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Jovonna Mara Jones April 7, 2015

Radical Sight: Frederick Douglass, Contemporary Photography, and the Visual Folds of Black Subjectivity

by

Jovonna Mara Jones

Dr. Cynthia Willett
Adviser

Department of African-American Studies

Dr. Cynthia Willett
Adviser

Dr. Dianne Stewart
Committee Member

Dr. Michael Harris
Committee Member

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Abstract
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This thesis examines Frederick Douglass' artistic interventions embedded in his 1861 lecture "Pictures and Progress." I argue that this lecture illuminates the limits of modernist notions of subjectivity, and opens a space of alternative philosophic inquiry. Closely reading Douglass' theory of "thought-pictures," I illustrate how the photographic landscape engages Blackness as an avenue of ontological transformation. To further explore the gestures of Douglass' philosophic insights, I look towards theorist bell hooks and contemporary photographer Carrie Mae Weems to elucidate the existential and ethical possibilities of photographic seeing and space. By critically engaging Douglass' theoretical lens through hooks and Weems, I suggest that Black photography offers profound orientations of being, visualizing structures of an existence more expansive than notions of universal humanity and offering a radical ethic of seeing.

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"Did you mean to share about a Black experience here?" my high school photography teacher asked me, peering over my shoulder at my portfolio, "something about Blackness?" No, I did not intend to. It is just that all my family and most of my friends are Black. They were my muses. He told me that my works read like an essay; that it seemed as if I was trying to tell a story, relay coherence to the points and people that cross my vision. If storytelling was indeed what I was seeking to accomplish through my work, then, as James Baldwin professed, "Writers are obliged, at some point, to realize that they are involved in the language which they must change."[1] I processed our language in pictures.

I yearned to be irked by my photography teacher's proposition. Did the use of Black subjects and my own Black identity officially deem my photography, "black"? What did it mean to "blacken" the composition and nuances of my loved ones' humanity? I could not feel offended by his inquiry, however, because blackness and humanity constituted the frame of my work, no matter how I could describe my intention. Photography sparked in me a wonder, a philosophic desire to envision what the lived-present could not seem to answer, but always summoned: what is Black? What is human? For over 150 years, these questions—so salient within current times—have long maintained the foundation of Black photographic movement.

Black identity, thought, and photography have historically been interwoven, with photography serving as a means for considering human existence beyond realities of enslavement and oppression. Although most known for his abolitionism, Frederick Douglass professed the fundamental significance of seeing with and through a photographic lens, suggesting its profound implications for the ways in which we can grasp and re-imagine human consciousness. For Douglass, the realm of photography could unfold onto new positive and

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[1] Baldwin, J., & Kenan, R. (2010). The cross of redemption: Uncollected writings. New York: Pantheon Books.

complex representations of Black people. Douglass, himself, boasted numerous portraits to emphasize his self-assertion and dignity in the face of persistent American racism.

Renowned scholar and curator Deborah Willis explains that over the course of the late 19th and 20th centuries, Black photographers produced "images of dignity, pride, success, and beauty,"[2] documenting black life in all its complexity, as well as racism in all its "viciousness" and "drama."[3] For over a century, Black photographers' endeavors opened different possibilities for engaging questions of racial identity, both in its socio-political construction and the intricacies and validity of its livedness, its everydayness. Photography is a material passion that has persisted within Black life in America for generations, and a phenomenon in which I, too, found myself implicated and inspired.

Yet, while I understand the significance of representing, recording, and honoring the existence of Black Americans, I also cringe at some of the tensions, both implicit and explicit in photographic space: (1) Photography has been and is consistently used as a hegemonic tool to provide scientific justifications for racism; (2) In striving to actively avoid the reproduction of stereotypes i.e. the thug, the jezebel, many Black folk could begin to devalue the lived experiences and expressions of those who do fall under the stereotypes; (3) When we regard photographs, there is always someone we *do not* see—can we only value existence through visibility?

The photographic medium, particularly in Black America, feeds a myriad of complexities, and perhaps, contradictions. Nevertheless, it has remained one of the most significant and accessible mediums for Black expression, nationally and globally. Thus, how else

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[2] Willis, D. (2000). *Reflections in Black: A history of Black photographers, 1840 to the present*. New York: W.W. Norton
p. IX.
[3] Ibid., p. X.

can we conceive of Black America and photography in ways that account for their history of visual violence *and* the possibilities of revolutionary visions?

My thesis grapples with how the Black photographic phenomenon radically transforms notions of human subjectivity, lived identity, and memory. Through a hermeneutical approach to Frederick Douglass' 1861 lecture "Pictures and Progress," I argue that photography illuminates the limits of modernist notions of subjectivity, and suggests a different ontological framework for contemplating what is Black, what is human. I then consider Douglass' visual theory through the lens of visual theorist bell hooks and contemporary photographer Carrie Mae Weems. By exploring and expanding Douglass' theory through hooks and Weems, I maintain that we can derive a Black photo-ontological movement that offers a radical orientation of being. Furthermore, this photographic movement ignites structures of an existence more expansive and intrinsic than the dominant framework of universal humanity.

This work primarily builds on the cultural and art history works of Deborah Willis, Lisa Collins, Maurice Wallace, and Shawn Michelle Smith. I intend for my arguments to contribute further theoretical analysis on Black photography and explore the possibilities for a paradigm of Black photographic thought. This thesis is comprised of three major sub-arguments, focusing on three photographic voices: abolitionist Frederick Douglass, cultural theorist bell hooks, and contemporary photographer Carrie Mae Weems.

Chapter one engages Frederick Douglass' 1861 lecture "Pictures and Progress." This lecture displays Douglass' excitement for photographic innovation, especially as the medium's growth in the United States paralleled the journey towards emancipation. In noticing the contextual placement of Douglass at the frontier of technological innovation and societal

transformation, I consider the industrial significance of photography to Black Americans in the mid-1860s. How does the materiality and industry of photography function in the makings of Black American identity and thought, particularly within a nation where property and ownership designate freedom? How does Frederick Douglass interrogate this convergence of industry, expression, and idealism? While Douglass honors the significant impact of photography on Black American industriousness and community, "Pictures and Progress" also takes a deeply theoretical turn, with Douglass utilizing complex and beautifully descriptive metaphors to express his meditations on pictures. He attends to an original concept of "thought-pictures" to approach what he feels is a fundamental power of human beings' photographic potential. Thus, I closely read Douglass' analysis of photography, contemplating: what are thought-pictures? What kind of space is Douglass describing? Where does the human subject fit into this space? What role does identity play in this space? How does Douglass see the abstraction of visual space as relating to inequality and enslavement? What is the potential of Douglass' vision?

Chapter two turns to contemporary cultural theorist bell hooks who focuses on race, gender, art, and memory. While hooks' scholarship offers invaluable criticism on visual culture, history, and identity, I am most intrigued by her work "In Our Glory," a narrative elucidating hooks' own experiences with familial images: a photograph of her father in his youth and a personal portrait from her youth. Keeping in mind Douglass' visual theory, I examine how hooks describes photographical space, and how her own subjectivity orients within that space. I consider: What is the role of memory and time surrounding photographic material? How does hooks decipher the presence of a photograph from the past? What is the role of the unfamiliar, that which hooks did not or cannot know about the image? How does relationship function

within or around the photographic space? Where can we locate the future in photographic archives? By closely reading hooks' narrative, I take the metaphoric visual space Douglass once theorized, and I interpret how it unfolds through the supposed concreteness of photographic material, lived experience**,** family, and self-awareness. hooks' narrative exemplifies a concept of *radical love* that expresses a conglomeration of Douglass' theory and hooks lived experiences within an existentially ethical framework.

Taking up "radical love" in the context of hooks' experience with photography, I also think about the limits of radical love: Does radical love within photography require pre-existing familial relationships and bond? By emphasizing radical love, do I presuppose that all beings have an implicit desire for intimacy and to see and be seen? Do I romanticize the possibilities of photography, reifying visuality in a way that ignores persistent power dynamics that impede the work of love? Noting the tensions of radical love in photographic space, I consider how artist Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashé's project *Daufuskie Island* uses photography to celebrate and salvage the Sea Island residents and culture threatened by impending capitalistic expansion. Moutoussamy-Ashé was motivated by the potential loss of this Black culture and people, and sought to use the visual realm for her activism. I study the intention and tensions in the makings of *Daufuskie Island* as a documentary photography project. Moreover, by the project's 25th anniversary in 2007, the island life present in *Daufuskie Island* was lost—Moutoussamy-Ashé's photography could not physically save it. What, then, is the role of the island's images, particularly when its legacy may still exist in its people, even if they are not physically located on the island? By examining Moutoussamy-Ashé's project, I outline the space where *radical love* can offer a different plane of "seeing" and challenge what it means to act on behalf of those "unseen."

Chapter three emphasizes the role and presence of subjects within photographic space, or more specifically, how an alternative ordering of bodies and selves within photographic spaces illustrates new kinds of lived experiences. While chapter II explains the experiential, affective nuances of seeing, chapter III investigates the possibilities of a radical seeing-space. I utilize contemporary photographer Carrie Mae Weems as my primary photographic voice for her artistry explores the body not just as a self-subject, but also as a facilitator of place, time, and identity. Analyzing Weems' projects "Kitchen Table Series" and "Museum Series," I contemplate how Weems' formulation and illustration of the human body relates to Douglass' notion of "thought-pictures." Furthermore, I apply her framework to another contemporary photography piece ("City of Brotherly Love," Hannah Price) to examine how her attention to the body's relationality with other bodies suggests a motivation towards radical love. In Chapter III, I intend to demonstrate that a critical reading of Weems' works enriches how contemporary Black photography can work to realize alternative imaginations and recollections of being.

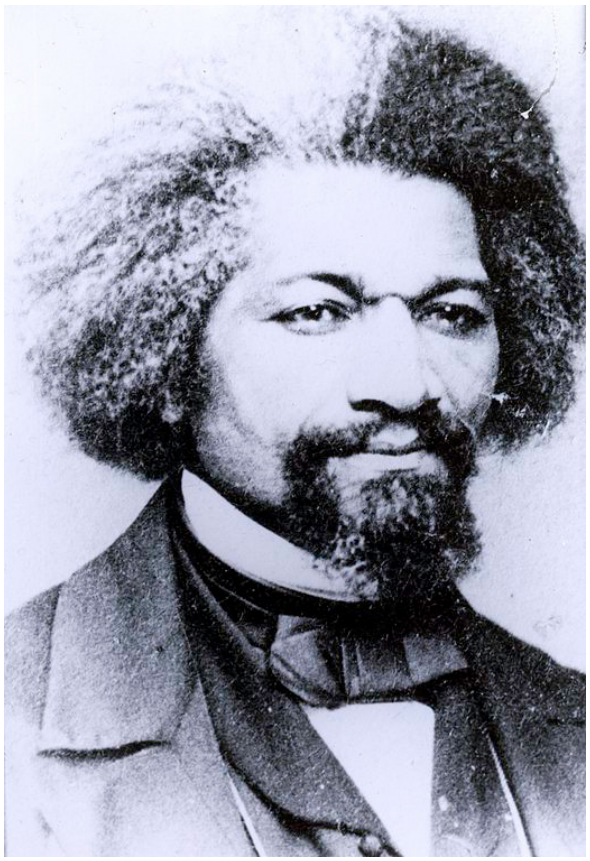
Ultimately, I maintain that Douglass, hooks, and Weems unveil ontological frameworks of Black being that exude ethical resonances, illuminating radical possibilities for self and others in a shared world. This thesis engages the folds of Blackness—the fabric of Black history, experience, affect, relationship, and aesthetic—through Black photographic visionaries, re-framing human existence while living in the crux of its complexities.

Chapter I

"Quiet as its kept, there is a visual paradox at the center of African-American thought." | *Lisa Gail Collins*

The Intersection of Early Black American Thought and Photographic Culture

Known for his philosophic admonition of slavery, abolitionist Frederick Douglass[4] (1818-1895) tested the bounds of American reason and demanded that citizens adhere to the ideals of the nation's creed. Such notions of liberty, rights, and justice for all seemed fundamentally progressive, yet the institution of slavery ruthlessly perverted these ideals. Through his famed declamation, Douglass sought to illuminate the dissonance between thought and action, belief and behavior. "No one man can put a chain about the ankle of his fellow man," he professed, "without at last finding the other end fastened about his own neck."[5] Such anti-slavery rhetoric strove to reveal the citizen's fragmented moral subjectivity—as if in each of his speeches, he merely had to hold a looking glass to the nation's many selves.



The reflective dynamics of Douglass' prose appropriately intersected with the newfound phenomena of photography. In addition to his countless portraits, Douglass thoughtfully and meticulously engaged the realm of photography through a series of speeches: "The Age of

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[4] Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division, The New York Public Library. *Frederick Douglass*.Retrieved from http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47dc-5038-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99

[5] Douglass, F., & Foner, P. (1999). Frederick Douglass selected speeches and writings. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books. 688.

Pictures," "Lecture on Pictures," "Pictures and Progress," and "Life Pictures."[6] Literary and visual scholars Maurice Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith emphasize the series' two primary interventions: (1) "[re-adjusting the] sight-lines and [correcting] the habits of racist misrecognition,"[7] and (2), "[exploring] how African-Americans utilized photography in all its cultural forms to represent a new people, a new period, and new modes of black thought."[8]

Given the nature of Douglass' interventions with these lesser-knows lectures, as Wallace and Smith outlined, it would seem that it was W.E.B. Du Bois who eventually, and most notably, fulfilled the progressive charges of visual representation a few decades later with his Paris exhibition "Types of American Negros" (1900) and his groundbreaking manifesto *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). By taking a closer look at the Du Boisian interpretation of visuality, so pronounced in the famed "double-consciousness theory," we can delineate the ways in which Douglass' photographic interest, "largely neglected by Douglass criticism,"[9] unravels profound existential terrain.

Du Bois' "Types of American Negroes" exhibition showcased over 300 un-captioned and un-dated photographs displaying the development of Black Americans to combat the racist taxonomy that attempted to assert the visual and biological inferiority of Black people. He even achieved the exhibition's gold medal for this work, suggesting a potential shift in how the white western world could perceive Blackness in the modern era. *Souls of Black Folk*, then, investigated and named the continued existential conflict of Blackness in the western world, of "looking at one's self through the eyes of others."[10] In her work *Photography at the Color Line,*

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[6] Wallace, M. O., & Smith, S. M. (2012). *Pictures and progress: Early photography and the making of African American identity*. Durham: Duke University Press. 9.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., 10.
[9] Meehan, S. (2008). Mediating American autobiography photography in Emerson, Thoreau, Douglass, and Whitman. Columbia: University of Missouri Press. 132.
[10] Ibid., 8.

Smith argues that this framework of "double-consciousness" was rooted in visuality, exemplifying the ways in which modern Black thought (located in the West) flourished from visual insight and photographic engagement, just as Douglass foreshadowed. However, Smith contends that while both Douglass and Du Bois accessed photographic space to draw philosophical, cultural, and political narratives, they differed in their subjective attention and audience.

Du Bois represented a bourgeoning Black middle-upper class, struggling to own their Blackness within elite white spaces, such as private educational institutions, advanced scholarship, and medicine, to name a few. This is not to say that Du Bois did not concern himself with poor, working class Black Americans, or that his double-consciousness theory did not apply to the whole of Black America. Rather, he attended to the ways in which Black people and Black thought could reform and progress what it means to be prosperous and free within elite, institutionalized spaces. More precisely, he concerned himself with the troubling and existentially stressful circumstances of being in this position to challenge dominant Western establishment, striving to prosper within or beyond it, but still being seen by whites as intrinsically inferior. Du Bois remarks that the American world "yields [the Negro] no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world."[11] Thus, the visual sphere becomes salient and necessary in so far as one can use it to transcend the limits and fallacies of a white gaze, long dominating the photographic sphere.

While Du Bois' theory matched Douglass' initial hope for photography, art Historian Lisa Gail Collins finds that the visual underpinnings of double-consciousness theory as situated within or in response to the confines of white imagination directly reflects a tense, visual paradox

[11] Smith, S. (2004). *Photography on the color line: W.E.B. Du Bois, race, and visual culture*. Durham: Duke University Press. 10, 11.

located at the center of modern Black thought.[12] According to Collins, photography is "burdened by its legacy of visual violence," but is simultaneously "widely accessible," "appealing to many," and can expose social issues to effect social change.[13] Visual historian Scott McQuire also highlights this visual paradox of the photographic medium as a socio-cultural tool: "Photography transforms the practice of self-identity and amplifies the duplicity of the term 'subject,' pointing on the one hand towards the sovereignty of the individual, and on the other to the possibility of being subjected to the rule of a normalizing discourse."[14] This dynamism of authoritative individuality and visual subjection is exactly what seems to frustrate Du Bois; photography as a tool becomes so crucial to him *because* of Black subjects' inevitable position within another's lens, motivating a subject's intrigue with and unease concerning photography. The stress of being 'looked-at' or seen, and therefore, externally determined, distanced Du Bois from the possibilities of the visual realm (which comprises the other end of photography's paradoxical spectrum). Collins notes that Du Bois' 1926 essay "The Criteria of Negro Art" advocated for either better representation of Blacks or a focused movement towards music and literature as more spacious realms for expressing Black life.[15] The corrective attributes of Du Bois' visuality subsequently limit his prescriptive approach to Black subjectivity, particularly in his emphasis on representation of Blacks—how they look to themselves and others within the greater society—rather than the visual imagination that captivates Douglass.

By the time of Du Bois' writing at the turn of the 20th century, photography had 40-50 years to cement itself into the cultural, political, and academic fabric of Western thought, a

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[12] Collins, L. (2002). *The art of history: African-American women artists engage the past.* New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press. 1.
[13] Ibid. 24.
[14] McQuire, S. *Visions of modernity: representation, memory, time, and space in the age of the camera.(* SAGE Publications, Ltd. 1st edition. 1998). 40.
[15] Collins, 4.

temporal moment perhaps influencing Du Bois' focus on the tension of visuality rather than its imaginative utility. Douglass, however, was able to embrace the intersection of new photographic phenomena and a newly emerging American landscape post-slavery. Literary historian Sean Ross Meehan references curator Colin Westerbeck as realizing the necessary significance of these converging technological and national trajectories: "[Douglass'] rise to prominence ran parallel with the rise to popularity of the daguerreotype as a medium for portraiture […] his daguerreotype could be yet another autobiography."[16] For Douglass, photography offered a space of possibility to interpret American identity differently.

The 1860s boasted 3000 American photographers, white and black.[17] Black American subjects consisted of soldiers, enslaved people, teamsters, chimney sweeps, carpenters, blacksmiths, artisans, bricklayers, seamstresses, shoemakers, washerwomen, cooks, gardeners, and midwives.[18] The widespread popularity of photographs within American society indicated for Douglass the transformative elements of modernity. According to him, even "the servant girl can now see a likeness of herself, such as noble ladies and even royalty itself could not purchase fifty years ago."[19] Thus, there was a way in which the rise and accessibility of the photographic medium penetrated the temporality of rigid social, economic, and citizen status. Black Americans explored the medium as a space of intervention. Cultural historians Willis and Krauthamer noted that Blacks used photography to "re-image" and "re-imagine"[20] their identities and status, relishing in the opportunity to assert their self-perceptions. Douglass marveled at this

[16] Meehan, 134, 135.
[17] Willis, D. Krauthamer, K (2013). *Envisioning emancipation: Black Americans and the end of slavery.* Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press., 20.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., 1.
[20] Ibid., 23.

capacity for human beings to manifest their own visions of themselves, both what they see and what they wish to see.

Douglass and Du Bois both become interested in the formulation and presentation of the subject of photographic images, realizing these materials as indicative of the status of Black life in national and global contexts. Du Bois ultimately hones in on Black subjectivity in the scope of representation and double-consciousness, emphasizing racism's ability to manipulate Black self-image. Douglass, however, situates imagination, rather than conflict, at the core of subjectivity. Wallace and Smith argue that Douglass envisioned "a much more autonomous African American viewer, seeking progress and improvement through a study of the self objectified as image."[21] They assert that for Douglass, it is the Black American viewer that is of primary and upmost importance. Additionally, the industrious appeal of early American photography allows Douglass to focus on the Black American subject, viewer, *and* photographer, thus expanding beyond notions of Black Americans as purely objectified-subjects within the photographic sphere.

The Philosophy of "Pictures and Progress"

Of Douglass' four lectures on photography, "Pictures and Progress," addressed to a Boston crowd on December 3, 1861, enumerates the necessary stakes for not only achieving freedom and equity for Black Americans, but more importantly, for envisioning and reassembling the makings of humanity. Through rich illustration of the visual realm and attention to imaginative possibilities, "Pictures and Progress" unfolds a theory predicated upon the process of seeing, and the transcendent materiality of pictures and bodies. Douglass ultimately calls into question the conceptual nature of subjectivity itself, weaving together seemingly disparate entities to illuminate radical notions of being.

[21] Wallace and Smith, 8.

The lecture begins with a wondrous nod to the accessibility of photography. The medium signaled that modernity was not only available to the rich. "Men of all conditions," Douglass proclaims, "may see themselves as others see them."[22] If taken to reflect the status quo of the day, Douglass' formulation would appear no different from the frames of scientific racism and Du Bois' eventual concern with the white gaze: a slave is a slave, if that is how he is generally seen. Yet in Douglass' formulation, the "others" seem to symbolize subjects other than Whites or ideological frames other than racism. "Others" designate the presence of other beings in the world, interrelated within the realm of seeing, and thus, widening the expanse of one's own visual imagination. To be in a photographic landscape, for Douglass, is to see *with*. Thus, when the servant girl marvels at her likeness, how does the mutual seeing between her and the photographer create a space of self-emergence rather than visual exploitation, particularly since the objective is to materialize her? Philosopher Cynthia Willett identifies Douglass' subject-object (photographer-photographed) concern as central to his considerations of bondage and freedom: "how might it be that a person is eternally differenced from a thing?"[23] Although the servant girl assumes a position of social abjection, Douglass reads the photographic space as a resolve between the servant girl as societal labor-object and the servant girl as seeing-subject, unquestionably capable of transforming notions of humanity through visual agency.

The toxicity of internalized racism could influence the ways in which the servant girl perceives herself (i.e. Du Bois' concern--the effect of racism on self-image). Within that schema, the servant girl would desire to see the image of herself that would most poignantly prove to her that she is *not* a servant, an object of domination. Yet, Douglass seems to be revealing a more

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[22] Douglass, F. "Pictures and progress: an address delivered in Boston, Massachusetts, on 3 december 1861," in *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One, Speeches, Debates, and Interviews; Volume Three,* ed. John W. Blassingame (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 454.
[23] Willett, C. (2001). *The soul of justice: Social bonds and racial hubris*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 190.

complex meaning-process occurring in 'seeing-as-others-see-me' through the photographic medium.

After asserting that photography finally allows beings to see themselves as others see them, Douglass slightly yet mightily shifts the visual authority implicit in socialized seeing. He explains: "the humbled servant girl whose income is but a few shillings per week may now possess a more perfect likeness of herself than noble ladies and court royalty […]."[24] Here, Douglass reveals that his emphasis on accessibility is not simply a romantic praise of modernization. Rather, the servant girl's accessibility to her own photographic image grants her authority and insight into the imaginative landscape. The status quo designates the servant girl as inferior to noble ladies and court royalty. Instead of emphasizing the servant girl's yearning to prove her own humanity in face of normalized oppression, Douglass realizes that the servant girl can possess the perfection of her own likeness, as she is. Moreover, her image would appear to be even more perfect and beautiful than the portraits of the culturally hegemonic elites.

For Douglass, the issue was never that the servant girl maintained an inferior image compared with the elite. Instead, the problem is that the frame was created to exclude the servant girl in the first place. According to art historian Jonathan Crary, 19th century modernization shifted the socio-political essence of the visual. Whereas the 17th and 18th centuries emphasized *camera obscura,* the mechanics of light and optics preceding photography, the 19th century marked a shift from the landscape of the visual to the visual as *embodied*.[25] Referencing Foucault, Crary explicates that modernization was predicated upon the production of manageable subjects through "a certain polity of the body, a certain way of rendering a group of men docile and useful." Furthermore, modernization "called for a technique of overlapping subjection and

[24] Ibid.
[25] Crary, J. (1990). Techniques of the observer: On vision and modernity in the nineteenth century. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press. 70.

objectification, [bringing] with it new procedures of individualization."[26] The modern imperialist agenda of photography is exactly what Du Bois sought to challenge, seeking to create a non-racist visual mapping of Black bodies and individuality. Douglass, too, participated in the photographic process of individualization through his insistence upon portraiture.

The servant girl's navigation within and beyond the frame of aesthetic, subjective exclusion suggests intricate movement in the folds of social ontology, personal emergence, and technological innovation. Douglass, for example, "learned to write by writing between the lines of his master's copybook,"[27] a fact he shared in his work *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave: Written by Himself*. Here was a slave, prohibited from being a human subject and having a self, writing an autobiography of himself, utilizing the skills he self-learned by engaging the empty spaces of his master's copybook. His autobiography eventually became part of the American canon. Hence, when Douglass and the servant girl shift the authority of the frame—or imagine new ones—they further engage the world towards which their likenesses gesture: a world that is not contingent upon the 19th century notion of modern human personhood; a world that does not yet exist for him. Moreover, Douglass maintains that the "cheapness" and popularity of photography silently, yet powerfully impacts "the ideas and sentiment of the present and future generations,"[28] that challenge the meaning, authority, and salience of visions seeking to maintain the status quo. Photography's accessibility, then, evokes alternative routes of liberation. The industrial focus of Douglass' opening segment subversively reveals his primary intrigue with photography: its existentially transformative nature.

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[26] Ibid.,15.
[27] Meehan, 132.
[28] Ibid., 458.

As the lecture progresses, he leads his listeners into a visual realm, a space devoid of explicit human engagement. "Pictures like songs," Douglass suggests, "should be left to make their own way in the world [.]"[29] Thus, an engagement with the visual realm Douglass intends to illustrate requires a bodily, mental disentanglement from photography as belonging to human utility. Contrary to the modernist approach to the visual as centered on human subjectivity and perception, Douglass insinuates that photography does something of and on its own, similar to the ways humans have long revered music.

What are songs but particular compositions of sound, described in a body that we call music? Sound occurs through the vibratory movement of elements in the world, and their alternate silences. Subjects are implicated within sound, and can contribute to it. But there is a way in which sound is accepted as transcending human subjectivity, hence why music has remained an infinite muse for thinkers and artists across civilizations. Douglass then ponders how to hold the visual realm—and its societal manifestation as 'photography'—in such high esteem. By likening picture to song, he justifies the philosophic attention photography deserves, opening an avenue for his own theoretical moves.

Douglass' philosophy of photography circulates around the concept of "thought-pictures."[30] He describes thought-pictures as:

> "[…] the outstanding headlands of the meandering shores of life [that] are points to steer by on the broad sea of thought and experience. They body forth in living forms and colors, the varying lights and shadows of the soul."[31]

"Thought-pictures" as situated on the "broad sea of thought and experience" signals the interrelation of mind and body that comprise consciousness for Douglass. Here, consciousness

[29] Douglass, 458.
[30] Ibid., 459.
[31] *Ibid.*

does not strictly relegate to the mind or the body. Rather, Douglass acknowledges the broad space in which thought and experience recollect each other. This space becomes the determinant imagination, a tangible manifestation of mind and body unfolding onto each other. While Douglass imagines this space, he does not transpire as its subject, nor as its facilitator. Thought-pictures, positioning as the headlands of the broad sea's shore, mark the ways in which Douglass-as-subject recalls his emergence within the cognitive and experiential folds of existence.

The sensory nuances of Douglass' sea metaphor correlate with continental phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1945) account of human subjectivity: the ways in which lived presence in the world unfolds through a myriad of relations, perceptions, and happenings. For Merleau-Ponty, "the subject of sensation is a power that is born together with a certain existential milieu or that is synchronized with it."[32] Each sense—such as 'vision'—occurs as pre-personal[33] to individual beings, yet constitutes a primary way in which we each experience the world in first-person. Sense is not a purely subjective entity, only existing for single beings. Rather, Merleau-Ponty explains that sensations belong to a field of existence—perhaps the "broad sea" in Douglass' metaphor—igniting subjective experience. Sense synchronizes with the livedness of beings. We see only because there is the capacity for shared vision, a realm of existential navigation that anchors us within the world in particular kinds of ways Thus, a subject's sensorial contemplation becomes the existential avenue, realizing its presences within all that is suspended in the field of existence: place, time, and objects. The orientation of place, time, and objects—and the subject's sensorial contemplation amidst these

[32] Merleau-Ponty, M. *Phenomenology of perception.* 1945. (Routledge, 2013), 219.
[33] Ibid.

elements—dictates the nature of Douglass' "broad sea of thought and experience," granting thought-pictures a unique presence along the edges of these existential folds.

For Douglass, it is vision that has the capacity to envelop both the being-subject and a world in a mutually determining and motivating relation. Although a Cartesian[34] method of understanding existence emphasizes language, measurement, or record, "the dead fact is nothing without the lived impression."[35] Douglass contends that facts and reason are empty of motion in themselves and do not speak to nor summon the sensory attributes and emotive responses through which subjects grasp themselves as existing. Thus, how we determine place, time, and object as outside of subjectivity require re-interpretation along with a re-evaluation of being itself. For this reason, Douglass gestures towards the significance of the ways in which existential elements impress upon each other, much like the mutual absorption of thought and experience as designating the subject.

With an emphasis on relational impressions of existential elements, the visual realm manifests as a plane of formulation, positing "thought-pictures" as bodies of lived impression from which the subject reflexively navigates. Douglass describes, "[thought-pictures] body forth in living forms and colors, the ever varying lights and shadows of the soul."[36] He places consciousness in the function of thought-pictures, while the process of thought-pictures qualifies the human subjectivity. Here, Douglass radically redefines the ontological foundations of human consciousness. His emphasis on the movement, form, color, light, and shadows of thought-pictures challenges consciousness as primarily orienting around human mind or body, thus

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[34] Cartesian ideas of experience and consciousness stem relate to Descartes' philosophy, asserting the notion that, "I think, therefore, I am." This philosophy emphasizes consciousness in mind and reason, and correlates the nature of being with the realm of thought. For more background on Descartes, see:
Hatfield, Gary, "René Descartes", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2014/entries/descartes/>
[35] Douglass, 462.
[36] Ibid., 459

considering ontology beyond Cartesian or phenomenological thought. By regarding form, color, light and shadow, Douglass even moves away from his modernist leanings towards photography, revisiting the makings of visual phenomena prior to embodiment. For Douglass, the essence of "thought-pictures," and thus, the nature of being needs to account for the ways in which the visual realm experientially manifests, theoretically and practically.

Douglass' thought-pictures function as "the outstanding headlands of the meandering shores of life and are points to steer by"[37] within one's lived experience of the world. A "headland" is defined as a stretch of land projecting towards the sea. Douglass suggests that thought-pictures motivate a reaching out towards others and to an existing world unfolding through being itself. Shaping the sea and establishing flexible boundaries of its motion, the headland traverses sea and ground, marking the point at which they both come together and fall apart. The headland facilitates such similarity and difference, yet exists as a point in itself. While it motivates sea and ground to remain as different elements, it becomes motivated by these bodies to consistently facilitate their emergence. Sea and ground lean into the headland to push back onto themselves. While the headland forms from both land and water, it impresses upon the re-shaping and re-engaging of land and water's very existence. The headland—"thought-pictures"—gesture out to re-establish and reform its creating.

Considering the conceptual contributions of thought-pictures, material photographs and the process of photography take on new meaning. The materiality of thought-pictures situates subject, viewer, and photographer on the shores of life, pulling them into themselves and inhabiting the world interdependently. Each picture ("point") positions them on shared edges of the world, stimulating their vision of being, yet living the photographed moment differently.

[37] Ibid.

Photographic phenomenologist Ed Casey contends that "edges emerge between things,"[38] proposing that the material surface, sides, or camera frame of an image tease out the conflated boundaries of being. These edges place lived moments face-to-face, allowing each participating subject to meet first in the field of sensation—vision as a lens for stimulation and emotion. To materialize and review such an image is to meet oneself as the world, as the mutual impressions of place, time, and object. Pictures transfer each being-subject out into the world as seeing and seen, as feeling and felt, yet ultimately unraveling and re-orienting in our assumed tangibility. When Douglass engages a photograph, he engages the visuality of this imminent unraveling. The photographic landscape is the way Douglass retains a grasp on himself in the world, yet this realm proves the slippage of his very existence. He cannot regard material image and see only a reflective object of himself without meeting the fundamental movement of this self—in time, yet across time; impersonal, yet inherently sensed, contemplated. For Douglass, the process of thought-pictures, then, is ultimately one of self-revelation, "a comparison of beauty and excellence without, with those which are within."[39] Thought-pictures reveal, engage, and re-create the self that emerges in and of the world, arresting the idea of the human self as to engage the possibilities of its decomposition.

The ontological revolution of thought-pictures leads Douglass to proclaim that "the process by which [one] is able to invent his own subjective consciousness into the objective form […] is in truth the highest attribute of man's nature."[40] I argue that this photographic capability stands as the highest attribute of human's nature insofar as it challenges the nature of human subjectivity itself. Douglass' conceptual conflation of mind and body, subject and object, and thought and experience all translate into alternative philosophical ground for photography's

[38] Casey, E. "Taking photography to the edge." Emory University, Atlanta, GA. 03 Oct. 2013. Lecture.
[39] Ibid., 460.
[40] Douglass as quoted by M. Wallace, 6.

modernist direction. Photographic visuality emerges as "[a] science of [humans'] own relations to the world,"[41] operating as both a plane of contemplation and tool of navigation, allowing us to traverse and broaden the boundaries of our being.

Realizing the transformative philosophic underpinnings of photography, Douglass re-emphasizes the materiality and accessibility of the medium to stress the *moral* implications of his visual theory. "Material progress," he asserts, "may for a time be separated from moral progress. But the two cannot be permanently divorced."[42] He stresses the significance of our faculties of imagination to re-frame reality, suggesting that the ways we learn to navigate our lived experiences become our avenues for our contributions. Although material images create spaces of interrelation and self-revelation, "this picture making faculty is flung out into the world" just as we are, "subject to a wild scramble between contending interests and forces."[43] Douglass recognizes that photography as a philosophic tool does not intrinsically imply radical social change, but rather serves as a radical mode of grasping the world and ourselves differently.

The universality of the photographic realm and sensation introduces what Douglass would note as a more progressive potential for "a larger, fuller, and freer range of vision."[44] Transcending boundaries of space, language, and knowledge, "all the pictures in the book are known before a single lesson is learned. They speak to [people] in [their] own tongue."[45] Visuality realizes the world in how it appears, motivates, and responds, illuminating the structure through which beings come to inhabit the world relationally. Hence, Douglass concludes his visual theory with a call to action, hoping that the technological progress of photography

[41] Douglass, 472.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 461.
[44] Ibid., 460.
[45] Ibid.

"[dissolves] the granite barriers of arbitrary power, [bringing] the world into peace and unity."[46] Capturing the nuances of Douglass' hope, visual scholar Ginger Hill suggests that thought-picture theory requires "new gestural habits"[47] in order to inspire modes of inhabiting the world, true to Douglass' imaginative and interpersonal motivations. Additionally, as his theory promotes, ontological change requires a re-conceptualization of the making and marking of a human subject in or beyond the socio-political and economic map.

Portraiture and the Limits of Humanistic Framing

While Douglass' attention to the industrial and theoretical interventions of photography revealed new ground for philosophic consideration, his solutions to the robust ontological challenge become limited by the ways in which he seeks to reconstruct the human subject, particularly in his attachment to the power of portraits or "likenesses." His theory necessarily dilutes the primacy of the subject in an account of existence, situating thought-pictures as the bodies that move throughout and determine configurations in and of the world. But, when Douglass seeks to bring his theory back into the American landscape, he (1) re-centers the human subject, and (2) continues to align the possibilities of the photographic space with an inherently flawed formulation of human idealism.

Perhaps Douglass becomes ultimately confined by his own evaluation of humanity's contemplative limits:

> *"Man everywhere worships man, and in the last analyses worships himself. He finds in himself the qualities he calls divine and reverently bows before them. This is the best he can do. It is the measure of his being […] for man can never rise above his humanity."*[48]

[46] Ibid., 472.
[47] Hill, 72.
[48] Douglass, 463.

Douglass' philosophical scope recognizes the breadth of consciousness including, yet detached from human mind and body. The displacing of consciousness from within human subjectivity poses a limit for how he seeks to change the idea of "human" through its image. In the aforementioned passage, Douglass finds that the measure of man's being springs from subject to subject, unable to rise above that of which they are conscious. To grasp himself, he looks towards what is valuable in the being of others, and at last, worships the divinity within, for he cannot satisfyingly anchor himself beyond. "This is the best he can do," Douglass figures, ever-searching to embody the divine, only to realize it within. Yet, what we find within formulates from what we saw beyond: "the whole soul of man is a sort of picture-gallery, a grand panorama, in which all the great facts of the universe, in tracing things of time and things of eternity, are painted."[49]

The divinity Douglass draws from the world, and eventually himself, stems from the dissonance between an abstract vision of freedom, happiness, and prosperity, and lived visions of slavery, inequality, and death. If the soul is a panoramic picture-gallery of the universe, Douglass needs the photographic space to imagine the measure of humanity differently. Yet, philosopher Charles Mills explains how Douglass' attachment to American ideals as fundamental to humanity constricts the plane of being he seeks to imagine.

Analyzing Douglass' speech "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro" (1852), Mills argues that although Douglass reveals the contradictions that marked the birth of the American republic, he misses the ways American idealistic principles, in which he remains hopeful, are fundamentally linked to racism and imperialism. Conceptions of "the human being" fabricate a nature of desired being that intrinsically and actively exclude "others," primarily Blacks. The idea of humanity is predicated upon the assumption that the "other" is *not* human. It is this kind

[49] Ibid., 459.

of categorization—"human" and "other"—that white imperialists sought to solidify through photography, asserting photographs as markers of bourgeois citizenship, prosperity, and subjectivity. In the 19th century, photographs offered "observable proof of happiness and equality,"[50] supposed evidence of the hegemonic Western construction of humanity as naturally and objectively true. The bourgeois subject did not have to be the focus of the image to assert its gaze. Rather, bourgeois citizen-subjectivity constructed the ideals and the lens through which all beings were to be measured.

Douglass sought to shift this agenda through photography, deconstructing racist capitalization on the medium, emphasizing the philosophic significance of photographic visuality, and realizing anyone's access to it. However, when considering his own likeness or the likeness of the servant girl, for example, Douglass still wants these portraits to *do* something within the American schema and for oneself. He hopes that technological progress will finalize movement into a world of "justice, liberty, and brotherly kindness,"[51] echoing ideals of the nation's creed. This conclusion to the photographic segment of "Pictures and Progress" aligns with Douglass' earlier message in "The Meaning of July Fourth."

Mills asserts that in this speech, Douglass reasons that: (1) we must embrace notions of natural law to examine the moral issues at hand, (2) the original intent for the framers of the Declaration of Independence was antislavery and anti-white supremacy, (3) "there is an inconsistency between the actuality and the founding principles of the American polity which can be used by those agitating for change," and (4) these are grounds for hope that Blacks will be accepted as full citizens.[52] Even though Douglass is right that the unjust practices of the American institution do not match with the nation's humanistic ideals, he maintains a concept of

[50] Crary, 11.
[51] Douglass, 472.
[52] Mills, C. (1998). Blackness visible: Essays on philosophy and race. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press. 199.

a universal, unchanging[53] orientation of human being, and the laws and rights that organize this societal existence. He assumes a progressive morality of the nation's founders, and the ability for American injustice to be eradicated by moral, humanistic appeals to the integrity of the nation's own ideals. Finally, his desired outcome is that Blacks can assume access to the very framework constructed against their existence. Mills laments that Douglass did not see that the onus of citizenry depended upon racially differential rights, supporting "the white property-owning polity that justifies its racial architecture and shapes the moral consciousness and sense of entitlement of its white citizens."[54] What Mills is saying here is that there is no universal *human* consciousness sans the racism that constructs its foundational vision.

A universal human consciousness grounds itself a framework of what it means to be human according to the modernist, Western tradition. To be human, in this theoretical context, requires that one knows what *is not* human: the beast, the amoral, and the uncivilized. By seeking to disprove inhumanity, Douglass must re-imagine the image within the constructs of what he knows to be human. Thus, while Douglass' photographic theory opens a space of radical philosophic transformation, his reification of "the human" continues to ignore the realities and intricacies of Blackness, which the white Western world sought to capture or destroy in the first place.

Since Douglass' trajectory does not seem to challenge the ideals that already dominate philosophic thought and societal practice, it would seem that his photographic space would only amount to the same challenge Du Bois faced: aiming to represent the humanity of Blackness while suffocating in the impossibility of said status. The guise of humanity only serves the conscious of the imperialist. Yet, Mills reconciles Douglass' limits by illuminating the radicalism

[53] Mills, 173.
[54] Ibid., 200.

of his methodology: "black will."[55] Mills describes black will as Douglass' earnestness to stand up, demonstrating "the will he was not supposed to have."[56] Douglass tenaciously asserted himself as a Black man, not a slave. This "piece of property" stole himself, "repudiated his official subpersonhood."[57] Just as he wrote in the margins of his master's copybook, or the servant girl could embrace a photographic likeness more perfect than noble ladies, Douglass asserted his own intent to be free,[58] no matter the theoretical parameters of such freedom.

Although Douglass presented "The Meaning of July Fourth" about a decade prior to "Pictures and Progress," I maintain that his black-will undergirds the existential folds and possibilities Douglass theorizes through photography. Rather than emphasize photography as a method for realizing Black humanity, then, I consider Black photography as a particular kind of visual, temporally suspended space where 'being' is contemplated, engaged, questioned, moved, realized, and changed. If the modern subject leans towards and expects universal sameness, then Black photographic thought negotiates real differences such as poverty, racial exclusion, exploitation, and crisis.[59] Subjectivity, as the supposedly personal consciousness of being, emerges from layers and layers of illusion, idealism, decomposition, and reformulation. Thus, Douglass' theory of thought-pictures, in its de-centering of the subject as the moralistic anchor, exhales a plane of new philosophic considerations, piercing humanistic stagnancy with the movement of existential curiosity.

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[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Grandin, Greg (2004). *"Can the subaltern be seen? Photography and the affects of nationalism."* Hispanic American Historical Review, 84:1. Retrieved from http://greggrandin.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Can-the-Subaltern-Be-Seen.pdf. 110.

Chapter II

"The family is the foundation head of all mental and moral influence. And the presence there of the miniature forms and faces of our loved ones whether separated from us by time and space, or by the Silent countenents *(sic)* of Eternity—must act powerfully upon the minds of all. They bring to mind all that is amiable and good, in the departed, and strengthen the same qualities."

| Frederick Douglass, *Pictures and Progress*

At the dusk of an era where a Black American's visage was worth only as much as the cash reward listed on their runaway poster, how magnificent did it feel to hold and gaze upon a portrait one could love? Douglass exhausted the potential of personal portraiture, and Black photographers scurried to homes, weddings, funerals, and schools to engage Black life, in all its bustle and stillness. Black women made and shared their portraits with each other as gifts, provoking thought, emotion, and social action.[60] Photographs not only depicted the likenesses of individuals, families, and community spaces, but also reflected the "loving and dedicated relationships that sustained families, supported children's education, and created emotional worlds that far exceeded material conditions."[61] Thought-pictures inform the gestures and frame the material of communal seeing, suspending the archival, emotional memory of Black life—and Black loss.

The photographic medium, particularly Black America's socio-historical relationship to photography, relies on the ability to visualize abstract processes and (seemingly) concrete facts of being, long disregarded within dominant Western frameworks. Both Douglass and Collins would agree that vision, "to be able to see and name something,"[62] begs a certain kind of power: a power to both affirm and create existence. But, what does Black *loss* look like? What does it feel like? What does it mean to visualize deprivation, displacement, and absence—experiences woven into both the makings of Blackness and the intimate human condition?

Black loss attends to an emotional thread that recognizes what we had, what we are now without, and perhaps, what we still desire. Just as photography signals the love and relationships sustaining Black life post-slavery, photography also frames the personal and shared experience of Black loss: grief, memory, and even, potential. Keeping with Douglass' theorizations,

[60] Willis and Krauthmer, 30.
[61] Ibid., 143.
[62] Collins, 24.

thought-pictures de-center the human subject as the locus of experience, broadening the landscape of relations, feelings, and impressions in the world. Thus, how does the grief and memory of Black loss emerge in the photographic sphere, and what can this process tell us about Black being?

In this chapter, I consider Black loss as it functions in Black subjective visuality, particularly through the photographic narratives of cultural theorist bell hooks and photographer Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashé. In her essay "In Our Glory," (1995) hooks contemplates memory through family photographs, and complicates self-reflection upon the tragic loss of her own childhood portrait. Moutoussamy-Ashé's *Daufuskie Island* (1982) explores and savors the last southern coastal Sea Island to withstand resort expansion and consumerism. By the book's 25th anniversary (2007), barely any of Daufuskie's native Black population and historic grounds was left, a fate Moutoussamy-Ashé felt moved to prevent with her work. hooks and Moutoussamy-Ashé present vastly different projects that converge on the plane of Black loss: loss of material memory (photograph and land), and loss of self (portrait and legacy). By paying attention to what loss *does* in the photographic space, we can explore the fragments of a subjective presence in the past, and the formulation of a future.

Without Our Glory: A Close-Reading of bell hooks' Reflections on Photography

bell hooks' *Art On My Mind* is a series of essays contemplating the lived experience of art. While many Black American activists and thinkers embraced the arts with political fervor and emotional necessity, hooks contends that an identification with art expands beyond notions of representation. Since the early 20th century, discussions on representation centralized within a

binary of 'good' and 'bad' images,[63] particularly regarding popular media. In the 1970s, as during the Harlem Renaissance, Black youth and the contemporary Black visual art world noticed the limitations of this binary, pressuring boundaries seemingly cemented in the visual landscape. The artists became less concerned with depicting explicitly positive and multi-faceted images of Black life in America. Rather, they were determined to directly influence and communicate with viewers on the grounds of subjectivity, strongly encouraging (if not forcing) themselves and viewers to challenge their own modes of perceiving race, gender, socio-economic status, and various other shared identities. For example, visual cultural scholar Richard Powell explains that images in the form of music videos encouraged young people and other viewers or critics to, "embrace a public freedom bereft of any thread of decorum or social responsibility."[64] This assertion of freedom sought to release black subjects (as artists, viewers, and models/sitters) from a dichotomous attachment to the white gaze, newly considering Black artistic expression, reflection, and recognition.

Yet for hooks, a revolutionary process of seeing and imagining Blackness was not limited to the realm of new material creation. Radical seeing not only emphasized looking-forward, but also required a critical looking-back, particularly towards the kind of photographs that have intimately lived among families for generations. Thus, "In Our Glory" meditates on the phenomena of family portraiture, and the affective space that unfolds through a critical reflection of personal photographs. By accentuating the loss or absence surrounding an old image of her father and a personal portrait from her childhood, hooks ponders the productivity of negative or sorrowful feelings, rather than striving to counteract them.

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[63] hooks, b. (1995). *Art on my mind: Visual politics*. New York: New Press

[64] Powell, Richard J. *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 2008. P. 179.

My emphasis on 'the productivity of negativity' is influenced by performance art theorist José Muñoz's reference to theorist Paolo Virno in Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. He explains that Virno finds "a potentiality in negative affects that can be reshaped by negation and made to work in the service of enacting a mode of critical possibility."[65] I am intrigued by his conceptualization of negative affects as working towards future possibilities: an attention to the emotional space of what-is-not, an embrace of that existential failure, and an entry to a critical imagining of what could-and-can-be. I ponder this notion of negativity to help formulate my reading of self, relationship, and loss in hooks' narrative, noting that hooks concerns herself with an experience of memory that does more than reify the past.

Although both hooks and Powell specifically challenge the positive-negative binary within the context of Black representation in popular media, I up-root the *feeling* of negativity from the material image itself, and posit it back into the realm of emotion that the material ignites. When we determine images as 'positive' or 'negative,' we are really referencing the comfort or joy we feel upon viewing a sentimental or dignified image of ourselves, or the violence we feel when our images are manipulated and used against us. Thus, by engaging the space of negativity surrounding images—whether linked to popular media or to family photographs—, we can imagine the transformative possibilities of emotional life.

"In Our Glory" actually begins within the contours of someone else's life, not hooks'. She remarks that her older sister V, whose sexuality and preferences for white women seemed to mirror their fathers', was "always a daddy's girl."[66] Referencing a family history never clarified

[65] Oz, J. (2009). *Cruising utopia: The then and there of queer futurity*. New York: New York University Press. 12.
[66] hooks, 54.

for the reader, hooks proclaims that V's likeness to her father in lifestyle also reflected a movement away from Black womanhood. hooks determines this diversion from Black womanhood as emblematic of V's retreating from an image of her mother—a woman whom both hooks and V did not want to become.[67] Although hooks and V share disillusionment concerning their mother (again, for reasons unstated), hooks begins this narrative with V. V is the daddy's girl, and we can assume hooks is not. V maintains a lifestyle that somehow draws her closer to their father, even if for reasons hooks-as-scholar may deem problematic. Nevertheless, V is still the only daughter to possess the object of hooks' desire: the image of their father "in his glory."[68]

In this photograph, the only family portrait V boasts in her household, "Daddy" wears a crisp white t-shirt and leans against the frame of a bare pool table. His deep, dark skin and glinting smile shine brighter than the walls and "mingle with the shadows."[69] The shirt hugs him, defying the emptiness of his corner in the pool hall. He is bold, assured. Seductive.[70] He welcomes the camera, leading hooks to believe that whoever snapped this portrait is someone he deeply cared for. It was 1949, and her father, Veodis Watkins was *open*.[71]

But hooks never knew Daddy that way. She explains that he never opened up about his life before his marriage to their mother and their breed of seven children, "forcing him to leave behind the carefree masculine identity [the pose in the photograph] conveys."[72] Here, hooks insinuates that her experienced recollection of Daddy seems vastly different from the emotional and factual life his image suggests. Again, she does not know who took this image. She only knows that it was not her immediate family. Her ability to know Daddy at all exemplifies the fact

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[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid., 55.
[72] Ibid.

of her existence as his child. Yet it is her very existence—and that of her siblings and her mother— that marks the death of Veodis Watkins. hooks relays that when her and her siblings were young children, they would ask Daddy about "who he was, how he acted, and what he did and felt before [them],"[73] but he refused to answer. hooks ponders, "It was as though he did not want to remember or share that part of himself, as though remembering hurt."[74] He refused to entertain their questions, for the self he would proclaim to describe would only be a caricature to them, a conjuring of a Veodis Watkins that exists only insofar as Daddy keeps him to himself—perhaps in the form of a photograph.

V keeps this photograph now. hooks had never seen this image before, and we can assume that she regarded it for the first time in V's home. V's possession of this photograph confirms for hooks the ideal closeness and bond between V and Daddy, a daughter-father relationship of which one could only dream. With this photograph, V was allowed to know him[75], or the parts of him none of the other children knew. hooks begins this narrative by resolving that V is a "daddy's girl," however, she sounds barely bitter or resentful about her sister's access to their father. V is consistently reluctant to gift hooks a copy of that photograph, sending it instead to their other sister who did not even want it. hooks explains that in childhood, she and V were rivals. V was always winning, and as the one who possessed Daddy's affection, hooks deduces that V probably does not want to give that up or share her father in such a way.[76]

hooks' discovery of this photograph, this version of her father, reveals to her that she lost out. Perhaps even worse, hooks never had anything of Daddy she could lose. It was Daddy who had once lost: his confidence, his coolness. If Daddy had wanted hooks to find him, he would

[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid., 55.

have given her the photograph.[77] Nevertheless, as hooks studies the portrait, she strives to embrace the photographed being that bodies forth towards her as she stands before the snapshot. It is *open*, even as Daddy was "cold, distant, and dark."[78] While hooks laments that she was not always able to love Daddy as she knew him, the photograph offered a version of him that she was sure she could love. Note, hooks does not profess that she now loves the man she receives in the photograph. Rather, she recognizes the potential of love this image offers, even if she can only catch a glimpse of its opening.

For hooks, photographs can map the intimacy of relationships in various ways, particularly in contrast to the images that impede upon a way of love.[79] Her conceptualization of photographs mirrors Douglass' illustration of the universe, its pictorial composition, and how we navigate its landscape:

> *"Rightly viewed, the whole soul of man is a sort of picture-gallery, a grand panorama, in which all the great facts of the universe, in tracing things of time and things of eternity, are painted. The love of pictures stands first among our passional inclinations, and is among the last to forsake us our pilgrimage here. In youth it gilds all our Earthly future with bright and glorious visions; and [as] we age, it paves the streets of our paradise with gold and sets all its opening gates with pearls."*[80]

I quote this passage at length as to exemplify the ways in which photographs depict the impossibility of knowing, yet still offering avenues for further exploration. The process of discovery becomes the content of our completion. The picture-gallery of the universe "paves the streets of our paradise with gold and sets all its opening gates with pearls." Douglass emphasizes the love of pictures as the initial motivation for one's descent into the world, and yet, it is these very pictures that "forsake us our pilgrimage." In the context of hooks' experience with her father's image, I liken this motivation and renouncement to hooks' hopeful glimpse of her father,

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[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 56.
[80] Douglass, 459.

and, her inherent exclusion from him. Yet, Douglass never describes or emphasizes the ends of these roads and the space or place unto which the gates open. He does not pre-occupy himself with the absolute content of photographic visualization. Instead, the embellishments of gold and pearls signify 'process' as the reward. This process, then, ignites one's infinite ability to see *differently*.

hooks' critical engagement with the memory and materiality of her father's image unearths for her a similar disorientation she experiences in herself. Perhaps she and her father were more intimately linked than they could initially see. hooks reflects on a cherished-image of her childhood self. A young hooks sports her cow girl outfit: white ruffled blouse, vest, fringed skirt, gun, and boots.[81] While hooks struggled with self-image growing up, deeming herself unworthy of love, this image convinced her of her presence, girlhood, beauty, and capacity for joy, even if she did not consistently feel it.[82] Similar to her father's portrait, hooks' image became her one reminder that she could "know and express joy."[83] As a child, hooks struggled to receive herself beyond damaging images and messages impressed upon her by authority figures, perhaps by parents, dominant white culture, etc. In both childhood and adulthood, this cowgirl photograph offered hooks an avenue to see herself, on her own terms and through the lens of her own imagination. "I am most real to myself in snapshots," she determines, "there I see an image I can love."[84]

During her first trip away from home, hooks misplaces this cherished portrait at a cousin's house. Grief strikes her. She explains that she yearned to share this image of herself "in

[81] hooks., 56.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.

[her] glory,"[85] then giving it to another family member for safekeeping until the end of her stay. Upon her departure, the image could not be traced. hooks recalls:

> *"This was for me a terrible loss, an irreconcilable grief. Gone was the image of myself I could love. Losing that snapshot, I lost the proof of my worthiness—that I had ever been a bright-eyed child capable of wonder—the proof that there was a "me of me.""*[86]

hooks laments the loss of this portrait as if she was a dear family member. Without this access to her childhood joy, hooks has nowhere to anchor her hope. Her loss of the "bright-eyed child capable of wonder" simultaneously shatters her visualization of a joyful, imaginatively pleasurable[87] future. She does not even consider the continued possibility of a joyful life without that childhood image. The image offered her proof of a "me of me," and yet, hooks could not locate this childhood self within her lived presence. The photograph contained this 'me' to which she attached. Without the proof, this form of "me" remains permanently severed from hooks'. She can no longer peer into the edges of her supposed-self. She can no longer re-member[88] the frames and fragments of her being to envision a future. Her attachment to the material photograph arrests her possibilities in as much as the image stimulates their potential.

For both hooks and Daddy, the grief of loss collides with a realization of dispossession. Their youth contains the locus of their potential joy and vigor for life, yet these feelings cannot operate without their pictorial embodiment. To lose a photograph, or the loss the emotional life indicated in the photograph, is to displace oneself. The intricacies of this human condition, then, parallel the fundamental makings of Blackness. According to hooks, "when the psychohistory of a people is marked by on-going loss, when entire histories are denied, hidden, erased,

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[85] Ibid., 57.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., 56.
[88] Ibid., 64.

documentation can become an obsession."[89] I consider Du Bois' visual impulses, the culture of producing positive Black images, and Douglass' illumination of photographic passions. The process and material of seeing indicates a kind of concreteness of being, and a re-mapping of a people's past and an affirming exploration of their present. The obsession of documentation cultivates from the seemingly graspable reality of time, place, and history. Photographs become snapshots of existence that can be "packed, stored, moved, […] shared, and passed around."[90] Photographs contained the world, recorded, hidden, and re-discovered.[91] Functionally, the camera would be an extension of vision one already maintains, with the lens facilitating the options for one's attention. Yet, hooks' "irreconcilable grief" and Daddy's pain surrounding their images suggest that photographs suspend in a realm of vision that escapes the self, or, that the self never had.

The non-possessive realm of photographic vision becomes evident when hooks, in her young adults years, begins to despise the photographic process. She was once enamored by images, relishing the moments when the children also got to be behind the camera because her father tended to be the only one to take the pictures.[92] Yet, she reached a point in her life when she detested the experience of photographs: posing, cameras, and images. She relays that she stopped living at home and refused anyone's camera, relinquishing the obsession with documentation in favor of an untraceable route. hooks proclaims, "I wanted to stand outside history."[93] With such an emphasis on the power of photographs and their function in rooting hooks to different elements of herself, how could the absence of photographs so seamlessly detach hooks from history?

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[89] Ibid., 59.
[90] Ibid., 60.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid., 61.
[93] Ibid.

hooks' self-determined exile from photography as an escape from history gestures towards the content of her initial passion for images. While hooks can reflect upon the joyful cowgirl of her childhood as a cherished artifact of a self not-yet-know, the little girl in the image regarded the photographic realm as the space of imaginative possibility. The camera worked to manifest an exploration of who she could be across time. The photographic archive as keeper of legacy becomes only a benefit of the photographic vision. But, it is the critical, intentional engagement of the seeing-process itself that constitutes the magic of photography.[94] Through this framework, time, place, and self jut out into the photographic landscape, becoming part of the illustrative composition of the world, rather than its immutable fact. The camera as a tool manifests to not only savor the present, but to witness the unraveling of a world, indulging in the infinite re-mapping of its fragments.

Towards the end of "In Our Glory," hooks collects family snapshots that had long adorned the walls of their homes, organizing them for interpretation. "I search these images," she explains, "to see if there are imprints waiting to be seen, recognized, and read."[95] hooks reference to potential "imprints" amidst these photographs is reminiscent of Douglass' account of the factual (time, place, things, people) world: "The dead fact is nothing without the lived impression […] a kind of frozen truth, destitute of motion itself—it is incapable of producing emotion in others."[96] The imprints and impressions of photographs cater to affective existence in ways that the conscious, human subject cannot. hooks suggests the fallibility of subjective human consciousness as she engages photographic narratives with a Black male friend. They assess the images of his boyhood to discern when and where he began to lose "a certain

[94] Ibid., 59.
[95] Ibid., 64.
[96] Douglass, 462.

openness," to "close himself away."[97] For hooks, this process of seeing designates a critical, recuperative engagement with the past. Although the friend hopes to return to his old self before the point of emotional entrapment, I contend that the process of recuperative seeing tends to the ways in which one can find ground in the space of visual and affective movement. Quoting philosopher A. David Napier, hooks determines, "the self becomes evident through a visual demonstration of its connectedness"—and, I would add, its *dis*-connectedness. Thus, instead of seeking to locate a complete self within facts or moments of life, we can ponder how emotive realities become mapped onto bodies and into narratives of being.

Ultimately, she embraces the flux of photography to participate in a kind of *radical* love. Daddy's loss of the smiling man in the white t-shirt branded its emptiness into his familial relationships. hooks could not connect with him; she did not know where to anchor herself within love's capacity, only peeking at the possibility of home in his image. Thus, I maintain that *radical* love engages the emotional realm to which photographs gesture. bell hooks grieved a father she never knew and glimpsed the glory of the person who was. In order to relish in that glory, hooks must sink into the loss that paints her family's existence. hooks *is* loss, and so too was the only father she knew. Radical love is not attached to places and persons as objects to catch our affections. Instead, it offers a framework for imagining realities differently. I consider radical love as an ethic of seeing wherein a photograph layers the tonalities of past, present, and future to examine the makings of an emotional world and the possibilities of our comportment within it.

[97] hooks, 64.

Moutoussamy-Ashé, Radical Love, and a Living Archive

Visual cultural scholar bell hooks' experiential formulation of radical love prompts me to consider how this affective framework manifests in photography as popular culture, fine arts, and documentary. Does radical love within photography require pre-existing familial relationship and bond? By emphasizing radical love, do I presuppose that all beings have an implicit desire for intimacy, and to see and be seen? Do I romanticize the possibilities of photography, reifying visuality in a way that avoids persistent power dynamics? To engage these intricate questions, I examine photographer Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashé's documentary photographic essay *Daufuskie Island*. Through engaging the political tension and emotional resonance that motivated her artistry, I argue that *Daufuskie Island* complicates how we come to know self and others through our corporeal experiences of negotiating, clarifying, and liberating socio-political tensions. Moutoussamy-Ashe's work begs an attention to the ethics of visuality, and a necessity for radical love.

In 1977, Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashé produced *Daufuskie Island*, a documentary photographic celebration of the Gullah/Geechie peoples and a challenge to the Sea Island resort industry threatening to expand onto their land. Her exploration manifested into a project of activism. At the time of Moutoussamy-Ashé's visit, Daufuskie was the last South Carolina coastal island to withstand major resort expansion and cultural extinction. These coastal islands had been home to Gullah/Geechie peoples, Black Americans whose communities retained African influences throughout and post-slavery. Additionally, Blacks on Daufuskie had once boasted a thriving timber and oyster industry, re-claiming cultural and economic control over their land. The Depression forced farmers to sell their plots, and the stress of faltering livelihood fatally impacted many Daufuskie residents. Some began to frequently travel to Savannah to sell

local goods. Between 1910 and 1936, Daufuskie's predominately Black population fell from 3,000 to 300.[98] While Hilton Head (Daufuskie's sister sea-island) experienced a tourist boom that trickled into Daufuskie's industry, the island had generally remained the same post-Depression.

During her visit, Moutoussamy-Ashé met with direct slave descendants still speaking their dialects, and she explored prayer houses dating back to worship practice on the plantations.[99] The Daufuskie lifestyle captivated her: children playing in yards with dolls, teenagers coming into their personal fashion, women relaxing in their kitchens, and men descending the ferries back from the mainland.[100] Yet, when speaking with Mrs. H.A. White, and 80-year-old Daufuskie resident, Moutoussamy-Ashé realized the threat of expansion on these lifestyles she had begun to so delicately and artistically honor. Speaking on Daufuskie's potential transformation into a resort, Mrs. White explained, "Well, I guess if those people buy the land, they got the right to do whatever they want to do. But it's already got to where probably every hour I see some car go by. I just know I don't want to see it if it gets any worse."[101] Moutoussamy-Ashé related to author Alex Haley (who wrote the book's foreword) that the moment she experienced Mrs. White's testimony, she realized the necessity of recording Daufuskie Island and its people as they still were, before it was too late.[102] She was not to be commissioned for this work. Rather, the dissonance between socio-economic climate and community narratives motivated her to react.

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[98] Moutoussamy-Ashe, J. (2007). *Daufuskie Island: photographs*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press. 11.
[99] Ibid., 8.
[100] Ibid., 16.
[101] Ibid., 8.
[102] Ibid.

Moutoussamy-Ashé's conversation with Mrs. White and her resulting artistic motivation exemplifies philosopher Suely Rolnick's notion of *aesthetic experience*. In the realm of existential dissonance lays new meanings, new possibilities for artistic expression. For Rolnick, "this experience depends on the ability of the body to become vulnerable to what surrounds it,"[103] subjecting oneself not only to the present space, but to the other bodies, histories, and interactions that mediate the space. In this moment, the artist is overcome by the sensation of reality, its form, and the movements that "fluctuate its apparent stability."[104] Moutoussamy-Ashé could no longer romanticize the lifestyles of Daufuskie's Black residents, feeding from the ways in which their legacies provided historical solace for Black American life. Rather, Mrs. White's sentiments implicated Moutoussamy-Ashé into the present movement of the island, slipping slowly through the frame she had built for it, and launching her back into the lived-ness of racialized, socio-economic disparity. Moutoussamy-Ashé's point of realization signals Rolnick's "state of art," the moment at which creative inclination moves the artist to make something of this tangible, yet confusing, troubling, and revealing contention in-the-world. Moutoussamy-Ashé moved forth in such inclinations, deciding to "schedule every possible trip to Daufuskie to photographically record these people and their island as they still were."[105] If only the country—and resort developers—could see Daufuskie as she sees it, perhaps they would be moved to celebrate and preserve the island and its people, rather than extinguish them or run them out.

In the 25th Anniversary edition of *Daufuskie Island*, cultural scholar Deborah Willis reflects on the potency of Moutoussamy-Ashé's documented works since her instrumental visit to the island. Her preface begins with a nod to Haley's original forward in which he designates

[103] Rolnik, S., & Sauerländer, K. (2011). Archive mania. In *DOCUMENTA* (Vol. 13, Ser. 022). Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz.178.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Moutoussamy-Ashé, 8.

Moutoussamy-Ashé's project as the "emotional reaction of an artist to what she saw, heard and felt […]."[106] The *emotional* aesthetic experience illustrates the memories and evidence the artist sought to contribute. Willis interpreted Moutoussamy-Ashé's project as an "activist approach to photography," praising the ways in which the artist grounded her craft in an on-going struggle for economic liberation and cultural preservation. Reflecting on her artistic vision since the original edition, Moutoussamy-Ashé notes that 25th anniversary edition includes more images and more intentional compositional framing.

This edition comprises of four parts: People, Place, Everyday Life, and Spiritual Grace. She makes portraits of men and women on their porches and in their kitchens, patiently waiting for the fruits of their open invitation to Moutoussamy-Ashé. She chronicles little girls at school, a resident picking pecans and another jumping a stalled car. She captures the bustle of mainland ferries and the stillness of the lime wood church and the old social club. She recorded the old prayer house before and after Hurricane David, meditating on the beautiful disaster of a community space. Yet, life still moved. Moutoussamy-Ashé and her camera witnessed funerals and weddings, joined in the preparation of communion, and admired a young man playing the piano in his church suit.

The artist shot every image in black-and-white, with soft focuses and sharp contrasts emerging from the edges where natural light and curious shadows meet. Light and its absence are key ethics for documentary portraiture, impelling the artist's aesthetic to accept and work with what is available.[107] Moutoussamy-Ashé's image "Riding in a car with no windows"[108] best illustrates the contours of this ethic. A woman sits in the back seat of a car with no windows,

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[106] Ibid., 15.
[107] Collins, L. G. (2002). *The art of history: African American women artists engage the past*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. 109.
[108] Moutoussamy-Ashé, 80.

squeezed tightly between a sheet of plastic covering part of the door and the edge of the artist's frame. A turtleneck rests at the base of her chin, and her eyes peer out the window, penetrating the blurry, moving image of bare trees and road. Moutoussamy-Ashé's lens watches the sunlight peek onto the woman's top and get caught in the plastic beneath the window. The light's reflection glows onto the woman's calm, pensive face, highlighting the tip of her nose and the subtle intensity of her side-ward gaze. Unlike the portraits in which subjects directly face Moutoussamy-Ashé's lens or the landscapes in which the artist explicitly observes, "Riding in a car with no windows" emphasizes the abstraction of the artist's position amidst this woman and her everyday life. Similar to the island and its ties to the mainland, the woman in the window-less car is inextricably linked to the place that surrounds her. Car-rides signify isolated movement, and yet the island's winds sweep through the car and the sunlight streams in from behind her, yet reflects back onto her face. While Moutoussamy-Ashé is also present in this moment, we cannot locate her. Rather, we are drawn into the woman and back into the world she meets.

"Riding in a car with no windows" exemplifies the ways in which documentary photographic moments have the potential to signify the "humanistic elements"[109] of seeing and being seen, realizing the subjects as unfolding through lived experiences and shared spaces. According to historian Beaumont Newhall, documentary photography has traditionally intended to "makes us feel that if we had been there, we would have seen it so. We could have touched it,

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[109] Duganne, E. (2010). *The self in black and white: Race and subjectivity in postwar American photography*. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press. 45. | Duganne discusses how certain Post-War photographers sought to deconstruct the rigid subject/object hierarchy of photographic interactions. Instead, they preferred to draw attention to the intimacy between photographers and subjects, realizing "the ways in which our experiences of ourselves and our interactions with others are shaped by the frequently contradictory terms, including racial dimensions, of these intersubjective relations."

counted the pebbles, noted the wrinkles, no more, no less."[110] If we were to ride in the car with this woman, we, too, would feel suspended in the moment where place meets person, where movement and light facilitates our being in this moment together.

Moutoussamy-Ashé did not sacrifice beauty for activism, unlike more widely acclaimed American documentary photographers such as Robert Frank, who once exclaimed that he no longer believed in beautiful photography. To him, photography had to "deal with life" and its messiness.[111] Instead, she could be likened to Vera Jackson, a black woman photographer in the 1930s who proclaimed, "I'd rather think I am helping to open up new horizons of the mind, rather than to just make beautiful photographs, which, of course, I am also trying to do."[112] In her project of beautiful, monochromatic photographs of Daufuskie Island and its residents, Moutoussamy-Ashé strove to celebrate and solidify its resonance in American history and Black life. Her activist motivation suggests exactly what kind of mental and emotional horizons Moutoussamy-Ashé wanted to open. However, perhaps her political intentionality also confines the frame through which we meet and interact with Daufuskie.

Moutoussamy-Ashé's emotional aesthetic experience manifested a project of activism, inscribing political and economic purpose into what began as a personal curiosity. Yet, Rolnick implores that "we must free ourselves from the romantic trap that binds creation to pain,"[113] speaking to the ways in which art as protest can still render both artist and subject immobile. Rolnick primarily references the Latin American macro-political authority over artists in the 1960s and 70s, explaining how even the artist who radically reacts to the state loses touch with the transcending imaginable. She remains locked in a state-subject dichotomy that makes it

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[110] Weems, C. M., Neil, E., Cahan, S., & Metzger, P. R. (2004). *Carrie Mae Weems: The Louisiana Project*. New Orleans: Newcomb Art Gallery. 14.
[111] Duganne, 50.
[112] Moutoussamy-Ashe, J. (1986). *Viewfinders: Black women photographers*. New York: Dodd, Mead. 88.
[113] Rolnick, 177.

impossible for her to transform the political and ideological framework that binds them. Although macro-political dictatorial regimes spurred artistic movement, Rolnick argues that the strength of this aesthetic experience derives from the artist's ability to clarify and concretize these relations so that their poetics can transcend them. "This ability makes art a powerful, chemical reactive," she contends, "that […] can interfere in the molecular composition of the environments it enters, dissolving its toxic elements."[114] The artist can recognize and play with the various elements that create these shared, yet conflicting and contentious experiences, noticing the oppressive paradigms, but withstanding their grasp.

Essentially, Rolnick emphasizes the affective experience that correlates with the lived reality of socio-political strife. This experience does not solely revolve around the pain of struggle, voicelessness, or injustice. Moutoussamy-Ashé's emotional motivations for *Daufuskie Island* culminates in a desire to do something about this communal angst, to prevent the pain that could come with economic expansion. However, Rolnick would argue that Moutoussamy-Ashé's emotional response still centralizes her consciousness as the "I". Moutoussamy-Ashé re-configures the island in her historical imagination and her interpersonal interactions that bring it to life. Thus, her emotions react to what seems to directly threat the reality of Daufuskie that she both imagined and is coming to know. In keeping with a subject-object dichotomy, resort representatives become the threatening subjects who act upon a potentially objectified group. It is then Moutoussamy-Ashé and her lens that must protect them, or at least preserve their essence. When she becomes consumed by this emotional reaction and activist revelation, Moutoussamy-Ashé subsumes herself to "[exacerbating] feelings of anguish,"[115] inflating a particular lens of

[114] Ibid., 178.
[115] Rolnick, 178.

the island. In this way, her lived experience of Daufuskie and the subjects—including herself—can become "confused,"[116] or confined, rather than liberating.

In her essay, "Visible Roots and Visual Routes," Collins illuminates the limitations, or perhaps contradictions, of *Daufuskie Island* in its intentions and presentation. In her attention to preserving Gullah/Geechie culture and urgently recording Sea Island life before resort expansion, Moutoussamy-Ashé's project qualifies as "salvage ethnography,"[117] an arena of anthropological study intended for studying and retaining folklore culture and practice amidst impending modernization. Salvage ethnography blends well with the artist's intentions for the work, and the ways in which the island's legacy initially captivated her. Yet, Collins contends that the photographic essay itself "belies these charged concerns" to record and honor "the old Sea Island life" of her vision. As previously described, Moutoussamy-Ashé's images amplify both ailing wooden structures and busy ferries. In some images, residents shell and clean crab in the back yard, and in others images, they hold onto their hats and bags while travelling to and from the mainland. Collins proclaims that *Daufuskie Island* ingeniously illustrates and blends "economic lack and resiliency, and the structures of the enslaved past with the blueprints for the future."[118] The subjects in these images move, transform, critique, and consider. Although Daufuskie's residents seem rooted in African retentions and early Black American lifestyle, how can one visually capture the continuing "routes" of their lived possibilities?

Collins and Haley describe diverse sentiments of Daufuskie residents concerning the past, present, and future circumstances of the island. Both scholars describe an ambivalence about the economic and tourist development on the island, quoting the same individual who proclaimed, "I

[116] Ibid.
[117] Collins, 85.
[118] Ibid.

tell you, it's like this. Some things around here need to be changed, but others don't."[119] While Daufuskie's residents embraced their legacy, they were not stagnant in their experience of the land and its possibilities. According to Haley, Daufuskie's residents needed and wanted jobs. John C. West, South Carolina's first governor to visit the island, noted such conflict, wondering how to provide residents with more economic opportunity while still preserving the island's historic and cultural condition.[120] One could argue that historical racism and persisting capitalism manipulates the choices Daufuskie's residents have. The political and socio-economic pressure on Black life anywhere should not be romanticized. Yet upon concretizing these complexities in the lived experience of Daufuskie, we must now turn back to the ways in which Moutoussamy-Ashé's project engages the reality of these residents. Where do we situate her aesthetic experience and its material manifestation into the complex web of Daufuskie's existence?

For Rolnick, Moutoussamy-Ashé's sensations—emotions and affects—of being in the space and with residents collide with the tensions of the island's future, and should motivate her to "think-create."[121] This creation expands beyond the literal process of photography, and into the realm of understanding and possibility, gesturing out from the island, its history, its people, and its conflicts. Again, Moutoussamy-Ashé must locate the imaginable that does not fit into the current ambivalent map of old Sea Island culture and opportunistic modernization. To enter into this aesthetic space, the artist must escape this perceived dichotomy entirely. Rolnick reveals that such an experience expresses an aesthetic and inseparably ethical rigor: "aesthetic, because it renders sensible what is announced by the affects of the world within the body," she explains, and "ethical, because it implies taking charge of the demands of life to remain in process."[122] The

[119] Collins, 83; Moutoussamy-Ashé, 13.
[120] Moutoussamy-Ashé, 13.
[121] Rolnick, 178.
[122] Ibid.

image "Riding in a car with no windows," for example, exhibits the aesthetic realization of the subject whose present is constantly fluctuating in the stillness of a solid past and the movement of an uncertain future. The woman embodies a complex temporal space, mediated through cherished place, the everydayness of life, and the stark potentiality of future. Moutoussamy-Ashé stunningly executes the artistic sensitivity to these moments. Yet, the ethical component of the aesthetic experience calls into question the len through which Moutoussamy-Ashé directs or engages the process of this life—this body—in all its existential demands.

Although Moutoussamy-Ashé's project was sincerely emotionally driven, Collins speculates an ethical tension in her works. She explains that in response to an endangered American culture, the artist "acted upon an assumption of a vanishing culture in need of preservation for posterity."[123] For her, she needed to make urgently visible the necessary existence of Daufuskie's people, yet Collins seems to suggest that Moutoussamy-Ashé's assumption led her to further distance herself from the livedness and mobility of the residents, and the reality that the residents are constantly present in their own self and communal transformations. They are not simply to be acted upon or looked at. They, too, have creative agency.

Some residents of Daufuskie were "pained" or "made uncomfortable" by Moutoussamy-Ashé's lens, "believing that the camera was taking something away from them."[124] This idea of photography is not unique to these residents. In the emergence of documentary and anthropological photography, exploited peoples often believed that cameras had the ability to arrest one's soul, freeze it into a material image, and steal part of one's soul away.[125]

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[123] Collins, 83.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Garb, T., & Barnes, M. (2011). *Figures & fictions: Contemporary South African photography*. Göttingen, Germany: Steidl.

Nevertheless, Moutoussamy-Ashé persisted in her artistic benevolence. She recounts that during every visit, she tried to convince them that she was performing an act of preservation, to which they would respond to her, "Why? Why us, why this island?"[126] Reflecting on this continuous unease and her activist motivation, Moutoussamy-Ashé declared: "Well, I hope that with the collection of these images, they will understand, that in the long run it was worth their submission before my lens."[127] It is at this point when Moutoussamy-Ashé's aesthetic experience dissipates back into a personally charged project that does not adequately honor the realities, experiences, and ever-transforming people at hand. Although Moutoussamy-Ashé intended to make an ethical claim on historical preservation in the face of oppressive modernization, the process of her project displayed ethical tensions between photographer and subject. For Rolnick, the body's opening to the aesthetic experience "allows us to glimpse the fact that there is no other world but the one in which we live, and that only within its dead-ends can other worlds be invented at each moment."[128] Moutoussamy-Ashé's project revealed an ethical "dead-end" in interpersonal interaction and visuality, instead of collaboratively imagining and inventing the world differently *with* Daufuskie residents.

By 2007, when the 25th Edition of *Daufuskie Island* was published, the island captured in Moutoussamy-Ashé's photographs no longer existed.[129] Popular, lavish resorts replaced original landmarks and community spaces, and many of Daufuskie's families could no longer afford to live there. Willis proclaims that Moutoussamy-Ashé's photographic essay allows us to still see, and potentially feel the now invisible, and perhaps lost, community.[130] However, does the community become lost when the land no longer roots them? Are the people and the place

[126] Residents quote in Collins, 83.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Rolnick, 182.
[129] Moutoussamy-Ashé, 17.
[130] Ibid.

always inextricably linked? Such is the persisting question of the African Diaspora, the lived experiences of Black people dispersed around the globe, and even, bell hooks' existential reliance on her childhood image. While Collins asserts that *Daufuskie Island* does not necessarily express Moutoussamy-Ashé's initial intentions, the work unfolds as a canvas for fundamentally re-considering roots and *routedness*. She concludes that the project's photographs of movement and transport expand "the possibility of thinking about Sea Islands culture as being continually shaped by economic forces and as influencing the people and places that its members come in contact with off the islands."[131] Thinking about *Daufuskie Island* in such a way centralizes aesthetic experience, relationality, and transformation at the crux of human being. The ethics of this process attests to the very essence of our being in the world, an essence that is never absolute and stable, and cannot be arrested by contextual circumstances and societal forces. Rolnick's aesthetics, *Daufuskie Island*'s gestures, and Moutoussamy-Ashé's emotional inclinations all unfold into a revelatory expanse of human existence, rooted in the world as it happens; as it embraces and releases. Fearing the impending loss of Black people and Black land, Moutoussamy-Ashé situated her grief in a particular illustration of the future she envisioned for the island, a picture that fell in line with the island's glory as a persistent and thriving Black community tied to the legacy of the land.

Yet, when we de-center Moutoussamy-Ashé from the lens and consider the dynamism of hope and loss functioning among the Daufuskie's residents, I wonder what we actually see here. For me, a question remains: how do we envision and anchor ourselves in the realm of the experienced *and* the imaginable? This is the point at which an engagement of *radical love* could expand Moutoussamy-Ashé's project, as well as the field of documentary photography, beyond its visual, relational tensions. For hooks, radical love operates in the contours of emotive

[131] Collins, 85.

relations with objects, others, and self. Radical love is not attached to places, persons, or even particular legacies. Instead, it offers a framework for imagining realities differently and contemplating the possibilities of its routes. Perhaps the movement of documentary photography, and its intention to honor the composition of time, place, and people in the world, provides a rich landscape in which love can test and radically surpass its limits, instead of seeking to conclude that we have already arrived.

Chapter III

"The process by which [one] is able to invent his own subjective consciousness into the objective form […] is in truth the highest attribute of man's nature." | *Frederick Douglass*

"[…] And she had nothing to fall back on: not maleness, not whiteness, not ladyhood, not anything. And out of the profound desolation of her reality, she may very well have invented herself." | *Toni Morrison*

From Saartjie Bartman to Josephine Baker to Nicki Minaj, Black women's bodies have been sites of both struggle and empowerment. Black women's bodies have been habitually suspended within and subjected to the scrutiny of both white and Black patriarchal gazes, particularly through the evolution of media representation and entertainment. According to Deborah Willis and artist Carla Williams in their work *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History*, "[…] even after the abolition of slavery, the Black female was the perpetual 'working girl,' in that she could never possess a status in European culture that was unrelated to her labor, whether forced or paid"[132]—her labor *and* her sexuality. While Willis and Williams do not maintain that the Black female's primary purpose was to fit into European culture, they do illustrate the social landscape in which the Black female could only exist in certain ways: hypersexual, docile, fertile, and working. Willis and Williams question, "how does one map a *self-image* out of this history?"[133]

Over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries, Black women artists have sought to take control over their own images, disrupting the primary circulation of stereotypical or pornographic depictions of Black women. Photography served as a prime medium for "revisiting" and "re-interrogating" the Black female body and the traces of its images in history and present.[134] Themes of self-portraiture, self-presentation, and autobiography became pillars for Black women in photography, paralleling fundamental attributes of Black feminism and nurturing a field of art production and art criticism rooted in notions of humanity beyond white, Western construct. The mission of many Black women artists of the 20th and 21st centuries, then,

[132] Willis, D. Williams, C. (2002). *The Black female body: A photographic history.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 3.
[133] Ibid., 198.
[134] Ibid., x.

consisted of honoring historical pain, exploring Black female body, and attending to the nuances and desires of communal selves.

Take photographer Carrie Mae Weems. Poised as the protagonist of her project "Kitchen Table Series"[135] (1990), this Black woman sits coyly at the head of her kitchen table. A glass and a pack of cigarettes caress the edge of the wood, and another glass stands beyond slender fingers resting on the surface. Her other hand careens up to her cheek, marking the glint of a smirk while her silk, floral robe drapes over relaxed shoulders. A man leans over her, suited, face hiding under the brim of a fedora. One arm begins to enclose her in a slight embrace as his hand stables on the table's corner. He covers the top tip of her ear. She neither looks towards him, nor at the vanity mirror sitting before her. The ceiling lamp glares above, contained within its own

[135] CARRIE MAE WEEMS. *Untitled (Eating Lobster)*, 1990. silver print. 28 1/4 x 28 1/4 inches. Inventory #CMW90.005. ©Carrie Mae Weems. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

harshness while its reflection on the shining wood casts a soft glow around this woman and this scene. Across the kitchen table, eyes bear towards us—as if we dare interrogate her.

Carrie Mae Weems' "Kitchen Table Series" centers on a Black woman navigating the ever-transforming space of a kitchen table and the relationships surrounding her places at this table. Through a series of photographic tableaus and textual narrative, Weems weaves together nuanced moments to develop a living history of blossoming relationship, loss, love, motherhood, and friendship.[136] Weems posits herself as the protagonist, collapsing artist and subject in order to open the realm of viewer participation, interpretation, and embodiment. In a conversation with bell hooks, Weems reveals, "I was thinking about [whether] it might be possible to use Black subjects to represent universal concepts."[137] Revisiting her opening tableau, is it possible to bear into the eyes of this Black woman sitting before us at the kitchen table, and somehow, fold back into the realm of feelings, complexities, and contradictions in which we, too, are posited? This question approaches Weems' deeply philosophic intentions for her numerous bodies of work. By engaging these questions head on, particularly as she emphasizes herself as a Black woman facilitating these considerations, Weems make two critical interventions in the world of Black subjectivity and photography.

First, Weems examines the Black female body beyond its socio-historical narrative of subjugation, beyond notions of double-consciousness that engage the maneuvers of the Black self within and behind the white frame.[138] Second, and what I intend to examine for the purposes of this chapter, she engages Black bodies, particularly those of women, as facilitators of *being* and how we come to visually realize its (im)possibilities. From "Kitchen Table Series" to "The

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[136] Delmez, Kathryn E. *Carrie Mae Weems: Three Decades of Photography and Video*. Nashville, TN: Frist Center for the Visual Arts, 2012. 76.
[137] Hooks, B. (1995). *Art on my mind: Visual politics*. New York: New Press. 76.
[138] Delmez, 51.

Museum Series" (2006), where Weems haunts the grounds of world-class museums, the framework of her art "is the visible process of negotiation,"[139] how our notions of being are not necessarily located within bodies we posses as "selves," but are structured within the body's suspension of the webs, signs, and affects of existence. Thus, if for Morrison the Black woman subject might well have invented herself, I am invested in how Weems' photographic and philosophic methodology of corporeal subjectivity engages the makings of a world, and then, how we might consider social landscapes differently.

Weems' Philosophic Intervention in the Mediation of the "Black Subject"

The "Kitchen Table Series" meditates on race, gender, sexuality, and relationships inextricably linked with a sense of time, place, and movement. Such themes and their composition within lived experience prompted Weems' initial photographic interest in documentary photography. However, "Kitchen Table Series" appeared to Weems to be a canvas of articulating and exploring the fabric of humanity as multiple selves in relation to one another, particularly as we unravel.

At the beginning of her photographic career, Weems was most inspired by Roy DeCavara's documentary work, in which he was concerned with the "ethereal beauty"[140] of Blackness, and the "key ethics" of "light and its absence."[141] DeCavara aimed to "claim Blackness as an aesthetic space […] of persistent, unsuppressed elegance and grace,"[142] while his attention to light and its absence within the artist's aesthetic marked a technical ethic of

[139] Ibid.
[140] hooks, 67.
[141] Collins, L. (2002). *The art of history: African-American women artists engage the past.* New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press. 109.
[142] hooks, 67.

accepting and working with what is available.[143] Weems' first body of work ("Family Pictures and Stories") centered on this particular aesthetic of documentary portraiture with the purpose of contesting racist representations and conceptions of Blackness. However, hooks argues DeCavara's philosophic approach translates as the "critical labor of the positive"[144] regarding Black subjectivity. This type of labor stands as a corrective to damaging images and cultural messages, while applying a fundamental frame of positivity emanating from the Black aesthetic. Weems departs from this trajectory, leaning towards a "politics of dislocation"[145] where identity is fragmented and fluid.

Like Douglass, Weems configures photographic vision and works as the realm that places the fragmentation of the subject at the edges of the frame, spilling into the full pictures of humanity onto which we hold dear. To be a subject is to embody a particular kind of existential condition, where one's sense of self unfolds on a plane of its ultimate unknowablility. In its collaboration between photographer, viewer, and photographed-subject, photography allows Weems to locate these traces of selves and communities, and compose different kinds of lenses for what it means to be human. So, to be a *Black* subject, a *Black* human, ignites Weems insofar as the Black subject had long been socially, politically, and economically disavowed of its narrative space, the space that fulfills the content of what it means to be a 'human being.' While in actuality, Blacks have always narrated their experiences, Weems is interested in that process of negotiation wherein the Black subject had to consider varying frames of humanity in order to cognize the existential dissonance between their lived experiences and ideologies, and the Western world predicated on their *inhumanness* and their death. Thus, even though categories of race, gender, and class have often been designated as socially constructed categories bearing

[143] Collins, 109.
[144] hooks, 68.
[145] Ibid.

little truth to human subjectivity, Weems would acknowledge how designation of oppressed identity—Black, female, or poor—becomes complicated and dislocated by its own fundamental fragmentation, including the incompleteness of the "human." According to hooks, "race, gender, and class identity converge, fuse, and mix so as to disrupt and deconstruct simple notions of subjectivity."[146] In any sense, we have to deal with subjectivity in its inherent opaqueness.

Weems grapples with a longstanding philosophical conversation about existential disconnectedness within human and Black subjectivity. Willis and Williams maintain photography's ability to trace historical images of Blackness, particularly Black women, as entrenched in the simultaneity of fear and desire.[147] They note that philosopher Frantz Fanon posits the contradictory emotions of fear and desire at "the heart of the psychic reality of racism."[148] Fanon explored the affective dissonance of Blackness in his own account of subjective disillusion and fragmentation in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Weems' engagement of Black women's experiences, facilitated by her own Black woman's body, contributes a necessary and productive intervention in this particular philosophic conversation.

In the chapter "The Lived Experience of the Black" in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon describes a moment when a white child points to him in wonder and fear, screaming to his mother, "Mama, look, a Negro; I'm scared!"[149] In this moment, taking up Du Bois' earlier concern about white visuality, Fanon embodies a healthy minded subject who must learn to perceive and orient himself in a perverse world. No matter Fanon's lived experience as subject, he emerges through this shared space as simply, 'Black body.' The child configures Fanon as a

[146] Ibid., 67.
[147] Willis and Williams, x.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Fanon, F (2008). *Black skin, white masks.* New York: Grove Press. Kindle Edition. 91.

visual, corporeal springboard from which his mother can explain to him the world's strange phenomena—a Black body in plain sight.

Fanon's concern with the mapping of fear and wonder on the materiality of a Black body bleeds into Weems' acknowledgement of the relationality of seeing—in moments and in media—and its existential implications. In reflecting on American cultural visualizations of Black women as "ugly" and "monstrous"[150], Weems recalls, "These images are so unlike me, my sisters or any other women I know—I didn't know it was supposed to be me. No really in history, in media, in photography, in literature […] I didn't know it was me being made fun of. Somebody had to tell me."[151] At this point, for Fanon, his sense of self within his Black body begins to crumble, as even his assertion of who he calls himself to be must contend with what white spectators project onto him.

Slowly, Fanon must construct his consciousness through the tension of his body in the world, despite his own vision of himself. Scholar Jeremy Weate explains, "A white mythos inserts itself between the black body and its self-image, becoming the elements used in a reflective understanding of black subjectivity."[152] Whereas Du Bois would assert this white mythos as a veil looming over a Black subject's self-consciousness, Fanon would contend that a consciousness of Black being and self-image cannot emerge as anything but the Other. "Ontology does not allow us to understand the being of the black man," he argues, "since it ignores the lived experience. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man."[153] Fanon exudes existential distress, realizing that even his reaction within the white gaze re-appropriates its ontological dominance. While Fanon meditates on the

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[150] Delmez, 35.
[151] Ibid., 35-36.
[152] Weate, J. (2001). Fanon, Merleau-Ponty, and the difference of phenomenology. In *Race*. Oxford: Blackwell. 7.
[153] Ibid., 89.

distress of subjective deconstruction and fragmentation, Weems is interested in a different project. Before I delve into Weems' interventions, I want to elucidate the ways in which Fanon considers the relationality between subjects, particularly in the visual landscape, and the Western philosophical conversation he transforms. By noticing the depth of this series of thought, I can clarify how Weems' vision shifts a fundamental conversation of subjectivity.

Fanon's critique of Western phenomenology develops primarily in response to his intellectual European continental counterparts, Jean Paul-Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In his work *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Sartre emphasizes the moment at which the being-subject realizes himself in another's gaze, feels his body as alienated.[154] Within this gaze, his body becomes activated. Sartre becomes "vividly" conscious of his body, not as it is for him, but as it is for the Other.[155] He tries to reconcile this alienation as being a body-for-other, pondering his own comportment, even his own conception of self. Sartre maintains, the "Other accomplishes for us a function of which we are incapable and which nevertheless is incumbent on us: to see ourselves as we are."[156] He concedes that the existence of multiple beings implies an inability to grasp one's self fully, for there is always a bit of one's self that others determine. As a resolution to this existential disjointedness, Sartre suggests that it is only through language and communication that we learn our body's structures for the other.[157] However, considering Fanon's racialized experience, the white child and mother do not ask Fanon about his Blackness, inquire about this difference that shocks him. They do not intend to communicate their assumptions of him, open to the ways he might challenge their bigotry.

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[154] Sartre, J., & Barnes, H. (1992). *Being and nothingness: A phenomenological essay on ontology*. New York: Washington Square Press. 462.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid., 463.
[157] Ibid., 464.

Merleau-Ponty's conception of being-for-others and being-for-self might offer an alternative paradigm for Fanon's ontological angst. Similar to Douglass' visual framework, in his work *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the experience of being-*with*-others in the world. The embodiment of self and other become mutually motivated and emergent through sense, time, and space. Weate quotes Merleau-Ponty as explaining, "our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space […] For us, the body […] is our expression in the world, the visible form of our intentions."[158] Nonetheless, Fanon would note that Merleau-Ponty still cannot account for the "nauseous"[159] experience of this ontological relation when the White subject posits the Black body as disgusting object. In this frame, Fanon cannot visually emerge as the embodiment of his lived intentions. He perpetually manifests in the socio-historical confinement of Black abjection, unable to transform otherwise. "I wanted to quite simply be a man among men," he admits, "I would have liked to enter our world young and sleek, a world we could build together."[160] Fanon cannot reconcile academic ontological frameworks with the lived experience of Blackness; like Du Bois, intellectuality affords him little resolve. He is part of 'Being' "to the degree that [he goes] beyond it."[161]

Perhaps we can only envision what it means to go beyond 'being' once we can illustrate and visualize its traces of transformation, particularly as we lose hold on what seems to affirm our human existence (identity, relationship, place, time). Such is the project of Weems, engaging "a disaporic landscape of longing"[162] in which boundaries fall as they rise and desire points to the impossibility of wholeness. The "Kitchen Table Series" manifests a place of pondering the

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[158] Merleau-Ponty, M (1964). "An unpublished text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: a prospectus of his work," *The primacy of perception*. IL: Northwestern University Press. 5. (Weate, 4.)
[159] Fanon, 91.
[160] Fanon, 91-92.
[161] Fanon, quoted by Weate, 13.
[162] hooks, 73.

endurance of being, and playing with the realities and fantasies of a self among others in the physical and emotional world.

In a 2014 interview with The Guardian blogger Karin Andreasson, Weems speaks about her philosophic artistic process in creating the "Kitchen Table Series." She reflects on one specific image where the protagonist sits at the kitchen table, this time on the side-end, dining on boiled lobster with a man, sitting at the head of the table (the same seat where we are first introduced to the protagonist in the introductory tableau). She rests her hand on space between his head and cheek, as he leans intimately over his dish of disappearing lobster. He holds a piece of the crustacean in both hands, suckling the meat from its shell. Both he and the protagonist's eyes are lowered as they dine together under the warm dining room light, while a messy deck of cards waits at the other end of the table and a cigarette dish rests in the center. His glass is empty. Hers is nearly full.

Weems notes that on the surface, this scene looks "loving," a portrait of a relationship between two people we do not know. We just feel their connection—or do we fantasize it? Weems explains that if we are paying attention to the forms, gestures, and signs composed within the scene, we can construct a different story of what is going on here:

"The woman, played by me, reaches out to the man who is ultimately only concerned with himself. He takes the lobster in the way that men often take. Women are often put in the position of being carers: men are socially contracted to take, while women are contracted to give. That relationship is played out subtly because her tenderness is the first thing you focus on. You don't become aware of her clenching her teeth until a bit later."[163]

Even if we as the viewers fantasized a particular connection between the photographs' characters, so too did the protagonist herself. It is for this reason that Weems acknowledges the folds of reality and fantasy implicated in not only art, but lived experience of being. "There is a

[163] Weems, C. (2014, October 30). Carrie Mae Weems' Best Photograph: Lobster dinner at the kitchen table [Online interview]. http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/oct/30/carrie-mae-weems-best-photograph

wonderful tension between the real and the fabricated moment in this image,"[164] Weems explains to the interviewer, discussing how the staged "Kitchen Table Series" appears stunningly documentary, falling in line with her initial photographic inspirations. Using her body to perform the protagonists (or other characters) of her works, she came to realize the body as an "interlocutor between the self, the constructed self, and the audience,"[165] suggesting the ways in which the body mediates the space of self and communal unraveling and reconfiguration. For Weems, there was something significant about utilizing her own "skin and body" to work through difficult issues of family, monogamy, relationships, womanhood, and Blackness,[166] particularly as our understanding of these notions develops in everyday moments.

"Kitchen Table Series" exemplifies the complex foundation of Weems' photographic philosophy. As bell hooks formulates, "[Weems] consistently invites us to engage the Black subject in ways that call attention to the specificity of race, even as we engage an emotional landscape that challenges us to look beyond race and recognize the multiple concerns represented."[167] "Kitchen Table Series" culminates being and that which Fanon would to fantasize beyond it. Additionally, Weems' lens as a Black woman challenges Fanon's experiential conception of Blackness. Even though Fanon provides a profound and foundational account of subjectivity within the world of Black and Western thought, visual theorist Shawn Michelle Smith notices a misogynistic undercurrent that belies the radical social salience of his philosophical account.

In her text *Photography At The Colorline: W.E.B Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture,* Smith's reading of Fanon suggests that his ontological quest fails the moment he discounts and

[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid.
[167] hooks, 66.

condemns the experience of Black women, particularly in relation to Black male self-image. She explains that for Fanon, the black woman only lives her experience in relation to the formulation of Black male consciousness.[168] Fanon regards the Black woman as constantly dissenting the very being of Black men.

In fact, it is through Fanon's recollection of his lived experience with Black women that we locate dissention in what Blackness means for Fanon, and who gets to determine it. Smith quotes Fanon's perception of Black women: "I know a great number of girls from Martinique, students in France, who admitted to me with complete candor—completely white candor—that they would find it impossible to marry black men […] in a word, the race must be whitened."[169] Here, Fanon does not account for the ways in which colonial acculturation also effects Black women. He recalls his own moment of insecurity in his self-image after his interaction with the child, discovering his "livery" for the first time and finding it "ugly." Then he decides that he will not continue his thought, "because who can tell [him] what beauty is?"[170] While Fanon can recount his own nuanced feelings of self-consciousness and image, he refuses to imagine or engage the ways in which colonization has impacted many Black women, particularly in how the psychic (and physical) violence of colonization influences Black women to try to see and validate their bodies as sexual *and* beautiful—worthy of affection, even from 'the esteemed white man.' Rather, Smith asserts that Fanon receives these comments from some Black women in France as a rejection of his image of black masculinity.[171] The lived experience placed at the core of Fanon's ontological Blackness fundamentally discounts Black women in their own subjectivity, mapping an agenda of ideal masculinity as the goal of Black being.

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[168] Smith, S. (2004). *Photography on the color line: W.E.B. Du Bois, race, and visual culture*. Durham: Duke University Press. 38
[169] Ibid.
[170] Fanon, 93.
[171] Smith, 38.

For Fanon, if the Black woman does not confirm his embodiment of Blackness, she might as well be white. By excluding the nuanced experiences of Black women as sites of subjective consciousness, Fanon dilutes the potential for a radical notion of being through the lens of Blackness. If his theory needs to go beyond ontology as the West has come to understand it, then his assertion of lived experience must strive to disassemble all structures of oppressive 'seeing.' Weate asserts that Fanon implicitly suggests this kind of corrective consciousness with his phenomenology of difference in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Nevertheless, we cannot embrace Fanon's underlying philosophical intention if we do not release all voices and bodies from structural, cultural silencing i.e. the voices and bodies Black women.

Thus, Weems' very existence as a Black woman photographer grappling with the materiality and narratives of the Black body challenge and extend fundamental frameworks of Black subjectivity. Furthermore, her philosophical approach to her works offer the photographic landscape as a space of mediating and organizing bodies differently, illuminating radical spaces of feeling, contemplation, and creation.

The Body, Space, and Place in "The Museum Series" (2006)

While Weems' photographic methodology ignites critical philosophical terrain, she also explores the potential of her own bodily presence in shaping and guiding her exploration and decomposition of physical place, and its embedded narratives. Delmez emphasizes Weems' use and performance of herself in many of her works. By utilizing herself as the subject, Weems "assumes great control and awareness of her body, its place and movement in space and in relation to others."[172] In this way, the artist maintains an awareness of the lived experience of presence in place. Although this method seems to suggest that she uses her body as a function for

[172] Delmez, 9.

further artistic purpose and strategy, Weems resists positing herself as a being-object or as a clean-canvas, embodying or representing a non-specific "human" or completely fictional persona. Instead, she contemplates how to account for and be her identities, without making clear-cut social and political claims to make room for herself in the wider social narratives and histories. Weems proclaims that she has both a practical and conceptual desire to, "inscribe my presence in the things I consider important. I…insert myself as the narrator of history."[173] Whether travelling the Sea Islands, Louisiana, or Le Louvre, Weems explores and assesses the non-linear temporality of her being-in-the-world among archaic and majestic entities pre-dating her own existence. She contemplates how bodies orient in particular spaces, with our bodies taking up different identities that elastically motivate particular kinds of relations to land, structure, and legacy.

"The Museum Series" (2006-Present), her most recent and on-going work, profoundly describes Weems' contemplations of place, space, embodied histories, and relation to others. For these black-and-white photographs,[174] Weems dawns a long black dress, matching the deepness of her hair tied at the nape of her neck. In each image, she stands before domestic and international museums and monuments, the monochrome print illustrating contrasts of light and shadow, size and depth. As the viewer, I never see her face. Rather, I always face her back and must follow her view. Experiencing her through a material image, I cannot make her acknowledge me or guide me in the way I may need or want. Her back is turned on me. For me to move forward, to navigate the scene, I must acknowledge both her framing as photographer and her guidance as subject. Weems posits herself as both photographer and photographed

[173] Ibid., p. 9.
[174] Frank, Priscilla. "Carrie Mae Weems Explores Inequalities Embedded In Artistic Institutions." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 11 Jan. 2014. Web. 22 July 2014.

subject, "blurring the distinction between participant and observer,"[175] and making deliberate yet indirect gestures towards me as the viewer. To navigate the image and grasp meaning, I must find myself in it and be present, interrogating my place in this seeing-moment with Weems. When I try to gaze at the landscape of a majestic museum, does Weems become a disturbance? Do I overlook or ignore her? Or, does the grand structure simply become background to the real sight we see: Weems herself? These questions of intention and vision exemplify how Weems being in particular spaces also implicitly re-orients the viewer.

In "British Museum,"[176] Weems' presence among the towering structure first calls attention to a general experience of tourism and spectatorship. Sightseeing monuments and exploring museums, viewers and observers retain the architecture and works that appear to them in the foreground of their consciousness. Although we may learn of the history behind the work, our lived impressions of these structures depend on the ways we become engrossed in their aesthetics, sizes, and curatorial purposes. The patrons in this photograph all crowd around the entrance to the museum, dawning backpacks and purses, casual attire and comfortable shoes for trekking through the adorned halls. One patron sits on the stairs, his face resting against his palm in either rest or boredom. Weems

[175] Ibid., p.9.

[176] CARRIE MAE WEEMS. *British Museum*, 2006-present. digital c-print. dimensions variable. Inventory #CMW08.085. ©Carrie Mae Weems. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

watches this activity. She holds her arms solidly at her sides as if she must ground herself amidst the rush of a wide-eyed, commodifed culture of spectatorship and shallow appreciation.

As an artist, positing as participant and observer, Weems' presence in the seeing-moment manifests as both honor and affront. She embodies the essence of the art museum and how it can even be, as the museums' works breed from artists. However, her physical appearance in the picture defies her accepted position as background to the institution's majesty. Her mentions and accolades live as artwork's back-story, but in "British Museum," her presence looms in the foreground. She stands still with the wind slightly ruffling a flap of her dress; no one acknowledges her, yet she does not assert or impose her presence. A face on the banner, with watching eye, overlooks the entrance and peers at the crowd. The space is not for Weems, and yet the space is Weems. Positioned further behind her, the camera's lens provides the initial frame from which I, the viewer, then initially orient myself in this space. Will I stand with Weems? Will I proceed past her? Will I bring her in? Or will she lead me? I must make contact with her beyond my habitual way of seeing and inhabiting that space that juts forth into a museum, a place in which I would normally be part of the crowd. Weems influences me to become aware of my being with her, a meeting of consciousness and presence that stimulates us to navigate the seeing-moment relationally.

While "British Museum" emphasizes Weems' attention to relationality and the presence of artists implicit in a museum's being, "Zwinger Palace"[177] illuminates the lived contrast and ambivalence of literal Blackness, and how Weems facilitates this contemplation. As she faces the strikingly dark entrance of the palace, the shadow appears to melt into Weems; shoulder and the stark black of her dress. The hues match closely, influencing a visual recognition and connection

[177] CARRIE MAE WEEMS. *Zwinger Palace*, 2006-present. digital c-print. dimensions variable. Inventory #CMW06.009. ©Carrie Mae Weems. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

between these two forms. Observing the shadowed entrance, I am motivated to move forth, discovering what lies within. The grandiose and naturally lit architecture summon my wonder. The shadow invites me.

Yet before the shadow, Weems appears, black as the summoning entrance, but somehow different. She embodies this black differently, almost ghostly.[178] For Weems the photographer, the woman in black is "a witness and a guide,"[179] leading us through both history and present.[180] Yet, to both lead us through and embody history and present is to also recognize how her body illicit fear, nervousness, caution. Like Weems present before the British Museum, perhaps she is a disturbance. She does not belong here, yet she facilitates the temporal "pilgrimage"[181] through a story and presence in which she is already implicated. Her being becomes a gesture towards something else, like the shadowed entrance of Zwinger Palace. The only difference is that history and time has not affirmed her majesty. So when I experience this photograph, navigating myself in the space Weems has inhabited, I am confronted by conflicting stimulations of blackness, contemplating how I orient myself before and within it.

[178] Ibid., p. 220.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid.

In both “British Museum” and “Zwinger Palace,” Weems composes an arena in which the photographer, photographed subject, and viewer co-navigate the seeing-moment and interrogate their positions. She activates the *photographic realm* as an intersubjective process of seeing onto and within which a material image unfolds. This realm signals spaces of shared consciousness, stimulating contact and communication between each subject implicated in the 'seeing' moment: the photographer, whose vision frames and emphasizes this particular moment in time and space; the photographed, who looks back at the photographer, asserts or turns into herself as she feels out her position, and engages her own potential to guide; and the viewer, who seems to observe an image from a distance, but must personally navigate the moment in order to derive meaning from the material. Ultimately, Weems’ bodily strategies and material images, launch a way of being that allows her to transform ways of seeing and position viewers to embody that process along with her.

Body as Reconfiguring Social Landscape: Reading Weems in Hannah Price’s “City of Brotherly Love”

Carrie Mae Weems’ work conflates photographer and photographed subject, asserting an authority and intentionality in orchestrating the seeing-moment through which an image—and its meaning—emerges. This methodology established direct contact within the experiential photographic realm, offering Weems an opportunity to interrogate and transform the grounds of vision, human relation, and self. Considering her experiential engagements of position and subjectivity, Weems’ transformative visual space and gestures could have profound implications across multiple bodies, between people. In her work “The City of Brotherly Love,” (2006-

present) photographer Hannah Price engages this realm of relational seeing and subjectivity during daily occurrences of catcalling.

Shot in Philadelphia, PA, "The City of Brotherly Love" chronicles portraits of Black men who catcall Price (an Afro-Mexican woman), the project's title and subject-matter alluding to the tensions and nuances of shared racial identity and affection, but also of violation and harassment. In an interview with NPR, Price explains that her series does not make aggressive or critical claims on catcalling.[182] Rather, her series is an observation and reaction, a way to navigate and understand gestures and assertions that she had "never really [experienced] before."[183] Here, Price insinuates that these moments of uninvited seeing did not initially *appear* to her as already loaded with aggressive, assertive, and sexual desire. This is not to say that catcalls do not exemplify structures and histories of sexualized male gazes and patriarchal entitlement to 'look at.' Moreover, catcalling has continued to manifest as a habitual practice among many men of various identities, regardless of women's responses. Thus, in engaging the tension of these interactions, Price's project interrogates the ways in which she initially embodies or positions herself in the seeing-moments. To her, these experiences are new. To the cat-callers and many women, asserting and responding to gazes have become habitual of every-day life. So, similar to Weems, Price examines her personal experience of being in the seeing moment, and how she comports herself in and visualizes the relational experience with these catcalling men. Her personal interventions can speak to different ways of understanding the shared experiences and seeing-moments of catcalling.

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[182] "A Photographer Turns Her Lens on Men Who Catcall." Interview by Kat Chow.*Www.npr.org*. 17 Oct. 2013. Web. <http://www.npr.org/blogs/codeswitch/2013/10/17/235413025/a-photographer-turns-her-lens-on-men-who-cat-call>

[183] Ibid.

When achieving her photographs, Price is walking down the street and receives a catcall. She then turns towards the man and either (1) takes his portrait right on the spot, or (2) asks him if she can "make [his] portrait."[184] When he called her, the catcaller rested his gaze upon her, positing her in a way she has not self-asserted, deeming her a being—if not an object—of his desire. While she could then position him as "the threat" or "the danger," Price considers how to humanize the subject, one who must own his explicit gaze and seeing-gesture through which Price notices him in the first place. If a man says "no" to being photographed, she will not photograph him. Yet, she notes that a majority of the men agree to the exchange.[185] Although Price confirms that she will not engage this method when she does feel threatened, most of these seeing-moments unfold into provocative moments of self-reflexivity, vulnerability, and contact. What does it look and feel like to make contact through conflicting, confusing, and violating lenses?

In a portrait of a man sitting propped up on a park bench. the man rests slightly turned away from the camera, leaning back into the bench. His arm relaxes on the wood, hand slipped in pocket. He simultaneously smiles and grimaces, his eyes communicating neither retreat nor welcome. Sunrays illumine the background, spilling onto his elbow and facial profile, but missing the rest of his body that faces photographer and viewer. He peers towards us from the side of his eyes. This man's pose and engagement with the camera emerges from a contrast of vulnerability and self-presentation. While he agrees to be photographed, he cannot seem to decide how to present himself to Price, realizing that she has only yet seen and known him as 'catcaller.' Have women affirmed his advances before? Does he tend to be ignored or avoided?

[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid.

Despite their responses to him, this man continues to assert his gaze, no matter the reactions. Yet, Price's reaction to his catcall unveils as an image of the man himself. He is his own response.

When Price responds to the catcaller with a self-reflexive, imagining moment of presentation, she motivates a space of vision in which both parties are seeing and seen. A man must visualize himself beyond his habitual behavior of catcalling and his position of seeing women simply as beings of desire on which he can rest and actively assert his fantasies. By agreeing to be photographed, he acknowledges Price as one who sees, one who also creates the space in which she comports herself and allows him to show up.

However, another man peers behind a car window, a physical manifestation of a boundary that separates him and Price. It is through this screen that the man first created and asserted his image of Price, flirting with his idea of her and hoping she embodies the form. Yet it is through this same screen that the catcaller hides behind his presentation, his reflection, when Price turns the lens on him. Like the translucent glass of our eyes, the car window provides an illusion of protection, self-preservation, and outward gazes; we can look out, but we somehow assume that nobody can see in.

Brow slightly furrowed, leaning away from the window, the man falls further into the car and towards his rearview mirror, peeking out from behind his head. Lips tight around a black cigarette, the man's mouth is full and cannot speak. If he looks away from the window, he can only face himself in the mirror's glass. If he looks down into the car or out through the other window, he becomes subjected and vulnerable to Price's gaze, relinquishing his ability to assert himself or co-create his image with the canvas Price has set before him. Either way, he is implicated in the seeing-moment, not just as the one who could assert his outward gaze, but as one who must interrogate his own experience of being seen. The man in the car silently squirms

in this suspension of vision, unsure of how to comport himself in this seeing-space that is possibly so different from how he habitually instigates and experiences catcalling moments.

Ultimately, Price has created a moment in which the photographer and photographed subject must make contact with themselves and each other. They self-reflexively notice how they relationally navigate vision, contemplating what this experience of seeing means, and how it feels. Price admits that she did not intend to change the cat-callers minds about their acts, or take a deliberate stand against catcalling.[186] Rather, she notes:

> *"I was just trying to...point out that we're all human and all confused. […] I'm in the photograph, but I'm not. Just turning the photograph on them kind of gives them a feel of what it's like to be in a vulnerable position. ... It's a different dynamic — but it's just another way of dealing with the experience, of trying to understand it."*[187]

Thus, realizing her capacity to engage these catcalling interactions differently, Price reorients the ways in which she and these men appear to each other and themselves. With her project, Price recognizes profound existential shift through photographic sense.

Much like gazing at the exquisite architecture of a museum, or noticing a person who has called for my attention, my experience of looking at a photograph enfolds me into a lived dynamic of interaction, contact, and visibility. While a photograph certainly represents instances in time and space, my impression of the scene emerges through the ways I embody and live the moment appearing before my eyes, even if merely a material depiction. Roland Barthes describes such impression by navigating himself in the frame, latching onto particular symbols and cues that stimulate the photograph's meaning for him. When Barthes' experiences a photograph, he

[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid.

visualizes a process of memory and familiarity, positing the photograph and its subjects as avenues for his own self-reflection. Yet for photographers Carrie Mae Weems and Hannah Price, the photographic image manifests through an intersubjective sense insofar as visuality decenters the subject entirely, calling attention to the shared affective spaces between photographer, photographed, and viewer. To engage this range of vision, Weems and Price both question the how seeing-subjects comport themselves in relation to or in the midst of one another. Weems experiments with positing herself as both photographer and subject, manipulating the limits of observer and participant, mediating spaces and history through presence and being. Price examines boundaries, contact, and vulnerability between herself as an Afro-Mexican women and Black men who catcall her, contemplating how to navigate shared seeing-moments that are so deeply motivated by historically gendered and racial tensions. Both artists realize the complex factors of experience that are always at work when we are seeing others and ourselves. The process of capturing such "subjective consciousness into the objective form"[188] of a material image describes a realm of ontological exploration for which a photograph unravels the world just as it seems to confirm its existence.

[188] Douglass, Frederick. Quote. Wallace, Maurice. *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity.* Durham: Duke UP, 2013. P. 6

Conclusion

"I'd rather think I am helping to open up new horizons of the mind, rather than to just make beautiful photographs, which of course, I am also trying to do."
| *Vera Ruth Jackson, 1912-1999*

What is Black? What is human? To be Black American was to hold these questions at the crux of one's reality, the lived experience of Blackness constantly contrasting the patriotic fantasy to which they were meant to aspire. This is not to say that Black American life was only the sum of struggle and deferred dreams. Rather, Blackness seemed to gesture to something for which citizenship and modern notions of humanity could not account. While the facts and feelings of everyday life impress upon our existence in the present, photography offered memory and representation where Black Americans could commemorate their own historical past and inspire a future. Furthermore, while Black photography became a mode of productive representation for Black folk, the medium ultimately signaled a realm for radically altering the landscape of existential inquiry.

In "Pictures and Progress," Frederick Douglass interrogated the makings of visuality, theorizing thought-pictures as the fundamental material of human being. Thought-pictures body forth into the world, balancing amidst its contours. Thought-pictures visually emerge to human beings insofar as we entrench ourselves in their gestures. Thus, even though Douglass seeks a moral mission for photography, his theoretical formulations open an expanse of pictorial being that can never be reduced to politics and property. For Douglass, the photographic medium marks the highest existential faculty of humanity, deserving of serious inquiry as Black identities and notions of freedom took shape.

Situated within the temporal layers of photographic seeing, bell hooks investigated the livedness of photographic material. hooks' reflections on her father's candid portrait and her own childhood glory revealed photographic image as a space of temporal and affective combustion. These family photographs did not present to hooks' a historical memory that she could salvage and cherish. Rather, these photographs' stimulated that which she never had and what she had

lost: intimate access to her father and joy within herself. With these photographs, hooks did not seek to reconstruct history, nor did she long for a future that would rectify past wounds. Instead, hooks engaged the photographic realm of family memorabilia to love *radically*: a realm where love has no object[189], but formulates through the inherent fragmentation of self, others, place, and time. Photographic vision gestures towards the possibilities of radical love, and becomes, for hooks, an ethics of existence.

The works of Carrie Mae Weems, then, operationalize and expand Douglass' process of imaginative vision and hooks' ethical seeing. Weems bears the fundamental differences in the structure of human being and in the photographic space, and suspends their elements on the frames of her photographic work. She grapples with race, gender, sexuality, relationships, time and place just as she meditates on the technical web between photographer, photographed, and viewer. Weems' approach to the diversity of lived experience, and its affective collisions, recalls feminist theorist Audre Lorde's formulation of difference: "Difference must not be merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark."[190] In difference, Weems locates the "stuff" of human existence, utilizing her body to navigate the folds of the world, its story, and her being-in-it.

The legacy of Black American photography offers a philosophical paradigm for illustrating and considering human existence itself. Moreover, the materialization and circulation of this philosophical process of seeing can implicate anyone in its formulation. Remembering

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189 Recalling a Sadiyah Hartman formulation in her narrative *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route.*

190 Lorde, A., & Byrd, R. (2009). I am your sister: Collected and unpublished writings of Audre Lorde. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Douglass' excitement for the practical accessibility of photography, I wonder how this comprehensive philosophy of photography can continue to transform how Blackness lives. Douglass, hooks, and Weems cultivated their meditations on humanity through photography, offering profound theorizations of existence, radically different from dominant Western frameworks predicated on the inhumanity of Black beings. How, then, does Black visuality of this sort realize the radical photographic imagination in the lived world, where primarily popular media and notions of representation establish the meaning of photography?

Nowhere does the salience and synthesis of Douglass, hooks, and Weems better emerge than in Shelia Pree Bright's project "Fifteen – For Whom It Stands: The Flag and the American People," 2014. This series of images depicts silvered black and white portraits of youth, each with the American flag draped around them at differing angles and shapes. For City Springs Elementary/Middle School in Baltimore, Maryland, Bright utilized the students as her subjects, engaging them in an exercise of likening school bullying to the terror of their elders' experiences with historical racism, sexism, etc. While the exercise engaged the students in the living legacy of history in the present, her presentation of the photographs transformed the whole community. Along with her various other projects, Bright wheat-pastes these images right onto the brick of the school's building. In quilt-like formation, the images sink into communal space.

Featured in a short documentary about the piece, an older woman on the street leans on her walker at the edge of the sidewalk, contemplating the presentation as cars and pedestrians meander by. "It's…it's like having a night dream in the daytime," she remarks. "You can't describe it, but it's beautiful."

Theorizing Black photography, this woman on the sidewalk identifies the collapsing of the "real" and the "imaginable." In reality, the night dream effect of Black youth draped in

American flags manifests as the nightmare of their persistent deaths, either at the hands of police or other youth. Perhaps a Black child draped in the American flag recalls the beauty of strange fruit hanging from a poplar tree. Or, maybe the dream splashes from the puddles beneath the children's hops, glowers through the angst of growing pains, and sparks in this older woman a chuckle of remembrance. A night dream in the daytime. Through her photographical project, Bright effectively conjures the affects of Blackness—the overwhelming historicity of Black life and death in the present—while embracing the community within the space of transformative contemplation. There is something radical about this kind of love, where a photographer enfolds you into the imagination of the present. Though you see and feel it, you simply cannot describe it. But the vision is beautiful, nonetheless.

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