What's all this talk about whiteness?[?]

Toby Ganley

> *I had no such worry, having been born into the mainstream, a white Protestant – and even Quincy in his septic genius had not been able to discover the comic possibilities inherent in our characteristics; after all, what characteristics did we possess?*
>
> Don DeLillo, *Americana*

In this paper I review the literature that has the problematic of whiteness as its primary concern. This body of literature is rapidly expanding, much of it emerging from (or contributing to the development of) a new field of academic pursuit, critical race and whiteness studies, or simply, 'white(ness) studies'[1]. The first contributions to be identified with this particular sub-discipline were written and published in the United States of America; however, this work sits within, and has been influenced by, a much longer tradition. Academic work critically engaging the problematic of whiteness has since been produced around the world, most notably in settler-colonial, post-colonial, or post-imperial contexts. The problematic of whiteness will first be broadly and briefly described, and then the American literature will be discussed. The literature contributing to the study of whiteness that has been produced in Australia will then be introduced. Finally, some of the suggestions regarding what can be done about problems associated with white race privilege will be canvassed.

The problematic of whiteness

Recent academic work concerned with the problematic of whiteness typically starts with two interrelated assumptions. The first is that there is significant privilege and power associated with being (identified as) white. The second is

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[1] The labeling of work engaging the problematic of whiteness under the monikers 'white studies' or 'whiteness studies' is both contentious and dangerous. Roediger argues, "[t]o the extent that those studying whiteness see themselves as involved in a distinct and novel enterprise...the charge that new work recentres whiteness and takes the edge off oppression has considerable force. Indeed even when those are not the intentions, the risk that scholarship on whiteness will be read in such a way is real. The lamentable terms "White Studies" and "Whiteness Studies" lend themselves to such readings" (2001: 78). See also Dyer (1997: 10) for his articulation of similar concerns.

that much of this white race privilege extends from the monopoly that whiteness has over the norm. The first assumption is less contentious than the second. Homi Bhabha summed up the motivation behind recent critical engagements with whiteness succinctly when he wrote, "[t]he critique of whiteness…attempts to displace the normativity of the white position by seeing it as a strategy of authority rather than an authentic or essential 'identity'" (1998: 21). David Roediger's explanation, in a recent article, takes the study of whiteness a step further when he adds a more practical and day-to-day element to the importance of analysing whiteness. He writes, "the central overarching theme in scholarship on whiteness is the argument that white identity is decisively shaped by the exercise of power and the expectation of advantages in acquiring property" (Roediger 2001: 81)[2]. Roediger is amongst those writers in this area who are concerned with the relations between whiteness and class, his explicit concern with property reflects this, but it also reflects the broader theme present in the scholarship of 'mundane', everyday white race privilege[3]. Critical studies of whiteness seek to inscribe whiteness into the larger dynamic of racial identities, "[w]hite people need to learn to see themselves as white, to see their particularity. In other words, whiteness needs to be made strange" (Dyer 2000: 541). Recent engagements with the problematic of whiteness have sought, to a large extent, to make whiteness strange, to re-inscribe it within a general economy of racial identities. In this way whiteness becomes one racialised position amongst many rather than the norm against which others are measured. This project also works to destabilise white race privilege which emanates to a significant degree from the fact that whiteness "colonises the definition of the normal and also the definition of other norms" (Haggis, Schech et al. 1999: 169). Roediger argues that the "first and most critical contribution" of the critical study of whiteness "lies in 'marking' whiteness as a particular, even peculiar, identity, rather than as the presumed norm" (Roediger 2001: 79).

The American literature [4]

Most of the (early) literature that has come to form the basis of 'whiteness

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[2] For a discussion of the way whiteness "confers dominance and a property right that has consequences for the distribution of wealth, status and opportunity in Australia", see Moreton-Robinson (2001: 163).
[3] For a good over-view of the day-to-day privileges that white people experience see McIntosh (1992), a widely referenced article somewhat particular to the American context, and Tannoch-Bland (1998), a quite similar article produced for an Australian audience.
[4] Roediger produced a thorough review of this literature (Roediger, 2001) to which this section is indebted.

studies' was produced in North America (Roediger 1991; Frankenberg 1993; Allen 1994; Ignatiev 1996; Hill 1997; Babb 1998; Jacobson 1998; Lipsitz 1998). This literature sits within a long history of observations of whiteness as a problem; however, the debt owed to this tradition is often unacknowledged. Roediger has recently argued that those inquiries now understood as being part of the 'whiteness studies' literature are the most recent contribution to "an African American tradition stretching from the escaped slave turned antislavery activist Fredrick Douglass" (2001: 75). He points to a similar tradition amongst "Native American thinkers", "slave folklore", and "Chiana/o tales", describing these as "point[s] of departure for the critical study of whiteness", citing Americo Praredes and W.E.B. Du Bois as key figures within these traditions. He acknowledges that "James Baldwin, and [bell] hooks understood, such knowledge was situated in 'points of vantage'" (Roediger 2001: 75). Roediger makes a powerful argument that the "novelty of critical studies of whiteness is…only alleged", the "growth of the profile of studies of whiteness has itself reflected the privileges enjoyed by white scholars" (2001: 74). "The casting of the study of whiteness as a project of white scholars thus represents both a continued placing of whites at the centre of everything and, as significantly, a continuing refusal to take the insights of people of colour into whiteness seriously" (Roediger 2001: 75).

As Roediger argues, there is a long tradition of work on Black Americans' experience of and resistance to racism and whiteness[5]. It "stands to reason that those groups for whom white behaviour and attitudes have been most problematic would have enquired most fully into the dynamics of whiteness" (Roediger 2001: 74-75). Toni Morrison's (1992) influential *Playing in the Dark* is amongst those texts which are connected with this tradition and it requires recognition. Morrison's work has perhaps been the most influential of these to the development of critical studies of race and whiteness in Australia.

However, it has (somewhat ironically) been the work of white scholars of whiteness that has been centred by the emergence of 'whiteness studies' (Roediger 2001). There are several texts that can be located as central to the

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[5] Referring to the Australian context, a journalist recently noted: "Black explorations of whiteness began in the 1600s when William Dampier's ships loomed off Australia's west coast, and continued when Arthur Phillip and his pasty crew descended on the Gadigal people of Sydney Cove 212 years ago. Their whiteness was not just in their skin, but in their intent to seize, stay and exploit" (Jopson 2000: 5).

field of whiteness studies and some of these require particular mention. Theodore Allen's *The Invention of the White Race* (1994); Ruth Frankenberg's *White Women, race matters* (1993); Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White* (1996); and, David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991) are amongst those which are particularly deserving of special mention. This is not an exhaustive list of foundational texts in American whiteness studies; however, these are each significant and will be briefly discussed in turn.

Allen (1994), as is central to the critical study of whiteness, begins by denying the scientific basis of race, describing the invention of the white race as political rather than biological or evolutionary[6]. However, he finds it insufficient to simply argue that whiteness is socially constructed. He links whiteness (and race more broadly) to class. In the following paragraphs it will become clear that much of the early American work on whiteness stresses issues of class, this is partly due to the fact that labour historians have produced much of this work. Allen's argument is that the white race became the controlling class, and *The Invention of the White Race* has been described as one of the "most sweeping accounts of the Anglo-American history of whiteness…in terms of class and power" (Roediger 2001: 81). He covers some similar ground to the work of Ignatiev (1996), discussed below, exploring the relations between class and race that allowed the Irish to emerge as part of the white race/controlling class.

In *How the Irish Became White*, Ignatiev describes how Irish immigrants to the USA from the 1840s managed to secure a place amongst those considered white by differentiating themselves from African Americans. The Irish immigrants were an oppressed minority before migrating; they did not receive benefits and privileges associated with whiteness in the old country. Ignatiev's text (1996) deals with race and class and the relations between them. It tells of how the Irish used unions and organised labour to compete with and oppress the free blacks in the Northern states. The Irish, arriving poor, were in direct contact and competition with the African Americans whose social class they shared. They managed to become identified as white through their complicity in the oppression of blacks. Despite, or perhaps because of, calls from Daniel O'Connell in Ireland for the Irish in America to support the abolition of slavery, the American Irish felt

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[6] George Lipsizt, another foundational American whiteness scholar and author of *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (1998), articulates this central tenet succinctly when he describes whiteness as a scientific and cultural fiction, but a social fact.

their tenuous position in America would be weakened further if they were to associate themselves (or allow themselves to be associated with) the plight of the Africans in America. In this book Ignatiev tells of how the Irish became successful migrants in America by embracing white identity and becoming white.

Ignatiev produced an edited collection (Ignatiev and Garvey 1996) with John Garvey in the same year, *Race Traitor*, and has been closely involved with the production of a periodical of the same name which has a significant presence in the World Wide Web (racetraitor.org). The journal, *Race Traitor*, and its corresponding internet presence is at the forefront of the New Abolitionist movement[7] (instigated and lead by Ignatiev amongst others).

Rather than seeking to abolish whiteness, Frankenberg argues that "we need to displace the colonial construction of whiteness as an "empty" cultural space, in part by refiguring it as constructed and dominant rather than as norm" (1993: 242-243). Her text *White Women race matters*, therefore, does not endorse the same strategies as the work of Ignatiev[8]. There are also, however, similarities between her work and the others mentioned. The most obvious of these is her recognition, which is ubiquitous in this body of literature, that race and whiteness are socially/historically/culturally produced[9]; and, that whiteness is produced as particularly powerful and dominant largely due to its occupation of the position of normal. She writes, "the term 'whiteness' signals the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage" (Frankenberg 1993: 236-237). Frankenberg convincingly demonstrates that whiteness affects the lives of white women. She argues that, although it goes largely unnoticed, race structures the experience of white people (her focus is particularly on women) by conferring upon them unearned, uncriticised, and often-unacknowledged privilege. She brings an analysis of gender (and sexuality) to the exploration of the relations (mentioned above) between race and class, using life history interviews as primary data. Roediger argues that Frankenberg's work is the "leading book-length study making white womanhood in the U.S. a problem for

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[7] This movement is based on the notion that since whiteness is socially and historically produced it can similarly be abolished (see: racetraitor.org). The new abolitionist movement will be discussed further below.

[8] The various strategies that have been proposed in the literature to deal with the problem of whiteness are covered below as a separate issue.

[9] The sub-title of the book *The social construction of whiteness* captures this.

investigation", describing the work as "an ethnography charting the various ways in which white and female identities interact…" (2001: 81).

Frankenberg also edited a collection of articles engaged with the analysis of whiteness (Frankenberg 1997), although this was not produced quite as rapidly in relation to her own text as was Ignatiev's.

Considering the white working class Roediger's, *The wages of whiteness* (1991), also focuses to some extent on the Irish in America. Roediger's aim in this text is to make whiteness visible to the white working class, particularly to illuminate the role of race in the development of organised labour in the USA.   This text is, to a significant extent, a re-writing of accepted American labour history. As the title suggests, Roediger argues in this book that white workers received both financial and broader 'wages' for their whiteness. Connecting their freedom and their work, working class whites were able to differentiate themselves from slaves and indentured labour and thus contribute to their own construction as white.

Again, Roediger was also responsible for editing a collection of essays concerned with whiteness (1994). Entitled *Towards the abolition of whiteness*, this text contributes to the movement, above attributed to Ignatiev, of those seeking to combat white race privilege by abolishing the white race.

Although it is not an American work, Richard Dyer's *White* (1997), deserves mention before the discussion turns to Australian scholarship on whiteness. *White* has rapidly become one of the most influential and frequently cited texts concerned with the problematic of whiteness. However, Dyer has been criticised for dehistoricisng and decontextualising whiteness (Pugliese 2002: 149). This is a charge not easily laid upon any of the previously mentioned works which have been produced as variants of accepted labour history or employing life history interviews.   Both of these methodological techniques actively historicise and contextualise their subject matter. While this criticism may be accurate it does not affect the importance of Dyer's work.   The analysis, in *White*, of the production of whiteness as normal is some of the most compelling scholarship in the field. Dyer explores whiteness through analyses of cinema and various other forms of imagery. He argues that in "a visual culture – that is a culture which gives primacy to the visible…social groups must be visibly recognisable and

representable, since this is a major currency of communication and power" (Dyer 1997: 44).   As Don DeLillo wrote, referring to a "16mm camera", "[w]hat the machine accepts is verifiably existent; all else is unborn or worse" (1971: 6). Through his analyses of our visual culture and particular instances of it, Dyer is able to demonstrate how dominant representations of whiteness contribute to its construction as normal.   His argument, that in dominant representations in the West there is an "assumption that white people are just people", is convincing and has been taken up by many other scholars in the filed.   He continues, "as long as whiteness is felt to be the human condition, then it alone both defines normality and fully inhabits it.   ...the equation of being white with being human secures a position of power.   ...white people set the standards of humanity by which they are bound to succeed and others bound to fail" (Dyer 1997: 2, 9)[10].

Dyer's work is certainly not the only significant work on whiteness to have been produced in the United Kingdom; however, it is worth particular mention as it has extended significant influence upon subsequent scholarship.

Australian Whiteness Literature
In the Australian context literature dealing with the problematic of whiteness has recently expanded significantly.   It has been argued that (especially in comparison with American and other overseas literature) Australian scholars have failed thus far to interrogate whiteness sufficiently (Larbalestier 1999: 145; Perera 1999: 185; Stratton 1999: 163).   While it is true that much work remains to be done, that which has been done provides a solid foundation for the continuance of scholarship in this field.   Issues of race have been of major concern amongst scholars in a variety of fields in Australia for some time. However, it is only in recent times that major texts have been produced interrogating whiteness qua whiteness.   In this section of this article a number of these are discussed.   Three books – Warwick Anderson's *The Cultivation of Whiteness* (2002), Aileen Moreton-Robison's *Talkin' Up to the White Woman* (2000), and Ghassan Hage's *White Nation* (1998) – are discussed first before two significant edited collections – *Unmasking Whiteness* (1999), and *Race, Colour and Identity* (2000) – are mentioned.   The Australian literature has used and

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[10] Dyer's argument that whiteness gains its normality through being invisible, unmarked and universal has also been criticized as not accurate in the settler-colonial context. Penelope Ingram argues that "in contemporary white settler texts whiteness is not portrayed as unraced, transparent, or neutral, but rather is racialized [sic] or marked" (2001: 157).

been influenced by some of the earlier overseas work, but has also made some significant contributions to this body of work. Given the specificity of the Australian context a number of insights have emerged from this literature that perhaps would not have been possible with a focus on a different set of historical/cultural/political circumstances.

The Cultivation of Whiteness (Anderson 2002) is a recent text that is likely to become a key contribution to the critical study of whiteness in Australia. This is the first comprehensive investigation of race as a scientific and medical category in Australia. In it, among other things, Anderson deals with the production of whiteness through various medico-scientific discourses[11]. Through examining the history of medical ideas about whiteness, Anderson discusses the multiple connotations that whiteness has had throughout Australian history including (British) ancestry/decent and notions of racial and cultural superiority. By focussing on the meaning of whiteness during the shift from colonial settler to Australian national he is able to make the argument that the influx of diverse migrants during the gold rushes lead to the linking of whiteness and Australianness. The development of whiteness as a norm is one of the predominant themes in this work.

Talkin' Up to the White Woman (Moreton-Robinson 2000) has already been widely acknowledged as a significant contribution to critical investigations of whiteness in Australia. Fiona Paisley (2001: 209) uncontroversially describes Moreton-Robinson's book as "the first full-length critique of white feminism in Australia". In this text Moreton-Robinson powerfully argues that it is white race privilege that has and continues to provide white feminism/feminists with what authority they have: "all white feminists benefit from colonisation; they are overwhelmingly represented and disproportionately dominant, have the key roles, and constitute the norm, the ordinary and the standard of womanhood in Australia" (2000: xxv). She argues further, that to move beyond this position "requires white feminists to relinquish some power, dominance and privilege in Australian feminism" (Moreton-Robinson 2000: xxv).

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[11] It has been argued that Australian "tropical medicine" was "a site which strangely reversed the more usual gendered and raced dynamics of modern Western medico-scientific research. Rather than studying the black body it studied the white body, and, as [she] argue[s], rather than pathologizing [sic] women, it pathologized [sic] men" (Bashford 2000: 249).

Moreton-Robison's work, in which she engages with the ontological and epistemological conditions and effects of whiteness, often through critiques of knowledge production among white feminists in the academy but also through analyses of land-rights issues, *Mabo* and *Wik*, position hers as one of the most important and influential critical voices engaging the problematic of whiteness in Australia (Moreton-Robinson 1998; Moreton-Robinson 1999; Moreton-Robinson 2000; Moreton-Robinson 2001).

The work of Ghassan Hage is also extremely useful and influential[12] to the critical study of race and whiteness in Australia. His text *White Nation* (1998) has helped to create the intellectual space in which the problematic of whiteness can be analysed. In this text Hage works through themes such as the relation between nationalism and racism, the relations between whiteness (as cultural capital) and class, the relation between whiteness and practical nationalism or belonging, the relation between tolerance (central to multiculturalism) and white supremacy, amongst others. His 'popular' use of psychoanalytic (and other) theory in this text and others, while being criticised (Mackey 2000), it has also spored a great deal of thought, discussion and critique. His writing is passionate and engaging which has certainly influenced its adoption by many who have chosen to use *White Nation* in the academy and elsewhere. Hage has continued, and developed, his engagement with whiteness (and other issues) in his recent book *Against Paranoid Nationalism* (2003).

A number of edited collections that have emerged from conferences have also contributed to the growing body of literature concerned with whiteness in Australia. Amongst these are *Unmasking Whiteness* (McKay 1999), and *Race, Colour & Identity* (Docker and Fischer 2000), although the latter takes both Australia and New Zealand into consideration.

Unmasking Whiteness (McKay 1999) is a collection of papers which critically analyse the social construction of whiteness with the aim of 'unmasking' it, that is making it visible alongside the range of 'Other' racialised categories. In her introduction to this collection, Belinda McKay says debates around "native title, reconciliation and immigration demonstrate that race continues to be central to

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[12] See the collection of reviews published in the March 2000 issue of *Oceania* 70(30): 268-276, for evidence of this influence.

Australian culture", although it is not necessarily made explicit. She argues that in "such debates the category 'race' is reserved for those deemed to be 'other'; whites as a racial group remain invisible" (McKay 1999: 3). The idea driving *Unmasking Whiteness* is, as the title suggests, to combat this tendency. The papers in the collection all contribute to this project albeit in a variety of different ways[13].

Race, Colour & Identity (Docker and Fischer 2000), brings together scholarship concerned with race and whiteness focusing on both the Australian and the New Zealand contexts. In their paper Susanne Schech and Jane Haggis argue that engaging with whiteness "allows a focus on the racialised character of the Australian social formation in ways which focus on the 'self' rather than the 'other', thus inverting how whiteness usually identifies itself – through non-whiteness" (2000: 232). They argue that de-centring whiteness would require an abandonment of the (Howardian[14]) "search for 'core values'" and taking up a process of

> dismantling the edifices – institutional and discursive – which constantly reproduce whiteness as hegemonic narratives of identity, nation and self. Only then would whiteness become visible as something which is constantly being produced in specific historical, institutional and political contexts and not as some taken-for-granted, invisible, primordial or essential set of 'core Australian values'. (Schech and Haggis 2000: 237)

There are some similarities between critical race and whiteness studies and gender studies. However, while it is a continuing problem for gender studies and feminism that in many cases gender is not yet recognised as basic to the production of research and knowledge, those involved in critical race studies have much more work to do. It is not uncommon for 'well meaning' edited collections and texts to recognise gender by way of including a 'token' chapter on gender, women, or feminism. This is still extremely rare in the case of critical studies of race and whiteness. However, a recent collection focussed on Australian multiculturalism (Hage, Couch et al. 1999) dedicates a whole section (a set of

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[13] After the introductory section which contains three chapters that not only introduce the papers which comprise the content of the book but also present some important preliminary arguments, the collection itself is boken down into the following sections: 'The social construction of whiteness', 'The politics of whiteness', 'Whiteness, whiteness studies and sites of resistence', 'Whiteness and social policy', 'Reflections of the conference', and 'Artistic statement'. These are suggestive of some of the different approaches and modes of critique/reflection that are adopted by the various authors represented in the collection.

[14] For an engaging discussion of Prime Minister John Howard's continuing concern with fundamental and 'core Australian values' see Hage (2001).

chapters) to critical engagement with the problematic of whiteness. In the introduction to this collection Hage (somewhat optimistically) tells us that while whiteness has been "for a long time invisible. Its new visibility is in a sense a mark of the decrease in its hegemonic power. Indeed it is most visible in the discourse of 'white decline'[15] through which some white Australians articulate a sense of loss of centrality and even a loss of reality as a result of multiculturalism" (1999: x). Jon Stratton's chapter (1999), in this collection, provides an historical account of the changes in the meaning and boundaries of whiteness in Australia. Comparing the Australian context with the American he argues that there is "remarkably little work on the construction of the racial category of 'white' in Australia" describing the American context as being defined by an "outpouring" of such work "over the last ten years" (Stratton 1999: 163). His chapter concludes by illuminating the ways that the legacy of the White Australia Policy continues to 'haunt'[16] contemporary multicultural Australia and multicultural practices.

Similarly, in her chapter, Jan Larbalestier argues that "the difficult and contentious question of whiteness has been a "relatively neglected area of academic engagement in Australia" (1999: 145). She makes the point that in "representations of multiculturalism" particularly, "whiteness itself is frequently an unexamined all-encompassing given" (Larbalestier 1999: 146). Suvendrini Perera argues that "in the current 'race debate' [in Australia] the concept of 'race' has remained largely unexamined" (1999: 185). While these claims have some substance, as can be seen, there is a growing interest in critically examining whiteness and race in Australia.

In addition to the Australian literature that explicitly engages whiteness qua whiteness there is some post-colonial feminist literature that has recently addressed what it means (and what it has meant) to be a white Australian women (Bulbeck 1992; Woollacott 1997; Bulbeck 1998; Schech and Haggis 1998).

Again, it must be stressed that this brief overview of the Australian literature engaging with whiteness is certainly not exhaustive. However, it provides an

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[15] For a thorough discussion and analysis of the discourse of white decline see Hage (1998).
[16] For a more thorough discussion of the ways the White Australia Policy continues to haunt us see: Jayasuriya, Walker and Gothard (2003).

entry point into the growing and diverse body of work that is useful and has been influential to those wanting to explore whiteness in Australia.

What to do about whiteness...

> our society does not often produce or even imagine genuinely antiracist white people (Lipsitz 1998: xiv)

There is a tension in the literature, summed up by Dyer when he wrote, "[m]y blood runs cold at the thought that talking about whiteness could lead to the development of something called 'White Studies'". He points to the possibility of the development of backlash responses – white men claiming victim status – and the possibility that a fixation with whiteness might give "white people the go-ahead to write and talk about what in any case we have always talked about: ourselves" (Dyer 1997: 10).   This tension is also apparent in Roediger's statement that "the growth of the profile of studies of whiteness has itself reflected the privileges enjoyed by white scholars" (2001: 74). Voicing a similar concern, Cynthia Levine-Rasky asks "How can whites name, yet sidestep their claim to knowledge so as to avoid reaffirming their social domination?" (2002: 319). However, Dyer believes that "whiteness needs to be made strange" and that this can be done through critical analyses of whiteness (1997: 10).

There have been various (although not explicit) responses to this tension in the Australian literature. Writing on the value of indigenous insights into whiteness, and following Moreton-Robinson, Jane Haggis (et al) state "those placed outside or who place themselves outside of 'whiteness' usually can describe whiteness, reflect on it and recount experiences of it" (1999: 169). Ian Callahan writes, "To bring whiteness into the foreground is precisely to subject it to an enquiry of its naturalised presence as unmarked and the measure of all others" (2001: 102). Similarly, as already noted above, Hage argues that making whiteness visible through explicitly engaging with it is necessary and a positive step towards weakening its hegemony (1999: x).

As has been demonstrated above there is a significant and growing body of literature both overseas and within Australia that is engaged with analysing the problematic of whiteness. There are many academics involved in various projects aimed at demonstrating that whiteness is a problem for white people as well as others, that it is a problem that requires attention. However, there is much less

work that takes the step beyond investigating the problem of whiteness to ask, "Where do we go from here?" (Brodkin 1999).

Amongst those who do attempt this next step there are various "disagreements…considering how a focus on whiteness ought to inform political practice", however, most of the work to this end has "fallen into two camps, labeled [sic] by Noel Ignatiev the 'abolitionists' and the 'preservationists'" (Roediger 2001: 84, 85). Roediger, following Ignatiev, differentiates between these as initiatives aimed to either "rearticulate" or to 'abolish' whiteness, and asks, "what can whites be without white racial identity?" (2001: 85, 88).

'New Abolitionism' "refers to the abolishment of the white race so that whites may gain their freedom from the enslavement of their cooperation in racism" (Levine-Rasky 2002: 339). This concept is based on the notion that if we accept that race (and whiteness in particular) is a construct then we must accept the possibility that such a category can be dismantled or abolished. It requires challenging all of the institutions that reproduce race and whiteness, and the supporters of 'new abolitionism' call on all 'so-called whites' (to borrow the language of *Race Traitor*) to become race traitors, telling us that "treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity"[17]. Describing whites as those who accept the privileges associated with whiteness, and the white race as a 'club' that people may or may not be born into, new abolitionists call for white people to reject white race privilege and relinquish membership of the club. New abolitionism distinguishes itself from 'anti-racist' movements due to the reliance of these movements on (and therefore the support that they offer to) the concept of race.

There are, however, a number of criticisms that can be made of new abolitionism. Following Marilyn Frye, Levine-Rasky argues that "the option to choose the terms of one's racial membership in social relations is a function of white privilege itself. Disaffiliation from whiteness is exercised through the racial domination from which the race traitor attempts to withdraw" (2002: 342). Therefore, the call for whites to relinquish their membership to the club that is the white race is based on (and therefore reproduces) the power of whiteness. As has been argued elsewhere, it is an aspect of white race privilege that white people have the capacity to "choose whether or not to be concerned about racism" (Tannoch-

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[17] This slogan is the banner for the journal *Race Traitor*.

Bland 1998: 36). Similarly then, it is an aspect of white race privilege that the suggestion is made that white people ought to opt out of whiteness – there is no similar option for those marked out as not white. New abolitionism relies upon, to some degree, the privilege and power attached to being recognised as white.

Those labelled (unfairly) as 'preservationists' on the other hand, rather than abolishing whiteness, seek to "dislodge it from its centrality and authority", to make whiteness strange (Dyer 1997: 10) or at least as strange as all other racial categories; to re-inscribe it within a general economy of races, rather than allow it to continue as normal and dominant. In the Australian context Olivia Khoo (2001) uses Asian-Australian and indigenous literature to discuss the possibilities for destabilising whiteness in Australia. She suggests a strategy of 'visibilising' whiteness as an 'ornamental detail', arguing that "[s]howing up the ornamentation of whiteness enables it to be dislodged from its position of power and associated privileges" (Khoo 2001: 68, 77).

Dyer is well known for his argument that the power of whiteness stems (largely) from its simultaneously being both invisible and visible. It is everywhere, ubiquitous, but empty, unmarked (Dyer 1997: 44-45). He says, "Whites must be seen to be white, yet whiteness as race resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen" (Dyer 1997: 45). Following Dyer's argument that white privilege emerges from whiteness's invisibility, Stephanie Donald argues that "even the seeming trivialities of whiteness are conducive to the maintenance of widespread inequalities based on a notion of race, and that seeing these trivialities is, at present, a step that needs to be taken over and over again". She continues, "visibility is a necessary stage, for without visibility there is no way of marking the responsibility for white people to acknowledge the fact of their privilege" (Donald 2000: 158). Therefore, rather than abolishing whiteness, it is argued here that even to mark whiteness as a racialised category is a step towards undermining the power associated with whiteness because it loses its 'natural' attachment to the norm. However, Penelope Ingram (2001) argues that whiteness is already (and has been since colonisation) marked and visible in Australia.

Schech and Haggis offer a way to "decentre the white heart" by renarrating migrancy as marked by not one originary narrative but by multiple departures

and arrivals (2000: 231-2). In this way they hope that it might be possible to "dismantle the edifices – institutional and discursive – which constantly reproduce whiteness as hegemonic narratives of identity, nation and self" (Schech and Haggis 2000: 237). Suvendrini Perera "identifies some of the means by which strategic mobilisations of 'difference' also function to both challenge and reaffirm whiteness" (1999: 184). She argues that making visible "the assumptions, exclusions and sleights-of-hand by which whiteness stakes its claim to a naturalised and unified status in contemporary Australia" necessarily weakens the naturalness of these, and therefore, works against white race privilege.

The argument that the privileges associated with whiteness emerge in some part from whiteness's occupation and definition of all that is normal, and that this is discursively naturalised and thus whiteness becomes invisible despite the ubiquitously visible (yet racially unmarked) nature of whiteness, is compelling. Therefore, making whiteness visible as constructed and emphasising the privilege attached to this racialised category necessarily disturbs the naturalness, (racial) invisibility, and normality of whiteness and, weakens white race privilege. It does so without further empowering whites by asking them to chose to opt out of whiteness (an option that stems directly from the privilege associated with whiteness). Obviously white people need to relinquish some power for white race privilege to be addressed or overcome, however, if this can be done without falling into a performative contradiction that simultaneously reproduces white privilege then all the better. The position articulated in this paper "derives from and is limited by the standpoint" of this author (Moreton-Robinson 2000: xxi). It represents an ongoing engagement both personal and academic to deal with and work to weaken white race privilege. If whiteness gains power through its invisibility then any work which "makes whiteness visible" (Moreton-Robinson 2000: xxi) must weaken this power.

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