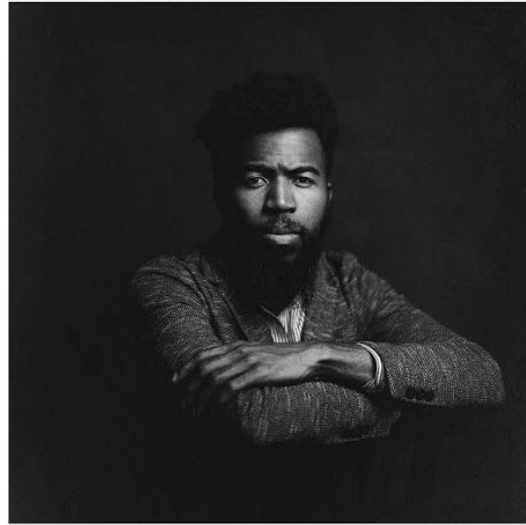


## ***Revising the Wasteland: black anti-pastoral & the end of the world***

thursday, october 5th  
6:30pm

19 university place  
room 102

conversation + snacks  
to follow



**Joshua Bennett**  
(Harvard Society of Fellows)

with respondents

**Kesi Augustine** (NYU)  
+

**Kate McIntyre** (Columbia)  
+

**Sonya Posmentier** (NYU)  
+

**Simone White**  
(the New School)

*This talk uses the correspondence between the St. Dominguan projector and planter Jean Trembley and his cousin Charles Bonnet to explore the transformation of preexistence theory in the eighteenth-century Americas. My aim is to use this dialogue to articulate an ethos that might help us to address the conjoined environmental and economic problems of our time.*

**Monique Allewaert**  
(Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison)



## ***Insect Light: a dialogue on preexistence & messianic time in the american colonies***

tuesday, october 19th  
6:30pm

20 cooper square  
4th floor flex space

conversation + snacks  
to follow

## *The Miracle of Black Childhood*

I'd like to start by saying – welcome to the apocalypse.

I woke up today, like many of you, feeling inexplicably tired, anxious, angry; many of us are cycling through feeling disconnected from, and disappointed in, the collective. So Joshua Bennett's analysis in "Revising the Wasteland" is timely. I am grateful that we have him here tonight, during this month that will continue to change the course of our lives. It is a luxury and an honor to sit here with you all, charged with the task of just thinking these things through. Thank you, first and foremost, for being here.

With that said, it might seem like hardly the time to feel optimistic. But the undercurrent of the darkness we're experiencing—like the chaos embedded in Whitfield and Williams poems—is the re-emergence of light.

But how do we get there? Bennett suggests that the speaker in Whitfield's "The Misanthropist" positions his youth as a "contradistinction to the light" (8) As I look at pictures of destruction in Puerto Rico, or encounter the rampant homelessness here in New York City—all problems that are compounded by the color line—I have the sense that, perhaps this is it. We must, like Whitfield, embrace "endarkenment," become comfortable in the darkness (8).

That darkness includes fatigue, anxiety, and anger like we are experiencing today; more specifically, the darkness encompasses all of the atrocities committed under the mast of anti-blackness—the dreams deferred, the deaths of the innocent, the fracturing of psyches, the plugs that trigger us through viral videos of police brutality, the systems that feed off the constant fluctuations of our impulse to fight or flight. That darkness, as

Bennett describes, is “the precarious dance between life and death that is black human being and becoming” (8).

And, I notice that, for Whitfield and Williams, there’s no figure more equipped to help us confront this darkness than the figure of the Black child. To socialize a Black child is an exercise in double consciousness - to believe in her promise, and to be aware that she is the racial other, the “blight” on the world (2). In a “global order that depends upon their subjugation for its very coherence,” Black children are miracles. To fully embrace “endarkenment,” the culprits must look into the mirror that Black children provide and atone for their sins.

At the same time, Whitfield and Williams are exploring childhood as an embodiment of the coming light. According to Bennett, Whitfield and Williams both construct a form of Afrofuturism, a “willingness to take seriously the idea that any apocalypse is also, quite literally, a revelation, or opening: one wherein black human beings can improvise a radically divergent order of things” (6). Black children, those who will grow up to be adults, are literally the future.

These poems, then, are prophetic. From the darkness, new life is forming. We are pushing forward to a new earth. It will be the “Black planet” that Public Enemy described. An earth in which the Black child, and all Black people, live freely within the plush green meadows. The “opaque, unruly” waters, as we know, are already here (8). The ark is on its way. And it just may be helmed by children.

Welcome to the apocalypse.