

*The Door of ~~No~~ Return*  
*Being-As-Black*

By,  
Michael E. Sawyer, PhD  
University of Pittsburgh

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Bear with me.  
Ralph Ellison  
*Invisible Man*

Introduction

b. **A Black Future:**

On March 3<sup>rd</sup> of 2018 in the East Liberty neighborhood of Pittsburgh, artist Alisha Wormsley installed a visual art object that read “There Are Black People in the Future.” After public outcry the landlord, We Do Property, forced the text to be removed. Eve Picker, of the realtor, explained the removal by saying she “heard from a number of people in the community who said that they found the message offensive and divisive.”<sup>1</sup> After other members of the Pittsburgh community complained about the removal, the property manager was driven to “authorize its reinstatement.”<sup>2</sup> Despite all of that, it is still important to think seriously about what could be offensive and divisive about the notion that there will be Black people in the future.

The artist, Alisha Wormsley in the same article referenced here is quoted as saying:

It started out as a black nerd sci-fi joke. A response to the absence of non-white faces in science fiction films and TV. Very much a response to many Afrofuturist writings, like Florence Oyeke’s: [...] “Afrofuturism dares to suggest that not only will black people exist in the future, but that we will be makers and shapers of it, too.”<sup>3</sup>

It is clear that to some members of the community in Pittsburgh, one in which Black people have been a vital component for over 100-years, the notion of their positive existence in the future is both offensive and divisive. That can only be the product of the notion that, in the same vein as white supremacist anger at the positive assertion of Black life mattering meeting with the grotesque corrective that “All Lives Matter” or perhaps worse the substantively terroristic threat that “Blue Lives Matter”, the presence of Black people as something other than objects of control is a destabilizing force. The abstract notion that there will be Black people; necessarily denying that we will be wiped out in some fashion troubles the project of white supremacy. Black existence, in the minds of those with this view, is strictly predicated upon the terms and conditions established by white people.

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Anything else, much less an assertion of sovereign Blackness, cannot be countenanced even as a billboard.

This book has as its central ambition the presentation of a work of speculative theory and philosophy that proposes the manner in which Black people bring into being that future and also what the world that serves as the spatial/temporal context for that existence looks like. This requires that we make progress in answering four questions that are central to Africana Thought:

1. What do people of African descent, Black People, find themselves facing;
2. What is the proper, and here I mean destabilizing, response to that situation;
3. What is the telos or logic of that response; and
4. What is the overarching ethos that will be the guide to a beneficial resolution?

What this means is that an important component of Africana Thought, and here that term is meant to encompass both theory and philosophy specifically in addition to other modalities of inquiry, is to describe the past and present and to reach beyond the horizon of the foreseeable to propose a future where, following Alisha Wormsley, there are Black people.

To that end, the manner in which this work of speculative theory and philosophy begins with a reflection on an art installation, this project will endeavor to render inoperable the traditional boundaries around those disciplines. With that in mind, the next move is to trace the implication for thinking about the future of Black people through a musical performance from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### b. We Don't Need No More Trouble:

In 1977, Bob Marley & the Wailers performed live at the Rainbow Theater in London during their Exodus Tour. The video of the performance of the medley, *War/No More Trouble* that is available online is the text that serves as the point of departure for this effort to think beyond the seemingly inescapable subjective paralysis of Anti-Black Racism. This is substantively due to what I understand to be its import for the theory and practice of Africana Philosophy, the Black Radical Tradition, and

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the future of Blackness as we have and will come to understand it. Marley and the Wailer's performance traces the sweep of Black Radical or Black Revolutionary Thought from the slave coffle to the present moment and beyond just as this text aspires.

This tracing, I am proposing, reveals itself as the answer to what I understand to be questions that are both central to Africana thought. 1) What do people of African Descent (Black People), find themselves facing; 2) what is the proper response to the situation; 3) what is the telos or logic of that response, and finally; 4) what is the overarching ethos that will be the guide to a beneficial resolution? The performance by Bob Marley and the Wailers under consideration here effectively asks and answers each of these concerns through musical interpretation of Haile Selassie's speech at the United Nations in 1963 that clearly states the situation at hand, asking and answering concerns 1&2 delineated above, unequivocally asserting that:

Until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned, everywhere is war. And until there are no longer first-class and second-class citizens of any nation, until the color of a man's skin is of no more significance than the color of his eyes. And until the basic human rights are equally guaranteed to all without regard to race, there is war. And until that day, the dream of lasting peace, world citizenship, rule of international morality, will remain but a fleeting illusion to be pursued but never attained...now everywhere is war.<sup>4</sup> (Selassie. 374)

I want to spend a bit of time interrogating the first lines quoted here that require that the philosophy of white supremacy be first discredited and in the aftermath of that exercise abandoned. This means several things from a methodological perspective for this project. First, in order to thoroughly discredit a philosophical system, it must first be thoroughly interrogated; we will do that in this project. Second, that system is then abandoned which is substantively different than being opposed. Africana philosophy and theory have, as a necessary component of their viability for the project of seeking freedom for the aggrieved, been necessarily oppositional practices. Endeavoring to construct a philosophical system that speculates on a future that is untethered from a dialectical

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relationship to white supremacy, that effort must also be left behind but never discredited. What Emperor Selassie and Marley understand as “war” is just the physical manifestation of the force of thoroughgoing interrogation that discredits and facilitates abandonment. These moments ought not be confused.

The performance in question here, the text that performs Emperor Selassie’s text, opens with the band’s distinctive drum figure from Carlton Barrett, that, when read through its presence in the context we are exploring, must always be understood as a call to radical action and ultimately war. As mentioned, the text of Emperor Selassie’s speech serves as the stuff from which Marley and the Wailers weave this complex engagement with the metaphysics of Blackness in the process of revolutionary reconstruction of identity. By the beginning of the verse, when Marley begins to press home his indictment of white supremacy via Selassie, the seemingly synchronous relationship between the pace of Marley’s lyrics and the methodic vamp of Tyrone Downey on keys that leads the rhythm section is discernably shattered. What I mean is that the pace of the rhythm section quickens, and Marley resists the urge to flee and remains steady in his methodic pursuit of the argument. In exploring this performance and listening closely it appears that the rhythm section is running *forward* to the place of resolution; away from the chaos and mayhem of the war Bob Marley, at this stage of things, is insisting upon. They cannot wait but there is still work, both physical and metaphysical, to be done.

This is indicative of a primary methodological question that arises out of the need to discredit and then abandon white supremacy. This proposes that this is a systemic replacement that happens as the result of a process. An intellectual journey rather than a sudden revelation. Although the moment of crossing may very well appear as such, it is in actuality the result of a working through that seems to be what Marley insists upon with and against the impatience of the rhythm section. Process. Journey versus sudden revelatory alteration that recognizes the importance of not rushing while at the same time resisting the impulse to become comfortable in that exercise.

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Here, my attention is immediately drawn to the backing vocals and movements of Rita Marley, Marcia Griffiths, and Judy Mowatt: The I-Threes. Far from existing as mere background to the lead vocals of Marley, The I-Threes serve here as the disciplining force that dissipates the unresolvable tension between Bob and the rhythmic fugitivity of Aston “Familyman” Barrett and the aforementioned drummer and keyboardist. They, the I-Threes, are at one and the same time a Greek Chorus, the Three Weird Sisters that foretold the tragedy that would befall Macbeth, and the prime meridian against which this musical and philosophical chaos operate. The metaphoric relationship to Macbeth is important here. In this sense, as with the Weird Sisters, Macbeth, here Marley who is visiting these soothsayers must, contra the Dane, not seek sovereignty within the context of the system as it stands. That project is doomed to fail. In my reading of this milieu, it is the I-Threes who mark, verify, and demand the parameters of the liminal space between the stages that Bob Marley is traversing. At the 3 minute and 26 second mark in the performance, Marley is driven from the mic and joins the I-Threes to exhort them to re-double their metronomic repetition of the consequences and corrective to this form of oppression: “War”. They, the I-Threes, are non-plussed. Their facial expressions belying the gravity of this argument and in their failure to react, drive Marley back to his microphone to continue his narrative. At 3 minutes and 57 seconds the band, the I-Threes, and Marley reach a point of transition when he voices the next phase of the conflict, uttering “we don’t need...” and is frozen between war and the desire for the absence of trouble, for 12 seconds: in the Break, the Cut where Ellison’s Jack-the-Bear explains that:

Sometimes you’re ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around.<sup>5</sup> (Ellison.4)

Here, in this space, we can begin to tease out several things about the pause, halting, rest, or in Ellisonian terms, hibernation, that we witness here. Motion is of critical importance here both in the performance and the forward momentum of Black Study, but motion is necessarily relative.

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Relative in at least two senses. The first is relative to macro movement that can seem immobile because of its vast nature. An oversimplified way to think about this is that as I am writing this my desk appears to be stable but is only relatively so when in fact the earth is rotating, as is the solar system, as is the galaxy, etc. What this means is that even in segments of temporal examination that motion appears to be static it may only be so relative to larger movements and/or it may be in steady motion without acceleration that gives the appearance of immobility. Marley has halted his individual motion forward but the machine of transportation they have constructed together has grown in mass to accommodate the appearance of a lack of movement.

This is revelatory. Thinking here of Ellison through Marley who is ahead of the band in that he is all too aware of where this argument leads but behind their flight to safety: Now. Resonant with our own “Now”, Marley is jarred from his space of nodal existence by the opening drum figure and is thrown back to the circularity of reprising the problematic; however accurate, the cul-de-sac of pessimism happens to be with respect to its taxonomy of the problem at hand, it does not provide forward momentum. I want to linger here in the fulsome nature of the break and ensure that we understand that it is far from a node that is characterized by absence but rather a space/time that portends possibility. Mark this as a space of vertical temporal movement rather than the horizontal movement from past through the fleeting present to the always arriving future. This dis(re)orientation will be explored in this project in great detail. Suffice it to say at this point that as time halts in the common experience of horizontal orientation, Marley has conjured for this exploration/journey a space that facilitates this temporal shift and in that requires the patience to deal with the depth of the node before revisiting its breadth.

He literally begins again; the band has moved on to the next phase while he pulls the I-Threes back to the point of departure. It is important to note that this recurring same is necessarily different, as Marley has traversed this territory he has learned, and this learning allows the possibility of a



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retracing of this space that has the potential to yield a new result. This, returning to Ellison, cannot be the boomerang that Jack-the-Bear cautions against. “(Beware...” Ellison writes, “of those who speak of the *spiral* of history; they are preparing a boomerang. Keep a steel helmet handy.)”<sup>6</sup> (Ellison. 6) Marley will have none of it. He has found the path forward where he left it and leaves the I-Threes repeating “War” as he (re)establishes the point of transition, returning to the threshold of the node singing again “We don’t need...” and the I-Threes drop the repetition of “War!” and describe the need to be without trouble. In the next verses, what serve as the Bridge, Marley addresses the wages of pessimism after attesting that “what we need is love sweet love” he exhorts the listener to “Speak happiness. We’re sad enough without our woes. Come on and speak of love, we’re sad enough without your wars.” I hear this lyric variously as the requirement to “Speak” and/or “Seek” happiness. In the case of Marley’s exploration and the project here to seek is to speak and vice versa. At this moment of crossing, forward motion requires naming and in the production of that sonic object to already have found in the seeking through speaking the way forward. In this Marley is both in preparation and beyond the threshold. Between war and love, between discrediting and abandoning with the middle term being the speaking and seeking of Happiness.

This formulation is complicated in that it can be read as Marley shifting the territory of what constitutes seemingly irreconcilable states of being. What may be useful here is to imagine that the speaking of happiness into existence facilitates the introduction of the type of euphoria needed to progress to a position of agency under conditions of threat. Agency that requires a termination of the state of being warred upon to a state of war against just that condition progressing from a position of happiness to that of love even with the attendant chaos that in its previous instantiation mired the subject in woe or what we have come to term melancholia. The human condition under the threat of racialized coercion is a sadness of sufficient depth and breadth to be sufficiently articulated net of additive woes beyond that reality. Further, by resolving the imperative of conflict with the palliating

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force of Love, the articulation of happiness overwhelms that same condition of sadness that arrives along with woes and foes just as the silencing of woes accomplishes alone and in some measure.

Marley, with this journey both backward and forward from the point of *now*, is indicative of the current moment in Black Radical Theory and Philosophical practice that struggles to find a way forward without forgetting the point of departure. The title of this book, *The Door of ~~No~~ Return*, that leaves the negation of the possibility of return in place to be refuted is written to propose that the metaphysical obstruction represented by the Door of No Return can be penetrated. To do so is to imagine a different World than the one that confounds something like the positive formation of Black Self-Consciousness under the coercive regime of white supremacy and Anti-Black Racism. This project is speculative in its vision and convinced that there is a way of Being-As-Black that is available to us that exceeds the seemingly impenetrable and irreducible nature of Anti-Blackness as the dominant discourse of the world as we know it. The notion of Imagination will be a constant companion here and it is important to take a moment to articulate its power for a radical political project. The term bears the bulk of the weight of this effort to think the futurity of Blackness beyond the boundary of Anti-Blackness. What this means is that the Black Aesthetic as the manifestation or product of the machine of the imagination is simultaneously the way backward, a way to linger in the fullness of the break/present, and to see, manifest, and secure the future. With this in mind, the project has reached a point of oscillation from the sonic practice of Marley's sonic philosophizing to literature.

### b. The Black Aesthetic As Guide:

It may be useful to make some foray into articulating how the world we currently live in is a manifestation of the imagined racist, sexist, homophobic, etc. world that did not exist prior to it being conjured into existence. As a practical matter, the notion of Manifest Destiny serves as a negative instantiation of the power of imagination. The 19<sup>th</sup> century belief on the part of white settlers that they would inhabit and completely dominate that land (of which they had no actual awareness) between

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the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans was an act of imagination that now is all to true. Imagination in this project will introduce into our current culture the notion that there can be a kenosis of the logic that renders our world a debased place for the existence of Black people that will then be filled with a new way of Being that can only be properly described as the existence of a New World that we will find expressed clearly in the imagination of thinker Toni Morrison.

This project is deeply indebted to the work of Toni Morrison in general; an artist whose *oeuvre* exemplifies what I am situating as the fact that the Black Aesthetic has the “answer” to this dilemma, and it is the primary challenge of Black Radical Thought to piece together the terms and conditions of what is a “new” manner of Black Being that is the result of re-thought and re-imagined modalities of cognition and consciousness. Morrison provides the road map to that place in her masterful essay “Race Matters” in the collection *The Source of Self-Regard*, where she frames the depth and breadth of the possibilities, writing:

The distrust that race studies receives from the authenticating off-campus community is legitimate only when the scholars themselves have not imagined their own homes; have not unapologetically realized and recognized that the valuable work they do can be done no other place; have not envisioned academic life as neither straddling opposing worlds nor as a flight from any...W.E.B. Du Bois’s observation is a strategy, not a prophecy or a cure. Beyond the outside/inside double consciousness, this new space postulates the inwardness of the outside; imagines safety without walls where we can conceive of a third, if you will pardon the expression, world, “already made for me, both snug and wide open, with a doorway never needing to be closed.”  
Home.<sup>7</sup> (Morrison, *Self-Regard*. 139.)

I want to trouble, in the sense the late Congressman John Lewis employed the term, “good trouble”, the account of home that Morrison granted us as not dependent upon memory but literally the same as it. Home then, in the absence of memory is not home and is vacated of this peace and shelter. The sinister technology of the Middle Passage and the appearance of the Door that appears to resist return is made of the absence of memory or, following this logic, it is itself the absence of memory. The durability of Blackness before, after, and in excess of the world of Anti-Black Racism is

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obscured by the technology introduced through the horror of the Passage, the opening of the Door that will be shut and blocked with a void that persists in resisting knowing.

The telos here, Home, is a progression from Morrison's essay entitled "Home" reproduced in the 2019 publication, *Mouth Full of Blood: Essays, Speeches, Meditations*. Morrison's argument is a response to a colleague's curiosity about her upbringing and she writes the following in response:

This region (Lorain, Elyria, Oberlin) is not like it was when I lived here, but in a way it doesn't matter because home is memory and companions and/or friends who share the memory. But equally important as the memory and place of one's personal home is the very idea of home. What do we mean when we say "home"?<sup>8</sup> (Morrison. *Mouth*. 17)

As we will see, the implications of finding ways to deal with the complex barriers to the home-sustaining power of memory erected by white supremacy is the Prime Mover in this project. I am using the term Prime Mover here carefully and mean for it to work in the way it does in the realm of ontology. It is necessary to ensure that the catastrophe of the Middle Passage and its associated tidal waves are divested of the power to be understood as the cause to the effect of Black Memory in response to its destruction of unfettered access to the same. The conceptualization of Black Memory intended to be developed here through Morrison locates its origination in the ontological existence of Blackness that, in its fundamental nature, survives points of transition both coercive and validating. What that means is that the understanding that we will trace here that reaches beyond the Middle Passage and its echoes to ground subjectivity is necessitated by that coercive reality but the memories themselves are self-referential objects that are restored through the kinetic power of durable Blackness; what Morrison references here as Home. What that means through a series of what I will describe as mechanical relations is that Morrison's notion of Home that equals or is constructed of Memory is Blackness that is coexistent and productively understood as Home.

This leads to a position that allows one to consider the implication of Blackness in the perceived absence of Memory forced into deriving an understanding of Home under the duress of

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this negativity. This product of the illogic and coercive dystopia of white supremacy and anti-Blackness can lead to the debilitating notion that Blackness does not, did not, and will not exist in the absence of coercive and dialogically oppositional whiteness. The dominant cognitive lens that refracts reality in the world that comes into being at and through the Middle Passage that exists as both a physical and metaphysical object, both fleeting and durable, is designed to render the durability of Blackness as at best idiosyncratic if not an empirical impossibility.

This project intends to take seriously Morrison's proposal to search for a new World that allows us to understand what we indeed need to be meaning when we use the term "Home." Morrison's quote is generative for this text but more importantly places an explicit challenge before the Black Radical Tradition: to think and act beyond the binary proposition of positive Black subjectivity indexed against Anti-Black Racism. The fact that she immediately in explicit and implicit terms summons W.E.B. Du Bois and his canonical thinking from *The Souls of Black Folk* to this discourse is positively destabilizing to the state of Black Thought that in many ways proceeds from the thinking in *Souls*. There is the obvious reference to what I have called Tripartite Subaltern Consciousness<sup>9</sup> that will be examined in some detail in this project but at the outset it is the reference to "space" and then "world" that require our immediate attention before we can get to the point of defining "Home".

b. **Space- and Place-iality:**

All of these terms have, in some sense, become ossified in a variety of disciplinary formations. Understanding that, it is important here to gesture at a threshold feature of the methodological argument of this book that first wants to strenuously resist the notion that Black Aesthetic practices, broadly considered are not doing philosophical work. That is not true. The Black Aesthetic, broadly understood, is philosophy and philosophical in ways that philosophy should recognize but chooses not to and in fact many ways that philosophy, as currently constructed, is generally incapable of

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recognizing. This statement is in some ways a response to recent and important scholarship that provides an opening for this discussion that argues the opposite in some sense.

Note that Morrison first marks the existence and cognitive relevance of a “new space [that] postulates the inwardness of the outside: imagines safety without walls where we can conceive of a third world.”<sup>10</sup> (Morrison. *Self-Regard*. 139.) This project is dedicated to making some progress in defining a liminal space described here as the position of and for observation of the *third, if you will pardon the expression world*, that will itself be explored that will appear as the Threshold of The Door of ~~No~~ Return. In dealing with what I call the liminal space *of* and *for* observation, it is necessary to map a series of inter-related and inter-connected spaces and to designate those spaces of relative stability and those of relative or constant instability in that they are deeply implicated in the generative stuff of the imaginary. In order to accomplish that, a thorough exploration of the abstract nature of both “space” and “world” and the relationship between the two is imperative.

It is important at this point to give an account of the relationship that will be developed here between Space, World, Memory, Home, and ultimately an account of Blackness that is predicated, along with each of these elements, on cognition.

First, this section will develop a series of diagrams, substantively “maps” or a “mapping” in the sense that Sylvia Wynter employs the term, of the Spaces and Worlds that are the operating context explored here. This argument, in its initial instantiation, will proceed in linear fashion along a predictable and generally accepted timeline that progresses from past to the future. There will be instances and phenomenon that require that we abandon notions of the linearity and horizontal nature of time for other ways of indexing events, and they will be noted. Because of the current context of our being we exist in a World brought into kinetic reality through what we understand as the Middle Passage. With that in mind we must give some account of the World prior to that event. Figure 1 here

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lays out the foundational structure of the Worlds and Spaces being discussed that will be further developed in this project.

In the detail presented by the diagrams that will follow, we will find that Worlds contain and are somewhat made up of Spaces. Spaces are made of memory in the sense that the boundaries of an individual event/space are bracketed by memory. What philosopher Alain Badiou describes as “The Event”. These spaces or “Memory Boxe”s can be displaced, misplaced, disoriented, forgotten, re-ordered, remembered, mis-remembered and/or recalled. What I mean here is that a memory, space, or memory-space that is established by awareness of a threshold condition that situates it as an event means that there is necessarily a sense of before, after, and during. In the most benign sense one might understand this with respect to one’s own life which is oriented and comprised of a series of before, afters, and durings that become the type of memory spaces we are describing here. The life of a human subject is generally understood to be an object that begins with the event of birth and ends with the event of death. Within this totality, there are phenomena that achieve the status of events for individuals or collectivities that are understood as pillars which there is always a before and after. In our contemporary context, most of us have an event driven understanding of the World in which we exist as a way of being before and after the Global Pandemic, COVID-19.

A brief thought experiment here will allow us to think about the concepts of World, Space, Memory, and Blackness in thoroughgoing fashion. Recall for a moment what it was like at the height of the pandemic to be in public spaces where most people presented themselves with masks. Observing this behavior or perhaps the space that it created and not being “aware” of the event of the pandemic would be disorienting. To approach this thinking from another direction, assuming that the condition of global viral catastrophe represents the mode of being at that time/space, it would be disorienting to be witness to modes of living that are *not* under conditions of pandemic in that same time/space. What this demonstrates is that an event, in this case the pandemic, has the power to force

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the creation of public spaces that are of such size, durability, and ubiquity to be coterminous with world. Following this logic, viewing the condition of Black Subjectivity under the conditions/event of anti-Blackness is a snapshot of a particular cultural context. That apparition as a knowable and a known Event does not mean that the same subject was not in existence prior to or after the phenomenon or that the subject is only understood to exist as a result of that event. Using our example, there were obviously people before the pandemic. During it, people were understood to exist in a particular manner with an unstable relationship to life. If one were to allow themselves to imagine that people, outside the condition of the pandemic did not exist as a form of foundational being, it would result in a state of abjection instituted from this confusion.

All of this is to facilitate being more careful in understanding the way in which Event(s), their knowability and knowledge, prove to establish, via the technology of Memory, a space that contains all of the formative elements of variously or, in some instances, World and Space. An assemblage of these spaces can be perceived in the aggregate and based upon some criterion to be Worlds. What is important for this project is the relationship between memory, space, and world under the conditions of remembering, forgetting, or what we will come to understand as re-remembering.

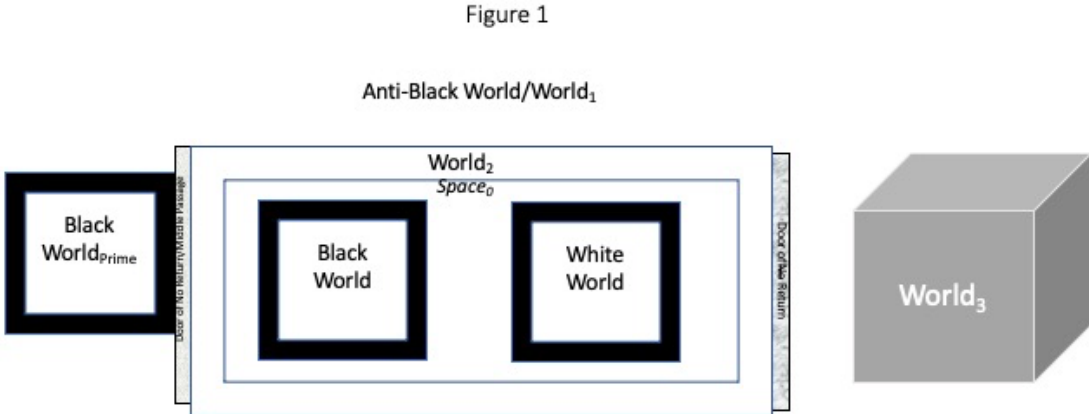
Questions proceed from this that complicate matters. If we accept that the erasure of memory from knowledge or the possibility of knowing fractures or renders inactive those spaces, then the components of a world are necessarily rendered unstable in their incompleteness. What we are dealing with here is the erasure of a coherent relationship to the memory-space-world triad of the world before the Middle Passage. What results from that exercise is the construction of a world that requires that essential elements of it, memory spaces, are relegated to the bin of established versus actual non-existence. To recreate or re-collect these Memory-Space-Worlds would then fracture the world that depends upon this disappearance.



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In tracing the journey toward Morrisons *third, if you will allow the expression, world*, the first figure that will appear represents the base condition we are examining that proceeds along a linear time-line.

The following diagram is the first layer of this mapping.



The overarching contemporary context, what I have called the Anti-Black World or World<sub>1</sub>, that in the reckoning of linear time, comes into existence at the moment of the encounter of Black World<sub>Prime</sub> with Europe. The context that antecedes the existence of the Anti-Black World or World<sub>1</sub> must be understood as non-existent in the consciousness or World that I have labelled as Black World<sub>Prime</sub>. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and its physical and metaphysical *entrepôt* to the Anti-Black World, the Middle Passage, forms the boundary of that system that, in the present moment, is characterized most accurately as a type of infinite return that seems to offer no coherent escape from its logic. This project, in summary, proposes that one method for achieving a form of Black Subjectivity that is stable, self-referential, and recognized as such is to *return* to the point of entry and recover, through that phenomenological experience, the necessary consciousness to destabilize and marginalize Anti-

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Blackness. It is important to note that this return is found through *forward* rather than backward motion and does not portend a physical or metaphysical retracing of the space and time we have traversed.

It is further necessary at this stage to give some coherent accounting of the distinction between the terms “space” and “world”. There are five areas designated in Figure 1 as “world”. The Black World<sub>Prime</sub> that precedes the existence of the overarching category of our contemporary way of being, the Anti-Black World or World<sub>1</sub> that contains World<sub>2</sub>. World<sub>2</sub> is the repository of Space<sub>0</sub> (the nomenclature here is meant to assert the existence of other, related Spaces that will be exposed in due time) where we find the Black and White Worlds that Du Bois, among others, understands to be separated by the Color Line or veil. Finally, we find at some required disconnect from World<sub>2</sub>, World<sub>3</sub> or Morrison’s *third, if you will pardon the expression, world* that is the “location” of Home.

Note that there are three Spaces designated as such. The “space” between the Black World<sub>Prime</sub> and the Anti-Black World or World<sub>1</sub> is that which we know as the Door of No Return and the Middle Passage. We have already noted the existence of Space<sub>0</sub> which is related to the liminal space that is the preoccupation of this effort, the Door of ~~No~~ Return. There are Liminal Spaces that lead to the threshold of the Door of ~~No~~ Return that will be revealed as we approach them.

Thinking a theory of the subject by beginning at the level of World requires deeper engagement with the thinkers who have pointed us in this direction in that it is clearly the preoccupation of Du Bois and the response/innovation/intervention by Morrison. Nahum Dimitri Chandler’s *Beyond This Narrow Now* or, *Delimitation of W.E.B. Du Bois* explores this in some detail. Chandler lays out the stakes of this in the thinking of Du Bois, writing “[h]is ultimate concern was the possibility of another world, not one that existed in the past and not the present in the future, but another world, one that has not yet been and remains yet to come.”<sup>11</sup> (Chandler. 5-6.) In broad gauge, this conceptualization mirrors the thinking of Morrison that serves as the point of departure for this project. The generative intervention by Morrison is in the novelist’s resistance to the dialectical nature of Du Bois’s

formulation. Chandler details this complexity that Morrison deepens in turn, and he is quoted here expansively.

Du Bois, it may be understood, is on the track of outlining a complicated sense of world. The world in question is always one of worlds...

Du Bois outlines two contrasting experiences of the sense of world. The “European child” and the “white American child” exist within a world of separate worlds marked by a series of horizontal distinctions, layers, or gradations, configured as distinct “social grades and walks of life.” It is a stratified social order. But, in the telling as given here, however, “world” is yet more or less experienced as if a whole, indeed as a “sphere” (even as we can note that at its root, in its genealogy, the distinction of supposed social class could purport from a certain position of hegemony to function as a categorical mark). The existence of the “Afro-American” child also takes place within separate horizontal worlds but, according to the text at hand, with a radical difference. A vertical or “perpendicular” line of distinction, which Du Bois describes as “a fissure,” divides the horizontal layers into two different “hemispheres,” one “white” and the other “black.” Thus, “world” here, while experienced in a certain way as a whole, is yet also already re-marked within that form of experience, that is to say, explicitly marked, as a categorically or oppositionally divided whole. The sense of whole here is always already that of the originary nonsimple. And even if only in the form of the remark as an infrastructural organization of its possibility, the nonsimple world remain precisely *as the sense* of “world”- in the apparent here and now of this situation. The sense of world will always have been already phenomenological.<sup>12</sup> (Chandler. 68)

Chandler’s articulation of Du Bois’s “sense of world” is of great importance for the arguments in this project. As a matter of translation, I want to gloss the term employed by Chandler, “sense” as another way of pronouncing the fact here that forms of cognition grant or implicate forms of consciousness that are derived through sensory engagement. What that means is that the manner in which a phenomenon is encountered (seen, heard, tasted, felt, etc.) is in many ways presupposes the manner in which a subject is conscious of an object/phenomenon. What Chandler exposes here is that Du Bois is referencing the sensory experience of world that he finds to be “...already phenomenological.”<sup>13</sup> What Du Bois exposes through Chandler is what I will call the “Racist

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Architecture” of white supremacy. The reality of the series of divisions and thresholds, substantively the “Events” referenced here aggregate themselves into an assemblage that replicates the reality of World that may or may not be World in and of itself. This is an important distinction. By misunderstanding architecture, or following the diagrams presented here, false memories and erasures, what Du Bois describes as a depravity of true self-consciousness, as world, one can be led to believe that nothing can be done about it without destroying the world. If it is architecture, it can be torn down at one extreme or perhaps “re-modelled” at the other without an existential threat to being as the cost of the destruction.

Conversely, misapprehending world for architecture is also catastrophic. What this requires is that we endeavor to develop sensitive enough technologies of cognition that will facilitate accurate differentiation of space, world, and architecture in order to determine whether an object is a component of one or the other or posing as something it is not.

Figure 1 here, specifically the element of the diagram that depicts the separation between the Black and White Worlds within Space<sub>0</sub> that exists within the Anti-Black World, demonstrates the manner in which Du Bois understands this Racist Architecture. The argument here is that Morrison and Du Bois agree about the structure of the world we currently inhabit but depart when it comes to the manner that Du Bois’s world yet to come and Morrison’s *third, if you will pardon the expression, world*, exist with respect to the Anti-Black World. Again, Chandler’s careful examination of Du Bois presents an argument as to how this world yet to come is brought into being or, at the very least, thought by thinking through the relationship of his ambition to temporality.

[T]here are three primary temporalities of *istoria* for Du Bois: past, present, future. Of those three, the most decisive is the futural aspect, that is, with regard to the temporality that attends to “a people.” This is also, then, to say that “a people” is a temporal reference; that is to say, the key matter is the group’s relationship to that which is not yet, has not yet been, remains yet to come, becoming; this is the decisive matter for thought and action. This aspect of temporality, precisely as the terms of *istoria* for Du Bois, can be affirmed as – in principle –

illimitable. It cannot be limited by prejudgment or predetermination. If telos, it remains open. This we can think of in contemporary thought as a delimitation within and of the thought of Du Bois with regard to his sense of an African American collectivity.<sup>14</sup> (Chandler. 97)

The notion of *istoria* examined here by Chandler requires close attention in that it is relevant to effectively dealing with the shifts in temporality I have referenced here. Chandler proposes that what is “most decisive” for Du Bois is that “a people” are referent to that which is to come while necessarily doing so from a presence in the present that may or may not have a concrete or coherent relationship to the past. Chandler indexes this as the fact of Du Bois’s “sense” (there is that term again that I want to replace with the couplet of Cognition and Consciousness) of “an African American collectivity.”<sup>15</sup>

This is necessarily an argument for the durability of Blackness across realms of subjective existence/perception. What I mean to take up with that claim is the question, stated simply: whether there were Black people or perhaps more carefully something that looks a lot like Blackness before the encounter or the catastrophe of the Middle Passage that stands in here as a cipher for a global Anti-Blackness whenever or wherever it appears/appeared.

Recall that Morrison’s notion of World specifically rejects as a strategy, existence between (straddling) oppositional worlds as well as being in flight from one to the other. Morrison indexes the complexity that Chandler exposes against Du Bois’s notion of Double Consciousness that is demoted in her system from telos to almost agential possibility that she elects to reject. This project is necessarily interested in proposing a way of situating notions of *Was*, *Is*, and *Will Be*, concepts that roughly take up the manner in which Chandler understands that Du Bois’s futurity is delimited but also the manner in which Morrison’s world to come reshuffles the terms and conditions of the way *Was* and *Is* are perceived as a threshold condition of this *Will Be*.

Figure 1 here demands our attention. Recall that this diagram proceeds from left to right, past through the present into the future in roughly linear context. As a practical matter, the diagram that

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would antecede this one would necessarily, from our perception, situate Black World<sub>Prime</sub> as World in the absence of our awareness of other antecedent modes of existence. This is the linchpin in understanding the way in which cognition and consciousness require durable referents in order to be grounded. Blackness as such is established here as just such a point of durable and continuous reference by mapping that claim on top of Chandler's exposing that Du Bois proposes that " 'a people' is a temporal reference."

### b. What is at stake:

Prior to the existence of the Anti-Black World that we have mapped here as conditioned on the event of the Middle Passage one cannot argue that there were no people. To argue that more insightfully that there were no Black People prior to the encounter with white people is compelling in the sense that the notion of Blackness as a distinction from whiteness did not exist. Afropessimist Frank Wilderson unpacks this point in his September 14, 2022, interview with philosopher George Yancy published on the *truthout* online platform. Wilderson proposes the following:

Paradoxically, Blackness embodies the absence of capacity. This absence vouchsafes the presence that is the relational capacity for the human. That's hard to endure and contemplate every waking moment. Before 626 CE, there were no Black people. There were Masai, Kikuyu, the Buganda, etc. They became Black through the imposition of social death, but Blackness did not have a prior plenitude of subjectivity and relationship. Blackness is elaborated simultaneously with social death. When the anti-Black world is destroyed, there will still be people like you and me, just as there were prior to 625, but they will not be Black. There will be a new epistemological order. Just like there were not working-class people all the time. A worker is a paradigmatic position that is no more than 400-years old. Workers did not exist before that.<sup>16</sup>

This foundational claim of Afropessimism is the primary place of distinction between this project and that discourse. Wilderson, in this same discussion, insists upon understanding that "...in Afropessimism there exists only a descriptive intervention, not a prescriptive intervention. Afropessimism doesn't answer Vladimir Lenin's question, 'What is to be done?' That is because

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Blackness in the site of destruction of cosmological proportions.”<sup>17</sup> As a practical matter, the axiomatic assertion that there is nothing to be done eliminates the necessity of worrying about what is to be done. This project departs from a different space and perhaps an approach that endeavors to derive the paradigmatic structure from the limit case will be useful.

Following Wilderson’s insightful requirement that we recognize the diversity of those who he takes to become Black at the point of coercive force: Maasai, Kikuyu, the Buganda, etc., is not the point of departure of the thinking I am proposing here that is invited by this opening. I would propose that the cohesion of people that enabled the possibility of diasporic Black people finding a point of common reference in the hold of the slave ship is not the coercive force of whiteness and social death but the foundational and life-giving force of Blackness and social life even under the direst of circumstances. This project refuses to grant white racists the ability to define the terms of conditions of Black Being then, now, or in the future as being called into existence by their hatred.

This project is speculative and therefore necessarily “prescriptive” in its aspirations. That proceeds from a different understanding as articulated here of Blackness as it expresses itself ante-what Wilderson cites as the emergence of the Black subject in 625 CE, post the Middle Passage and in the world beyond The Door of ~~No~~-Return.

Stated simply, Blackness as a referent provided by people who understand themselves as non-Black and generally white, does not appear because of the gaze of the non-Black Other. Accepting that the Maasai, Kikuyu, the Buganda, etc., existed with respect to themselves before what we will call “Wilderson’s Encounter” circa 635 CE, I would argue that those ethnicities/cultural formations are typologies of Blackness rather than the reductive (mis)understanding of that existence on the part of Anti-Black racists. What that means is that the discourse of Patterson’s social death in this understanding does not institute Blackness but rather is the accurate description of a technology of

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existential threat to the idea of sovereign and ontological Blackness, a mission central to the devastating goal of white supremacy and Anti-Blackness.

Returning to Figure 1, it is apparent that there was a point in the common reckoning of linear time when Black World<sub>prime</sub> did not exist in the system of knowing of Anti-Black racists wherever, wherever, and whenever they might be. This does not mean that Blackness as positive self-referent did not exist and serve as the primary feature of the contrived animosity of non-Black people to those who become Black, in their reckoning, as a negative way to serve their manifold malevolent interests. At the point in time when Black World<sub>prime</sub> did not exist in point of reference to the Anti-Black World or World<sub>1</sub>, it is “just” World without modifiers and exists without referent to other systems of Being.

Here, the distinction between architecture and world resurges. Architecture, as we have noted, can be abandoned leaving world intact. The opposite is not the case. Blackness in the understanding of this project is not an architectural feature of the white world. Conversely, the durability, scale, and omnipresence of the brand of vampiric whiteness on display in the Anti-Black world poses as world and causes the existential crisis that necessitates its dismantling.

This confusion, understanding that the Black subject as a self-referent is only manifest through the activity of anti-Black racists is to allow that technology of erasure to succeed without reference to the temporality of “person” as developed by Du Bois. This is in important and disorienting ways tantamount to “today” to exist without unbreakable relation to the ontological yesterdays that are mechanically related to tomorrows.

The question of futurity for this project and the thinking on this matter of both Du Bois and Morrison is the survivability of subjects through points of radical transformation that institute new Worlds. For instance, a subject formed in Black World<sub>prime</sub> suffers losses of subjective context as a result of crossing from that world, through the Door of No Return and across the Middle Passage to the interior of the Anti-Black World or World<sub>1</sub>. If we imagine that there are fundamental alterations



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to the subjects that are ontologically related to Black World<sub>prime</sub> who find themselves in the Anti-Black World, the notion of the impossibility of return to that system of Being is related to this problematic. The challenge for this question of futurity is fundamentally a question of what survives in the crossing that is necessary to realize Du Bois's world to come and Morrison's *third, if you will pardon the expression, world*. The operative frameworks of space and World require a complex understanding of geography that serves as the context for the appearance, alteration, and relative stability of subjects.

Katherine McKittrick's 2006 text, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* is canonical in exposing this phenomenon. McKittrick proposes the following in the introduction of *Demonic Grounds*:

Indeed, black matters are spatial matters. The displacement of difference, geographic domination, transatlantic slavery, and the black Atlantic Ocean differentially contribute to the mapping of the real and imaginative geographies of black women; they are understood here as social processes that *made* geography a racial-sexual terrain. Hence, black women's lives and experiences become especially visible through these concepts and moments because they clarify that blackness is integral to the production of space. To put it another way, social practices create landscapes and contribute to how we organize, build, and imagine our surroundings.<sup>18</sup> (McKittrick. xiv.)

McKittrick's essential intervention that recalls for us the manner in which Blackness asserts itself in the "production" of space assists in thinking through the durability of Black subjectivity across differential contexts of Being. In some sense, the nomenclature employed here to label the various worlds and spaces reifies the primacy of Blackness for their existence. As a practical matter, it is not *possible* for Black World<sub>prime</sub> as World to exist without the presence of the Black subject. The same goes for the Anti-Black World or World<sub>1</sub> in that in the absence of Black subjects against whom the world is structured to render inert in some respect and dynamic in others, this world would not and could not exist. What Morrison is understood to be proposing is what our philosophizing and theorizing (for want of better terms with which to describe this work) are meant to accomplish, which in McKittrick's view, is to render a world, in some respects like Black World<sub>prime</sub> that is legible *qua* itself

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and not in imperative dialectical existence to whiteness. It is of critical importance that what had been World and became Black World<sub>prime</sub> in its negative relationship to the appearance through that encounter with the Anti-Black World, be situated as a world that pre-exists and also does not exist prior to the simultaneous appearance of this oppositional context of Being.

The challenge for this text is to describe the manner in which a Black Futurity is configured from the catastrophe of the Anti-Black World that has lines of reference to predicate systems of Being without dependence. This is an act of imagination that this project locates in the Black Aesthetic generally and in literature in specificity. It is important here to be as clear as possible with respect to the work that “imagination” or perhaps something that may be best described as “re-imagination” (to map onto Morrison’s Rememory) does here. This is the bridge to an understanding of the Black Aesthetic as the prime technology of altering the world.

To (re)imagine a Black World that erupts because of new and renewed forms of Black Being is to be involved in the speculative project represented by this book that refuses the limitation of Black Imagination by the imagination and domination of language and symbols by white supremacy and Anti-Blackness. This means that (re)imagination, a project of re-thinking the terms and conditions of Blackness finds itself expressed or better yet realized in the materiality of Black aesthetic practice that also necessarily dismantles standard/European notions of time.

For its part, Pheng Cheah’s 2016 *what is a world?: On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature*, gestures at this possibility that rejects the prevailing manner in which world is a result of a relationship to European notions of time.

The mapping of the world by temporal calculations is premised on a conceptualization of the world as a spatial category, namely, an object of the greatest possible spatial extension that can be divided into zones of quantitatively measurable time. *World*, however, is originally a temporal category. Before the world can appear as an object it must first be.<sup>19</sup> (Cheah. 2)

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Cheah endeavors to approach the notion of world or even perhaps “worlding” by understanding [t]he theory of world literature [he] propose[s] suggests that the world is a normative temporal category and not the spatial whole made by globalization.<sup>20</sup> (Cheah. 16) This project, in many ways synchronizes the thinking of McKittrick and Cheah and proposes that the world to come, Morrison’s *third, if you will allow the expression, world*, is called into being within and through the Black Aesthetic. Further, that we are already at the threshold of crossing into that system of Being that has always and already rendered the past and present essential and anachronistic at the same time and in that moment, through a recalibrated system of cognition, full consciousness will be the order of things and establish an altered system of Black as Being.

b. **The Black Aesthetic as Guide:**

In many ways, this effort is led by the chart provided by Farah Jasmine Griffin’s recent text, *Read Until You Understand: The Profound Wisdom of Black Life and Literature*. Griffin asserts that she is guided by, as is this text under the protection of her work, “...by the following questions: What might an engagement with literature written by Black Americans teach us about the United States and its quest for democracy? What might it teach us about the fullest blooming of our own humanity?”<sup>21</sup> (Griffin. xi.) It is perhaps worth being clear here in that the full bloom of Black Humanity will be realized in the futurity that has served as the point of departure here. In solidarity with Griffin, Kevin Quashie’s *Black Aliveness, or A Poetics of Being*, has pointed in this direction with this recent text quoted here for its clear articulation of this telos.

This work begins with a single premise, an instruction, really: imagine a black world. Such a directive acknowledges that the New World plunder of modernity and coloniality enacts a destruction of the world as it was and might have become, that the New World unorders the relationship of the human to place, time, other humans. Or we might say there never was a world, that imperialism’s destructiveness *is* that it imposed a world logic. Either case describes world-failure that, among other horrors, mobilizes blackness as an antithesis to human life.

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In the face of failure that is so unspeakably broad, I use “imagine” as a turn toward the small, an opportunity to understand black worldness as what black texts do...as the aesthetics of black art. Reading this way scales the matter of world-and-being to a level I can manage, and through it may not resolve catastrophe, it moves away from summoning black literature to teach about black humanity. (What is there to learn? The human is human.) “Imagine” postpones the logics of address, dominance, and misrecognition – the terms of an antiblack world – that interferes with beholding black aliveness and a black ethic of relation. This study of aliveness rests on the inclination to imagine that the black text speaks to and in a black world, subjunctive and imaginary as that is, away from the false and damaging expectations that black texts have to speak universally, which means that they speak to the larger racial project or conversation – that is, to people who are black...which indeed they do.<sup>22</sup> (Quashie. 13-14.)

The point of departure here that allows this project to engage that of Quashie is explicitly in the world ante- the world/architecture instituted by the Middle Passage that exceeds its spatio-temporal limits through the subterfuge of white supremacy.

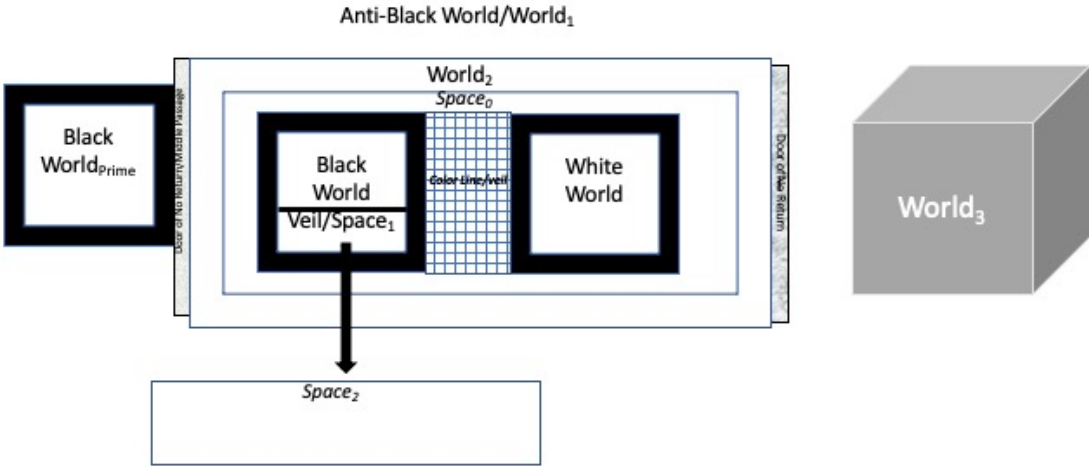
I am drawn to the final lines of the quote rendered here that asserts the existence of Black Aliveness that is, in at least some preliminary register in excess of Patterson’s theorizing of Social Death that serves as the ordering principle for the seemingly impenetrable walled in territory of Anti-Blackness that Afro-Pessimism has so effectively mapped. A territory that is roughly co-extensive with the Atlantic World and its reverberations. The existence of this “*third, if you will pardon the expression, world*”, in excess of the Black/white World Binary that serves as the dialectical imperative of the thinking of canonical scholars like Du Bois and Fanon, is the telos of the philosophical project of Morrison. What this means is that the phenomenological system I intend to expose here establishes the point of departure as well as the goal for the Black Radical Tradition that is, in some sense reimagined; to in fact think beyond the limitations of Anti-Black Racism and its subject dys-forming logic to a world that provides for a space of stability for self-referentially formed Black subjectivity.

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In substance, the philosophical system I intend to explore begins with identification of the architecture that locates and requires Morrison’s *third, if you will pardon the expression, world*.

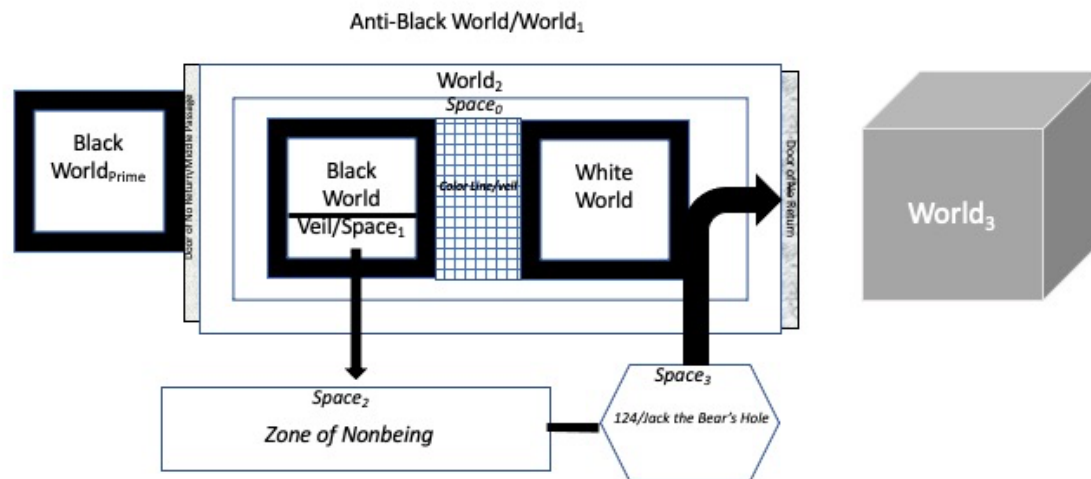
This requires a journey and, as I noted above, there are liminal spaces that are appended to the foundational architecture that must be traversed and are illustrated in Figure 1. Figure 2 below that depicts the next layer of this understanding.

Figure 2



What this illustrates in an elaboration of Chandler’s gloss on Du Bois’s exposure of horizontal gradation within the white world that I am arguing the thinker also locates within the Black World. That space contains the *sanctum sanctorum* of what we might call his Talented Tenth where complex thinking leads to Space<sub>2</sub> that is fleshed out in Figure 3 and is concealed from the view by what Du Bois designates as another “Veil”.

Figure 3



Much more will be said about this as the argument in this book unfolds but this Space, Space<sub>2</sub>, is indexed as what I understand Frantz Fanon to be elaborating in *Black Skin, White Masks* that forms the generative space for the evolution of the work of thinkers like Ellison Morrison, and perhaps surprisingly Herman Melville. That Space, Space<sub>3</sub> is the threshold of the Door of No Return where these artists have revealed and presented a portal to the return that will allow cognition, consciousness and ultimately access to World<sub>3</sub> or the *third, if you will allow the expression, world*. The way to World<sub>3</sub> requires the exit from the crushing coercive spatiality of World<sub>2</sub> where the prevailing logic prevents forward progress.

b. **Cognition – Consciousness – Being:**

This movement is hardly meant to propose that racism as such will disappear but rather to provide for a cognitive positionality, pace Morrison, that renders the nature of Du Boisian consciousness “a strategy, not a prophecy or cure.”<sup>23</sup> (Morrison. *Self-Regard*. 139) This is in excess of the three elements of Du Bois’s formulation that begins with second-sight that I understand as the form of cognition that leads to double-consciousness as just that: the system of consciousness here

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that, in some sense is accessed through Du Bois's Veiled Space<sub>1</sub> and predictably, leads to the form of being, two-ness, that forms an irreconcilable binary subjectivity. Morrison, in order to advance beyond this simultaneously rigid and dialectical system provided by Du Bois and exemplar of the cul-de-sac that Afropessimism describes, exposes that there must necessarily be, what we can call here for lack of a better term, a "Third-sight" that she names Rememory. This fits with the cause-and-effect relationship proposed by Du Bois: cognition leading to consciousness that resolves itself in a way of Being. Morrison's destination, a "*third, if you will pardon the expression, world*" is only possible from a foundation of non-binary Cognition and Consciousness.

The architecture that poses as "world" presented in these maps or schematics illustrate a pathway/journey that facilitates the abandonment of architecture posing as world that represents a way *back* by going forward. The architecture presented maps a way *back* to the door that has been understood to be closed forever and protected by walls too thick to breach, too wide to go around, too high to get over and too low to go under. The system of cognition that will be revealed here, again following Morrison, dispenses with the notion that Diasporic Black Subjectivity exists "outside" of the Black World and therefore "inside" the world of white supremacy and Anti-Blackness. Recall that Morrison's formulation "postulates the inwardness of the outside". This means that the walls of the slave castle and the portal that seems to allow motion in only one direction, is a physical manifestation of a metaphysical fiction. The barrier is not real.

The philosophical project here, after fleshing out an alternative cognitive system, will define the system of Consciousness required for access to the "*third, if you will pardon the expression, world*" that depends upon the threshold condition of access to an altered cognitive state, "Third-sight", that will facilitate engagement with the truth of Black subjectivity, or Du Bois's "true self-consciousness" that is hidden, in some sense, despite its presence. It is perhaps useful to defy convention here and first lay out what this book is *not* meant to be before giving some idea of what it *is* meant to accomplish. This

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speculative philosophical effort to define the futurity of Black Subjectivity is not a book *about* Toni Morrison though that thinker's work establishes the point of departure and the destiny of this project, and the middle portion of the book will wade into the portal that I believe both Ellison and Morrison have granted us. Readers may find elements of Part I pedantic in its careful hermeneutics of Hegel's relevant thinking. Just as this book is not *about* Morrison it is also not *about* Hegel. That thicket, whether we like it or not exists, and the discipling of this effort requires that we execute a comprehensive re-reading of that philosopher's work for at least three reasons. First because of the omnipresence of the master/slave dialectic in Africana theory and philosophy and secondly because I will argue that Hegel's work is the most comprehensive map that we have of the Anti-Black World from the perspective of whiteness a careful examination of which will reveal the point of weakness that allows separation from its crushing logic. Third, as mentioned earlier, this is a work of speculative philosophy and theory that endeavors to avoid leaning the system upon a "Magic Black Box: out of which appears a Theory of the (New) Black Subject. Others should be able to follow the path and agree, disagree depart, enhance or wholesale reject it based upon this detailed work. It also may seem that Hegel is situated to be dismissed only to reappear. That is the fact until the logic of the Anti-Black World that Hegel explicates is left behind across thresholds that can only be crossed after their understanding.

Finally, this book is not meant to be a critique of Afro-Pessimism and here I acknowledge that that assemblage has provided an effective tool for the articulation of the terms and conditions of Anti-Blackness. But similarly, the fact that an electron microscope is the most accurate tool for examining suitably sized objects it is probably not what you want to employ to observe a nebula. This text is assembling a tool for looking at a different world, not this one and is therefore talking about something related to though different than the preoccupations of that framework.



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b. **Structure:**

This text is divided into three parts that mirror the theory of the subject operating here that I believe Du Bois has granted this intellectual tradition: *Cognition*, *Consciousness*, and finally, *Being*.

*Cognition*, Part I, will proceed from this opening by further elaborating the architecture and “laws of motion” that are arrayed against positively formed Black Subjectivity. This will, in many ways, be the effect to the cause of a careful analysis of the philosophical system descriptive of the mechanics of white supremacy and Anti-Black Racism that is in opposition to the system of cognition required to advance to the “*third, if you will pardon the expression, world*”. Here is where Hegel will be explored in some detail in service of the necessity to break the relationship to dialectics and death as the way to knowing and explicate in some detail the functioning of Morrison’s “Third Sight” or “Rememory”.

Part II, *Consciousness*, will focus on elements of the Black Aesthetic that this project understands to be pointing to the positive resolution of Black subjectivity exemplified by the importance of the work of Toni Morrison but present in music, other literature, visual art, and a variety of physical disciplines. This section will deliver us to the Threshold of the Door of ~~No~~ Return where the meticulously assembled cognitive tool necessary for the system of consciousness that allows a view of the telos of this argument; a new way of *Being-As-Black*, will be employed. This is an act of the Imagination that allows consciousness of this way of Being-As-Black prior to the experience of its subjective logic. Part III, *Being*, aspires to rescue ontology in the terms Fanon grants us from *Black Skin, White Mask* in that the Black Subject, at this stage Being-As-Black, will present a thoroughgoing and sustainable resistance to coercive force.

The form of the book is reflective of the method of inquiry and multidisciplinary approach necessary to describe an Africana Philosophy of Being. Where we have begun here with Morrison signals the critical importance that African-American literature specifically and the Black Aesthetic more broadly plays in this effort. The project will presuppose that the Black Aesthetic represents a

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mode of inquiry, a system of cognition, and an object of analysis. I say the Black Aesthetic “more broadly” in that the assumption here is that the boundaries of what are considered aesthetic practice in this project have been removed or rendered more porous or accommodating, depending upon the perspective of the reader. This means that literature, visual art, music, and film will be considered alongside philosophy, theory, sports, biography, and anecdote as essential objects and units of analysis. These objects will appear as necessary in the text, often as the point of inquiry or the method of analysis but also as exemplar of the ecology of ways of seeing and expression that serve to describe ways of *Being-As-Black*. Additionally, it is important that the non-linear nature of Black existence be allowed to inform the process that cannot effectively grapple with this complexity by insisting on notions of sequentiality and predictable notions of the spatial and the “place-ial” that are deleterious to properly engaging Black Existence. Periodically in the text there will be sections called “Notice to Mariners”. In resonance of the utility of this vital information provided to sailors navigating difficult and often unpredictable waters, these will provide locational data and descriptions that assist in locating the Black Subject in relation to The Door of No Return, The Door of ~~No~~ Return, and other spaces and places.

### b. **Notes on Method:**

In contradistinctive improvisation on the Fanon of *Black Skin, White Masks* assertion that he will not articulate a method while doing so, I will be explicit about the necessity to do just that. As context the methodological approach of this project proceeds from the necessity to articulate the utility of philosophy and theory for the Black Radical Tradition. In *Black Minded: The Political Philosophy of Malcolm X*, I dealt with this question in order to elevate the limitation of the discipline of political philosophy and theory to meet the challenge of Malcolm’s system of thinking. First, there is the praxis of philosophical thought that repudiates the notion that Black people are incapable of just that intellectual complexity. What that means is that the corpus of objects that are of philosophical import

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or present themselves as philosophical in and of themselves, must be expanded. That means that this project will employ material that has been recognized as philosophy and theory as well as objects that seem beyond the boundary of those disciplinary formations. The point of departure here, the performance of Bob Marley exemplifies this.

In December of 1964, Malcolm X insists that the type of philosophy he is providing will “give them something to think about and start them thinking in a way that they should think.”<sup>24</sup> (Sawyer. 17) In that text I viewed this as a uni-subjective notion in that it applied to Black people generally and Black Radical Thinkers in particular. That is not the case. The radical nature of Black Radical Philosophy and Theory, in altering the system of awareness of those who identify as Black and/or are affected as if they are also destabilize the terms and conditions of the system of harm that is the condition for the existent of Black Radical Thought in the first place.

What this means is that the purpose of Black Radical Philosophy and Theory is at least threefold. In the first place it erupts as the necessary response to a system of coercive threat. Second, it must rescue the aggrieved Black Subject from a condition of self-hatred as an important condition that renders Blackness always and already a problem. Third it must look to a futurity and propose a companion to the elegance and profundity of Black Imagining.

Bear with me.<sup>25</sup>

## The Door of No Return: Being-As-Black

### Part I Cognition

God didn't mean for man to wear the world like a loose fitting garment.

Leon Forrest

*There is a Tree More Ancient Than Eden*

- a. Preliminary Matters: In the Shadow of David: Florence, Italy 2016 or The Child of the Renaissance:

Slugs, I am certain, think they are smart too. What I mean by this is that the sensory realm in which the slug exists, the tools available to the animal to witness or sense the world around it are limited to what they happen to be and a wise slug will have explored every single millimeter of the world it is able to witness and becomes conscious in its own way of that realm. Obviously, and at least from the perspective of the human animal, we would imagine that sensory realm to be fairly limited, but we also have to realize that perception from our place of cognition and the tools that we have to do so do not speak for the slug or the richness and in-depth knowledge that creature could possess.

Like the slug, the human animal, as we have tirelessly endeavored to stretch the horizon of our sensory world and the understanding of that information, may believe that we also are “smart” but in reality are operating within a tragically limited realm. The effort here to take up the technology of cognition in its existence and its possibilities is the first step toward a new form of Being is designed to presuppose that the way we have been witnessing the world is encumbered by the logic of a coercive force designed to limit the potentiality of certain subjects. What this means is that the system of cognition that is imposed upon the effected subjects by the terms and conditions of the Middle Passage is designed to deliver several results.

1. That the Black subject is sub-human.
2. That the sub-human condition is by nature not by “nurture”.
3. That the imposition of the rupture of the Middle Passage slams shut the door of access to the human condition imagined ante- its (il)logic.
4. That right reason reifies this thinking and any other way of thinking that tends to deny this is irrational.