

Beyond Whiteness as [Failing] World:
Reimagining the Possibilities of Self through Africana Philosophical Thought

A THESIS

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Introduction: *is our search for meaning meaningless?*

When I came to Colorado College to start my undergraduate degree, I was freshly 17 and coming from a small predominantly white predominantly rich town. I lived in a community that privileged the type of individualism that told white people that we *deserve* everything that we ‘earned’ but rejected the type of individualism that allowed everyone to express themselves freely. So, in other words, I was starved for meaning.

I remember when I signed up for my first class at CC— I was choosing between Existential Philosophy and an Introduction to Feminist and Gender Studies course. I read the class descriptions, and with no hard feelings towards FGS, when I saw the question, “does our life have any real meaning?”, the choice became easy. I wasn’t sure, coming from that homogenous town, where I would be able to find people who wanted something other than the life we were prescribed.

In that Existential Philosophy class, I searched for meaning in the texts and subtexts and contexts, but, as I did so, I found myself further and further from the goal of my pursuit. As I continued my journey at Colorado College, I realized that there was *no way* to find true meaning in those texts. I found that everything I read upheld and perpetuated the ideals and ideas of white supremacy. How could I find meaning in texts that were steeped in false, geriatric narratives of our past? How could I find meaning in texts that had, as their foundation, revisionist histories? Texts that assumed whiteness as supreme? That assumed Blackness as inferior? That assumed our history is one of upheld treaties and empowered peoples? I could not and can not find meaning in a world which is built on a false foundation. And I do not really think anyone can.

This thesis shows the journey that I went on through my undergraduate education to understand where we *can* begin our search for meaning. The myths that our modern world is

built on leave us starved, no matter where we go. To begin to find meaning is to deconstruct the foundation from which we have assumed life:

What I mean to get at here, is that our orientation towards everyday questions, and towards the bigger ones, is flawed in that we have not, as a society, given enough weight to the pervasive presence of anti-blackness, white supremacy, patriarchy, and settler colonialism, to name a few.

Through this work, it will become obvious how whiteness is illusory. But before I get into that, I will assert, as my central claim, that when living in an illusion¹-- whiteness as [failing] world-- there is no possibility for moving towards *meaningful* meaning. I will prove that whiteness as [failing] world hurts us all; and beyond the illusory nature and death grip of whiteness is the possibility for being-towards-particularity rather than being-is/as-white.

I will continue by exploring the ways in which the exclusive-possibility for living-in-illusion has created the impossibility of a flourishing self. I will explore how this is true for phenotypically white people as well as phenotypically Black people, and other people on the margins of our modern society.

It will become clear why it is crucial to (re)analyze and (re)assert the devastation that white supremacy causes, and in doing so, we will find just how devastating it *truly* is.

After that, I will think through possibilities for *else; is it possible for us to find our way through/out of/around/over/// whiteness as [failing] world? And, how? Where will we go? Where will we go back to? How will we survive it? Who will we be? Where do we begin?*

¹ Or even a delusion. “The reason for this, at bottom, is that the doctrine of white supremacy, which still controls most white people, is itself a stupendous delusion...People who cling to their delusions find it difficult, if not impossible, to learn anything worth learning” (Baldwin 432 collected essays).

Note on Method and Positionality:

I am not part of the conversation of who Black studies is for, but this thesis, as I am a white person, by nature, contributes to that discourse. This thesis is not meant to do the work of appropriating Black studies and Africana philosophical thought for the benefit of white people, or claim to benefit phenotypically Black people, but rather this thesis is meant to employ the generative nature of Black studies and Africana philosophy to illuminate this world *as it is*, using thought from Africana philosophical thinkers.

It is important, also, to note in my methodology, that when I write about the ‘world,’ I often mean ‘society’ and further, ‘the project of modernity’. Similarly, when I write about whiteness, I am considering whiteness as inextricably linked to white supremacy, if not the same thing. I say this because *whiteness has never existed without white supremacy*; the creation of whiteness was the creation of hierarchizing races.

And to borrow from adrienne maree brown, “if this is being read in a future in which this language has evolved, then please know I would be evolving right along with you” (brown).

Whiteness as World:

What I mean when I say whiteness is world, is that, at its core, the idea that white people are inherently better than, more evolved than, or somehow a different type of being than Black people is demonstrably false; I call whiteness a world because we have built an entire set of systems, institutions, frameworks, livings based on some foundational ideology of whiteness as inherently better, and when the foundation of our society is demonstrably false, I will choose to call it a world we, colonizers, have created rather than ‘World’, ‘true’, ‘real’ or a ‘natural teleological progression’.

As Europe and the Western world gained control over the rest of the world over the course of the “Atlantic period,” (Mbembe 16) “the pressing question ... was how to deploy large numbers of laborers within a commercial enterprise that spanned great distances. The answer was the invention of Blackness. It was the cog that made possible the creation of the plantation-- one of the period’s most effective forms of wealth accumulation-- and accelerated the integration of merchant capitalism with technology and the control of subordinated labor” (Mbembe 20). Essentially, the Western world was able to keep power through the invention of Blackness; to put it differently, Blackness became the thing to exploit in order to gain and maintain power². Blackness becomes interminably plastic, meaning that Blackness is not an adjective used to describe a phenotype, but rather a type of nothingness which white people can mold into whatever we need. Mbembe furthers this point by suggesting the ‘becoming black of the world’; that as capitalism continues to boom, all subaltern people have become, or are becoming, Black in some sense. In our whiteness as [failing] world, Blackness, then, means ‘subaltern’ or ‘excluded,’ rather than the color of one's skin. This is so because of the *purpose* of the creation of this Blackness-- that Blackness was created for the success of white people/white power, shows that whiteness cares not whether one is phenotypically Black or not, suggests Mbembe, but rather, whiteness cares to herd all those who are politically useful, for the project of whiteness, into the condition of existence that is Blackness in the modern world³. That ‘Blackness’ is subject to such vast change without true reason, and not relating in any sense to

² Some suggest that Blackness precedes whiteness and that white people noticed Blackness and used it to create whiteness. While this argument seems correct to me and worthwhile to explore, for the purposes of this paper, I am using the term Blackness in the context of whiteness as [failing] world.

³ We can see this ‘becoming Black’ of people throughout history: Chinese laborers dehumanized and used to build railroads; Latinx undocumented workers being exploited and paid unlivable wages, etc. It is crucial, though, to note that there are very real and dangerous implications that come with being phenotypically Black in this modern world that do not pertain to other ‘subaltern’ peoples.

*rationality*⁴, shows, again, the instability of whiteness as *World*, and rather proves whiteness is constructed world. More simply put, ‘Blackness’, as defined by the master narrative, does not actually mean to *be Black*. It is rather used as a tool to categorize the ‘other’ as other.

Furthermore, “[the plantation] was also defined by the fact that the social links defined by exploitation were never stable. They were constantly challenged and had to be produced and reproduced through violence of a molecular kind that sutured and saturated the master-slave relationship” (Mbembe 18). The instability of the positionalities in the plantation structure inflicted fear in those who had power, namely, white people; there was a deep fear of reversal, or, put simply, that the enslaved would overthrow the enslavers. Because of this fear of reversal, white people put in place rules/laws/codes/institutions⁵/systems/theologies to make sure that Black people were stably at the bottom. The fear of reversal, again, shows that the power held by white people within whiteness as [failing] world is not inherent to whiteness or white people or white world, but rather just power-in-itself, which is explicitly a part of the illusion of whiteness; that whiteness/ ‘white power’/ white supremacy must be upheld and upheld to hold, is indicative of its *imagined and constructed*, though relevant, standing as foundational//true/world. White power is constructed, and white power is upheld. It is able to be upheld because whiteness has set up a world that upholds it. Our orientation is being-towards-upholding whiteness.

Colonizing nations vied for global dominance and recognized that in order to gain such power and so fast, they would have to, as Mbembe said, invent Blackness. In doing so, these nations self-referentially gained the power to create a history, narrative, and set of facts that placed whiteness on the top, and again, Blackness as stably at the bottom of societal order. “The expansion of the European spatial horizon...went hand in hand with a division of the historical

⁴ Supposed ‘lack of *rationality*’ has been used to demonize/vilify/oppress/civilize Black people.

⁵ “The will of the people, or the State, is revealed by the State’s institutions” (Baldwin 839)

and cultural imagination and, in certain cases, a relative closing of the mind. In sum, once genders, species, and races were identified and classified, nothing remained but to enumerate the differences between them” (Mbembe Critique 16,17). With their power, Europe and the Western world closed off the possibilities for thinking in particularities, and rather only allowed for the possibility of being-is/as-white, in order to uphold whiteness as world.

Put more simply, the constant need to perpetuate the supremacy of whiteness, rather than it being an inherently perpetuated thing, reveals that by no means can whiteness as world be seen as *true*, but rather as constructed world; and though most things are constructed, this construction serves none of us, truly. This construction is taken as an unalterable reality, when we know that it is, in fact, alterable. Whiteness is [failing] world because it claims to be ‘natural,’ or ‘World’, when we know it is just *constructed* as world; the necessity of the ongoing construction of whiteness reveals how fragile the foundation of white power really is and remains to be. And because the need for whiteness to constantly be perpetuated in order to stay strong, for white power to remain, our world must only be towards whiteness. There is no room for anything else because, as will be explored further, whiteness requires all our commitment and energy.

Why it’s Failing:

Insofar as it has been established that whiteness is world, I must make clear now why it is failing. To put it simply, all of us are struggling. Whether that be a struggle to find meaning, a high rate of suicidality in the modern world⁶, Black people being executed at the hands of our ‘justice-upholding’ patriots (yes, the police), a burning earth, and so on, there is no doubt that the world as we know it is in some sort of state of illness. This state affects us all: phenotypically

⁶ According to the CDC, there is approximately one death every 11 minutes, in the US, due to suicide. (“Facts”)

white people, phenotypically Black people, and, just all people. I choose to take up the belief, in this work, that anti-blackness and therefore the existence of whiteness as [failing] world is at the root of this ever-present, parasitic illness that fashions the modern world, *because we cannot exist as selves in the way of meaning when we are solely agents of perpetuation.*

For White People:

While the white world is not necessarily monolithic by any means, I will assert here that, regardless of religious beliefs, political beliefs, socio-economic status, etc., there are grave effects that whiteness as [failing] world has on all white people. As an overview, we are unable to make real meaning. In the face of no true meaning, again, our world is fashioned by illness. Though we often assume that white people are doing just fine in our varying positions of power⁷ in this society. Yet we are constantly searching for a meaning that we have not found, and, again, are suffering in many different ways in this world that is fashioned by the project of modernity. I will go on to assert that the suffering in our modern world, and our inability to find meaning, is not just ‘human nature,’ but has to do with our orientation towards the failing world of whiteness, for a few reasons. Firstly, we categorize things in a way that leaves us in Bad Faith. Second, because of whiteness as [failing] world, we are living in constant fear, and third, we are unable to really love our children.

1) Categorization and Bad Faith

Whiteness as [failing] world has done the work of categorizing things in a way that does not allow us to see things-as-they-are, but rather as symbols or signifiers. In a world centered

⁷ Though not all white people have the same type or degree of power, one will never not have power *because* of their whiteness.

around upholding whiteness, we see a Black person and immediately have biases flood through our heads, we see ‘women’ and immediately have biases flood through our heads, etc. In this world, to privilege efficiency, we have put all things into categories so that instead of taking time to get to know what is in front of us, we can just take in ‘all the information we might need’ from just looking at someone. Lewis Gordon gets at this by saying, “To see him as black is to see enough. Hence to see him as black is not to see him at all. His presence is a form of absence” (Gordon 99).

To categorize makes sense in a world that has as its foundation an illusion and therefore has people who are lost for meaning⁸. One constantly needs to grab on to some sort of meaning and therefore to make-things-mean-things, prescribes a meaning that one can blindly follow. And in making-things-mean-things, in a world that holds whiteness as [failing] world, it follows that the meaning of things would center around upholding whiteness. Insofar as whiteness privileges efficiency— so as to continue to perpetuate whiteness as supreme— the meaning that we have made is towards whiteness, is towards efficiency. To put it another way, the way we have made meaning is through being-towards-whiteness in a way that has systematized whiteness and allowed it to, again, *become* able to perpetuate itself. What is helpful here is an argument by Dr. Michael Sawyer: he says we often see whiteness as gravity, or a fact of this world that is unable to be changed. Sawyer proposes, though, that whiteness is not *actually* like gravity, but it acts like gravity, and we have not yet changed that (Sawyer). Whiteness as [failing] world creates meaning that acts as gravity but is not really gravity. Whiteness as [failing] world makes us

⁸ I imagine there will be pushback that categorization itself is not the problem, and rather that the orientation towards whiteness is. While I agree with the latter half, I question the former. I question whether a process of categorizing people/places/things may always lead to some hierarchical system. Yet further, some hierarchy may not be ‘bad’—it may just be the orientation and context of hierarchy in our modern world that is.

believe that the meaning we have made *is* as earthly as gravity; **that** is the very thing that keeps us in the cycle of perpetuating it: that we do not think it can be different.

What is so grave about subscribing to whiteness as [failing] world in terms of meaning-making, aside from the loss of *true meaning*, is that one is lost in Bad Faith. Taking the prescribed route, or unconscious route, is something Jean-Paul Sartre would call having “bad faith”. Bad faith is the act of hiding the truth from oneself in a subconscious way; it is the way in which one takes the choice out of life. Whiteness has become that which one can just blindly follow, neither questioning nor consenting to uphold all of the ‘values’ that come with living in and as whiteness as [failing] world. Bad faith is, to Sartre, the way in which people become lost, and to be lost is to be constantly searching for meaning, and to be constantly searching for meaning in the world as whiteness as [failing] world is to be looking to ground oneself in an illusion, something I suggest is impossible⁹— and leads to a substantial set of the ills of our world. To have bad faith is to constantly be betraying yourself by living life not according to the inherent desires and thoughts you have, but rather to always and already be-is/as-white.

Theorist Lewis Gordon furthers this discourse on antiblack racism in relation to Sartre’s Bad Faith. He says,

Although the white body is regarded as Presence, it lives in the mode of Absence, and it offers, instead, its perspective as Presence. In other words, the white body is expected to be seen by others without seeing itself being seen. Its presence is therefore its perspectivity. Its mode of being, of being self-justified, is never superfluous. Unlike the black, whose transformation from Absence to Presence poses a threat to the precarious balance of reality, the white is already Presence and therefore poses no such threat—

⁹ Again, it is not impossible to ground oneself in a *construction*, as most things in this world are constructed. But it is impossible to ground oneself in an illusion—the difference being us taking what is *illusory*, again, as unalterable.

except, perhaps, in his absence. This is because, as once pointed out by William James, there is no more reality than what there is. The conclusion, then, is that reality is threatened by the *inclusion* of blacks, whereas reality is jeopardized by the *exclusion* or *diminution* of white presence.

The obvious flaw in this logic built upon an identity relation between whiteness and Presence is that all human beings are present and, being human, are also beings to whom and in virtue of whom the world is presented. They are also simultaneously absent. The ontological situation of humanity hasn't changed under the interpretation of blacks as Absence and whites as Presence. What happens here is an affective appeal to an imaginary, 'magical' version of the world that suits the desired duality. This magical appeal is antiblack racism. (Gordon 103)

The white body has been constructed to be 'Presence,' which is seen as the positive end of the spectrum, as opposed to absence. Even though white people/the white body is still in the way of bad faith, or in the way of lying to ourselves, the actions/existence of the white body, in this modern world, are considered the epitome of Presence. We have *constructed* 'Presence,' and in doing so have avoided confronting true presence. By defining that which is coveted, 'Presence,' as what a white person is *already doing* is not actually to be seen in a meaningful way, but to be constructing 'meaning' in the terms of bad faith. Whiteness as 'Presence' is never questioned because presence does not exist on its own— 'Presence' is whiteness and whiteness is *being*. Therefore, when there is an absence of whiteness, the world falls into crisis, because there is an absence of *being*. We know, though, that this is not true, because Black beings *Be*. This

constructed reality, or ‘magical’ version of the world, does deep harm to white people¹⁰, as we are only able to *be* in one way; I must believe that we are more expansive beings than that— that we want to be whoever we are at any given moment rather than in a set of codes/rules/laws. Even though those codes/rules/laws/// privilege white people, we live in bad faith by being-towards-whiteness. We are lost in a circular illusion, always grabbing on to shadows of meaning. We are struggling, and it shows.

2) Living in Constant Fear

Whiteness tells us that we must continue to perpetuate it *or else* the power will be in the hands of someone else and come back to bite us, or, work to not serve white people. Fanon is helpful here, as he says, “Europe is literally the creation of the Third World” (Fanon 58). He is saying that those who have power in this world have that power because someone else does not have power-- or rather, Europe, and further the project of modernity, has only been made possible through the exploitation of a people. Because of this, the magnitude of power that the modern world has is contingent upon the exploitation of others for profit. Insofar as this is the case, those in power, namely, white people, fear that if we lose the power, the same magnitude of *oppression* will be turned on us— power in our world becomes a zero-sum game. This very fear shows that the power is not inherent to whiteness, but rather just brute power that has been constructed to exist in our world. If that power were inherent to whiteness, there would lack such an urgent necessity to perpetuate and uphold it.

Therefore, living in and of whiteness as [failing] world means the exclusive possibility for being-is/as-white which means the exclusive possibility for *being-toward-upholding-*

¹⁰ And to every being. Because we treat people who know nothing about themselves as those who are the epitome of selves. Our understanding of self is thrown into deep crisis.

whiteness. If one was to not be towards upholding whiteness, there would be fear of losing the momentum that holds in place the power of whiteness, and again, fear that some other force would take its place. White people are so fearful of this that we choose to murder Black people over giving them parking tickets, to incarcerate upwards of 2 million people rather than admit that we are not a real danger to one another-- that *we*, as worlding-whiteness, have created the harm that will continue to cycle through our society. We choose power over meaning, and in doing so, we lose our *selves*.

Murder Over Ticket

More often than is even comprehensible, Black people in our modern world are killed for simply existing. George Floyd was killed for a crime he did not commit— and even if he had, the sentencing for that crime would have been up to 20 years, not death. Breonna Taylor was killed while sleeping. Ahmaud Arbery was killed for running. Black people are killed for simply existing. White people feel the need to *keep Black people in their place*¹¹. We are so fearful of losing our positions of power, that we need to assert our dominance **constantly** and *illogically*. This assertion, again, leaves us ‘powerful’ yet out of a self. Is it really power if we must sacrifice self? Is it really power if we are lost for meaning? Is it really power if we are empty? What is power for when we have no self?

Incarceration

¹¹ Meaning, in positions of no power

Black people represent 60 percent of the imprisoned population (Sharpe 15).

Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow*, lets us know that “people of all colors use and sell illegal drugs at remarkably similar rates...[However], black men have been admitted to prison on drug charges at rates twenty to fifty times greater than those of white men” (Alexander). Black people are being disproportionately punished for ‘crimes’ that are just as common for white people to commit. White people are unable to admit, as the ones in power in this society, that Black people are not more dangerous than white people— we just uphold falsities to *keep them in their place*. White people are so fearful of losing our place that we are blinded to the *truth*.

To put it simply, white people are willing to go to vastly *irrational* lengths to ensure the supremacy of whiteness and the ‘order’ of our society, so as to make sure we stay in power. Because of this, we are unable to see what is *really* happening and *really* there, because we are only oriented towards whiteness as [failing] world and the fear of losing power. Upholding whiteness becomes a full time job, and the possibility for being a self fades away-- a notion that will continue to be explored throughout this paper.

3) We Cannot Love our Children

In being hyper-focused on holding onto power and believing in whiteness, white people have lost the ability to love our kids, and even ourselves, says James Baldwin in an interview with Nikki Giovanni (“JAMES”).

What can we take from this?

What Baldwin does here is press on white people to look inside and imagine what might be true in this statement; why might he assert that white people cannot love their children? What I believe Baldwin is getting at here, is that white people chose power over all else. He says, “The price the white American paid for his ticket was to become white... This incredibly limited not to say dimwitted ambition has choked many a human being to death here: and this, I contend, is because the white American never accepted the real reasons for his journey... They require of me a song less to celebrate my captivity than to justify their own” (Baldwin 842). What Baldwin is saying is that white people have chosen to be held in captivity, by whiteness, in order to keep power. Insofar as whiteness is world and not some inherent unalterable *truth*, again, we must be constantly perpetuating it in order to hold it up; what this does is make white people purely agents of perpetuation rather than beings-in-ourselves. White people must constantly buy into a system that is not real or self-perpetuating and in doing so, we lose the ability to really *see*. In other words, we are blinded to the world and to love, and rather only [hyper] attentive to upholding whiteness or being-is/as-white.

I choose to subscribe to Baldwin’s view of love as ‘accepting one’s nakedness’. When you do that, you begin to be able to really *see*, says Baldwin (Baldwin 23). And in order to accept one’s nakedness, to truly see oneself, one must know that the essence of their being is not color. The essence of ones being is not how much or how little power they have. When one truly sees another, and therefore allows themselves to be fully ‘naked’, whiteness falls away. And when whiteness falls away, the world as we know it falls into crisis because everything in this modern world is touched by whiteness—whiteness is ‘presence’. Therefore, because we are

unable to divest from whiteness, we cannot really see. And because we cannot really see, we cannot really love. We can only make gestures at love that often fall flat in this world¹².

Whiteness is [failing] world because we, in the modern world, live in a love-lacking/loveless state.

For Black People:

Jane Elliott, a white woman, asks a crowd of white people to stand if they would like to be treated the way that Black people are treated in our society, and no one stands (“BLUE”). That tells me, if everything else that I see did not already tell me, that this ‘modern’ world is dangerous for/rooted against/at odds with/// Black people. Whiteness as [failing] world is failing for Black people because in white people’s craze to maintain power, we have created worlds based on dangerous untruths. These untruths make an unbreakable bond between whiteness and the blackness-that-is-blackness-under-a-white-supremacist-state. Again, I will choose to take up the belief that it is whiteness as [failing] world, as illusion, that is at the root of the subjugation and devastation of Blackness in this modern world¹³. I say this for primarily three reasons: that in this modern world, Black people can 1) never be seen as truly ‘human’, 2) can only ever be living in the face of illusion, and 3) that Blackness will only ever be seen as evil in a world that is founded on anti-blackness.

1) (Hum[an]imal]

¹² Let us not forget that the divorce rate falls somewhere around 50% in the United States. Though marriage is a weird metric of love, it is supposed to be a metric in this society.

¹³ It is important to note that the subjugation and devastation of blackness are actually signs of the health of whiteness. That blackness is subjugated and devastated shows that whiteness is doing a sufficient job at maintaining supremacy in the zero-sum game that whiteness has created.

"...the process of making the slave relied on the abjection and criminalization of slave humanity, rather than the denial of it" (Jackson 27)

Holding whiteness as [failing] world means, at the foundation of our society is, initially, the thought that Black people are animal (Jackson 29,30), and then the idea that Black people are a step between human and animal, finally to somewhere we are now, which is that Black people have *become* human (Jackson). Theorist Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, in her book *Becoming Human*, outlines why the ‘humanization’ of Black people might not be as liberating as we once thought it to be, and as some of us still hold it to be. What stands out to me as a crucial part of this argument is that the category of ‘human’ has *always and already* been afforded to white people; it has never been put into question, in a systemically relevant way, whether white people are human or not. Insofar as it has been put into question whether Black people are human or not, we can see that the term ‘human’ holds an invisible adjective: ‘white’. In our modern world, human has never meant every fleshly being, but rather all ‘white’ fleshly beings. Black people, though, were able to be ‘brought into’ the category of human, in the eyes of white people, through a heightened proximity to whiteness; If Black people became more ‘civilized’ – “Domestic disorder was held responsible for criminality...” (Hartman 159)– or ‘clean’ – “the lack of cleanliness is associated with moral depravity, animal habits, and criminality” (Hartman 159)– they could be considered more human. Because of this, in the case of the ‘human’, there will always be the categories of *always and already* human, and *having become* human. When the category of ‘human’ has not *always and already* been yours, and in a world that has had the power to grant you the title of human, it seems to me that this title can always be taken away, or does not really even hold the same meaning as it does for white people¹⁴. To become human,

¹⁴ Geraldine Heng says, “Race is one of the primary names we have—a name we retain for the epistemological, ethical, and political commitments it recognizes—for a repeating tendency, of the greatest import, to demarcate

Black people had to become closer to whiteness, and to become closer to whiteness meant to become human-- what this sets up, again, is that to be human is to be white and to be white is to be human and to become human is to be-is/as-white. Jackson puts it more simply, “in order to *become* human without qualification, you must already *be* Man in its idealized form, yet Man, understood simultaneously as an achievement and bio-ontology, implies whiteness and specifically non blackness" (Jackson 33). What occurs to me is that either Black people must be seen as white to be considered human, or as close enough to white, *or* Black people are stably set as the animal of humanity ((hum[an]imal))-- that Blackness is the outside which provides meaning to the inside.

While holding whiteness as [failing] world, the category of human can never hold ‘Black’; it can only hold no adjective or ‘white’. To be ‘human,’ therefore, is to give up one's ability to be-towards-particularity, what I consider the true *being* of being, to be. Whiteness as [failing] world, as illusion, holds Black people in a death grip of either being-white or being-humanimal. This world is failing because Black people cannot be¹⁵.

2) False Universal

"I know that my feelings of exaggerated visibility and invisibility are the product of my not being part of the larger cultural picture. I know too that the larger cultural picture is an illusion, albeit a powerful one, concocted from a perceptual consensus to which I am

human beings through differences that are selectively essentialized as absolute and fundamental, so as to distribute positions and powers differentially to the human groups” (qtd. in EFrench). Essentially, that race is political. I recognize that others in our history have, in some sense, ‘become human’ in the eyes of whiteness-- and as race-making is political, it has been politically advantageous at certain moments to include previously excluded others-- in the pursuit of *making* blackness, it was politically advantageous to recognize Italian and Irish people as white so that those people would not be more man power for Black people/subaltern people.

¹⁵ This is not to say that Black people do not exist and, again, create complex and beautiful countercultures. This is to say that the fear that Black people have in this society *is not right*.

not party; and that while these perceptions operate as dictators of truth, they are after all merely perceptions," says Patricia J Williams. (qtd. in Jackson 102)

When whiteness as [failing] world¹⁶ remains the central point for which all is based off, Black people face a false universal. This false universal is exactly the enactment of whiteness as [failing] world; the world where Black people are considered lesser, or animal, or bad. Black people (and many other people, consciously) know that it is not true-- and even demonstrably false-- that they are lesser or animal or 'bad,' yet the whiteness as [failing] world we live in **forces** an enactment of *otherwise*. To put it another way, in order to make sense of the world we live in, it is almost imperative for one to believe, in some sense, that Black people are lesser beings than white people, because if not, the enactment of the world (whiteness as [failing] world) as we know it becomes nonsensical or even anti-sensical¹⁷. Frank Wilderson further theorizes that to be Black in this world means to have a "life constituted by disorientation rather than disrupted by disorientation" (qtd. in Jackson 114). What he is getting at here is that to be Black is to be constantly living in a disoriented/disorienting world, or a false universal; the world that we inhabit allows one only to be-is/as-white rather than to be-towards-particularity. The constant confronting of a world that makes no sense -- theoretically or literally, and, again, is anti-sensical -- for Black people¹⁸ lets us know, further, that there is no inherent truth or reality to the way our world as whiteness as [failing] world operates because it is not real/rational/livable/salvageable for some *people*, and these *people* were born and therefore make up World. Lewis Gordon's point comes up again here when he writes, "The obvious flaw in this

¹⁶ Or, white supremacy as foundation of world

¹⁷ White conservatives often can not handle the idea of 'killing a baby' (abortion), so if we all believed, truly, that Black people were human, would not the ruthless killing of Black people call for some fuss from said white conservatives?

¹⁸ It is also nonsensical for white people but the difference is-- for Black people it makes no sense and they cannot fit into it, whereas for white people, it makes no sense but we can fit into it.

logic built upon an identity relation between whiteness and Presence is that all human beings are present and, being human, are also beings to whom and in virtue of whom the world is presented” (Gordon 103). In sum, to be Black in this world is to be constantly confronting a world that makes no *rational* sense, making a deeply disorienting and dangerous reality.

Whiteness is [failing] world because Black people can see/have to see beyond it in order to exist. Whiteness is [failing] world because it does not have room for Black beings to be.

3) Killed– in Whiteness as [Failing] World, Blackness Can Only Ever be Evil

As Christina Sharpe grapples with a photo of a young Black girl marked with the word ‘Ship’ on her forehead, she asks this question, “How does one mark someone *for* a space--the ship-- who is already marked *by it?*” (Sharpe 48). What I believe her, an afro-pessimist, to be saying here is that, once you are marked, once you are placed, you cannot do the work of placing yourself, of marking yourself. Whiteness as [failing] world has set Blackness as stably marked/placed/made/fraught. In this sense, Black people, as living through the dominant narrative, are determined in this modern world. Though an important distinction to make is that, again, the Blackness that I write of is not what we know as Black culture. This Blackness that I write of is the Blackness that the white world has deemed necessary in order to gain and maintain power. Black culture, on the other hand, has had and will continue to have a vast ability to be self-determined. So, in this ‘modern’ sense of Blackness, which has only been subjugated/devastated/oppresed// at the foundations of our society, and *in order to build our society*, it can only ever be subjugated/devastated/oppresed// to keep our society functioning ‘properly’.

How we see this play out, is that Black people are killed for no reason other than that they are Black; “the weapon is blackness” (Sharpe 16). Whereas white people are not arrested for *killing* Black people because the lives of Black people, in this modern world, are demonstrably less important than the lives of white people -- this section is arguably the most urgent and important in this paper as it highlights the most immediate dangers of whiteness as [failing] world. The *illogic* of whiteness creates a world that cannot function in the way of justice and good faith. When one is living in a nonsensical world, the next step is never obvious, because it is not inherent to us but rather prescribed by some greater¹⁹ system. I believe that this is how societies get to places like the one we are in now. One where genocides are no longer news. We have lost our selves, and because of that, we blindly follow along with bad faith, leaving Black people in danger.

Others:

For other people at the margins of our society-- people who are deeply important and deserve more than a small section-- the opportunity to be-towards-particularity is also stripped away by whiteness as [failing] world. Whiteness holds one type of way to be, and one must be as close as possible to that way to succeed in this society. To be queer, to be biracial, to be otherly-able, to be anything besides a cisgender straight white able-bodied man in this society is to be told that your particularities are the things about you that need fixing, changing, or are wrong²⁰. Though at the root of this argument, is that even to be a cisgender straight white able-bodied man is to be gravely affected by the ills of whiteness as [failing] world. It is important to note, again, that to be phenotypically Black in this society poses much more of an immediate and life-

¹⁹ Larger, more powerful. Not better.

²⁰ Being-towards-particularity is directly contrasted by being in the way of bad faith.

threatening danger, a fact which should not be taken lightly. And for the purpose of this argument, it is also important to flesh out why, even as the nexus of this society, a straight white cisgender able-bodied man is not served by that-which-serves-him. I hope by now it is clear why, but for the purpose of making this point, I will venture to *make it* again. At the center of this argument is that, to be in the whiteness as [failing] world, one cannot truly be oneself or towards the particularities of one's being, because we must be either constantly perpetuating or facing whiteness. I argue that because of this, we are constantly searching for a meaning that we cannot find, because it is impossible to find a true meaning in a world that has as its foundation, an illusion (whiteness as supreme). This leads us, again, to blindly follow the meaning that has been fabricated in this whiteness as [failing] world. So, though a straight white cisgender able-bodied man is rewarded greatly in this society, that man is still suffering from a lack of true meaning, true seeing, and a lack of *true self*. Put simply, even being the exact model of what one *should* look like in this society is to be starved for meaning and purpose; A white cisgender straight able-bodied man, though benefitting from the illusion, is still facing a false universal that disallows him from truly seeing and being in the way of his true self– “To attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another” (Du Bois 14 souls).

In Sum:

When we are always towards whiteness (as supreme, as [failing] world), which is an illusion, we can only be-is/as-white. If that is all we can be, we cannot be selves. Two things cannot occupy the same space at the same time, or else they become the same thing– to be self and to be white become the same thing. Again, we cannot find meaning in any sense because we are looking for meaning in an illusion. The grave effects of this are not few, as demonstrated

above. The consequences are clear. We are living them right now: a lack of meaning ushering in an epidemic of mental health struggles, a burning earth, etc. Without access to one's true self, the possibility of living in and of the world as *enjoying* the world seems impossible to me.

Else: where do we go?

Whiteness as [failing] world is that which strips us of our ability to be in the way of true meaning.

Is it possible to live outside of/around/above/through whiteness? Would it project us into a less illusory world? Who can we be? Where will we end up? Where will we go back to? Why should we go there? What, really, would the process of reorienting look like? What are the possibilities for self that we might desire?

In this world, there is no way not to struggle. **We have believed for far too long that to have power is to not struggle.** We have more than proved ourselves wrong and it is time to move towards *else*.

I believe there are meaningful struggles; struggles that will project us into this new world.

A new world is needed. Due to the ills of white supremacy– whiteness as [failing] world– we have lost sight .

Our orientation towards whiteness as [failing] world has aided us in the destruction of our world.

Rather than helping our earth flourish, we have depleted almost all of its reserves. We have chosen to exploit the earth's resources to help us uphold whiteness as dominant. And therefore, we are in a climate disaster that is at the hands of whiteness as [failing] world.

We have chosen to continue to endlessly grow our economy over prioritizing the possibility for life 10 years from now. Our economy is one that drives us all into the ground. But a world that is not driven by the ills of whiteness is a world where we do not need to produce for production's sake, but to produce when we need and what we need— it is a world where we do not spend over half of our lives *at work*. It is a world where people do not have to work three jobs and have no money, while others have six homes. This world allows that we do not need to own to have power and that we do not need to have power to belong.

The new world that we must picture is one that has a home for everybody. It is a world that recognizes that there is not a housing shortage but a housing crisis; that there are more empty rooms than we can fill, that there are more roofs than we know what to do with. Whiteness tells us that there is not enough. That there is never enough. That we can never have enough. This *illogic* leaves people without homes; leaves people at each other's throats.

The new world is one where we do not fear that our neighbor is going to stab us in the back or steal from our garden, and rather one where we grow extra for them. *We have more than enough. We do not have to hurt each other to gain power. We do not have to have power to be worthy.*

The new world is one where Black people do not fear running, walking, driving, playing, talking, going to school, going to work, going outside when it's dark, having kids, living in certain places, moving, breathing, thinking,,, no— the new world is one where Black people can run, walk, think, move, play, talk, go to work, go outside when it's dark, breathe,,,

The new world is one where people do not feel afraid to walk outside with a beard and a dress on. The new world does not force people into boxes, because in the new world, we can see all of people; in the new world we do not have to categorize people and dumb them down to simple beings that they are not. The new world, that we need, is one where we are curious about what we have not seen, not hostile towards it. The new world does not rely on a prescribed set of rules (**whiteness**) to inform identity formation.

The new world lets us make art— and maybe in the new world we will not have to make art as an escape, but rather a radical act of *being there*. I do not know many people who find solace in facing what is really here. Whiteness takes away the possibility for loving what is really here. We are too busy being-white.

The new world has committed people, has growing people, has hurting people, has suffering people, has working people, has People and PPL and pEople and pPL and peepl and peepuhl.

The new world does not leave anyone behind, because it *is* everyone.

The new world sings and the new world cries and the new world bursts and the new world does not indoctrinate. And the new world does not *keep us in our place*, because in the new world, our place just is.

The new world is not one where everyone agrees, but the new world is one where there are nuances and debates and curiosity and life and light and sparkle and movement and budding and and and and,

It will be the end of the world when we decouple ourselves from white supremacy. There is no way for it not to be. It will be scary and confusing and hard—but it does not mean that we do not continue to try try try,,,

As we move away from whiteness as supreme, whiteness as world, world as abyss/abysmal... we create space for people as they are, worlding as living, living as enjoying, universal as particular-----

The new world requires healing from the ills of whiteness. It requires profound transformation. It requires trust and it requires us all to be pulling in the same direction—

I am not trying to sell a dream. I am trying to imagine what might be possible if we could let go of whiteness as [failing] world.

Healing

Never can we, nor never will we, forget the ills of the world we call our world right now. There have been genocide and homicide and suicide and homelessness and hopelessness and forgetfulness. There have been fractures and there have been bruises and there have been cuts so deep we have felt like we might never heal.

Healing Through Trust

What does it mean that we have had to move so fast, to keep up with whiteness as [failing] world, that we have gone against what we believe? I know we do not believe in harm. I know we do not believe in alienation. I know we do not believe in this world. To heal is to begin to be able to trust ourselves again. We have been taught to betray

ourselves, our morals, our sense. We have betrayed ourselves so much that these have become ourselves and our morals and our senses.

Healing Through Profound Transformation

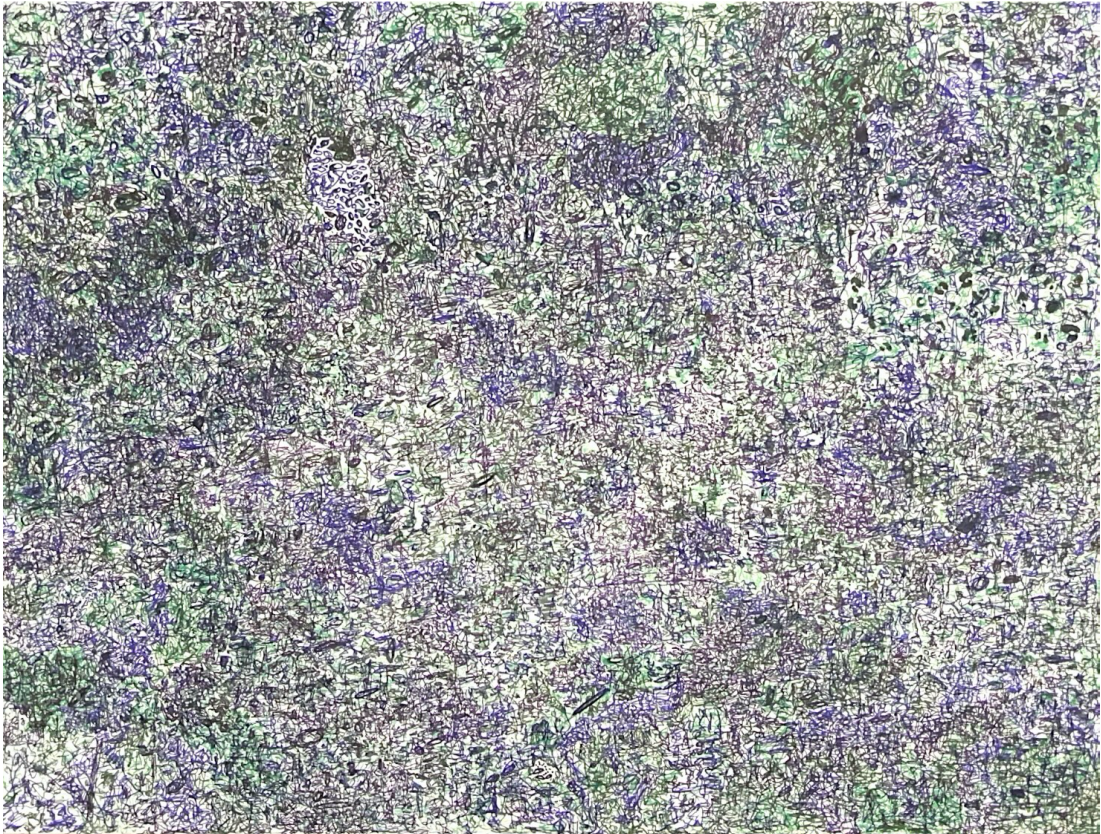
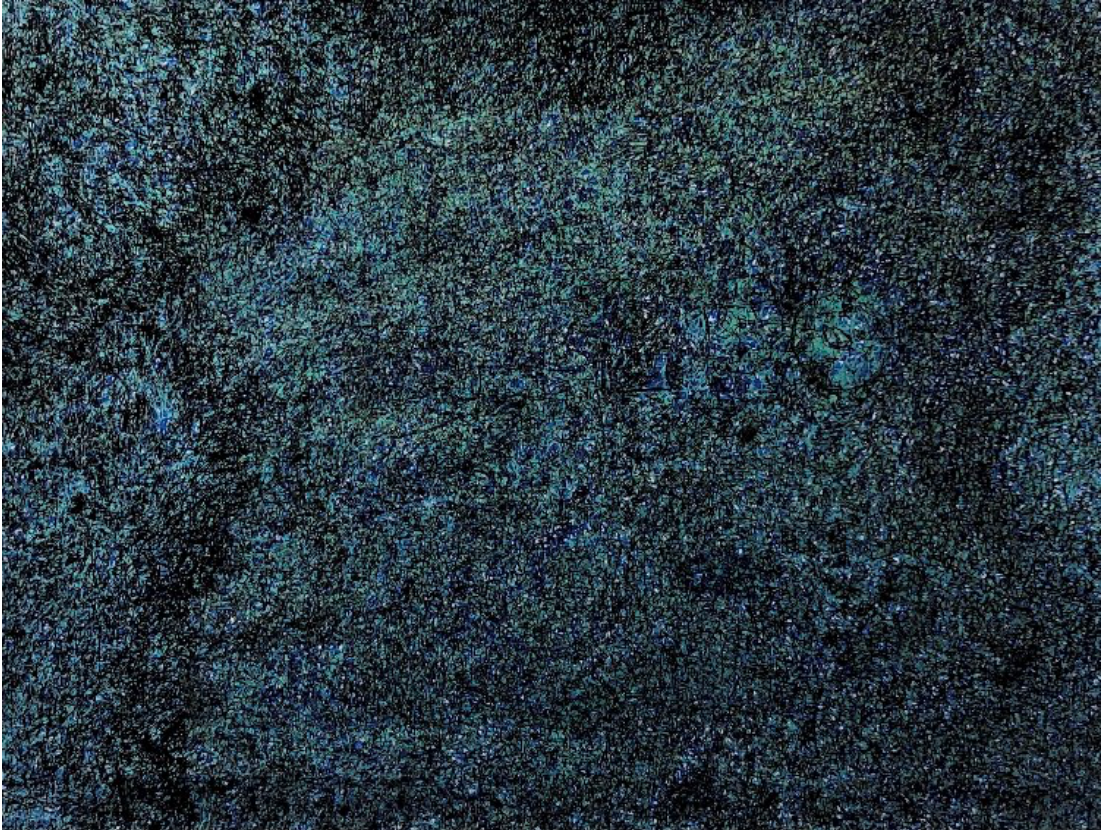
Maybe it takes transformation. Deep and profound transformation. How can we move **so far away** from the circumstances that allowed whiteness to flourish? Who can we become? Calm, at ease, with love, towards growth, **towards future, in present**, changing past, interested, interesting,

Healing Through Togetherness

I imagine that once we begin to heal ourselves, we will also need to heal together. We have hurt each other and hated each other.

Art: as comma at the 'end,'

There are no answers that I can give. What worlds can we create? What worlds will hold enough to set us free? In short, it seems that we “go” right here—that we live in the present towards a future that we desire.



'Making Worlds on Paper Helps Me Live Into It All' (Pen on Paper by Lily Epstein)

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