself as a teacher and person. Reminding myself of field theory, that mistakes and successes are not just about me, I can also be more compassionate and curious about various personal and environmental factors in the situation. Just as I write this, I breathe more easily.

Power and privilege

Gestalt therapists have too-often ignored the more stable field structures and processes such as those related to group power and privilege (Parlett, 2005). I want to bring these to light also in the training of therapy students. Soon after the initial experiment regarding taking space in the group, I invited everyone to consider whether membership in dominant groups might have played a role. There is a guideline in 'Agreements for Multi-Cultural Interactions' (EBMC, 2017) that is highly relevant here, namely 'Move Up / Move Back: Encourage full participation by all present. Take note of who is speaking and who is not. If you tend to speak often, consider "moving back" and vice versa.' On day two, this is what Nina seemed to do, giving Nadia space. This guideline and understanding should be very much in line with a relational and field orientation. It contrasts with the more individualistic approach of some Gestalt therapists (especially in earlier times) who place responsibility on the person who doesn't take space, working to make this individual more assertive perhaps, seeing it mostly

as an individual matter rather than a question of power, privilege and the wider field.

After Nadia spoke, Nina used the term ‘victim’ while speaking and Elisabeth then said, ‘I’m not trying to compete for the victim role, but...’ Among the possible functions of using the term ‘victim role’ – often unintentionally and unconsciously, of course – are a continuation of individualism, silencing of ‘victims’ and continuation of oppression (see also Monk, Winslade & Sinclair, 2008; Schulz, 2018). I have often heard fully trained Gestalt therapists use this term as well, including about their clients; I hope we become more aware of how we use it, what it implies and its possible functions and effects. During our joint research process, I have realised that the term ‘victim’ may also be particularly triggering for Nadia: a racist stereotype is that, while brown men like me can be dangerous (though less so when also seen as queer), the brown (especially Muslim) woman is a victim that needs saving.

Elisabeth continued in her statement with a ‘but’ and described difficult experiences of her own, thereby making the ‘victim role’ statement at least uncertain and ambiguous. When confronted with someone’s experiences of oppression – especially when it may relate to our own power and privilege – it can be tempting to insist how we ourselves are also victims or have very similar experiences. During the workshop as well as later during our joint-research process, Elisabeth described how she was interested in the similarities with Nadia and finding common ground. Nadia, however, stressed during the workshop as well as later, that her experiences as a BIPOC woman are particular and referred to ‘intersectionality’. Intersectionality is a concept and tool that challenges the universalisation of the female experience of gender overlooking the unique situations facing those with intertwined identities (Crenshaw, 1991). The exchange between Nadia, Nina and Elisabeth has clear parallels to the struggle that women of colour have had with white feminists.

Often we don’t realise we have the privilege we have. McIntosh (1989), who first coined the term ‘white privilege’, writes:

One factor seems clear about all of the interlocking oppression. They take both active forms, which we can see, and embedded forms, which as a member of the dominant group one is taught not to see. In my class and place, I did not see myself as a racist because I was taught to recognise racism only in individual acts of

meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth.

In a Norwegian context, Furseth (2020) writes, ‘White privilege is invisible for most white people. They were for me too’ and goes on to describe how she became more aware when returning from the USA to Norway with a black husband. It helps to know diverse people, to listen to their experiences, be open to feedback, as well as do some self-investigation. During the workshop, partly to explain and to model, I described several incidents and processes from my own life. For example, through making friends with people who are trans, I became much more aware of my cis-male privilege, such as not having to fear using public toilets. Having realised that toilets can be oppressive spaces for trans folks, I started using my power and privilege to work for changes, such as introducing gender-neutral toilets at the Institute. In a similar way, white group members in a majority white group, who recognise white privilege and how race may play a role in the group, could decide to listen attentively and give space when a BIPOC person (finally) speaks about race and racism in the group.

As a teacher I have a special position and power as well, of course. This entails certain responsibility. I saw it as my responsibility to not let the incident when Nadia started explaining/apologising to just pass. But I also became afraid, not least of seeming partial. Upon reflection, I’m rather critical of the norm of impartiality and neutrality. In reality this may often involve being complicit and supporting oppression. As many have stressed, we must be anti-racist, not merely ‘non-racist’. I also wonder if the impartiality norm may be infused with racism: would a white teacher be seen as partial if they’d let the incident pass? I don’t think so, at least not by the white majority. During our joint-research process, it has become clear that Elisabeth and Nina had been upset with me largely because they felt I did not sufficiently see them and their suffering, that they are used to being seen in a Gestalt therapy context and the shock of not having this expectation met was great. (Here it may also be relevant that the students were in the first year of their training.) Meanwhile, Nadia, who is not used to (white) teachers noticing microaggressions that affect her, was pleasantly surprised by being so seen by me.

A related point concerns subjectivity. According to field theory, there are, in one sense at least, as many fields as there are participants in a room (Parlett, 2005). We all see things slightly differently. Figure formation may not be as 'natural', neutral and apolitical as we often seem to think. In my life I've experienced and had to reflect on racism in a way white people haven't. Since the start of 2021 I was engaging quite proactively in various anti-racist work. This naturally influences what I see and what I choose to do in a situation. The imperative in field theory and Gestalt therapy is that we realise that there are many fields and that we aim for dialogue, not insisting that we alone have the full truth.

When racism can be so subtle and difficult to spot (as something implicit, unintentional or internalised), who gets to decide that there has been a racist incident? There is a risk of power abuse in anti-racist education. For example, Bejan (2020) claims that 'DiAngelo positions herself as the only one capable of understanding the racist meanings of socio-cultural interactions and the only one to make a teachable moment out of it.' Rather than accuse or conclude, I tried to teach and model by sharing how I'd started reflecting on, and taking responsibility for, my own privilege and power in various life situations. When Elisabeth asked me whether I thought she might have participated in a racist structure, I genuinely felt and expressed that I didn't know and that she might want to explore it more herself. Finally, I hope that what I did was supportive for Nadia, but I have also wondered if I was putting her too much in the spotlight in a majority white group. Was I (partly) using her in an exploration of race and racism? As a Gestalt therapist, I strive for what Buber (2010) calls I-Thou-relating and dialogue, but this is always a matter of degrees. A dialogue free from power may be quite unrealistic (see also Boghossian, 2002). Becoming more aware of, and taking responsibility for, power and privilege can perhaps make the dialogue more of a dialogue.

Safe enough for whom?

All of us, especially the three students and I, felt rather high levels of fear at times during the exploration. Was I feeling safe enough to teach in a useful way? Perhaps I was too afraid at times, something that may have narrowed and distorted my awareness and attention, and that may have caused me to push and challenge the students too much too fast. Within pedagogy, it is considered important to balance challenge and support for learning to happen (see for example, Sanford, 1966). Within Gestalt therapy we have the concept

of safe emergency (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951/1994). Within the trauma field a useful, related conceptualisation is the window of tolerance (Siegel, 2001).

Limiting the exploration to the three students and me was not least a way of avoiding being overwhelmed myself. When I asked all of us to turn away from the screen and reflect individually at the end of day one, this was also partly due to my own need to calm myself down. I started day two by meditating. During check-in I asked how safe students felt on a scale from one to ten, inspired by Bud Feder (2008), and I followed this up later in the day, working on safety in the group. Still, upon reflection, I want to focus more on calming myself and the group down in similar situations in the future. Before even addressing any possible microaggression I need to feel calm and safe enough myself. Perhaps I thought that racism was a scar that I could teach from, but it is probably more like a wound, one that is ripped open with every new microaggression. I can perhaps still teach from the wound, but I must take much care of it first. However, I also want to be compassionate towards myself as a BIPOC teacher: it is not easy. I did my best, I do my best, and I can continue to grow and learn.

An important question to ask here, as always, is: safe enough for whom? The space was majority white. As Nadia has later mentioned during our joint research process, she, along with other BIPOC folks, is used to microaggressions and subtle racism going unnoticed by (white) teachers and people in authority. Often BIPOC folks simply don't expect the level of safety that white people do. Because there is so much pain that has been caused between white and BIPOC folks, it may be safer for BIPOC folks – but also white folks – to temporarily separate into racial affinity groups when exploring issues of race and racism. This has been my experience.

Since the workshop I have, as a compulsory part of the two-year mindfulness teacher training I am taking, been part of a racial affinity group. This is based on recommendations by Ruth King (2018) who has done a lot of mindful anti-racist training. At the start some mistake must have happened – perhaps because I had said I was dual heritage and lived in Norway – because I was placed in a group where everyone else were white Europeans apart from one woman. Not wanting to be 'the difficult student' I didn't say anything to the administrators. And when I raised it with the other group members, they all said it was much nicer to be a mixed group and didn't see the point of separating us anyway. But then during a sharing early on, when

the only other BIPOC person was absent, white person after white person shared how there isn't really much racism in their country, how many BIPOC friends they have, that they themselves are colour-blind, that Europe is not America after all, that it can't possibly be as bad as the black people in the US say it is there either, that this has all gone too far, that it is wrong that they must feel guilty just for being white, etc. Nothing new. I had some faith in the group, however – we were mindfulness teachers in training, after all – and chose to be authentic and transparent, sharing some of my frustration, that this was a situation all too familiar to me, that in these sorts of situations I don't feel safe enough to share my experiences of racism, that creating safe spaces where everyone could work well with race and racism had been the intention of the program and I appreciated that even more now. The group listened mindfully to me and responded in an understanding, compassionate way. Later I contacted the BIPOC woman who had been absent, and with the permission of the course administrators we eventually separated out and created our own group, one where we both felt safer and could explore our experiences and learn in a much better way.

Meanwhile, I hope and believe that there has been progress in my previous group as well as the other white groups. My partner Daniel, who is in the same mindfulness teacher training program, has certainly benefited from his white group, becoming more aware of white position and privilege, of microaggressions, of white guilt and fragility and how to better handle this, and of how to be 'a helpful partner and friend to BIPOC folks' (As you may have guessed, I'm trying to avoid the term 'ally' here.) Perhaps racial awareness training and racial affiliation groups might be something to consider in Gestalt institutes and the Gestalt community more widely as well?

The very first line

In this paper I have described a process where I explored race and racism with Gestalt therapy students. On the basis of this experience, I reflected on three themes: the importance and difficulty of understanding racism as a field phenomenon; the complexities of power and privilege and how we need to increase awareness of these issues; and the importance and difficulty of balancing support and challenge in these situations. As already mentioned, Nadia, Elisabeth, Nina and I are continuing to research this further. It has been a healing and learning process so far. And we are taking our time.

Taking time is particularly important for me now since I have been suffering from burnout since the summer of 2021. The reasons are probably many. But I do believe it has something to do with racism. I have been engaging more proactively with this in a variety of ways since the start of 2021, and this work takes its toll. BIPOC friends and I have often reminded each other of the words of Audre Lorde (1988/2017): 'Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.' While, again, I'm no fan of the war metaphor, I truly believe that it is a radical act for BIPOC and other people who experience structural and pervasive oppression and discrimination to engage in self-care, to find a balance between working passionately for changes and also not let this work leave us exhausted and defeated. In fact, the dichotomy of self-care versus work is of course a false one, rooted in individualism and dualism. Self-care *is* transformative work. I have spent much time in nature lately. While I spend time with various friends, with BIPOC friends we have especially spoken about our joys. I have read and written poetry again. Let me end with one I wrote in January 2022 in the south of Spain (where my ever-migrating mother currently stays). It was before submitting a revised version of this paper. In fact, I think it may have helped me finish this paper – and leave other work unfinished.

Out on the terrace
 Waiting for something beautiful to happen
 The body still
 But the mind racing
 The papers I've promised to write
 About racism
 What they said
 What I said
 What they did
 What I did
 What they didn't
 What I didn't, half-
 Sentences
 What I'll have to say
 Heart racing, dead-
 Line, then
 A bird sings
 A breeze
 One dry leaf dragged across the tiles
 I return
 The most radical thing I can do
 Free from racism for a moment
 The vast morning sky
 Waiting patiently

Blue, purple, light pink
 Sudden snort, startling smile
 It has happened
 The most beautiful thing

Ahhh
 Most important mantra
 Letting go, relaxing
 Opening

I notice
 The tree
 Next to me
 Doing the same

I want
 The rest of the day
 To be like a poem
 Where this sunrise horizon is
 The very first line

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