Unlike Conventional Form(s) Of: Beyond Reparative Antiracism

Louis M. Maraj

This essay argues that prevailing discourse in and the practice of antiracist thought in rhetoric and writing studies take a generally reactive stance to racial violence, while centering whiteness and white guilt in response. It contextualizes this response as indicative of wider U.S. society's crisis-driven modes of dealing with racism that play into making peoples of color—and particularly Black folx—fodder for social justice. "Unlike Conventional Form(s) Of" calls for, enacts, and shares fracturing, unconventional approaches to antiracism, based in the epistemologies and life practices of those peoples. It offers, while performatively engaging in, three Black and Black feminist rhetorics as basis for mobilizing such approaches in positioning, storytelling, and dialogue. The piece concludes with an autoethnographic pedagogical activity that conjures these antiracist strategies in gesturing at alternate pedagogical and societal futures.

Marginalized populations in North America have experienced more acutely the effects of the economic strain brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Unemployment skyrocketed, lack of access to healthcare became even more of a societal scourge, and the pandemic directly affected peoples of color in disproportionate ways because of their already minoritized positions. With a string of police and vigilante murders occurring early in the pandemic, including, but not limited to, the killings of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Nina Pop, and Rayshard Brooks, the Black Lives Matter movement saw a tremendous resurgence in public attention. But this time, that attention found more positive public support. By June 2020, the Pew Research Center reported that—for the first time—the movement had backing across a majority of racial and ethnic groups (Parker et. al.). According to the *New York Times*, public opinion of the movement pre-2019 was net negative but has now changed (Cohn and Quealy). The slogan Black Lives Matter began appearing during summer 2020 on websites and commercials of major U.S. retailers, multinational corporations, even on the jerseys of European soccer-club players. Was it the drawn-out snuff film documenting George Floyd's death at the hands of the state that prompted this new energy? We've seen images like that before.

In this temporal moment of socioeconomic crisis, sociopolitical crisis seems to matter more. And while antiBlackness predates the U.S.'s founding and still

breathes on, the summer of 2020 marshaled an immediate urgency to combat this quotidian feature of Western democracy. One might ask, again: what's different about now? Why the rush to antiracist reading lists, the performative wokeness of social media profile picture blackouts, and the "are you okay?" texts to the Black friends and colleagues of white folx? Black Lives Matter as a movement existed well before this new push for racial awareness, and Black peoples been done been being murdered for centuries. Why must it always take a spate of public executions to spur antiracist action, and when will these bandages on systemic antiBlackness and racism again wear out? Who must die next for progressives to enter their next new stage of privilege-awareness that seems tethered mainly to white guilt? And when do we wake up to the idea that addressing such guilt conjures temporary pats on the back for those who engage with antiracism and antiracist pedagogies?

This essay briefly journeys through my first engagement with rhetoric and writing studies and its generally reactive disciplinary stance to racism, which I argue re-centers whiteness, much like the current emergency-driven focus on antiracism and white guilt. It calls for, enacts, and shares proactively fracturing approaches to antiracism, based in Black epistemologies and life practices. I offer, while performatively engaging in, three rhetorics situated in Black and Black feminist theoretics for mobilizing such approaches in positioning, storytelling, and dialogue. The piece ends by providing an autoethnographic pedagogical activity as means for participating in these antiracist strategies that gestures toward fracturing alternate field-wide, pedagogical, and societal futures.

While I particularly address rhetoric and writing studies and its pedagogies, I suggest that reactive stances toward racialized and settler-colonial violence permeate through and beyond these and adjacent fields. In some respects, reactive antiracism appears ubiquitous in cultural studies scholarship, as well as generally in popular culture. In terms of rhetorical studies, Paula Chakravartty, Rachel Kuo, Victoria Grubbs, and Charlton McIlwain's #CommunicationSoWhite (alongside the #RhetoricSoWhite movement itself) offers a template for this kind of thinking. These scholars point out the pervasiveness of whiteness and white ideologies within communication as a problem and the warrant for doing antiracist work in the field.[1] Similarly, Lisa Flores, in arguing for "racial rhetorical criticism" outlines the "[f]atigues of whiteness" as reasons necessitating such criticism's desire to name and undo disciplinary whiteness (351-353). Asao Inoue's award-winning *Antiracist Assessment Ecologies* likewise grounds its arguments as responding to the "white racial habitus" that maintains hegemony in classrooms (see chapter one). Mainstream rhetorical and writing studies work's pointing to whiteness, its effects, and its Othering frameworks often legitimates or mobilizes the field's exigency for antiracist thinking. Why should whiteness work as the controlling idea through which

we think ourselves subject? Yes, such critique is absolutely necessary, but could antiracism be oriented in ways otherwise? One only needs to glance at popular titles, like philosopher George Yancy's *Look a White! Philosophical Essays on Whiteness* or British journalist Reni Eddo-Lodge's *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race,* to grasp the prevalence of reactionary antiracism in public intellectualism.

And though Eddo-Lodge highlights that proclaiming a cut-off to engaging white people about race has paradoxically led to spending most of her time talking to white people about race (16-17), this essay does not pursue the particular dynamics of this contradiction. It also does not concern itself with reacting to reactive antiracism. These examples, rather, offer contextual backdrop for thinking and doing antiracism in ways that do not simply augur intellectual praxis positioned from "anti-" as signifying any of its five primary meanings as prefix in "opposed to/against; preventing; relieving; the opposite of; acting as rival to," respectively ("anti-, prefix"). Instead, I delve into fluxional possibilities within a sixth signification where "anti-" racism conjures "unlike the conventional form of " to traverse the fluid potentials in constantly destabilizing ideas of race as governing body ("anti-, prefix").

Experience

I arrived at rhetoric and writing studies proper a little late in the grad school game, though my thinking up to that point did consider early modern literature's contemporaneous and ongoing relationships with issues of literacy and rhetoric. After the racialized violence of candidacy-exam hazing, the transition to writing studies was easier than I'd imagined in terms of my own capacity to switch focus, to understand how to read rhetorically, etc. But with that change I began paying careful attention to how grad school colleagues, faculty, and the field talked about race and antiracism, if only to find my position relative to them. An attention to difference had oriented my teaching for a number of years; however, as a first-generation Black international student, I thought it my duty to offer students a different standpoint—one exterior to the academy's historical functions.

A two-week digital media institute showed me what's really good, though. I discovered, a week and a half in, that the organizers had planned only one workshop dedicated to talking about race and digital media—and that one workshop was optional. I was livid. The very idea that race, at the tail-end of Obama's presidency—or really, at any point in the U.S.'s long antiBlack history—was something optional for engagement is deeply offensive. Critical race theorists have long worked to illustrate the permanence of race and the racism that comes with it as structural/structuring dimensions of social life (Bell; Delgado and Stefancic). But I wanted to peep who was on this panel, who

said what, how it was being said, and to survey for any attempt to address the choice that this institute's participants had to simply ignore the topic of race and its material consequences altogether. Let's be clear—three-quarter-ways deep into this institute, issues of access, digital composition and communication, economics, and more were discussed but never directly in relation to racial identity.

The panel consisted of four graduate students: three cis-white men and a Black woman. I sat with a small community of Black graduate students and faculty and passed notes with them—some old-school live-tweeting. The panel's first graduate student highlighted the importance of addressing white privilege in doing service work with/in Black communities. He leaned on Peggy McIntosh's 1989 "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" in explaining his approach to fieldwork. That an over 30-year-old, two-page article would serve as the basis for engagement with real-life Black folx, much less writing by and about Black peoples, still staggers me. Acknowledging privilege, while possibly a precursor to doing the work of critiquing its use, offers little more as a standalone practice than a performance or gesture of wokeness. As Black feminist theorist Marquis Bey pronounces, this "dance... keeps intact the integrity of that identity rather than doing the work to destroy it" by centering "one's hegemonic identification" (69). Ultimately, the dynamic set in play by this panelist through such acknowledgment makes service work with Black peoples a form of white saviorism that emphasizes the white speaker's solidarity as most important. Rhetoric and writing scholar Pritha Prasad describes a process akin to this situation as a form of "idealized coalition," where such coalitions become "characterized by uneven, non-reciprocal, and usually idealized/imaginary collective relationships between groups with differential positions of power and vulnerability." Although, for Prasad, these gestures "crop up exclusively in response to acute anti-Black racialized violence" (such as in the summer of 2020), we might potentially read the panelist's fairly mundane and routinized move here as similarly oriented.

I watched the other two white men follow this move by not addressing or confronting their own whiteness, by mixing up race, nationality, and ethnicity, and by talking about Black participants in their research as traditional objects of study. The latter, through its extension of settler-colonial logics that "thingify" peoples of color (Césaire), promotes the racist logics of Black peoples as unable to speak for themselves in research—a foundational epistemic tenet of dominant Eurocentric philosophical and anthropological thought (da Silva, *Toward*). The one Black woman spotlighted a key issue in doing work for an historically white university in a Black community: even as a Black woman, her attachment to the university had placed her on the receiving end of hostility from some of the community members to whom she had reached

out. Reflecting with this woman afterward, I read her inclusion as a form of tokenization. Something's messed up about this scene, no? The inclusion of Black women to salve the guilt induced from appearing progressive harkens back to the occasion of Audre Lorde's "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," while also recalling how institutional diversity initiatives often work to objectify those racially marked as different. It might seem even more familiar to those witnessing white colleagues boasting about the one Black scholar they recently included in their course readings—something still going on post-summer 2020.

A couple years later, I attended an important keynote talk that my graduate program sponsored. The speaker, a leading figure in antiracist pedagogy, held the attention of the packed room of faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students. They explained the philosophical underpinnings of their approach with: "if white supremacy is gonna swing at our students, we have to be teaching them how to dodge that shit." Attendees clamored to tweet the missive in the "oohs" of the audience. The metaphor makes logical sense, but I wondered: why talk about racism and antiracism in pugilistic terms? Racism manifests in violent ways, no doubt, but should we be teaching our students how to respond to it within such a traditionally masculinist and ableist framework—where strength and physicality, the ability to dodge an on-coming blow—offers some kind of respite from its effects?

Later, I participated in the workshop section of the keynote, exclusively offered to graduate students. It began with a meditation, and I, along with the other graduate students of color in the audience, curiously looked on to understand how this fit with the speaker's positionality and background. How did the exercise cite, unpack, and/or show respect for the traditions from which it comes and the cultures from which it seems lifted? The speaker then unequivocally stated that those successful in academia, as we all are to an extent, benefit and have benefited from whiteness. Because the institution is raced white, the story goes, our success depends on our being versed in and experts on whiteness. Discomfort shifts to anger. I can tell from brief glances at my Black and Brown colleagues that the implications of this gesture similarly disturbed us: the argument sidesteps, if not erases, our struggles to survive the academy, to hold to home literacies dear to us in frequent moments when hegemony interrogates them.

The scholar then asked us to grade an assignment. They provided an assignment description and an essay response and prompted audience members to formulate individual grades. We needed to prepare to explain the rationales behind our assessment. In discussion of why we assigned our respective letter grades, the speaker circulated copies of a list of "white logics." The items on the list, to them, align with all of the reasonings behind our assessment practices.

For instance, a woman of color graduate student assigned a grade based on the assignment prompt's requirements; the speaker explained that the white logic of giving primacy to the rule of law influenced her evaluation of the piece of writing. You could have tasted the tension in the room like bad dry-mouth. Shortly after the workshop, graduate students of color huddled in a hallway or office and whispered about how wild the whole thing was—we felt like the speaker came for us. The approach alienated us; a single-axis approach to race shoved us into a dominant social-identity category (by way of class, nonetheless). This approach belies crucial interventions Black and women of color feminists theorize and practice through their work on intersectionality—pointing to the very mechanisms critical race theorist and law scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw critiques in formulating the concept. Concurrently, the speaker's framework seems designed for participants to come to grips with their respective cultural guilt: a form of reactive antiracism.

We can all admit that whiteness might not only be tethered biologically to certain bodies. But must white spaces mean that all in spatial relation with it succumb automatically to it? Should whiteness work as the controlling idea through which we think ourselves subject? Black feminist surveillance scholar Simone Browne highlights how "white gazes and vantage points" orient many ways of looking critically, shaping representation while escaping it (49). In the workshop, this pattern of assuming the role of omnipotent observer occurs in denying peoples of color referential schema outside of whiteness—figuring us bereft of ontological resistance and rendering our experiences essentialized via characteristics deemed white (Fanon 82-83).

Meanwhile, in an introductory course on rhetorical theory, I learn the trajectory of Kenneth Burke's scholarship and where our still routine reliance on the rhetorical situation comes from. Burke draws directly from how anthropologists, specifically Bronislaw Malinowski, "clearly recognize the rhetorical *function* in magic"—magic being primitive and native to the peoples of color Malinowski exploits for his theories on Indigenous Polynesian tribes–which Burke then sets in conversation with the function of rhetoric writ large (43).[2] Lloyd Bitzer's canonical essay "The Rhetorical Situation"—which appears in pedagogical readers like Mark J. Porrovecchio's and Celeste Michelle Condit's *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader* (in its second edition) and Carl R. Burgchardt and Hillary A. Jones's *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism* (in its fifth edition)—leans even more heavily on Malinowski's harrowing racialist ethnocentrism. Bitzer, in deploying the anthropologist's findings, avers "So controlling is situation that we should consider it the very ground of rhetorical action" (5). This theory has been picked up in many first year writing and introductory communication classrooms as a basis for explaining their rhetorical triangle, Aristotle's ethos, logos, pathos, and other instructional formulae

to which we routinely subscribe. I wonder: how do we brush over the racially problematic, objectifying findings of early twentieth century anthropologists because this scholarship represents what passed in its time and even decades later as *de rigueur*? The very foundations of the revitalization of the field of rhetorical studies in the twentieth century seem reliant on research that was, is, well, wack.

As Black feminist theorist Denise Ferreira da Silva shows, foundational anthropological thought—that of men like Frederick Boas (168-89) and Malinowski (338)—fashions Western Man as "the subject of transparency, for whom internal reason is an interior guide" while rendering others through racialization as "subjects of affectability, for whom universal reason remains an exterior ruler" (*Toward* 40). As such, rhetorical theory drawing fundamentally on ideas from Malinowskian thought might have the effect of positioning racialized peoples as objects needing domination, operating outside of the self-conscious will of Western Man. Theories, practices, and pedagogies generated via this epistemological genealogy hold the propensity to subject peoples of color to being objects of thought rather than capable of thought ourselves. This might function similarly to the panel I'd experienced at that digital media institute and parallel to the ways in which antiracist studies centered in whiteness use racial stress (usually afflicted on peoples of color) as a motivator to engage white guilt. Each of these approaches means positioning oneself—whether its practitioners benefit from hegemonic whiteness or not—as reactive to whiteness, white environments, and the logics of whiteness that maintain hegemony in our research, teaching, and daily lives. For Black peoples, it means existing in an exterior from which one becomes an object of another's control, in the object-commoditizing afterlives of Transatlantic slavery.

The title of this essay, "Unlike Conventional Form(s) Of: Beyond Reparative Antiracism," signals that dominant discourses within antiracist pedagogy and thought in Western society are predominantly reactive and reparative. And I argue that such an approach remains championed within disciplinary and public discourse. I do not deny that we remain familiar with the work of scholars of color like Geneva Smitherman, Keith Gilyard, Victor Villanueva, Elaine Richardson, Morris Young, Beverly J. Moss, Jacqueline Jones Royster, Carmen Kynard, Catherine Squires, Karma Chávez, Kent Ono, David Cisneros, and Andre Johnson and have embraced recent work by folx like April Baker-Bell and Aja Y. Martinez, within writing studies in particular. But the intense degree to which scholars cite and celebrate whiteness studies-based antiracist criticism has been and remains palpable. Take, for instance, Krista Ratcliffe's *Rhetorical Listening*—winner of the 2006 Gary A. Olson Award for Rhetoric and Cultural Studies, the 2007 Rhetoric Society of America Book Award, and the 2007 Conference on College Composition and Communication

Outstanding Book Award. Kennedy, Middleton, and Ratcliffe's co-edited collection *Rhetorics of Whiteness* won the CCCC Award in 2018. This problematic obviously manifests beyond the singular example of Ratcliffe, as one might look alongside it to Frankie Condon's election to the chairship of CCCC in 2021—over accomplished scholar of Chinese rhetorics and translingualism, Xiaoye You, specifically in a year marked by continuing, brutal anti-Asian violence during the pandemic—and the friction within the National Communication Association regarding its mostly white choices for Distinguished Scholars (made manifest by challenges to its selection processes for the honor in summer 2019). In the heightened racialized temporality of COVID-19, Robin DiAngelo's July 2020 *New York Times* bestseller, *White Fragility,* sat at the number two spot on Amazon's most sold nonfiction list, ahead of Ibram X. Kendi's *How to Be an Antiracist* (which brings with it its own problematic, woke checklist antiracism) and Eddie Glaude's *Begin Again* on James Baldwin. While it remains important that we combat whiteness in its repressive forms, both within our disciplinary spaces and elsewhere, I urge us to think beyond the moment of immediate response to racial violence where our tendency remains addressing and redressing whiteness.

What does it mean to take unconventional, fracturing approaches to antiracism, to avoid having to dodge a racist blow (in the earlier metaphor), and to eschew conversations about race that center on whiteness and its meanings? How can we envision classrooms as spaces where literacy enacts the practice of freedom, as Black feminist bell hooks proposes, and not where we must always already defend ourselves against the threat of white supremacy? hooks conceives such praxis as possibility, as process: "an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries" (207). This philosophical shift takes a great deal of reorientation. We must understand how approaching antiracism by primarily critiquing white privilege as our point of entry works to re-center whiteness. Classroom experiences where racial identity suddenly comes up without prior discussion or planning generally enact racial violence. Black instructors may also be familiar with that feeling when the (typically) one or two Black students in classes at historically white institutions become tokenized in speaking as an ambassador on and for a whole race when Blackness enters classroom discussion—like the Black woman graduate student in the optional panel on race earlier. Moreover, the trend of slapping diversity requirements on courses often results in a few authors of color showing up on our syllabi as a band-aid to some contemporaneous on-campus act of racism. As cultural studies scholar Sara Ahmed shows, "diversity" and the methods we use to represent diversity in these cases turn into "non-performative[s]" (17). Ahmed explains that the word "diversity" itself can very easily become an empty solution to the issue it

attempts to address. If we move away from being reactive and from thinking of issues of racializing identity formation second, we might foster alternate spaces where dealing with white fragility first doesn't suddenly become our ministry.

A primary focus on such fragility, which instructors of color deal with on the daily both inside and outside of classrooms, augurs a re-centering of whiteness. A major factor in having to deal with such defensiveness situationally (i.e. reparatively) results from the "white racial habitus" of our classrooms, where issues of intersectional identity often play second or third fiddle to course objectives (Inoue 17). As Inoue outlines, via social theorists Pierre Bourdieu and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, the concept of racial habitus "explains the way race is made up of discursive, material, and performative structuring structures," where "white racial habitus" refers to how whiteness operates through such mechanisms (43). This set-up means that these issues tend to become overt in writing classrooms, only in relation to particular texts or reactions to them, because whiteness remains a normalized unmarked equilibrium in most U.S. public spaces (Dyer). We then witness racial stress from students (and instructors) because of interruptions to whiteness, interruptions that DiAngelo has enumerated (57).

While proactive approaches to antiracist pedagogies cannot erase white fragility and defensiveness, such approaches can drastically alter how they might manifest in our classrooms through attempts to attune a learning community to positionality, identity, and subjectivity from the jump. Because white fragility, male fragility, cis-fragility etc. gets put on the table initially in these approaches, such fragilities lose much of their rhetorical power to interrupt as disturbances to the deconstruction of identity. Race/racism and antiBlackness structure the very operations of power dynamics in the Western world, and we do a disservice to students and ourselves when we hope to broach these ideas in situational response when they happen to arise. When they do erupt, the environment created by consciously centralizing positionality as a key factor in the teaching of rhetoric and writing can afford us with opportunities toward generative, uncomfortable discussions of race, gender, sexuality, nationality, disability and their entanglements with subject-formation.

Theory

In mobilizing proactive approaches to antiracism, I particularly deploy African Indigenous and Black feminist rhetorical strategies in using positioning, storytelling, and dialogue. These strategies function via a combination of interrelated theoretical frameworks that emphasize a subject's self-awareness and reflexivity/reflectivity, while highlighting their presences' co-constitution with others in gesturing toward relational meaning. In other words, grasping one's relationships to systemic power and the functions of identity through

their interrelations lie at the core of shaping escape paths from oppressive spaces. These strategies, culled from a variety of Black thinkers across various disciplines, emphasize the crucial idea that addressing antiBlackness remains important to dismantling antiBlack philosophies and actions through which systematic power operates. I turn to Black and Black feminist rhetorical tactics that have long been key to survival for Black/diasporic peoples, urging others to engage reflectively.

African and African-based research methodologies "[start] with self-knowledge," where "cultural and social immersion are imperative" to knowing (Mazama 399). Identity narratives form a basis for further exploring how an individual might engage their social position with a "recognition for things living and non-living," a core idea in African Indigenous theories of being (Chilisa 820). With this relational methodology centered in such narratives, a fracturing approach to antiracism that pays close attention to positionality, uses storytelling, and incites dialogue might also engage "lived experience as a criterion of meaning"—the first tenet of Black feminist epistemology laid out by Patricia Hill Collins (260). Starting with lived experience means wrestling with how a subject might navigate the world in relation to and in excess of overarching categories of identity that systems of power deploy for control. If we consciously occupy our various relationships with, in, and across systemic power structures in their concatenated ways while acknowledging that these systems generally function through binary mechanisms, we might understand how to engage and conceptualize privilege and marginalization alternatively.

Opening up in this way could offer those willing to tackle it another tenet of Black feminist thought "the ethic of personal accountability" (Collins 265). Such accountability allows avenues for participants in positionality exercises to be vulnerable, the kind of stances that Black feminist bell hooks calls for in *Teaching to Transgress* as key to critical pedagogies. It can position subjects, aware of various weighty intersectional axes through identity categories, to tell stories of how those categories function and potentially fall apart. In classroom spaces with fellow students' and instructor participation, shared vulnerability proffers fertile ground from which to do antiracist work. As Black feminist Audre Lorde avers, writers are inherently teachers: "There is something to be learned from the sharing of true feeling between two or more people; co-communicating is teaching—touching—really touching another human being is teaching—writing real poems is teaching—digging good ditches is teaching—living is teaching" ("Poet" 182). Digging ditches into living through positionality awareness creates space from which to potentially spur the generativity inherent in differences.

Considering these identity positions, participants can storytell from places of conscious reflection, emphasizing "expressiveness, the appropriateness of

emotions, and the capacity for empathy" (Collins 264). Storytelling holds deep roots in Black and Black diasporic cultures as path-breaking Black historian Carter Godwin Woodson notes: "story-telling in Africa is almost an institution…The story-teller passes as a respectable person in the community and figures especially in social functions. In certain parts, however, story-telling is a daily performance" (ix-x). As an everyday Black rhetorical strategy, storytelling's importance has been evidenced as a mode of survival in the West, from slave narratives to rap cyphers. Cultural rhetoricians Keith Gilyard and Adam Banks situate storytelling as a feature of orature, which enacts *nommo*, or the power/magic of the word in Black diasporic cultures (50). Using storytelling as the basis for antiracism, then, speaks in concert with these histories and philosophies and their capacities to make worlds from the ruins of our own.

Words, when operationalized in these frameworks, do not simply describe extant realities or how one particular subject navigates those realities relative to dominant discourse, as illustrated in the earlier story of the speaker who sought to list white habits so concretely that white racial orientation (potentially) denies the presence of anything outside of it. According to Africana studies scholar Adisa Alkebulan, in African indigenous philosophies such as those of the Dogon people of Mali and of ancient Egyptians, nommo represents a "life force" (379) that "relate[s] to the life sustaining power of speech itself" (380). This power of the word, in making and shaping reality into and across forms of being and non-being, illustrates how storytelling offers means to conjure oneself dynamically present. Indeed, as Black rhetoric doyenne Geneva Smitherman observes, "So strong is the African belief in the power and absolute necessity of Nommo that all craftsmanship must be accompanied by speech" (78). Importantly, these stories need not simply align with set precepts, significations, or racialized routines, especially given that "the power of the word is different from one individual to the next" in these African Indigenous cosmologies (Alkebulan 380). For the writer, speaker, or orator, meaning-making possibilities arise from playing with, in, across, and outside those differences in ways that create alternate expressions of consciousness.

Additionally, putting stories in conversation with each other evokes yet another feature of Black and Black feminist discourse, "the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims" (Collins 260). Dialogue stresses the importance of how antiracist action might emerge as a collective concern drawn from a convergence of different experiences through intercultural exchange. Communication scholar Laura W. Black contends that dialogue in co-occurrence with storytelling affords groups of people opportunities to understand difference through negotiations of self and other, where notions of identity emerge in and through discussion. Enacted in recent autoethnographic scholarship, TreaAndrea Russworm and Samantha Blackmon exhibit the distinct potentials

for thinking/discussing with story as Black feminist analytical framework. Put in the context of, and for use in, antiracist pedagogies, dialogue via storytelling destabilizes notions of identity that define the privileged and the marginalized for hegemonic exploitation and, instead, might further gesture at different worlds. Vulnerable dialogue rooted in positionality awareness and spurred by storytelling based on that awareness digs deeply into notions of the subject. Such exchanges lay bare the processes of structuring dimensions of identity categorization in subject formation, thus offering room in which to undercut hegemonic social ordering.

On one hand, white gender theorists like Judith Butler and Donna Haraway have offered formulations of the subject as a materialized performance of one's social environment and perception as a matter of one's specifically located and embodied historical and geographic perspective respectively. Black feminist orientations toward identity, on the other hand, emphasize the subject as intersectional (Crenshaw) and relational (Spillers; Weheliye; Wynter) in ways that confound white notions of gender containment. Crenshaw avers that "when [feminist and antiracist] practices expound identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition," for instance, "they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling" (1242). Black feminist thought, then, holds promise to trouble and fracture either/or constructs of subjectivity. Indeed, Denise Ferriera da Silva demonstrates through "Hacking the Subject," how one might "activate blackness's ability to disrupt the subject and the racial and gender-sexual forms that sustain it, without sacrificing [blackness's] capacity to expose the fundamentally violent core of modern thinking" (21). Apprehending the multiply located, geographically dispersed, and shifting social environments, histories, and discourses animated through Black feminist dialogue remains key in moving beyond antiracist work that embraces cohesive identity forms and toward possibilities for language as means to make them soluble. If we unpack the stories that congeal notions of a social subjectivity in concert with others doing such work, we might draw on how these multiple experiential sites break down power to find life force in fluid linguistic magic and chaos. The subjectification that happens through intersectional positionality/positioning in which one recognizes subjects with/in institutional structures—rather than mobilizing identity as label—allows windows into storytelling's capacities to re/invent the subject along with its contexts.

Practice

In this final section, I offer an example of an antiracist activity for classroom use to practice the theories offered in this article. This activity mobilizes alternative approaches called for in antiracist theory and pedagogy. I use this activ-

ity at the beginning of every class I teach and in most antiracist workshops I conduct—usually on the second day of class, whether it's with students in under-resourced high schools in historically Black neighborhoods or engaging graduate students in specialized seminars at historically white institutions. Orienting participants to the politics of our spaces through each other's lived experiences means that those experiences populate and live with us as we engage in course material and discussions. The vocabularies of the exercise remain useful throughout the course and helps participants grapple with how our pasts, presents, and futures remain wrapped up and co-constituted in each other's.

I invite participants to paraphrase our course theme description or the declaration "Writing, at heart, is an exchange of power." Then volunteers read their paraphrases and point out the most insoluble word or phrase put into their own words. Usually participants identify the phrase "systems of power" (which I include in most course descriptions) or find themselves repeating the word "power" from the prompt sentence un-toyed. I spotlight the difficulty in describing power otherwise, noting problematics and possible shortcomings of words like "authority" or "dominance" when we think about writing in its usual contexts and/or its subversive potentials of power. I draw a chart on the board using "systems of power" at its center. I ask contributors to name such systems in the U.S., classifying them broadly under "church," "state," and "societal norms" if participants mention these particular terms, but generally leaving suggestions as free-standing entries. Responses usually range in abstraction from these broader concepts and others like "class" and "race" to specifics like "universities," "physical infrastructure," or "police."

When we exhaust the possibilities of this list, I encourage participants to chart identities of individuals or groups of people who typically have access to (or benefit from) or who are denied access to (or are marginalized through) those systems of power. We make two columns to illustrate the binary nature of identity frameworks and the functioning of systemic/institutional power. For each entry on the so-called "privileged" side, a corresponding entry occurs in the "marginalized" side of the ledger. In working with more experienced scholars undertaking the activity, pushback generally emerges from these dichotomous framings. But I ask for patience at this moment, since one of our key purposes in this experience lies in eventually dissolving these categorizations in generative ways. As much as we know that these matrixes of domination serve to reinforce hegemony, they continue to structure our lives, epistemologies, and interpersonal communications (Collins 18). Proposed items for the list generally start with the most-often discussed identities categories like "white" versus "peoples of color" and get to often less-discussed identities like "native-English speaker" versus "second language learner."

Once the audience and I can no longer add item entries, I press us to consider the identities listed with which we identify or have been identified, highlighting that access and in-access to social power take different shapes and forms, most of which directly relate to us personally in some way. We then spend time writing about specific experiences when these identities allowed us to benefit from access to power or marginalized us, keeping us outside of tapping into structural power systems like the ones we first listed. We take turns sharing these experiences, telling our various stories about our relations and relationships with institutional structures. As the facilitator, I tell my stories first to open up space for vulnerability from others in this usually tense moment. We put these (sometimes traumatic) stories in dialogue with each other as we listen to how hegemonic categorization has oriented each participant to learning the antiBlack world in particular ways. Having broken down the term "power," we dis-cohere the workings of hegemony through the activity and contribute to a space where we could start addressing power in our reading, writing, and thinking through relational fracture, shaping a space with/in which we might continue to do so generatively and consciously. I remind participants of possible imbalances between different kinds of social categories in lived reality and the importance of potentially using understood "privileges" in actively conspiring with marginalized peoples. The activity thus mobilizes self-knowledge, cultural immersion and relationality, and Black feminist ideas of experience, dialogue, empathy, and personal accountability through the politics of the everyday.

Rather than presenting antiracism as having to dodge an oncoming blow—as the speaker I mentioned earlier offers—or simply listing the names of social identity markers to illustrate an empty awareness of privilege—like my white grad student colleague did to contextualize their service work with Black peoples—the activity starts from a multifaceted, obtuse construct and directs participants to unpack its varied lived formations in the world through fracturing that concept. It destabilizes identity and its containment, seeking to reconfigure them through the creative forces of stories which sit with us in some ways but also intermingle and continuously fracture in our ensuing discussions. These stories, in some respects, attend to Ferriera da Silva's hacking of the subject, where "Hacking…is not so much a method, as it is refusal as a mode of engagement" ("Hacking" 22). Rejecting the confinement of particular expressions, forms, and formations of identity as object category opens up possibilities for thinking outside of white classifications systems—the logics that bring us race, gender, class, ability, etc.

This exercise not only offers vocabularies for talking about social power in quotidian ways, but it also allows for a definition of 'analysis' via power and identity, crucial in antiracist writing courses that attempt critical thinking and

research: the idea of taking a difficult text, concept, or artifact to task by defining its significant parts and how those parts work. Importantly, this activity frames continuing discussion around these power dynamics, institutions, and social identity categories. It means that these concepts stay at the forefront of our future discussions and learners might then be more conscious of how power works with/against an author, their classmates and/or themselves, and their spaces. The moving implications of identity positions, thus, proactively shape our exchanges and filter through to difficult conversations on race and marginalization, rather than arising with those discussions in their respective moments.

Conclusion

Foregrounding positionality and sharing lived experiences can help foster classroom and other kinds of communities that gesture at alternative worlds by starting discussions in critiquing social power through lived experience. In naming the various institutions and normative functional categories that structure our lives and interactions, we partake in our entanglements with the world in their varied instituted forms. By then moving to list categories of identity, we call attention to the governing codes that arrange these systems, or what Black feminist thinker Sylvia Wynter terms 'genres' of Western Man. Wynter explains these as "modes of sociogeny… *genres* or *kinds* of being human, in whose always auto-instituted and origin-narratively inscribed terms, we can alone experience ourselves as human" (114). For Wynter, sociogeny—which emerges from the conditions of Black alienation—challenges the idea that we can define human being/s in bio-genetic or biocentric terms alone when culturally genres of being institute and narrate the functions of such being. Coming to consciousness of this genre-ing—as the positionality activity I describe above prompts—offers possible means to mobilize storytelling and dialogue to grasp how our lives wrap up with/in systemic power. We might then exceed such formations through re/invention beyond reacting to white guilt or the stress of a situationally arising moment of racial tension.

While there no doubt remains work left to dismantle destructive white logics, we might, importantly, also pay mind to Audre Lorde's conclusion that the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. As Lorde puts it, we must recognize "difference as a crucial strength" rather than simply a means for self-reflection on whiteness' hegemonic terms or only in moments of crisis, where, in Lorde's pivotal declaration's situation, she was asked at the "last hour" to represent difference for white feminists at the 1979 Second Sex Conference (*Sister* 112, 110). Such practices work in congruence with the objectifying experiences of my Black woman graduate school colleague in an earlier story. The Black feminist writer/activist conversely contends that "In our world, di-

vide and conquer must become define and empower"—the former being the master's key philosophical and epistemological means for control (Lorde *Sister* 112). We must refuse such constructions, working, as da Silva does to "propose that the *object* (as figured in modern political philosophy and the arsenal of racial knowledge and the practices and discourses these sustained) emerging as *subject* of a critical address interrupts such refashionings of modern themes disguised as critical departures from deconstruction (. . .) or from postmodern deviations of proper philosophy" ("Hacking" 21). Through Black and Black feminist rhetorics of positioning, storytelling, and dialogue, we might engage in what Lorde describes as definition toward continuously re/inventing what our classroom spaces mean unlike conventional form(s) of subject.

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Notes

1. In some ways, the related hashtag "#RhetoricSoWhite" offers a performative gesture of illustrating pervasive whiteness as critical antiracist work in-and-of itself.

2. See Malinowski, Bronislaw. "The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Tribes," *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language Upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism, with Supplementary Essays* by B. Malinowski and F. G. Crookshank. Eds. C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards. Harcourt, Brace, 1927.

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