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NEWSLETTER ON PHILOSOPHY AND THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

FROM THE EDITORS, JOHN McCLENDON & GEORGE YANCY

ARTICLES

JESSICA PATELLA KONIG

“A Call to Look: An Essay on the Power of the Sartrean Gaze”

LEONARD HARRIS

“Aphorism and Musing: Gestures”

REVIEW ESSAYS AND RESPONSE

TAINÉ DUNCAN

“Keeping Hold of Ariadne’s Thread: A Critical Review
of George Yancy’s *Look, a White!*”

TIM LAKE

“*Look, a White! Philosophical Essays on Whiteness*, A Review”

CRISTA LEBENS

“Truth, Grief, Relief, and Hope”

CRIS MAYO

“Pedagogies of Spectacle”

DAVID ROEDIGER

“I Am Not George Yancy”



GRANT SILVA

“On Why I Keep Getting [Socially] Interrupted by White People”

GEORGE YANCY

“The Pleasures of Dialogue: Responses to My Interlocutors”

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES



Philosophy and the Black Experience

John McClendon & George Yancy, Co-Editors

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FROM THE EDITORS

ARTICLES

In this issue of the *Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience*, we would like to acknowledge the sad and untimely death of African American philosopher-activist William Jones on July 17, 2012, at the age of 78. Dr. Jones will be sadly missed for his bold and challenging philosophical scholarship, activism, institutional building, and friendship. We would like to invite contributors to submit critical reflections on his life and work for consideration in the *Newsletter*. We will continue this theme for the next two issues. For those not familiar with Dr. Jones' life and work, we suggest going to the following site: <http://danielharper.org/yauu/2012/08/william-r-jones-a-brief-appreciation/>.

In this issue of the *Newsletter*, we are excited to include two articles and six review essays of George Yancy's newest authored book, *Look, a White! Philosophical Essays on Whiteness* (Temple University Press, 2012), with a response from the author. In the first article, "A Call to Look: An Essay on the Power of the Sartrean Gaze," Jessica Patella Konig examines the notion of "the look" as it is understood in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. She first explicates the mechanism of the look in defining subject/object relations; second, the way in which the look functions positively in relationships among people of equal social standing; and third, how in structures of inequality and domination the look is manipulated to legitimize and reinscribe oppression. Konig specifically looks at the racial implications of this within the United States where Black people have been systematically denied the right to look back, thus perpetuating white insularity and Black objectification. Lastly, she suggests possibilities for a radical oppositional gaze that could disrupt and overturn this power structure. In the second article, "Aphorism and Musing: Gestures," Leonard Harris provides a series of musings and aphorisms, somewhat disconnected and over-the-top, that explore the killing of Trayvon Martin in terms of cultural universals, the ethics of gestures, and institutionalized misery. The individual injustice suffered by Trayvon Martin, his particularity, fails to picture the network of rules and institutions that makes individual miseries possible. He argues that the ethics of gesture works well to sustain misery in a culture that praises sadomasochist entertainment.

Following Harris' article are six insightful and challenging review essays by a range of scholars who agreed to explore the significance of George Yancy's book *Look, a White! Philosophical Essays on Whiteness*. The review essays both creatively extend Yancy's important work on whiteness and offer different ways of exploring the meaning of whiteness. Yancy provides a collective response to each of the review essays, providing further clarification of his work on whiteness and inviting larger dialogical responses to his work and the work of the reviewers.

A Call to Look: An Essay on the Power of the Sartrean Gaze

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Here are black men standing, looking at us, and I hope that you—like me—will feel that shock of being seen. . . . Today, these black men are looking at us, and our gaze comes back to our own eyes...¹

In *The Respectful Prostitute*,² Jean-Paul Sartre tells the story of Lizzie, a white prostitute living in the south. On a train she is assaulted and molested by four white men, who only stop what they are doing once they notice that they are being watched by two Black men. This realization is so upsetting to them that they are moved to beat the Black men, eventually pulling a gun on them and killing one. Suddenly, these white men who have a great deal of political and social capital in their town are entangled in both the rape of a white prostitute and the murder of a Black man. Lizzie is then pressured, nay blackmailed, to claim that it is the Black men who assaulted her, presumably in order to protect white cohesion. When she objects that they did nothing, she is told, "a black person has always 'done something.'"³ What this "something" is becomes clear throughout the play: "The black men on the train 'saw' the white men. At the moment of molesting Lizzie, the white men were subjected to the look of the black other."⁴ Yet, the belief that "a black person has always done something" is indicative of a racist history that depicts the Black body as guilty a priori.

It is 1955, Emmett Till, a 14-year old Black boy from Chicago, goes to visit relatives in Mississippi. While there he walks into a store and flirts with the 21-year old white woman who turns out to be the shop owner's wife. Once the shop owner hears about this he and his cousin find Till, beat him, gouge out one of his eyes, and then kill him. Interestingly, when questioned about their intentions, the shop owner and his cousin claim that they had not intended to kill Till, they had only planned to scare him.⁵ But Till does something unimaginable for a Black man in Mississippi in 1955, he "looks" right back at the white men and defends himself. With a leveling gaze he says, "You bastards, I'm not afraid of you. I'm as good as you are. I've 'had' white women. My grandmother was a white woman."⁶ Till, in other words, dares to look at the white men, after daring to look at the white woman. Or, as bell hooks succinctly puts it, Emmett Till was murdered by a white supremacist structure that "interpreted his look as violation, as 'rape' of white womanhood."⁷

What these stories have in common is that in both cases Black men are murdered for doing nothing more than daring to look. *Prima facie*, a look hardly seems like something powerful enough to incite murder. Yet, as is clear from the above stories, there is a power in the look that has serious social and political implications. In this paper I examine the notion of “the look” as it is understood in Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*. First, I will explicate the mechanism of the look in defining subject/object relations; second, at the way in which the look functions positively in relationships of equality; and third, how in structures of inequality and domination the look is manipulated to legitimize and reinscribe oppression.

In *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre describes human relationships as being marred by conflict and struggle. This struggle begins with the recognition that the universe is there for others in the same way that it appears to be there for me, or, that I am not the center of the universe. This shifting of center that such a realization necessitates does not happen in grand gestures, but can rather be found in everyday encounters with the Other. Or in Sartre’s words, “It is in the reality of everyday life that the Other appears to us, and his probability refers to everyday reality.”⁸ The probability of this Other which appears in everyday reality challenges me, in other words, to renegotiate the relationships between myself and my world, a painful process which strips me of my perceived mastery. Indeed, once the other steps onto the scene, “there is a total space which is grouped around the Other, and this space is made with my space; there is a regrouping in which I take part but which escapes me, a regrouping of all the objects which people my universe.”⁹ While such a regrouping does not change any of the actual physical distances between objects, it has a profound impact on the way in which I experience my own relation to them:

Everything is in place; everything still exists for me; but everything is traversed by an invisible flight and fixed in the direction of a new object. The appearance of the Other in the world corresponds therefore to a fixed sliding of the whole universe, to a decentralization of the world which undermines the centralization which I am simultaneously effecting.¹⁰

Given that the Other has the ability to decentralize my entire existence, it is important to understand what exactly the Other is.

Sartre describes the Other as:

the being toward whom I do not turn my attention. He is the one who looks at me and at whom I am not yet looking, the one who delivers me to myself as unrevealed but without revealing himself, the one who is present to me as directing at me but never as the object of my direction.¹¹

In everyday reality we encounter the Other; but more importantly, we encounter ourselves through the Other. Sartre claims, for example, “When I am alone, I cannot realize my ‘being-seated’: at most it can be said that I simultaneously both am it and am not it.”¹² That is to say, while alone at my desk I do not think of myself as seated at the desk unless, for example, someone walks into the room and sees that this is in fact the case. At this moment my possibilities are realized, making the Other necessary for my very existence. Sartre says, “In order for me to be what I am, it suffices merely that the Other looks at me.”¹³ Or, more simply, “I see myself because somebody sees me.”¹⁴ What should stand out at this point is that it is the look of the Other that creates both these possibilities and these limits for me, though the look of the Other would have different dynamics depending upon how gender and race inflect the encounter.

It is in the look of the Other that I become who I am, a being-for-others. In “Sartre on Racism,” Jonathan Judaken explains it thusly:

The gaze determines the basic structure of being-for-others. I see others and see them seeing me and know that they judge my choices. The Other’s gaze turns me into an object in his/her world, a character in his/her life drama, and thereby takes away my freedom to freely determine my own existence.¹⁵

That is to say, the encounter with the Other, in particular the realization that I am being looked at by the Other, forces me to recognize the Other’s subjectivity. The Other occupies a world that is essentially created through his/her own gaze. That world is a collection of objects, of which I am included.

Herein lies the crux of the problem for me: when the Other steps onto the scene I become an object to this subject. Sartre says, “The Other’s look touches me across the world and is not only a transformation of myself but a total metamorphosis of the world. I am looked-at in a world which is looked-at.”¹⁶ I, in other words, become an object for the Other in the same way that the desk at which I am sitting, the computer on which I am typing, and the coffee that I am drinking are objects for me. With the appearance of the Other, those objects become objects for him/her too, as do I. Or, as Martinot points out, “Finding oneself in the look of another, one apprehends the other as a subject by recognizing oneself as an object for that subject.”¹⁷ When someone looks at me, I am conscious of being an object for that Other; and because I am objectified in relation to this Other, it is only in and through the existence of the Other that this consciousness can be produced.

At this point it is important to point out that the gaze of the Other need not necessarily be attached to a particular Other. In “Fashioned in Nakedness, Sculptured, and Caused to be Born: Bodies in Light of the Sartrean Gaze,” Lisa Folkmarson Kall points out that “The other is thus given to me in presence or in absence through the gaze, but whereas the gaze reveals with certainty the existence of others to me, it is only probable that the gaze is bound to be a specific person in the world.”¹⁸ Indeed, Sartre claims, “What most often manifests a look is the convergence of two ocular globes in my direction. But the look will be given just as well on occasion when there is a rustling of branches, or the sounds of a footstep followed by silence. . . .”¹⁹ I can feel the gaze of the Other as soon as there is a possibility of the presence of the Other, even when no specific Other is actually there. What this observation points to is that it is not really the physical gaze of the Other that I apprehend, I do not have to see the Other look at me. Instead, what I actually apprehend is “that I am vulnerable, that I have a body which can be hurt, that I occupy a place and that I can not in any case escape from the space in which I am without defense—in short, that I am seen.”²⁰ In other words, that I am an object for the Other, that I am not master of my own world, and that my fate can be determined by the will of the Other.

Ironically, while this objectification by way of the Other is something that seems to rob me of my own possibilities and that alarmingly shifts my center, it is necessary for the realization of my own subjectivity. According to Kall, “The possibility of being objectified before the gaze of the other is a necessary condition of being a subject in possession or deprived of agency and freedom.”²¹ As a being who lives in the world with other people, my own objectification by the Other is “a fact of subjectivity,” that I cannot “escape or rid [myself] of.”²² Given the inevitability of the objectifying gaze of the other, I must learn how to respond to it in a way that does not crush my own possibilities. Judaken points out that Sartre himself only offers

two possibilities, “to make oneself the kind of object that you would like to be perceived as or to desire the pure instrumental appropriation of the Other.”²³ Stated simply, I can accept my own objectification or I can return the gaze on the Other and objectify him/her, thus reasserting my own subjectivity.

These two options cannot be realized at once. Sartre tells us “I cannot be an object for an object.”²⁴ Conversely, I cannot be a subject for a subject. Kall explains further,

Just as the body cannot according to Sartre simultaneously be knower and known, I cannot gaze upon an object while the gaze of the other is directed upon me, for to apprehend the gaze is not to apprehend it as an object in the world, it is to consciously experience being looked at.²⁵

A body, in other words, can be either knowing subject or known object, but not both at the same time. Sartre explains, “We cannot perceive the world and at the same time apprehend a look fastened upon it; it must be either one or the other.”²⁶ To perceive is to look at and to apprehend is “to be conscious of being looked at,”²⁷ and these are two opposite functions.

It should become clear at this point that the objectification of the Other becomes essential for the preservation of my own subjectivity. Judaken adds, “When I am looked at, I become objectified and my subjectivity is fixed by my being-for-others; this can be avoided by returning the gaze and objectifying the Other.”²⁸ Or in Sartre’s words, “The objectification of the Other . . . is a defense on the part of my being which, precisely by conferring on the Other as being-for-me, frees me from my being-for the Other.”²⁹ Through the gaze I am objectified in relation to the Other’s subjectivity and vice versa. Yet Sartre proclaims that it is in this mutual exchange of gazes that I can recognize my own possibilities, reclaim some degree of freedom, and recognize the Other. Kall explains:

When I recapture my freedom and return the gaze upon the other, I know that the other is the one with whom I am related through the gaze. When I objectify the other I have already experienced the other as free subjectivity through the gaze, as it is ultimately the same gaze which hovers between us and through which we alternate between being perceiver and perceived.³⁰

Indeed, between individuals of equal social standing, the look can be returned, reestablishing one’s own subjectivity by seeing the Other as an object.

While objectification can be viewed as oppressive, among those of equal social standing the ability to both give and receive the gaze allows for a mutual interchange where neither party is dominant. In Julien Murphy’s article “The Look in Sartre and Rich” she points out, “insofar as each person is capable of receiving and returning the gaze, each person can function as oppressor and oppressed.”³¹ Yet the problem comes in when one party is unable to act as oppressor,³² indeed, when one is not able to return the gaze, and is instead trapped in a state of oppression from which he/she cannot flee. The look, in this sense, can be quite destructive in nature; annihilating one’s freedom to the point that one “may not be able to stare back.”³³ Kall echoes this sentiment, claiming that those who have been marked by oppressive structures remain so because of their inability to look back:

Being marked by difference, whether sexual, ethnic, racial, or other, is in many ways being trapped by the objectifying gaze of the other in such a way that the ability to return the gaze and claim a subject position is deeply circumscribed.³⁴

Bell hooks reminds us “there is power in looking.”³⁵ And given that there is power in looking, denying a person or a group the ability to look back is an extreme assertion of dominance and oppression.

Martinot comments that one of the key insights of Sartre’s philosophy is that “an essential aspect of domination or oppression of another consists in reducing him/her to the subhuman status through a denial of subjectivity itself.”³⁶ In short, denying someone the right to look back is an essential feature of oppressive domination: “The subordinate is denied the possibility of making the dominant an object for him/herself.”³⁷ Recall, the way in which one reasserts one’s own subjectivity is to return the gaze to the Other, thus engaging in a mutual exchange of subject and object relations. In relationships among those of equal social standing, this is possible. In systems of oppression, the look is denied thus limiting one’s subjectivity. Martinot explains:

The limited subjectivity the other is permitted will only extend to the performance of tasks assigned, as well as expressions of gratitude and respect for the oppressor, so that the latter need not confront his refusal of humanity to the oppressed. The corollary is that no respect or kindness can be shown toward the oppressed because it would signify that the oppressed has been fully human all along.³⁸

Interestingly, one of the defining features of this denial of the Other’s gaze is the refusal to acknowledge the Other’s humanity. That is to say, it is a refusal to recognize that the Other has an interior life that is similar to one’s own. In *Black Bodies, White Gazes*, George Yancy points to the particular problems that this poses for the Black body, which has been systemically denied this right:

The Black body, through the hegemony of the white gaze, undergoes a phenomenological return that leaves it distorted and fixed as a pre-existing essence. The Black body becomes a “prisoner” of an imago—an elaborate distorted image of the Black. . . .³⁹

One of the features of the white gaze, in other words, is that in denying the Black body the right to return the gaze and thus assert its own subjectivity, it is instead turned into an object for the purpose of the white Other.

Hooks points out that in systemic forms of oppression, American slavery being the prime example, the denial of the gaze is quite formalized. She says,

An effective strategy of white supremacist terror and dehumanization during slavery centered around white control of the black gaze. Black slaves, and later manumitted servants, could be brutally punished for looking, for appearing to observe the whites they were servicing, as only a subject can observe, or see.⁴⁰

The politics of racialized power relations, and in particular of slavery and its aftermath, were such that the Blacks were denied their right to gaze. Quoting Sartre at length, Judaken explains:

Sartre described how under Jim Crow blacks were treated as “untouchables” who when you “cross them in the streets . . . you did not return their stares. Or if by chance their eyes meet yours, it seems to you that they do not see you and it is better for them and you that you pretend not to have noticed them.” Blacks function like “machines”: they serve whites; they shine their shoes and operate their elevators. To Sartre, this was the ultimate example of the sadistic reification of the Other.⁴¹

Reduced to “machinery” and to physical labor, “black people learned to appear before whites as though they were zombies, cultivating the habit of casting the gaze downward.”⁴² Why? Hooks explains, “To look directly was an assertion of subjectivity, equality. Safety resided in the pretense of invisibility.”⁴³ These relations were reinforced and reified as whites continued to deny subjectivity to Blacks through the denial of the Black gaze.

Such a denial has an interesting effect on white people in that it perpetuates white insularity. Denying Black subjectivity and perpetually relegating them to objecthood, whites are unable to see themselves through the eyes of the Black Other. Recall, according to Sartre, I become aware of myself only when I am seen by the Other. This creates an insular environment for whites whereupon they are only answerable to each other. Martinot comments, “For whites, since black people are to be prohibited the look, they can only become conscious of their social framework through other whites. All social dynamics occur only through interaction with other whites.”⁴⁴

Robert Bernasconi works out the way in which, given the Sartrean framework, the denial of the Black gaze works to render class/race invisible to the white people:

Sartre has tended to highlight the ontological bond experienced by the oppressed under the gaze of the oppressor and, by contrast, reduced to the level of psychology the bond between the oppressors because they are not united by the gaze. This provides an excellent basis for explaining both the solidarity uniting the oppressed under a description and the somewhat looser ties that one sometimes finds among the oppressors, such as is reflected in the tendency of the bourgeois or whites to deny the saliency of class or race in a world dominated by it. They literally do not see what is sustaining them because their own identity is invisible to them, even while they see a corresponding identity in others.⁴⁵

In other words, because the oppressed are looked at they have their identity prescribed to them from outside of themselves. In contrast, the oppressors have denied the oppressed the right to look back, allowing them to believe themselves somehow invisible. They are not forced to look at themselves through the eyes of the Other because the eyes of the Other never meet their own. Hooks would agree, “In white supremacist society, white people can ‘safely’ imagine that they are invisible to black people since the power they have historically asserted . . . accord them the right to control the black gaze.”⁴⁶ Stated more strongly, “As fantastic as it may seem, racist white people find it easy to imagine that black people cannot see them if within their desire they do not want to be seen by the dark Other.”⁴⁷ A mark of white privilege then consists in “seeing [the Other] without being seen.”⁴⁸

At this point it is clear that I gain knowledge of myself through my relationship with the Other, or I encounter myself when I first apprehend the gaze of the Other. It is at this defining moment that I become aware of myself as an object for the Other. In order to recover my own subjectivity, in short, in order to take my world back and reassert it as something for me (as the Other has just done), I need only to return the gaze. In relationships among people with equal social standing this is something that can be done quite readily, in a mutual exchange of subjectivity and objectivity between two parties. However, in systems of oppression the ability to look back and assert subjectivity on the part of the oppressed becomes highly circumscribed. In such cases, “The impact of the look can be so devastating that it reduces us, at a glance, to powerlessness, to the status of a thing.”⁴⁹ Moreover, the look becomes quite

destructive and can “rob us of our possibilities, alienate us from ourselves and our options for choice, and make us feel in the service of the other.”⁵⁰

Kall rightly views Sartre’s account of the gaze as a useful tool for understanding the “dynamics of oppression and discrimination on the basis of bodily difference.”⁵¹ Murphy agrees and explains in greater detail:

The work of Sartre . . . is instrumental in demonstrating the lived situation of the look and the ways in which this oppressive kind of seeing effect a fundamental difference in our existence. The movement of oppression begins with the look of the oppressor, a look whose distance, desire, and destruction frame the context for our lives.⁵²

While both of these thinkers are feminists who are primarily interested in the male gaze and its impact on female⁵³ subjectivity, their points very easily lend themselves to an analysis of racial oppression as well. Historically, in the United States, whites have been able to assert subjective personhood without having to recognize their correlative objecthood because they have both figuratively and literally denied Blacks the right to look back. They do it literally when they severely beat and sometimes kill Black men and women for daring to look (like in the examples of Emmett Till and the Black man on Sartre’s train); and they do it figuratively when they collectively forget that they denied this subjectivity to Blacks and simply pretend that they are not seen by “the dark Other.”⁵⁴

Given that the denial of the Black gaze perpetuates this destructive distancing and oppression, it would seem that the only way to get out of it would be to change the way in which we see, to make movements toward a more equitable exchange of looks, one in which there is a fluid movement between subject and objecthood that allows both parties to see themselves through the eyes of the Other. Yet, given centuries of systemic racism, it is not enough to just claim that whites should allow themselves to be seen by the Black Other. Sartre himself claims, “In order for the oppressor to get a clear view of an unjustifiable situation, it is not enough to look at it honestly, he must also change the structure of his eyes.”⁵⁵ Murphy explains that changing the structure of one’s eyes “implies that one must choose those actions which radically disrupt the present system of judging and call into questions how one is to be in the future.”⁵⁶ Simply allowing myself to be looked at by the Other is not enough if I do not also allow that look to arrest me, to disrupt radically the way in which I see myself, and ultimately to judge me to the point of shame, a shame that makes me recognize that “I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging.”⁵⁷

Hooks calls for a radical oppositional gaze on the part of Black people that has this very power; indeed, one that has the power to disrupt this systemic oppression:

All attempts to repress our/black peoples’ right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze. By courageously looking, we defiantly declared; “Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality.”⁵⁸

She goes on to claim, “subordinates in relations of power learn experientially that there is a critical gaze, one that ‘looks’ to document, one that is oppositional.”⁵⁹ And moreover, “In resistance struggle, the power of the dominated to assert agency by claiming and cultivating ‘awareness’ politicizes ‘looking’ relations—one learns to look a certain way in order to resist.”⁶⁰

This radical oppositional gaze that has the power to disrupt is something that allows Black people to redefine themselves

apart from white objectification. Indeed, Yancy asserts that this has been an important project: “Blacks have struggled mightily to disrupt, redefine, and transcend white fictions,”⁶¹ fictions that inscribed Black bodies within a facticity that stripped them of subjectivity. It is through resistance, in other words, that “the Black body denies its being pure facticity.”⁶² It is in refusing to be narrowly defined by the gaze of the white Other, in “not settling for an anti-Black project superimposed by the white other,”⁶³ that Black people can re-narrate their own existence and thus insist on subjectivity. In other words, “Through the act of resistance, from the perspective of the white gaze, I become a living contradiction, an anomaly. I become more than whites can measure within the horizon of their limited understandings of the Black body.”⁶⁴ Moreover, this oppositional gaze does more than just shake the foundations of deep-seated and limited understandings of the Black body, it simultaneously calls into question white understanding of itself. Yancy explains:

“I am not the one!” throws whites into a state of cognitive dissonance. After all, the Black imago has served them well. They know that they are being seen and exposed. But I now return whites to themselves, which is a place of reaction. It is a place of bad faith, a place where I am needed to be what they say I am. By rejecting their need, I force whites into a state of anxiety. For they are forced to see the emptiness of a self dialectically predicated on a lie.⁶⁵

This is not simply a refusal to accept objectification, it is rather an “instantiation of affirmation.”⁶⁶ Such resistance is an affirmation of the humanity which Black people have been denied under the tyrannical gaze of the white Other.

A call to look (even an oppositional one) hardly sounds like a call to arms, revolution style. Yet recall what happened to Emmett Till when he dared to look directly at his adversaries: one of his eyes was gouged out. And recall what happens to the man on the train in Sartre’s *The Respectful Prostitute*; he is murdered not for what he does, but rather for what he sees. Yet, under the gaze of whites, there is a sense in which his act of looking is interpreted as an act of doing. Certainly Black resistance has “had its dangerous and deadly consequences”⁶⁷; indeed, the murderers of each story recognize the power inherent in the look. They know that they are being seen, that they are being judged, and that they are ultimately answerable to anyone that dares to look at them. Hence, within this context, it is important that the oppressed continue the radical move of cultivating an oppositional gaze that turns the power dynamic on its head, one that shows the oppressors that they are being seen, one that forces them to see themselves through such a lens, necessitating a reinterpretation of self that compels them to change.

Endnotes

1. Jean-Paul Sartre and John MacCombie, “Black Orpheus,” *The Massachusetts Review* 6, no. 1 (Autumn 1964-Winter 1965): 13.
2. It is believed that Sartre’s text was based on the famous Scottsboro Boy’s case where nine African American males were *accused* of raping two white women in Alabama in 1931. The myth of the Black male rapist is embedded in white America’s consciousness.
3. Steve Martinot, “Skin for Sale: Race and The Respectful Prostitute,” in *Race after Sartre: Antiracism, Africana Existentialism, Postcolonialism*, edited by Jonathan Judaken (New York: Washington Square Press, 2008), 58.
4. *Ibid.*, 60.
5. It is important to note that Bryant and Milam (the shop owner and his cousin) were acquitted for the murder of Emmett Till. They confessed to his murder in an interview with William

- Bradford Huie of *Look Magazine* only after the trial when they knew they were protected by Double Jeopardy laws.
6. William Bradford Huie, “The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi,” *Look*, www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/sfeature/sf_look_confession.html (accessed November 19, 2011).
7. bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 118.
8. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 341.
9. *Ibid.*, 343.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, 360.
12. *Ibid.*, 351.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, 349.
15. Jonathan Judaken, “Sartre on Racism: From Existential Phenomenology to Globalization and ‘the New Racism,’” in *Race after Sartre: Antiracism, Africana Existentialism, Postcolonialism*, edited by Jonathan Judaken (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), 25.
16. Sartre 1956, 360.
17. Martinot 2008, 60.
18. Lisa Folkmarson Kall, “Fashioned in Nakedness, Sculptured, and Caused to be Born: Bodies in Light of the Sartrean Gaze,” in *Continental Philosophy Review* 43 (2010): 67.
19. Sartre 1956, 346.
20. *Ibid.*, 347.
21. Kall 2010, 64.
22. *Ibid.*, 63.
23. Judaken 2008, 26.
24. Sartre 1956, 345.
25. Kall 2010, 75.
26. Sartre 1956, 347.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Judakin 2008, 25-26.
29. Sartre 1956, 359.
30. Kall 2010, 75.
31. Julien S. Murphy, “The Look in Sartre and Rich,” *Hypatia* 2 (Summer 1987): 115.
32. This is not to say that being an oppressor is a desirable position.
33. Murphy 1987, 115.
34. Kall 2010, 62.
35. hooks 1992, 115.
36. Martinot 2008, 61.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*
39. George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 109.
40. hooks 1992, 168.
41. Judaken 2008, 29.
42. hooks 1992, 168.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Martinot 2008, 62.
45. Robert Bernasconi, “Sartre and Levinas: Philosophers against Racism and Antisemitism,” in *Race after Sartre: Antiracism, Africana Existentialism, Postcolonialism*, edited by Jonathan Judaken (New York: State University of New York Press 2008), 121.
46. hooks 1992, 168.
47. hooks 1992, 168.
48. Martinot 2008, 61.
49. Murphy 1987, 115.

50. *Ibid.*, 114-115.
51. Kall 2010, 62.
52. Murphy 1987, 114.
53. It is important to note here that there has been a tendency in first- and second-wave feminism that presupposes “female subjectivity” to be white, middle-class female subjectivity.
54. hooks 1992, 168.
55. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, Vol. 1*, trans. Richard C. McLeary and edited by Michel Conat and Michel Rybalka (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 229.
56. Murphy 1987, 114.
57. Sartre 1956, 350.
58. hooks 1992, 116.
59. *Ibid.*
60. *Ibid.*
61. Yancy 2008, 110.
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Aphorism and Musing: Gestures

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There are human and cultural universals. That is, there are cognitive and ethical values all normal persons share independent of their culture. To be coy. To see colors (Brown, Wiredu, et al.). And, I contend, to see external appearances and gestures as a reflection of the internal being of the agent bearing the external (Schmitt). Contrary to Schmitt, seeing this link is not a function of being Western. Cicero’s depiction in *De officiis* regarding the need to hold one’s head erect thereby reflecting the mean of moderation bespeaks the link as well as the posture of the Buddha, which bespeaks serenity by his stillness and closed fingered energy flow; the link is apparent in the bronze ceremonial regalia of the Edo, which conveys constrained power and piercing wide-eyed wisdom. Movements, and the intersection of stillness, tell us the state of the soul. Gestures convey when to trust strangers, show deference, and share privileged information based on gross generalizations. These are necessary preconditions for the possibility of social life. Linking external appearances to internal states is a function of the kind of beings we are.

Philosophers often provide a depiction of appropriate behavior and gestures as well as gestures not consonant with their conception of appropriate behavior. The latter are often treated as indicative of “lesser” beings, or souls of debased character. Inappropriate gestures may be pictured as behavior causing or consonant with debauchery or social misery. Treating particular gestures as emblematic of pleasure-seeking behavior of a lowly quality, reasoning that fails to meet the criteria of coherency, or gestures as emblematic of a false consciousness such that the agent is ignorant of his own self interest, requires a standpoint where the clean, pure, hygienic, and virtuous seek quality pleasures, use right reason, and have true consciousness (Bentham, Kant, and Marx). Normal people for such thinkers would only want quality pleasures, seek true knowledge, and pursue their true self interest; their gestures would be correlative with their *intus* (soul, intuitions, species being, consciousness, etc.). Philosophers are hardly the only persons using the link between outward/inward to define normality.

In 2011, a series of newspaper articles in the Netherlands were rumored to describe communal eating as fundamentally unsanitary. Whether in North Africa or Malaysia, whether among the Amharic or Polynesian, persons share meals by eating with their hands. Communal eating always conveys acceptance. Eating with knives and forks from plates reserved for each individual conveys separate individuation of space. Postures associated with each form of eating give implicit warrant to the virtues associated with that form; hunching over and reaching for communal eating and narrowed motions for individuated eating. A person presumed embodying magnanimous goods such as trustworthiness and reliability is, *mutatus mutandis*, sanitary.

The soul of the eater is a soul of higher or lower merit, and the virtue of each is more or less magnanimous depending on which form of eating is given warrant. Fortuitously, the newspaper articles gave the impression—at the very least by simply praising one form of eating as more hygienic than another—of again expressing a view of Europeans as superior beings and the bearers of superior civilization. I was told about these articles when I was lecturing at the Center for Language & Culture in Morocco on December 10, 2011, as the guest of Emmanuel Hamza Weinman. Women students raised questions

about who counts as “cosmopolitan” given such articles. What gestures, in effect, are to count as the embodiment of social virtues?

Aphorism I

Life is necessarily a drudgery. Lonely eaters struggling to be individual ascetic puritans while practicing communal hedonism, and communal eaters insisting on their individualism but struggling to appear as communal ascetic puritans.

Musing I

Gestures can be a warrant for killing. The base, the bearer of a demented soul and defective character virtues, the wayward and irredeemable are revealed by their gestures. Nothing is lost by the death of “that” which is already dead; nothing much should be mourned by the loss of the irredeemable. Let us see how this works.

A Black male wearing a hoodie is often seen as being a criminal; a person with a character trait that makes social life impossible because he is untrustworthy. His appearance is both revealing (as what we see) and readily available to help us hide. That is, the obvious is also a source that helps hide reality.

When an individual is treated as the exemplar of injustice for that individual, the conditions associated with one’s status as an object, a target, are left silent. The terms used to describe injustices suffered by an individual differ from the terms used to describe injustices suffered by groups. Additionally, the facts, circumstances, images, motivations, and intentions associated with individual injustices differ from the facts, circumstances, images, motivations, and intentions associated with conditions that make individual injustices possible. The misery suffered by African American males is not seen, or spoken, when the injustice suffered by one is pictured as a violation of his rights by a misguided racist.

The reality behind individual injustice is a world of institutional variables. The brutality suffered by boys and men in prison, the high rate by which Black men are seen as criminal and considered guilty, receiving legal punishments worse than whites, for example, are a matter of institutional rules and legitimized behaviors. The high rate of Black males raped in orphanages is not a feature relevant to the description of an individual suffering other forms of misery. The collective suffering of Black males is in some ways arguably well known. Television shows such as *Prison*, *Jail*, or *Lock-Up* feature the suffering and confinement of prisoners as entertainment. Nearly all of the prisoners are Black males. The racial segregation, gangs, and drug use in prisons are shown and consumed by a placid audience. There is no social upheaval; no social movement in response to seeing misery. Creating misery is well managed by highly respected institutions (police, judges, lawyers, jailers).

Misery occurs in sequestered institutions like prisons and orphanages. The sources of their populations are places one can visit. Tourists in New York, Chicago, or Detroit, for example, ride open top buses that go through depressed neighborhoods; the “Harlem” sites of special culture where the guttural, emotive, jazzy swingers (Black) live. One can gaze upon them in comfort. On Sundays in New York, a bus of tourists may stop at Abyssinia Baptist Church, pay five dollars, and sit in the balcony to watch Black men delivery emotionally exciting sermons and Black women get the “holy ghost,” shout, and become saved. It is a two-hour program that comes with singing. The buses, having driven past locations where Black people board buses to visit their relatives in prison, move on so tourists may gaze at people in the parks and dine at the waterfront. There is no false consciousness defined as ignorance of a condition or regularly attributing false causes to what is seen and known. Tourists

know discrimination and exploitation exists. The general population is arguably no less aware; no less invested in living within images and meanings of popular gestures.

Trayvon Martin was killed in Sanford, Florida. Trayvon was killed by George Zimmerman, a community watch member. He was held five hours for questioning and released. Trayvon, wearing a hoodie, appeared to Zimmerman as a potential criminal and allegedly conveyed threatening gestures toward Zimmerman. Zimmerman was trusted by the police. He had all the right credentials—non-Black and a civic volunteer—to help police the defective. Trayvon and Zimmerman were alone. Zimmerman’s description of the killing was accepted.

The killer of Trayvon Martin can be understood as gaining two-fold. He acquired a sense of self worth and empowerment, having taken the life of a defective, lesser rational. No crime was committed and, therefore, no form of remorse is occasioned. Analogously, when slave masters killed slaves they did not characteristically express remorse for the slave; only remorse for his or her lost investment or lost endeared chattel servant. Analogously, the hooded man was, if not already dead as a soul beyond redemption, at least a soul unworthy of compassion by rational superior beings. The killer gained a sense of superiority and moral worthy because he helped cleanse the neighborhood. The killer also gained by being a member of a class of persons that materially benefit. One central way they benefit is that they live healthier and longer, given lopsided institutional benefits and harms. They benefit unintentionally. It is the world of racism, class exploitation, status differential subjection, institutionalized, that makes lopsided benefits and miseries possible. A multitude of rules, information networks, sources of information, and cumulative small privileges amount to lopsided benefits and miseries.

It is the world of institutionalized misery, misery made a normal part of daily life, that makes killing the innocent in such a world acceptable.

Sanford is a city with African American police officers, community watch members, elected officials, and Black-owned businesses. There is no absolute divide between the Black and white worlds of Sanford, Florida. There are interlaced networks. Yet, divides exist of risk and probabilities between the races and ethnic groups. There are residential clusters, segregated worshipping communities, and networks of privileges. Black men are at a high risk of being seen as criminal, their gestures bespeaking an unworthy soul. They face a high probability of not being hired and if hired, first fired, or not promoted given the same qualifications and work effort as white counterparts. Small slights, risks, and denials will not be seen or vindicated. They are hidden. Unspoken.

Aphorism and Musing II

There is an absolute disjunction between the individual as exemplar, the apparent, the visible, and the institutions behind that which are hidden, but known and accepted. The disjunction is analogous to the difference between abstractions and their particulars.

The greater an abstraction the less it explains. That is, the broader an abstraction the less it tells us about the causes and first-order motivations of the particulars that the abstraction depicts. The reason is that abstractions always entail at least one property that limits their ability to explain—the property of abstract—that which makes it independent of any particular of which it entails. The relationship between particular members of an abstraction and the abstraction itself is non-reciprocal. It is true, for example, that as a species human males and females are attracted to one another and will likely mate with one another. It is false that same-sex attraction violates the

abstraction that *homo sapiens* are, in their historical biological development, paired opposite sex reproductive animals. It is false that the existence of same-sex couples contradict the abstraction that *homo sapiens* are, in their historical biological development, paired opposite sex reproductive animals in the sense that same-sex couples violate a compelling human motivation. Opposite-sex coupling is not ubiquitous to all individuals; all individuals do not share the same motivations. The abstraction that *homo sapiens* are, in their historical biological development, paired opposite-sex reproductive animals, is nonetheless true. An abstraction is never reducible to or derivable from simple summations, aggregations, or generalizations of particulars.

The individual injustice suffered by Trayvon, his particularity, fails to picture the institutional miseries that have made his killing possible, the abstract institutional networks and rules.

The sheer fact of linking external appearances to internal states is a function of the kind of beings we are but does not tell us the ways the linking works in a given cultural space. There is no necessary reason why gestures warrant killing.

The killing of Trayvon Martin has been treated as if nothing has happened; nothing is taken to reflect or be exemplar of the misery suffered by African American males; nothing taken to show how anti-Black racism is institutionalized because, in truth, nothing of note has happened in popular imaginations. That is how the ethics of gesture works in a culture based on praising parasites, sadomasochist entertainment, racial hierarchies, institutionalized misery, and making killing, i.e., not murder, warranted according to race-based stereotyped gestures.

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REVIEW ESSAYS AND RESPONSE

Keeping Hold of Ariadne's Thread: A Critical Review of George Yancy's Look, a White!

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As I was reading George Yancy's powerful new work *Look, a White!: Philosophical Essays on Whiteness* I was reminded of Ariadne's thread. Ariadne led a faithless Theseus out of the labyrinth by the thinnest of threads—a guideline that must be attended to and followed closely or lost entirely. I felt like I was following such a thread while reading Yancy's book, not because his argument was thin or tenuous. On the contrary, in fact, his argument was so sophisticated and challenging that working through the claims and insights required attentiveness, disquieting introspection, and careful tracing. As Theseus betrayed Ariadne, I am also capable of repaying Yancy's careful work with thoughtlessness. Instead, I hope that this review offers a productive challenge to Yancy.

Because of my own interests, this book read to me like an inspired work of critical theory at its most liberationist. It questioned the prereflective consciousness, differentiated

between the conceptual and the interpersonal, and enacted a sophisticated negative dialectics of racism. As in all his books, Yancy engages in word-play and examines etymological roots of his conceptual terms. Here, however, this etymology is made even more accessible and contextualized through the use of parenthetical asides and lived examples from both media and the classroom. However, I think the strongest aspects of the book were the pedagogical lessons. Yancy challenges us in the discipline to become fearless teachers. This is the theme that holds the six essays constituting the chapters of *Look, a White!* together. Because this is ostensibly a book of essays, rather than a singular argument, in what follows I review the book chapter by chapter. It is clear, however, that Ariadne's thread traces from the introduction through all six chapters.

In his introduction, "Flipping the Script," Yancy explains that this book serves a two-fold purpose. First, it serves to reassert Black subjectivity through an activity of resisting objectification, by "flipping the script" and fortifying the Black gaze as the seer, the knower, the finger who can knowingly point at whiteness and challenge it. Second, this book serves as a "gift" to white readers; by this Yancy seems to mean the gift of existential freedom. Although Yancy references Sartre throughout, I take this conception of existential freedom to be more akin to Beauvoir's analysis in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. There Beauvoir explains that freedom is linked inextricably to responsibility, both a personal responsibility and a social responsibility that comes of living in a world shared with others. By marking and delineating whiteness, Yancy seeks to make the invisible norm of whiteness visible in order to "mark whites as *raced* beings, as inextricably bound to the historical legacy of the 'workings of race'" (9). These goals are challenging, discomfiting, sometimes even groundbreaking. And for this, I am a thankful reader of Yancy's work. However, in the introduction I find two possible issues with Yancy's project that emerge. First, if this is really an activity of "flipping" the gaze, wouldn't similar issues of fixity, essentialism, and what he later calls *missilic* consciousness attend the reversal? Yancy recognizes this issue from the start of *Look, a White!* and he responds by explaining that essentializing whiteness is descriptive of the phenomenological experience of whiteness—he reiterates "Look, a white!" (14). He explains that not describing a universal whiteness allows for self-perceived *exceptional* whites to escape responsibility. I understand this problem. It is similar to an issue faced by feminist theorists who must explain patriarchy in order to undo it. By defining patriarchy and differentiating it from feminism, feminists have seen that sometimes the difference that they are attempting to account for is occluded. Sometimes women themselves feel alienated from the project because of the perceived essentialism. And this brings up the second potential problem with the onset of Yancy's project: the risk of alienating the insights of the individual Black subjects on which this exposure of whiteness stands. Yancy recognizes that "it is true that not all people of color have the same understanding of the operations of whiteness, at all levels of its complex expression" (8). He contends, however, that "this does not negate the fact that people of color undergo *raced* experiences vis-à-vis whiteness that lead to specific insights that render whiteness visible" (8). Again, I am sympathetic to this position from the analogous issues in feminist theory. But, I do not feel that Yancy addresses the complexity of this issue enough to demonstrate his recognition and understanding of the messiness of this issue. In fact, I was somewhat troubled by his later reference to Christine E. Sleeter's account of students of color dropping her course due to frustration (60). Yancy uses this example to demonstrate the frustration of the power of the unexamined white collective in the classroom. However,

since Sleeter's class was explicitly about cultural diversity, this would appear to be the perfect place for students of color to address these frustrations. What kept these students out? How can I ensure that my own students do not feel similarly threatened in my own "Gender, Race, and Class" course? Potential alienation needs further examination, especially in relation to the explicit project of reforming the academy that Yancy has laid out for himself in this book.

In the first chapter, "Looking at Whiteness: Finding Myself Much like a Mugger at a Boardwalk's End," Yancy argues that becoming white is akin to learning the English language as a child (25). He explains that both require identification with a way of being that is learned through subtle and often unrecognized correction. The reinforcement of appropriate grammar and speech does not happen formally, but informally in everyday practice. So, too, is the appropriate way of being white in our supremacist world reinscribed, reinforced, reiterated. Yancy gives powerful examples of individual children who experienced and participated in racism, proving his claim that whiteness as an orientation emerges *ab initio* (22). This sort of lived reinforcement of racism reminded me of Judith Lichtenberg's careful distinctions between racism-in-the-head and racism-in-the-world. Like Yancy, Lichtenberg sees that white liberalism has proudly disavowed overt racist speech and action from normatively sanctioned social practice. However, the real danger is that the comfortability and innocence that we feel as "good whites" who no longer sanction lynching and Jim Crow causes us to turn a blind eye to the continued construction of whiteness as a hegemonic norm against which all persons of color are forced to face their own Otherness. The racism that persists, what Lichtenberg calls racism-in-the-world and what Yancy simply calls the racism of whiteness, is insidious, existentially inauthentic, and epistemologically corrupt. We do not need public displays of white hooded men burning crosses when newscasters can simply say that an adolescent boy shouldn't have worn a hoodie if he didn't want to be marked (and killed) as a thug.

As Naomi Zack recognizes in her forward to *Look, a White!* the issue becomes how to inspire whites who have long been comfortable with the benefits of their own invisible whiteness to enter into genuine dialogue about race and racism. Yancy gives several specific recommendations, many of which I found to be insightful advice for the classroom. He explains that whites need a call to dialogue about the mutual effect of whiteness on the experience of both whites and people of color (29). Whites need to know that whiteness also limits their own world experiences, diminishing their *Mitsein* and authenticity (32). Whites need to be confronted with the voices of those who have experienced the effects of contemporary whiteness—Yancy uses his own voice and phenomenological experience as a model (35), but they also need to be reminded of the historical construction of whiteness (37).

In discussing the historical construction of whiteness, Yancy describes the experience of Black women under slavery as surrogate rape victims. He explains that many white women allowed their husbands to sexually abuse Black slaves in order to deflect unwanted sexual advances. This was a powerful and disturbing part of my own history that I had never confronted. It is easy as a white woman to say that I was never part of the legacy of slaveholding since women were not allowed to be property owners either. I have more in common with the slave than the white man, right? Look, a white!—Me! Rather than seeing sisterhood with their Black maids, my ancestral mothers called them "girls" and by their first names. (Even pop culture got that lesson in *The Help*.) However, the explicitly violent and sexual dimension of essentially making use of Black women's

bodies as a rape shield was jarring as I read. I felt the finger poking at my comfortable whiteness.

The example of the historical use of Black women's bodies brings to light an important issue I found with the work overall. Yancy effectively and bravely acknowledges his own sexism, modeling the fearlessness whites must enact in claiming their own participation in racism. Additionally, Yancy recognizes the uniqueness of Black female embodied experience (as evidenced in the example I cited above), but he fails to acknowledge the intersectional complexity of how white bodies' responses to Black bodies are also always gendered. Drawing from the same Judith Butler source that Yancy cites in the final chapters of *Look, a White!* I would contend that some bodies recognize and reflect on their own vulnerabilities more readily, while other bodies try to protect themselves by disavowing vulnerability entirely. The paradigm of white masculinity is, as Yancy references in his introduction, Clint Eastwood, a man perceived as autonomous, invulnerable, and who has earned his superiority and dominion. The paradigm of white femininity, on the other hand, is demure, pretty, in need of protection. Because of these differences in gendered embodiment, differences in gendered performance, even gendered performances of whiteness, are a phenomenological reality. For the most part, Yancy has chosen to ignore the differences in gendered performance for the philosophical reasons laid out in the introduction. However, in chapters three and four, these gender differences seem integral to understanding the richness of his examples, and this chapter ends without giving readers the conceptual framework to make sense of gender performance differences.

In the second chapter, "Looking at Whiteness: Subverting White Academic Spaces through the Pedagogical Perspective of bell hooks," Yancy argues for transforming philosophical classrooms into spaces of *becoming* (73). Following Paulo Freire and bell hooks, Yancy argues that traditional approaches to teaching philosophy short-change students by encouraging them to conceptualize *truth* abstracted from lived realities. Yancy effectively and eloquently argues that this is an irresponsible approach by returning to a definition of philosophy as a resource for understanding human reality. In chapter five, he expands on that definition of philosophy, but in the second chapter he is engaged with what this might mean for students in the classroom. I found this chapter to be the strongest of the book stylistically; Yancy's hallmark autobiographical approach functions to provide illuminating evidence for the honesty, fearlessness, and emotional fidelity he convincingly argues classrooms should have.

He begins by challenging conventional epistemology, paralleling feminist arguments that emotions are an integral part of wisdom, learning, and meaning-making (55). He clearly rejects the Cartesian legacy of epistemological inquiry as primarily detached and as the culmination of all philosophical undertaking. To reinforce the importance of emotion to real learning, Yancy cites several examples from his own classrooms when emotional outbursts and tears became breakthroughs to introspection and deep inquiry. In one example, Yancy powerfully argues for recognition of the difference between seeing tears as weak and deferential and seeing raw emotion as a sign of agency. He writes, "In this case, her tears were not to be taken as a sign of weakness but as deep frustration aimed at the ethical failure of white students to come to terms with their privilege/racism" (60). He connects this example to his main lesson from bell hooks: "Healers, in this case both teachers/professors and students, are not navel gazers, but are committed to social practice" (61). Following hooks, Yancy sees a continuum of theory and practice, academy and world, where

the emotional lessons of conceptualizing whiteness are taken as grounds and evidence for communal actions against hegemony.

I would love to see more on the continuum of theory and practice, academy and world. This concept is both pedagogically rich and critically insightful, and although Yancy effectively describes moments where his classroom integrates the lived experiences of his students, I was anxious for the other side of the argument. How are students taking the lessons of the classroom to the world? As a scholar with a similar pedagogical approach to Yancy's, I am always looking for more ways to close the circle—to encourage participation after the reflection and introspection of the classroom.

Another tremendous insight in this chapter is the importance of children and young people in interrogating racism. Since whiteness and racism are not biological givens, but do come to us *ab initio* from being-in-the-world, tarrying with children and young people seems to be naturally productive. Yancy mentions that the relationships of mothers and children often inform our racialized expectations (52). He also acknowledges that the “unsafe” classroom, the “honest” classroom, the classroom of *becoming*—all the names for the nontraditional space of philosophical inquiry connected to embodiment—depends on students as much as it depends on us as professors. Dismissing the conventional pedagogy of lectureship, Yancy embraces hooks' claim that both teachers and students are the “healers,” or the connections between social practice and the classroom. Yancy mentions individual examples of his white students who have expressed profound insights in class assignments, acknowledging each as “one of a few” who take the lessons seriously (61). But I would go further to say that each of these students is one of a few of a few who self-selectively chose to register for a race theory class. These are students who are willing and interested in philosophy and in examining race—already a very small minority of white students. How can we overcome the initial hurdle of motivating students and young people to even feign interest, let alone to “get it” once they are in class? It seems that this must be our next project as critical philosophers who want to use our teaching to change social realities.

The third chapter, “Looking at Whiteness: The Colonial Semiotics in Kamau Brathwaite's Reading of *The Tempest*,” offers a creative exploration of historical whiteness. However, there is an abrupt shift between the second and third chapters, and not enough integration of chapter three into subsequent chapters, either. Despite the book's subtitle as “Philosophical Essays on Whiteness,” every other chapter seems to fit into a cohesive argument about the importance of fearlessly interrogating whiteness in dialogue. This third chapter, however, seems to be an independent essay.

That is not to say that this chapter is without merit, however. In fact, this chapter is both the most academic and creative chapter, fluidly toying with the timeline of historical situatedness and whiteness. Whiteness is connected to a colonial history of “missilic consciousness” (84). Yancy adopts this term from the poet and critic Kamau Brathwaite, who means by “missilic” a targeting and objectifying consciousness with a teleological goal of mastery, mercantilism, and military superiority (84). This concept skillfully connects the critique of whiteness to a critique of both colonial legacies and capitalism, and I appreciated the critical theoretical connections. To me, however, the greatest insights in this chapter had to do with the power of resistance exemplified by the creative reading of Sycorax from *The Tempest*. Sycorax is Calliban's mostly absent mother who is also the heroine in Yancy's reading of Brathwaite (85). This is a wonderfully subversive psychoanalytic challenging of white civilization's norms. Sycorax alludes to the

conventional psychoanalytic approach to familial structure, where the father must be present as a civilizing force, as the gateway between childhood and citizenship. The mother, in this conventional reading, is resigned to the home. She is absent from civilization because of her duties as a caregiver. Through the maternal figure of Sycorax, triumph over objectification is not simply in the counter-gaze, but in countering the gaze. The gaze as missilic is authoritative and fixative, but countering that hegemonic supremacy with humility, silence, patience, song, and maternal power as exemplified by Sycorax disarms the missilic (101). I found this reading to be powerfully creative and convincing, although many of the feminist and psychoanalytic themes were left to subtext. I also found the creative warps of time and place in this chapter to be philosophically rich, both for understanding the complexity of whiteness and colonial legacies, and for representing the non-linearity of history (90). As an independent essay, this chapter also provided a new argument for why whites must be concerned with the inauthenticity of whiteness. Missilic consciousness is exposed as pure teleological being, wherein the missiles (white people) are themselves “thingified” (105). This critique serves three-fold: against whiteness, against capitalism, and against ideals of masculinity that promote competition and success above all else. However, these ideas cannot be fully thematized in this chapter, and are unfortunately dropped from the discussion in the following chapters.

Yancy begins chapter four by explaining that this chapter was originally a stand-alone article. However, “Looking at Whiteness: Whiting Up and Blacking Out in *White Chicks*” fits with the overall pedagogical theme of the book by offering a very teachable example of how critiques of whiteness have been culturally manifested in film. Perhaps this seemed a natural fit to me because I, too, often teach through film, or perhaps because he returns again to works by bell hooks. I have only ever seen parts of *White Chicks* edited for television, so my limited knowledge of the film impeded my ability to critically evaluate its usefulness as an example. I worry about a film that uses drag in order to soften the sting of racial critique. Yancy references *Some Like It Hot* and *Tootsie*, two comedic films which deploy cross-dressing as a performance of countergazing at sexuality and gender (110). In these cases, the cross-dressing was the subversive element, whereas in *White Chicks* the subversive angle seems to come from “whiting up,” while the drag seems to be merely for comedic purposes. This worries me that the film's potential sexism and heteronormativity might reinforce sexist assumptions that would impact women of color as well as white women, diminishing the effective critique of whiteness as such. Here, again, Yancy might be served by an exploration of the intersections of gender, race, and sexuality to diffuse any confusion about *White Chicks* as an effective exposé of whiteness. However, in the final paragraph of this chapter Yancy does an excellent job arguing for the merit of using film as text: “Of course, film, more generally, functions as a powerful vehicle through which we literally *see* the contradictions, prejudices, tensions, and complexities embedded in the interstitial domain of our *lived* social reality” (128).

The fifth chapter, “Looking at Whiteness: Loving Wisdom and Playing with Danger,” returns explicitly to the pedagogical themes. In this chapter, Yancy fleshes out the classroom dynamics and underlying definition of philosophy that underscores the style of teaching modeled in chapter two. Yancy explains that Socrates as gadfly in Plato's *Apology* should be taken seriously. He asks students to appreciate the bravery associated with speaking fearlessly, in public, about challenging ideas (137). He calls this fearless speech parrhesia and deploys and invites such speech in the classroom. Taking Socrates as a model discloses more of Yancy's pedagogy, to be sure, but it also

illuminates his operative definition of wisdom. Socratic wisdom is the wisdom of dialectical tensions, of loving learning but never feeling as if knowledge is complete, it is the understanding that knowledge is power even more threatening than political power—and each of these aspects of wisdom undergirds this chapter. Whiteness is challenged only by being brave enough to speak its name and to critique its continued hegemony (130). Yancy makes two bold claims about parrhesia in the classroom. One is that white students have a more difficult time learning and adopting this skill. Students of color have often already had to live bravely and speak fearlessly in order to survive white supremacy. White students, however, are used to security and safety when speaking, and sometimes feel threatened by parrhesia before they learn the skill. Anecdotally, I can support these claims from my experience with students in both my gender studies courses and my courses on race. Men are afraid to talk about gender, and white students are afraid to talk about race as if acknowledgement means culpability and guilt. Yancy recommends combating this hesitancy by encouraging real dialogue and personal narratives. He gives the example of a journaling assignment, where he simply asks students to record daily experiences when they've encountered racism (148-150). He reprints some student samples of this assignment, and it seems very effective and powerful—I think I may have to adapt it for my own courses. The flip-side of fearless speaking is having to listen to that speech. Yancy describes many times when audiences have responded angrily and even with hostility and threats at his speaking engagements. Yancy argues that in spite of these threats, however, the danger is ultimately productive because it forces a genuine dialogue with the eventual goal of collective change (138). Many critics of Yancy and critical race theories in general claim that the indictments of and challenges against white supremacy force a hopeless antagonism between the races. In this chapter, however, Yancy clearly articulates that a truly critical model of engagement is dialogical and unifying: “I want them to think *collectively*, to seize the moment *together*, though never independently of the powerful and courageous voices, epistemic standpoints and political praxes of people of color” (137).

Finally, in “Looking at Whiteness: Tarrying with the Embedded and Opaque White Racist Self,” lest we readers have lost the initial thread of the argument against hegemonic whiteness, Yancy explains how and why whiteness persists. He claims that just as parrhesia and dialectical thinking motivate collective change, security and the desire for pure autonomy protect whiteness. He clarifies his earlier claims that whiteness not only shelters racism, but inhibits whites from authentic being, claiming that critically dismantling whiteness is the hope for all (157). He draws careful distinctions between white supremacy/racism and racist insults used against whites. He explains that it is not only defensive students who want to use their own experience as proof that racism no longer exists, but also sympathetic white students who still see their own experience as universalizable (159-160). These arguments are familiar in critical race theory texts, but Yancy handles them sensitively and deftly. The most sophisticated and original argument in this chapter, however, comes from his use of Butler's *Precarious Life* to contrast the vulnerability of embodied social constitution with the illusion of absolute autonomy (166-167). Although Butler is not referencing whiteness in particular, she is challenging Western Enlightenment ideals in a globalized society. Yancy takes this challenge further, demonstrating that the same inadequacies of the Enlightenment exist when talking about the racial realities within American society—that whiteness operates precisely because of this disavowal of contingency and vulnerability. I found this argument persuasive and illuminating, but I had the same difficulty with Yancy's

extension of the argument as I did with Butler's original. How do we reach and convince those who are assured of their autonomy and invulnerability? In other words, this notion of autonomy so attendant to white privilege is difficult to argue against for those who actively resist being vulnerable: men who see vulnerability as emasculating; women who see their empowerment at risk; tea partiers who see it as irresponsible social weakness; even students with learning disabilities who have been taught it as an effective defense mechanism. How do you get these groups to open up to the dangerous and fearless classroom both for their own good and for the social good of challenging hegemonic white privilege? This is the quintessential problem of democratically liberationist theories, so I do not expect Yancy to have the final answer. However, his critique is so sophisticated, and his pedagogical insights so compelling, I would love to see him theorize on these ideas more.

In the end, I found *Look, a White!* to be challenging, insightful, and original. I think this book would work well in the classroom for both undergraduate and graduate students, and as a resource manual for teaching, especially for me as a white woman philosopher teaching race theories—*look, a white!*

Look, a White! Philosophical Essays on Whiteness, A Review

George Yancy (Temple University Press, 2012), pp. 207.

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“If you point your finger at me, then, there are three pointing back at you,” goes the old adage. The lesson that it's meant to teach is that one ought to be very cautious when pointing out faults in others. However, it is a mistake to take it to mean that we are not to point out faults at all. Indeed, we can learn much about the nature of the human condition when we point out the behaviors of others. Yet, still, this takes a degree of courage. While pointing out the faults in others might immediately direct our attention to the behavior of the *object*, it tends to also call into question the motivation of the *subject*. It is the link between the gesture of pointing and the motivation for pointing that makes pointing a risky affair. Pointing out the speck in the eye of another might reveal the plank in your own eye.

George Yancy is fully aware of the pitfalls of a deep investigation into the souls of white folks. However, he is undeterred. His training as a professional philosopher, equipped with a set of particular intellectual skills, his love of wisdom and quest for truth, makes him suited for such a task. His own historical specificity—an African American male born in the mid-twentieth century—is also a resource that he takes advantage of in exposing the ways that race has mattered in the modern world and continues to matter well into the first decade of the twenty-first century. In fact, it is his Blackness, the experience of being racialized as a Negro, that renders “intelligible vis-à-vis an entire play of white racist signifiers that ontologically truncate the black body; it is an expression that calls forth an entire white racist worldview” (Yancy, p. 3).

It is a worldview where anonymity belongs to whites. They alone “have that wonderful capacity to live anonymously, thoughtlessly, to be ordinary qua human, to go unmarked and unnamed—in essence, to be white” (4). However, the result of being white is the production of constructing the Black body as abnormal and problematic. “I am white!” was egomaniacal and thanatological. Yancy continues, “It was

a process of self-naming that functioned to ‘justify,’ through racial myth making, the actions of whites in their quest to dominate those ‘backward’ and ‘inferior’ others.” In examining whiteness through the “lived density of race,” Yancy wants to “mark whiteness”—to point it out—as “a manifestation of white messianic imperialism” (6). In this regard, the fact of his Blackness is an asset to his philosophical inquiry into the meaning and function of race—i.e., racial truth. After all, it is the assumption of whiteness, the peculiar capacity to assign epistemic and deviant value to the nonwhite racial category/ies while simultaneously cloaking whiteness as normatively human that is under attack here. “I see how you see me, and I damn sure don’t like it,” exclaims Yancy, and “this indictment constitutes the entire thrust of this book” (28).

There is much to be admired about Yancy’s approach to examining the philosophical implications of modern white supremacist ideology. Yancy forces us to take seriously the lived experiences of Black and other nonwhite people. The unasked question here is: “Does being Black have anything to teach us about being white?” For Yancy, the answer is: “Yes!” What Blacks offer whites is the “gift of seeing more of themselves, more of the complex manifestations of their whiteness. . . .” (10). Viewed from the perspective of the “black gaze,” we come to see “whiteness as a site of privilege and power” that is an “embedded set of social practices that render white people complicit in larger social practices” (11). For example, antimiscegenation laws are read as regulations aimed at producing and protecting the white body from the corrupt and corrupting Black and nonwhite bodies. Moreover, such legal statutes are outcomes of a western socio-linguistic system that, in the words of Cornel West, secretes a notion of supremacy.

Whites are not biologically hardwired towards racism; rather, they are culturally created racists. “It is within the context of a loving white family structure that the vicious practices of white racism are communicated and learned,” argues Yancy (22). Whites are not born racist; however, they are born into whiteness—i.e., white racist practices. The gift that Blacks offer to whites is the “nomination” of incidents, expressions, and attitudes that “call the real problem out—“Look, a white!” (24).

Yancy dodges the problem of biological essentialism but lands in the trap of cultural determinism. Well, not quite. He argues that what is problematic is the way that whites learn to perform and perpetuate certain racial logics—e.g., racial spatial logics (Blacks are to be kept at a distance), racial affective logics (Blacks are harmful), and racial judgmental logics (Blacks are inferior)—that do not mark whiteness as racist or detrimental to white children (22). It is the refusal to be seen, the anonymity of individual whites as the normative mode for being human, that sets the context and informs the content of white identity formation. But whites are visible to Blacks and other nonwhites through their whiteness (Yancy’s expansive term for racist acts, white supremacy ideology, and white privileging socio-historical structures, etc). Moreover, the fact that Blacks exist at all is owing to whiteness’ relative equivocation of their humanity.

For Yancy, whiteness and Blackness are necessarily relational. Put another way, whites create Blacks so as to make their whiteness possible. So what appeared to be cultural determinism is really identity formation cloaked in a set of socio-historical practices and supremacist discourse charged by muddy reasoning: “You are not because I am not.” The translation here is that racialized nonwhites assume the default status of non-normatively human and whites, who are not racialized, assume the default status of normatively human. According to Yancy, “whiteness gains its ontological purchase through the construction and degradation of nonwhiteness.” He continues, “Thus, to ‘authenticate’ their whiteness, they must

enact a form of white solipsism whereby the nonwhite is erased and devalued, reduced to a form of nonbeing” (116-117). You (Blacks) are not human vis-à-vis race because I am (whites) not racial vis-à-vis human.

While Yancy is aware of the relational character of any self-conception (e.g., whites call Black bodies into existence as a means of crafting their own identity), he doesn’t give it sufficient attention for understanding the myth of the autonomous white subject. He argues that part of what it means to be white is to grant to oneself the power to name and define the range of possibilities for Others while, yet, remaining self-defined and unrestricted. And, yet, this is so despite the fact of the relational character of whiteness to the Other. But how exactly is this so? Whites understand themselves as “*completely* autonomous agents, free from the power of white racist effective history.” Yancy argues, “whites see themselves, even if unconsciously, as raceless, as abstract minds, spectral beings, as constituting the transcendental norm” (161). Yancy appeals to the work of feminist philosophers elsewhere but doesn’t enlist them in exploring the implication of conceptualizations of autonomy for white identity formation. Here, he can be helped by Catronia Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar’s edited book, *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self* (Oxford, 2000). Particularly insightful are Stoljar’s “Autonomy and the Feminist Intuition” and Diana Tietjens Meyers’ “Intersectional Identity and the Authentic Self?: Opposites Attract.”

Stoljar is critical of procedural theories of autonomy that stress independence of mind (a set of critical reflections), rather than the capacity for substantive independence (self-sufficiency), as necessary and sufficient for autonomy. However, the major advantage is that, on procedural accounts, autonomous decisions are “content-neutral” and “allow that preferences for dependence and connection can be autonomous.” But while feminists gain by adopting procedural conceptions of autonomy they lose by, in some cases, having to endorse preferences that satisfy the standards for procedural autonomy but are influenced by oppressive norms of femininity.

In the end, it is a substantive rather than a procedural account of autonomy that proves more conducive to feminists because such theories claim “self-trust or self-worth” and “other specified content” are, in addition to relevant capacities of critical reflection, needed for autonomy (Stoljar, p. 94-95). “I try to have my white students understand the ways in which they are materially linked to the public and private worlds of white others, and how the simple act of walking into a store with (white) racial impunity/immunity constitutes the site of a body that ‘bears the imprint’ of white silent assumptions, moral integrity, and greater freedom of bodily mobility/comportment,” writes Yancy (166). His students must come to understand themselves as self-directing agents whose authority is derived from a set of deliberative judgments that are deeply contingent upon sociality and their sense of themselves as nonracial white racists. Indeed, a tall order. However, if Yancy is to be successful in getting whites to see themselves as racists, then, he is going to need a procedural theory of autonomy that’s robust enough to carry with it constituencies of substantive thinking.

Diana Tietjens Meyers argues that “ideas of authenticity and self-governance” are “caricatures” that have “seized the philosophical imagination.” “The reality,” writes Meyers, “is the fact that enormous numbers of people are assigned to social groups that are systematically subordinated.” Yet, still, “there are autonomous dissenters and revolutionaries and legions of individuals who autonomously craft private lives within the confines of oppressive regimes.” Furthermore, we are capable of being dually members of subordinated in

subordinating groups. If Meyers is correct, and I think she is, then, three assumptions follow. First, autonomous agents can be found in the most nonautonomous-friendly places. Second, “intuitively it seems that psychic fragmentation” caused by such dual positionality “would preclude autonomy” (Meyers, p. 152). But people who survive under oppressive structures display instances of autonomy. Third, the “self” is not static but fluid and, likewise, autonomy involves a negotiation between at least the following: one’s subject position, one’s sociality, one’s historical specificity, one’s group membership(s), and one’s critical and imaginative powers.

Feminist philosophers Stoljar and Meyers move our thinking about autonomy past considerations of procedural requirements and content-neutrality to include substantial thinking and subject positionality within structures of oppression. All of this has serious implications for Yancy’s account of white identity formation. Yancy writes, “Given my theorization of white self-formation as involving one’s ‘immanent other’—that is, the opaque white racist self—one that presupposes the reality of various destructive processes of white iterative racist practices, some overt, many covert, my sense is that this opacity places a limit on self-knowledge regarding one’s own white racism” (170). Instead of reading the white self as opaque, it could be, on a feminist autonomy account, that white “selves” (indeed, any “self”) are unknowable and, also, nonautonomous outside of an engaged reflection on the range of possible realizable actions/choices available in any circumstance; and a negotiation between the range of actions/choices and their potential consequences for our subject position (oppressor/oppressed) and group affiliations (gender, race, class, etc). It is one thing to argue that whites have “no exit” to the “structural permanence” of white racism. But it is a different thing altogether to argue for the “inscrutability” of the white racist self to whites. The former describes the racial social stratification that emerged at the start of the modern period and shows no signs of vanishing soon. But the latter comes too close to excusing whites for white racism because, here, they would seem to commit acts of racism or conspire with racist systems without the autonomy to do otherwise.

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Truth, Grief, Relief, and Hope

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In recounting his experience of giving a lecture to an academic audience, George Yancy tells of one notable comment:

another white male professor, this time an older gentleman, felt that I had failed members of the audience. He said, and one could sense the irritation in his voice, “You leave us with *no* hope.” (154)

Yancy responds appropriately by asking, “Why do you want hope? My objective here is not to bring white people hope, to make them walk away feeling good about themselves” (154). The same could be said of this book. It is an emotionally difficult and important book for white people to read; a crucial addition to the study of race, not only of whiteness, but also of how racial construction works across the white/not-white divide.

The book is composed of a series of six chapters, including three previously published essays revised for this volume,

plus an introduction and a forward by Naomi Zack. Yancy draws on a wide range of sources for his work, including bell hooks, white anti-racist activists and scholars, and postcolonial theorists Kamau Brathwaite and Aimé Césaire in his reading of colonialism through Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. In the beginning sections of the book he employs both phenomenology and the works of Frantz Fanon, whose signature analysis of the phrase, “Look, a Negro!” gives the book its title.

Yancy’s purpose in this book, as he says, is to get his white students to be able to say, “Look, a white!” He explores what that means as a kind of reversal of the (now) famous phrase directed toward Franz Fanon by a little white boy in Paris, “Look, a Negro!” Yancy offers a phenomenological account of that event:

The tight smile on Fanon’s face is a forced smile, uncomfortable, tolerant. Fanon feels the impact of the collective white gaze. He is, as it were, “strangled” by the attention. He has become a peculiar *thing*. He becomes a dreaded object, a thing of fear, a frightening and ominous presence. The turned heads and twisted bodies that move suddenly to catch a glimpse of the object of the white boy’s alarm function as confirmation that something has gone awry. Their abruptly turned white bodies help to “materialize” the threat through white collusion. The white boy has triggered something of an optical frenzy. Everyone is now looking, bracing for something to happen, something that the Negro will do. (2)

Fanon analyzed the power of the white gaze to turn him into an object. Yancy’s work is to “flip the script” to look at what whites “see” in that moment of calling out recognition of the “Negro,” and to show us (whites) that what we really see is ourselves, that is, the product of the historical and contemporary white colonial imaginary (5). To be able to say, “Look, a white,” then, is not to objectify whiteness as Fanon was objectified, but to point out what white people are doing when we turn the white gaze onto people of color.

Yancy succeeds in reversing the gaze that had been directed at Fanon to say, instead, “Look, a white!” What does that mean? “Disentangling the sight of white bodies from the sight of such bodies as just bodies . . .” (9). To do this, Yancy draws on several metaphors, including, in the introduction, the mirror and the idea of a gift that people of color can give to white people:

It is time for the mirror to speak through a different script, from the perspective of *lived* experiences of those bodies of color that encounter white people on a daily basis as a problem or perhaps as a site of terror. The mirror will tell the truth: “*No, damn it! Snow White is not the ‘fairest’ of them all. She is precisely the problem!*” (10)

He speaks of this mirror as a gift from the perspective of one who has received such a gift: having analyzed male privilege he can now understand better the workings of male supremacy. He is humbled by this gift, and, as he rightly says, whites should be humbled by the gift of the mirror as well.

The book begins with an examination of the ontological construction of Blackness as always already fixed: criminal, dangerous, sexual, must be stopped. This construction always precedes the actual body to the point that it makes him feel like a fiction, unreal. In fact, the fantasy does precede him, both the historical fantasy and the contemporary fantasy as depicted in movies and confirmed by the epistemological authority of, for example, white police officers. Amadou Diallo in fact held a

wallet, in the [white] fantasy it was a gun. In reality, the fantasy counted for more and he is dead.

Yancy sees himself precede himself walking across a street, he sees himself at the movies, and he sees the cop seeing him (or any other Black man) this way. This is the daily, lived experience of a Black man in the U.S.: “the *density* of race, *race as lived*” (50).

After constructing an unflinching personal, phenomenological, and political reconstruction of his own subjectivity to act as a window for white people on Black experience in the present-day United States, Yancy turns to the question of race in the classroom. The account of his experience in the previous chapter makes his work on teaching more compelling. This is what education must be about.

For Yancy, teaching is an embodied practice, including emotions and passions, engaged in as a raced and gendered body. Drawing on the works of bell hooks, he explores the human side of teaching, such as teaching as healing and teaching as shared work. Following hooks, he advocates practices in the classroom that disrupt the usual “banking” model of teaching, cultivating, instead, an openness to being questioned, openness to saying dangerous things. He works to get white students to interrogate whiteness, to present/reveal reality, to get them to question. This consciousness of whiteness must be sustained, yet he recognizes that realizations of racism may only last a moment, or perhaps only for the duration of the course.

Moving more deeply into the level of the symbolic and its role in constructing and maintaining whiteness as distinct from the non-white, in chapter three Yancy uses readings of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* by Kamau Brathwaite and Aimé Césaire to articulate an account of the development of modernity as a process of dehumanization, not only of people of color, but, in a different way, of white people as well. Non-white peoples are used as fuel, consumed by missilic (Brathwaite’s term) white people who also must become objects in order to fulfill their mercantile mission. (The religious overtone is not overtly discussed, but hovers in the background.)

Prospero (a kind of Columbus) characterizes the missilic mindset, he wants to control and dominate all, though he is a stranger to the land. He tells a story about Sycorax, Caliban’s absent mother, that turns her into a subhuman creature, which justifies his subordination of Caliban. Both stand in for non-white peoples as subjects/objects of teratology, the study of the deformed, the monstrous, or mythical creatures. Real people have been turned into mythical monsters named in the language of the colonizer, for example, Sarah Bartmann. Sycorax represents the tidalectic¹ flow of resistance to genocide, dehumanization, colonization, consumption. Her presence ebbs and flows, and, as a symbolic figure of resistance and resilience, she reappears in the form of women of color resisting, in the music of resistance, such as reggae, and in the language of resistance.

Numerous accounts of the development of modernity have included analyses of the violence—physical, intellectual, social, environmental—that Europeans wreaked on indigenous peoples of the Caribbean and Africa. Yancy adds an analysis of the symbolism underlying this devastation. Not only was it about defining people of color as inferior, but it was about consuming them as fuel (missilic culture). Not only was it about dehumanizing people of color, but it was about how white people became dehumanized as well, all the while professing to be the race of reason and universal ethics. Not only was it about devastation in the Caribbean and Africa, but how the peoples of both regions were consumed, one after another, and how their heritages mixed, symbolized by the “monstrous” witch-

child, Caliban, who was, in fact and symbolically, the creation of Prospero, whom Prospero then tries to “civilize.”

This is not only an account of *historic* events. We, in the twenty-first century (over)developed world are directly participating in this missilic mission. We are consuming brown and Black peoples, and their lands and resources, as fuel for our mercantilism. In our disposable, plastic-packaged world, we are using people as fuel to gain access to fossil fuels to package our lives conveniently and fill ourselves up with things. This is Western civilization, universal ethics, humanism. “Look, a white.”

Chapter four takes a break from the deeply serious and turns to contemporary culture in the form of film. Here, Yancy interprets the film “White Chicks” by the Wayans brothers. Film is one way, historically and in the present, that the white imaginary (the white fantasy) of Blackness is constructed and maintained.

The film accomplishes two important tasks: it turns the gaze around, “look a white!” and it serves to mark and challenge myths about Black men. Nevertheless, Yancy maintains that it does not completely escape the white gaze that essentializes Blackness.

Yancy situates the film historically in terms of the role of race in entertainment. In reversing the gaze, minstrelsy is reversed here (and so is gender). Interestingly, the suggestion of homoeroticism is not explored, but the absence of that is not especially troublesome, either.

While this chapter is much less dense in terms of analysis and subject matter, the work of the previous chapters underscores what’s at stake in challenging the white gaze.

In chapter five, Yancy returns to the classroom, this time to pursue his goal of getting white students to engage in *parrhesia*, or fearless speech. He encourages this fearless speech much like Socrates acted as gadfly to Athens. Like Socrates, Yancy also has a Meletus (“my Meletus”) who, in response to a radio presentation, makes repeated efforts to get Yancy fired from his university position (141 ff.). Yancy explores the lived experience of being Black in the very white discipline of philosophy. He recounts what it is like to walk through the halls of a national philosophy conference as a Black man, knowing the discipline has characterized him a priori as matter, as body, as anything but a philosopher. His description of the characters one encounters at such conferences is dead-on and hilarious, though disturbing, given what’s at stake for him. Despite the danger, Yancy also uses the metaphor of play, not in a trivial, or lighthearted sense, but, “being daring, audacious, and heroic, though not foolish” (131).

Truth-telling is necessary, but dangerous work for people of color, who risk job, health, personal safety, and life to speak out. It is “dangerous” in a psychic sense for white people who, if reflecting honestly, will lose a kind of innocence that was never real and must be lost in order to gain some degree of moral integrity.

The final chapter explores racism at the level of the psyche, as embedded in the (collective?) psyche of white people. Building on analyses of structural oppression by Peggy McIntosh and white complicity pedagogy of Barbara Applebaum, Yancy uses Judith Butler’s analysis of subjectivity to reveal the unconscious dimensions of the self, distinguishing the *subject* of structural racism from the *self* of racism at the level of the psyche. Yancy explores the psychological dimension of racism in depth, the third of three “levels” at which racism works: (1) the individual level, where racism is understood by white folks as simply white people doing mean things to people of color and white people who don’t do such things claim they are not

racists; (2) the structural level, where racism is the structure that grants all white people (mean or not) privilege that may be unwanted and is largely unacknowledged; and (3) the psychic level where unconscious racism lurks despite all of the antiracist work a white person may have done.

To explain more fully this third level or dimension, he develops the concept of the opaque white self. This is the whiteness or racism I, as a white person cannot recognize. The message is that I am not a Cartesian self, completely transparent to myself (170). He calls white people to confront the existence of the opaque self and the evidence of one's racism at the level of the unconscious, despite conscious denials or a lot of antiracist work. This is a fitting conclusion to the work of the book. Throughout, Yancy has laid bare his own subjectivity to reveal how whiteness and white people have constructed him to be such. At the same time he builds his case that it is the construction and maintenance of whiteness that puts him in this position.

All white people should read this book. Okay, every white philosopher should read this book. Any scholar doing work on race should read this book. As a philosopher trained primarily in the analytic tradition, I was a bit intimidated by the continental focus, but I found the continental terminology to be challenging but accessible.

My students (undergraduate non-majors) would need a lot of background to understand the terminology. I might assign one chapter to read, but incorporate ideas from other sections of the book into the framework of the course. The choice of chapters would depend upon the focus of the course. The critique of Descartes on metaphysics and epistemology throughout could, for example, form the structure of an introductory philosophy class.

I find the most compelling contributions of the book to be the analysis of colonialism and the analysis of the opaque white self. It has been my experience that, sometimes, hearing the truth about racism can bring, simultaneously, a sense of relief and a sense of grief. I felt this on reading the last chapter of the book. Relief from getting confirmation of what I had had a sense of beforehand, the way that my racism "ambushes" me, and an explanation of how and why it works. Grief, of course, because how can one not grieve the harm that I, and all white people have and will continue to perpetrate unknowingly. It is like hearing the bad news one has dreaded. Now we have a better sense of what we are up against, even if we will continue to unknowingly perform it.

With respect to teaching, this book made bell hooks' work seem more possible for me to incorporate into my work. I worry that I, being white, will necessarily be my opaque white self from time to time and cause harm in the classroom by fumbling a teachable moment and reinscribe more deeply embedded racist beliefs and practices—and this will especially harm my students of color. On the other hand, ignoring race harms students of color and white students by keeping hidden the racist colonial script. So, no exit! Yancy gives us a courageous example of marking himself, acknowledging his bodily reality. I can do the same.

I wondered about how this work might connect with the work of women of color feminists. This reflects my choice of a frame of reference, of course, but it would be interesting to read women of color feminism in relation to these analyses. For example, Maria Lugones' work could pair with Yancy's analysis of interpellation as a Black man. Lugones theorizes subjectivity along multiple, simultaneous axes of oppression. While she does not go deeper into the subjective elements of experience, as Yancy's rich account does, she could suggest a way to consider how race and gender are co-constitutive (Lugones

2003 and 2010). It is not just a Black person walking down the street, Yancy works from his own subjectivity as a Black man. He circles around to mark gender on a regular basis, which is important. Sometimes it seems as if he is universalizing Black male experience, but other times he clearly marks out and distinguishes the way Black experience is differently gendered. In the chapter on colonialism, he risks turning the Black woman into an icon of resistance where she stands as a symbol, not a flesh and blood human being. But then he brings in examples of actual Black women, historic and contemporary, to stand as real as Black men in his analysis.

A second response I had was that Marilyn Frye's concept of "whiteness" could support Yancy's concept of moral and epistemological opacity. Frye distinguishes being white, a simple fact about one's self, from being whitely, which is actively engaging in racist practices, especially at the structural level frequently ignored or denied by white people (Frye 1992). "Whiteness" is characterized by the assumption of moral and epistemological authority over, well, everything, including people of color. Yancy gives some prime examples of whiteness. One can be white without being whitely, according to Frye. I think it would be useful to develop the account of racism at the psychic level in relation to this claim by Frye. Perhaps the idea of whiteness is problematic in that it suggests a(nother) way for whites to deny racism. I can say I am not like the arrogant white professor Yancy cites, but can I say I am not whitely? Most likely I am whitely in my own way, invisible to me. *Perhaps* a white person can be white without being whitely, but a white person certainly cannot get out of being racist. This is where Mariana Ortega's concept of "knowing, loving ignorance" can be helpful to explain how white people deceive ourselves about our racism (Ortega 2006).

Many more themes, concepts, and arguments remain to be explored in this text. Yancy offers a challenging account of white racism; in some ways the more antiracist a white person thinks she is, the more she would benefit from this book. Far from leaving us with "no hope," the entire book is the gift Yancy intends it to be, and every page is an expression of hope that white people can learn and change.

Endnotes

1. "Tidalectic" is a concept developed by Brathwaite in place of Hegel's dialectic. Whereas the dialectic is linear, like a missile always moving forward, tidelectics embraces the culture of the circle, connected, organic rather than mechanical. Cited in Yancy, 102.

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Pedagogies of Spectacle

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In his new book *Look, A White!* George Yancy pushes and pulls with spectacularity, pointing back at the quotidian spectacles of white people whose own fascination with the appearance/spectre of Black people keep race both a fantastical presence

and an awful absence. The dynamism of Yancy's work as well as his own ability to negotiate what it means to be both a spectacle and also invisible provide us, I think, with an intriguing and difficult path to negotiate if we seek to inhabit and enact whiteness in new ways. Thinking and enacting this often called for and little followed through on path as gendered whiteness creates even more trouble—the visibility of the Black male has been an alibi for white racialized and gendered protectionism, and the style of his demands are both racialized and gender-racialized. In other words, he calls on us to do this work through particular styles of Black masculinity that have been well described by Fanon and, more recently, E. Patrick Johnson (2008), forms of assertion of race-gender that use the performance of affect and gesture to mark their appearance as Black, emotive, living men.

As Yancy describes it, this racism is both starkly structural and mundanely repeated with gestures toward and (mis) recognitions of Blackness. Whiteness is the source of the imperative to see Blackness in a particular way. Fanon's "look, a Negro" is a demand to look that brings with it a demand to attempt to control Blackness as well. To those who would object that times have changed, Yancy offers staccato refusals, as abrupt and distinct counterpoints to the repeated acts of racism, ranging from murder to unacknowledged white privilege that continue the work of white supremacy. He insistently points out the articulations of white privilege and unearned ignorance in his rapid conversation with how Blackness feels, how Blackness is lived, and how Blackness is punished. The affective tempo of living as always spectacle and often invisible demonstrates how Blackness vibrates against the pressures of the white status quo.

It is this level of epistemological and phenomenological intensity that characterizes Yancy's always-at-work philosophy. Conceptually keen in his work against the messiness of racism, the complexity of negotiating the world of philosophy and the white gaze, Yancy nonetheless and necessarily invokes "Black joy": the contours of movement and community may be haunted by insistent whiteness, but a community that also knows that whiteness isn't all there is. He also details how whiteness becomes an ontological and spatial fact, tracing the ways that white people raise children to see their experience in the world as defined through their whiteness, not yet a deeply theoretical or political concept but the simple contours of where and how white children live. Having seen him perform chapter 1 during a public talk, the use of the "click" of door locks at his presence echoes out the recognition: "n-gger." These gestures call Blackness into disparaged presence and his recollection shifts them back at the audience rearticulated as a demand for responsibility and recognition. The click is not the end of the process. The click gets flipped, the perpetual movement of whiteness in now-called "microaggressions" get clicked back to white audiences in all their irritating repetitiveness—count out each one, call out each act: look!

What happens, I think, in Yancy's refusal to let acts of whiteness go by is a fine portrayal of the relationality and mutual spectacularization of race. As Audre Lorde (1980) pointed out so well, "your silence will not protect you" (41) and indeed, Yancy might say back, "race isn't silent so there's no context of silence anyway." Being a spectacle in response to the conflicted white gestures of misrecognition and avoidance is an uneasy tactic, especially since Yancy's insistence can be seen to be part of the white process of misrecognition—standing up, becoming the object of "Look, a n-gger!" in a rearticulated way, has opened him to charges from students that he's making too much of Blackness. Indeed, by representing the collapse of multiple lived experiences of the same customary gestures of white locks being clicked shut, he is in the time of the utterance,

making much of what happens by collecting those gestures and throwing them back together. They have accreted weight and each small white gesture of racism holds within it all the other large and small white gestures, so when white people, for instance, start trying to take responsibility for whiteness, they find that going back to childhood and going back to history turn out to produce quite a lot to take responsibility for. Yancy's point is simple: that responsibility is already there in every move against Blackness and every move, however unrecognized, toward white superiority. As Yancy puts it, white people need him. The relationality between Black and white is required for the operations of white superiority and yet the dynamic is also one of white disavowal of this need. The repeated gestures of white superiority or of need, as he puts it, "fragment my existence" and put where he lives ahead of where he is: the click is always waiting for him.

His response is the assertion of a new spectacle of time and place that represents not only Blackness but also Black masculinity. If anything is missing in this performance it is a more sustained gendered analysis of how space can be taken, retaken, occupied, and seen. Would I prefer he not express his anger about race by using an analogy to rape (138)? Yes. I've indicated elsewhere that analogies are tricky things, they can, as so many whiteness theorists point out, displace a concerted examination of race by bringing in other terms as alibis or complications. But if we are to take the complexity of lived and historically constituted identities seriously, as Yancy does with Blackness, we need to also explore how white distancing strategies are not only that, they are also indications of where we miss the complexity of whiteness, gender, etc. If we do take intersectionality seriously we are left with yes . . . but also something else too. Because we're generally so keen to end the obfuscations of whiteness that "something else too" is always treated like a residual barrier to responsibility but it's not just that, it is also the fact of complexity and interrelationality. White women, I think, displace their fears about violence in private onto bodies they perceive as threatening in public. They startle and hold purses and children closer in my presence too, misreading white female masculinity as white masculinity or simply not understanding gender complexity. Likely they're more frightened of Black masculinity than my only-sometimes-read female-masculinity. But understanding that these incidents of white female discomfort are sometimes directed at Blackness first and sometimes directed at masculinity first and most times an expression of discomfort about both may change our responses to these events. This is a longer conversation in trans and butch literature and honestly, I do think sometimes women are scared in public areas in a displacement of the actually greater threat to their safety in private spaces. For everyone, it's disavowal all the way down. These are breaks in the text that show as much the raced qualities of gendered interactions as they do the gendered qualities of racial interactions—a point Yancy makes well in other areas. I would have to say here clearly that my point is not to make one category overwhelm the other but only to show the difficulties in reading complex histories together and making sure that one is not used strategically to silence the other ones.

There is a sense in any account of spectacle and misrecognition that these are singular occurrences and what Yancy's version of this does is inhabit the singularity of lived incidents, particular relationships, and events, but with a broader historical and contemporary account of these vivid situations as persistent patterns. His spectacle, then, is the longer slide of such things across years—he exclaims with Fanon, experiences the veil with Du Bois, and rails against silence with Lorde, putting embodiments into histories and shifting white embodiment into those spaces as well. Misrecognition is, in a

certain political sense, how any recognition functions: the time and place of greeting and acknowledgement is not only within the particular bodies in relation but the longer histories of those encounters. Any assertion of identity is always out of synch with its time, either belated or too new to easily inhabit a category by which it could be known. The assumption that one will be recognized correctly, then, may be only the purview of those with privilege and even their particularities will be missed by their function as symbols of a certain order.

For those of us who want to try to change patterns of recognition, Yancy's use of the spectacle may be quite instructive. His use of restated words, the concatenation of sounds with implications, the willingness to occupy a space of Black masculine demand show that rearticulations of identity essentially rework the performances of whiteness-as-normal. Like drag, Yancy's stylized responses to racism read racism back onto itself through hyperbolic and exaggerated gestures that racism, and whiteness especially, function to obscure. The normal cannot continue to operate unnoticed when the spectacle of its function is revealed. As much as he may be making a spectacle of himself in the service of this work, he is also uncovering the ways in which that spectacle has been made already. The difficulty is avoiding the likely unavoidable problem of having an already established response to such spectacularity folding back on the rearticulated performance. But this is the unavoidable problem of misrecognition anyway, and that unavoidability of the dominant epistemological view framing an assertion against it is the double consciousness. Performances like Yancy's phenomenological assertion create a self-conscious scene of duplicating the real as a relation that emerges in particular spaces and times—and provides us with material for critical analysis. He shows, too, the persistence of such selves and relations, even against our attempts to make progress. In that gap between the common place, mundane repetition and the new spectacle made of that common place, Yancy shows what it feels like to point out a problem and to try to shift relations away from that problem. Shifting the narrative, one hopes, shifts too the sense of responsibility from his necessity of becoming a spectacle to problematizing the spectacles and absences caused by white supremacy—his gesture is the excessive wave toward the obfuscatory workings of whiteness.

It isn't easy to be a spectacle or to self-consciously decide to take on the position of raising the profile of one's misrecognized state. Like Yancy's strategy, queers of all colors and inclinations have grappled with this problem of making a spectacle of themselves while also wanting accurate recognition and the justice that we usually think should flow from that. Like those of other marginal identities, such desires are fraught: recognition of someone who is becoming is always belated, always misses the edge of critique in reworked identities, and always misses the intersections that those inhabiting the identity may themselves miss or neglect to account for. There is no possibility of coming "lithe into the world" (43), not only because of power that bears down, but also because of powers we bear. The gesture demanding that we look anew may seem a quick, fluid movement of the arm, but the difficulties in making such gestures are evident in his recounting of resistances and discomforts. Sometimes the philosopher just gets positioned by someone in the audience as "angry," but I disagree with Yancy that this simplifies his subjectivity and much prefer the positive spin with which he quotes Toni Morrison on anger "as a sense of being," indicative of worth, in a sense then, the opening demand for recognition.

The most reasonable response to entrenched whiteness, whether or not they always generate better readings, may

be this serious play through embodiments and re-ritualizing responses to violence and insult. Yancy shows ways to do this by recourse to the density of race, bringing feeling and even heart into philosophy, and the workings of comedy. The weight, the caring, and the riffs on race open new spaces for an indirect, felt, and thought education. By showing the density of race, we understand (maybe) what we miss by being who we are in relation to others whose experience is not ours, especially if we are white or, I think, by extension (always tricking to extend or to analogize and always dangerous to not), any position of dominance. By showing how relations with white students can be changed through race-centered critical pedagogy, Yancy shows that spaces for rethinking and re-becoming can be opened. But like any attempt at relation or communication, there will be failures to connect as well. Indeed those failures to transform are the problem of spectacle—spectacle invites rethinking but, like all pedagogies, it may teach without seeing any evidence of learning.

His historical position as spectacularity and his determination to make a spectacle of himself in the context of being an "historically fluid hypertext" (84) show us the duration and provisionality of such scenes of learning and reworking. The duration is both historical and affective—history weighs and so too does the sometimes intentional and sometimes coerced experience of visibility. Yancy points to hopeful moments, too, where whites position themselves as objects to be recognized and not assumed, where white understanding of Black expressive culture and experience is deeper than they might initially avow, and where a Black professor can be recognized more fully as himself and as a part of the historical and philosophical experiences of race.

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I Am Not George Yancy

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George Yancy's *Look, a White!* courts risk from its title forward. To invoke and reverse Fanon is to create all sorts of expectations, methodologically and otherwise. To argue from inside the discipline of philosophy for passion, engagement, and emotion as keys to the winning of knowledge is to expose oneself to hazard. Yancy's accounts of responses to some of his invited lectures and pedagogy show as much. To teach in a Freirean, or perhaps it is bell hooks-ian, style—making dialogue, feeling, and indeed one's own feelings central to pedagogy is bold no matter what the subject. Where race is concerned it is breathtakingly so.

To challenge whites to acknowledge that racism and whiteness cohabit, in ways hard-wired in the social structure and daily life, presents challenges and constant opportunities to be misheard. To argue specifically that becoming an antiracist white does not mean ceasing to be a white racist breaks boldly from more therapeutic models of antiracist training that suppose stages of racism are passed through, are gotten over, and are capable of yielding to an anti-racist whiteness that is much more a happy consciousness than the productively troubled one that Yancy holds out as desirable. Audre Lorde wrote in "The Uses of Anger": "I speak out of direct and particular anger

at an academic conference, and a white woman says, ‘Tell me how you feel but don’t say it too harshly or I cannot hear you.’ But is it my manner that keeps her from hearing, or the threat of a message that her life may change?” Yancy here describes a career much devoted to tarrying around such danger, and brilliantly shows why insistence on headlong confrontation with whiteness is actually a great gift to his white listeners, readers, and students. His risks, like Lorde’s, very much pay off.

In the short space of this response I want to back into some central concerns of the book by introducing an Internet video clip that I have recently been eager to discuss with all willing to do so. My remarks will then turn to questions of teaching, hopefully as a bridge to considering the role and the limitations of white educators and activists who seek to name whiteness as a problem. Throughout I will adopt Yancy’s use of anecdote and personal experience to make matters concrete.

The video clip, titled “I Am Not Trayvon Martin,” began to be forwarded to me, and by me, in spring of 2012. You can watch it at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBRwuiJ8K7w>. At that time, in order to protest the vigilante murder of Florida teenager Trayvon Martin, activists began to wear hoodies, the allegedly menacing item in Martin’s wardrobe that led to racial profiling ending in his death. They also sported I AM TRAYVON MARTIN t-shirts. The latter reprised the I AM TROY DAVIS shirts worn in the solidarity campaign for the Death Row inmate murdered by the state of Georgia in 2011. In the clip, a young white woman, very pale and blonde, with a stylish nose ring, spoke directly into the camera with a flatness seeming to conceal understandable anguish.

She had to deliver the hard truth that the many whites wearing such items did not in fact occupy the same moments of danger in which Martin and Davis lived and died. They were not subject to such profiling and to what Ruth Wilson Gilmore has identified as the dealing out of “premature death” that defines white supremacy. Indeed she goes so far as to say that the more fitting shirt for white activists like herself would read I AM GEORGE ZIMMERMAN, signaling how racial learning, as much by osmosis as design, infects us with the kind of panic that predisposed Zimmerman to take Martin’s life. “‘Look, a white,’ and it is I,” said the video in effect.

I identified with the clip’s central message and its no-concessions tone. So did most of those forwarding it my way or commenting on it in emails. One forward was from its posting on a Nazi website, and called attention to the deeply personal and violent responses it provoked. I was not surprised to learn that the woman was a student in a program where a valued former colleague now teaches in African American Studies.

It would therefore be very far from my intention to criticize the clip as a whole. If it moves in directions that gave me sharp pause for a significant moment, I still applaud its boldness and its basic impulse to “out” even progressive whiteness. Thus, any critique that I offer stays in a minor register and is as much of the air we breathe with regard to race as it is of the video. Given that poisonous atmosphere it is a mistake—Yancy eloquently spells out just why—to suppose that any consistent white antiracist position outside of white supremacy can emerge. The speaker in the clip follows her explanation of the ways the social order produces a tendency toward George Zimmerman’s stance within all whites with a tribute to the “truly excellent parenting” and “decent education” who delivered her from much such evil. “There,” she tells us, “but for the grace of God go I.” The claim of exceptionality proves irresistible even in the context of this very thoughtful clip.

It seems to me that in addition to underlining the force of Yancy’s central arguments, the video also suggests two areas where those arguments might be further pushed. The first

regards the invocation of the parents as the godsends warding off racism. Yancy masterfully uses white teaching of locking car doors and of the rolling up of windows on entering Black neighborhoods to concretize the always and already present racial order from which there is no preserve in childhood innocence.

But my own childhood experience of just the clicks that Yancy describes as doors locked on the passing of my family’s car into East St. Louis reminds me that such teaching was typically carried out by loved ones in a child’s family as well as by a white supremacist society as a whole. It is moms and dads, aunts and uncles, grandmas and grandpas who teach racism, while also simultaneously giving first lessons in hypocrisy, in the hollowness of Christian love, and in the absurdity of promises of security. The reminiscences of Lillian Smith, the great white Southern antiracist writer featured at times by Yancy, regarding racial terror in her own family wonderfully capture one answer to the question of what the clicking of doors and the threats, and more, of racial violence did to the white kids involved.

The wrenching stories of the theologian and philosopher Thandeka in *Learning to Be White* and particularly the moving to tears among the whites whom she challenges to recall moments of early racial/racist learning suggest to me that a more explicitly psychoanalytical dimension may be at play in some of both the powerful pedagogical breakthroughs Yancy makes to white audiences and in the audience members’ determined clinging to bad faith at other times. In my own case, the lessons of whiteness were taught in very different emotional registers by one side of a family and the other, themselves at war over religious differences. They are painful memories accompanied by painful memories.

James Baldwin insists that misery among whites is a key to any honest interrogation of what he calls the “lie of whiteness.” White writers, myself decidedly included, seldom succeed in probing this misery—my Freudian slip in the first draft of this response rendered “misery” as “mystery”—much. I used to think that an understandable hesitancy to be taken as possibly conflating the miseries whites experience with the miseries white supremacy deals out to people it racializes produce reticence surrounding the issue. But the simultaneity of racial learning with the learning of the fault lines in families, the repression of sexuality, and the illusion of security may also reinforce silences and incuriosity.

My one other reservation regarding “I Am Not Trayvon Martin” flags an issue in *Look, a White!* that I want to mention, but not much pursue in the depth it deserves here. As much as the speaker in the video frames matters within her admiration of the movements to free Troy Davis and to secure justice in the Martin murder case, the hard truths she articulates can sound like they are delivered from above the fray of social movements. When I recently played the clip for students in San Diego, some in the audience worried, across racial lines, that white activists, having just gotten involved in anti-racist work, would feel denounced as racists and would retreat from involvement. I am much in favor of hard truths. But the point that the academic elucidation of a critique and the effective introducing of it into movement practice differ seems worth pondering.

Look, a White! tends to bracket activism, concerning itself with the classroom and lecture hall as productive sites of critique. I think though that Yancy’s work in the book has profound, and profoundly healthy, implications for movement building. The ability to see the anti-racist white as also a racist deflates the politics of guilt and perfectionism. The space such a perception opens might allow for a critique of the practices of individuals and of initiatives that regards both as works in

progress, constantly in a dialectical relation of both challenging and being challenged by the order of things.

On one Internet site, “I Am Not Trayvon Martin” is headed “She Speaks Truth.” This burdensome tribute allows entry into some closing thoughts concerning pedagogy, the white anti-racist scholar, and the Black anti-racist scholar. Certainly the truth of the video is one that did not originate among whites. One of the most challenging remarks directed towards my lectures on whiteness takes a similar form. After talks as an invited lecturer I am regularly taken aside by a listener of color who thanks me for saying “things like what I’ve been saying myself” but without being heard. The praise was gratifying on the first few hearings but it also troubles matters, sometimes designedly so. That is, the praise underlines that whiteness structures who gets believed and esteemed even in discussing whiteness. Moreover the “things like what I’ve been saying” phrasing underlines, subconsciously perhaps, how much white writers on whiteness borrow from long traditions of such study by thinkers from groups for whom whiteness has most murderously been a problem. For me, trained in African American history, debts to Toni Morrison, Sterling Stuckey, Langston Hughes, Ida B. Wells, bell hooks, and, among many others, above all James Baldwin and W.E.B. Du Bois, can be acknowledged but cannot be fully repaid.

“Like what I have been saying” also helps us to understand that what is being said is also not just the same across the color line and this conditions reception. I have disappointed the shows of Bill O’Reilly, Glenn Beck, and other right-wing media figures who regularly discover the existence of “Whiteness Studies” courses and want to ridicule on television someone teaching one. I have never taught courses on the critical study of whiteness as in my view whiteness cannot be understood apart from the experiences of peoples racialized as not white. Thus, when my students read about whiteness they do so as part of courses on ethnic studies. In the fascinating class sessions on whiteness that Yancy describes, his expertise and experience ensure that a course centered on whiteness is about a social relationship.

I do lecture frequently on whiteness visiting in other cities. When I do, the sorts of direct expressions of doubt and opposition from the audience that Yancy recounts rarely surface during the lecture, the Q and A that follows, or talks with faculty and students over meals. Opposition is generally expressed via email, anonymously, rarely, and after the fact. Tears are very occasional, most recently when I argued against the idea of “white culture” and a Missouri student cried, “If I can’t be white, what can I be?”

Years ago, as I was thinking about the coexistence of white young people’s love of Black culture and their racism, I asked an African American colleague to help me to sort the question out. He then went to speak at a local high school and briefly mused on how it was that cheerleaders there might go to the “more Black,” urban high school to see dance moves but not want to attend an integrated school. The results included disorder in the gym, a vicious campaign against him in the newspaper, and threats. I could have spoken those same lines with only sullenness and silent dismissal as the result. Such a positionality makes my life easier but troublingly so. It makes my teaching about whiteness more predictable and less impactful than that described in *Look, a White!*

On Why I Keep Getting [Socially] Interrupted by White People

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I read *Look, a White!* in various coffee shops and libraries throughout Los Angeles, California, and Buffalo, New York. Never has a book in my hand attracted so much attention. Written across the light blue cover the word “White” stands out in large print and rests above an index finger pointed upward. This somehow manages to antagonize passersby while simultaneously creating a sense of what can only be called “entitled curiosity.” On several occasions, I was interrupted by strangers who glanced at the cover of the book and could not resist asking questions or making comments: “What are you reading?” “What is *that* book about?” “Wow, that *seems* like an interesting topic...” and, eventually, “Who wrote that book?” Most appeared shocked and, to be quite honest, suspicious that I was reading about whiteness, maybe because I am Latino. They were even more surprised that the book’s author is African American. “I don’t see what a Black man can know about whiteness” summarizes most of the responses.

Soon after I finished the text I realized that this is exactly what George Yancy wants. *Look, a White!* challenges readers to “nominalize” the various ways whiteness permeates their life and our society: “Nomination brings attention to, discloses, renders ethically problematic, a network of iterative power relations, normative assumptions, and calcified modes of being that are created and defined by whiteness” (23). In this sense, the suspicion I perceived might not have anything to do with my identity but the fact that whiteness is being discussed openly and honestly throughout an entire text, especially one written by a Black man.

Nominalizing whiteness is crucial to combating the evolving, dynamic nature of racism. In today’s “progressive” era, people are often comfortable talking about race when it pertains to the ways in which minorities are negatively impacted and socially determined by unjust socioeconomic and political forces. Yancy’s text, however, “flips the script” and, in doing so, shows how nuanced his argument is. *Look, A White!* nominalizes whiteness by highlighting the ways in which race *positively* impacts those who tend to think of themselves as race-less, namely, whites. The positive impact that race has on the lives of white people comes at the expense of those who are denied social goods and various forms of recognition, namely, racialized minorities. Anti-Black racism is thus “socially axiomatic” in social spaces where whiteness is taken for granted and constitutes the norm (19). This is what Naomi Zack labeled “whiteness-as-antiblack-racism” (x).

Yancy’s text demonstrates how racism always accompanies whiteness, regardless of whether white people *intend* on being racist. A common response to the charge of racism is that one cannot be racist since there are no races. This sentiment appeals to the non-reality of race in order to abate the detection of racism. Here, discussions pertaining to the ontological status of race often serve as a red herring to exploring the lived significance of racism. Yancy subverts this maneuver by “bracketing”¹ or suspending questions pertaining to the ontological status of race, i.e., the nonreferential status of the concept (17). This bracketing allows for reflection upon mundane social interactions and embodied social phenomena, those very places that so many people think of as race-less, often because they do not intend any harm or because whiteness constitutes the norm (which is why the book is about naming

whiteness). Yancy writes, “My point is twofold. First, to restrict the problem of race to conceptual analysis full stop is too limiting. Second, an exploration of race as lived takes one beyond what is thought about in the abstract to the level of how race is meaningfully lived as an embodied and messy phenomenon” (19).

This book, however, is not just about identifying whiteness in its various manifestations. Much like in *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race* (2008), Yancy argues that anti-Black racism reveals more about white identity than the actual nature of Black people. Whiteness implies structures of domination, institutional and classical forms of racism, and asymmetrical social relations that hinder human subjectivity-formation for both whites and Blacks (not to mention “others”). The insidious nature of whiteness is the way it obscures these structures of domination and perverse social relations, thus eliding social critique and political rectification.

For the author, the sinister description “Look, a Negro!” should read: “Look, a projection of white fears, insecurity and hate, but something desperately needed for white identity (a.k.a. a ‘Negro!’)” Yancy tells the reader,

At the heart of whiteness is a profound disavowal: “*I am not that!*” In other words, whiteness is secured through marking what it is not. Yet what it (whiteness) is not (blackness in this case) is a false construction that whites themselves have created to sustain their false sense of themselves as ontologically superior. However, it is a form of superiority that involves the subordination of their freedom. (20)

Predicated on the *via negativa* (that which it is not), whiteness requires anti-whiteness as a constituting facet of white identity. More specifically, whiteness needs Blackness for its existence.² “Whiteness gains its ontological purchase,” Yancy explains, “through the construction and degradation of nonwhiteness. Thus, to ‘authenticate’ their whiteness, they [whites] must enact a form of white solipsism whereby the nonwhite is erased and devalued, reduced to a form of nonbeing” (116-117). The “solipsistic” dimension of this problem—which I return to below—becomes visible when one realizes that “Blackness” is a construct of white lies about the Black body.

Disabusing the lies that are told about the Black body is perhaps the work of those thinkers concerned with the ontological status of race, which begs the question as to whether one can completely separate abstract discussions from the lived-density project. Put differently, the *experience* of racism is so severe that it is almost impossible to completely place the nonreferential status of “race” on hold. As Yancy explains, “In a form of sociality that is fundamentally structured by race and racism, black people . . . undergo ontological truncating traumatic experiences in the face of white others who refuse to recognize their humanity. In short, blacks are reduced to their epidermis, and so the experience of black people vis-à-vis race/racism presupposes the existence of white others” (19). Is the racialized Black body, that which is “truncated” and marked as inferior, necessary for racist sentiment? If so, racists need to denigrate the Black body in order to bolster their racism. Racism thus attempts to render people objects, it permeates the ontological status of Black people. My question, then, is whether or not the lived-density of “race,” that which is explored using the phenomenological analysis, always reverts back to its referential status?

If a positive formulation of whiteness is possible, one that does not depend upon the suppression, domination, and misrecognition of Otherness, then it remains to be seen. While the average white person walking down the street may

not be the progenitor of this perverse social dependency, they are implicated in racism in several ways. Just how they are implicated is the main question that follows.

Yancy pushes the reader to rethink both the explicit and implicit forms of racism/whiteness perpetuated by our existence in this racist world. Racism, in this view, is like original sin within the Christian tradition.³ It is a sin imposed upon us by the actions of those who came before. Even though we may not have bitten any apple, all are held accountable on the basis of simply being born of flesh. Unlike original sin, however, no baptism shall cleanse one of whiteness and the racism that comes along with it. Rather than be dismissive or overly compensatory, Yancy asks white people to *dwell* on their whiteness, to give thought to a topic where usually there is none.⁴ To dwell on whiteness is not to dismiss the question of racism in light of one’s lack of racist intent or appeals to meritocracy. Similarly, quietism in response to the inability to shed one’s self of racism cannot be an option. Wrestling with the fact that one may never be capable of ridding herself of racism or, for that matter, whiteness, and seeing this as a “problem” is what Yancy desires. This is no easy task and there may be no way of saving oneself from whiteness, nor is it Yancy’s job to provide hope that something like that is possible (174-175).

Through the use of the phenomenological tradition and recognition theories of human subjectivity-formation, white people are offered the opportunity to gain a critical consciousness that reveals how white identity is indebted to racism and racialized Others. For Yancy, human identity does not form in a vacuum, nor are we the atomistic, unencumbered self of much of modern thought. Instead, humans are social beings, and our social nature has a determinant effect on our agency. We are born into a world we did not create, we come to terms with ourselves in languages that we did not found, and we inherit social positions that are not of our doing.⁵ Human agency may still exist in varying degrees depending upon an assortment of factors (i.e., class, gender, nationality, one’s relationship to white privilege), but we are not free to define ourselves from nothing. How we recognize ourselves, are recognized by others, and the continuity or discontinuity stemming from these interactions is crucial to Yancy’s critique of whiteness.

More important, as the chapter on pedagogy suggests, is the understanding of the self as a work in progress transformed and shaped through intersubjective social situations that often force growth through discomfort. “Philosophy is not about technocratic control in my classrooms but about practices of dialogical mutual freedom, dialogical reciprocity, and forms of communicative emancipation that are not afraid to walk the edge of danger to concede that one was mistaken—indeed blatantly so” (133). Whiteness distorts, obviates, and even mutes the unfolding of the self, both in the classroom and in everyday social interactions. While whites and Blacks are impacted by this stultification, the former do not realize the extent of the limitations and in fact benefit by not knowing this.

Whiteness requires a non-dialectic, sometimes called an epistemic monologue or what Enrique Dussel calls an “anti-dialogue.”⁶ Whiteness does this through the projection and imposition of white ideas about what African Americans are like or supposed to be, what Yancy calls “white solipsism.” White solipsism occurs when whites expect African Americans to be nothing more than stereotypic imaginings of Blacks as criminals, welfare recipients, drug dealers, gang members, and the like. Yancy brilliantly describes this as “anterior guilt” (2). Reflecting on Frantz Fanon’s experience of being singled out by a young white boy as a “Negro,” Yancy writes:

Fanon has done nothing save be a Negro. Yet this is sufficient. The Negro has always already done

something by virtue of being a Negro. It is an anterior guilt that always haunts the Negro and his or her present and future actions. After all, that is what it means to be a Negro—to have done something wrong. The little white boy's utterance is felicitous against a backdrop of white lies and myths about the black body. (2)

Notice the use of "always already," a phrase employed at least twelve times throughout the text. Like the idea of "arriving already," which Yancy also relies upon to describe the feeling of being represented before having a chance to speak for one's self, "always already" does the work of explaining the way African Americans are *claimed* by white ideas about them.

The nature of time in the racist world becomes an interesting issue at this point, especially the "anteriority" or "claimed" nature of Black people. In white solipsism whites are seemingly the only people who temporally advance or develop, albeit through their own projections. Blacks remain caught in a vicious web of deceit about what they are supposed to be (past tense). One can easily see how this connects with the idea of an inferior, historicized Black body, as opposed to the modern white self of the future, the only being capable of making history and not just being a part of it.⁷ Rather than actually encounter and exchange with a Black person, which would allow an authentic dialogue to unfold, whites simply resort to expectations about African Americans. This is a form of idealism; one is not actually engaging with the real world or other people, but only ideas. Nonetheless, this is an idealism that is very real, as Trayvon Martin's murder reminds us. Being stuck in their own solipsistic world, whites limit their social and personal development. White identity formation is inchoate. Given the resentment and resistance Yancy receives from his students, one might think that most white people are comfortable in this half-baked state (which is why Yancy seeks to disrupt this continuity). White solipsism results in a suspension of human social development. It is the denial of humanity in the white self and the racialized other.

For African Americans who are forced to *live*, or at least have to contend with on a daily basis, white projections of fear, hate, and insecurity, being misrecognized does not allow them to fully blossom into human beings. Black subjectivity is also muted, stunted, hindered, and *handcuffed*. The operative modes of whiteness hold us back from realizing our common humanity. It is whiteness that is the problem, a form of laziness. One is too lazy to be human in the sense that one does not want to or has been conditioned to ignore other people. At what point this complacency or laziness becomes morally reprehensible is where the debate ensues.

"Fanon is clear," Yancy writes, "that the white boy, while not fully realizing the complex, historical, psychological, and phenomenological implications, has actually distorted his (Fanon's) body." He continues, "The white boy, though, is not a mere innocent proxy for whiteness. Rather, he is learning, at that very moment, the power of racial speech, the power of racial gesturing. He is learning how to think about and feel toward the so-called dark Other. He is undergoing white subject formation, a formation that is fundamentally linked to the object that he fears and dreads" (3). Notice that some culpability lies with the boy's actions (he "is not a mere innocent proxy"). However, as Yancy argues, the boy's racial practices are "learned effortlessly," which is to say that "the white boy's performance points to fundamental ways in which many white children are oriented, at the level of everyday practices, within the world, where their bodily orientations are unreflected expressions of the background lived orientations of whiteness, white ways of being, white modes of racial and racist practice" (3).

I point out the tension between the boy's culpability and the fact that his racism is learned effortlessly, imposed from outside. Many readers will object to this idea. The claim is that the child is heteronomous, socialized into his racist views. Yet this does not fit with Yancy's thoughts. He argues that the boy is not just the product of a "superimposed superstructural grid of racist ideology" (3). The boy's very comportment in a racist world constitutes a form of racism. It is now too late for the boy; he is doomed to be a racist. There may be varying degrees of racism, but no escape from its grips.

Look, A White! problematizes debates on the nature and ethics of racism, which, in Yancy's view, is something that exceeds questions of ill will, maliciousness, and hatred.⁸

Racism inhabits a shared social space where often times people do not *intend* on *being* racist, they just *are*. It is "etched" into their being (61). More specifically, however, the culpability lies in failing to recognize their whiteness (perhaps?). They are responsible for their ignorance or failure to know. This is a tough point that not many whites will accept. I can see some people being on board with the idea that they are culpable if they live in bad faith and acknowledge their privilege but do not care to do anything about it. Similarly, if whiteness does depend upon the domination of Otherness, that too will implicate the white boy in racist activity in a "noncontroversial" way (similar to how I am implicated in sweatshop labor by buying Nike). But where exactly does racist behavior become culpable in the case of Fanon's interaction with the boy? While it may be one thing to say that it is a messy situation, this is not an argument that will hold when holding people responsible for their actions.

Overall, Yancy's project is commendable, especially for its phenomenological analysis of race and racism. Let me give one more example that attempts to show how embedded racism is in our culture and why only the phenomenological analysis can reach the depths of this kind of prejudice. Yancy argues that the racist world we live in is a product of radical contingency; we do not have to inhabit a world of white privilege: "There is, however, no historical inevitability that necessitates the accrual of white hegemony and the power of the white gaze to position and subordinate nonwhites. White power and privilege are fundamentally contingent. The scopical hegemony of whiteness is grounded in structural, historical, and material processes of subjugation, dispossession and imperial invasion" (110). This is an important point to remember since people tend to view civil rights movements and progressive moments in history in a light that is only possible in the wake of racism. What I mean is that in order for many people to fully appreciate something like our first Black president, a history of colonization, slavery, lynching, Jim Crow, and other atrocious events is *required*. In other words, history tends to be viewed as teleological, and racism is rendered necessary for our current appreciation of the world as it is. If that is the case, what about the lives of those who died for the sake of our unique appreciation of Obama's accomplishment? When it comes to racism this deeply embedded, we must not brook any theodicies. Yancy will not let us.

Written in a prose that is inspiring, eloquent, and *alive* (just see his comments on speaking in clicks, p. 30), Yancy's text guides the reader through an assortment of chapters on the embedded nature of whiteness, drawing examples from post-colonial literature, popular culture, and film (an entire chapter on the movie *White Chicks!*). Along the way, the author initiates helpful discussions about the various pedagogical issues and academic dangers that come with asking people to think seriously about whiteness and racism in historically white universities. I highly recommend this text to philosophers interested in the nature of whiteness and the complex question of racism.

Endnotes

1. I am importing the term “bracketing.” Here, the Husserlian phenomenological roots of Yancy’s project become obvious.
2. In my forthcoming manuscript, *Thinking about Justice from “The Outside” of Nationality: Re-Examining the Legal and National Dimensions of Citizenship*, I argue that nationalism and legal constructions of citizenship operate in a similar fashion to Yancy’s views on whiteness. The ideas of “nation” and legal personhood have no meaning outside of their exclusive nature that denies membership or rights to those born outside the state.
3. Yancy first made a comparison between racism and original sin in “Elevators, Social Spaces and Racism” (*Philosophy & Social Criticism* 34 [2008]). He writes, “My dark body occludes the presumption of innocence. It is as if one’s Blackness is a congenital defect, one that burdens the body with tremendous inherited guilt. On this reading, one might say that Blackness functions metaphorically as original sin. There is not anything as such that a Black body needs to do in order to be found blameworthy” (847).
4. See Chapter 6, especially p. 157 (bottom paragraph).
5. This last point will set up the objection many of Yancy’s students level against him, namely, “I didn’t own slaves and we didn’t create the oppressive social position that African Americans inherit; therefore, I’m not implicated in anti-black racism.” Although these are not of our doing, one can be implicated in the maintenance of these social positions, which begs the question as to the nature of racism (I will return to this below).
6. See Enrique Dussel, *Anti-Cartesian Meditations: On the Origin of Philosophical Anti-Discourse of Modernity*, trans. George Ciccariello-Maher, www.enriquedussel.org (accessed April 5, 2010). Another idea that Dussel can offer Yancy is that of analectics (“ano” and “logos,” the reason from beyond). Dussel uses this idea to offer ways of getting past solipsistic monologues, especially those of modernity. Rather than attempt to find something of one’s self in the other (to render something the “same” and thus obviate the alterity), analectics is the reason from an-Other. It is the voice of the Other who speaks from a position of oppression (a necessary condition) and thus forces growth in the self.
7. White temporality depends upon that of blackness. Although this may be a semantic issue, I do not agree with the idea of “alterRenaissance” (see 87-93). In the chapter on colonial semiotics (chapter 3), the idea of alterRenaissance is introduced to explain how *contemporeneous* with the development of modern humanisms and the modern self is an alternative script about the inferiority of the colonized. In line with Latin American philosophers, I see modern humanisms as dependent upon the colonized. The colonized as inferior is a *constituent* factor, not a coterminous event. See Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of “the Other” and the Myth of Modernity*, trans. Michael D. Barber (New York: Continuum, 1995).
8. For a classic account of racism that hinges on intent and hatred, see J.L.A. Garcia’s “The Heart of Racism,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 27 (1996): 5-46. I often teach this essay in conjunction with chapters from Yancy’s *Black Bodies, White Gazes*. Garcia’s Kantian/Catholic views on racism make for good comparison with Yancy’s phenomenological perspective.

work of a living African American philosopher by, in this case, *his* colleagues. As I stated then, the text was not to divinize Cornel West, but to engage his work critically; indeed, to respect his work through the activity of discursive engagement. In his own lengthy and meta-philosophically insightful contribution to that text, “Philosophy and the Funk of Life,” West writes, “How sweet it is to be taken seriously by one’s colleagues and friends in our fast-paced world of superficial praise and supercilious putdown! How joyous it is to encounter critics who actually have read one’s work in a careful and cautious manner.” In stream with West, I would like to thank the six contributors who eagerly agreed to read *Look, a White! Philosophical Essays on Whiteness* and to give a careful and cautious reading of the text. It is with the same careful and cautious reading that I respond to their reviews. My hope is that this exchange will bear important philosophical fruit and stimulate further critical dialogue. I found each of the reviews to be honest, critical, and insightful. I am honored by such a critical cadre. I take responsibility for any errors in exegesis, faulty inferences, or blatant misunderstandings.

Taine Duncan begins her insightful review by pulling from Greek mythology, stating that just as Theseus betrayed Ariadne, she is capable of repaying my work with thoughtlessness. This sort of opening disclosure is what makes for mutual vulnerability. The importance, in this case, of a white woman admitting to betrayals vis-à-vis discussing my work on whiteness is a fruitful place to begin. Indeed, Taine’s admission is logically connected to the important and indefatigable need to mark whiteness: Look, a white! As white, one has all sorts of reasons to engage in betrayal. After all, whiteness has a proclivity to elide its own complicity in white racist structures and practices. Part of this self-marking is excellently performed where Duncan writes, “It is easy as a white woman to say that I was never part of the legacy of slaveholding since women were not allowed to be property owners either. I have more in common with the slave than the white man, right? Look, a white!— Me!” And at the very end of her review, she writes “Look, a White!” after describing how she thinks, as a white woman philosopher teaching race theories, my book would work well in the classroom as a resource manual for both undergraduate and graduate students. By ending with “Look, a White!” she again marks her whiteness as a site of opacity and possible ambush. In this way, she nicely enacts some of the critical dimensions of the text, applying to her own whiteness. She argues that my work enacted “a sophisticated negative dialectics of racism.” I appreciate her comparison here as I think that this is an insightful one. I think that in terms of conceptualizing whiteness/racism, there is a sense in which the complexity of *lived* whiteness/racism leaves an excess and that we must call into question the idea that antiracism is a concept that can be mastered and performed successfully through some process of Cartesian epistemic transparency.

Contrary to Duncan’s assessment that it is a book of essays as opposed to a singular argument, I would argue that while it is true this it is a book composed of essays this does not *ipso facto* mean that it does not constitute a singular argument, though one with multiple examples and diverse points of analysis. She does say, though, that it is clear that Ariadne’s thread traces from the introduction through all six chapters. I would agree, however, that chapter three, which looks at the work of Kamau Brathwaite vis-à-vis whiteness, does have a sort of “independence.” I see this especially in terms of style and its use of magical realism. Yet, the chapter was designed to deploy Brathwaite’s work within the discursive framework of the text, which was to mark whiteness, but to do so within a colonial context. I appreciate Duncan’s reading and unique interpretation of that chapter as “a wonderfully subversive

The Pleasures of Dialogue: Responses to My Interlocutors

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I edited *Cornel West: A Critical Reader* in 2001. It is the first book in American history to explore the multifaceted philosophical

psychoanalytic challenging of white civilization's norms. Sycorax alludes to the conventional psychoanalytic approach to familial structure, where the father must be present as a civilizing force, as the gateway between childhood and citizenship." The use of Brathwaite's term "missilic," however, was not to re-inscribe essentialism, as implied in Duncan's remarks, but was used in a heuristic fashion. Within this context, Duncan wonders if my argument in the introduction regarding "flipping the script" re-inscribes essentialism. She writes, "First, if this is really an activity of 'flipping' the gaze, wouldn't similar issues of fixity, essentialism, and what [Yancy] later calls missilic consciousness attend the reversal?" My answer is no. In flipping the script/gaze, the idea is to come to see whiteness in all of its barbarity, but to see it as contingent, even if deeply structural and "permanent." In flipping the script/gaze, the idea is not to reproduce the white racist same, but to create fissures in the structure and practices of whiteness; moreover, universalizing whiteness qua global does not mean rendering whiteness *essential*—ontologically or otherwise.

Duncan is correct that I do not want to allow space for "exceptional whites." Hence, my persistence, throughout the text, Look, a white! Also, there is no "risk of alienating the insights of the individual Black subjects on which this exposure of whiteness stands" as it is my contention that all Black people in North America have experienced (or will experience) the pangs of white racism as long as whiteness continues to exist as a site of privilege, power, and anti-Blackness. Duncan is troubled by my use of Christine E. Sleeter's account of students of color dropping her cultural diversity course due to frustration. Duncan wonders why, given the nature of the course, the students of color refused to take the course as "this would appear to be the perfect place for students of color to address these frustrations." My sense is that the students of color were suspicious of the possible *apolitical* nature of such courses, fearful and frustrated that they would have to explain over and over again to their fellow white classmates the realities of racism, only to have the latter doubt them. This entire process can be very fatiguing. I do think that Duncan is correct that more work needs to be done on potential alienation within the framework of reforming the academy. Yet, I am empathetic to those students of color who find it necessary to explain *ad nauseam* the realities of racism just as I am empathetic to women who find themselves in situations where they tire of explicating ways in which they are oppressed by male patriarchy.

Duncan also argues that I fail "to acknowledge the intersectional complexity of how white bodies' responses to Black bodies are also always gendered." I would not say that I "fail"; rather, I didn't think that it was important to explore this in great detail. Partly, I am suspicious of white women who have attempted to obfuscate their own whiteness by laying claim to their gender. In fact, I would say that it is a given that responses to black bodies are always already gendered, but, as I show (38), Black women's bodies still get stereotyped in white racist ways regardless of the gendered white body. And while it is true that white males see themselves as autonomous and that "the paradigm of white femininity, on the other hand, is demure, pretty, in need of protection," white women see themselves as autonomous, powerful, and bold vis-à-vis Black women. Indeed, the historical brutality of white women shown toward Black women did not place the former in the category of needing protection. It is also important to keep in mind that their need for protection was also instigated by white men, especially when it came to "Black predatory men," as a pretext for maintaining Black male subservience through acts of white racist violence.

I agree with Duncan that while my analysis of *White Chicks* does expose whiteness, there is more to be explored in that

movie at the intersections. Duncan's own fearless speech on this theme of the differential treatment of Black women by white women, however, is powerful: "This was a powerful and disturbing part of my own history that I had never confronted." This is the sort of exposure that I find pre-conditional to any serious discussion of race/racism. I applaud Duncan's honesty here, especially given the fact that she insightfully telescopes what she calls my "hallmark autobiographical approach [which] functions to provide illuminating evidence for the honesty, fearlessness, and emotional fidelity he convincingly argues classrooms should have." Given her feminist and critical theory philosophical approach to pedagogy, we are kindred spirits.

I also appreciate Duncan's assessment of my original use, in the last chapter, of Butler's *Precarious Life*. She asks a very difficult question, one that can't be addressed in any great detail here: "How do we reach and convince those who are assured of their autonomy and invulnerability?" I allude to a possible approach (161-162) where I describe being in a classroom as a guest lecturer where a white male defined himself as autonomous and invulnerable vis-à-vis his whiteness, particularly in terms of denying any complicity with the perpetuation of whiteness. I describe how two young women in that course, after experiencing his "Cartesian posturing," began to weep as they contrasted their deeply felt sense of vulnerability to structures of oppression. There was something about the fact that he was a witness not simply to propositional claims to the effect that they were vulnerable, but more importantly to their pain and suffering *up-close*. While this is not *the* solution to the problem that Duncan insightfully raises, it speaks to revealing or un-concealing the white male student's *existential dependency*, the way in which he is part of a larger and more complex integument vis-à-vis the pain of those two female students. There was a collapse of a false subject/object distinction. There was a sense of de-distancing. Perhaps this is what the famous photojournalist Kevin Carter felt which resulted in him committing suicide after experiencing so much suffering, brutality and violence, and corpses around the world. Carter's suicide note read: "I am haunted by the vivid memories of killings and corpses and anger and pain . . . of starving or wounded children, of trigger-happy madmen, often police or killer executioners."¹ Perhaps there is something in *dwelling near* the suffering that might make a difference. The white student, after all, did seem to show some sign of movement at the end of the class. Indeed, he might be said to have experienced some sort of "death," perhaps death of the illusory construction of his identity as autonomous and invulnerable. He might be said to have been *haunted*. He came *to see* something differently; he began to cross over. In the case of Carter, his "suicide creates a more complex reality. The disintegration of the subject/object dichotomy implicates us all."² While I am not arguing that physical death is the solution to the problem of whiteness, *dwelling near* those who suffer might trigger the disintegration of the subject/object bifurcation, un-concealing our mutual implication, our mutual *dependency*, and thus mutual *vulnerability*. Yet, we know that there are many who remain convinced of their autonomy and invulnerability and where this conviction leads to acts of brutality and the piling up of more corpses.

As implied here, my response to Duncan's question does not make a transcendental turn, an appeal to some ahistorical principle or to some common shared *human nature* that inexorably leads us to identify with those deemed "others." Perhaps what we have is the power of *Bildung*. Perhaps this is part of what I mean by education being a site of danger. Regarding chapter five, Duncan notes, "Taking Socrates as a model discloses more of Yancy's pedagogy, to be sure, but it also

illuminates his operative definition of wisdom. Socratic wisdom is the wisdom of dialectical tensions, of loving learning but never feeling as if knowledge is complete, it is the understanding that knowledge is power even more threatening than political power—and each of these aspects of wisdom undergirds this chapter.” Through a dynamic process of exposure, and through a critical form of *educare* (leading out, crossing over, collapsing the subject/object divide, coming to dwell near), the self is placed in danger, opened to a form of *haunting* that triggers a radically different response.

Tim Lake begins his review with an intriguing adage. He writes, “If you point your finger at me, then, there are three pointing back at you.” While not denying the importance of pointing out/to problems where they exist, Lake argues that “it is the link between the gesture of pointing and the motivation for pointing that makes pointing a risky affair. Pointing out the speck in the eye of another might reveal the plank in your own eye.” I understand and appreciate the ethical thrust of Lake’s point here, but I fail to see its relevance vis-à-vis my work on the significance of nominating whiteness—Look, a white! Perhaps Lake’s aim is just to bring attention to the overall ethical significance of avoiding arrogance and self-righteousness when it comes to faulting others. If so, there is no dispute. Or perhaps his aim is to suggest that my work does not install this sort of arrogance even as it pulls no punches in nominating whiteness. If so, I agree. Yet, his opening lines can be exploited by those (in this case, whites) who are bent upon deflecting the importance of nominating whiteness by attempting to create a false equivalence. In other words, Lake’s opening lines might encourage some whites to suggest that all groups, all people, are a little bit racist. My white students often avoid any discussion of contemporary forms of *systemic* white racism by shifting the discussion away from themselves to *individual* instances where a Black person has accosted them or used an expletive to refer to them. On this reading, they are able to obfuscate the historical weight of white supremacy and elide the specific ways in which they (unlike people of color) differentially benefit from white supremacy. My fear is that Lake’s opening line might lead to a perlocutionary effect that he did not intend. Nevertheless, Lake makes an important move to locate the specificity of my identity as a Black male and to suggest that my identity is an important source that informs my critique of whiteness. I could not agree with him more. In fact, this specificity is not unique to me, but speaks to the larger social location of Black bodies that inhabit raced spaces within North America, spaces that are marked by whiteness. While he does not name standpoint epistemology, this is precisely the theoretical framework from which I theorize the Black gaze and the importance of that gaze as a gift to white people. Lake says, “After all, it is the assumption of whiteness, the peculiar capacity to assign epistemic and deviant value to the nonwhite racial category/ies while simultaneously cloaking whiteness as normatively human that is under attack here.” Lake also adds that, for me, “The gift that Blacks offer to whites is the ‘nomination.’” I would agree with both points. Two qualifiers follow, though. First, I would add that it is the gift of the Black gaze (and the gaze of other people of color) that enables whites to develop a form of double consciousness that can lead to forms of recognition of the powerful ways in which whiteness is a master of concealment. Second, while I do stress the importance of nomination, it is important to note that the act of nomination is coupled with the insights of Black subjectivity vis-à-vis the demonstrative act of pointing out/to whiteness. Lake correctly identifies my thesis that it is within the context of mundane everyday social transactions that whiteness is learned. He writes, “Whites are not biologically hardwired towards racism; rather, they are culturally created racists.” To state Lake’s point here differently, it is my view that

white racism is *historically* grounded in various social practices, epistemic norms, and axiological frames of reference. Indeed, there is nothing *necessary* about the existence of white racism. It did not have to exist, and, by implication, it does not have to continue to exist. And while there might be something to be said about our “genetic disposition” as human beings to divide the world in meaningful ways, there is nothing genetic—it seems to me—that historically led whites to create an entire white racist *Weltanschauung* designed to maintain their hegemony over people of color.

While his above observations are correct, there are other places where he interprets my position incorrectly. For example, he writes, “Yancy dodges the problem of biological essentialism but lands in the trap of cultural determinism.” I would not say that I have “dodged” the problem of biological essentialism. Rather, I simply reject it. More correctly, “biological essentialism” is, for me, a false assumption. And while he does write that I have landed myself into the trap of cultural determinism, he adds, “Well, not quite.” He writes, “For Yancy, whiteness and Blackness are necessarily relational. Put another way, whites create Blacks so as to make their whiteness possible. So what appeared to be cultural determinism is really identity formation cloaked in a set of socio-historical practices and supremacist discourse charged by muddy reasoning: ‘You are not because I am not.’” While I agree with Lake’s emphasis upon the importance of socio-historical practices and racist discourse in my conceptualization of whiteness, at no point do/did I argue for a form of “cultural determinism.” In any event, Lake does not identify where I allegedly argued this. I would also add that it is whiteness and Blackness as specifically *racial categories* that have become “necessarily relational,” that is, relational in terms of normative hierarchical arrangements, forming a Manichean *racial* divide where whiteness is on the top and, in this case, Blackness is on the bottom. Again, there isn’t anything relationally normative about phenotypically dark and light bodies. On this score, biology does not carry the weight of a normative ought. Lake’s example of “muddy reasoning” is correct if he means that whiteness is predicated upon the “creation” of Blackness as naturally, ontologically problematic. Rather than arguing that “You are not because I am not,” I would argue that “You are not because I am.” In short, the white *I* is predicated upon the negation of the Black *you*. That is, as I argue in the text, the white “I” is constituted within a space of relationality or alterity. At the heart of whiteness is a profound disavowal: “*I am not that!*” In other words, whiteness is secured through marking what it is not. Yet, what it (whiteness) is not (Blackness, in this case) is a false construction that whites themselves have created to sustain their false sense of themselves as ontologically superior. However, it is a form of superiority that involves the subordination of their freedom. And as Duncan remarks in her review, the gift of the Black gaze is inextricably linked to a species of *existential freedom*. Yet, on my view, it is a species of existential freedom that recognizes the importance of heteronomy.

Lake also charges that I am guilty of another form of determinacy of sorts. He writes, “It is one thing to argue that whites have ‘no exit’ to the ‘structural permanence’ of white racism. But it is a different thing altogether to argue for the ‘inscrutability’ of the white racist self to whites. The former describes the racial social stratification that emerged at the start of the modern period and shows no signs of vanishing soon. But the latter comes too close to excusing whites for white racism because, here, they would seem to commit acts of racism or conspire with racist systems without the autonomy to do otherwise.” I agree with Lake that I am making two different claims, though I do not agree with the inference that he draws. On the one hand, I am indeed referencing the longstanding

material and structural dimensions of white supremacy, that is, its historical maintenance and endurance. I also argue, and the reader should note the scare quotes within the actual text, that perhaps the psychic configuration of white racist opacity has a structural “permanence” that has no exit. This way of theorizing white subject formation, which critically and creatively deploys important concepts from the work of Judith Butler, does not excuse whites. From the examples that I give within the text, from Tim Wise to Michael Richards, and others, I demonstrate that whiteness is a site of opacity and dispossession, one that helps to explain the phenomenon of what I call white ambush. This does not, by the way, deny, as Lake implies, that I don’t allow for other domains within which opacity prefigures. I do, but my point is to theorize white opacity. My point is to argue that white subject formation is grounded within heteronomous forces, that the white self is always already embedded within a stream of white constitutive processes. This description, however, is not designed to excuse whites. On the contrary, my understanding of white subject formation is a call for whites to grapple with a more complex understanding of their whiteness, to realize that undoing whiteness, honestly confronting their white constituted identities, to the extent to which this is even possible, is a constant undoing. Of course, it is easy for whites to live in bad faith through distorting how I understand white opacity, to use this conception of white subject formation as a way of fleeing their freedom. However, in the face of this opacity, whites must act, but without any illusions grounded in a fictive conception of a liberal ahistorical subjectivity. The denial of this fiction does not erase agency; rather, the denial situates agency within heteronomous forces—historic and psychic. To reiterate, Lake’s contention that I allow whites an out through the denial of their autonomy to do otherwise is simply mistaken. Lake is correct that I do not explore “the myth of the autonomous white subject” vis-à-vis the relational understanding of the self in any great detail. I agree that more work needs to be done here. My aim, though, was not to give a genealogical account of how white subjectivity has come to deem itself autonomous while asserting the non-autonomous subjectivities of people of color. However, I do provide a phenomenological description of Carla’s burgeoning white subjectivity, in chapter two, and how she lives her existence according to racial spatial logics, racial affective logics, and racial judgmental logics that have begun to feel like “life as usual.” It seems to me that these relational logics are inextricably linked to white racialized conceptions of autonomy. Lastly, Lake deploys the work of feminist scholars to suggest ways in which I have perhaps under-theorized conceptions of autonomy. My guess is that on closer inspection I hold a view of autonomy that is actually more consistent with such views than Lake realizes, but I appreciate his suggestions for further thought.

Crista Lebens’ review wonderfully performs my own preferred style of presentation. Yet, she does more. She extends her analysis in ways that deepen my understanding of what I am doing. This is also a gift. For example, concerning chapter three, she writes, “This is not only an account of *historic* events. We, in the twenty-first century (over)developed world are directly participating in this missilic mission. We are consuming brown and Black peoples, and their lands and resources, as fuel for our mercantilism. In our disposable, plastic-packaged world, we are using people as fuel to gain access to fossil fuels to package our lives conveniently and fill ourselves up with things. This is Western civilization, universal ethics, humanism. ‘Look, a white.’” Lebens provides an insightful contemporary reading of Prospero’s missilic consciousness, but she also marks that consciousness, using the title of the book, and flags the deep tension and contradiction embedded within the Western world’s conception of itself. At the beginning of her review, Lebens notes

that the book “is an emotionally difficult and important book for white people to read.” I was thrilled and honored to read the emphasis placed upon the *emotionally* difficult aspects of the book. Why? I feel that the book accomplishes what I see as its embodied significance. I want whites to read the book and to feel challenged emotionally; indeed, not to think that *intellectually* understanding the text is sufficient. The book is designed to touch, to sting, to unnerve.

Lebens also discerns the significance of how I theorize the Black body as always already ahead of itself. She writes, “In fact, the fantasy does precede him, both the historical fantasy and the contemporary fantasy as depicted in movies and confirmed by the epistemological authority of, for example, white police officers.” The phenomenological implications of the idea of the racist fantasy or the imago as always already ahead of the body are incredible. Mari J. Matsuda describes a similar situation that I explore while sitting in movie theaters. Confronted by racist images of Asians that depicted her in ways that denied her concrete presence, she notes: “Many times I have sat in dark theaters, there only to seek a little escapist entertainment, only to find myself assaulted by a racist image or epithet thrown in gratuitously without any connection to the plot.”³ It is, I must say, a very strange feeling to precede one’s own identity, to have the boundaries of one’s identity fixed in advance of one’s existential emergence.

Delineating some of the pedagogical challenges that I write about in chapter two with respect to teaching race within a predominantly white classroom, Lebens notes, “This consciousness of whiteness must be sustained, yet he [Yancy] recognizes that realizations of racism may only last a moment, or perhaps only for the duration of the course.” Lebens is spot-on. I am under no illusions that what I do in the classroom, the moments of success that are achieved in the classroom, will continue to have an impact on the lives of white students outside the classroom. And while I am excited that there are those “Aha!” moments, I face the reality that those moments will be forgotten, covered over, as my students live their lives in ways that reinforce whiteness as the invisible background. “Look, a White!” will lose its sting.

Regarding chapter five, Lebens writes, “Truth-telling is necessary, but dangerous work for people of color, who risk job, health, personal safety, and life to speak out. It is ‘dangerous’ in a psychic sense for white people who, if reflecting honestly, will lose a kind of innocence that was never real and must be lost in order to gain some degree of moral integrity.” I like this, particularly the idea of losing something (innocence) that one never had. There is a call to white maturity. The expressing of losing something that one never had sounds oxymoronic and yet it describes a real and necessary catharsis for whites. Lebens’ phrasing points to the importance that whites must lose so many of the mythopoetic constructions that they think are “real.” Like Plato’s prisoners restricted to the illusions of the cave, whites are in a similar situation. Yet, for me, there is no single, autonomous heroic act that will release them from the confines of the cave. The movement will be iterative, continuous, but not nihilistic.

In the last chapter of the book, I attempt to flesh out the importance of mapping the proverbial rabbit hole of white racism. Lebens is correct to locate this rabbit hole at “the psychic level where unconscious racism lurks despite all of the antiracist work a white person may have done”; it is at the level of white opacity. I appreciate Lebens’ acknowledgment of the ways in which I am willing to enact risk within the text. She, too, does this: “It has been my experience that, sometimes, hearing the truth about racism can bring, simultaneously, a sense of relief and a sense of grief. I felt this on reading the last chapter of the book. Relief from getting confirmation of what I had had

a sense of beforehand, the way that my racism ‘ambushes’ me, and an explanation of how and why it works. Grief, of course, because how can one not grieve the harm that I, and all white people have and will continue to perpetrate unknowingly.” It is this sort of white honesty that I encourage, that the book seeks. Yet, it is a form of honesty that does not reek of pomposity or seek adulation. Lebens is aware of this trap.

I am excited about Lebens’ suggestion that Maria Lugones’ work, which I admire, could pair with my analysis of interpellation as a black man. I am also appreciative of Lebens’ suggestion that there are important links between my work and Marilyn Frye’s concept of “whiteness.” I have used Frye’s distinction between being white and acting whitely in *Black Bodies, White Gazes*. It is a philosophically, psychologically, and ethically fruitful concept. While I agree with Frye, given the meaning of her terms, that one can be white without being whitely, I wonder, given my theorization of white embeddedness at both the material structural level and at the physical level, if one ever escapes being whitely. In short, on my view, white opacity signifies (using Butler’s discourse) having been given over from the start *as whitely*. After teaching Frye’s work, there are times when I wonder if my white students think about whiteness as outer garments that can be easily discarded. In this way, they are left with a benign white body free of whiteness. Hence, I wonder if by separating being white from being whitely frees them from thinking about the deeper ways in which having a “white body” implicates that body in whitely processes—even as they make sure to micro-manage, as it were, their whiteness. Given the existentially and socio-psychologically muddy ways in which whiteness is *lived*, perhaps the “white-whitely” distinction is too presumptuously clear-cut and does not grapple with the ways in which being white is always already a site of entanglement vis-à-vis the lives of those who suffer because of what it means *to be white*, even in (or especially in) cases where one is not clearly behaving whitely. I think that Lebens is cognizant of this problem where she notes, “*Perhaps* a white person can be white without being whitely, but a white person certainly cannot get out of being racist.” While I am skeptical of forms of white hope that tend to sidestep the complexity of white racism, I appreciate Lebens’ conclusion: “Far from leaving us with ‘no hope,’ the entire book is the gift Yancy intends it to be, and every page is an expression of hope that white people can learn and change.”

Cris Mayo’s review begins with an insightful and provocative opening stating that “George Yancy pushes and pulls with spectacularity, pointing back at the quotidian spectacles of white people whose own fascination with the appearance/spectre of Black people keep race both a fantastical presence and an awful absence.” One way of thinking about this is that whites deploy race (and the racially fantastic) when it comes to those that they have deemed “others.” As the “same,” however, race is absent vis-à-vis whites (the normative same—as nothing special to be seen or seeable). Of course, white people can’t have it both ways, to see Black people in terms of the perspective of the white imaginary and *to actually see them*. The former negates the latter. This also applied to whites themselves. Their false and racially fantastic constructions of themselves obfuscate alternative ways of iterating anti-white identities and imagining alternative identities. I appreciate Mayo’s emphasis upon the specular. While she does not mention this in the quote, *Look, a White!* is precisely written to mark whiteness, to nominate it, to carve out a space for whiteness as spectacle-object, etymologically, an object “to look” at. The objective is not to exaggerate whiteness, but to render whiteness as that which is peculiar, a spectacle to be seen, watched, and critically examined. In other words, Black bodies as spectacles have historically been sites of dehumanization, distortion, fantasy.

Flipping the script on whiteness is not designed to return a fantasy, but to deconstruct whiteness as that which takes itself as normative, which, of course, is a fantasy backed by power and privilege. Mayo says, “Fanon’s ‘look, a Negro’ is a demand to look that brings with it a demand to attempt to control Blackness as well.” The relationship between looking and controlling is obvious in the tragic situation involving the death of Trayvon Martin. In many ways, George Zimmerman, through the lens of whiteness, which is a mobile phenomenon, truncated Trayvon’s mobility. His “being on watch” was a signifier for “being on watch for *the Black*, the body that needs controlling.” The declaration, “Look, a White!” is not about control, but freedom.

Writing about the examples that I examine and the discourse that I deploy to uncover race matters, Mayo captures what has become a signature of my philosophical work. She writes, “It is this level of epistemological and phenomenological intensity that characterizes Yancy’s always-at-work philosophy.” I would agree that it is the intensity of description that I am after. It is my effort to get words to perform on the page in ways that are not only intense, but capture what I call the lived density of race. Indeed, how does one write about the lived density of race without writing with a distinct sense of intensity and urgency? She captures my effort to describe this lived density where she notes, “He also details how whiteness becomes an ontological and spatial fact, tracing the ways that white people raise children to see their experience in the world as defined through their whiteness, not yet a deeply theoretical or political concept but the simple contours of where and how white children live.” In my analysis of Carla, in chapter one, there is the attempt to describe what happens as one *becomes white*. By doing so, I shift the quotidian to the “spectacular,” to that which can and must be seen. I attempt to show how becoming white is structured through various logics that are precisely socially ontological *humdrum* and uneventful. This is partly why I encourage my white students and white audiences to remain vigilant (“to watch”); for whiteness is always already *doing* something, performing, impacting, structuring, privileging, and empowering. But as Mayo points out, there is always risk here. She writes, “Being a spectacle in response to the conflicted white gestures of misrecognition and avoidance is an uneasy tactic, especially since Yancy’s insistence can be seen to be part of the white process of misrecognition—standing up, becoming the object of ‘Look, a n-gger!’ in a rearticulated way, has opened him to charges from students that he’s making too much of Blackness.” I agree with Mayo here. I have experienced this misrecognition, which is often, consciously or unconsciously, at the expense of white self-interrogation. Either way, the white self is freed from the force of discursive nomination. And, in the process, my embodied subjectivity and the experiences that shape that subjectivity are placed under erasure. I become the angry Black man, the one who exaggerates the historical and current realities of racism, the one whose assumptions are epistemologically unsound—as a matter of course. Yet, there remains an opening, a space to undo whiteness. As Mayo insightfully states, “Yancy’s point is simple: that responsibility is already there in every move against blackness and every move, however unrecognized, toward white superiority.” Regarding my pedagogical methodology, she also says, “By showing how relations with white students can be changed through race-centered critical pedagogy, Yancy shows that spaces for rethinking and re-becoming can be opened.” Mayo’s point critically speaks to Lake’s contention that my view has implications for excusing whites or preventing whites from having the autonomy to act otherwise. The inscrutability of the white opaque self does not nullify the ethical necessity of a response to this inscrutability or an attempt to understand it, and to grapple with its constitutive reality. Like Lebens, Mayo also

locates the importance of my analysis of the phenomenological dynamic of being ahead of oneself. Mayo writes, “[Yancy] lives ahead of where he is: the click is always waiting for him.” This is an insightful point as it elaborates on how the clicking sounds that I perform in chapter one are always ahead of me. In short, Mayo’s point, one which I find to be worth exploring in greater detail, though not in this venue, is that white index fingers are always already geared in a certain way, geared up to lock their doors even in my absence. By implication, the Black body as “criminal,” “predatory,” and “dangerous” has already been solidified in the white imaginary, pre-structuring white responses to Black bodies: *Click, Click, Click*. The white body “knows” its place in-the-world; it “knows” how to avoid, on cue, the Black body’s paradoxical presence in its absence.

Throughout Mayo’s review, she uses the term “spectacle.” There are times when I am unclear of her deployment of the term. For example, when giving lectures about the persistence of racism and how racism impacts my body, does she mean to imply that my performative examples are sites of spectacle? And if so, how does this undo or collude with white historical projections of the Black body as raced spectacle? Or does she mean that the examples that I provide during such lectures have the capacity to pull white listeners into a *demonstrative* space, a “hyperbolic space” that guarantees a certain quality of attention? Aside from my failure to grasp the use of this term in each instance throughout her review, Mayo is correct that I don’t limit the significance of my own lived experiences of white racism to a kind of autobiographical singularity, as it were. She writes, “There is a sense in any account of spectacle and misrecognition that these are singular occurrences and what Yancy’s version of this does is inhabit the singularity of lived incidents, particular relationships, and events, but with a broader historical and contemporary account of these vivid situations as persistent patterns.”

Lastly, I would like to thank Mayo for bringing to my attention the complex ways in which intersectionality works vis-à-vis questions of “white female masculinity” and how such bodies are perceived in their public re-presentation. She writes, “White women, I think, displace their fears about violence in private onto bodies they perceive as threatening in public. They startle and hold purses and children closer in my presence too, misreading white female masculinity as white masculinity or simply not understanding gender complexity. Likely they’re more frightened of Black masculinity than my only-sometimes-read female-masculinity.”

David Roediger’s review is appreciated not only for its profound conceptual trajectories and the fact that his prolific work on whiteness has been principled and critically insightful over the years, but his review speaks to his own courage to engage in self-critique. For this, I am thankful, though he knows all too well that this nod of thanks does not carry implications for his “exceptional whiteness.” If it did, it would not only belie my own approach to whiteness, but would also issue in Roediger’s rejection of such a claim. This partly speaks to Roediger’s understanding of the complexity of whiteness, its seductions, its structural gravity, and its deep and persistent psychic density. In his review, he identifies with the mundane and yet powerful *clicking* sounds made by white adults as they protect their white children from the “dark” outside. He also argues that it is “moms and dads, aunts and uncles, grandmas and grandpas who teach racism, while also simultaneously giving first lessons in hypocrisy, in the hollowness of Christian love, and in the absurdity of promises of security.” Commenting on how my work rejects a simple formulaic approach to anti-racism, he writes, “To argue specifically that becoming an antiracist white does not mean ceasing to be a white racist breaks boldly from

more therapeutic models of antiracist training that suppose stages of racism are passed through, are gotten over, and are capable of yielding to an anti-racist whiteness that is much more a happy consciousness than the productively troubled one that Yancy holds out as desirable.”

What is also powerful about Roediger’s rejection of the conception of the atomic, lone white liberal subject who fights against the powers of white racism is how he positions his own epistemic tutelage vis-à-vis the dynamics of whiteness. He writes, “For me, trained in African American history, debts to Toni Morrison, Sterling Stuckey, Langston Hughes, Ida B. Wells, bell hooks, and, among many others, above all James Baldwin and W.E.B. Du Bois, can be acknowledged but cannot be fully repaid.” He also incorporates this insight and epistemic alliance in his pedagogy: “I have never taught courses on the critical study of whiteness as in my view whiteness cannot be understood apart from the experiences of peoples racialized as not white.” Roediger is also cognizant of the ways in which whites privilege other whites with a certain epistemic subjectivity, denying that same subjectivity to Blacks, for example, who have critically given attention to whiteness/racism. Much of my work in *Black Bodies, White Gazes, and Look, a White!* has explored the deep and dense everyday lived experiences of being Black in an anti-white world and how whiteness is far more complex than many white theorists have thought. What I have not explored in any detail is how my work might have relevance to movement building. Roediger thinks that it does. He writes, “I think though that Yancy’s work in the book has profound, and profoundly healthy, implications for movement building. The ability to see the anti-racist white as also a racist deflates the politics of guilt and perfectionism.” I am encouraged by this, particularly given my own humble attempt to change the world and not simply to interpret it differently. I have deployed this pedagogical value within the context of my classrooms, pushing ways of doing philosophy, of loving wisdom in pedagogical action, that engage white students in ways that trouble the core of who they take themselves to be. Roediger captures what is at stake in this form of pedagogy where he notes, “To argue from inside the discipline of philosophy for passion, engagement, and emotion as keys to the winning of knowledge is to expose oneself to hazard.” In chapter five, I write about how one white male attempted to get me fired from my current position through a form of bad faith rhetoric that I was out to corrupt the white students at my university and that my views about whiteness were anti-Catholic. If only he had appreciated what I do through the eyes of Roediger: “Yancy here describes a career much devoted to tarrying around such danger, and brilliantly shows why insistence on headlong confrontation with whiteness is actually a great gift to his white listeners, readers, and students.”

What I found particularly insightful about Roediger’s review is how he deploys a narrative style filled with rich anecdotes and personal experiences. His title sets the stage: “I Am Not George Yancy.” It speaks powerfully to the importance of 1) rejecting the desire to conflate experiences between whites and people of color, 2) the importance of deconstructing white narcissism, 3) the recognition that, as white, he does not escape the entanglements of white racist embedded-ness and white racist opacity, and 4) the rejection of a racialized epistemic arrogance. It is this sort of respect for difference/alterity that creates stronger bridges of alliance. The power of his title is related to an experience that he shares about receiving a video clip, titled “I Am Not Trayvon Martin,” which involves a young white woman correctly arguing that it is problematic for whites to declare, “I Am Not Trayvon Martin.” Indeed, she argues that it is more appropriate to wear a shirt that declared: “I am George Zimmerman.” Roediger insightfully argues that this reversal,

one which is more truthful in terms of capturing the actual ways in which anti-Black racism is so pervasive, subtle, and destructive, signals “how racial learning, as much by osmosis as design, infects us with the kind of panic that predisposed Zimmerman to take Martin’s life. ‘Look, a white,’ and it is I,’ said the video in effect.” Imagine a sea of white faces as far as the eyes can see shouting in unison: “I am George Zimmerman!” “I am George Zimmerman!” “I am George Zimmerman!” As Roediger implies, the young white woman’s boldness speaks to the emphasis that I place upon the importance of whites *tarrying* with their whiteness and its complexity. Roediger uses the video example to further push my analysis. He points out that the young white woman praises her “parents as the godsend warding off racism.” It is not that he does not believe in the moral fortitude of her parents, but that her parents were being valorized as “exceptional whites.” It is here that Roediger finds value in my work that situates the anti-white racist within a structural and psychic context of constitutive racism, and, thus, as stated above, a move that deflates the politics of guilt and perfectionism. Roediger ends his review by again drawing an important demarcation, one signalling both aspects of white privilege and the suspicion of Black bodies a priori. Describing how an African American colleague of his was wrongly treated and came under fire after raising the issue about ways in which white students continue to appropriate African American culture with little or no desire to go to school with them, he talks about how things would have been different for him had he raised the same issue. Linking this to his pedagogy, he concludes, “It makes my teaching about whiteness more predictable and less impactful than that described in *Look, a White!*”

I enjoyed the way that Grant J. Silva began his review with a fascinating story about the cover of the book. He found that the cover itself became a site of curiosity for those (I assume mostly whites) who caught a glimpse of the title. The title does have a demonstrative, “self-performative” dimension about it, especially given the large white letters and the index finger. The word “Look” on the cover calls attention to itself. Moreover, the fact that “Look” is followed by “A White!” only ups the intrigue, especially for white people. The pointing index finger is indeed *indexical*—identifying something, pointing it out. My sense is that many whites would simply respond: “What is there to see?” This, of course, is part of the hub and rub of the problem with whiteness. It refuses nomination, especially by those who know it by a different name—terror, colonialism, the lynch law, oppression, murder, castration, hate, and discrimination. Silva notes that “*Look, a White!* challenges readers to ‘nominalize’ the various ways whiteness permeates their life and our society.” While Silva’s point is accurate, I would only caution those who would argue that to “nominalize” whiteness has to do with nominalism, which implies existing in name only. I was not surprised that once those who were curious about the book found out that the author is African American they responded with, “I don’t see what a Black man can know about whiteness...” So, at the beginning of Silva’s fine review, the structure of whiteness, its performance, is made evident. The doubt that a Black man or woman or a nonwhite person, more generally, might know about whiteness attempts to obfuscate the historic and current ways in which whiteness is tied to the lives of Black and other nonwhite persons. It is as if to be white means to be “something” of which only white people have exclusive knowledge. Yet, it is this presumption that belies the sheer weight of the terror of whiteness visited upon those bodies of color. The presumption elides the dynamic ways in which whiteness has always already touched the lives of people of color in deeply problematic ways, the ways in which its mode of being and structure implicate so many beyond itself, and the ways in which its genesis is inextricably linked to the lives

of nonwhite people, their oppression and existential malaise. More precisely, one might argue that if whiteness is structurally dependent upon the denigration of Black and other nonwhite persons, then whiteness, the meaning of whiteness, is not some hidden property, but is always already public, always already constitutive of the suffering of non-white people. Embedded within the core meaning of whiteness is a profound paradoxical dependency and negation. “I don’t see what a Black man can know about whiteness” denies Black critical subjectivity regarding whiteness. Indeed, the doubt and denial that a Black man knows anything about whiteness means that whites have nothing to learn about themselves through the critical perspectives of Black people. As Silva correctly states, “Whiteness requires a non-dialectic, sometimes called an epistemic monologue or what Enrique Dussel calls an ‘anti-dialogue.’” This anti-dialogical stance, however, rejects a priori what I call the gift of the Black gaze. There is no gift believed to be given. What can you give to those who have everything? In the case of white expansionism and usurpation, I mean this quite literally. Yet, what does it mean to have everything at the expense of having an identity that is perhaps empty or at least solely dependent upon the negation of nonwhite others? And while it is true that all identities are *relational* and thereby involve the important and indispensable feature of dependency, whiteness is constituted by a relationality that is perhaps entirely dependent on the process of *violent negation*. In the process, Blacks, in this case, are ontologically truncated whereas whites get to live the illusion of freedom and independence. While I would like to know about how Silva theorizes temporality here, he insightfully writes, “In white solipsism whites are seemingly the only people who temporally advance or develop, albeit through their own projections.” Silva also writes, “This is a form of idealism; one is not actually engaging with the real world or other people, but only ideas.” While I like this concept, I would only add that it is a form of “idealism” that helps to keep whites “innocent.” As such, it reeks of bad faith and idolatry. In addition, as Silva notes, it is a form of idealism that brutally impacts the bodies of nonwhite people. And, yes, this idealism is misanthropic and stifles white maturity, and in the process leaves Black subjectivity, to use Silva’s powerful wording, “handcuffed,” which points not only to the sense of feeling constrained by white gazes, utterances, and gestures, but is indicative of a racist prison industrial complex bent on confining and controlling Black embodied mobility.

I appreciate Silva’s attempt to bridge the distinction that I draw between the abstract concerns of those philosophers who deal with the question of the referential status of the concept of race and my own density project. He has given me much to think about regarding that apparent divide. Silva writes, “My question, then, is whether or not the lived-density of ‘race,’ that which is explored using the phenomenological analysis, always reverts back to its referential status?” I would say no. The project of exploring race as *lived* is not dependent upon the referential status of race, that is, whether or not race is something that cuts at the joints of reality. But even if race was real, say, like rocks and trees and galaxies, the *lived* dimensions of race would still require elucidation and exploration independently of its existential status as real. On another note, I really appreciate how Silva interprets my theorization of racism vis-à-vis those conceptions of racism that are tied to hatred and ill will as preconditions or inextricably linked to racism. I think that this is a very fruitful tension for more philosophical discussion. Silva is correct that my conception of racism implicates those whites who have good intentions and might be said not to hate Black people or people of color. It is also inclusive of white antiracists precisely through the ways in which I theorize the embedded character of white racism and the ambush

experience that is predicated upon complex ways in which white subject formation is a site of opacity and dispossession. Roediger captures this in his review. Within the context of my understanding of white racism, Silva writes that whites “are responsible for their ignorance or failure to know.” Yes, there is a sense in which I want to say, “Well, you should have known.” Also, despite their ignorance or failure to know, this in no way mitigates the suffering of Black people that is dependent upon what whites do or do not know. In the introduction where I discuss the little white boy and how he interpellates Fanon’s body, it would be unfair to say that the boy is responsible for his ignorance or failure to know. This, of course, raises the larger issue of whether or not there are forms of ignorance regarding racism or sexism that do not implicate bad faith. My aim is not to address this question here. Yet, concerning the white boy, Silva is correct that I don’t characterize the boy as simply the product of a superimposed superstructural grid of racist ideology. Indeed, as I argue and Silva quotes, “the boy’s very comportment in a racist world constitutes a form of racism.” Silva adds, “It is now too late for the boy; he is doomed to be a racist. There may be varying degrees of racism, but no escape from its grips.” Yes and no. By his very comportment, learned racist practices, and by his structural situational reality within a white dominant culture (in this case France), it is too late for the white boy; he is already complicit. In short, in this case, I can argue that the white boy need not be responsible for his ignorance, and yet he is still complicit. Then again, it is “never too late” for the white boy. *There will be work to be done.* Silva’s review is insightful and suggestive, confirming the reality that one’s work is always open to revision.

Endnotes

1. See Laurie M. Cassidy’s “Grotesque Un/knowning of Suffering: A White Christian response,” in *Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?* edited by George Yancy (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 41.
2. *Ibid.*, 42.
3. Mari J. Matsuda, *Where is Your Body? And Other Essays on Race, Gender, and the Law* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 163.

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