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CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY, RACIAL JUSTICE, AND RADICAL IMAGINATION: AN INTRODUCTION

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This themed issue, "Critical Phenomenology, Racial Justice, and Radical Imagination," was conceived in the wake of the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. The year 2020 laid bare the pre-existing need to direct collective attention to systems of structural oppression. The coronavirus pandemic, the Western wildfires, and anti-Black police violence highlighted the differential distribution of precarity along racial, gender, and class lines, as well as the role that historical, financial, and governmental structures play in its perpetuation. George Floyd's lynching galvanized decades of frustration, dissatisfaction, and anger over police brutality that date back to the beating and arrest of Rodney King in March 1991. As attorney Andrea Ritchie observes, George Floyd's murder became emblematic because it pointed to the many systemic issues that this country needs to address, like "the impunity of police, their imperviousness to reform, the criminalization of poverty, the ways in which the war on drugs is mobilized to justify Black death [. . . as well as] the vast resources that go into the killing machine that is the Minneapolis police department" (Cornish, Isackson, and Scott 2021). The protests mobilized upward of 25 million Americans of different races, genders, and ages across the country, united in the call to "defund/abolish the police," i.e., to move resources currently directed to law enforcement to programs that strive to meet people's material needs and generate safety. Political leaders, corporations, and universities expressed support of the movement against racial justice, echoing the claim "Black lives matter," and vowing to take an active role in confronting systemic racism. But two and half years after the George Floyd protests erupted, where do things stand?[1]

On May 21, 2021, following the conviction of Floyd's killer, Derek Chauvin, and as legislation H.R. 1280, "The George Floyd Justice in Policing Act,"[2] was making its way

[1] In May 2022, *Forbes* published an issue, "Two Years After George Floyd. Black Leaders Reflect on Change," in which, as the title suggests, Black leaders reflect on where we stand today regarding racial justice (Council 2022a).

[2] H.R. 1280 stablished a framework to prevent and remedy racial violence by law enforcement that, at the time, was working its way through Congress (U.S. Congress 2021).

through Congress, NPR host Audie Cornish observed that the calls for justice permeating the movement for Black lives "ha[d] been answered" (Cornish, Isackson, and Scott 2021). The calls seem to have been answered by both corporate America and elected officials. Between May 2020 and August 2021, America's top 50 companies pledged to collectively contribute (but did not necessarily contribute) $49.5 billion to address racial inequality—"an amount that," as Washington post editors and reporters Tracy Jan, Jena McGregor, and Meghan Hoyer (2021) observed, "appears unequaled in sheer scale." Elected officials (predominantly Democratic) across the country rejected racist symbols by, e.g., removing the racist iconography of the Confederacy that has become central to white-supremacist groups, and instituted the Juneteenth National Independence Day to commemorate the end of slavery, marking "the closest that [U.S.] society has come to acknowledging the legacy of slavery as a fact of American life," as Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2021) pointed out.

And yet, as William Paris points out in this themed issue, the racism of the United States' social order endures, impervious to any fundamental restructuring. In part, as Ritchie notes, this may be because accomplishments like Chauvin's conviction, although necessary, have the side effect of sending the message that the "system is working as it should" when, in fact, the majority of officers do not face arrest or prosecution for the violence they commit (Cornish, Isackson, and Scott 2021). Along these lines, the hyper-visible speech acts and gestures performed by corporate America (from Silicon Valley to Wall Street)—like JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon kneeling with bank employees, or McDonald's declaration that Floyd was "one of us" (Jan, McGregor, and Hoyer 2021)—risks saturating the public sphere with what Taylor (2021) calls "the low-hanging fruit of symbolic transformation." After all, when one follows the money, of the $49.5 billion pledged by corporations, only $70 million went to organizations working on criminal justice reform, and more than 90 percent of the total ($45.2 billion) was allocated as loans or investments to companies stood to profit from (Jan, McGregor, and Hoyer 2021). Taking Philadelphia as her case study, Taylor notes that the United States is "caught between a recognition that racism is rooted in unfair and unequal conditions, created within public and private sectors, and reproduced over time and place, and a reluctance to take drastic action to cure it" (Taylor 2021). In this sense, although these symbolic gestures matter because they can change the conversation around and the perception of racial (in)justice (as Taylor noted above), they detract from grappling with the systemic nature of the injustice and with the question of what structural justice actually needs—i.e., policy change, if not system change.

The intersectional nature of the George Floyd protests has made abundantly clear that many of the institutions at the core of North American society—like the police, financial and credit institutions, and prison industrial complex—are violent forces in Black communities, underpinning a system of racial capitalism and limiting the possibilities of Black life. As such, activists and scholars point out that current institutions as we know them cannot be fixed (Akbar 2018). Rather, they need to be *reimagined*.

Radical change that interrupts the reproduction of systems of violence calls for *radical* imagination. In their groundbreaking work on the centrality of radical imagination to social movements, Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish (2014) trace the meaning of the concept "radical" to its Latin root, *radix*, which translates in English as "root." This etymology, they suggest, points to the fact that

> radical ideas, ideologies, or perspectives are informed by the understanding that social, political, economic, and cultural problems are outcomes of deeply rooted and systemic antagonisms, contradictions, power imbalances, and forms of oppression and exploitation.

In turn, this means that "even if the system as a whole can be changed through gradual institutional reforms, those reforms must be based on and aimed at a transformation of the fundamental qualities and tenets of the system itself." In this sense, radical imagination is a modality of imagining committed to bringing about conditions of possibility that make system change possible, that generate fields of sense that make forms of life thus far deemed unintelligible and unbelievable legible and believable. Works like the policy platform of the Movement for Black Lives, "A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom, and Justice," is instructive of the transformative power of radical imagination. The Vision offers a blueprint for concrete transformative change in six sectors (End the War on Black People, Reparations, Economic Justice, Invest/Divest, Community Control, and Political Power), inclusive of mainstream approaches to reform (M4BL 2020).

Unsurprisingly, despite the protests' massive support, radical system and institutional change does not exactly appear to be on the political table as of yet. In spite of the fact that corporate executives and politicians condemned the horrific crimes against Black Americans perpetrated by police offers, companies hesitated to direct funds into the core issue that sparked the George Floyd protests. The notion of "defund/abolish the police" was met with resistance; groups connected to Black Lives Matter and focused on criminal justice and police reform received substantially lower pledges than those supporting economic mobility (Jan, McGregor, and Hoyer 2021). Moreover, far from heeding to the demand for fundamental changes to the neoliberal racial capitalist system underpinning systemic racism, the measures thus far taken sidestep key demands of the B.L.M. protests and the outlined in the Vision. These demands include criminal justice and economic change including the redistribution of resources away from police toward other services more equipped to interrupt patterns of violence and economic redistribution to address the systematic theft of Black wealth.[3]

As we strive to understand what didn't work, it is important to learn from what was one of the most radical dimensions of the George Floyd protests, i.e., its intersectional politics including feminist and anti-capitalist commitments (Akbar 2018). Such a framework cautions us against pinning the shortcomings of radical imagination and bringing about

[3] In May 2022, *Forbes* traces the gains (or lack thereof) that have been made vis-à-vis racial equity in the post-Floyd era, reporting that "little progress in outcomes for Black lives and livelihoods" has been accomplished (Council 2022b).

radical change exclusively to individual moral failures, like complacency, bigotry, or racist investments in the status quo. While individual vices do play a role, the shortcomings are also structural; after all, the neoliberal capitalist system structuring North American society actively erodes the space and time necessary for the cultivation of radical imagination. As Haiven and Khasnabish (2010) observe,

> With the neoliberal privatization of social life and the liquidation of the public sphere the *space and time* necessary for the cultivation of a shared social imagination has been almost totally foreclosed. Where capital has been unable to simply buy-up the means of social imagination (as is the case with the mass media) it has, through neoliberal restructuring, imposed such austerity that the radical imagination has come to be feared even in formally "public" spaces such as the airwaves, schools and universities, and the civil service. (xv)

Starting with the acknowledgment of the necessity of radical imagination for social change, and with the threat that neoliberal capitalism poses to radical imagination, our hope is that this themed issue offers the time and space to cultivate radical imagination as it takes up questions of racial justice. Moreover, our intent is to solicit critical phenomenology toward robust investigations of radical imagination, what it makes possible, and the ways in which current social, economic, and political arrangements sustain or foreclose the space and time for its cultivation.

What the past few years have made clear is that individuals and institutions continue to be complicit in the perpetuation of structural inequality and racial violence in our society. For us, the editors of *Puncta*, acknowledging this complicity means, at a minimum, using our platform to amplify the voices of scholars of color and establish a forum devoted to critical conversations about racial justice. In sum, we hope we can create a space-time for the cultivation of radical imagination. This themed issue strives to be such a venue; the ten articles featured in this issue explore the intersections of race/racialization with methodological concerns within the field of critical phenomenology, theoretical understandings of the notion of race itself, and demands for racial justice on scholarly, activist, and imaginary grounds.

As a methodology that tracks how historical and social institutions shape fundamental structures and conditions of existence in the world, or how the world and possibilities of a subject may be drastically and painfully constrained by oppressive societal norms, critical phenomenology is well situated to advance important conversations about the harm of such norms and institutions, as well as to identify paths for resistance and change. Differently from other methodological approaches that, similarly, track the workings of history and institutions, critical phenomenology hones in on how these structures are *lived* by subjects, thus offering a unique perspective on the impact of given historical socio-political arrangements. Thinking at the intersections of structural injustice, collective resistance, and radical imagination, the ten articles featured in the issue take up crucial questions in the fight for racial and social justice within and outside of academia.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE THEMED ISSUE

Part I, "Race in Critical Phenomenology," foregrounds questions of method and scope, pushing critical phenomenology to contend with its own complicity with structural racism. In "Critical Impurity and Race for Critical Phenomenology," Mariana Ortega invites her audience—and those of us doing critical phenomenology in particular—to adopt an attitude of "*critical criticality*" or "critical impurity" to take notice of the ways in which the logic of purity remains operative in critical phenomenological analyses. In "Idle Talk and Anti-Racism: On Critical Phenomenology, Language, and Racial Justice," Eyo Ewara asks about the scope of critical phenomenology, especially insofar as explicit thematizations of language—and anti-racist language in particular—are concerned. Echoing Taylor's mention of the "low-hanging fruit of symbolic transformation," against the backdrop of ever more commonplace invocations of anti-racist sentiments and actions, Ewara points out that critical phenomenology has yet to take up language as an explicit concern, focusing instead on the body in its sensory and motor capacities. Insofar as anti-racist language is at stake, this occlusion is problematic because it turns language into idle talk, thus "leav[ing] behind resources through which to ask ourselves what is happening as we articulate increasingly taken-for-granted ways of speaking and living out an opposition to racism" (33). The implicit critical question raised by Ewara's article is: what kinds of resources for racial justice are lost by critical phenomenology by not taking language as a site of analysis?

Part II, "Tools for a Critical Phenomenology of Racial Justice," reworks theoretical concepts like homonationalism, creolizing, postracial whiteness, identity politics, flesh, and alienation in a manner that brings their usefulness for critical phenomenology into view, as the articles in this section take up questions of racial justice and radical imagination. Kris Sealy's and Stephanie Rivera Berruz's articles can be read as taking up Ortega's invitation to adopt an attitude of critical impurity. In "Banging Heads Together: Creolizing and Indigenous Identities in the Americas,"[4] Kris Sealey puts in conversation Antillean writer, poet, and philosophy Éduard Glissant's notion of "opacities in relation" with Indigenous scholar Jodi Byrd's concept of "horizontal cacophony" and Black feminist Tiffany King's account of "shoaling" to offer a framework capable to carry out antiracist *and* decolonizing work together. Starting from the recognition that the violence of sub-humanization and indigenous erasure are "always-already an entangled synthesis" grounding Western colonial states, Sealey proposes to center opacity as a way to think these entangled violences together while upholding their incommensurability. Opacity, in fact, avoids the pitfalls of upholding, on the one hand, antiblackness in decolonization and Indigenous restoration projects and, on the other hand, settler logic while pursing possibilities of black abolition. In "'. . . In the Borderlands you are the battleground . . .': June 12 and the Pulse of the Sacred," Stephanie Rivera Berruz offers a reading of the June 12 Pulse Night Club massacre that highlights how "the severing of race from sexuality" in the coverage of the June 12 events "serves to justify the mechanisms of terror that uphold sovereignty and U.S. exceptionalism" (54). The

[4] Sealey's article will be included in the issue at a later date.

homonormative omission of race and ethnicity from the coverage of the murder of a group of LGBTQ youth that was, in fact, predominantly Latinx was necessary for the massacre to rise to the level of national concern as it avoided disrupting American patriotism and anti-terrorist sentiments. I find traces of radical imagination in Rivera Berruz's discussion of the sacredness of Latin night at the club. Operating at the intertwining of the numinous and the mundane, and materializing as a space for erotic queer and Latinx subjectivities otherwise rendered invisible within dominant discourse, Latin night offers glimpses into the possibilities of life in the face of an outside world rife with violence.

In their articles, Shilpi Sinha and Uzma Jamil take stock of the mechanisms through which whiteness is secured at the institutional level, pushing against the criticism that identity politics reinforces tribalism while also calling out the deployment of academic freedom as a way of advancing postracial whiteness. In "We Flesh: Musser, Spillers and Beyond the Phenomenological Body," Andrea Warmack problematizes Merleau-Ponty's purportedly universal notion of flesh. Warmack articulates an alternative account of "lived flesh" that is at once always-already material and capable of naming itself in "erotic, communal, and transformative acts." A central distinction informing the alternative conception of flesh presented by Warmack requires that we notice how the lived experience of people of color is marked by an intentional social grammar which in turn is responsible for the ways in which "Indigenous and African bodies are translated from subjects/bodies into captive bodies/flesh" (108–09). In crafting such an account, Warmack adopts and adapts a constellation of insights from the writings of Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, Hortense Spillers, and Amber Jamilla Musser for the purpose of bringing into view the affective, experiential, and ethical practices of American Blackwomxn. In this way, the contribution put forward by Warmack is twofold: on the one hand, it exposes how the implicit dichotomy "captive vs uncaptive" operates as an omnipresent condition of embodied-lived-experience (a condition that in and of itself renders all pretension of "universality" of experience shortsighted, to say the least); on the other hand, Warmack's piece provides us with an enticing opportunity to theorize the different experiences of flesh described by the author by means of a radical use of imagination. Insofar as "We Flesh" highlights how "captive" bodies are consistently engaging in "multiple ways of signifying that are beyond the fixed grammar of the human subject/thief" (117), it brings into attention a radical form of "excess" that seems dramatically relevant and encouraging given our current socio-political predicament. Part II ends with Celine Lebeouf's musing on the notion of "bodily alienation" to reflect upon its uses for a critical phenomenology aimed beyond description at normative change of oppressive norms and institutions. First thematized by Frantz Fanon and, more recently, by George Yancy (2008), Kristin Zeiler (2013), and Helen Ngo (2017), among others, "alienation" combines description with evaluation, thus serving as a promising tool for critical phenomenology.

Part III, "Insights from Critical Phenomenology," puts to work critical phenomenology to make sense of two remarkedly different phenomena. In "Unsettling Encounters: On the Ontological Significance of Habitual Racism," Tyler Loveless argues that the reported experience of white people feeling (ontologically) threatened by interracial encounters is due to habitual racism. White people "(mis)perceive threats to their 'worldview'—e.g., a

'bookish' Black student or a masculine gay man (Schimel et al. 1999)—as ontologically threatening so as to avoid the kind of work and existential anguish that altering one's normative expectations would require" (136). William Paris's "Crisis Consciousness, Utopian Consciousness, and the Struggle for Racial Justice" is the concluding piece of this themed issue. Paris returns us to the question broached at the outset of this introduction: why weren't the George Floyd protests enough to bring about a fundamental restructuring of the current social order? To answer that question, Paris puts forth a theory of social transformation that moves away from a conception of consciousness as mostly passive or reactive—what he calls the "awareness model of consciousness" (144)—and rather thematizes consciousness as "the agential capacity to establish *horizons of normative expectations*" (145, italics in original). When these horizons fall short in grounding an agent's social practices, we can expect social change; the social order is put into question within agents' horizon of normative expectations, what Paris also calls "crisis consciousness." Finally, "utopian consciousness" develops new norms of justification for social practices and, importantly, experiences insight into the "structural possibility . . . of a social order that is not yet" (154). Radical social change requires radical imagination.

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CRITICAL IMPURITY AND THE RACE FOR CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY

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> *A subject who in its multiplicity perceives, understands, grasps its worlds as multiple sensuously, passionately as well as rationally without the splitting separation between sense/emotion/reason lacks the unidimensionality and simplicity required to occupy the privileged vantage point.*
>
> – María Lugones, "Purity, Impurity and Separation"

Phenomenology finds itself at a critical moment as scholars reinterpret its revered, canonical texts by Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty to show their political and ethical import. More specifically, phenomenologists wish to demonstrate phenomenology's relevance to critical analyses of various social identities. Given methodological commitments to the transcendental method, a predilection for apodictic evidence, the call for the bracketing of the natural attitude, and the quest for general ontological categories, contemporary scholars have not immediately recognized phenomenology as a likely source for theorizing contingent, historical structures. Perhaps the problem is that philosophy itself, as Helen Ngo (2019) notes, has "a well-known tendency toward abstraction and conceptualization that can make it difficult to *reckon* with the deeply historical nature and situated specificity of racism" (207; emphasis added).[1] Indeed, Ngo's description of philosophy's "reckoning" with race is very apt; philosophy needs to confront its practices of omission and elision or, in short, its racism. Certainly, a

[1] Linda Martín Alcoff (2021) notes that critical philosophy of race emerges in the late twentieth century and constitutes a philosophical study interested in "engendering a critical approach to race and hence the name of the sub-field." In the case of phenomenology, race and ethnicity have been discussed by Simone de Beauvoir (1999; 2011), Edith Stein (1989), and Jean-Paul Sartre (1995). Frantz Fanon's (1967) *Black Skin, White Masks*, originally written in 1952 is a key example of an early "critical" deep and sustained engagement with race in phenomenology. In the contemporary context, work by Alia Al-Saji (2014; 2018; 2019; 2020), Helen Fielding (2006; 2021), Lewis Gordon (1995; 2000; 2022), Lisa Guenther (2013; 2020; 2021; 2022), Emily Lee (2019), Linda Martín Alcoff (2020; 2021), Jacqueline Martinez (2000; 2014), Helen Ngo (2017; 2019; 2022), Gayle Salamon (2018b), Gail Weiss (2008; 2015; 2017), and my own work (2009; 2013; 2019a; 2019b) engage questions at the nexus of phenomenology, race, and racialization.

philosophy such as phenomenology that takes lived experience and life-worlds seriously needs to theorize race as a key feature of lived experience and meaning-making. Not doing so would point to a deep failure to engage with the famous "problem of the color line" that W. E. B. Du Bois (1989) so acutely understood as the main problem of the twentieth century, but which clearly continues to haunt us.

Fortunately, this critical moment in phenomenology carries with it a demand that we no longer consider race and racism as the proper subject matter of the sociologist or historian, or as simply belonging to the realm of the ontic. Yet recent calls for critical phenomenology, especially from scholars such as Gayle Salamon (2018b) and Lisa Guenther (2020; 2021), who explicitly discuss a *critical* turn in phenomenology, have led to a number of difficult questions about phenomenology's relevance in the quest for racial justice. Such issues range from debates about the very meaning of "critique" or "the critical," to the usefulness of phenomenological methodologies in analyzing the complex, multilayered, historical processes of racialization, to what I describe here as the race for critical phenomenology of race.

In this work I am inspired by Black literary critic Barbara Christian's (1988) influential essay "The Race for Theory" that carries out a critique of literary criticism's reliance on European theories that, according to Christian, turn hegemonic by way of appeals to an organizing general principle; a tendency toward the monolithic; overly theoretical, inaccessible writing; and the transference of norms of texts by white males to "Third World" women of color writers. In this influential text, Christian states, "[m]y major objection to the race for theory . . . really hinges on the question, 'For whom are we doing what we are doing when we do literary criticism?'" (77). While I am deeply supportive of critical phenomenological analyses of social identities, following Christian, I wish to ask the question: for whom are we doing what we are doing when we do critical phenomenology of race or, for that matter, critical phenomenology? Christian's discussion prompts me to ask about the current race to explain the origin of the critical in phenomenology and prompts me to reflect on what María Lugones (2003) calls the "logic of purity" in connection with critical phenomenology (126–34).[2]

In the following, I thus discuss what I regard as the current race for critical phenomenology in light of María Lugones's (2003) understanding of the "logic of purity" and her call for impure theorizing. My aim is twofold: (a) to suggest how Lugones's analyses of the logic of purity may guide us in developing phenomenological studies of complex social identities such as race, thus warning us about categorial logics that highlight fragmentation, sharp dichotomies, and univocity; and (b) to provide a brief example on how Lugones's call for a logic of impurity that acknowledges multiplicity problematizes some specific moves

[2] My comments on Christian's (1988) critique of the new literary criticism are not suggesting that critical phenomenology has the same problems that Christian saw in literary criticism. Yet her essay inspires me to reflect on key issues that need to be considered regarding highly theoretical work inspired by white male Europeans that attempts to enhance knowledge about people of color's lives, knowledge, and struggles. Her essay thus closely accompanies me in this reflection on critical phenomenology of race and plays a heuristic role in my discussion.

by recent critical phenomenological analyses of race. In the first section I explain some of the characteristics of the logic of purity and Lugones's critique of it. I also discuss some of the problems in the search for the origin of the critical in phenomenology. In the second section, I engage specifically with critical phenomenology of race. I introduce an analysis of the problematic Black/White binary that dominates US discussions of race and move on to critically assess a methodological move in the work of Guenther, namely the reduction of what in her view are "quasi-transcendental" structures such as white supremacy and racism.

In line with my 2017 analysis of "decolonial woes" and "practices of un-knowing,"[3] I wish to note how phenomenology's own *project of reckoning* with the complex notions of race, racialization, racism, and their epistemic and material consequences stands to benefit from an attitude of *critical criticality*. My discussion in this work points to the importance of this meta-critical attitude and practice of checking for the different ways in which a logic of purity persists, even if in traces, and even in the most critical and self-critical phenomenological methodologies. It also calls for an openness to *critical impurity*, to an acknowledgement that a critical phenomenological project needs to be open to ambiguity, multiplicity, and impurity, and attuned to how these elements affect methodologies, descriptions, and conclusions, especially as they pertain to the study of social identities that are to be understood as complex and enmeshed or intersectional.[4] Ultimately, this work reveals how Latina theoretical contributions such as Lugones's stand to help the development of critical phenomenologies in general and critical phenomenologies of race in particular.

I. ON THE LOGIC OF PURITY AND THE *CRITICAL* IN PHENOMENOLOGY

Given the phenomenological desire for apodictic truth, particularly in the Husserlian transcendental approach, phenomenology could be dismissed rather easily as incapable of forging projects attentive to specific social identities, especially race. However, as work by Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Frantz Fanon, and Lewis Gordon have shown, there are various ways in which phenomenology can be enlisted in projects related to race. Yet recent discussions, in particular the work of Salamon (2018a; 2018b) and Guenther (2013; 2020; 2021) take such projects to be proposing a "critical" phenomenology rather than adhering to "classical" phenomenology (namely the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl and existential phenomenologies that borrow from his approach). Salamon

[3] I define "practices of un-knowing" as practices that distort or negate the very projects that have been deployed to fight ignorance regarding marginalized identities. I point to ways in which decolonial projects, including those carried out by scholars of color, may inadvertently have colonial impulses or practices, hence my claim about "decolonial woes" or the affliction connected to these practices and their consequences (Ortega 2017, 510). The analysis I provide here is thus part of my broader interest in epistemic ignorance and epistemic justice.

[4] Lugones opts for "interwoven," "intermeshed," or "enmeshed" instead of "intersected." While the notion of intersectionality is key to Lugones's (2003) work in *Pilgrimages*, she critcizes it in her later decolonial work.

(2018b), whose essay "What's Critical About Critical Phenomenology" has sparked much discussion, appeals to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology for the purposes of a critical approach. She takes the critical phenomenological project to be one that reflects on the conditions of its own emergence and describes "what it sees in order to see it anew" (12), illuminates what is true, and attends to "the power that is always conditioning that truth" (15). Salamon agrees with the editors of the first issue of *Puncta*, who describe critical phenomenology as multiple and continuously questioning its own practices, methods, and assumptions (Ferrari et al. 2018).

While Guenther (2020) agrees with Salamon regarding the self-criticality of critical phenomenology, she highlights Husserlian phenomenology but does not see it as sufficiently critical.[5] In her view, critical phenomenology is different from classical phenomenology in that it fails "to give an equally rigorous account of how contingent historical and social structures also shape our experience," hence her call for an analysis of what she takes to be "quasi-transcendental structures" such as heteropatriarchy, anti-Black racism, and colonialism (12).[6] This distinction between "classical" and "critical phenomenology" has sparked a number of responses. Notably, it has mobilized Husserlians to defend the critical and self-critical elements within Husserl's phenomenology, claiming that

> From its Husserlian inception, through its manifold developments and modifications, phenomenological inquiry has, by its very design, always produced and developed intentional-historical methods of reflection well-equipped to tackle the genetic as well as generative dimensions of experience. (Heinämaa, Carr, and Aldea 2022, 5)[7]

At this point, the reader may be aware of a critical issue (if I may use different senses of "critical"), that commentators are working with different senses of "critique," "the critical," and "criticality." Stella Gaon (2021) makes this point and goes back to Immanuel Kant's critical project in order to show the aporias of a critical project, and the way that Derridean deconstruction points to the impossibility of critique establishing normative grounds to interfere in political struggles. Gaon (2021) thus calls for a phenomenology that

[5] In her latest thinking regarding critical phenomenology, Guenther (2022) takes the self-reflexivity of critical phenomenology to be so open as to allow for a recognition that phenomenology might not survive. She asks, "Is this not also the challenge facing critical phenomenology: to review our categories, rearrange our project, and interrogate our basic premises, without any guarantee that phenomenology as we know it can or should survive?" (41).

[6] In a more recent work Guenther (2021) admits that "classical phenomenology" is "an imperfect term." However, she still notes that there is "a significant difference between a practice of phenomenology that explicitly engages in social critique—let's call this critical phenomenology—and a practice of phenomenology that does not" (5). She further comments that she does not take classical phenomenology to be uncritical and suggests that the difference between the two rests on the types of critiques they enact.

[7] In the collection edited by Sara Heinämaa, David Carr, and Andreea Smaranda Aldea (2022), *Phenomenology as Critique: Why Method Matters*, commentators vigorously defend Husserl's approach and point to criticality as a key aspect of Husserlean phenomenology, thus strongly disputing the recent relegation of his work to "classical" (and thus uncritical) phenomenology. It is my hope that my analysis and suggestions in this work can inform analyses of the approaches found in this volume.

is critical "[n]ot by revealing what is true, but on the contrary, by challenging the givenness of experience relentlessly, without telos, without closure, and without respite" (2021, 43), what she calls a "quasi-critical" phenomenology (23).[8] Yet other commentators such as Johanna Oksala (2016) call for a "postphenomenology" that employs a method of partial bracketing in order to study questions of gender.[9] The current moment, then, is indeed critical as there is a race for critical phenomenology, a race prompting commentators to find the origin of the critical in phenomenology (and thus to announce to whom critical phenomenology belongs), and to determine whether so-called classical phenomenologies are to be merely revisited, substantially reframed and reconfigured, or left behind in projects of social justice connected to marginalized social identities. Gaon's (2021) appeal to a "quasi-critical" phenomenology as in need of constantly challenging the givenness of experience directs me to think about Lugones's critique of the logic of purity and the need for a philosophy that is attentive to impurity and multiplicity. That is, I am led to reflect on how such impurity and multiplicity may inform critical phenomenological theories committed not only to a description that does justice to the experience of marginalized identities, but also to a concomitant call for change. In the following, I thus provide some details about Lugones's understanding and critique of the logic of purity, and then comment on what I call the question of origins in critical phenomenology.

Inspired by Latina writers and theorists working on and embodying the notions of mestizaje and multiplicity, Lugones (2003) contests the "logic of purity" and calls for an impure logic and theorizing that she calls "curdling." With the general aim of distinguishing between the notions of multiplicity and fragmentation in the context of people of color's lives, Lugones calls for an understanding of this pernicious "logic of purity." In her view, this logic is fundamentally tied to the assumption that there is unity underlying multiplicity—an assumption that posits an understanding of the heterogeneous as capable of "split-separation," that is, as parts that are internally separable and divisible and thus in need of unification (126). The social world, then, is understood as both unified and fragmented. Key to this vision is a particular kind of subjectivity, modern subjectivity, that aims at the creation of an ahistorical vantage point whose main function is unity. This unity, however, is not a mere metaphysical desideratum but rather, a function of what, in Nietzschean fashion, Lugones (2003) calls the need to control and order people's lives and psyches (127).

According to Lugones, by way of what can be understood as a magical feat of abstraction (and self-deception), the preferred subject of the logic of purity—the rational unified subject

[8] Gaon's appeal to the openness of phenomenology is shared by both Salamon and Guenther. Yet these theorists have different understandings as to what constitutes "better" phenomenological descriptions. My own position is that phenomenology is indeed in need of better descriptions, understood as fuller, more anchored and inclusive descriptions, especially of marginalized experience. While such a quest is not its only aim, it is a key aim. Dan Zahavi (2018) notes that "phenomenology cannot be reduced to a concern with that topic" (3). In my view, it cannot be reduced to methodological concerns either.

[9] The notion of postphenomenology appears in the early 1990s in the work of Don Ihde (1993) whose work highlights human relations with the environment as mediated through technology. In order to explains such relations, Ihde proposes a postphenomenology that is nonfoundational, nontranscendental, and accepting of contingency, fallibility, and perspectivalism (7–8) that he contrasts with "classical" phenomenology. In an earlier work, Idhe (1986) discusses a "non-foundational Phenomenology."

and the "lover of purity"—creates himself and a simple, one-dimensional vantage point that only he can see. His rationality allows him to put to the side his own multiplicity, the markings of his own gender and race, and see and understand the world as if from "above" or from "a view from nowhere." As Lugones states:

> The modern subject must be dressed, costumed, masked so as to appear able to exercise this reduction of heterogeneity to homogeneity, of multiplicity to unity . . . As the lover of purity, the impartial reasoner is outside history, outside culture. (130)

Ultimately, Lugones claims that the logic of purity leads the lover of purity to maintain a "paradoxical incoherence," since he must ignore his own multiplicity while, at the same time, be dependent on it. As such, Lugones claims that he is at the mercy of his own control and "shuns impurity, ambiguity, and multiplicity as they threaten his own fiction" (132).

Given the damaging consequences of a logic of purity with its predilection for a unified subject who is allegedly capable of understanding the world from "above"—the covering up of what Frantz Fanon (1967) calls the historico-racial schema being just one such consequence—Lugones introduces a logic of impurity, of "curdling," whose main characteristic is the unfolding of the complexity and multiplicity of the subject and social worlds. In so doing, Lugones opens the possibility for a full engagement with what the lover of purity understands as tainted: the subject's own embodiment, social locations, and identities. Via an everyday example, the making of mayonnaise, Lugones explains the instability of the mixture and the way it may curdle if too much oil is introduced, the result being yolky oil and oily yolk. Her main point is is that there is not split separation but an "impure" end-result that she reads as a positive element because this condition of impurity resists the attempt to breaking down parts into pure elements that can then be easily categorized (read controlled). The subject of this logic of impurity is what Lugones calls a curdled, multiple, and active subject or a "multiplicitous self" that has an epistemic advantage or epistemic privilege insofar as it has multiple viewpoints (Ortega 2016).[10] It is also a subject whose embodied lived existence and "tainted" gendered and racial markers are of the utmost importance, as they are key not only epistemically but also existentially.

In sum, the logic of purity is pernicious, according to Lugones (2003), because (a) it is committed to an underlying unity that covers up the multiplicity and heterogeneity of human experience; (b) it theorizes this unity in order to control a heterogeneity that is understood as fragmented; (c) it takes this unity as the ground for the creation of an ahistorical vantage point or a "view from nowhere," thus ignoring human situationality; (d) it postulates a modern subject (the lover of purity) understood as primarily rational in need to abstract himself from the world and to remove himself from his very embodiment; (e) it understands the modern subject as transparent to itself; and (f) it posits a modern

[10] There are various understandings of selfhood and subjectivity in Lugones's texts. More specifically, while in some discussions she seems to be referring to multiplicitous subjects, in others she explicitly discusses the self as multiple or being different selves in different worlds. See chapter three of Ortega (2016). Ultimately, Lugones (2003) opts for the notion of active subjectivity understood as "I —> we" that has an attenuated sense of agency (6).

subject that, in his love for purity, shuns impurity, ambiguity, and multiplicity. In my view, all these features of the logic of purity do not neatly fit all characterizations of the subject of modernity. They also do not serve as full critical points against phenomenology either, as various phenomenologists, notably Heidegger (2010) and Merleau-Ponty (2012), aim precisely to offer a critique of modern subjectivity, especially in its Cartesian version. Nevertheless, Lugones's (2003) concern about this logic of purity pertains to the fact that (a)–(f) enact a categorial logics—an understanding of selves and groups as fragmented, or as she would say, "split separated," and thus in need of control. Such split-separation is also understood as in need of unification, thus undermining impurity, ambiguity, and multiplicity. Ultimately, Lugones's key concern is the possibility of complex coalitions across differences that can enact resistant responses against dominant structures. Her critique of the logic of purity, however, provides important insights for the development of critical phenomenologies calling for justice for marginalized social identities.

How then is a logic of purity relevant to the understanding of the notion of criticality itself, and more specifically to critical phenomenology? In other words, how does a Lugonesian critique of the logic of purity help a critical phenomenological approach to various social identities? I proceed with a discussion of what I am calling the question of origins, and subsequently point to an attitude and practice of *critical criticality* that stands to alert the critical phenomenologist to the ways in which the logic of purity trickles in even the most critical and self-critical projects.

The Question Of Origins

First, I would like to consider the issue regarding the origin of "the critical" in phenomenology, a question that has become relevant as commentators try to forge the field of "critical phenomenology." Quoting Donn Welton, Salamon (2018) notes that "a more dialectical and critical phenomenology" as opposed to "classical phenomenology" was practiced at the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy in the 1980s, and points to *Critical and Dialectical Phenomenology* edited by Welton and Hugh Silverman (1987) as an early text specifically using the label "critical phenomenology" (Salamon 2018, 8–9). For their part, other scholars are not looking at specific texts labeled "critical phenomenology" but at the critical aspect of phenomenology itself, even in transcendental phenomenology (Guenther 2016; 2020, 202; Heinämaa, Carr, and Aldea 2022), while others are looking at Wilhelm Dilthey for insights about historicity (Myers 2021), and, as we have noted, other commentators are examining Kant's critical project (Gaon 2021). There is also discussion regarding sources of the critical in phenomenology outside of philosophy. As Jarrett Zigon and Jason Throop (2021) state: "To the best of our knowledge, however, it was anthropologists who first articulated the necessity of, and then actually did, a critical phenomenology." They point to the work of Byron Good (1994) as "developing an anthropologically-based critical phenomenology in the late-1980s and early 1990s" (Zigon and Throop 2021, 10).

Finding the origin of the critical in phenomenology becomes as difficult as the question of the meaning of "the 'critical'" itself. After all, depending on how we understand this

term, we might find its roots back in Kant (1929; 1993), Husserl, critical theory, or in Beauvoir or Fanon, who provide early phenomenological analyses of social identities. My point is not that there should not be an interest in the question of origins of the critical in phenomenology, or of any particular philosophical project—there is room for both intellectual history and genealogical analysis—but my concern is with the impetus to purity that lies behind an attempt to catalogue the precise beginning of the critical in phenomenology and what such an impetus might mean or lead to methodologically. In other words, what does it mean to lay claim to an intellectual enterprise, as if we were able to own split-separated ideas and methods, and what practices could follow from such a move?

As we have seen, according to Lugones (2003), a logic of purity categorizes the social—and I would add philosophical fields and academic disciplines—into discrete compartments that can be split-separated. The implication here is that different aspects of phenomenology, or for that matter, other philosophical fields and disciplines, can in principle be understood as self-contained. As such, we could engage in an investigation of the precise moment in the field, the point of origin, the precious *arche* as it were, that launches the critical project. Yet doing so would fail to understand that criticality itself, in reflecting on its own operations, would profit from reflecting on the linkages and interconnections not only within the particular domain being studied but also with what is deemed as "outside" of it. Chela Sandoval (1991), whose Latina feminism is approached in a critical and decolonial manner, points to the detrimental results of what she calls the "racialization of theoretical domains," and the "apartheid of academic knowledge," or the neat compartmentalization of academic disciplines (68–69). She notes the ways that white and European progressive thinkers such as Roland Barthes missed the contributions of scholars of color whose aim was also to critique capitalist norms and to develop a consciousness that could deal with the violence derived from those norms (68–78). This is a particularly important point by Sandoval as it suggests that the fragmentation of disciplines (and subdisciplines) leads not only to a lack of intellectual cooperation but also a failure on the part of dominant white scholars—even those engaged in critique and trying to shift oppressive structures—to see and understand how their critical efforts may be connected to and enhanced by critical efforts of scholars of color in other domains or disciplines.

Were critical phenomenology to engage in a race to find its origin while not recognizing how a logic of purity may still be informing its work, it would miss the theoretical, methodological, and literary opportunities that arise from a more expansive understanding of the ways in which critique is connected to other philosophical aims and movements, as well as the ways that other domains deemed outside the field can come to its aid—for example, the way that Latina feminisms can inform not only a critical phenomenology in general but one related specifically to race. Latina feminist theory has not always been acknowledged in early discussions of the critical turn (or return) in phenomenology. Moreover, Latina feminist theory *explicitly* engaging phenomenology, such as Jacqueline Martinez's (2000) does not appear in discussions on critical phenomenology in general and phenomenology of race in particular. Latina feminist theory that does not explicitly engage with phenomenology is even less likely to be considered by phenomenologists,

especially those who have been described as "classical" in their orientation. The reasons for this exclusion are overdetermined; yet I can comment on some of the reasons why these theories are left out of discussions, especially those engaging phenomenology and race. They have to do to with the compartmentalization (read fragmentation) of theoretical domains and disciplines, and with the lack of insight that Latina feminists are theorizing in different ways than it is traditionally understood—Christian (1988) makes precisely this point regarding Black women writers (68).[11] Moreover, a reason why Latina feminist theory is not always included in phenomenological analyses of race has to do with the fact that Latinx identity is highly heterogeneous, difficult to classify, and is understood as ethnicity rather than race, while in other cases, it is understood as an ethno-race (Alcoff 2000). As I will discuss below, questions of race are generally subsumed under a Black/White binary that dominates US discourses on issues of race and racism, thus invisibilizing identities and work on identities that do not fit neatly in this binary.

The race to find the origin of the critical in phenomenology alerts us to assumptions connected to the logic of purity, not just in what may be an obvious problematic claim of ownership of the critical, but also in the assumption of distinct or split-separated intellectual domains that further preclude cooperation within and across disciplines, and in the recognition of the work of writers and thinkers that do not follow normative conventions of theorizing. It is thus necessary to cultivate an attitude of *critical criticality*, a constant awareness of the different ways in which critical projects themselves, even those that are understood to be robustly self-critical, may contain traces of the logic of purity so as be ready to modify and revise our theories. Moreover, it is important to think *of origins and convergences*, of an openness to multiple origins and theorizations of the critical, even within critical phenomenology, and to the multiple lines of connection that critical phenomenological projects have with other domains of knowledge and experience.[12] This

[11] Christian (1988) states,

> For people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, because dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries, our very humanity? (68)

Similarly to the writers that Christian discusses, Gloria Anzaldúa (2015) writes what she calls *autohistorias-teorías* (autostories-theories), personal narratives that include theoretical points (6).

[12] Gaon's (2021) critical analysis of "criticality" is an interesting example that looks at the notion from a political philosophical perspective attuned to critical theory as well as the Kantian critical project, thus showing important interconnections and understandings of the critical. It is necessary to be aware that these interconnections may not follow a linear developement. Guenther (2021) is also interested in both theoretical as well as political connections between critical phenomenology and other disciplines. Importantly, she recognizes that there are multiple senses of critique in both what she calls classical phenomenology and her work. Most recently, she is also willing to "abolish" phenomenology, if necessary, in order to "abolish the world as we know it" (2022). My view is that even within this vision of critical phenomenology that is attuned to openness and multiplicity an attitude of *critical criticality* is needed. This will become clearer in the next section .

practice is part of what in the next section I introduce as a mode of *critical impurity*. Before discussing this mode, I turn to a more specific analysis of critical phenomenology of race that begins with comments on the Black/White binary, followed by some comments on what for Husserl became a necessary methodological practice for transcendental phenomenology, the transcendental reductions (the *epoché* and the transcendental/eidetic reduction). I comment primarily on the *epoché* in light of some questions related to race and privilege.

II. PHENOMENOLOGY, RACE, AND THE CRITICAL

Moving to an analysis more specific to critical phenomenology of race and racialization, I wish to give a warning about a possible intrusion of the logic of purity. Following Lugones's (2003) explanation of this logic, it can be seen that the "lover of purity," as Lugones calls the subject ruled by the logic of purity, is keen to parcel out the world and its beings into ready-made compartments of opposites and clear dichotomies, thus not allowing multiplicity, enmeshedness, and in-betweeness to come to the fore. A world reigned by dichotomies is preferable to the lover of purity, because it is more epistemically accessible (things and beings can be better understood in terms of the dichotomy), and it is a world where control is easily wielded (there are clear definitions of who belongs in the "good" or "bad" side). Here it is helpful to recall Gloria Anzaldúa's important discussion of the consciousness of the new *mestiza* that inspired Lugones's overall vision of multiplicity and the social. Anzaldúa (1987) insists that the work of *mestiza* consciousness is to transcend dualities and understand the importance of ambiguity and contradiction. As she puts it, "[a] massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle" (80).[13] As Ronald Sundstrom (2008) writes in his important commentary on what he calls the "browning" of the US, the Black-White binary is thought as a "sort of master key to all things racial" and that "[i]n naïve hands, the binary is used to make the absurd claim that it *describes* the totality of racial diversity, or at least the diversity that matters" (Sundstrom 2008, 69).[14] If it is to provide careful analysis of race and racialization, critical phenomenology needs to problematize an understanding of race dominated by a Black-White binary. This is yet another characteristic of the mode of *critical impurity*, the avoidance of simple dichotomies that cover up the complexity of experience

[13] When describing her account of a new *mestiza* consciousness, Anzaldúa (1987) mentions how its energy "comes from a continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm" (80).

[14] Sundstrom (2008) provides a nuanced, complex analysis of how the Black-White binary can be understood as stemming from important circumstances and appeals to justice in the context of the US, but also as deeply detrimental in analyses of race. He provides six interpretations of the workings of this binary, showing how there needs to be an acknowledgement of how the binary may serve as a "conceptual baseline of race in the United States," so that we can also understand why discourses on race in this country center Blackness (84). He notes, "[t]he future of race in the United States, or elsewhere, will not be determined solely through the American instinct to return to black-white politics—as if the question of the conservation or elimination of race and racial justice is in the hands of white and blacks who need to hash out their issues for the sake of all of us" (65).

or phenomena. In this context, the contributions of Latina feminist phenomenologies are crucial as they problematize not only binary thinking itself, but provide analyses in which race is not understood through a reductive Black-White binary. They bring in the experience of brownness, indigeneity, mixed race, and of those who quickly fall out of conversations of race due to the way that the Black-White binary is operationalized.[15]

In addition to not adhering to dichotomies that might occlude the complexity of racialization, another aspect of critical impurity is an awareness that traces of the logic of purity need to be understood as part of critical projects despite the latter's attempts at radicalizing philosophy or countering established philosophical notions or methods. This is not surprising, especially when discussing a tradition of canonical figures such as Plato, whose philosophical vision prioritized rationality over embodiment. It is also certainly the case in phenomenology in which we find Cartesian impulses in thinkers such as Husserl and Sartre.[16] It is important to be aware that despite phenomenology's fundamental critique of the Cartesian unified subject, especially in Heideggerian and Merleau-Pontian existential phenomenologies, traces of the logic of purity remain.[17] The key issue is the direction to which such traces propel the overall critical project. That is, traces of the logic of purity may be part of even the most critical projects; yet the crucial issue is to spot them and to recognize their scope, influence, and ramifications. Are they mere residues not obfuscating degrees of criticality in the project? Do they pose complications or obstacles for a critical phenomenology of race?

Here I thus want to point to an example that is particularly interesting and complex as it poses serious questions regarding the viability of critical phenomenologies that rely in one of two key Husserlian methodological moves from his "pure phenomenology": the phenomenological and eidetic reductions, the first of which is the *epoché* (a suspension/bracketing/putting out of action of the natural attitude), and the second of which is a transcendental reduction that calls for a reflection that yields essential structures of consciousness. While this methodological move in Husserl is notoriously complicated and has an extensive history and revisions in his writings, here I wish to make an isolated point

[15] Here I want to make sure that it is clear that I am not calling for a reification of *mestizaje*, substituting *mestizaje* for a Black-White binary, or trying to minimize or undermine projects seeking justice for Black lives. As I note in my discussion of Anzaldúa, her understanding of *mestizaje* leads to serious criticisms (Ortega 2016, 29). More recently, Latinx Studies is in a moment of self-reflection as scholars such as Claudia Milian (2013; 2020), Lorgia García-Peña (2016) and many others bring to the fore questions about the meaning of "Latinidad" and the voices of Afro-Latinxs in the context of the meaning of "Latinidad."

[16] It is interesting to note the crucial yet paradoxical philosophical moment of Cartesian philosophy. Despite Descartes's utterly radical project of engaging in methodological doubt that leads him to hyperbolic doubt regarding all of his beliefs, including those beliefs deemed indubitable such as those of mathematics, he theorizes the ultimate lover of purity, the Cartesian epistemic subject, whose own quest for certainty leads to dichotomies (subject-object; inner-outer) that set the stage for philosophy's future—solving the deep problems introduced by the Cartesian vision, the problem of the existence of the external world and the problem of the existence of others.

[17] Such traces and even more explicit aspects of the logic of purity can be found in Husserlian transcendental phenomenology, even despite claims to its commitment to criticality and positive characterizations of its ability to engage in analyses of the historically contingent.

about its applicability to philosophical engagements with race and racialization. The issue at hand is the question of whether critical phenomenology should appeal to the reduction. This is a question that is of particular concern to those committed to the Husserlian project in its fully transcendental methodology as well as to those who call for a revision of this project in order to offer a phenomenology that can fruitfully engage questions of race and racialization so as to enact change.

The "Who" Of The Reduction

The role of the transcendental reduction in Husserl's (1999) methodology is crucial to a transcendental project, as it is the first step toward bringing to light the transcendental structures that Husserl is intent on reflecting upon to prevent phenomenology from the mistakes and assumptions of the empirical sciences. In this transcendental approach, the *epoché* is necessary in order to suspend/bracket the natural attitude that takes the world for granted or the view that there is a world out there. A naïve realism about the world and all the assumptions supporting such realism are not to taint an investigation searching for the essences of consciousness, for that which makes possible experience in the first place. Unlike the Cartesian method of doubt, this method does not call for a radical doubt about the existence of the world, and thus is not to be faulted on this account. Instead, I wish to think through a key issue that arises when this particular transcendental method of reduction is still appealed to, albeit in a revised form, in more explicit critical phenomenological analyses of race and racializing with the aim of undermining oppressive structures, for example, in Guenther's critical phenomenology.

I wish to ask the question: who is supposed to be doing this reduction in the first place? Who is being asked to suspend or ignore all that pertains to everyday existence? Is this reduction possible when thought from the point of view of racialized, marginalized, multiplicitous selves? In other words, what does it mean to bracket or suspend the world and all the assumptions that inform one's everyday experience when that world is constantly, endlessly impinging not just in the ways one (read a marginalized, racialized self) understands the world but in one's very flesh? Here I am reminded of Anzaldúa's (1987) key insight about embodiment as lived in a state of liminality and in-betweenness. She writes: "*Escribo con la tinta de mi sangre*" (Anzaldúa; 1987, 71; italics in original).[18] That is, her intellectual and artistic productions, her *autohistorias* (fictionalized stories of her life) and her *autohistoria-teorías* (narratives that include theoretical reflections informed by her life) are fundamentally informed by the ways she (her "body-mind-soul") is impacted by the different normative structures of power regulating social identities, be it race, class, gender, or ability. What would it mean to suspend or bracket the wounds of colonization, racism, sexism that she carries in her body and that are an integral part of her self-understanding and of her creative movement to forge a new resistant consciousness? As Alia Al-Saji (2020) puts it when discussing the possibility of suspension of the natural attitude in the context of Fanon, another thinker of color who carries the wounds of colonization on his body, as if they were part of his very bones and sinews:

[18] "I write with the ink that is my blood" (my translation).

> Neither can colonization be bracketed to reveal a core of sense, as if racism were an afterthought; nor can it be put out of play to conceive a universalizable subject free of historical violence. Critical phenomenology cannot stay at the level of constitution of sense, for colonization already structures the phenomenological field of sense and draws the borders that differentiate sense from non-sense. (211)

Anzaldúa and Al-Saji, then, can be taken as alerting us to what might not just be traces of the logic of purity but to fuller instances of it in an investigation proposing the possibility of a suspension of features of embodied experience that are in fact deeply connected to the possibility of self-understanding and self-transformation (Anzaldúa) and to sense-making itself (Al-Saji). In this vein, it will be key to examine whether transcendental phenomenology (and existential phenomenology) can be modified to provide nuanced, complex analyses of race, racialization, and racializing perception.

With attention to *critical criticality*, I now turn to a project to which I am very sympathetic but about which I am also concerned given its continued appeal to a reduction: Guenther's (2020) proposed critical phenomenology, which she describes as "a way of doing philosophy and a way of approaching political activism" (15). Guenther's critical phenomenological approach is indeed attuned to what I have above described as *critical impurity*. Importantly, she expands her understanding of the critical so as to engage different senses of critique (Guenther 2021), thus moving away from rigid understandings of the critical. Her approach is also open to interdisciplinarity, and to the different ways in which critical phenomenology may be engaged in conjunction with, not only other theorists, but also political activists, and what she calls "creative reparative" action that may "(re)open horizons of indeterminacy, possibility, and becoming otherwise" (2021, 9). For example, she takes Audre Lorde's understanding of poetry as "a revelatory distillation of experience" to be a phenomenology in so far as it calls for critical scrutiny that matters to those engaged in it, thus opening the possibility for poetry as both a descriptive and transformative practice (Lorde, quoted in Guenther 2020, 14).

In addition, Guenther (2020) provides a significant revision to Husserl's transcendental reduction (15). She proposes a phenomenology capable of rigorously analyzing contingent historical structures such as heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and heteronormativity that she deems "quasi-transcendental" insofar as they normalize and naturalize experience.[19] Although not *a priori*, these structures are supposed to be constitutive to meaning-making and norm-making in life-worlds and are thus, according to Guenther, "what we must bracket to get into the phenomenological attitude" (12). Presumably, a rigorous quasi-transcendental critical phenomenological analysis of these structures moves us closer to understanding how they structure the world and experience, hence opening possibilities for change. By bracketing specific contingent, historical structures that uphold racism, we

[19] The status of a "quasi-transcendental" structure is difficult, as it is not clear that there is room for such an entity in the first place. I take it that what Guenther means is that these structures can be understood as *if* they were transcendental in organizing our experience.

will be in a position to provide "an equally rigorous account of how contingent historical and social structures also shape our experience, not just empirically or in a piecemeal fashion, but in what we might call a quasi-transcendental way" (2020, 12).

Let us go back to my question of the "who" of the reduction. Who can carry out a reduction, this time, of quasi-transcendental structures such as colonialism? As we have seen, to ask a marginalized, oppressed person of color to carry out such a suspension amounts to asking her to suspend her own body, which carries the wounds of coloniality as well her history. Is it more possible for a member of the dominant group (i.e., a white person or a member of a dominant group) to perform such a suspension? A possible answer is that a white person could be better able to carry out the reduction as an exercise in abstraction. After all, he might not carry the wounds of colonization (at least in the same way that a person of color does). There is also a second alternative: in the context where whites are dominant, a white person could not possibly bracket coloniality and its concomitant structure of white supremacy, given that he is so thoroughly immersed in it and defined by it that performing the suspension would amount to becoming a fiction of himself, a subject that is not marked by privileged race.[20] Here, I don't mean to suggest that whites should not unlearn their white supremacist ways or that they are determined to be racist due to reigning structures organizing present experience. Their actions in a world that privileges their existence depend on a complex web of operations linking power, practices of ignorance, deep forgetting, intentional avoidance, unconsciousness, belief in superiority, and many other practices that uphold white dominance. The point is to consider whether a reduction of quasi-transcendental structures is a tenable approach that opens fruitful possibilities for racial justice. While this is an issue in need of further analysis, the proposed bracketing of quasi-transcendental structures raises serious issues in connection to the logic of purity. If a white dominant subject is better able to perform the reduction of white supremacy, it could be precisely because he does not carry the wounds prompted by that structure and could then perform an abstract exercise. Conversely, if he cannot perform that reduction and is being asked to do so, he is being put in the position of abstracting his very embodiment that reaps the privilege of whiteness. Both operations would require methodological commitments tied to the logic of purity. They would also make the project dependent on a methodological move difficult to put in practice.

One could respond that a privileged subject is always involved in a process of bracketing—not in a phenomenological reduction, but as an everyday project of epistemic ignorance, a forgetting that he is also racialized, that the world has been set up for his ease, that he can deem himself neutral in the face of his own understanding of the race "problem" (although of course, there is no phenomenological reduction here). As noted above, the racialized subject in the midst of marginalization and worlds that are not welcoming does not get a theoretician's methodological privilege of suspending the very structures that have, through time, become embedded in her very flesh and that fragment her into scattered body parts

[20] See Ngo (2021) for an interesting account of the "banality " of white supremacy explained through the workings of "pre-thought" bodily habituation (8).

to be controlled, used, and abused.[21] It it would be precisely this forgetting and ignorance of white supremacy that needs to be put out play. Yet this would entail a suspension of the very ignorance that gives meaning to his existence and that makes his life one of privilege, control, and power.[22]

Importantly, Guenther (2021) is aware of the difficulties raised above. She explicitly states that white supremacy cannot be simply bracketed or put out of play in order to carry out a reflection on how it shapes experience, and she adds that "the challenge of bracketing white supremacy, even just methodologically in order to 'think what we are doing' (Arendt 1958, 5), will be different depending on how one is situated in relation to this structure" (7). In her view, this recognition is one of the major substantive differences between her project and that of "classical" phenomenology. Unfortunately, she does not elaborate on the ways in which the bracketing is different for selves that are differently situated in the structure of white supremacy. As I note above, the bracketing performed by either a white dominant self or a marginalized, person of color seems problematic.

Importantly, there are some clues regarding the reduction in light of questions of racialization in Guenther's (2020) explanation of critical phenomenology. There, she briefly comments on how Lorde's (1987) poetry may be helpful in connection to questions related to racialization. She quotes Lorde's comment that "[t]he quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives" (quoted in Guenther 2020,14). She then engages in an insightful analysis of what Lorde's words can teach the phenomenologist:

> In phenomenological terms, we could think of this "quality of light" as the affective tonality or mood that both motivates and contours one's meaningful experience as an embodied Being-in-the-world. This affective tonality cannot be understood apart from one's social location in a specific historical lifeworld, and yet social location is not reducible to a causal or determinative force. For example, an affective investment in whiteness as property, whether conscious or unconscious, will bring a different quality of light to one's experience and generate a different understanding of the world, than a Black, Indigenous, or Latinx investment in abolishing white supremacy. But the structure of whiteness as property is not an inexorable destiny condemning white people to racism and absolving us of the responsibility to become otherwise. Rather, a critical phenomenology of whiteness inspired by Lorde's account of poetry would have to scrutinize the quality of light that illuminates the world from a white perspective

[21] Think here of Anzaldúa's (2015) preoccupation with Coyolxauhqui, the Aztec goddess of the moon whose body has been torn to pieces, and Anzaldúa's desire to put Coyolxauhqui together (95–116). For her part, one of Lugones's (2003) principal aims is to reject fragmentation given its connection to the logic of purity.

[22] This is not to say that all whites have power in all respects, but even when economic power is not present, there may be racial privilege.

> and to name the feelings that motivate this perspective, with the hope of bringing about a change. (Guenther 2020, 14–15)

Guenther is reminding us that while whites have a different affective investment in whiteness than BIPOC people do, they are nevertheless not condemned to being trapped in a pernicious affective investment to whiteness. I read her as adding an affective dimension to critical phenomenology that must be considered if an investment in whiteness is to be modified or dislodged. Such an addition strikes me as a crucial for her project, as it should be very clear to us by now that the racism associated with white supremacy cannot be treated as solely a theoretical, discursive, or legal matter. This is the reason why Guenther is also a proponent of supplementing critical phenomenology with praxical, activist political projects. I also see an opening here toward the aesthetic, in the possibility of alternative modes of aesthetic production being capable of changing the affective tonality that Guenther discusses. The question that arises, then, is regarding the relation between this appeal to affective tonality and the reduction of quasi-transcendental structures. If the quality of light is not to be read as a metaphor for what a quasi-transcendental reflection reveals, how is it to be read, or, rather, felt? How does it connect to the findings of the reduction?

In her most recent discussion of critical phenomenology turning into abolitionist phenomenology with the aid of the work of Ferreira da Silva (2014), Guenther (2022) re-imagines and re-thinks the *epoché*, suggesting a movement from a Husserlian project to Fanon's (1967) account of radical disruption of his body schema and a rethinking of the *epoché* as a "tracking and hacking" of the material-historical and quasi-transcendental structures that structure the world (Guenther 2022, 39). She also comes back to the theme of the aesthetic, in this case the "poethic," and moves toward a "feel for poethical (im) possibilities beyond critique" (32). Guenther goes as far as saying that phenomenology itself may be abolished or perhaps phenomenology will become abolitionist phenomenology. A sustained analysis of Guenther's latest additions and revisions, especially concerning the relationship between poetry, poethics and critical phenomenology, is beyond the scope of this discussion. Yet I welcome this move toward the aesthetic. With Anzaldúa, I recognize the potential for what I call aesthesic production to open possibilities for transformation and for perceiving the world otherwise.[23] But how does critical phenomenology transform into an "abolitionist praxis of Black feminist poethics"? The question of the who returns here. Who is to perform this praxis? What affective tonality does it depend on? And

[23] Alia Al-Saji has recently theorized about the need for strategies that foster affective responses to negative racialized perception (2014) as well as the importance of aesthetic works to redirect affective and embodied harms of colonization (2019). In my work, I have also discussed the importance of the aesthetic in dealing with questions of racialization (2019a; 2019b; 2013; 2009). In my current research, I am particularly interested in the nexus between critical phenomenology and artistic practices understood in terms of the ways in which they reshape, redirect, or transform perception and thus our affective modalities. I thus interpret aesthetics as *aesthesis* in terms of its potential to redirect normative modalities of sensation and affect. See Mignolo and Vazquez (2019) for a discussion of a turn from "AestheTics" to "AestheSics" as a decolonial challenge to modern conceptions of the aesthetic.

bringing back the spirit of Christian's discussion on the race for theory, I ask again: for whom are we doing what we are doing when we do critical phenomenology of race?

CONCLUSION

Lugones's (2003) analysis of the logic purity warns us about the impulses, characteristics, and traces of this logic—traces that can be found in the quest to answer the question of origin of critical phenomenology, as well as in more specific critical phenomenological methodologies such as the reduction of quasi-transcendental structures. Traces of this logic appear in split-separation or compartmentalization of disciplines, adherence to dichotomies to cover up the complexity and multiplicity of experience, and a resurgent methodological abstraction from the very conditions that wound racialized beings and uphold dominant beings' existence. In the face of this intransigency of the logic of purity, even within critical phenomenological projects, I call for the nurturing of an attitude and practice of *critical criticality* that takes seriously the possibility that even already critical and self-critical projects may contain traces of purity that need to be discovered and assessed in light of methodological commitments, explanatory aims, and praxical, political aims. This *critical criticality* may be understood as one of the various aspects of a mode of *critical impurity* that also calls for an openness to multiple origins; inter and intra-disciplinary cooperation; alertness to convergences of ideas and methods; avoidance of simple dichotomies that cover up the complexity of experience; understanding the constructive aspects of ambiguity, multiplicity and contradiction; and self-critical analyses that look for traces of the logic of impurity and how they problematize methods and aims. Informed by scholars of color, in this case Latina feminist theorists, whose understanding of multiplicity and impurity is both existentially and theoretically crucial for analyses of race, the mode of critical impurity stands to enrich a phenomenology that is critical, not only in the sense that it critically engages social identities but in the sense that it is much needed at the present time in which racism and white supremacy are even more explicit.

A critical impure phenomenological approach might suggest a movement to postphenomenology. It all depends on what is meant by the "post" in postphenomenology, as there are still various resources that may be found within phenomenology (classical or critical) that can be thought and praxically engaged with theoretically, politically, and imaginatively rich resources in other disciplines and practices, as Guenther's critical phenomenology endorses. It also depends on our ability to think together with the contributions of scholars of color who can teach us much about race and racialization, and how to handle the impure, the contingent, the multiplicitous—what the lover of purity fears. I look to Lugones, other Latina feminist theorists, and Latina feminist phenomenologists in their understanding that our theories arise from the flesh, from the wounds of liminality and in-betweenness (Anzaldúa 1987), from the tensions of the fractured locus (Lugones 2010)—in their recognition of the seductiveness of the logic of purity and its deep traps, in their concerted effort to warn us not to fall in love with the lover of purity, and in their call for us to recognize how the "art of curdling" encompasses practices that people of color

engage in order not only to survive but also to transform themselves and to resist racial and other injustices. As Lugones (2003) reminds us, "It is the impulse to reject dichotomies and live and embody that rejection that gives us some hope of standing together as people who recognize each other in our complexity" (143). Let us then practice critical phenomenology impurely.

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IDLE TALK AND ANTI-RACISM: ON CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY, LANGUAGE, AND RACIAL JUSTICE

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In this paper, I want to address the question of critical phenomenology's contributions to projects of racial justice and the production of radical imaginaries from a somewhat oblique angle.[1] While critical phenomenologists have offered many accounts of what it is like to live in a world shaped by *racism*—particularly in terms of embodiment—they have not drawn attention to questions about what it is like to live in a world increasingly shaped by *anti*-racist sentiment and action, the kind of world in which the question of critical phenomenology's contribution to projects of racial justice can itself arise. While race and racism have never stopped being urgent issues for many communities of color, talk about race, racism, and racial justice have once again become a central part of mainstream social and political discourse in America. Through public attention to continuing state violence against Black people, the exponential rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders during the COVID-19 pandemic, and both the growing awareness of the inextricability of American institutions from white supremacy and the ensuing backlash, what has been dubbed America's "racial reckoning" has made overt talk about racism and racial justice ubiquitous.[2] "Racial justice" is a phrase on our screens, on our streets, and on our own lips more and more often.

I argue that one avenue to approach the silence in critical phenomenology around the experiences and habits of anti-racism as they circulate in our discourse is to draw attention to how critical phenomenology, as it turns *to* questions of race, tends to turn *away* from explorations of language. Echoing Maurice Merleau-Ponty's claim that French thinkers had "interrogated phenomenology," Paul Ricoeur (1967), in his article "New

[1] My thanks to Emmanuel Carillo for putting together our "Philosophies of Race and Language" independent study at UTSA in the fall of 2020. The seeds for this paper grew out of our reading and thinking together in that space.

[2] See for example Sreenivasan 2021, Francilius 2021, and Balto 2021.

Developments in Phenomenology in France: The Phenomenology of Language," argued that a turn toward language was a central element of this interrogation (Ricoeur 1967, 10). Ricoeur offered a reconstruction of how, through taking up the work of the late Husserl and elaborating on phenomenology's turn to the problem of meaning as it grew out of a methodological reliance on "the reduction whereby every question concerning being becomes a question concerning the *sense* of being," language became an inescapable concern for French phenomenologists (10). Here, I want to interrogate how it is that critical phenomenologists approaching racial issues have nonetheless managed to escape explicitly thematizing language. I argue that this occlusion of language by critical phenomenology consequently leaves behind resources through which to ask ourselves what is happening as we articulate increasingly taken-for-granted ways of speaking and living out an opposition to racism.

Rather than offering an evaluation of anti-racist strategies as Linda Martín Alcoff (1998) does in her piece "What Should White People Do?" and Shannon Sullivan (2016) does in her *Good White People: The Problem with White Middle-Class Anti-Racism*, I am interested in what phenomenological work on language can offer in helping to describe *how* anti-racist speech circulates and becomes conventional, how we encounter it, and how it can suffuse and orient our experience.[3] My aim here is not to make a moral judgment about the diffusion of anti-racist speech or to participate in accusations of superficial "wokeness." There are clear reasons why widespread conversation about race and racism is a good thing. I argue instead that critical phenomenology is well positioned to bring to light how we talk about anti-racism and racial justice, how we encounter talk about anti-racism and racial justice, and what such talk enables or constrains. At the same time, I argue that there is something particularly important for the field of critical phenomenology in this project. Exploring anti-racist language use requires us to defamiliarize our own habits of critical thought and engagement and reexamine our expectations about what it looks like to take seriously race, racism, and racial justice in philosophical and specifically phenomenological work.

To talk about how language operates and shapes experience in taken for granted understandings and expressions of anti-racism involves scrutinizing how critical phenomenology describes itself as "an ameliorative phenomenology that seeks not only to describe but also to repair the world, encouraging generosity, respect, and compassion for the diversity of our lived experiences" (Weiss, Salamon, and Murphy 2020, xiv). It is not only our overtly harmful or racist sentiments and structures that can become hidden in their habitual operations in our lives, covering over and perhaps misleading us about their mechanisms and force. Our ameliorative, anti-racist sentiments can themselves become reflexes, habits of speech, orientation, and gesture that circulate without our noticing in ways and that can cause us to under-examine what we are speaking about or what we

[3] Though both these thinkers at times draw on Merleau-Ponty, Fanon, and other phenomenological resources in their descriptions of racist and racialized embodiment in other parts of their work, references to phenomenology disappear as they turn towards accounts of anti-racism. They turn to prescriptive arguments about what one ought or ought not do as an anti-racist, in contrast to the descriptions of the experiential conditions through which people take up such imperatives.

are doing with our speech.[4] While this habit-forming is not in itself a bad thing, I see phenomenology's particular power as its ability to draw our attention back to those habits. Phenomenology can draw us back to what we say because it goes without saying that we would, what we do because we understand—tacitly—that we should, and where we direct ourselves without always having a clear sense of what assumptions, structures, and mechanisms orient us. In that sense, it can offer a first step in evaluating and reimaging how we approach anti-racism in thought and action.

Toward that end, I will first draw attention to how critical phenomenological attention to race habitually de-emphasizes the phenomenological tradition's concern with and theorizations of language. Taking readings of Frantz Fanon's (2008) *Black Skin, White Masks* as an example, I note how, when critical phenomenologists do attend to language and speech in addressing questions of racial justice, they do so only as a part of a focus on *racism's* expressions. In doing so, they elaborate on what might already be well-recognized concerns as opposed—in perhaps more traditionally phenomenological fashion—to calling into question our taken-for-granted *anti*-racist sentiments, habits, and, particularly, speech. In the second part, I point to how this focus on racist language quickly segues from a concern with language itself into a concern with the body, which monopolizes much of critical phenomenology's attention in issues around race. In the third part, I then draw on Frantz Fanon's reflections on language and his descriptions of anti-racist language in conversation with Martin Heidegger's account of "idle talk" to offer a brief example of a critical phenomenological analysis of the diffusion of anti-racist language and what critical phenomenology can help us to understand about it.

CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY, LANGUAGE, AND RACISM

On the first page of their recent collection, *50 Concepts for a Critical* Phenomenology,* editors Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon (2020) write:

> One of phenomenology's most axiomatic methodological commitments is the refusal to accept the taken-for-grantedness of experience. This commitment entails the perpetual interrogation of the most familiar features of our everyday experiences, not to deny them but in order to know them better. Like literature, history, and anthropology, phenomenology has yielded rich descriptions of lived experience. Phenomenology is marked by a faith that such descriptions can disclose the most basic structures

[4] Throughout this paper I use "language" and "speech" interchangeably. Arguably, there are important differences here, differences that are tracked, for example, in the structuralist distinction between *langue* and *parole*. Investigating the relationship between race, racism, and language and a drawing on phenomenological work on language can encompass more than discussions of speech acts. That said, my goal here is to draw attention to the occlusion of language in critical phenomenological discussions in general and thus hopefully open room to explore how these distinctions become relevant for critical phenomenology and for thinking on racial justice that draws from phenomenological sources.

> of human existence including temporality, perception, language, and intersubjectivity. (xiii)

In this passage, the editors articulate some of the key philosophical interventions of the phenomenological tradition that make its "critical" deployments both possible and powerful. Phenomenology can show us the structures that underly our experiences, even as their study often casts the everyday in a light that leaves it unfamiliar, strange, and open to critique. Their brief list of some of these structures point out central themes in phenomenological writing and research past and present. That said, though the volume that follows—like much of the work in critical phenomenology that has appeared thus far—does indeed involve accounts of temporality, perception, and intersubjectivity, *50 Concepts* exemplifies a tendency in the move toward a specifically *critical* phenomenology to leave behind thematic investigations of language.

The omission of much thematic investigation into language among critical phenomenologists is surprising, particularly insofar as language has been thematized by key phenomenological figures from Husserl onwards and has been a central and recurring area of phenomenological research. Concerns about language appear in Husserl's work as early as the *Logical Investigations* and already in Part II of Merleau-Ponty's much-cited *The Phenomenology of Perception*, and both thinkers continue a concern with language throughout their respective bodies of work. Heidegger—from whom critical phenomenologists have drawn in explorations of temporality, world, being-toward-death, and "the They"—both investigates language in relation to these other key concepts and as a pressing subject of investigation itself. As I will pay particular attention to, Frantz Fanon (2008) is concerned with language in what has become a key text for critical phenomenologists, *Black Skin, White Masks*. That language is a central area of research in the work of these figures in the phenomenological tradition has certainly not been missed in the scholarship that has read and hoped to extend their work.[5] Indeed, the importance of language to phenomenology is framed clearly in the very title of Françoise Dastur's 2017 book *Questions of Phenomenology: Language, Alterity, Temporality, Finitude*. Nonetheless, despite language's position as one of phenomenology's central and recurring questions, though references to phenomenological concerns about language are scattered throughout *50 Concepts*, none of the authors there and few elsewhere in the burgeoning field of critical phenomenology have centered either phenomenology's historical engagement with, or accounts of, language, or investigated their possible use for phenomenologically oriented critique.

The tendency of critical phenomenologists to decenter language is apparent particularly in the many and varied readings of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*. As Robert Bernasconi (2011) has argued, "the prominence that phenomenology enjoys today within critical philosophy of race has much to do with the compelling and indispensable nature of the phenomenological accounts of the lived experience of racism presented by Frantz Fanon in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War" (552). It is unquestionably the case that thinkers within the areas of critical phenomenology, broadly construed, have drawn

[5] See for example Ricoeur 1967, Erickson 1970, Edie 1976, Bernasconi 1985, Inkpin 2016, Apostolopoulos 2019, and Engelland 2021 among many others.

heavily on Fanon's work in developing accounts of racialization and racism. Indeed, Weiss (2017) has written that

> Fanon's work has played a central role in inaugurating what Lisa Guenther calls a "critical phenomenology," a rigorous philosophical mode of inquiry that abandons the meta-level of 'pure' subjective description advocated by Husserl, and directly addresses the constitutive social, political, psychological, economic, historical, and cultural dimensions of the phenomena under investigation. (233)

The elements Weiss lists as part of the turn from Husserl's "pure" description towards a more Fanonian critical phenomenology are, once again, telling. While it could be subsumed in some senses under accounts of politics, psychology, history, or culture, language is never explicitly mentioned as an area of Fanonian intervention or of specifically *critical* phenomenological investigation in this passage, and only rarely and partially engaged in the literature.[6]

Michel Henry (1999) points out that there are two veins in which phenomenology engages with language. On the one hand, phenomenology is concerned with language insofar as it takes language as an object of investigation, one among many possible such objects open to phenomenological analysis and research. On the other hand:

> Far from being proposed as one theme or object among others for the work of phenomenological elucidation (a phenomenology of language just as there can be a phenomenology of social forms, of the work of art, etc.), language belongs, on the contrary, to the internal conditions of this process of elucidation; it is this internal condition if it is true that it bears within itself the capacity for making us see what it designates by naming it before pursuing the analysis of it either in the spontaneous assertions of common sense or in the advanced propositions of scientific knowledge. But, not only must the things be able to show themselves to us (the things to which these propositions refer), but also these propositions themselves must be able to show themselves, and they can do this only in a monstration proper to language, a monstration which constitutes its originary essence, its Logos. The primitive Saying is never therefore on the side of what is said, that is, on the side of what is shown; it is what shows. (344–45)

[6] See Gordon 2015 and Davis 2018, both of whom engage Fanon on language but, I argue, overlook his engagements with anti-racist speech. It is worth noting that David Marriott is particularly attentive to the role language plays in Fanon's work in his *Whither Fanon?* That said, importantly, Marriott's emphasis on language is part of his particular turn away from phenomenological and existential readings of Fanon and towards a more psychoanalytically oriented engagement therewith. In *What Fanon Said*, though Lewis Gordon (2015), emphasizes the importance of the existential and phenomenological elements of Fanon's work and does not set them in harsh opposition to his psychoanalytic influences, he does begin his longest engagement on Fanon's conception of language with a meditation on whether Fanon ultimately relies on or surpasses psychoanalytic insights (24).

In this passage, Henry not only points to how there is such a thing as a phenomenology *of* language but underlines how phenomenology's concern with phenomenality and elucidation inherently involves a concern *with* language. Insofar as phenomenology is concerned both with a project of description and with things as they show themselves, it is unavoidably concerned with language not only as one among other objects shown, but as the medium of that showing. Critical phenomenological investigation has almost completely occluded both phenomenologies of language and the relationship between phenomenology and language more broadly. While critical phenomenological investigations arguably do at times make use of language's function as "what shows," there is a tendency to then disregard that language as what allows things to show themselves and to move instead to an analysis of the things thus shown. This tendency plays out in readings of Fanon and particularly in readings of *Black Skin*'s most famous scene.

It might be argued that critical phenomenological investigation that draws from Fanon (2008) does indeed center language or speech in the many and varied invocations of the scene from *Black Skin* where a child cries out "'Dirty Nigger' or simply 'Look! A Negro!'" [*"Sale nègre!" ou simplement "Tiens un nègre!"*] (89). For example, already in response to the 1991 beating of Rodney King, Judith Butler centered the child's cry in their essay "Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia" in ways amenable to what is now called critical phenomenology. Turning to Fanon's repetitions of "Look! A Negro!," Butler (2004) argued that

> Frantz Fanon offers here a description of how the black male body is constituted through fear, and through a naming and a seeing: "Look, a Negro!" where the "look" is both a pointing and a seeing, a pointing out what there is to see, a pointing which circumscribes a dangerous body, a racist indicative which relays its own danger to the body to which it points. (207)

In this passage, Butler does indeed exemplify how language for Fanon is a not just a saying but a showing, a way in which the black body is constituted as a phobic object through the cry that points it out, that calls to "look!" Nonetheless, note how swiftly Butler's account deprioritizes language *per se*. The child's call is read only relative to its content, its imperative to "look!" in such a way that the would-be critical phenomenologist's attention turns towards questions of seeing and of being seen as they constitute and operate on the body, and turns away from the role that speech and language play in this racist and racializing interaction.[7] "Look!" is primarily "a pointing and a seeing" in a way that distracts from any discussion of how it is also, and primarily, a *saying*. Here—to misuse a phrase from Levinas—the saying is lost in the said.

There are reasons why work in critical phenomenology might center this jarring scene and those like it in ways that decenter an explicit concern with language itself. The charged nature of the slur and its call in public interrupts the people on the train, throws the

[7] Something similar takes place in Lee McBride's (2020) reference to Fanon's "Look! A Negro" in his essay in 50 Concepts, unsurprisingly entitled "The Look."

dynamics of the scene into relief by interrupting the everydayness of the experience of its riders. Phenomenologists often center moments of interruption as attempts to break out of habitual and sedimented ways of perceiving the world so as to look at and think about its structures. Husserlian phenomenology called for an *epoché* that could suspend the natural attitude in order to study experience and its conditions. Heidegger, in *Being and Time,* articulates that it is only through the interruption of *angst*–tied notably here to the *call* of conscience [*der Ruf des Gewissens*]—that one is able to gain access to the existential structures of *Dasein* in its everydayness. Fanon's invocation of this slur arguably works in a similar way. The slur interrupts the familiarity of his reader's immersion in the world at the beginning of this chapter, meant to redescribe experience just as the character he describes is interrupted by the child's call as he goes about his day.

As George Yancy (2018) argues in defense of opening his work *Backlash* in Fanonian fashion with the repetition of the word "Nigger!":

> such an opening is so out of step given philosophy's penchant for conceptual abstraction where the messiness of the real world is left behind as theory soars unencumbered. Imagine the impact on philosophy books and philosophy courses where central foci deal with ethics, aesthetics, social and political philosophy, or even metaphysics, were they to begin with the reality that in white America there is this contemptible category that white people created called "nigger." (3)

For Yancy, this slur carries with it the power to interrupt the sediment of abstractions and metaphysical conceptions with which philosophy cloaks experience and with which America avoids its reality and turns us back—we could say—to the things themselves. Both Yancy and Fanon open parts of their studies with these slurs because both recognize that these words have the power to defamiliarize the world and our movement through it, opening it to investigation and redescription.

That said, in this context, centering slurs or other explicitly or recognizably racist language undermines a phenomenological engagement with language itself. These moments of speech are recognizably racist and thus charged in the sense that they draw attention to themselves, acting similarly to what Ian Hacking (1999) calls "elevator words" (22). As such, they do not call out for their own phenomenological defamiliarization or denaturalization since they are themselves already disconcerting enough to be used to spark types of verbal *epoché*, to raise the moral, social, and political stakes such that we are forced to turn back and reflect upon what had otherwise been business as usual. Focusing on racist language puts emphasis not on how language has been operating in overlooked ways as a part of everyday life, but on what other elements of everyday life can be illuminated *by* a kind of language that disrupts the everyday. There is no need to defamiliarize one's relationship to "Look! A Negro" since the charged framing of the slur itself resists familiarization in this interruptive instance. In the focus on what is recognizably racist language, language itself is taken as conspicuous and not in need of illumination or thematization. It acts only as a tool to focus on what is "really" overlooked as we live race and live with racism: the bodily

experiences and habits whose investigation has become the taken for granted contribution of critical phenomenology to anti-racist work and thought.

"LIVED EXPERIENCE" AND THE CENTERING OF THE BODY

In her careful phenomenological study of racism and embodiment, *The Habits of Racism,* Helen Ngo centers a moment similar to the Fanonian "Look!" that exemplifies the tendency to turn away from its analysis at the level of language and toward an account of the body. While her use of Fanon does not turn to the famous passage on the look, Ngo articulates her own account of a similar scene of intrusive racist speech, its reflection of a racist hypervisibility, and its effects on the body in a scene where a vendor calls out to her on seeing that she is an Asian woman. Ngo (2017) writes: "suddenly a loud, booming voice cuts across from the right. *NI HAO! (HELLO!)* My gut sinks. *Ni Hao!* I pretend not to notice, but a lump grows in my throat, my mouth grows dry . . . This is humiliating." (55). This scene begins Ngo's second chapter "The Lived Experience of Racism and Racialized Embodiment" and yet, though she opens the chapter with this moment of speech, she turns immediately to an account of the bodily experience of racism and racialization that leaves questions about speech and language behind. There is no explicit discussion of language throughout the rest of the chapter. Thus, while Ngo's framing example shows just how central instances of speech are to experiences of racism and racialization, she presents them only as invocations of a broader set of physical patterns and habits that instantiate racist structures and attitudes, turning "to a consideration of the *experience* of racism, with a particular emphasis on how those on the 'receiving end' of racism come to experience the phenomenon, and on their own *bodies*" (56, my emphasis).

There are scholarly reasons, beyond its interruptive character, that critical deployments of phenomenology like Ngo's, Butler's, and Yancy's, would center moments like Fanon's "Look! A Negro!" in ways that de-emphasize the role language plays therein and emphasize the body. Not only is the calling of the slur interruptive, it appears at the opening of the fifth chapter of *Black Skin,* "The Lived Experience of the Black," whose invocation of "lived experience" [*l'expérience vécu*] directly invokes phenomenological terminology and which contains Fanon's most extended engagement with Jean-Paul Sartre and his famous invocation of Merleau-Ponty. On the one hand, the tendency to de-prioritize Fanon's thinking on language, particularly in *Black Skin,* in favor of accounts of visibility might reflect the prioritization of this Fanonian debt to and dialogue with Sartre.[8] Fanon unquestionably draws from Sartre's own discussion of vision and the look and engages his discussions of Negritude directly in *Black Skin*. That said, Sartre's himself does not explicitly thematize the question of language,[9] putting Fanon's thinking on language in

[8] Indeed, Butler's longest explicit engagement with Fanon is expressly a reading of Fanon through Sartre in their 2006 essay "Violence, Nonviolence: Sartre on Fanon."

[9] See Ricoeur 1967. My thanks to Wendy O'Brien for her help on this point.

that text at odds with readings that emphasize its Sartrean engagements, however critical. In this Sartrean reading through the look, the body is then tacitly re-centered.

On the other hand, many thinkers including Ngo (2017), Weiss (2017), Alcoff (2006), and Alia Al-Saji (2010) prioritize Fanon's engagement with Merleau-Ponty and the concept of the corporeal schema in "The Lived Experience of the Black" as the key phenomenological element of that chapter. As I noted above, Merleau-Ponty does thematize language, but the focus among these readers as they have drawn connections between Merleau-Ponty, Fanon, and race has been on the corporeal schema, on bodily feeling, habit, and gesture. Here "lived experience" takes on a distinctly and reductively *physical* sense that, while acknowledging the body's existence in a world of history, cultural practices, and concrete others, creates a surprisingly isolated conception of what critical phenomenology is looking at when it looks at life as it is actually "lived" that centers the body's sensory and motor capacities. These Sartre-centered or Merleau-Ponty-centered interpretations point readers towards the idea that Fanon's most phenomenological interventions are indeed those in "The Lived Experience of the Black." They read Fanon such that, within that chapter, his is pre-eminently a phenomenological account either of the racialized and racializing look, of the effects of racialization on the body in terms of its sensory experience and physical navigation of its world, or both.[10]

These turns towards the conditions of visibility and towards a somewhat physicalist sense of embodiment reflect what I argue is critical phenomenology's ambivalent tendency to locate what is critical about phenomenology in its capacity to turn towards the body to the degree that the body is taken as the locus of race, gender, sex, and ability and of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism. While Weiss (2017) above notably presents what is critical about critical phenomenology as its turn away from the transcendental subject and towards quasi-transcendental structures like politics and culture that shape the subject, the body acts as the only point of contact for many critical phenomenologists between those structures and that subject. Gunther (2013) notably describes what is "critical" about critical phenomenology as its willingness to take into account discourses like those of critical race theory that show, "in different and sometimes divergent ways, how *embodied* subjects have been racialized through (for example) the colonization of the Americas, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the practice of plantation slavery and its partial abolition, followed

[10] Lewis Gordon tacitly points to how this slippage away from a direct engagement with Fanon on the question of language takes place. Gordon (2015) writes that, for Fanon, "language is a construction that has the force of transforming reality . . . To transform language, then, is the godlike project of transforming reality. Living language is, however, embodied. Flesh and such language are, in other words, symbiotic. Fanon is here referring to the phenomenological view of body and flesh; they refer, as well, to consciousness, which, from an existential phenomenological perspective, is always embodied consciousness of things, including intersubjective consciousness or the social world. This is because consciousness requires a point of view, a perspective, which cannot be achieved, as Sartre and Merleau-Ponty showed, without a body" (25). Gordon argues—notably in reference to both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty—that for Fanon the questions of language and of embodiment are closely aligned insofar as language, and consciousness along with it, is both embodied and has effects on its embodied speakers. While this is true, noticeably this conversation on language thus transitions into a conversation about the embodiment with which it is inextricably intertwined at the moment when what is supposedly a specifically *phenomenological* perspective is invoked.

by the hyperincarceration of black men and women in what is now the United States" (xiv, my emphasis). Note here the emphasis on *embodied* subjects that shapes Guenther's engagement with the structural and historical forces that she then lists. The specifically embodied quality of this analysis is set in contrast to either the "pure" phenomenological concerns with a disembodied transcendental subjectivity or what is often taken as more recognizably "post-structural" or "postphenomenological" emphases on discourse.[11]

Consequently, in invocations of moments like the child's explicitly racist call above, critical phenomenology does not attend to the import of language itself, how language operates or what its role is in the creation or maintenance of racial conditions. It does not ask how language might also operate as a point of contact between structures and subjects, but only about what language *does to* or *shows about* the body. Language certainly operates in these accounts, but while it instigates changes in how we look or feel or in how we approach our looking and feeling, its role outside of that initial moment and the promise of a power to arrest and illuminate the embodied self—the thunderous call to look, the jarring force of the word "Negro"—falls out of the picture. The orientation towards explicitly racist interventions and toward the bodily engagements and habits that they illuminate draws attention away from aspects of Fanon's work that arguably show his engagement with other key concerns of the phenomenological tradition. These would include his concern with language not in its intrusive effects on the individual body, but in its role in carrying and shaping the shared world.[12] Little attention in critical phenomenology has thus been paid to other chapters like the first in *Black Skin*, "The Black Man and Language," or even to the phenomenological import of other elements in "The Lived Experience of the Black" where Fanon centers quotations of more everyday accounts of what people tend to say in attempts at *anti*-racism that are not jarring interventions in the style of "Look! A Negro!" and not invitations to reflection on the body. Critical phenomenology thus turns away from

[11] This latter concern with the post-structural is reflected in Salamon's (2018) own reading of the question of what is "critical" about critical phenomenology as its inheritance of a Kantian sense of critique that she reads through its uptake by Michel Foucault. Whether a turn toward political and social structures as foremost in critique is where a critical phenomenology begins or where phenomenology-proper has been superseded is a question Gunther (2013) herself notes in writing that among the methodological issues that critical phenomenology raises is the fact that "it is not clear where critical phenomenology ends and postphenomenology begins" (xiv).

[12] Note, for example, how in their article on "World Traveling" in *50 Concepts*, Andrea Pitts (2020) turns away from an explicit theorization of world construction or maintenance when they turn toward the overlaps between María Lugones's work on worlds and world travelling and that of black existentialists, Fanon among them. After noting the tendency of readers to interpret Lugones's work alongside the "foundational texts of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, as well as those of Merleau-Ponty," citing particularly Mariana Ortega who has emphasized the overlaps in conceptions of world between Heidegger and Lugones, Pitts (2020) writes that "another interesting overlap within phenomenological traditions emerges between Lugones's conception of world-traveling and theorizations of resistance and agency found within the black existentialist tradition" (347). While they then turn to an engagement with Fanon, Pitts's interest there is in Fanon's critique of Sartre and the resistant tendency to disconnect concerns about one's blackness from wider concerns about freedom and embodiment in a part-whole relationship. The occlusion of Fanon discussions of worlds and travel between them is especially notable here as Fanon, like Lugones, emphasizes the intimacy of worlds and language. See Lugones 2003, 11, and Fanon 2008, 1. While Ortega (2016) references Fanon twice in her book *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenologies, Multiplicity, and the Self*, she too does not explore these connections.

resources in Fanon that can help to call into question and to re-examine what is happening in the uptake and circulation of the anti-racist discourse in which critical phenomenology itself often partakes. In what follows, I draw attention to just such passages, using both Fanon's own theorization of language and elements of Heidegger's work in *Being and Time*, to offer a brief example of how such language can operate.

LANGUAGE, DISCOURSE, AND IDLE ANTI-RACIST TALK

> Striving for a New Humanism.
> Understanding Mankind.
> Our Black Brothers.
> I believe in you, Man.
> Racial Prejudice.
> Understanding and Loving (Fanon 2008, xi)

On the first page of *Black Skin,* Fanon lists these as some of the "hundreds of lines that try to foist themselves" on him. Rather than beginning the text with an interruptive exclamation like "Look! A Negro!" or a reflection on bodily comportment, Fanon opens his work by drawing attention to these comparatively benign phrases. He orients his readers not to a scene marked by a racial slur, but to the diffuse anti-racist slogans that "foist" themselves on him, even as they appear out of nowhere, not tied to any particular moment, scene, or interlocutor like the child who calls out "Look! A Negro!" on the train. Who says these things? What do they mean? What ought we do with them? Though none of these questions are answered by the text, Fanon confronts his readers with the recognizable moral impetus these phrases contain in his experience of them. They are the kinds of things one says when one is trying to express anti-racist sentiment, to participate in a general dialogue about race and racism. They are also the kinds of things people of color hear from those working to show, put bluntly, that they are on "the right side of history" when it comes to racial justice.

> "You see, my dear fellow, color prejudice is totally foreign 'o me." "But do come in, old chap, you won't find any color prejudice here." "Quite so, the Black is just as much a man as we are." "It is not because he's black that he's less intelligent than we are." "I had a Senegalese colleague in the regiment, very smart guy." (Fanon 2008, 93)

These further passages appear in "The Lived Experience of the Black." Much like Fanon's earlier list of phrases, they are not narrativized or localized expressions and they do not present themselves as harsh racist intrusions. These phrases too "float," unmoored to a given space or speaker, and yet are familiar, the types of things one might have heard, or one might find oneself tempted to say without explicitly knowing why they ought to. Drawn out of context, these recognizable, common, unsurprising, perhaps *expected* expressions of anti-

racist sentiment are cast in a critical light, calling into question their very inconspicuousness. Uprooted, they show Fanon's attempt to draw attention to and defamiliarize these phrases not as interruptions that illuminate the body but as constitutive of a world.

Fanon (2008) writes in "The Black Man and Language" that "a man who possesses a language possesses as an indirect consequence the world expressed and implied by this language. You can see what we are driving at: there is an extraordinary power in the possession of a language. Paul Valéry knew this and described language as 'the god gone astray in the flesh'" (2). Though it does not appear in "The Lived Experience of the Black," this earlier claim shows a key element of Fanon's specifically phenomenological engagement, insofar as he here explores the common theme in phenomenology of the relationship between language and world. D Davis (2018) writes that, on Fanon's account:

> through our understanding of a language we come to know the world as a certain *kind* of world—one that has a specific meaning and set of meanings and that "hangs together" in a particular way. Through this language we interpret and understand and, therefore, live in a certain world ("*this* world") and in a certain way ("*our* way of life"). (32)

Not merely descriptive, language here carries with it an understanding that holds together and discloses things in a particular, coherent way, tacitly interpreting the world for, and orienting, the speaker.

Though Fanon (2008) uses the phrasing here of a man who "possesses" a language [*un homme qui possède le langue*] in a way that carries an active sense of ownership, mastery, and use, several lines above he claims that "to speak means being able to use a certain syntax and possessing the morphology of such and such a language, but it means above all assuming a culture and bearing the weight of a civilization" (1–2). Here to be able to use a language is to far more passively "assume" [*assumer*] a culture and "bear" [*supporter*] a civilization. Rather than saying that one takes possession of a language and with it a world, Fanon indicates that one is possessed by the world taken on through language, speaking not as master of it but as someone already beholden to it. One is shaped by that language and that world without necessarily recognizing how. Fanon argues for the weight of language and its power as part of a discussion on how "the more the black Antillean assimilates the French language, the whiter he gets–i.e., the closer he comes to becoming a true human being" (2). That said, as Lewis Gordon points out, the irony of this passage lies in the fact that what he then articulates is not an account of the successful, but of the somewhat *failed* and caricatured whitening on the part of the French speaker, one that does not liberate them from racial bondage but shows the depth of its force in continuing to present whiteness as "true human being." Gordon (2015) argues that

> the promise of language is not only seductive but also unfaithful. Semiotic resistance, albeit important—Fanon after all admonishes the use of condescending language—at times intensifies the problem instead of alleviating it. Mastering the language for the sake of recognition *as white* reflects a dependency that subordinates the black's humanity. (28)

While Fanon and Gordon here draw attention to what happens as black people work to transform themselves through the use of another language, a similar conception inhabits Fanon's deployment of instances of anti-racist speech. Such speech often possesses its speakers without their express knowledge, coming to them as part of a world and helping to disclose things in that world in ways that might not be evident. Still further, such speech might orient and transform that speaker in ways they neither see nor intend and that might undermine those intentions. In this sense, Fanon's comments on language overlap with the account that Heidegger offers in *Being and Time* on what he calls "discourse" [*Rede*] and his description of a diffuse anti-racist language converges with Heidegger's account of "idle talk" [*Gerede*]. [13]

Heidegger's (2010) discussion of idle talk takes place as an account of the everyday way in which discourse is one of the structures that "first make something like language ontologically possible," as it discloses a world and an extension of his much-cited account of "the They" [*das Man*] (157). For Heidegger, it is as a part of the They, as the "They-Self," that Dasein primarily understands itself in its everyday life, taking its understanding of what it is, who it is, how it ought to act, and what is possible for it from the already-disclosed, impersonal sense of what "one" is like. As Nancy J. Holland (2020) puts it:

> many aspects of our lives, from the grammar of the language we speak to how we use tools to the rules of etiquette and the laws we live under, aren't addressed to us as individuals but are understood or communicated to us impersonally as what "they" do in a particular situation or what "we" do or what "one" does. (315)[14]

This everyday, public understanding of things-- the way that they are already interpreted relative to an averageness for which they have been, as Heidegger (2010) says, "leveled down" in order to become generally accessible—is particularly harbored in language.

Not just one among other ways that "I" am primarily as "one," our relationship to language in our sense of what "one says" and our speaking "as one does," marks the key avenue through which we take up, maintain, and disseminate the average, public understandings of the They. Heidegger (2010) writes that

> in the language that is spoken when one expresses oneself, there already lies an average intelligibility; and, in accordance with this intelligibility,

[13] Heidegger resists the claim that his account of idle talk is part of a "philosophy of culture," perhaps in precisely the sense in which I am currently deploying it in conversation with Fanon. While I acknowledge that idle talk is not meant to indicate a particular cultural tendency to lose oneself in the masses but, rather, an existential structure, I see no reason not to articulate the former in terms of its conditions in the latter.

[14] Holland (2020) refers to Heidegger's account of idle talk in her contribution on "the They" in *50 Concepts*. That said, Holland mentions idle talk only briefly and does not engage with its particular function or explore how it operates as a phenomenological reflection on language-use, taking it only as an example of the ways that the They operates and is theorized, as she points to Heidegger's references to idle talk to argue that "'The They' makes authenticity possible" (316).

> the discourse communicated can be understood to a large extent without the listener coming to a being toward what is talked about in the discourse so as to have a primordial understanding of it. One understands not so much the beings talked about; rather one already listens to what is spoken about as such. This is understood, what is talked about is understood, only approximately and superficially. (Heidegger 2010, 162)

For Heidegger, idle talk is what allows us to speak about "what *one* knows," to carry an average interpretation of the subjects of our speech, without having any direct contact with what it is that we are talking about. As Heidegger is quick to point out, this does not make idle talk something meant "in a disparaging sense" (161). Part of the point of his analysis of the They is to show how it is perfectly normal that, as social beings, much of what we know and how we understand ourselves is built out of a reflection of average social understandings and behaviors, understandings that we pick up from and relay on to others through language in figures of speech, common phrases or claims, and recognizable verbal signals. In this sense, idle talk is not inherently a bad thing any more than it is inherently a bad thing that much of what we know and talk about we glean not from direct experience with our subjects but from the testimony of others. Much of what we talk about we gather from what we have understood only tacitly, what we have heard second hand in a diffuse way whose authority we both accept and reinforce as we participate in "*passing the word along*" (163).[15]

That said, though idle talk, like the They itself, is not inherently negative, it does carry with it particular kinds of dangers, the very dangers—I argue—that Fanon expresses in the idle anti-racist talk that he cites and parodies. Heidegger (2010) writes that

> discourse, which belongs to the essential constitution of the being of Dasein, and also constitutes its disclosedness, has the possibility of becoming idle talk, and as such of not really keeping being-in-the-world open in an articulated understanding, but of closing it off and covering over innerwordly beings. To do this, one need not aim to deceive . . . idle talk is a closing off since it *omits* going back to the foundation of what is being talked about. (163)

The concern with idle talk here is that, while it is true that there is much that we take up, understand, and relay through simply what "one says," omitting a return to the matter at hand or encountering and repeating *simply* what "one" says can dull our experience of what we speak about. This closes off our attention to and possible ways of relating with the people and things that appear to us out of the world thus disclosed. Heidegger notes that "idle talk, which everyone can snatch up, not only divests us of the task of genuine understanding, but develops an indifferent intelligibility" (163). In idle talk, it is not just that one does not take up—for better or worse—the work of coming to understand something in a direct way, but that one becomes indifferent to it, levels it down in the sense in which Heidegger will say that the averageness of the They "prescribes what can and may be ventured, watches

[15] My thanks to Andrew Cutrofello for his framing of idle talk as a reflection on something like testimony.

over every exception which thrusts itself to the fore. Every priority is noiselessly squashed. Overnight everything that is original is flattened down as something long since known" (Heideger 2010, 123). Idle talk runs the risk of undermining or occluding the disclosive power of language, preventing it from drawing our attention, our wonder, or our concern by presenting what is idly talked about as indifferent, unimportant, what everyone says since everyone already knows what it is and what to do with it. The right words seem to present themselves in their obviousness, to float to us out of our world.

In both of Fanon's (2008) lists of phrases above, there is a sense that what he is describing is idle talk and that just such a closing off has taken place. Unlike his "Look! A Negro!," these lines are not situated in a narrative frame or given to a particular speaker. Who in particular is saying such things is unclear, and yet they are recognizable as what *one* says or might say to show one shares in general ant-racist sentiment. While these phrases are recognizable in this way, it is equally clear from their critical placement in the text that in them, both racism and anti-racist commitments have become matters of indifference in ways that close off attention to and engagement with the matters they describe. This kind of idle talk, "holds any new questioning and discussion at a distance because it presumes it has understood and in a peculiar way it suppresses them and holds them back" (Heidegger 2010, 163). Indeed, this way of speaking has closed off attention to the very issues that such language casually invokes, for example, in articulating as a welcome the statement that "you'll find no color prejudice here."

An obvious part of Fanon's critique of such phrases is that they fail to recognize how the speaker is himself seeing their interlocutor's blackness, reading and responding to that interlocutor through a sense of them not, as Fanon puts it elsewhere, as a "man" but as a "black man." To do so, for Fanon, is to manifest the very kind of prejudice that their idle talk disavows in the casual and thoughtless repetition of anti-racist language become platitude. Fanon (2008) describes how "I see in this white gaze that it's the arrival not of a new man, but of a new type of man, a new species. A Negro, in fact!" (95). Yet in these moments not of the white gaze but of idle white anti-racist speech, he not only recognizes *that* he is taken as a new "type" of man but shows *how* that very recognition is elided in the seemingly obvious, levelled down claims like "you'll find no color prejudice here" and "the Black is just as much a man as we." The equal claim to the human is a potentially powerful statement, one that *could* be a call to resist the denigration of the humanity of black people in the very division into the type "the Black." Instead, here the latter type is reified as a conception of a kind of basic difference is diffused, dispersed through repetitions of these phrases as idle talk.

Heidegger's account of idle talk is ambivalent to the degree that idle talk carries this threat of a leveling down and closing off of the matters at issue in our speech, but at the same time disperses the possibility of a more powerful rediscovery of what that speech involves, even as it is disseminated in a way that is indifferent to what is spoken about. In idle talk, "the intelligibility already deposited in expressions pertains to the discoveredness of beings actually obtained and handed down, as of the current intelligibility of being, *and of the possibilities and horizons available for fresh interpretation*" (Heidegger 2010, 162, my emphasis). In this passage, Heidegger is clear that idle talk carries with it a kind of

access to the matters it passes over indifferently. It holds a path back to them even if that path is blocked or closed over. As such, the way that idle talk spreads what is talked about in "wider circles" (Heidegger 2010, 163) is both a dissemination of a leveled down and indifferent understanding of the matters spoken about, but also the dissemination of further opportunities for a fresh interpretation of them, for a re-thinking or re-exploration of what it is one habitually says, what one thought one knew well enough in knowing how to talk about it with ease. This ambivalence is echoed in how Fanon does not ever actively reject these phrases. His concern is not that these phrases simply involve the use of the "wrong" words. Particularly, his inclusion of "Striving for a New Humanism" should alert readers to this fact insofar as Fanon himself advocates for a new humanism throughout his work.[16] There is, in the very uprooted dispersion of these phrases, an expansion of the possibility that they might come to more than an indifferent attention, their use become subject to critique, and for phrases like "a new humanism" to be seen in new and potentially more effective ways. Both these dangers and these possibilities in the dispersion of anti-racist speech appear to the degree that this speech itself becomes a question, to the degree that language's character as part of a world comes to the fore in our analyses of race, or put briefly, in the light that a critical phenomenological approach to language can reveal.

CONCLUSION

Above, I have worked to put in question critical phenomenology's habitual ways of theorizing race and racism as these are reflective both of its own tacit senses of what anti-racist contributions look like and of its tendency to explore and describe how overt racism—and not attempts at anti-racism—take place. This questioning has pointed to how critical phenomenology has conspicuously overlooked the resources of the phenomenological tradition's work on language and selectively interpreted the role language plays in racist scenes, focusing on the body. Finally, I offered a brief example of a critical phenomenological account of anti-racism and language, one that I hope shows both the richness of the possibilities still open for phenomenological work on race and the importance of examining what it is that we are doing as, in our potentially idle anti-racist speech, we pass the word along.

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[16] For accounts of Fanon on a new humanism see Bernasconi 1996, Silverman 2012, and Lee 2015.

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". . . IN THE BORDERLANDS YOU ARE THE BATTLEGROUND . . .":[1] JUNE 12 AND THE PULSE OF THE SACRED

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> *"Maybe your Ma blessed you on the way out the door. Maybe she wrapped a plate for you in the fridge so you don't come home and mess up her kitchen with your hunger. Maybe your Tia dropped you off, gave you cab money home. Maybe you had to get a sitter. Maybe you've yet to come out to your family at all, or maybe your family kicked you out years ago. Forget it, you survived. Maybe your boo stayed home, wasn't feeling it, but is blowing up your phone with sweet texts, trying to make sure you don't stray. Maybe you're allowed to stray. Maybe you're flush, maybe you're broke as nothing, and angling your pretty face barside, hoping someone might buy you a drink. Maybe your half-Latin-ass doesn't even speak Spanish; maybe you barely speak English. Maybe you're undocumented."*
>
> –Justin Torres, "In Praise of Latin Night at the Club"[1]

On June 12, 2016, the world witnessed one of the deadliest single shooter massacres in U.S. history. Fifty persons were killed and fifty-three were critically injured. Of those fifty, twenty-three were Puerto Rican; 90% of those killed were Latinx. Their faces spanned the racial kaleidoscope of the African, Latinx, and Indigenous diaspora. Most of them were working class and extremely young (Ochoa 2016). However, these particularities went largely omitted from the coverage of the event that swept the nation under the label of an LGBTQ hate crime. The ubiquity of death of color in the U.S. cannot be overstated. Indeed, many pulses have been lost outside of Pulse Nightclub. To many, June 12 may seem like a day among many, lost to the memorials of death no one really wants to remember. In this paper I explore June 12 as we turn the page on its sixth year of remembrance. I make the case for a reading of June 12 as more than an LGBTQ hate crime, but rather as emblematic of a battleground of a sacred space (Latin night at the gay bar) for queer bodies of color. The project establishes a more complex framework for understanding what took place on June 12 that can appreciate the ethno-racial, spiritual, and queer dimensions

[1] The title is a direct reference to the work of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987): "To live in the borderlands means you" (216).

that foregrounded the event. I maintain that the method of analysis necessitates a different model of theorizing, one that can crystalize the sexuality of terrorism, the whiteness of homonationalism, and thereby the importance of creating sacred space for Latinx queer subjects, many of whom, in the context of June 12, form part of the Puerto Rican diaspora.

THE SEEN AND THE UNSEEN

The aftermath of June 12 saw an outpour of reporting much of which sparked discussions around the sacredness of nightclub spaces for the queer community. Pulse nightclub was readily described as a sacred place or a sacred space by news reporters, bloggers, and academics alike. For instance, Christina Aguilar (2016), a young queer Latina, reported: "These spaces were rare and sacred. They gave me slivers of time where I could be my whole self that frankly did not exist most of the time." Michael Barbaro (2016), writing for the *New York Times,* described gay night clubs as sacred spaces insofar as they act as refuge for the LGBTQ community. In discussion with fellow activists, he reflects on the Pulse mass shooting event as comparable to a gunman going into a church and shooting people. The owner of the nightclub, Barbara Poma, described Pulse as a "sacred place" as she considered selling the club to the city for the construction of the memorial (Shah and Almasy 2016). Marcia Ochoa (2016), professor at UC Santa Cruz, described bars and nightclubs as sacred spaces, "places to worship and learn." The sacred emerged as a way to describe that which was interrupted by the massacre. More specifically, the violence enacted upon the queer of color community at Pulse was understood as a disruption of sacred space.

The sacred is generally defined as that which is precious, fragile, in need of protection, and often contrasted with the profane. However, theories of the sacred can be found across disciplinary conversations in philosophy, anthropology, religious studies, and literature. Context is key to understanding how the sacred is interpolated. Sarah Bloesch (2016, 112) describes the sacred within three general identifiable contexts. The first context involves articulations of how people handle the sacred and the profane. Generally, these discussions revolve around considerations of why spaces, rituals, and/or objects assume the characteristics that they do. The second context, philosophical and theological, aims to make assertions about the categories in relation to physicality. Finally, there is the context which seeks to theorize the secular (112). Those who try to theorize the secular argue that we cannot neatly separate the sphere of spiritual life from the secular as the rise of secularism did not seal spiritual/religious practices from public life. To this effect, the sacred and the profane need to be understood and for the purposes of this exploration are understood as active forces read up against social-cultural interpretations of gender, race, and sexuality as well as, importantly, the status of personhood (113).

To unpack the religious/spiritual dimensions of the event of June 12, we must appreciate the fact that the massacre was framed through the religious/spiritual dimensions of life. Notably, the length of the reporting was cloaked in the language of religion. The shooter, Omar Mateen, identified himself as "a soldier of God" as he pledged his allegiance to

a Sunni militant jihadist group: Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, more commonly referred to in the United States as ISIL (Doornbos 2016). Religion was a further salient feature, as it framed how people discussed Mateen's motivations. In fact, as a subject, Mateen was entirely interpellated through the lens of religious fanaticism, leaving little room for understanding June 12 as anything other than an attack on the nation. June 12 became a national massacre memorialized without much attention to the lives lost—lives that the nation would otherwise consider disposable. Religion framed the violent disruption of sanctuary through the identification of Latin night at gay clubs as sacred space. However, the massacre took place on what most of us would identify as secular grounds: a gay Latin night at a club. So, we might ask, in what ways was Pulse Nightclub sacred space? . . . And for whom?

The history of LGBTQ people in the U.S. is imbued with violence, a point emphatically central to the coverage of the massacre. *The Atlantic* ran an article on June 12 titled, "The Extraordinarily Common Violence Against LGBT People in America," which aimed to expose the prevalence of violence in the LGBT community (Green 2016). But in providing evidence for its claims, the article fragmented identities by separating sexuality from race, ethnicity, and religion. Citing the Southern Poverty Law Center, the article asserted that hate-crimes against LGBT people are twice as likely as violence against Black or Jewish people. A few days later, the *New York Times* released an article, arguing along similar lines, that LGBT people are more likely to be targets of violent attacks over African Americans (Park and Mykhyalyshyn 2016).

The reporting notably overlooked two vital pieces of information: most of the people injured or murdered on June 12 spanned the Latinx diaspora, and it was Latin night. At stake in the Pulse shooting was not merely the desecration of a queer space, but a racialized, queer space. Here, I am drawing attention to the fact that all spaces are racialized, even if unnamed as such. In this instance, one key omission revolved around the intersections between race/ethnicity and sexuality, thus, naming queerness as normatively white and folding the event into the homonormativity of our times. That is to say, the event was largely understood as a queer hate crime that could render intelligible the lives lost as lives worthy of mourning only if they could be framed through a national narrative of queerness that was centered around the sexual norms of whiteness. The confluence between "American" sexuality and national politics often goes overlooked, particularly in the wake of such tragedies. However, the crossings between nationalism and sexuality provide the framework for understanding the discussions that transpired in the wake of June 12. Cited as a *national* event both in its magnitude and tragedy, June 12 was normatively folded into national rhetoric that quickly elevated the status of LGBTQ folks to the spotlight. However, the coverage came at a deep cost as the image of the LGBTQ community that drew most attention pitted race and ethnicity against sexuality, inviting viewers to segment sexual orientation from racial, ethnic, migratory, or religious/spiritual identity. The move to sever sexuality and highlight its exceptional status confirms that only certain queer subjects can subjects of the nation and thus subjects of mourning.

In *Terrorist Assemblages,* Jasbir K. Puar (2007) argues that the collusion between homosexuality and American nationalism generates a national discourse of patriotic

homonormative inclusion that is anchored in the exclusion of racialized and sexualized "others," most notably the "terrorist" of the American imagination (39). The national recognition of homosexuality "is contingent upon the segregation and disqualification of racial and sexual others" (2). The dynamic that produces the dichotomy between the possibilities of the "liberated" nation and "liberated" queer subjects (white-gay-lesbian liberal subjects) rests upon the contradistinction with those racial-sexual disavowed others whose identity cannot be folded into the nation: the undocumented, the terrorist, the queer of color, the trans person of color. The result is the production of the "terrorist" and "citizen" through the deployment of national gay politics. Thus, Puar argues that a regulatory narrative is promulgated, which understands racial and religious communities as "more homophobic than white mainstream queer communities," no matter how racist they might be (15). She claims, "[c]ollectively . . . [these processes] extend the project of U.S. nationalism and imperial expansion endemic to the war on terror" (2). Hence, the severing of race from sexuality serves to justify the mechanisms of terror that uphold sovereignty and U.S. exceptionalism through the production of the citizen subject which *can be* non-heterosexual so long as they uphold white moral citizenship.

The notable omission of the ethnicity and race from the coverage of June 12 should be further juxtaposed with the overwhelming attention garnered by Omar Mateen's status as a Muslim terrorist. Much of the coverage of the event swallowed Mateen's narrative into the national rhetoric using his repressed or perverse sexuality as justification for the massacre, and this fact should not be all that surprising. As Puar notes, "the invocation of the terrorist as a queer, non-national, perversely racialized other has become part of the normative script of the U.S. war on terror" (37). By constructing Mateen as sexually deviant, he was quarantined into a terrorist body and labored in the service of enforcing the terms of U.S. patriotism as a subject whose death did not even rise to the level of counting as part of the death toll on June 12. "The emasculated terrorist is not merely an other" that sits outside of the citizenry of the nation, but is further "a barometer of ab/normality involved in disciplinary apparatuses" of nationalism (38). As such, the focus on Mateen's terrorist status simultaneously consolidated a base of normalized LGBTQ subjects that could be appropriately attended to by national politics and whose "unique" status with respect to violence could be covered by national media and invoked by candlelight vigil.

The framework of the coverage deployed an either/or mechanism that split racial/ethnic/religious/spiritual others from the status of LGBTQ subjects. Hence, the massacre could rise to the level of national concern without disrupting American patriotic sentiments about terrorism. The disaggregation of identity required to achieve this result necessitated the collusion between a normative homosexuality and American nationalism—or as Puar calls it, homo-nationalism—that relegated the racialized queer dimensions of the subjects and the space on June 12 outside of the folds of national concern.

As a result, the average political imaginative geography that tells a narrative of the immigrant stealing jobs, the Muslim terrorist that is trying to kill us all, the lazy Puerto Rican who is living off the system, or the immigrant that refuses to assimilate, remained undisrupted. At the same time, the U.S. could collectively declare June 12 a national tragedy. Read against this backdrop, the response of queer Latinx folks stating that Latin

night at the gay club was and is sacred should not be read as a small or trivial claim. In light of the many excluded dimensions from attention and analysis, to call upon the sacred here is to summon something much more powerful: the intimacies, proximities, and intersubjectivities of erotic life that are made possible by Latin night at the gay club.

ARTICULATING THE SACRED: QUEER BODIES OF COLOR

In the context of Pulse, Latin night at the gay club emerges as a space that can reconcile the clashes of identity engendered through the homonormative political framework discussed in the previous section. The space/place becomes meaningful precisely because the social and political fabric of queer politics in the U.S. painfully severs sexuality from race/ethnicity. As a result, events like Latin night at the gay club are sacred because they act as portals to a time and place where the experience of identity is not wounded. Recalling Aguilar's (2016) reflections, what makes Latin night unique and sacred is tied to the experience of the self and temporality. For Aguilar, Latin night at the gay club created slivers of time where she could be her whole self in the world. Noting that she did not feel embraced by the LGBTQ community because of her *Latinidad*, Latin night at the gay club functions as a space where her race/ethnicity is not at odds with her sexuality. For Justin Torres (2016), the sacredness of "Latin Night at the Queer Club" is articulated through the freedom to be inviolable. Torres closes his essay with imaginings of dance and freedom as he reminds his readers that Latin night at the gay club operates as a refuge for life-giving and affirming practices that transform the spirit when the body feels safe.

Latin night at the gay club gives collective clearance for the possibilities of a harmonious articulation of ethno-race,[2] sexuality, and the immigrant experience of the Latinx community through the conditions of corporeal proximity and intimacy. It is an experience of intimate contact created through the contours of dance, rhythms, and beats that insist the body move toward, up, against, and away from the many others collectively sharing the space.

Latin night is not one night among many. From the outside looking in, Latin night might simply exemplify the ethnic "flair" that many welcome with the growth of a tolerant, multicultural society. However, Latin night is unique for those whose relationship to their ethnic, racial, and sexual identity is colored by migratory experiences that not only disconnect them from their home place, but also from the normative expectations that dancing salsa, reggaeton, cumbia, merengue, or popular Latin music is for those who are appropriately sexually dimorphic and heterosexual. To dance salsa in queer Latinx space is to transcend the clashes of diasporic identities, which dictate that to be a person of color, queer, and an immigrant, is simply incommensurable. The corporeal collectivity of Latin night at the gay bar creates an intersubjective experience of community that is profoundly

[2] I use the term ethno-race in this context because the term Latinx picks out both ethnicity and race in the U.S. context. I am not making an argument in support of its frequent use, but rather find it useful for capturing what it means to be Latinx in the U.S. today.

intimate and political.

Further, to call Latin night at the gay club sacred intimates the way in which the *cruces* between racialized erotic life can be folded into spiritual life. The sacredness of Latin night at the gay club is forged precisely because outside of the event there is a world that does not value your existence—a world that "is murderous to you and your kind" (Torres 2016). The imperative, as Torres invokes it for his readers, is to live, to be transformed and transfigured through a radical self-affirmation of racialized erotic subjectivity that is too dangerous to exist in most spaces.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera,* Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) explores the ways in which racial, cultural, and ethnic crosspollination yields the possibilities of the *mestiza*, and thus demonstrates how the multi-dimensionality of identity often rests on clashes or *choques* between those dimensions. The clash between the varying dimensions of identity often results in internal strife and psychic restlessness: "the coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes un *choque*, a cultural collision" (78). In order to navigate through the world, the *mestiza* must create her own consciousness, which can tolerate ambiguity and contradictions. Hence, Anzaldúa describes the intersecting dimensions of ethnicity, race, and culture through identification with a plural personality that has no choice but to operate through a pluralistic mode. There is no other option. "Rigidity means death" (79). Identity is an *amasamiento*—"kneading . . . uniting and joining" the dimensions of the self even if they show up as incompatible (81).

Yet, as many of us know, the kneading of identity is not an easy process. Reflecting on sexuality, Anzaldúa notes that for queer women of color, the ultimate rebellion is found through the articulation of desire. She clashes up against two prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality (19). She resists the trope that women are not sexual beings—a position which is part of the epistemic heirloom of the Spanish colonial encounter saturated by Catholicism. Normative femininity is subsequently rooted in its ability to participate in heterosexuality through the formation of the family vis-à-vis marriage. The queer woman of color cannot be normatively assimilated into these paradigms because her sexuality by definition is incommensurable with the norms of femininity. The production of the normative family through marriage is not at her disposal. Her sexual behavior is already framed through the prohibition of same gender desire, which makes her relation to home one coiled in fear. Furthermore, in this context, normative masculinity is rooted in articulations of the *macho*, which takes the flight from the feminine as its orienting force and in doing so distorts masculinity (41–43). Masculinity is experienced in negation of the feminine. To be appropriately masculine entails distancing from articulations of femininity already constructed through ethno-racial conditioning. Hence, homophobia emerges as a possibility framed around distancing from racialized femininity. As a result, homophobia is anchored in ethno-racial dimensions of identity as well as in articulations of gender.

Although homophobia is often discussed as an oriented fear toward queer bodies, Anzaldúa stretches this account to talk about homophobia as the fear of going home. She describes it with the following words:

> [F]ear of going home. And of not being taken in. We're afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, *la Raza,* for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged. Most of us unconsciously believe that if we reveal this unacceptable aspect of the self our mother/culture/race will totally reject us. . . . The world is not a safe place to live in. (Anzaldúa 1987, 20)

The crossroads of identity or *intersticios,* as Anzaldúa names them, can be very crippling as they are forged from the violent hemorrhaging of incommensurable dimensions of identity grating against each other. But the crossroads is home to many. Its inhabitants are *atravesados*: "the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half-dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'" (3). In other words, the crossroads is home to the racial/sexual others described in Puar's account, who find sanctuary in, among other places, at Latin nights like the one at Pulse.

At the intersection between race/ethnicity and sexuality is a path of knowing and learning that requires balancing and mitigating duality. It is from the place of "in between" or *nepantla* that radical consciousness is forged. In a later essay, Anzaldúa describes *nepantla* as "the site of transformation, the place where different perspectives come into conflict where you question the basic ideas, tenets, and identities inherited from your family, your education, and your different cultures." *Nepantla,* she tells her readers, is numinous. Evoking a distinction between the sacred and the profane, Anzaldúa identifies *nepantla* as the point where the mundane and the numinous converge, and harmony, albeit momentary, is possible. It is a point of contact where the body can be witnessed inspirited.

In light of the lens provided by Anzaldúa, we can forge an understanding of the Latin night at the gay bar as a point of contact for the *atravesados*. In the context of June 12, Latin night at the gay bar meant the momentary forging of a home-place for queer Latinx bodies, many of which were male identified. As such, Latin night at the gay bar operates as a space/time that can suspend the quotidian life of racism and homophobia, even if only momentarily. At the crux between the numinous and the mundane, Latin night at the gay club transforms into sacred offering glimpses into the possibilities of equilibrium where "you struggle to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and your inner relationship to it" (Anzaldúa and Keating 2002, 549). Returning to Torres (2016) at length is helpful as this moment makes use of the inside-outside distinction to demarcate the sacredness of Latin night at a queer club as he describes the inside as a place of transformation by evoking *mariposas* (butterflies), love, and the possibilities of life in the face of an outside world replete with violence:

> Outside, there's a world that politicizes every aspect of your identity. There are preachers, of multiple faiths, mostly self-identified Christians, condemning you to hell. Outside, they call you an abomination. Outside, there is a news media that acts as if there are two sides to a debate over trans people using public bathrooms. Outside, there is a presidential candidate who has built a platform on erecting a wall between the United States and Mexico—and not only do people believe that crap is possible,

> they believe it is necessary. Outside, Puerto Rico is still a colony, being allowed to drown in debt, to suffer, without the right to file for bankruptcy, to protect itself. Outside, there are more than 100 bills targeting you, your choices, your people, pending in various states. . . . But inside, it is loud and sexy and on. . . . You know what the opposite of Latin Night at the Queer Club is? Another Day in Straight White America. So when you walk into the club, if you're lucky, it feels expansive. "Safe space" is a cliche, overused and exhausted in our discourse, but the fact remains that a sense of safety transforms the body, transforms the spirit. So many of us walk through the world without it. So when you walk through the door and it's a salsa beat, and brown bodies, queer bodies, all writhing in some fake smoke and strobing lights, no matter how cool, how detached, how over-it you think you are, Latin Night at the Queer Club breaks your cool. You can't help but smile, this is for you, for us.
>
> Outside, tomorrow, hangovers, regrets, the grind. Outside, tomorrow, the struggle to effect change. But inside, tonight, none of that matters. Inside, tonight, the only imperative is to love. Lap the bar, out for a smoke, back inside, the ammonia and sweat and the floor slightly tacky, another drink, the imperative is to get loose, get down, find religion, lose it, find your hips locked into another's, break, dance on your own for a while—but you didn't come here to be a nun—find your lips pressed against another's, break, find your friends, dance. The only imperative is to be transformed, transfigured in the disco light. To lighten, loosen, see yourself reflected in the beauty of others. You didn't come here to be a martyr, you came to live, papi. To live, mamacita. To live, hijos. To live, mariposas. (Torres 2016)

In the space of Latin night at the queer club, the sacred extends beyond the mere capitalistic communion of bodies and emerges through practices of quotidian intimacy found through dance, movement, and the transformative experiences of the senses (affective life) as hips lock, beats drop, and bodies sweat as they move with one another. In other words, the sacred is engendered through the proximity of bodies sharing in erotic subjectivity that produces a quotidian intimacy of spirituality that otherwise, outside, has little license to exist. As Torres notes in his words, the imperative is to love, if only momentarily. The violence of the world outside cannot be overlooked as it is precisely that outside that imbues Latin night at the gay bar with so much meaning. Hence, it is not the space per se that is sacred, but rather the *inter*-subjectivities that make up the sacred.

I want to invoke Lyndon K. Gill's (2012, 288) concept of erotic subjectivity here in understanding the inter-relationalities at stake in the production of the sacred. Gill understands erotic subjectivity to be an epistemic intervention that captures an interpretative lens (epistemic) and a driving force (spiritual) that brings people together. He cuts against the grain of thinking of erotic life and subjectivity as apolitical, secular, and passionless (279). Rather, erotic subjectivity as an epistemological position links the political-sensual-spiritual that orients our social political and spiritual consciousness. As a mode of reading

and being in the world, erotic subjectivity interrupts the colonial heirloom that sees political, sensual, and spiritual concerns as purely exclusive realms (279–80). Thinking from this position, Gill maintains that the clearance for the sacred is created on, through, and in-between collective relationships not necessarily moored in any religious doctrine, but rather in the quotidian subjective experience of erotic life (Gill 2012, 289).

June 12 witnessed the disruption of sacred space cleared through the articulations of erotic subjectivity that for many served to rattle *cruces* of identity in line with each other creating the possibilities of transformation. Latin night at the queer club participates in the creation of a space that is sacred precisely because its practices give clearance to the articulation of erotic subjectivity to bodies that might not (for the most part) be rendered subjectivity in the first place, both in the body politic and the spiritual landscape. In fact, sacred bodies have historically been white bodies, which were identified as capable of participating in the temporality of Judeo-Christian progress (Bloesch 2016, 117). Hence, Latin night at the queer club further materializes as a space that is constitutively outside of the dominant domains of subjectivity and personhood, giving the floor to articulations of erotic subjectivity, and thus, has the potential of operating as a site of resistance and transformation. To some, the logic of a Latin night at a queer bar is incomprehensible, and to the extent that this is the case, it can be argued that Latin night at the queer club is threatening and dangerous because it is constituted on the fringes of social and political subjectivity. After all, the sacred in many capacities exceeds intelligibility and is thus posed as a threat to "normal" life, the very same "normal" life that is exceeded by the *atravesados* of the borderlands.

EL PULSO DE PUERTO RICO

The intersections between identity, subjectivity, and erotic life must further be read up against colonial histories that generate the conditions of confluence that make Latinx identity possible in the U.S. context. It cannot be overlooked that half of the lives lost on June 12 were Puerto Rican. Over the last decade, Orlando, Florida has become a landing ground for many Puerto Ricans as they flee social and economic deprivations set in motion by its status as a colony of the U.S. Hence, we must also be witness to the fact that colonial diasporic migrations are largely responsible for the very terms from which we come to understand June 12. What kind of a "national" tragedy was June 12 if the very same nation is simultaneously responsible for the occupation and violent disruption of Puerto Rico? Similarly, what kind of national tragedy was June 12 if the normative rhetoric ensures that U.S. politics be read as exceptional in the face of a terrorist Islamist agenda rather than an outgrowth of "homegrown homophobic terrorism" states (Torres 2016)?

Taking Puerto Rico as one point of departure for analysis implies situating Puerto Rico as a node of colonial rule and has been under U.S. colonial rule since 1898 as a result of the Spanish-American war. [3] The Puerto Rican economy has been in recession for well over

[3] For an in depth philosophical and economic analysis of the situation of Puerto Rico, see Rocío

a decade and is banned from declaring bankruptcy by the United States legislature and Supreme Court (La-Fountain Stokes 2016). The body of Puerto Rico—its land, people, and resources—have continually been used by the United States. From the bodies of women in trials for birth control, to the use of its land for bomb testing, to the use of Puerto Rico's men in the draft during world wars, Puerto Rico has been and continues to be a resource, a pulse one might even say, that feeds U.S. imperial power. Given the economic and political instability of Puerto Rico, Puerto Ricans have readily emigrated to the United States accounting for the first U.S. airborne migration. In the last decade, Orlando, Florida has been a prominent landing ground for many young Puerto Ricans, echoing earlier Puerto Rican migrations to New York City. According to the Pew Research Center, the population of Puerto Ricans in Florida has been rapidly growing and only accelerated in the wake of Hurricane María. The decade witnessed an unprecedented migration of Puerto Ricans out of Puerto Rico, leaving the island with a population deficit. For the first time in the island's history, there are more Puerto Ricans living outside of Puerto Rico than on the island (Cohn et al. 2014). Amongst those that have left are LGBTQ youth. Puerto Ricans cross oceans to arrive on the shores of "better opportunities" in the belly of its occupier and exploiter fleeing conditions engendered by the afterlife of occupation and colonization: violence, poverty, and lack of life opportunity.

There is a settler-colonial empire building project that sustains the backbone of the contemporary U.S. social order and informs how June 12 was framed and memorialized. To this effect, Ochoa (2016) has aptly accounted for June 12 as a manifestation of colonial terror rooted in toxic masculinity that makes rape and violence the avenues for the articulation of domination. It is a masculinity that is colonial in origin. For instance, Ochoa calls forth the conquistador Vasco Nuñez de Balboa who set his dogs on forty to sixty people who existed in a "gender" category that he did not comprehend. They would later come to be called "putos" or "sodomites," but they were shredded to pieces because the cross-roads of their identities were very much a battleground for colonization. The U.S. continues to breed normative masculinity steeped in militarization that glorifies weaponry and sexual violence most often on bodies of color, and on June 12 it was predominantly Latinx queer bodies. June 12 demonstrates the intimate relationship between colonial violence, racialized queerness, and the construction of gender. As a result, there was very little wiggle room for understanding Omar Mateen's actions outside of a narrative of violent sexual repression that could only materialize through militarized violence. The national narrative ensured we would encapsulate the event as a national tragedy, as exceptional or aberrational, when it is part of a larger webbed history of violence and terror that brought people together at Pulse in Orlando, Florida on the night of June 12.

The failures to see the conditions that make an event like June 12 possible feeds the homonationalism of our times that folds queer people of color out of the nation while simultaneously maintaining the status of U.S. exceptionalism that also frames the

Zambrana (2021).

relationship with Puerto Rico. Following Elvia Mendoza (2017) in her reflections on violence and queer undocumented peoples in the U.S., we see that state violence is not temporal or episodic, but ubiquitous, internalized, and part of the fabric of everyday life. It is for this reason that the memory of June 12 continues to matter deeply for how we think about queer Latinx life in the U.S. more broadly.

Pulse has since been turned into a memorial that seeks to create a space of sanctuary to honor the lives lost. The memorial, as can be seen in figures 1–5, weaves around the nightclub space and mosaics images from the social activism that erupted in its wake. The images are powerful and incite a sense of continuity between June 12 and the dominant framing narrative of an LGBTQ national tragedy.

figure 1.

figure 2.

figure 3.

figure 4.

figure 5.

The pride flags, the slogans about love and unity throughout the space, occlude the occasional image that reminds of the fact that the lives remembered are LGBTQ people of color.

figure 6.

However, upon closer inspection, there are occasional images that bring the intersection between race/ethnicity and sexuality to the surface. For instance, figure 7 quickly reminds the viewer that the pulses lost on June 12 were those of people of color.

figure 7.

Similarly, figure 8 calls attention to Muslims and Arabic communities and works against the construction of the terrorist envisioned by homonationalism. The memorial, as a space, is further complicated by the occasional presence of Puerto Rican and Mexican flags left as part of floating memorials and altars for loved ones alongside the bi-lingual translation of the rules of conduct and intention of the memorial (see figure 9). Hence, even in the space that produces and reproduces memory, the appreciation of the complexities of June 12 is painfully eclipsed. I wondered, as I stood in front of the names of the lives lost on June 12 (see figure 10), if the U.S. would have cared about their deaths if they died trying to cross the border, if the U.S. would care if they died protesting the corruption engendered by the colonial status of Puerto Rico, if the U.S. would care if they died actively resisting the impact of U.S. imperial power, if the U.S. would care if they had died of exhaustion laboring in agricultural fields or in the streets of Disney's empire . . . no, they would not. Their memory in the national imaginary is only made possible through the materialization of a homonationalist narrative that continues to understand the U.S. as a place of exception, much in line with President Biden's declaration of Pulse as a site of national memorial with an open-air museum, a reflecting pool, an education center with gardens, and a public plaza soon to come.

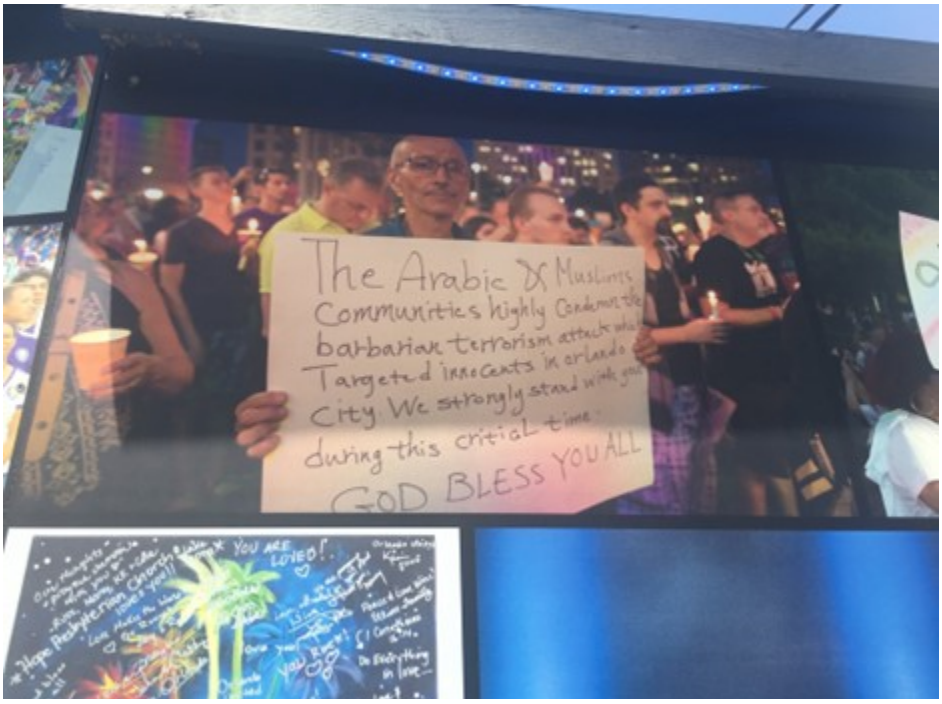

figure 8.

figure 9.

figure 10.

Returning to Puerto Rico, it is important to remember that the political and economic crisis of Puerto Rico has ruptured many pulses. Yet this has been a crisis many years in the making for an island nation that has never known independence and for the past 121 years has functioned as a resource for the construction of the U.S. as an imperial power, notably through the development of the military industrial complex. On June 12, the confluence between the outcomes of the U.S. appropriation of Puerto Rico (diasporic migrations) and

the continued development of U.S. militarization molded into U.S. nationalism became a collision. So, in thinking through the event of June 12, I simply advocate that we also attend to the complicated picture that brought the lives of folks like Javier Jorge Reyes, Akyra Monet Murray, Mercedez M. Flores, Alejandro Barrios Martinez, and Omar Mateen together in the first place.

CONCLUSION

And yet, in spite of the violence, in spite of the hate, in spite of the death, "Churches of *Joteria*," as Ochoa (2016) terms them, continue to exist. Racialized queerness continues to emerge with a praxis of resistance that demands, in Omise'eke Tinsely's (2008) words,

> connecting in ways that commodified flesh was never supposed to, loving your own kind when your kind was not supposed to exist, forging interpersonal connections that counteract imperial desires for Africans' living death. (199)

We must set our theory and praxis in an understanding of racialized queerness that does not anchor itself in a global imperial project, but rather fashioned concomitantly through the cross-currents of traumatic dislocations, and reveal themselves with possibilities of active resistance (193). In this context, it has entailed bringing to mind the cross-currents that give erotic subjectivity clearance to continue to forge sacred space for a harmonious articulation, if brief, of racialized queer identity.

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IDENTITY POLITICS, SOLIDARITY, AND THE AESTHETICS OF RACIALIZATION

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Critics of identity politics such as Mark Lilla (2017) and Asad Haider (2018) assert the often heard criticism that contemporary identity politics of marginalized or subordinated groups reinforce a vulgar tribalism. Identity politics is perceived as that which cannot serve as a force for just societal change since it is thought to undermine the possibility of crossing differences and engendering solidarity.[1] Realizing this possibility is seen to be especially important for addressing the racial polarization and cultural divisions that are evidenced in the United States today. However, such critiques against identity politics jettison any deep understanding or recognition of the structures and orientations that sustain the call to racial identity politics as found, for example, in the Black Lives Matter movement. In this article, I will examine what those structures and orientations are and explore the ways in which such an examination may reframe our understanding of what it is that might be required for the cultivation of solidarity.

Identity politics is a notion originally conceived in the late 1970s by the Combahee River Collective (CRC), a group of Black lesbian feminists who did not see parts of their experiences and concerns reflected or addressed by either the Black liberation movement or the feminist movement. For the CRC, "the most radical politics emerged from placing their own experience at the center of their analysis and rooting their politics in their own particular identities" (Haider 2018, 7–8). At the same time, the CRC also emphasized coalition building, since one of their other grounding assumptions was that major systems of oppression were interlocking, and that any real change or liberation could only come about through working in solidarity, through coalition building, with all who are oppressed (Combahee River Collective 1977, 8–9).

[1] Utilizing Lawrence Blum's (2007) definition, solidarity indicates "a kind of pulling together of a group in the face of perceived adversity, [which indicates] generally but not necessarily human-created adversity" (53).

Haider (2018) argues that contemporary identity politics has strayed far from what its originators conceived it to be. Both Haider and Lilla (2017) point to the notions that Amy Chua (2018), in her article for *The Guardian*, identified as plaguing contemporary identity politics: (1) the stance against universalist rhetoric; (2) epistemological exclusivity, which indicates that "out-group members cannot share in the knowledge possessed by in-group members" (e.g., "You can't understand x because you are white"); and (3) the stance against cultural appropriation, which is "rooted in the belief that groups have exclusive rights to their own histories, symbols, and traditions." Lilla (2017) writes that identity politics "fetishizes our individual and group attachments, applauds self-absorption," and thus is a depoliticizing force (132). Solidarity, for Lilla, has to be cultivated through the realm of what he calls "shared citizenship" (126), which he states is the "work of generations" (132) and which arises from the old model of citizenship from which we have purportedly strayed. The old model emphasized

> passion and commitment, but also knowledge and argument. Curiosity about the world outside your own head and about people unlike yourself. Care for this country and its citizens, all of them, and a willingness to sacrifice for them. And the ambition to imagine a common future for all of us. (140–41)

Here, solidarity seems to be based on the holding of certain values and dispositions together, values and dispositions that are to be cultivated over generations. One has to ask, however, what do these values and dispositions actually mean within the context of the different experiences that different groups in this country have undergone? Whose values and dispositions are actually being upheld? What are the accepted forms of the embodiment and enactment of these values and dispositions? Without an engagement with such questions, Lilla's articulation of citizenship remains aligned with socialization intent on reproducing the socio-political status quo, where an "in-group" can be strengthened and maintained only if identity affiliations are bracketed (DesRoches 2015, 540).

But even more so, as theorists such as Katherine Franke (2016) and Shaireen Rasheed (2020) have indicated, Lilla's argument remains in the service of repositioning whiteness. As Rasheed notes, the exhortation to bracket identity affiliations and the lived experiences that go along with such affiliations are done in the name of a purported neutrality, which in reality puts the very existence and safety of those who are subordinated and marginalized in jeopardy. Quoting Franke with reference to Mark Lilla's attack on identity politics, Rasheed writes:

> [i]t is a liberalism that figures the lives and interests of white men as the neutral, unmarked terrain around which a politics of "common interest" can and should be built. And it is a liberalism that regards the protests of people of color and women as a complaint or a feeling, ignoring the facts upon which those protests are based—facts about real, dead, tortured, raped, and starved bodies. (2020, 156)

In other words, Lilla's (2017) critique of identity politics can be seen itself to be built upon the shoulders of a pernicious white identity politics that serves to reinforce a system of racism.

Approaching the critique of identity politics from a Marxist foundation and thus in distinction from Lilla's focus on the ideals of shared citizenship, Haider (2018) tries, nevertheless, to point toward a solidarity that goes beyond the binary of identity politics and class solidarity and therefore beyond any "orthodox class reductionism" (Chen 2018). Haider notes that early socialist organizations did not recognize the uniqueness of Black workers' demands, which stemmed from the discrimination and racist violence they were facing within the workplace and beyond (59). Thus, Haider provides a nod toward the view that white supremacy serves to buttress racial solidarity among whites over class solidarity across races, and thus serves as an obstacle to building socialism (51). But concomitantly, Haider argues that contemporary identity politics that take the form of racial identity politics actually serve "as the *neutralization* of movements against racial oppression" by setting up the ideology of Blackness versus anti-Blackness, which hinges on the very epistemological exclusivity and protectionist stance towards a group's histories, symbols and traditions as noted earlier (12; emphasis in original). Hence, according to Haider, contemporary identity claims "lose their grounding in mass movements" (22). However, as the Field Street Collective (2018) note in their review of Haider's book: "[t]he book's narrow conception of identity does not investigate the term as a potential signifier of shared history or culture. It is also unclear whether attachments to specific identities should or could be 'set aside' without the transformation of the conditions that materially reproduce them." Correlatively, as Listen Chen (2018) notes, Haider fails to offer any sustained analysis of the "historical *production* of race" (emphasis in original). Consequently, to illuminate that which sustains the call to racial identity politics for marginalized or subordinated populations such as those represented by the Black Lives Matter movement within the United States, I will draw upon insights from critical phenomenology and affect theory in conjunction with Nell Irvin Painter's (2010) historical accounting of the enlargement of whiteness, W. E. B. Du Bois' (1920) reflections on the 1917 East St. Louis riots against Black workers, and Arlie Russell Hochschild's (2016) ethnographic research on the United States Tea Party members' adherence to conservative politics. If the call to solidarity is to be delinked from the discourse of domination, it must take into account both the relational as well as intersectional nature of any identity, which consequently will point toward the need for a differential mobilization of solidarity predicated on a shift of current material and affective conditions.

THE AESTHETICS OF RACIALIZATION

What gets lost or remains unaddressed in the way the critiques against identity politics are currently framed is precisely the reality of what I call the mobilization of the aesthetics of racialization, by which I mean our experiencing the world and coming to our identities by being interpellated through and by certain movements, patternings, cadences and tempos

in relation to spaces, bodies, and things. Such mobilization is to be understood through the terms of the socio-political materiality of race. The socio-political materiality of race is a counterpoint to any naturalistic or biological sense of race. But this does not mean that race is just a socially constructed idea and thus merely "a cultural *representation* of people" (Saldanha 2006, 9; emphasis in original). As noted by Linda Martin Alcoff (2014), race is not a "mythic overlay that can be discursively corrected" (266). Rather, drawing upon ideas presented by theorists such as Charles Mills (2014), Alcoff (2014) and Michalinos Zembylas (2017), we can understand the socio-political materiality of race to indicate race's reality in the way macro-historical events (i.e., slavery, colonial conquest, imperial wars, famines, land annexation) are entangled with "material, affective and discursive elements . . . [which] might include skin color, segregation, colonialism, oppression, law, language, the educational system and migration," enabling the very *happening* of race and its lived experience (Zembylas 2017, 401; emphasis in original).

Zembylas (2017) highlights the notion that race is a contingent but not arbitrary event and is the "'product' of affective power relations" (401), where affects are to be understood in the following ways: affects are (1) "transpersonal [in that] they are "positioned within and between bodies, formed through relations and interactions between bodies." They are (2) indicative of "capacities rather than existing properties of the body." In other words, affects indicate the unspecifiable-in-advance things a body may be capable of doing in any given situation. Lastly, they are (3) "non-cognitive" in that they are pre-representational (399). Importantly, this understanding of affect subverts the binaries of "power/resistance, public/private . . . the world 'out there' (external) and the body (internal)" (2020, 42). Affective elements sustain the very event of racialization.

Zembylas (2017) rightly emphasizes that a body's capacities emerge as an open-ended achievement on the basis of affective power relations and thus such capacities are not pre-determined by social structures or fixed identities (401). Hence, a key educational task, as Zembylas notes, would be to explore how new configurations of affective openings may arise within the educational endeavor. However, for the purposes of this paper in understanding the oppressive social relations to which Black bodies are often subjected, and to which racial identity politics is often a response, it is important to not rush to the theoretical endpoint of affects' liberatory potential: to call out a body's capacities in ways that "enable new ways of feeling and being with others, beyond what is already known and assumed" (402). As will be illustrated in the sections below, tarrying in the exploration and analysis of the patternings and movements through which bodies in this current social and political moment in the United States often emerge as Black provides one with a broader prism through which to understand both the call to racial identity politics as well as the call toward solidarity.[2]

[2] It is important to note here that the analysis that follows below is not an assertion of the neoliberal understanding of identity politics as an ethos of vulnerability. In the neoliberal narrative, it is upon a victimized identity that identity groups make their claims on "rights, status and privilege" (Brunila and Rossi 2017, 288). Here, the victimized identity is defined through "psycho-emotional vulnerabilities," "individual harm and psychic pain" (291). Therapeutic solutions are offered and prioritized, thereby "individualizing structural exclusions" (292). What is foreclosed is the ability to view societal problems as structural problems, which require a change in policies in order to address them. In addition, with

Sara Ahmed's (2007) analysis of the different bodily orientations or starting points for bodies marked through whiteness and for those of color, is instructive here. According to Ahmed:

> whiteness indicates a body that is extended by the spaces it inhabits, and where those spaces have already taken its shape. To be extended by spaces indicates that certain physical objects, styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, habits are within reach.

In contrast, she continues:

> the body of color is structured/produced through a disorientation of the body-that-is-not-at-home, which keeps certain physical objects, styles, capacities, aspirations, and techniques out of reach. Here, the body is not extended by the spaces one inhabits, but encounters explicit points of stress, pressure points, and points of stoppage that restrict what one can do, bringing to the fore the background into which white bodies normally sink. (154)[3]

Current media accounts are rife with conflict-laden incidents in which social interactions undergone by Black people reflect the playing out in everyday life of the theoretical analysis provided by Ahmed. Shopping in a store, driving a car, walking down the street, jogging in a park, barbecuing or bird-watching in a park, standing in an elevator, sleeping in a common room at a university, eating lunch on campus, sitting at a Starbucks, entering their own home, leaving their Airbnb rental, are all but a few of the many everyday occurrences where Black bodies have been actualized as Black through affective power relations and reacted to with fear, hostility or suspicion, illustrating, sometimes with devastating effect, how bodies of color are not extended by the spaces they inhabit (Sinha and Rasheed 2020, 16).

Correlative to Ahmed's analysis, theorists such as Helen Ngo (2016), Tyson Lewis (2016), and Alia Al-Saji (2014) highlight our fundamental relation to the world through the historico-racial body schema. Deriving from the Merleau-Pontian notion of the body schema, which, as Lewis notes, signifies the "pre-representational sensory motor capacity functioning below the level of reflective awareness, and 'which provides a posture toward a certain task, actual or possible,'" the historico-racial body schema extends our

the neoliberal rendering of identity politics, as subjects are made weak and interchangeable, they are also made competitive, resulting in what is termed "oppression olympics," where groups compete for the distribution of reparative measures based on the ranking of the harms to which they have been subjected. The understanding of the systemic interconnection of harms is foreclosed. Furthermore, the neoliberal rendering of the ethos of vulnerability is to be distinguished from the decolonial analysis of the harms and trauma that befall indigenous populations and non-majoritarian identity groups. The decolonial analysis of traumatized embodied positionalities exceeds and deconstructs the boundaries of the neoliberal framework of individual rights and privileges. See Adefarkan (2018).

[3] See also Sinha (2018, 220).

understanding of the body schema as already racialized (Sinha and Rasheed 2020, 15). Both Ahmed (2017) and Lewis (2016) note that race doesn't just interrupt the body schema but is constitutive of it and structures its mode of operation. Thus, as Lewis highlights, the body can serve as a site of the "inscription" and reinscription "of racialization" (Lewis 2016, 127). Ngo (2016) notes that the above occurs effortlessly through the recalling and reiteration of "responses that reside within the body schema," and it takes place pre-cognitively and pre-psychologically on the basis of habituation (854). As Ngo explains, habituation indicates a bodily orienting where one actively takes up residence in the spatiality of something, reanimating the past into the present. For example, "the repeated tensing of one's muscles, the stiffening of the back, the hardening or narrowing of the eyes or expression, the flincing or recoil, the hurried indignant movement toward another [or] the solicitous going toward, are all actions through which one may relate to the other as threatening, to be feared, [to be questioned], mistrusted, disdained or even pitied." Such bodily action arises easily "and points toward a relation with the racialized other as an over-determined body that is repeatedly re-positioned as such in the very momemt of bodily gesture and visual perception" (Sinha and Rasheed 2020, 17). Racializing perception thus closes down the receptive capacity and affective openness of vision (Al-Saji 2014, 140).

As I will show in the section below, the effects of social and political practices, understood through the entanglement of "affective, material and discursive elements," have resulted in and reinforced habituated ways of seeing and feeling about Blackness, which while not sedimented in a hard and fast way, are continuously reanimated and operative on a wide social scale (Zembylas 2020, 42). Habituation as marked by reanimation of the past into the present does not signify the historical *predetermination* of orientations and actions, but rather, utilizing Frank Margonis's (2016) conceptualization of neocolonial relationality through the metaphor of "neocolonial dances," it signifies "an extension of behaviors and scripts handed down from prior generations" (8) which indicates also "a re-creation that occurs with new contours and new moves" (6). At the same time, Margonis notes that such dances are accompanied by an element of force such that one "often fall[s] into these dances in obedience to the institutions and social relationships they inhabit" (7).

Hence, one can argue that it is the very living-in-the-world through the historico-racial body schema that underpins the contemporary orientation toward racial identity politics as found in the Black Lives Matter movement. The historical iteration of Black freedom movements aiming to tackle "issues of Black inequality," which Yohuru Williams (2016) highlights as coalescing around the "campaigns for decent housing, quality education, the right to vote, equal access to transportation and places of public accommodation, fair labor practices, and freedom from both legal and extralegal form of Jim Crow justice" can be seen to be a response to the reanimation of the white historico-racial body schema and its habituated privileges (xiii). Habituated white privileges are to be understood as the settling into the spatiality of something as a region of power and possibility in ways foreclosed from or not as easily accessible to bodies of color.[4] Such reanimation and privilege are encoded

[4] See Lewis (2016, 10) and Ngo (2016, 850).

through social policies and practices that are grounded in white supremacy, which takes its shape at the very intersection of racism and capitalism.

INSIGHTS OF INTERDISCIPLINARY THOUGHT: PAINTER, DU BOIS, AND HOCHSCHILD

Nell Irvin Painter's (2010) genealogy of whiteness, read in tandem with Du Bois' (1920) ruminations on the East St. Louis riots against Black workers in the essay "Of Work and Wealth," powerfully illuminates the intersection of racism and capitalism. While neither text is in itself phenomenological, they can be read through each other to foreground the very process of the sedimentation of the phenomenological and affective dynamics of whiteness as it occurs through such an intersection.

Painter chronicles whiteness not through a "single enduring definition," but as that which gains its contours through multiple historical enlargements, taking place "against a backdrop of the Black/white dichotomy" (201). The expansion of whiteness, understood through the terms of who could be shepherded under it and the structures that shape it, could be seen to take place under the influence of a number of social and political events; through the persistent racial animus that depended upon the invocation of an abject, racialized other; and through the "selective democratization of capitalism," indicating the inclusion of white non-elites into the process of economic mobility made possible through policies and practices that concomitantly reinforced the racial stratification of society (Robinson 2019). Painter (2010) recounted how whiteness was originally linked to a Teutonic/Anglo-Saxon heritage, signifying more than just skin color. Nineteenth century racial science and theory viewed European groups through a hierarchy of races, with those designated as Anglo-Saxon or Teutonic occupying the upper echelon. Hence, in the United States, the Irish, Italians, Southern and Eastern Europeans, all at one time or another occupied the lower racial rungs. However, unlike African Americans, Asians, and Native Americans, who were left out of the European racial hierarchy altogether and viewed instead through an even lower racial or "alien" to the American designation, the previously reviled European groups were able to became part of the white American fabric (357).

Painter (2010) details the alignment of European ethnic groups with "Americaness" and whiteness on the basis of a number of factors, of which I will provide a brief and by no means comprehensive overview. Through the removal of property qualifications for voting for free white males in the first half of the nineteenth-century, "male Europeans and their free male children could be naturalized and vote as white" (201). Their right to vote "led to involvement in politics, government patronage and civil service jobs," and eventually control of the labor unions (205). Government programs such as the 1933 New Deal benefitted the European ethnic immigrants but not the hundreds of thousand working class Blacks who had moved from the South to the North and were left out of the New Deal's provisions on labor, housing, and education (Painter 2010, 347–48). Black workers working on farms and in domestic service, were excluded from the newly created Social Security administration (348). Economic competition was intertwined with racial violence,

and inclusion in whiteness was further solidified for groups such as the Irish, by fighting against those still considered not white. In addition, with the rise of Nazi Germany, the US intellectual ethos began to connect racial science, *as it applied to whites*, to racial prejudice, and intellectuals such as Horace Kallen began to speak of American culture's greatness as lying in its plurality (Painter 2010, 327, 362).

After WWII federal programs such as the GI Bill of rights, unemployment compensation, low interest fixed rate long term loans and mortgages, 14.5 billion dollars worth of education subsidies for Veterans, and FHA financing of more than 120 billion dollars in housing, continued to set the ground for postwar prosperity for many of the ethnic groups (366–67). But since the GI Bill did not include an "antidiscrimination clause [and the Bill was] administered locally along Jim Crow lines," African Americans were left out from these programs' reach and benefits (371). With the decimation of urban areas directly linked to the inequity of federal funding, Black families, prevented from moving to the suburbs, remained behind in urban centers, now reframed through the imagery of "the Black ghetto" (372). Americanness and whiteness came to be equated with the middle class, but African Americans were effectively shut out of such an identification. Additionally, media normalized the presence of the newer ethnic groups as American. As Painter notes, the 1950's made Frank Sinatra and Annette Funicello "into One Hundred Percent Americans who happened to be Italian" (368). Thus, taking all the above into account, Painter writes, the figure of the Black person became "conflated with those of the degenerate families and alien races of the century's first half" (372).

What is key to understand is that this enlargement of whiteness, which took place in relation to an abject racialized other in conjunction with the racial stratification that arose from the "racially exclusive pathways of mobility" (Robinson 2019) worked in an embodied way, through the affective, "material and discursive effects of 'social relations of power'" (Adefarakan 2018, 240). It functioned as a force upon bodies where there was a taking hold of and a holding onto of certain patternings and movements, among and between bodies, spaces and things.[5] This point can be brought into relief through a reading of Du Bois' (1920) essay, "Of Work and Wealth," which provides a snapshot of the human toll exacted by some of the historical events chronicled by Painter.

In "Of Work and Wealth," Du Bois drew out the experience of the resentment and conflict sown within white workers against Black workers through the intersection of racism and capitalism. The white American worker had begun to reap the benefits of unionization, not just in terms of higher wages, but in terms of the rising of their dreams toward a middle-class existence and all its trappings. However, unionization and its benefits were more often than not foreclosed for Black workers since most unions would not admit them. As the need for workers increased on the part of the Northern employers, they turned to the Black workers in the South. As Du Bois (1920) wrote, driven by the need "to escape hunger and insult, the hand of oppression, and the shadow of death" (90), they were willing to work for the low wages offered by Northern employers, thereby undercutting the white unionized workers and "their dream of a great monopoly of common labor" (93).

[5] See Ngo (2016, 864).

Union leaders deflected the subsequent fury of the white workers onto the Black workers by pointing to the very fact of their Blackness and the degeneracy it purportedly signified to be the cause of the white workers' ills.

For the purposes of this paper, what is important to emphasize is that Du Bois (1920) was pointing to something that could not be encapsulated by the notion that it was merely a question of a false or illusory understanding on behalf of the white workers who could not see how the structures of the selective democratization of capitalism served to harm *both* Blacks and whites. It was not merely a question of white workers' inability to see how the very exclusion of Black workers from the structures of economic guardianship, such as unions, could be used by those in power to protect their own economic interests at the expense of workers' interests by compelling Black workers to work for wages that undercut the white workers and their unions. Du Bois was also highlighting the fomentation of conflict in ways that that could not be collapsed into merely economic or class terms and thus understood solely through the strictures of false belief or false consciousness. He wrote:

> Everything in the history of the United States, from slavery to Sunday supplements, from disenfranchisement to residence segregation, from "Jim-Crow" cars to a "Jim-Crow" army draft—all this history of discrimination and insult festered to make men think and willing to think that the venting of their unbridled anger against 12,000,000 humble, upstriving workers was a way of settling the industrial tangle of the ages. It was the logic of the broken plate, which, seared of old across its pattern, cracks never again, save along the old destruction. (94)

And:

> So hell flamed in East St. Louis! The white men drove even Black union men out of their unions and when the Black men, beaten by night and assaulted, flew to arms and shot back at the marauders, five thousand rioters arose and surged like a crested stormwave, from noonday until midnight; they killed and beat and murdered; they dashed out the brains of children and stripped off the clothes of women; they drove victims into the flames and hanged the helpless to the lighting poles. Fathers were killed before the faces of mothers; children were burned; heads were cut off with axes; pregnant women crawled and spawned in dark, wet fields. . . . Firemen, policemen, and militiamen stood with hanging hands or even joined eagerly with the mob. (94–95)

Du Bois' powerful depictions pointed to the very *festering* of the history of discrimination and insult levelled against those marked as Black, as it played out or was lived through the white workers' bodies, minds, and actions. We can understand a festering as a progressive deterioration within one's whole being, occurring through the reanimating of old fissures and breakages, as Du Bois' "logic of the broken plate" seems to signify. A festering of the history of discrimination and insult gives rise to certain "contingent but not arbitrary," to

use Zembylas' phrasing, relations and interactions among and between bodies and spaces, providing the contours of what some bodies who are at "home" can do and what other bodies not-at-home can or cannot do. In short, the reviling of Blackness must also be understood in terms of the recurring reanimation of the memory of that which is to be abased, a memory inscribed and reinscribed in bodies as a muscle memory that takes hold and *is held* through a living-in-the-world that functions through the iterations of the history of discrimination and insult entangled within social structures and practices.

Significantly, traces of the patternings and movements based on such a festering continue to be evidenced in contemporary society today, haunting our everyday existence and shaping our perceptions and comportments toward each other and the world.[6] How police may react when they encounter Black bodies, how store employees may react to customers of color, and how non-Black people may react to Black bodies going about their everyday lives may be seen to be evocative of Du Bois' "logic of the broken plate." Correlatively, one can make the case that a corresponding logic is at play in the deeply conservative orientation of Tea Party members living in the economically, environmentally, and educationally downtrodden Louisiana Bayou County, as depicted by Arlie Russell Hochschild (2016) in her book *Strangers in Their Own Land*. While a full accounting of Hochschild's ethnographic research is not possible within the space of this paper, and while Hochschild does not present any sustained analysis of race within this work, we can nevertheless interpret her account of her subjects' narratives, in part, through a phenomenological and affective framework, based upon her descriptions of their orientations to other people and the world.

Hochschild highlights her subjects' sense that they were stuck patiently waiting in line to attain the "American Dream of prosperity and security," while others such as Blacks, women, immigrants, refugees, even animals on the endangered species list, were cutting in line ahead of them undeservedly (136–39). She notes, "[m]issing from the image of Blacks in the minds of those I came to know was a man or woman standing patiently in line next to them waiting for a well-deserved reward." And, for many "older right-wing whites . . . Blacks entered their lives, not as neighbors and colleagues, but through the television screen and newspaper," which presented the contrasting images of rich sports and entertainment stars and Blacks on welfare (147). Hochschild quotes a restaurant proprietor who states:

> I hear stories and they break my heart. But then sometimes I don't know if I'm being had. I get men applying for a job. I give them a job and they don't show up. Is it just to put on their record that they applied and can continue on unemployment insurance? . . . A man from the Red Cross came asking for food for Sunday dinner for the homeless. I gave it to him because it's food. But I don't even want to go over there to see. Maybe they're not trying to be independent. (146)

Hochschild also highlights her subjects' distrust of government as driven not only by the sense that it displaced community, took away individual freedom, failed to protect citizenry, and was populated by officials who did not live modestly, but also by the sense

[6] See Balfour (2010, 556).

that "[the federal government] was taking from people of good character and giving to people of bad character" (114). Hochschild (2016) noted that while her subjects did not mention social class, "and enormous care was given to speak delicately and indirectly of Blacks, although fear-tinged talk of Muslims was blunt," their flashpoint pointed toward "the local welfare offices that gave federal money to beneficiaries—Louisiana Head Start, Louisiana Family Independence Temporary assistance Program, Medicaid, the national School Lunch and Breakfast Program, [and] the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children" (114–15).

Though Hochschild highlights issues of unacknowledged class conflict at play in her subjects' reasoning and actions, I argue that the issue of race could also be seen lurking prominently in the background. Her subjects' narratives foregrounded how perceptions can be closed off from seeing certain groups as being subject to oppression in ways that go beyond the struggles and hardships suffered by one's own group, in this case, the members of the Tea Party in Louisiana Bayou County. Hochschild's subjects' perceptions and interactions with others was habituated through the policies and practices that constituted their milieu: for example, de facto school segregation and the residential segregation upon which it depends, distorted or deficient media representation of people of color, predatory lending practices that devastate communities of color, voter suppression, inequitable funding for schools within communities of color, and neglect in the hiring and retention of educators of color. Such policies and practices contribute to the expulsion, disenfranchisement, or disempowerment of certain groups from the various social, cultural and political spheres of life, serving to cultivate a generalized perception that cannot see groups such as Blacks, for example, as having stood with others "side by side" or as also working hard without reaping its benefits. The orientation of distrust that thus arises leads to the feeling that such groups are unfairly cutting ahead of one in line and thus empowers and legitimizes certain ways of settling into the spatiality of something, that is, how it is possible to move about and interact with others within surrounding spaces. Hence, while old insults and discriminations take on modern forms, they continue to animate responses along the old trajectory, along the "old destruction" that has never fully healed (Du Bois 1920). The reanimation of the historico-racial body schema thus informs Hochschild's subjects' very understanding of the context of and response to their struggles and hardships in ways that reinforce structures of white supremacy.

CONCLUSION: RE-FRAMING SOLIDARITY

What might solidarity require within the context of the reality of an aesthetics of racialization and the existence of the habituated historico racial body schema? Based upon the preceding discussion, I posit that solidarity needs to be reframed as built upon the recognition of the ways we are relationally-bound together historically, structurally, institutionally, and territorially.[7]

[7] I am borrowing from Sigal Ben-Porath (2011) and Zembylas (2012) the language of relationality as signifying a being tied or bound together historically, institutionally and territorially. However, I am not

As it stands, under Mark Lilla's (2017) account, the ethical burden of solidarity falls disproportionately on the shoulders of those who are multiply subordinated and oppressed, precisely because the different attachments and experiences brought about by the different facets of one's identity are seen as having to be bracketed so that social bonding may occur. But the rub here is that social bonding is assumed only on the basis of one's alignment with the dominant modes of understanding and enacting ideals such as equality, freedom and justice. Correlatively, Asad Haider (2018), notwithstanding his nod against class reductionism, also builds his conception of solidarity on an abstractness that does not adequately speak to the material reality of racialization. Calls for solidarity thus become empty abstractions from real material conditions and often end up serving to perpetuate the oppressive identity politics of the dominant majority.

As Elizabeth Cole and Zakiya Luna (2010) note, those with less power and privilege are burdened with the toll of a "double shift" of the work required for solidarity: "Not only must they do the political work, but they must also struggle to decode what is unsaid and then communicate that information back to their coalition partners, who may not be eager to receive feedback reminding them of their blind spots" (94). Cole and Luna further highlight, also in contrast to Lilla and Haider's view, that identity is not a preventative to coalitional work generating political alliances. As their research on the "real-life political struggle and resistance" of activists from various identity categories showed, political alliances could be generated on the basis of "cautious and measured cooperation" as well as "a sense of some shared values," where political identities were "constructed *through* political work, rather than outside of it" (94, 95; emphasis in original).[8] What is important to keep in mind, as Priyamvada Gopal has noted, is that "[s]olidarity is a difficult practice that requires ongoing work" (Carby and Gopal 2020). This difficult practice entails that we understand how our historical, structural, institutional and territorial positioning plays out at not just the cognitive, but also the embodied, material and affective levels. In other words, solidarity needs to be grounded in a people's ability to access their ethical and critical capacity to recognize how the many identity positions of race, caste, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, disability, etc., that any individual inhabits, is linked to certain discourses and power relations. Further, solidarity requires recognition of how different facets of one's identity affect and interact with the different facets of another's identity, serving as the site of oppression of others as well as subordination by others. Finally, it requires recognition of the intersections of a given identity position by other categories of difference, resulting in a reinforcing, weakening or reconfiguration of that very identity.

utilizing this language to signify our ties and linkages in terms of our "common objectives and interests" (555). Rather, I'm using the language of relationality to point to how our actions, choices, practices, values, and beliefs, as well as the structures in which we partcipate, help create what others experience and who others are and become.

[8] The Black Lives Matter (n.d.) website, for example, highlights the need to move beyond "narrow nationalism," and the affirmation of "Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum." Hence, the focus on Black lives is posited as opening up to solidarity and political alliance with subordinated groups, as well as centering "those who have been marginalized within Black liberation movements."

Significantly, wherever and whenever an individual occupies identity positions of power and privilege in relation to others, the ethical burden of solidarity falls upon one in a pressing way.

While solidarity "starts with awareness of interdependence" (Direk 2018, 106), it also needs to be sustained by material enactments that enable one to be moved, to feel, and to perceive differently, so that one's habituated ways of moving and being may begin to take on different patterns and contours. Solidarity is predicated on the possibility of unsettling the ways one settles into the spatiality of something: the positionalities one currently occupies must be understood and engaged from different positionalities. One way to unpack what is meant here is to draw on the need for what Margonis (2016) described as "delinking" from the sustained patterns of colonial violence that were part of the founding of the United States and from the "patterns of thought . . . [that] rationalize and normalize [the] founding acts of violence and their contemporary legacies" (1). As an example, Margonis pointed to the necessity of unsettling imperial authority that finds its iteration or echoes in authoritarian discipline as it emerges in detention or punishment rooms, as well as the standard didactic curricular practices in schools, which are leveled disproportionately toward students of color. Here, what is to be interrupted and redirected is the repeated framing and living of the interaction between students and teachers as one of "imposition and resistance," which frames students as culturally deficient, defiant or unteachable (Margonis 2016, 7).

Correlatively, Zembylas (2020) spoke of the importance of "dewalling atmospheres" understood through Vrasti and Dayal's exhortation to "become aware of [the] class and colonial dimension of many of the taken for granted and innocently functional arrangements operative in Western liberal societies" (45). In this vein, Lyudmilla Bryzzheva (2018), self-identifying as a White Russian immigrant educator, highlighted the need for her ongoing vigilance in staying open to the ways in which interactions with her students of color served to unsettle her ease and familiarity with her movements, perceptions, and actions within the space of the racially conscious classroom that she was trying to create. Bryzzheva detailed how her attempts at arranging the classroom space and interaction through the employment of affinity groups and circles inadvertently ended up prioritizing the norms of whiteness and needs of her white students. She writes:

> Regardless of intention, in our circle space, participants are invited to inhabit whiteness. In hidden but real ways our circle is about control. We monitor in verbal and non-verbal ways whose stories and what stories are most welcome, whose emotional safety will be guarded, what emotional expressions will be legitimated, what types of disagreements and with whom are deemed appropriate, and how deviations from our unspoken norms will be disciplined: sometimes via silence, sometimes by switching the topic or via non-verbal expressions. Niceness and consensus (even if uneasy) are consistently elevated and legitimated. (251)

Thus, Bryzzheva (2018) highlights the ongoing need to stay open to the ways she is ambushed by her own whiteness and to interrupt the whiteness of and in a space (255).

Hence, both the notions of delinking and dewalling point to the very unsettling of Western liberal ideals and arrangements, such as those of

> responsible citizenship/subjecthood, to the rules of assessment, etiquette, and advancement, guarding access to our institutions and fields of action, as well as the values promoted in our normative discourses and the desires perpetuated in our "structures of feeling." (Vrasti and Dayal 2016, 1004)

This is because such ideals and arrangements have often served to both exclude the subordinated from dominant discourses and their terms of universality, as well as violently fit the subordinated into a dominant group's normalized discourse.[9] Consequently, dewalling atmospheres and delinking from sustained patterns of colonial violence would entail a redirecting or redrawing of the spatial and affective dimensions of life. This could then lead to a reconfiguring of one's "bodily habits of movement, gesture, perception and orientation," so that what a body is capable of doing as well as the interactions called out among bodies may take on potentially less oppressive/oppressed and more just configurations (Ngo 2016, 848). It is through such unsettling that the space for new ways of being, moving, feeling, perceiving, and thinking to arise may be potentially opened and meanings other than those engendered by dominant narratives and interactions may emerge, motivating a coming together and commitment to working together in ways that were perhaps previously limited or foreclosed.

I have argued that the movement toward identity politics among subordinated groups can be seen as a response to real material conditions, to the aesthetics of racialization, which overflows the rhetoric that is expressed by identity politics' castigation as epistemologically exclusive, protective of its histories, symbols and traditions, and reinstating siloed identities incapable of political mobilization. It is only by foregrounding how we come to our identities through the habituated movements, patterns, orientations, and capacities called out of our bodies in relation to spaces, places, other bodies and things, that can we begin to understand what sustains the call toward racial identity politics. Due to the socio-historical workings of white supremacy, which subtends embodied orientations and potentialities, the work of solidarity asks different things from differently-positioned people. Most significantly, solidarity is predicated on both pedagogical and policy enactments that may enable the redirecting or redrawing of our affective lives so we may come together in ways that may be potentially sustained and marked by genuine recognition of and responsiveness to those who are oppressed and subordinated.

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[9] See Medina 2013; Eze 1997; O'Loughlin 2020.

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RACIAL POLITICS AND THE POSTRACIAL UNIVERSITY

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In the summer of 2020, it seemed like racial politics had a clear impact on universities, as the murder of George Floyd set off protests by Black Lives Matter (BLM) movements in the US and other countries. The protests also reinvigorated existing student movements to "decolonize the university" in North America and the UK, calling for institutional recognition and accountability for historic links with the transatlantic slave trade and colonial empire. But politics had also been relevant to university life over the years preceding the protests, as conservative politicians and governments, as well as white supremacist "alt-right" groups, supported moral panics about free speech and academic freedom at universities. This combination forms the context for contemporary racial politics in and across western countries such as the US, UK, France, and Canada, among others.

In this paper, I examine how racial politics affects whiteness in universities through the relationship between racialized bodies, ideas and spaces. The university is situated within white colonial and settler colonial projects that underpin the nation in the UK, US and Canada, respectively. While the institutional whiteness of universities reflects these structural conditions of whiteness in society, it is also more flexible and dynamic in the present. In this context, I consider postracial whiteness in the university, drawing on two incidents in the UK and Canada, respectively. I argue that the discourse of academic freedom is mobilized amid contemporary racial politics to do postracial work in universities, drawing on Sara Ahmed's (2007; 2019) work on whiteness and the university and David Theo Goldberg's (2015) theorization of the postracial. I make a distinction between what academic freedom is and what the discourse of academic freedom does, focusing on the latter as a tool that is used to make a claim to the postracial while asserting the logic of whiteness.[1] It is a form of resistance both to the presence of racialized faculty and students

[1] It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss what academic freedom is or ought to be, though it opens up another question, as the editor noted: how does academic freedom itself do postracial work in the university, separate from the discourse about academic freedom? This question implies that academic freedom has its own content that would allow it to do postracial work (or not), which is different from what

in the university and their naming and making coloniality and racism explicit as part of current racial politics.

In the first part of this paper, I lay out the theoretical framework by discussing how whiteness in society (Mills 1997) is related to whiteness in universities (Ahmed 2007; 2019) and the role of the postracial (Goldberg 2015) through the relationship between bodies, spaces and ideas. In the second part of this paper, I analyze the two examples, one at a British university in 2018 and the second at a Canadian university in 2020, to illustrate this idea. Lastly, in the third part, I discuss the significance of contemporary racial politics to these two cases.

WHITENESS

The racial contract describes the relationship between white and non-white groups that underpins whiteness as a political system, as well as an epistemological one. Whiteness is a system of racial privilege of white groups over non-white groups with material outcomes that benefit white groups. The racial contract was used to justify genocide of Indigenous communities in the Americas, transatlantic slavery, and European colonialism in other parts of the world from 1492 until post World War II (Mills 1997, 21). The structure of European colonialism was built on the racialized hierarchy between white European colonizers over the non-white, non-European colonized, justifying not only political rule but also the extraction of material resources from the colonies and sent back to benefit the colonizers. Although colonial and white settler societies have moved from an explicitly colonial racial order in the past to an implicit racialized hierarchy in the present, the racial contract and its logic persists.

The foundation of the university reflects the colonial conditions of white societies, particularly their direct and indirect ties to slavery and colonialism. British and North American universities were built for the privileged—primarily men—in society. These universities provided an education for men who owned land and property (including enslaved people) who would go on to take up leadership positions in the government, the British colonial empire, or the Church (Collini 2018, 17; Wilder 2013). Colleges and universities benefited from the profits generated by slavery and colonialism. For example, at Jesus College, University of Cambridge, wealthy donors were merchants whose wealth came from the slave trade, as well as sugar and cotton. The College also had students from plantation families in the Caribbean and/or who had connections to the slave trade.

the discourse does. However, I would suggest that academic freedom as a principle isn't weighted, by itself, in one direction or another, but operates within the contexts and structures of the university. Thus, while academic freedom is important in and to the university, the emphasis remains on the analysis of how the postracial and whiteness work together to maintain a hegemonic status quo; academic freedom can further it, or not. For more on this topic, see the contributions in Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt and Kakali Bhattacharya (2021).

Their tuition fees and living expenses, derived from these sources, indirectly benefited the institution (Jesus College 2019, 7).

Colonial histories are part of the location of universities. Many Canadian universities are located on unceded Indigenous territory, referring to territory that was appropriated by the Canadian government from the Indigenous peoples who have lived there since before English or French colonial settlers arrived. Reflection on the implications of this past and present relationship between the Canadian government, universities, and Indigenous peoples is part of the Calls to Action highlighted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). Land acknowledgements, offered at the introduction of university events, name the specific Indigenous communities who have lived and currently live in the unceded territory of the province and city where the university is located. They recognize the past as part of the present, indicating that the establishment of the university was not the beginning of the history of the area (CAUT n.d.). While some have criticized land acknowledgements as formulaic and performative actions (Deer 2021), the very act of naming indicates the settler colonial roots of the university and society in Canada.

These links between universities, colonialism and slavery are a way of emphasizing that whiteness is not only part of how universities come to be, but also how they continue to be. The 2020 protests by anti-racism and BLM supporters focused public attention and anger towards the uncritical veneration of slaveowners and colonial merchants as founding patrons and donors to educational and civic institutions. The tearing down of their statues in places as far apart as Toronto, Canada and Bristol, UK was both a physical and symbolic response, standing in for an interrogation of the enduring ties between slavery, white supremacy and colonial histories and reinforcing calls to decolonize the university (Rhodes Must Fall Movement 2018).[2]

WHITE BODIES, WHITE SPACES

Whiteness in society is constituted through the privilege attributed to white bodies to take up and own space. In contrast, the presence of non-whites within these spaces generates tension (Mills 1997, 53). Sara Ahmed (2007) builds on Mills's ideas to address how the orientation of bodies and spaces constitutes whiteness in the university. She argues that institutional whiteness is shaped through the habitual comfort that comes out of the proximity of white bodies in relation to each other. White bodies both produce and extend

[2] In Toronto, a petition to remove the statue of Egerton Ryerson, Ryerson University's founder, was circulated, calling attention to his role in establishing Canada's residential schools. In Bristol, the statue of Edward Colston was toppled by BLM protestors and dumped into the harbor. In Oxford, in June 2020, Oriel College voted to remove the status of Cecil Rhodes and to appoint an independent commission to look into the issues surrounding him and the statue. The original call to remove the statue had come in 2015 by the student-led Rhodes Must Fall movement, but at the time, the university did not support its removal.

white spaces in the university. In contrast, non-white bodies become disruptions in them (Ahmed 2007, 157; Jamil 2022, 24).

Focusing on the constitutive relationship between bodies and spaces through "use" and "fit," Ahmed argues that universities are meant to be used by those who are perceived to best fit into it. This is not an accidental outcome, but something that is created intentionally and then reinforced over time (Jamil 2022, 25). "Institutions are built from small acts of use, from uses of use, from how building blocks put together, over time, become walls, walls that enable some bodies to enter, stay put, progress, others not" (Ahmed 2019, 191).

Institutional whiteness in universities is produced and maintained because white groups are readily perceived as belonging in it, while non-white groups are considered to not be a "good fit." But a "good fit" is contingent upon the space that already exists for one to fit into and to advance through the institution. Over the long term, institutional whiteness is collectively reproduced and maintained through the faculty body, made up of the people who are hired to teach there (Jamil 2022, 25). "An institution acquires the shape of those who have shaped it" (Ahmed 2019, 165).

While whiteness in universities is constituted and maintained through this relationship between bodies and spaces, I want to consider the specific role of universities as intellectual spaces and, in particular, the epistemic authority of whiteness. Mills reminds us that the racial contract is maintained in part through a worldview that privileges and normalizes whiteness. It sets the terms for "what counts as correct, objective interpretation of the world" (Mills 1997, 18). This includes what counts as knowledge about the world, who has the capacity to know it, and who is deemed to lack that capacity (Jamil 2022, 25).

These elements can be historically and politically contingent, as what is considered to be legitimate, important, and authoritative knowledge changes over time. For example, the study of eugenics was once considered to be an acceptable area of academic study, important for its justification of transatlantic slavery and, later, European colonialism. Francis Galton, considered to be the "father of eugenics," was an important figure in University College London's (UCL) history in the late 19th century. He left money to the university, which funded the first Chair and first department of eugenics in the world at the time. In 2019, an inquiry was launched into the university's role in propagating and supporting the eugenics movement, with a final report released in 2020 to address this institutional history (University College London 2020).

In academia, the epistemic authority of whiteness is reflected in the Eurocentrism of what constitutes the canon, which is often built on the work of white, male scholars. However, students are questioning the Eurocentrism and predominantly white, western, epistemic orientation of their disciplines across British universities. For example, in 2014, there was a student campaign called "Why is my curriculum white?" (UCL 2014). More recently, there are campaigns and debate focused on what it means to "decolonize the curriculum" at different universities (Sabaratnam 2017; Etienne 2019). These campaigns are situated within broader politics of neoliberalism in higher education, turning students into customers and higher education into a product for consumption. However, they also reflect how whiteness in universities is an ongoing intellectual and epistemic project.

POSTRACIAL

Whiteness is part of the social and political conditions within which British and North American universities were created and within which they continue to operate today. It is also connected to the postracial, imagined as a product of the white liberal imagination (Hesse 2021; Jamil 2022, 26).

The idea of the postracial is based on two main points. First, that "race" and racial discrimination are "over," as a result of a long, linear history of social and political progress. If racial discrimination is an issue at all today, it "is anomalous and individually expressed" (Goldberg 2015, 2). In other words, racist individuals can be characterized as "bad" people who can, in theory, be corrected and taught to not be racist. They confirm the normative position of "good white people," reinforcing a liberal view of "race" and racism in a postracial society (Sullivan 2014).

Nevertheless, despite the end of racism, the racial logic of society continues to exist. As Goldberg (2015) argues:

> What the claim about postraciality as the end of race suggests, rather, is simply that a certain way of thinking about race, and implicitly of racist expression, has given way to novel understandings, orders, and arrangements of racial designation and racist expression. (6)

Thus, while the postracial may claim that "race" and racism are over, this denial is what allows it to continue to do racial work (4). The concept of the postracial echoes Mills in gesturing to both the invisibility and hegemonic power of whiteness as constitutive of the racial contract in society. In universities, the postracial makes it possible to uphold whiteness as a racial logic by not naming it and furthermore, protects whiteness from attack by calling it something else (Jamil 2022, 26). This creates the space for a discourse on academic freedom to be mobilized to uphold institutional whiteness, as illustrated in the following two examples in the UK and Canada.

BRITISH COLONIAL NOSTALGIA AND THE JUSTIFICATION FOR EMPIRE

Since 2016, the public debate on Brexit opened up discussion on what the role of Britain has been and should be on the world stage in relation to its domestic (national) relationships to the formerly colonized peoples who are now citizens. It has catalyzed academic controversy on the study of British empire and colonial nostalgia. While there are many scholars involved in this intellectual project, in 2018, it took the form of a public disagreement between Nigel Biggar, a senior white male professor in theology at Oxford University, and Priyamvada Gopal, a postcolonial studies professor in the English department at Cambridge University, over Biggar's Ethics and Empire project.

In September 2017, Bruce Gilley (Portland State University) published an article titled "The Case for Colonialism" in the journal *Third World Quarterly*. As the title indicates, he argued that Western colonialism brought benefits to the colonized, rather than being harmful. He faced criticism from those who believed that it disregarded the existing scholarship on how destructive colonialism was to the colonized (Robinson 2017). Fifteen members of the Editorial Board resigned in protest against the journal editor's decision to override the blind peer review process and to publish the article anyway (Flaherty 2017; Dawes 2017). Although the journal first defended its decision by laying out the steps in its peer review process, it later withdrew the article (Taylor and Francis Online 2017a; 2017b).

Writing in support of Gilley's views a few months later in November 2017, Biggar (2017) published an op-ed article titled "Don't Feel Guilty about Our Colonial History" in *The Times* newspaper in the UK. It built on Gilley's argument, proposing that the "good" parts of British colonialism should not be overlooked out of a misplaced sense of shame and national guilt.

Biggar was talking about his own research as much as Gilley's. Earlier that year, Biggar's five-year project on Ethics and Empire, hosted by the McDonald Centre for Theology, Ethics, & Public Life at Oxford University, had had its first workshop (Murphy 2018). The project proposed to consider the "good and bad sides" in order to articulate, according to the Centre, a "nuanced and historically intelligent Christian ethic of empire" (McDonald Centre, n.d.). When this project became known as part of the publicity generated by Biggar's November *Times* article, a number of scholars at Oxford and other universities criticized it for its weak scholarly and methodological arguments (McDougall et al. 2017).

Among these academics was a Cambridge professor with expertise in postcolonial studies, Priya Gopal. On Twitter, she described it as "outright racist imperial apologetics" (Lodhia 2018). She was part of a group that drafted and signed an open letter opposing Biggar's position, that was published on December 21, 2017. It stated:

> The "balance sheet" approach to empire is rooted in the self-serving justifications of imperial administrators, attempting to balance out the violence committed in the name of empire with its supposed benefits. It has long since lost its scholarly legitimacy, as research has instead moved to trace the actions which occurred in the name of empire in their complexity through time. (Wilson 2017)

A few months later, on April 10, 2018, Biggar (2018) published another newspaper article in which he criticized Gopal's Twitter comments about his proposed project as "vile abuse." It became the opening for a personal attack published a few days later, on April 12, 2018, by Guy Adams in the *Daily Mail* newspaper. He singled out Gopal with the headline "How CAN Cambridge let this hate-filled don pour out her racist bile?" and presented Biggar as a victim of her "left wing nastiness" (Chye 2018). It led to a deluge of hate mail and attacks on social media from Biggar's supporters and other right wing free speech proponents who joined in the fray (Chye 2018). Gopal recognized the racist dimensions of the attack on her,

calling it a "racist and sexist hatchet job" (Lodhia 2018), given that she was the only non-white female professor targeted among the many scholars, both white and non-white, who had criticized Biggar's project publicly.

In addition to complaining about Gopal in the media, Biggar also registered complaints against her to her College in January 2018, and again in April, that she was impinging on his academic freedom and should be sanctioned for it. They did not take any action against her, and issued a generic statement supporting the importance of free speech (Churchill College Cambridge 2018; Gillespie 2018). Gopal criticized the statement put out by Churchill College for not going far enough to defend her. She stated that if she had been a "white, centrist/conservative and ideally, a full professor," both Cambridge University and Churchill College would have taken a stronger position in support of her, especially addressing the charges of racism (Gillespie 2018). While the official university response may have been lukewarm, students at Cambridge and other universities in Britain organized in her support (Gopal 2018).

This case highlights multiple points about the institutional whiteness of universities, the postracial, and the mobilization of the discourse of academic freedom. First, there is the racism of a deliberate public and personal attack against Gopal by a white male senior academic, facilitated by British newspapers, and followed through by social media supporters. It is a classic way of trying to silence her, trying to "put her in her place" as a racialized minority and a female professor, for speaking openly and critically. It mobilizes the trope of an "angry woman of color" to take away from the intellectual basis for her disagreement with him and reduces her to someone who does not "fit" (to use Ahmed's terminology), someone who does not "behave properly" (Gopal 2018).

There is also the implicit racism that Gopal points out in the institutional responses by Churchill College and Cambridge University. While they signal support for academic freedom, they also maintain a distance from her. Gopal's comment that if she had been a white male conservative professor, they would have taken a different stance, illustrates Ahmed's point about institutional whiteness that can function as a form of privilege for those whom the university is for.

Second, Biggar's attack is a response to intellectual criticism about his project, which he turned into a claim about academic freedom. This is where the postracial becomes visible. It deflects a problem of harassment and racism by a white male professor into a problem of academic freedom in which he is her victim. His claim that she impinged on his academic freedom is in fact a claim to a position of dominance rather than victimhood. It is a claim of whiteness as the unfettered privilege of a senior white male academic to say and do what he wants; in this case, to ignore scholarly disagreements pointing to the weakness of his argument.

Since the postracial favors individuals over systems, it makes Gopal "the problem" as a woman of color and as an individual faculty member because she named the racism and sexism against her (Ahmed 2015, 8). Gopal becomes "the problem" for naming the problem, rather than the institutional white privilege that continues to maintain the

positions of white male academics. Neither his project at Oxford University, nor his academic position, was affected by Gopal's comments.

Lastly, postracial whiteness extends also to the topic of the project itself. It maintains the power and invisibility of the epistemic authority of whiteness, which allows Biggar and his colleagues to make a pseudo-academic argument about "the good of colonialism." Colonialism is an expression of the racial contract (Mills 1997, 20). The British Empire was a global project of extraction and exploitation of resources, skewed in favor of the colonizers. By re-presenting colonialism as a "moral balancing" exercise, as Biggar and Gilley have done, the postracial recenters whiteness as invisible and reinforces the immensely negative and far-reaching impact of coloniality today.

I want to consider the implications of British colonial nostalgia argument in the context of contestation over the perceived disciplinary value of postcolonialism as a field of study. As historian Kim Wagner (2020) argues, this argument aligns with the colonial view of British Empire at the time as a force for good, spreading civilization to the "natives" and bringing them into modern times. It was based on a linear understanding of civilizational progress, from the dark ages into white/Western light: "The idea of progress and historical providence sustained the imperial project, providing a powerful moral alibi that has never really lost its grip on the British imagination" (Wagner 2020). Viewed from this perspective, decolonization and anti-colonial movements are seen as an aberration, not a moral challenge to the "good" of the British empire. This "means that critical scholarship exploring, for example, racialized violence, or revealing links to slavery, is all too often dismissed simply as 'biased' or 'woke'—not because it is factually incorrect, but because it challenges the very worldview that so many take for granted" (Wagner 2020). Or, in other words, because it challenges the epistemic authority of whiteness through which the racial contract endures in society today.

This example illustrates the contestation of the university as an intellectual space within contemporary politics and adds weight to the following questions: How was the university created? Who is the university for? Who can belong there? Who cannot? Going back to Sara Ahmed's work, extending the relationship between space, bodies, and ideas as constitutive of whiteness in the university, I am suggesting that this is also a political project in addition to an intellectual one. It does not exist in a vacuum, but is a response not only to whiteness within academia but also to racial politics within society. In the UK, Brexit forms the backdrop against which this example is meaningful.

The second case took place a few years later in Canada, at the University of Ottawa in September 2020, in the context of post-George Floyd's murder and summer of global BLM protests.

ANTI-BLACKNESS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

In the fall of 2020, in her class on Art and Gender at the University of Ottawa, Prof. Verushka Lieutenant-Duval used the N-word as part of a discussion about how words

that are used as insults have been reappropriated by the targeted community. She also used "queer" and "cripple" as examples of words that have been resignified through queer theory and crip theory, respectively. After class, a student wrote to her to say that they had been offended by her use of the N-word. She apologized and invited the student to open up a class discussion on whether it was okay to use the term as part of academic discussions on specific topics. The student posted this exchange on Twitter, expressing their unhappiness with the situation. As the tweet went viral, it quickly turned the issue into a matter of public and media interest (Holland and Dutil 2020).

The University of Ottawa suspended Dr. Lieutenant-Duval for a short time as a disciplinary measure. A group of thirty-four francophone academics from University of Ottawa published a public letter in her support on October 16, 2020, arguing that her academic freedom as a professor was being violated. They argued that students should not be able to censor the texts that are studied in the classroom. Students must develop academic inquiry and critical thinking skills by engaging with all materials, whether offensive or not, in line with the purpose of academic freedom in the university (Le Droit Numerique 2020). This was followed a few days later by a second public letter in the newspaper *Le Devoir*, signed by almost 600 predominantly white francophone professors in Ontario and Quebec, calling on the University of Ottawa to protect academic freedom.

These letters inspired a petition and statement written by twenty-four members of the BIPOC Caucus of Professors and Librarians at University of Ottawa. They "unequivocally condemned the use of the N-word and the conversation on academic freedom that is being used to justify the use of this racist slur." They expressed support for Black students and called out anti-Black racism: "Black students deserve to go to university without having to hear derogatory terms about their communities or having the use of terms that dehumanize them being put up for a class debate." They pointed out that racial slurs are not acceptable to use in the name of academic freedom in the classroom, and that in fact, making this argument was "a silencing tactic that aggressively deters and discourages students from coming forward when they experience systemic racism on campus" (Recommendations by the BIPOC Caucus 2020).

Lastly, they concluded by calling on the University of Ottawa administration to take concrete measures to address anti-Black racism. A month later, in an update, they issued a series of detailed recommendations to address systemic racism and anti-Black racism across all areas of the University, including faculty hiring and tenure guidelines, curriculum, student support, data collection and reporting, among other areas.

Writing along the same lines, the University of Ottawa's Student Union President, Babacar Faye, expressed disappointment and sadness that Black students were the ones being blamed for speaking up about their discomfort in the classroom, when it is already well-known that the term in question is a racial slur (Faye 2020).

Analyzing the racialized dimension of this debate, Black activist and Montreal resident Will Prosper noted the predominantly white composition of the group of 579 academics who signed the public letter in *Le Devoir* supporting academic freedom (Prosper 2020). He suggested that this may indicate that the problem is more the majority's fear of the

loss of their position of white privilege, rather than the use of the N-word. He criticized their argument for claiming it was acceptable to disrespect Black students who are already marginalized in the university and in society in the name of academic freedom.

There are different elements of this situation which took on a life of their own when they hit the media, but I want to focus on how the discourse of academic freedom comes into play and what postracial work it does. The situation began with a class session where a student felt the professor's use of the N-word and subsequent handling of the situation was inappropriate and harmful to Black students. The mobilization of the public response centering academic freedom came later and was driven by other professors, not by Lieutenant-Duval, the professor of the particular class. Yet, it echoed and amplified her reasoning, which deflected the racial critique by favoring a different explanation for her teaching strategies.

The N-word is well-known, historically and in the present, for being used as a racial slur towards Black people. Lieutenant-Duval was aware of that, but stated that she was making an argument for how terms used pejoratively had been resignified by the targeted communities. While the comparison between the N-word and other terms might be debatable, her explanation centered the pedagogical importance of academic inquiry, and by extension her role and authority as professor over the students. In other words, while she did not explicitly claim academic freedom, she sought to diffuse the critique that as a white professor she should not be using the word by claiming that the academic purpose behind it was more important. In effect, it was another way of saying she was not a racist, or even a white professor. She was *only* a professor doing her job.

To be clear, the value of academic inquiry, or a professor's academic freedom in the classroom as part of her job, is not the issue. Rather, the issue is how and why this claim is mobilized at this moment to do postracial work. It deflects the naming of race and whiteness generally and racial critique of whiteness specifically, by Black students. They are making visible how the classroom, and by extension, the university, operates as a white space by saying why they are uncomfortable in it. The response to this naming was denial and deflection, which had the effect of recentering the authority of the professor as a white body in the university as a white space at the expense of Black students.

The two public letters published in French language newspapers in support of Lieutenant-Duval did not have to do with the subject of her course, but rather opened up a separate conversation by mobilizing Quebec history and literature as the litmus test for academic freedom. The question then is why was this topic significant? There are two reasons for this. The first is that the debate created by this incident took place primarily in the French news media and it involved primarily francophone professors, many of whom teach at Quebec colleges (known as cegeps in the province) and universities. Thus, French Quebecers' claim to the importance of Quebec history and literature is logical in this situation. The second reason has to do with the specific work that they referred to. They gave the example of the book by Pierre Vallières, published in 1965, whose French title uses the N-word, *Les N* blancs d'Amerique*. They suggested that censoring this book today because of its title would lead to a partial and corrupted view of Quebec's history and

political consciousness, in addition to the literary merits of the text itself (Le Droit Numerique 2020).

Vallières wrote the book in the political context of Quebec's Quiet Revolution of the 1960s. Major social and political changes were taking place in Quebec, questioning the status quo that maintained the structures of power within society, sometimes through violence. He was inspired by the Black Power movement in the US, as well as anti-colonial and nationalist struggles for independence in other parts of the world (Cornellier 2017). In his book, Vallières compared the subjugated historical position of the French Quebecois with that of Black people in the US, ignoring the history of transatlantic slavery that defines the place of Black people in the racial hierarchy in North America. His work has been criticized by scholars since then (Austin 2013). But the fact that a group of predominantly white, francophone professors brought it up is noteworthy.

The BIPOC Caucus at University of Ottawa referred to this specifically when they argued that Quebec's history of white francophones was not comparable to Black history. Not only did the comparison demonstrate a certain degree of ignorance of how white supremacy works, it also did not offer a free pass on the use of the N-word on the pretext of discussing the former. Black students at University of Ottawa and other Quebec universities echoed this argument, that the comparison obscures the racial logics of domination as well as hurting Black students (Faye 2020; Scott 2020).

I noted earlier that the academic freedom discourse did postracial work by opening up a terrain that is seen to be universal, that could be used to deflect racial critique and to center whiteness in the form of professors' moral and epistemic authority over Black students. But there is a tension between the claim to universality on one hand and to the specificity of Quebec history and literature on the other. On the one hand, the signatories of the two public letters framed academic freedom as a universally desirable commitment and goal of all professors and all university classrooms. On the other hand, they claimed that this had to be done by considering the specificity of Quebec history and literature, such that their intellectual value could not be appreciated except through uncritical repetition of the pejorative terminology they employed.

These two examples illustrate how postracial whiteness operates in the university as a particular kind of institutional space. They demonstrate how a female, racialized minority professor and Black students interrupt the uncritical epistemic authority of white professors through their presence as non-white people in the university. In both examples, they interrupted the reproduction and circulation of ideas and knowledge that underpinned whiteness. In one case, this referred to the British colonial empire, built on the racial hierarchy between the colonized and the colonizer. In the second case, it referred to the use of a racial slur that is emblematic of a systemic anti-Blackness. Black students drew on their lived experiences of alienation in the classroom rather than allowing it to remain invisible and unremarkable as part of "how things work" at universities. They offered a critique that made whiteness visible and showed the historical and political contingency of these ideas shaped through British imperialism and slavery.

RACIAL POLITICS

These incidents, though several years apart, did not occur in a vacuum. It is worth considering why these incidents occurred at the time they did, or in other words, how racial politics create the context for postracial whiteness in universities. I noted at the beginning of this article that Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020 interrogated the racial foundations of universities, reinvigorating student-led decolonizing movements. But in the years before that, between 2016 and 2020, there were other relevant political events: the openly racist and Islamophobic Trump presidency in America, the virulent nationalism and xenophobia of the Brexit referendum, and the visible rise of far-right, white nationalist, and white supremist political groups in Canada, US, and Europe. This resurgence of white nationalism and far-right and conservative or right-leaning politics on both sides of the Atlantic demonstrate that the political conditions that shape the current situation extend longer, and deeper, than one summer.

I draw out two points here about how whiteness in racial politics is related to postracial whiteness within universities. The first regards whiteness as both a national and transnational political phenomenon. This includes the implicit and explicit ways that a platform of white supremacy was the basis for conservative politicians to win elections in the US, UK, and some provinces in Canada as well as in France, among other European countries. They played on the fear that white majorities are losing, or have lost, their power to the racialized minorities, immigrants, and Muslims who have "taken over" or are "taking over" the country. They mobilized a worldview of "white anxiety," combined with xenophobic and Islamophobic views and attitudes, that resulted in Brexit and Trump's policies against immigrants and Muslims, to give two examples.

The second point regards the consequences of these racial politics for how whiteness operates in universities through the relationship between bodies, ideas and spaces. Alt-right and white nationalist groups have made efforts to raise their visibility on university and college campuses in the US, UK, Canada, and other countries. Some popular figures from these groups operate on the speaker circuit at university and college events. They use the controversy provoked by their views to legitimize them by making a claim to free speech and academic freedom (Southern Poverty Law Center 2017). They claim that universities are havens for left-leaning activist-academics who limit their free speech as alt-right, white supremacist or conservative speakers. They politicize and polarize the discourse by claiming to be "victims" of "wokeness" and "cancel culture" created by the political correctness of the left.

In doing so, they politicize certain fields of study and disciplines by creating a dichotomy between normative disciplines, which teach "correct" history, politics, etc., and those associated with the left, which are automatically "biased" because they interrogate the epistemic, racial, gendered, capitalistic, etc., foundations of society and social structures in the past and present. This latter group includes critical race theory, gender studies, postcolonialism, and studies of decoloniality and Islamophobia, to name a few. While one might argue that these topics always had political ramifications, the key difference now

is the ideological polarization driven by a combination of government actions and white nationalist political groups that shapes a transnational discourse of whiteness.

For example, the Conservative government in the UK announced plans in February 2021 to appoint a government representative to protect free speech in British universities because it claimed the climate is "chilling" for those holding right wing or conservative views. Reflecting pushback to the summer 2020 protests which highlighted universities' links to slavery and colonialism, the Minister for the Department of Education claimed that this was necessary to "defend our culture and history from the noisy minority of activists constantly trying to do Britain down" (Walker 2021).

Along the same lines, in February 2021, a few months after the University of Ottawa incident, Quebec's Premier, Francois Legault, got involved in the media debate, saying that he would protect academic freedom from the minority of "radical activists" (Montpetit 2021; Oullette-Vézina 2021). He echoed a similar claim by France's President Macron the week before, that the import of "woke" American ideas was undermining France (Onishi 2021). Both of these leaders have suggested that anti-racism protests and social justice interests that originate in the US are circulating in their universities and undermining national cohesion and identity. In France, the government minister for higher education has called out "islamo-gauchisme," an invented term that links the critiques of Islamophobia by Muslim civil society organizations and academics with those who are ideologically on the left.

In conclusion, the postracial whiteness of universities is linked to the transnational characteristics of how whiteness operates in racial politics. This analysis allows us to understand why and how these two events, one at Cambridge University in 2018 and the other at University of Ottawa in 2020, are not isolated incidents. Rather, the way that academic freedom was mobilized as a discourse to push against the racial critiques of Black and racialized academics and students is tied to the way that it is being mobilized by right-wing and alt-right groups to support whiteness and to undermine the political claims and racial critiques of racialized minorities in and across different countries. This is a response to the undermining of the epistemic authority associated with whiteness, in which the worldview of white majorities was the only knowledge possible, and it was accepted as is. Thinking about the relationship between bodies, ideas and spaces shows us that the epistemic authority of whiteness and the political authority associated with it are closely intertwined.

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WE FLESH: MUSSER, SPILLERS, AND BEYOND THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL BODY

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I am a *homo sapiens* american Blackwomxn (AFAB) [1] and yet I am not a human. This paper explores the lived experience of *homo sapiens* but not human that I call "lived flesh," a lived experience distinction that shouldn't be possible on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (2012; 1968) account of human subjectivity in *Phenomenology of Perception* and "The Intertwining—The Chiasm." The use of flesh is deliberate and emerges from my engagement with Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* and "The Intertwining—The Chiasm" through Toni Morrison's (2004) *Beloved,* Hortense Spillers' (1982) "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words" and "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," Amber Musser's (2018) *Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance,* and Audre Lorde's (2003) *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. The affective, experiential, and ethical practices of american Blackwomxn in these texts problematize Merleau-Ponty's account of human subjectivity and his account of the generality of Being ("The Intertwining—The Chiasm"). Merleau-Ponty's effacement of raced, sexed, and gendered difference results in a construct of the human subject that cannot include all *homo sapiens.* [2]

[1] Gender-nonconforming, assigned female at birth.

[2] I take them up to them to think beyond a desire in critical phenomenology to expand the notion of the subject to include non-majoritarian lives. In *Black Bodies, White Gazes*, George Yancy (2017) provides a thoroughgoing account of the ways that white gaze as an "achievement" (243), white discursive practice, and white embodiment invent, project, and define themselves against the Black body as nigger, thing, sexual deviant, criminal, and subhuman and the toll of this definition (as well as the ways Black lives live beyond this quotidian thingification). Despite this, Yancy holds onto the notion of us "human subjects" even as he problematizes what it means to be human for white folks sutured to antiblackness and white supremacy (256) and gestures to Black "subjectivity" and the "agency" that is often tied to notions of subjectivity (247–254). Lisa Guenther's (2020) definition of critical phenomenology, emerging from her reading of Lorde, is stirring in its designation of critical phenomenology as both a philosophical and political practice engaged in "'restructuring the world' in order to generate new and liberatory possibilities for meaningful experience and existence" (15–16). Yet as a political practice, it falls back on an appeal to inter/subjectivity—where our imaginings appear to be limited to subjectivity—that seems to undercut its philosophical practice.

First, I outline two accounts of the body: Merleau-Ponty's account of the body proper/lived body and Spillers' captive body (as contrasted with the thief's body) of the pornotrope. My claim is that the body proper of Merleau-Ponty's "originary acquisition" does not guarantee the subjectivity of all *homo sapiens*.

Then I move to three accounts of flesh. I will start with Merleau-Ponty's account of flesh as an "element" of Being, not matter. I follow this with Spillers' account of captive flesh—which is most certainly matter—that serves as the vestibule for the thief. I intervene to deny the total captivity of flesh via an excerpt from Morrison's *Beloved*.

Finally, I conclude with an exploration of the practices of lived flesh. On my account, lived flesh—particularly the flesh lived by Blackwomxn—can name itself in erotic, communal, and transformative acts as exceeding captive flesh. I take up Musser's account of the pleasure in abjection of brown jouissance in *Sensual Excess* and Lorde's erotic engagements with her lover Afrekete in *Zami* to explore these ways of being with others.

I: BODY

The Lived Body

The *Phenomenology of Perception* and "The Intertwining—The Chiasm" situate the subject in an intimate engagement with and through the world. Specifically, the body is the horizon or condition for the existence of a world. The body "accomplishes" existence—it is in the lived body that existence takes on its full meaning. Existence is marked by the inextricability of the physical and the psychical in every action, which is only possible for humans (Olkowski 1982-1983, 99–101). The body is not, nor can it ever be, an object; nor is it just a positing consciousness. For Merleau-Ponty (2012) the body is a whole, an "indivisible possession" whose positions are known through a "*body schema* that envelops them all" (100–01). A body's schema is its "manner of expressing . . . in and toward the world" (103). As such, the body is not a collection of parts, but a community of imbricating relations. Each part of this body "envelops" all and each other part.

Because the body is always implicated in the world that appears for it—and this world is never bare (Olkowski 1982–1983, 103)—to emerge as a lived body in the world is to emerge into a world with other lived bodies and things. It is the existence of others and things that affirms subjectivity. All perception—including self-perception—is partial, ambiguous (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 172). The things and others perceived are their own horizons. Self-knowledge is impossible without another to see us and confirm our subjectivity. Subjectivity is affirmed intercoporeality in sight and touch.[3]

Moreover, we always already have some affective or attractional relationship to the others and things in our worlds, as Merleau-Ponty situates the body proper in an "osmosis between sexuality and existence" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 172). Subjectivity occurs in a

[3] See Merleau-Ponty 1968, pages 142-43 and 245.

sexual milieu. For Merleau-Ponty, the lived body is bound up in intercorporeal relations between others and things (Stawarska 2006, 101). These relations play out—touch and are touched—through sensorial organ/izations of sexuality (Toadvine and Lawlor 2007, 436). Human existence, "the movement by which facts are taken up," is sexual (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 173). Sexuality is the background against which things exist as meaningful (160).

Yet while sexuality organ/izes human existence and perception, it is not the primordial ground of being. Merleau-Ponty (2012) attributes this to an originary commonality: the embodied facticity of having sensory organs and faculties. All bodies emerge first into a natural/anonymous world, a world of *homo sapiens* and not *homo sapiens* that is prior to ego and culture. The lived body is claimed by (and claims) an "*originary acquisition*" of the natural or "physical world". The lived body that emerges in *Phenomenology of Perception* has a doubled subjectivity: that of the anonymous, pre-personal "I" and the named "I." It is the pre-personal I, the one "for which we are [not] responsible," the one "that has already sided with the world," that is shared in common by all (224).

To summarize, I have identified what I believe are four salient features of the lived body of Merleau-Ponty.

1. The lived body is whole and indeterminate.
2. The lived body is never an object.
3. The lived body is always already intersubjective because
    a. All bodies are subjects, and
    b. All bodies are the condition for the having and being-in of worlds that have both subjects and objects.
4. The lived subject-body lives an atmosphere of sexuality as a condition for the turning to and feeling for/toward others and objects in the world.

Limitations of the Lived Body

Merleau-Ponty's claim of the "originary acquisition" gestures to a pre-cultural and embodied condition of neutrality shared by all *homo sapiens* that seems to guarantee the transition from *homo sapiens* to human subject.[4]

[4] I read Merleau-Ponty's account of the originary acquisition as the natural body. We happen to be born with certain bodies. *Homo sapiens* hold certain attributes in common that distinguish them just enough from other *animalia*. The attributes of these bodies allow for the acquisition of certain habit/uations. For those reading Merleau-Ponty as resisting a description of the "originary acquisition" as biological/natural versus cultural, one may object that biology (or the concept "natural") is an acquisition or a habit of retrospection. In her thorough, insightful, and provoking article, Alia Al-Saji (2008) takes very seriously Merleau-Ponty's account of man as historical. In her careful work on the temporality of perception (notably, rhythm and memory), Al-Saji takes this history to be a thick event. If man is a historical event; then the "biological" or "natural" attributes that separate *homo sapiens* from other fauna and flora must also be historical. I take Al-Saji to be saying that not only do we not come into this world as human; *neither do we come into this world as homo sapiens*. Our species distinction—also thought of as the subject/object distinction—is an acquisition/cultural habit (41–48). I read Al-Saji as nudging her readers to consider that there is a past prior to our past as *homo sapiens*, a past "which has never been present" that Merleau-Ponty takes up when he takes up the "originary acquisition." We are in agreement that the human subject occurs at the level of culture/history. Yet I maintain that though the prepersonal

Merleau-Ponty (2012) discounts raced, sexed, and classed differentiation at the level of the biological level *homo sapiens*. *Prior to* ego acquisition/development, one is assigned to a group. Group-assignation does not require ego acquisition. Group assignation is sociogenic/cultural. *If* there is such a thing as *an* originary acquisition, it is not singular. Just as group-assignation precedes ego acquisition/development, in some cases it also precedes *existence*. I was Black and assigned-female before I was on this plane. I could be a totally different Andrea (actually, I would have been named "Gladys"), certainly, but they too would have been assigned-Black and assigned-female *in utero*. Christina Sharpe (2016) describes "living in/the wake" as an example of this socio-biological difference that destabilizes the ease of *homo sapiens* to subject on the grounds of group assignation and de-humanization:

> Living in/the wake of slavery is living "the afterlife of property" and living the afterlife of *partus sequitur ventrem* (that which is brought forth follows the womb), in which the Black child inherits the non/status, the non/being of the mother. That inheritance of a non/ status is everywhere apparent now in the ongoing criminalization of Black women and children. (15)

Partus sequitur ventrem, in which the Black child inherits the "non/status, the non/being of the mother," is the social code that overrides even phenotype to designate status/subject difference between *homo sapiens* at the level of biology. I want to be clear that I am not saying that at the level of DNA Black people are outside of *homo sapiens* species belonging. What I am saying is that at the level of natural acquisition that is lived contingent upon group assignation, Black people as *homo sapiens* are excluded from *homo sapiens* as subject.

The Captive Body/Flesh

In Spillers (2003), the human subject is a normative claim that is made through denigration. This normative claim is also a *nominative* claim, a claim about naming as a meaning-making and status-conferring project.

Spillers calls this an American Grammar, where grammar is the science/technology of the relations that produce the human subject. The grammar book teaches how to capture and deny certain bodies. Indigenous and African bodies are *translated* from subjects/bodies into captive bodies/flesh. It is through the apprehension of the captive body that the human subject emerges (208).[5] What does it take to capture a body, to arrest its subjectivity? It requires lusty despisal of the captive body; a flaying of the flesh; the picking out of the eyes; the use, the tying, chopping off, and emptying of the hands; the breaking and re-breaking of the mouth; the starvation and the noosing of the neck—an itemization, what Spillers

might not participate in a subject/object distinction, the prepersonal body that is "affectively open to the world" which "is already a tentative rhythm since it has a sensory history, constituted from previous encounters with the world and others" participates in distinctions at the attributory level that implicates the prepersonal in culture assignations (55).

[5] Spillers (2003) does refer to "African female subject." This use of "African female subject" is juxtaposed with the brutality she experiences "that we imagine as the peculiar province of male brutality and torture inflected by other males" that constitutes the "female flesh 'ungendered'" (207).

calls the "atomizing" of the captive body in this way—in an ongoing attempt to capture and keep captured, to fix and name, what was formerly the mobile African subject. The captive body sets the conditions for the uncaptive human subject and inter/subjectivity.

In "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," Spillers (2003) traces the distinction between the human and African and indigenous peoples vis-à-vis their different relationships to the speech-writing system, incursion, and sexuality. This act is not just *representational* of an ongoing encounter—it is not just an act of intellectualization, of a brain in a vat—it is written on the African body through actual torture and theft and the "hieroglyphics of the flesh" (207). The African body becomes captive—a thing/object for the thief/human subject—in the simultaneous discursive and incursive act. Spillers examines the way William Goodell records/describes these quotidian invasions via the whip, and Goodell's mastery of the written word helps to situate him as the subject, He Who Could Not Be Whipped. The captive body is made flesh: penetrated, flayed, seared, whipped, tortured by instruments masterfully wielded by seemingly invisible hands. Captive flesh has anatomy not as a human but as an object of use or study does. The "laboratory prose" positions Goodell as the subject.

Why is the captive body whipped? The captive body is whipped to keep and create it *as captive,* to render it flesh. Whipping and other forms of corporeal torture are pedagogical tools designed to teach the flesh how to be—and only to be—captive.[6] This is an attempt to "seve[r] the captive body from its motive will, its active desire" and the *sameness* of the torture for all captive bodies regardless of genitalia instantiates a "los[s]" of "gender difference in the outcome" (Spillers 2003, 206).

The creation of the captive body/flesh is the creation of a sexual object—and biological other—such that it cannot prevent itself from being seized by the thief in any meaning-full way:

> (1) [T]he captive body as the course of an irresistible, destructive sensuality; (2) at the same time—in stunning contradiction—it is reduced to a thing, to *being* for the captor; (3) in this distance *from* a subject position, the captured sexualities project a physical and biological expression of "otherness"; (4) as a category of "otherness," the captive body translates into a potential for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general "powerlessness," resonating through various centers of human and social meaning. (Spillers 2003, 206)

The captured body cum captive body/flesh as an ongoing historical production of sex/uality, race, gender, and porosity is distinguishable from the body proper of *Phenomenology of Perception* and the body of flesh:

1. Bodies qua subjects are historically and socially situated. That is, what a body is, what a subject means or intends is a product of the milieu in which it is, means, or intends. Bodies qua subjects are created.

[6] See Willis 1985, pages 199–202 and 208–10.

   a. For Merleau-Ponty this suggests the coevality of different embodied worlds that emerge from a shared original *homo sapiens* commonality.
   b. For Spillers this suggests that not all *homo sapiens* are body-subjects.
   c. The production of some *homo sapiens* as subjects and some as captive/flesh is the work of a grammar of race, gender, sex/uality, and the proximity to invasion. [7]
2. Formerly African bodies/subjects are stolen in an ongoing historical encounter of the TransAtlantic Slave Trade.
   a. This "trade" (theft) exchanges the African body for the captive body/flesh.
3. To be captive body/flesh is to be denied motricity, sexuality, and other necessary conditions to be produced as a subject.
   a. The denial of subjective-sexuality is commensurate with an externally inflicted excessive salaciousness.
   b. The denial of sexuality is also the denial of sexuate and gender difference as well as *the imposition of biological otherness*.
   c. The loss of the power to represent and power to ward off is also the denial of the power to name.
4. The captive body/flesh is still in the world, but not as a subject, as a captive/ating object for the use of the subject.
   a. This is a change in the phenomenological situation of the captured body.
   b. Pedagogical practices (a grammar of torture and non-humanization) seek to enact a different kind of entity of lived experience for the captured/captive body to distinguish it from the thieving body.
5. Sexuality, the ability to name, and motility are limited to the thieving body/subject.
   a. The thieving body becomes the only body able to inhabit linear space and time, the only body "free to take up the present and past as it wishes, and in the manner of its choosing" and thus we might posit the thieving body, the body living whitely or living whiteness as "temporally present, or even, futurally directed," in a way other than the captive body (Ngo 2019, 247).
   b. The thieving body, the body living whitely, is the only body that retains and maintains the kind of gender-difference and gender-specificity required to participate in sexuality.

[7] Because race is a social fact and historical process—and not a biological fact—antiblackness is not necessarily tied to an immediate phenotype or relations between particular phenotypes. Moreover, because race as a social fact is contingent upon context, I focus on the US american context. This context is the result, and producer, of a "historical context," which means that what white is and who qualifies as white has changed over time. In "The Phenomenology of White Identity" Linda Martín Alcoff (2019) outlines the ongoing production of white identities. White people are the result of an historical and ongoing process (176–77).

II: FLESH

The Lived Body of Flesh

In "The Intertwining—The Chiasm," rather than a body that, as in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, is a "specialized self, familiar with a single sector of being," a generalized account of Being emerges (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 224). The body of flesh is "a *sensible for itself*," an event of Being that is inhabited by the sensible (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 135). The body of flesh has two phases: objective and subjective. These two phases are inextricable, touching and forming each other in and through the flesh.

This flesh of "The Intertwining—The Chiasm" is the condition for the body; it is what the body shares in and with the sensorial world. So rather than biology being the condition for the body and the sensorial world, it is flesh (131–35). Flesh is the connective medium, a "tissue that lines . . . sustains and nourishes" the shared world of subjects and things (132). It is "not a thing" but a kind of state, a kind of *manifold* for the emergence of things: "a possibility, a latency" (133). "The flesh is not matter;" it is "an 'element' of Being" (139) that is marked by "reversibility" (144–47) and sets the grounds for intercorporeal experience. While there is no outside of flesh—the subject does not exit flesh—to be human is to be *in* the flesh and *of* the flesh not as a thing or an object (141).

Critiquing the Body of Flesh

Merleau-Ponty's fleshy revival at the end of his life suggests a critical reassessment of the normal subject that emerges in *Phenomenology of Perception* via his conclusions about blind people and the structure and capacity of perception of the normal subject.

> Let us conclude that the tactile field never has the scope of the visual field, the tactile object is never wholly present in each of its parts like the visual object, and, in short, that touch is not vision. . . . The blind person's world and the world of the normal person differ not merely in the quantity of matter available to them, but moreover in the *structure* of the whole. . . . The total signification of our life—of which the notional signification is never but an extract—would be different if we were deprived of vision. (2012, 233)

This quotation demonstrates the operation of the "normate" in Merleau-Ponty's thought (Reynolds 2017; 2020). It is not just that "touch is not vision," it is that blindness is a deprivation of the fullness of the world and a lack in the "*structure* of the whole" of being in the world.

Drawing from Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Reynolds (2017) takes up "normate" for its simultaneous and imbricating structure that brings the lived space, meaning, and the bodily schema to bear on our understandings of the subject and dis/ability (420). "Normate" is the necessary condition for the existence of the normative. And, per Reynolds (2020), it is social through and through (244–45).

Though Reynolds (2017) critiques the ways in which Merleau-Ponty falls back into ableist notions when he describes the ability of non-blind people to simulate blindness and the seizing of the cane as at hand (in the way the organist seizes the organ), he also reads Merleau-Ponty as turning ableist notions about the good life against themselves in service of non-philosophy (422–27). I appreciate these care-full and engaging readings of Merleau-Ponty. However, while Merleau-Ponty may be open to the *existence* of other worlds, I believe he does not go beyond the normate for an understanding of those worlds as not deviant. I find it striking that Merleau-Ponty uses "us" to identify with the "normal person." He implicates the abilities of his body in his account of perception.

Drawing on Reynolds' account of "ableism" and Garland-Thomson's account of "material anonymity," Christine Wieseler (2019) challenges "conceptions of the 'normal' subject in phenomenology." Wieseler critically reads Merleau-Ponty's "primary interest in examining case studies of people with illnesses and injuries [as an effort] to gain a better understanding of the 'normal' subject by way of contrast" (71). Specifically, Wieseler turns to Garland-Thomson's account of mis/fit—and its application for raced, gendered, sexed, and additionally othered ways of being in the world—to develop her critique of Merleau-Ponty's implicit normative claim that the normal human subject/lived body is white, male, cis, and abled (72–73). The characteristics of the mythical norm/ative[8] body allow these bodies to be lived as anonymous, and it is this "material anonymity" that assures and secures their fit in the world (71). A "misfit" occurs when there is an insufficient fit, when one has a *material conspicuity* that is experienced as an arrest of the "I can," or as a reason for being "stopped" (72).

In "From the Body Proper to Flesh: Merleau-Ponty on Intersubjectivity," Beata Stawarska (2006) argues that the "reversibility" of flesh is predicated on a conflation of intracorporeal and inter-corporeal touch. Stawarska claims that this conflation means that Merleau-Ponty's account neglects sexuate difference and effaces the other. Merleau-Ponty substitutes his hand for the hand of the other in the handshake encounter (92–99). His hand "annexes" the other's. "[T]he experience of one's own body comes to provide the matrix for intersubjective or intercorporeal relations**"** (94). Annexation is the condition for inter/subjectivity.

In "Urban Flesh," Gail Weiss (2006) explains Irigaray's account of the danger and violence in Merleau-Ponty's account of flesh as "pure generality." Flesh is not pure generality. Flesh differentiates in/as its ongoing manner of stylization in its manner of bringing things into being. A style is an identifiable cohesion that fixes a way of being. As Weiss explains, for Irigaray, being is "always already differentiated" through sexuate difference (148).

[8] "Somewhere on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a *mythical norm*, which each one of us within our hearts knows 'that is not me'. In america, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society. Those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practicing" (Lorde 2007, 116).

III: LIVED FLESH WE FLESH

What if prior to theft, flesh was the primordial status of all *homo sapiens*? What if when the bewildering encounter transformed freely relational African flesh/body into the captive/stolen body and flesh, it also transformed relational pre-european flesh into the European, then white, subject? This transformation instigates a subject-object relation in which the human subject/thief maintains its subjectivity by fleeing from its fleshiness and turning toward surface, transparency, and determination (Musser 2018, 48–50). The human subject/thief tears itself apart from fleshy being-with and projects that *wounding* onto the captive flesh through continued violence. Antiblackness and white-supremacy are the structures that have been produced to keep the captive body/flesh as an open wound, so that the flesh may be experienced as a lack *only*. In these last sections I will explore the experience of flesh that exceeds total capture.

To live beyond the clutches of the human coil is a unique opportunity "to be able to grasp the deep significance of the possibilities of the crisis" that is "unique in the ages" and develop expressive and affective engagements otherwise (Cooper 1892, 144). I see the possibility of this capacity beyond that of subjectivity and humanity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (2004). This "unique" "possibilit[y] of the crisis" is what I want to think about as *lived* flesh.

I am drawn to the "critical fabulation" of Toni Morrison's "recombinant narrative" (Hartman 2008, 11–12).[9] In *Beloved*, through the character, Sethe, Morrison channels Margaret Garner, "a young mother who, having escaped slavery, was arrested for killing one of her children (and trying to kill the others) rather than let them be returned to the owner's plantation" (Morrison 2004, xvii–xix). Sethe escapes enslavement at "Sweet Home" and flees to Ohio to be reunited with her kin. Baby Suggs, holy, Sethe's mother-in-love arrived in Cincinnati, Ohio years earlier after her child, Halle (and Sethe's "choice"), bought her freedom from their enslaver (13). Baby Suggs, holy, put her heart "to work at once" (102). This is the work of Clearing, of making place and kinship that exceeds the experience and ethical concerns of the human subject.

[9] "The method guiding this writing practice is best described as critical fabulation. 'Fabula' denotes the basic elements of story, the building blocks of the narrative. A fabula, according to Mieke Bal, is 'a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused and experienced by actors.' . . . By playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story . . . from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done . . . . I wanted to make visible the production of disposable lives (in the Atlantic slave trade and, as well, in the discipline of history), to describe 'the resistance of the object.' . . . The outcome of this method is a 'recombinant narrative,' which 'loops the strands' of incommensurate accounts and which weaves present, past, and future in retelling the girl's story and in narrating the time of slavery as our present. Narrative restraint, the refusal to fill in the gaps and provide closure, is a requirement of this method, as is the imperative to respect black noise" (Hartman 2008, 11–12).

In the Clearing[10] ritual, Black people gather in flesh. This Clearing is a geography where flesh exceeds and differentiates itself from the logic and grasp of the human subject/captors. That is, the Clearing ritual—a practice of sounding, touching, sorrowing, and joining—affirms the excessiveness of Black lives and the fact that flesh can never just be captive.

> It started that way: laughing children, dancing men, crying women and then it got mixed up. Women stopped crying and danced; men sat down and cried; children danced, women laughed, children cried until, exhausted and riven, all and each lay about the Clearing damp and gasping for breath. In the silence that followed, Baby Suggs, holy, offered up to them her great big heart . . .
>
> "Here," she said, "in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Touch others with them . . . stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. *You* got to love it, *you*! And no, they ain't in love with your mouth. Yonder, out there, they will see it broken and break it again. What you say out of it they will not heed . . . No, they don't love your mouth. *You* got to love it. This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. . . . And O my people, out yonder, hear me, they do not love your neck unnoosed and straight. So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up. (Morrison 2004, 102–04)

The lived flesh of the Clearing has kinship arrangements—children, parents, lovers—who inhabit simultaneous affective positions—laughing, smiling, dancing, crying—in and through touch and voice. It all gets mixed up. This mixing, this clearing, is not possible for the human subject who requires—even in its ambiguous perception—a steady and individual point of orientation. *We* flesh. In this here-place, in this geography, in this space and time beyond that of the yonder, *we* are "deeply loved" and deeply loving, touching, singing, laughing, weeping, dancing, communing in nature. This is flesh—lived flesh—I'm talking about here, flesh that insists beyond the piecemeal assemblage of the human body/parts. Baby Suggs, holy outlines the constructs of the human "they," the space of "yonder" and their acts that exclude flesh from humanity.

Spillers (2003) seems to echo Baby Suggs, holy's epistemological, axiological, and phenomenological assessments about the capacity of them "yonder."

[10] Morrison (2004) capitalizes "Clearing" in the novel. In my reading this designates the Clearing as both a place "where Baby Suggs had danced in sunlight" (101) and a practice.

> Whatever my mother, niece, and I might say and do about our sexuality (the terms of kinship are also meant collectively) remains an unarticulated nuance in various forms of public discourse as though we were figments of the great invisible empire of womankind. In a very real sense, black American women remain invisible to various public discourse, and the state of invisibility for them has its precedent in an analogy on any patriarchal symbolic mode that we might wish to name. (153)

The Clearing is a "wide-open place cut deep in the woods nobody knew for what at the end of a path known only to deer and whoever cleared the land in the first place" (Morrison 2004, 102). It is invisible to those "yonder." The Clearing ritual is "an unarticulated nuance" to the human subject yonder, that apprehends the lived flesh as parts, items, objects for use and not of, engaged in, and constituted by collective kin-marking process.

For Merleau-Ponty (1968), the flesh is not matter and is not a being itself. As an "element" of Being, it is "[un]thinkable by itself" (139–40). And since the body accomplishes thought, it is unlivable. Morrison provides an account of *lived flesh.* "We Flesh" is the lived sensor-sensed of the Black self. Lived flesh is a kind of lived being-otherwise that destabilizes Merleau-Ponty's account of the lived body and the body of flesh.

An Erotics of Lived Flesh

Morrison's critical fabulatory flesh is an otherwise of affect, kinship, and identity. An understanding of the Clearing as a world/region beyond (coeval, simultaneous, and intimate with, but inaccessible by) the experiential/perceptual realm of the human subject highlights different life projects for lived flesh.

Hortense Spillers' (2003) critical work on grammar and discursive projects opens onto an account of flesh that problematizes the narrative structure of Merleau-Ponty's account of the anonymous, natural, pre-personal world of the human as well as the generality of his account of the carnal body. Spillers' work in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," and "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words" centers the lived experience—via the discursive practices —of the Black female body that emerges in the wake of the Transatlantic Atlantic Slave Trade.[11] Spillers outlines the way that the deployment of sexuality affirms the human subject through its denial of the Black female's human subjectivity. Rather than intersubjectivity, a basic form of lived experience for american Black people is theft and violation. Merleau-Ponty's (1964) account of subjectivity in "The Philosopher and His Shadow" authorizes these invasions. The subject of the flesh has a grammar of annexation—and rendering others and things as at hand for the subject—and sameness that effaces the other.

[11] What I am therefore calling the Trans* Atlantic is that s/place, condition, or process that appears alongside and in relation to the Black Atlantic but also in excess of its currents. I want to think Trans* in a variety of ways that try to get at something *about* or *toward* the range of trans*formations enacted on and by Black bodies. The asterisk after a word functions as the wildcard, and I am thinking the trans* in that way, as a means to mark the ways the slave and the Black occupy what Saidiya Hartman calls the "position of the unthought" (Sharpe 2016, 30).

In Merleau-Ponty's (1964) account, subjects recognize other subjects because they are subjects themselves. "It is true that I would not recognize him if I were *not* a man myself" (170). Likeness is a criterion for recognition as an-other subject. Because Merleau-Ponty is writing in the wake of the historical events of mutilation, displacement, theft, and genocide, I suggest that he has taken his body as un-othered, as *neutral*, which is what allows him to use *his* intracorporeal experience as intercorporeal experience. This neutrality, when combined with the like-to-likeness of inter/subjectivity, indicates that dissimilar, non-"neutral" bodies are unrecognizable as subjects. The like-neutralness of subjects confines intersubjectivity to—and defines it against—the unlike-difference/otherness of other "*animalia*" (168). If for Merleau-Ponty bodies/subjects emerge into a world of intersubjectivity, there is room to think about intersubjectivity/sociality as conditioned by an understanding of non-sociality where *homo sapiens* animalia—as outside of subjectivity—reside. The subject's sociality and cultural world passes through the non-sociality, non-cultural world of animalia. When read through Spillers—where the animalia is Black lived flesh—the subject's sociality and culture must pass through the Black body.

Spillers (2003) treads these (Middle Passage) waters in "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words" as she explores the vestibular nature of the Black body and the Human experience:

> Slavery did not transform the black female into an embodiment of carnality at all, as the myth of the black woman would tend to convince us, nor, alone, the primary receptacle of a highly profitable generative act. She became instead the principal point of passage between the human and the non-human world. Her issue became the focus of a cunning difference—visually, psychologically, ontologically—as the route by which the dominant modes decided the distinction between humanity and "other." . . . [B]lack is vestibular to culture. (155)

I read this vestibular situation as one that undoes the notion that the "black female" is totally conditioned by the trade in enslaved flesh. The black female (mother?) and her "issue" are the very condition for the human subject—a site of difference, difference on sight from which the thief distinguishes itself. I want to linger in the vestibule and consider it as a lived experience. This attention to the vestibular takes up *alterity* and "suggests altogether different relationships to time and space" (Brown 2021, 159). The vestibule, because of its nature, is always becoming. It not fixed; is not an arrival. It is the possibility for arriving otherwise where non-humanity is not just the lack of humanity or "inhumanity;" it is not just captive flesh. The jump into the "unknowable" of alterity funks up the trope of pornography attributed to american Blackwomxn.

There is an opening to consider the flesh that can never be just captive, specifically in the case of american Blackwomxn. "Because black American women do not participate" in the traditional symbolics that have oppressed them, we have no "allegiances" to it (Spillers 2003, 159). As the vestibule from which the subject's sexuate difference emerges, the black "female" body that stands in the flesh has multiple ways of signifying that are beyond the fixed grammar of the human subject/thief (174).

> In this play of paradox, only the female stands *in the flesh*, both mother and mother-dispossessed. This problematizing of gender places her, in my view, out of the traditional symbolics of female gender, and it is our task to make a place for this different social subject. In doing so, we are less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness than gaining the *insurgent* ground as female social subject. Actually *claiming* the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to "name"), which her culture imposes in blindness, "Sapphire" might rewrite after all a radically different test for female empowerment. (Spillers 2003, 228–29)

Out of the "traditional symbolics of gender" lived flesh is in constant movement/transition. Beyond the limitations of the human subject, lived flesh is "transitive" and able to develop its own practices, its own relations and forms of accountability (Snorton 2017, 5–6). These relations include erotic practices that do not collapse into the traditional symbolics of sexuality. The nonhuman erotic practices always already exceed the subject's grammar. So "Sapphire" may once again "rear her head"—as one of my generous and engaging reviewers from Puncta has so evocatively put it—but, if she rears her head as lived flesh, self-named/naming—then she will exceed capture with her motion, her becoming (rather than arrival) and her flux (Brown 2021, 138). At the end of "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" Spillers (2003) leaves the reader with the task "to make a place for this different social subject" (228). I understand the task as not to give the Subject/Thief another thing to grasp. It is to love, to honor, to caress the *difference* of those of us who stand "in the flesh."

Amber Musser's (2018) "Brown jouissance" in the pornotrope takes up this task. Pornotroping speaks to the ways in which black and brown bodies are constructed not as desired *subjectivities*, but as desirable objects, denuded of subjectivity and gender (6–7). Musser's reading of Spillers' "pornotrope" draws from Weheliye (2008), who describes the pornotrope as the (political) means through which Black bodies are transformed into "bare life" or flesh (71–72). [12]

> Brown jouissance, I argue, gives us ways to think about the possibilities of resignifying that affective fleshiness, by showing us that which is not encumbered by discourses of sexuality, but that which traffics in sensuality, that amorphous quality of fleshiness that Spillers argues was assigned to the "captive body.'" (Musser 2018, 9)

Spillersian flesh demarcates the breakdown, the ground of the insurgent; Musser takes up this flesh and fingers the scar with a shiver of pleasure. For Spillers (2003) and Musser (2018), gender is an organizing scaffold of subjectivity; to be ungendered is to be denied subjectivity (Spillers 2003, 222–24; Musser 2018, 108). To live as flesh is to live as excluded

[12] The "bare life" of the *homo sacer* is the condition for the fullness of the life of the human subject (Weheliye 2008, 67–68).

from the guarantee of an emphatic, empathetic, and positively-affirming intersubjective encounter.

Jouissant flesh engages in a "practice of refusal"—a method of thinking (about), doing, and being otherwise (Campt 2019). This refusal to be rendered pornographic is monstrous. To take up the monstrous, to "*clai[m]* the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to 'name')" (Spillers 2003, 229), is to live as a warning of/about the failure of the human subject. The etymology of "monstrous" refers to the unnaturalness of its formation, its deviation from the natural socio-biological order, and its role as a "divine omen." [13] The natural order of the "traditional symbolics" leads to devastation. To *refuse* the normal or be in the world otherwise is to take up the dread of the pornotrope even as one exceeds it in the course of erotic engagement.

Specifically, lived flesh is more than just the lack of subjectivity; it is the movement and irrepressibility of sensual and affective encounters that insist beyond the objectification of the pornotrope. Musser (2018) refers to this motivity—and ability to signify multiply—retained by the lived flesh as "liquidity" (14). To slip, as liquid does, from the subject's fingers. The pornotrope fixes the human and imposes the limitations of sexuality and subjectivity. In describing the human subject as the "thief," Spillers (2003) makes an implicit claim about the tactile projects available to the subject. The thief has a limited range of tactile and affective engagements. They annex, appropriate, steal, clutch, and grasp. The pornotrope creates the un*feel*ing yet sexing subject. *In* the pornotrope, and yet outside of this noose, lived flesh has the oceanic capacity of the erotic.

Lorde's (2007) account of the erotic engages other practices that the human subject's grasping/objectifying sexuality does not. Lorde distinguishes the erotic from the pornographic:

> [T]he erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing. ... The aim of each thing which we do is to make our lives and the lives of our children richer and more possible. (54–55)

For Lorde (2007), "pornography . . . represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling" (54). The unfeeling yet sexing subject/thief of the pornotrope is the site of an overwhelming pornography. But the excessiveness of flesh, its situation as the always already otherwise of the subject's logic, is not totalized by this project. As such, the eroticism of the lived flesh opens onto different engagements/relations: the "We" of "We flesh." [14] On Lorde's account the erotic is a site of deep feeling *shared* with

[13] Gordon and Gordon (2016) center the monster as a divine omen/warning in their chapter "When Monsters No Longer Speak": "[W]e refer to the etymology of the term in Latin, namely, *monere*, which means to warn and its noun correlate *monstrum*, which means divine omen, portent, sign, warning, or abnormality. . . . Monsters are themselves, thus, etymologically, divine warnings, signs that something has gone wrong that are often mistaken as causes and events in themselves" (331).

[14] Lived flesh allows for identification in terms of selves that belong, and are accountable, to a "we" or an "us." We are made of selves, not subjects. This identification, this *we* flesh-ness, understands the lived fleshy self as an *aspect* of we/us. Whilst within the logic of subjectivity, identification tends toward individuation, the individual autonomous actor; lived flesh can accommodate unique components

and among others (56–57). This is demonstrated in her use of "our/s," "we," and "us" significantly more often than she uses "I," "me," "my," or "mine" in the text.[15]

For Lorde (2007) the erotic is a "resource," a "source of power and information within our lives" (53). It is "an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are not reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives" (55). Where sexuality is a paradigm of the thief/captive flesh, the erotic is that paradigm shift that does the (monstrous) work of naming and making connections (kinships). The erotic calls on us to demand better of ourselves and our shared engagements (57). What Musser (2018) calls the "liquidity" of the flesh allows for the affective, sensual, political, and communal capacity of the erotic.

While Lorde (2007) understands that these capacities are distributed to "women"—Lorde also uses "female"—I suggest that they are an example of what Musser (2018) refers to as "re-gendering" and "queer femininity," where femininity is not tied to, or only found in, bodies assigned female at birth. "Re-gendering" is a way of being (with others) in the world otherwise (107–09). For lived flesh gender, as an ongoing, open, supple, painful, pleasing, practice of the community, is a gerund (115). The gerund as a fleshy way of doing/living time, the gerund as a practice of, and orientation toward, beginning—to be becoming, to be emerging—is temporality otherwise.

In the last chapters of *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, Lorde (1982) witnesses (as participant) the erotics of doing/living time with her lover Afrekete. Again, Lorde privileges the communal "we" in her practices of "sharing" connection through tension, pleasure and non-pleasure, creation and transformation, and of coming and going together. There is play in Lorde's description "we had come together" (253). This is a kind of Bluesing/Beautifying the line, this drawing the ear toward simultaneous orgasmic connection and political intertwining.

Blues/ing—both the musical category of Blues and the lived practice of Bluesing—is a beautifying method of fleshy life. "Beauty is [the] method" of what you can do, how you can lie the pleasure of escape, and the shock of care (Sharpe 2019). It is a "wayward" practice that burst out, making its own space for life. Bluesing is a method that emerges from/in a "love of too much," and a "*beautiful* experiment in how-to-live" (Hartman 2020, 228). Blues' use of dissonance, blue notes, and syncopation can be read as "not studyin'" the traditional symbolics of classical music. It is marked by simultaneity and frank opacity.

without alienation. Selves are not in opposition to We/Us. What this means is that we are relational, and that being in and of relation is an ontological condition of lived flesh. I allow for relations within and among lived flesh that attend primarily to the flesh. This enlivens my refusal to think lived flesh as primarily evasive or fugitive, as I worry this line of thought—though rich with meaning—can center that which is being fled: the thief. Certainly, lived flesh can (and at times *must*) evade the grasp of the thief; but this to me is distinct from a thoroughgoing account of lived flesh as evasive. This essay is part of a larger project that explores the living and the fleshiness of lived flesh, the We/Us-ness that dances, laughs, weeps, and touches in Clearings. It is less an attempt to give borders to We and *more* an attempt to explore the ontological status and phenomenological practices of the erotic—rather than the sexual/ity—of "acutely and fully feeling" in our doings (Lorde 2007, 54).

[15] A rough count of the use distribution demonstrates that collective language is used 134 times and personal/individual language is used 34 times.

In addition to its libidinal highs, it also plumbs the depths of depression, suicidal ideation, desertion, and desolation. In Blues joy and pain are shared between the singer and audience in the call and response of created kin. Blues/ing is a method, an experiment in/of the lived flesh that goes beyond the imposed grammatical limitations of subjectivity (Hartman 2019, 227–28).

In "Interstices," Spillers (2003) turns to Bessie Smith's Blues/ing as an example of this method (165–67). For Spillers, the singer is a "being-for-self" and the model of Blackwomxn's wayward/otherwise sexuality—an erotics.

> My aim in quoting Michele Russell's valorization of the singer is to trace her proposal that the dancing voice embodied is the chief teaching model for black women of what *their* femininity might consist in . . . . Whatever luck or misfortune the Player has dealt to her, she is, in the moment of performance, the primary subject of her own invention. Her sexuality is precisely the physical expression of the highest self-regard and, often, the sheer pleasure she takes in her own powers. (166–67)

Smith's Blues/ing is a testimony of experiences, and practices of struggle and celebration, that are not exhausted by the other, even if they are contemporaneous. This method of creation (of beauty), this love of too much, of the flamboyant, is necessary for—and a mode of—the self-invention and self-regard of fleshy pleasure.

The liquidity of fleshy methods, such as Blues/ing, opens simultaneously onto acceptance and rejection, pleasure and non-pleasure, delight and devastation, the "sheer pleasure" of monstrosity. There is pleasure to be had in abjection, there is self to be lived fully and freely within the object, and there is community to be made outside of subjectivity (Musser 2018, 86–89). This is the soft-tough self, the co-mingling and co-constituting of joy and tears (Lorde 1982, 250).

With Afrekete, Lorde revels in the "possibilities that inhere in inequality" (Musser 2018, 39–40).[16] Lived flesh infiltrates, as an insurgent, hostile territory, whilst knowing that life is more than just the war. The excessiveness, or the beyondness, the too-muchness of flesh, means that it cannot make the kind of same holds on others in the world as the lived body. Lorde transforms both the notion of origin and nourishment in her time with Afrekete.

> "I got this under the bridge" was a saying from time immemorial, giving as adequate explanation that whatever it was had come from as far back and as close to home—that is to say, was as authentic—as was possible. (Lorde 1982, 288)

With Afrekete, there is lived experience of time otherwise—alterity. "I got this under the bridge," the "saying from time immemorial" echoes her mother's sounding out home/mother/tongue in a strange land. Lived time that loops, swirls, spirals, keeps pace with

[16] See also Musser 2018, pages 4, 43, 60–63, 87, and 98–102.

itself, lived at a voluptuous depth unavailable to the Body's time, "planted, fruit-deep" in the lived flesh. Fruit, feeling, and family are simultaneous, and are simultaneously longing and fulfillment. Lived flesh exceeds, *undoes*, and destabilizes the subject's grammar yonder. "Here," she said, "in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. *You* got to love it, *you!"* (Morrison 2004, 103).

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BODILY ALIENATION AND CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGIES OF RACE

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Frantz Fanon's (2008) descriptions of lived experience in *Black Skin, White Masks* have become canonical examples of bodily alienation. In several famous passages, Fanon shows how, faced with the White gaze or upon entering White spaces, Blacks may no longer feel at home in their bodies and become burdened by them: "And then we were given the occasion to confront the white gaze. An unusual weight descended on us" (90).[1] For instance, confronted with a habitual task, such as finding a seat on a train, the Black man finds himself disoriented: "In the train, it was a question of being aware of my body, no longer in the third person but in triple . . . I was unable to discover the feverish coordinates of the world. I existed in triple: I was taking up room" (92).

Since Fanon (2008), the concept of bodily alienation has been deployed by philosophers of race working in the phenomenological tradition (Yancy 2008; Zeiler 2013; Ngo 2017). What is interesting about this concept is that it brings with it a judgment of value: to be alienated from one's body is a *defective* state of affairs. Yet, the normative component of the language of alienation brings with it a methodological concern. Descriptions of bodily experience clearly belong to the domain of phenomenology. But what place is there for normative judgments within the field? Phenomenology's vocation, as it was originally articulated by Husserl, was to be a *descriptive* science. What are the merits of going beyond description and integrating the concept of bodily alienation into our phenomenological toolkit?

Before trying to address such a question, let us better circumscribe the experience at play. Kristin Zeiler's (2013) "A Phenomenology of Excorporation, Bodily Alienation and Resistance" offers a fruitful starting point since it develops an ample analysis of bodily alienation. Zeiler begins with the notion of *incorporation*. Following Maurice Merleau-Ponty, she contends that when we habitually use certain movements or tools, they disappear from focal awareness and become integrated—at the level of lived experience—into our bodies.

[1] Although Fanon does not capitalize the adjectives "white" and "black," I choose to do so to indicate that Whiteness and Blackness are identity categories, rather than mere descriptors of racial features.

For instance, after practicing a harp piece many times, I no longer need to focus on how to pluck each string; instead, the movements required for executing that piece become second nature. Suppose, however, that I begin to think about the process of playing. As has happened to me before, when I reflect on how well a performance is going, this change may disrupt my fluid execution of the piece. Suddenly, I can no longer play! What has happened is the opposite of incorporation; instead, the experience taking place corresponds to what Zeiler (2013) terms *excorporation*. When previously incorporated movements or tools return to focal awareness, they have been excorporated. Bodily alienation results from sustained experiences of excorporation: "Excorporation can lead to bodily alienation. I suggest that there also is a qualitative difference between these two, where alienation implies a more thorough and deeper breakage of the subject's lived body" (80).

In the context of racialized interactions, such as those described by Fanon (2008), what occurs is this: the White gaze, or the entrance into a White space, sparks experiences of *excorporation* and eventually of *bodily alienation*. This is evident in Fanon's example of the train. The Black man can no longer perform the motions required for finding a seat: the motions have been excorporated from his repertoire of habitual bodily movements, and this excorporation leads to pervasive disorientation and weightiness—that is, an experience of bodily alienation.

Now, what can descriptions of bodily alienation do for us? As I foreshadowed, the concept of alienation is dual: it involves *descriptive* and *normative* components. As Rahel Jaeggi (2014) puts it in *Alienation*, the concept is *diagnostic*: it simultaneously describes a state of affairs and judges that state as either good or bad. To borrow one of her examples, if I say, "you look sick," I'm not only describing your appearance but also evaluating it: implicit in this statement is the belief that there is something wrong with you (26). There is no need to engage in further inferences: if a person is told they look sick, then something bad is going on. To further clarify Jaeggi's point, consider the difference between the claims "you look sick" and "you look tanned." In the latter case, there is no implicit belief about the goodness or badness of your look. Depending on one's beliefs about the dangers of tanning, or one's aesthetic preferences, one may then make a separate judgment: the fact that you look tanned is deemed good or bad.

Because the concept of alienation combines description and evaluation, it can be used to develop *critical phenomenologies*. Using first-person testimony, one can evaluate a state of affairs as alienating or not. Let's return to Fanon. His phenomenology implies that there is something problematic going on in the Black man's encounters with the White gaze or passage through White spaces: it is bad to undergo experiences such as these. Ideally, they *should not* occur. Consequently, using the concept of bodily alienation within phenomenology allows us to bridge the merely descriptive and the normative. This use has a further upshot: describing social interactions or spaces as alienating may motivate us to change them.

To sum up, the concept of bodily alienation is promising for critical phenomenologies of race because it marries description and evaluation. With this concept, we can go beyond mere descriptions of lived experience and provide arguments for challenging the status quo. In fact, we can steer clear of another danger: an overly "objective" form of theorizing

about race that is unresponsive to the lived experiences of the subjects whose lives it aims to reimagine. By contrast, phenomenologies founded on the concept of bodily alienation teach us which social interactions and spaces alienate people of color. In turn, this knowledge can help us envision a more hospitable world for all.

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UNSETTLING ENCOUNTERS: ON THE ONTOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HABITUAL RACISM

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In July 2020, a video began to circulate online of a white woman in Oakland County, Michigan aiming a loaded handgun at a Black woman and her teenage daughter in a restaurant parking lot (Barmore 2020). The confrontation escalated quickly after the white woman, Jillian Wuestenberg, bumped into Takela Hill's daughter, who retorted: "Excuse you." In raised voices, Wuestenberg accused the family of "invading her personal space" and blocking her exit, while Hill and her daughter demanded an apology, calling Wuestenberg "ignorant" and "racist." Visibly distraught, the two women continued yelling for several minutes as Wuestenberg and her husband got into their vehicle to pull out of the parking lot, nearly backing into Hill in the process. When Hill began banging on the back of the car, Wuestenberg exited the vehicle with gun in hand screaming, "Get away!" (Barmore 2020). Oddly, in the aftermath, it was Wuestenberg who reported feeling "terrified" during the encounter (Kiertzner 2020). When asked what was going through her mind, she said, "I just remember thinking, 'I'm not going home tonight . . . I need to live. I need to survive'" (Kiertzner 2020). Deputies on the scene said they "were presented with two very different stories" of the altercation: though only one of the women was armed, both claimed that they felt "extremely threatened" (Armus and Guarino 2020).

Indeed, when describing encounters with a person of another race, both white and racialized people[1] often report feeling threatened, with psychological and physiological responses of tension (Yancy 2017, 20), distress (Salamon 2018, 116), nausea (Sullivan 2015,

[1] When using "racist" and "racialized," I have in mind Helen Ngo's (2017) definitions. Ngo defines *racism* as "a belief system in which certain 'races' (and their members) are considered inferior by virtue of characteristics or traits pertaining to that 'race'" (xiii). Here, "inferior" invokes not only discrimination but also condescension, pity, and *racialization*: the process by which a person is regarded as having a race and is assigned a racial identity. As Frantz Fanon (2008) suggests, racial stereotypes are not discovered; rather, the racist "*creates the inferiorized*" (73). Similarly, Jean-Paul Sartre (1995) writes: "it is the anti-Semite who *makes* the Jew" (69). Though not representative of all cases, in the Western context in which I am writing, "racialization" most often refers to the process by which people of color are "othered" as non-white, while the "non-naming" of whiteness normalizesd the perception of white people as "unraced." As such, I have followed Ngo in reserving the use of "racialized other" for people of color.

134), and trembling (Ngo 2017, 61). But while an abundance of empirical data is available to justify feelings of threat experienced by people of color—see, for example, data on police violence (Edwards, Lee, and Esposito 2019) or hospital mortality rates (Lucas et al. 2006)—the reasons for a white person's perceived sense of threat are less clear. Consequently, my inquiry is guided by two main questions: first, why is it that a white person who faces no physical danger during an encounter with a person of color nevertheless (mis)perceives the situation as threatening? Second, why is it that the white person subsequently leaves these encounters feeling reaffirmed while the person of color often leaves feeling "unsettled" (Ngo 2017, 61)? To answer these questions, I elaborate on recent developments in critical phenomenology from Helen Ngo, Shannon Sullivan, and Gayle Salamon to argue that encounters which give rise to offensive (and sometimes violent) reactions to the racialized other often share a common feature. Namely, these encounters have the potential to *unsettle* one's "at-home-ness" in the world.

The richness of the term "unsettling" has made it readily employable for phenomenological accounts of racism in philosophy of race literature; yet, the term has been left largely under-theorized. Here, I argue that unsettling encounters can be said to occur when the unfamiliar other has come into contact with the boundary of one's existential home. For many white people, interracial interactions produce an (often unwarranted) feeling of physical danger, but as I hope to show, this habitual (mis)perception of such encounters is not merely a conditioned response; it also functions to subvert situations that might unsettle white identifies partially constituted by phenomenological demarcations of space along racial lines. Crucial, then, to my thesis is an appropriation of Martin Heidegger's *ontico-ontological* difference: the distinction between the outward or empirically present features of the world (i.e., the ontic) and the structural conditions that make particular ways of being-in and moving-through the world possible (i.e., the ontological). While one might think of an *ontic* threat as a threat of physical harm to one's body as such, an *ontological* threat may challenge the internalized (culturally and historically contingent) "rules" and "categories" that found one's capacity to "have" a body at all. As I will argue, reports of feeling *ontically* threatened are often imagined—the result of a habitual, defensive (mis)perception of *ontological* threats to the structural conditions (i.e., the cultural, political, and socioeconomic underpinnings) of white lived experience. In making this claim, I aim to highlight some of the challenges facing attempts to dismantle white normativity[2] and bolster arguments by Ngo, George Yancy, and others that many of us remain "*too much* at-ease" or "too much at-home," such that we insulate ourselves from experiences that might otherwise lead us to re-evaluate our normative expectations (Ngo 2017, 94; emphasis in original).

[2] Sociologist Korie Edwards (2008) has described white normativity as the "normalization of whites' cultural practices, ideologies, and location within the racial hierarchy such that how whites do things; their understandings about life, society, and the world; and their dominant social location over other racial groups are accepted as 'just how things are'" (10).

HOME

In her book *The Habits of Racism*, Ngo (2017) draws on Heidegger's use of the term *die Unheimlichkeit,* meaning "uncanniness" or (more literally) "un-home-liness," to give an account of the racialized person's everyday experience in the world (93). Heidegger introduces the term "uncanniness" during a discussion of the individual's relationship to the public: the ways "Dasein gets lured into—or lost in—the idle hum of 'the They' (*das Man*)" (Ngo 2017, 94). How we are each ontologically constituted and distinguished from one another is a primary interest for Heidegger in *Being and Time* (Mansbach 1991, 65). Thus, one of Heidegger's largest concerns is the extent to which individuals allow their familiar everyday experiences to be influenced and shaped by the public. Heidegger (1962) argues that the public, or "publicness" [*die Öffentlichkeit*], "proximally controls" every way in which Dasein interprets herself and the world around her such that the individual-as-public lacks the capacity to see the boundaries of her own experience (165). He writes:

> We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* [*man*] take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the 'great mass' as *they* shrink back; we find 'shocking' what *they* find shocking. (164; emphasis in original)

Despite this rather negative characterization of "Being-in-the-world," Heidegger argues that it is precisely when the individual is most absorbed in her everyday life (that is to say, taken in and preoccupied with it) that she feels most "at-home" (234). This is because Dasein finds herself located in, and fascinated with, a world already richly populated with commonly accepted meaning. As Dasein is habituated to her world, and the "immediate circle of beings" in which she dwells, she comes to find it "familiar, reliable, [and] ordinary" (1971, 54). On the other hand, Heidegger (1996) maintains that experiences of uncanniness—which "[give] rise to anxiety"—come about when Dasein is pulled out of her absorption in everyday activities and set apart from the public (74). Take, for example, the experience of falling ill, when—as described by Luís Madeira and Beatriz Leal (2019)—the "pre-reflexive, intimate, and familiar" features of the body become "other" and the "painful, heavy, nauseated, feverish body, now alien and out of control, is no longer *home*" (278; emphasis in original). Drawing from his own experiences with illness, Drew Leder (2016) similarly writes that "when we fall sick, we are banished from the daily round of roles and duties on which so much of our conventional identity is based." Lying in a hospital bed, set apart from the public, "we are no longer a party to the concerns that absorb the outer world" (16).

However, Ngo (2017) points out that, as a minority, people of color are often *already* set apart from a public largely constituted by white bodies. Thus, in an effort to situate the racialized body within the Heideggerian framework, Ngo distinguishes the white person's experience—typically characterized by a feeling of being "at home" in one's body and the world-at-large—from the racialized person's, which Ngo claims is frequently "shaken, figuratively and literally" by encounters with racism (61). For example, Ngo (an Asian

woman) describes the effects of a racist encounter with a vendor while walking down the street. "My gut sinks," she writes. "A lump grows in my throat, my mouth goes dry" as the vendor repeatedly calls out "Ni Hao!"—"lips pursed . . . my cheeks betray slight signs of the internal fluster" (Ngo 2017, 55). George Yancy (2013), a Black man, similarly describes a time when a white police officer in North Philadelphia yelled out at him, "Man, I almost blew you away! . . . I thought you had a weapon." Yancy writes, "[t]he words made me tremble and pause; I felt the sort of bodily stress and deep existential anguish that no teenager should have to endure." Thus, Ngo (2017) suggests that Heidegger's description of the familiarity and comfort with which the white person typically moves through the world cannot always speak to the experience of racialized people who, often feeling not-at-home, are threatened by an "existential instability" (70).

The contrast between white and racialized embodiment is borne out further in Shannon Sullivan's (2006) work on "ontological expansiveness," which she argues is a characterizing feature of white experience:

> As ontologically expansive, white people tend to act and think as if all spaces—whether geographical, physical, linguistic, economic, spiritual, bodily, or otherwise—are or should be available for them to move in and out of as they wish. (10)

Here, the white person's orientation to the world is such that she feels entitled to move through any space with ease and confidence, "uninhibited and unobstructed by one's own body" (Ngo 2017, 80). By contrast, Yancy (2017) describes how his own bodily expansiveness is limited when he enters an elevator where a white woman is waiting to reach her floor. Upon seeing Yancy (or, more specifically, Yancy's "Black body"), the woman clutches her handbag more closely to her side (21). Yancy writes:

> My movements become and remain stilted. I dare not move suddenly… I feel trapped. I no longer feel bodily expansiveness within the elevator, but corporeally constrained, limited. I now begin to calculate, paying almost neurotic attention to my body movements, making sure this "Black object," what now feels like an appendage, a weight, is not too close, not too tall, not too threatening. (32)

Yancy's example demonstrates one of the ways ordinary life is interrupted for the racialized other. While almost everyone is likely to become aware of their bodily comportment during a job interview or doctor's visit—"in other words, for *events* or *occasions*"—the racialized body must engage in this kind of work in everyday "*non-events*" like strolling through the park or while shopping (Ngo 2017, 58; emphasis in original). Ngo (2017) cites a number of "coping mechanism[s]" used by people of color to appear non-threatening or subvert other stereotypes, from whistling songs by the Beatles as one walks past a young white couple at night to wearing university-branded clothing while shopping for real estate (57). During such cases, the racialized other is not "at home" in the world; rather, she may find herself "disturbed, destabilized, unsettled" (61). Ngo writes:

> In experiencing one's body schema as inherently unsettled or at any moment "unsettleable," the racialized body not only becomes accustomed to but indeed *anticipates* these moments of unraveling. (Ngo 2017, 70; emphasis in original)

Ngo's use of "unsettled" and "unsettleable" is interesting insofar as it points to the vulnerable nature of this existential home: even when she feels *settled*, she remains *unsettleable*. To further explore this characteristic of the home, we must first understand how one comes to feel settled, or "at home," in the first place. In the next section, I turn to Ngo once again and provide an overview of the role habit plays in constituting the home.

HABIT

In his lecture, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* Heidegger (1996) writes that the "homely" aspects of life are those which are "habitual" and "intimately familiar" (71). The connection between *habit* and *inhabit* is an important one for Ngo whose project is to reframe racism as something expressed habitually. Drawing on the work of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Ngo (2017) argues that racism "is not simply a practice that one engages in through conscious words or actions," nor is it "merely a set of attitudes held in thoughts;" rather, racism is "more deeply embedded in our bodily habits of movement, gesture, perception, and orientation" (1). While we might have a familiar association of "habit" with repetitive, absent-minded actions, such as biting one's nails, Merleau-Ponty (2012) uses habit specifically to denote experiences one has become accustomed or "habituated" to. For example:

> If I possess the habit of driving a car, then I enter into a lane and see that "I can pass" without comparing the width of the lane to that of the fender, just as I go through a door without comparing the width of the door to that of my body. (144)

Here, habit designates the ability to move in and respond to one's surroundings with *ease*, *familiarity*, and *confidence*. When I navigate a crowd wearing a backpack, there is no need to stop and evaluate the backpack's depth or calculate the distance between the people ahead of me—I am already aware of such things. My movement is smooth and uninterrupted, and while I do not have perfect knowledge of my backpack's position at all times, I have a sense of it. The knowledge of my surroundings and the space I occupy is not precise, but it is practical, and it shapes my movements as I maneuver through the crowd. One's interactions with the world are functional, in some sense, only because of the prevalence of this practical knowledge. "Indeed think of how we often employ our hands to convey indications of size, distance, direction, or shape in imprecise yet still meaningful ways," writes Ngo (2017, 3). The prevalence of habit in everyday activities (e.g., eating, walking,

driving, speaking) suggests that habits are more than something we accumulate; they are a "fundamental and primordial feature of embodied being" (3).

In a description of bodily habituation, Merleau-Ponty (2012) bears out the connection between habit and home, writing that "[t]o habituate oneself to a hat, an automobile, or a cane is to take up residence in them, or inversely, to make them participate within the voluminosity of one's own body" (144–45). For example, after spending only a short time becoming acquainted with an unfamiliar organ, an experienced organist nevertheless "settles into the organ." Merleau-Ponty writes:

> He sits on the bench, engages with the pedals, and pulls out the stops, he sizes up the instrument with his body, he incorporates its direction and dimensions, and he settles into the organ as one settles into a house. (146)

The habit "takes up residence" in the body, and in turn, the body 'settles into' the world around it. Ngo (2017) notes the way one might familiarize oneself with a new city, "first by orienting ourselves and attending to basic needs (navigating public transport, bureaucracy, and so forth)" and then by the gathering of habits: "visiting the same ***boulangerie*** every morning, figuring out one's route to the metro, or finding a local hangout spot to frequent" (8). This phenomenological account of habit provides the basis for Ngo's critical analysis of racism. Once again, Ngo's claim is that racism is expressed not only through overt acts of racial violence, hatred, and discrimination but also in the kinds of subtle bodily gestures and perceptions displayed by a white man who locks his car door as a person of color passes by. Or, returning to Ngo's earlier example, the white woman who, upon seeing Yancy, clutches her handbag more closely to her side. Ngo writes that the woman's "bodily habits are racist," that they have "settled into her bodily repertoire, and are made immediately available to her upon the unanticipated interaction with a Black man" (23). Thus, Ngo suggests that as the woman accustoms herself to this gesture, she becomes "at home" in her racism.

Oddly, however, though the woman Yancy encountered may have felt "at home" or at ease with her racist habits, the very deployment of these habits indicates (and perhaps even occasions) her apparent sense of ***dis-ease*** with the situation. She does not appear ***comfortable*** or ***uninhibited*** in the elevator. On the contrary, Yancy (2017) writes that the woman seems desperate to flee: "she feels anxiety in the pit of her stomach," her palms become clammy, she has difficulty swallowing, and she appears nauseous (21). Feeling "threatened," she begins to tense up, contract, and pull her body (and handbag) inward while "her peripheral vision surveils [Yancy]" (27). In this instance, the bodily habits of racism described by Ngo as that which allows the white person to feel "at home" are accompanied instead by intense, negative physiological responses similar to those exhibited by Yancy, who describes feeling "trapped" and "thrown into an uncomfortable awareness of [his] body" (32).

Ngo (2017) explains the woman's behavior—"the tensing, the constricted breathing, the uneasy shifting of the body"—as a response to her inscription or projection of "Blackness" onto Yancy (16). He does nothing to provoke the woman's response; rather, she responds with fear and defensiveness to her own habitual racist perception of Black

men as threatening. I take Ngo's account of the woman's reaction to Yancy to be correct. However, I propose that Ngo's account is incomplete insofar as it only addresses those forms of habitual racism in which the person of color is typically stereotyped as a physical or *ontic* threat to the white person's wellbeing. Indeed, even in cases where a particular racial group has been explicitly stereotyped as *non-dominant* (i.e., less assertive or domineering), the group is often still perceived as ontically threatening in other ways—for example, as a shrewd economic competitor on the job market (Berdahl and Min 2012). While ontic explanations are frequently given as justification for racist behavior, such behavior is not limited to encounters that can be easily misread as ontically threatening. Instead, negative responses to racialized people appear to coalesce around violations of racial boundaries; one need only look at the negative reaction many white people have to, for example, Black men with "white" hobbies or Asian men with knowledge of domestic vs. imported beers (Phelan and Rudman 2010). Moreover, the empirical literature suggests that interactions with individuals from different racial groups are often perceived as "distressing" (Richeson and Trawalter 2005, 934), causing not only feelings of danger or worry but also "uncertainty, discomfort, [and] anxiety" (Blascovich et al. 2001, 253). Thus, in supplementing Ngo's description of *how* habitual forms of perception lead to experiences of threat, I propose an explanation for *why* white people are invested in such a process at all.

When confronted with behaviors that challenge racial boundaries, those boundaries—and, by extension, the relative status and comfort of white people—are called into question. In the next section, I argue that the white person's apparent discomfort and racist response during these encounters are actually the result of *ontological* threats not altogether dissimilar from those which Ngo, Yancy, and countless other people of color must live with on a regular basis: for a brief moment, the white person experiences herself as *unsettleable* and responds with perceptual habits that reassure her that racial boundaries are still in place. In other words, I suggest that habitual forms of racism can be re-evaluated as more than a conditioned response; they are also functionally salient, serving as a *defense mechanism* by recycling perceptual patterns that support and reinforce the race-based boundaries that white normativity depends on.

THREAT

Ngo (2017) is clear that people of color often experience an uncanniness "*particular* to racialized being" (125; emphasis in original). Yancy (2017), for example, writes that he is unsettled by the racist gestures and perceptions of a white woman who forces him to "catch a glimpse of [him]self through the white person's gaze" (xxxv). In light of this, it is important to note that in claiming that white people may experience themselves as "unsettleable," I do not mean to treat as identical the lived experiences of white and racialized groups. Nor do I mean to conflate, for example, the very real threat of police brutality faced by Black men with the imagined threat white people often report during encounters with people of color. It is nevertheless the case that white people often *perceive* interracial encounters as threatening, and it is with this in mind that I continue my inquiry

into why habitual perceptions are triggered at all, and why they are often accompanied by feelings of uncertainty and anxiety.

The divergence between white and racialized experience is made clearer by the fallout of interracial encounters. Though both white and racialized people may describe the encounter itself as "unsettling," white people most often leave these encounters having reaffirmed themselves and their habitual racism, while the racialized person may leave in a state of deep existential anguish. Indeed, empirical research has demonstrated that in cases where racial and gender boundaries are challenged, stereotype violations appear to "cast perceivers into a state of uncertainty" by "threatening [their] worldview" (Phelan and Rudman 2010, 178, 266). For example, in a study of stereotyping in the workplace, psychologists Jennifer Berdahl and Ji-A Min (2012) found that East Asians in North America were expected to behave less dominantly than their white co-workers; consequently, East Asians who challenged this expectation were more frequently the target of racial harassment than peers who "stayed in their place" (149). Philosopher David Haekwon Kim (2020) writes that nonpassive Asians may be viewed as "a provocation or unsettling" to the perceiver's "habits or habitual body," such that "the Asian person's apparent dominance troubles the perceiver's normative expectations and related comportment in the world" (297). In this moment of "uncertainty," white people have a chance to reconsider the expectations which have just been challenged; however, psychologists Julie E. Phelan and Laurie A. Rudman (2010) have found that rather than altering these expectations, white people typically respond with backlash that increases their self-esteem (266). Thus, already animated in the empirical literature is a conceptual reworking of the role habitual racism (e.g., the habitual perception of Black men as dangerous) plays as a *response* to the presence of a deeper, ontological threat.

The empirical literature illustrates that the habitual perception of people of color as dangerous, as well as the physiological symptoms already mentioned here (e.g., nausea, trembling, flushing, tensing), often arise in moments when racial boundaries have been crossed: a phenomenon some psychologists have labeled a "distinctiveness" threat. Social categorization is said to "provide us with meaningful identities, which allow us to make sense of the world" by structuring our social environment and defining our place within it (Branscombe et al. 1999, 41). However, when these categories are violated by an out-group member (i.e., a member of a social group with which one does not identify), individuals may feel that they lack a distinct social identity and respond by displaying out-group degradation in attempts to differentiate themselves (37). This is illustrated quite clearly in *Black Skin, White Masks*, where Franz Fanon (2008) cites psychoanalyst Octave Mannoni's description of an argument used by "racialists" to persuade other white people of the alleged inferiority of Black people:

> "What," they say, "*if you had a daughter, do you mean to say that you would marry her to a Negro?*" I have seen people who appeared to have no racialist bias lose all critical sense when confronted with this kind of question. The reason is that such an argument disturbs certain uneasy feelings in them (more exactly, *incestuous* feelings) and they turn to racialism as a defense reaction. (142; emphasis in original)

Fanon (2008) writes that "the white man is convinced the black man is an animal" and, when confronted with evidence to the contrary, must "defend himself" by "characteriz[ing]" the unfamiliar other as dangerous, sexually promiscuous, etc. (147). Here, the "white man" is no longer "at home." He is disturbed, uneasy at the thought of allowing a person of color into his family, and he "defends" himself against this unsettling proposition with the same habitual perceptions Ngo describes: the projection of Blackness onto a person of color.

In *The Physiology of Sexist and Racist Oppression*, Sullivan (2015) suggests that this desire for differentiation is responsible for many of the unconscious psychological and physiological habits we hold. During a period of extreme racial segregation in 19th century America, eating with a person of color carried a taboo equivalent to interracial sex—a violation of (white) racial etiquette enforced with severe physical punishment (135). Expectations regarding mealtime etiquette were "so deeply ingrained in the habits of white lives that many white people experienced intense revulsion at the thought of eating with African Americans" (136). However, as white people were aware and accepting of the fact that African Americans prepared and served their food to them, Sullivan suggests that the "revulsion" they felt was not caused by racist stereotypes of African Americans as dirty or unclean; rather, white refusal to eat with African Americans reflected a racist rejection of people of color as a way of defining white identity. Segregation enacted in restaurants, dining cars, and kitchens was not merely geographical or political; it was also ontological. Sullivan writes, "it was a matter of what parts of the 'outside' world would be taken into white bodies to help constitute them" (137). Consequently, the many physiological habits that alert white people to the alleged danger of African Americans appear to function not as a response to physical danger, dirtiness, or other ontic features, but as a means to convince white people that they are ontologically separate from African Americans who come into contact with the boundaries of white normativity.

Further highlighting the ontological significance of habitual racism, Sullivan (2006) writes that the habits which enforce racial boundaries often begin developing at a young age as children adopt signifiers unconsciously displayed by their parents during tense or racially charged situations:

> Along with timbre of voice—itself a bodily effect—it is the comportment of adults' faces, hands, and feet that communicate to the children. A tensely pursed mouth, an anxiously tapping foot, a worried wrung hand convey the gravity of their family's world to [children] even though they do not fully know why the situation is grave and cannot understand the words used by the adults to discuss it. (66)

These perceptual and physiological responses are then taken up by children who use them to read and respond to situations in their own lives. For example, Sullivan writes of the "enigmatic messages" about race that were relayed to her as a child by the "distasteful hiss" in her grandmother's voice as she pronounced the word "Mexican" (69). Similarly,

she describes an olfactory association she developed between cumin—a spice often used in Mexican and Tex-Mex food—and negative stereotypes about Mexican-Americans. Sullivan (2006) writes that her negative reaction to the smell of cumin involved a racist process by which the spice was identified through its disavowal: to give up the olfactory association would be to "challenge the oppositional relationship between white and non-white people that helps guarantee [her] whiteness." In this way, unconscious habits appear to "protect [her] white privileged sense of self" (68). Indeed, to give up such habits would be to leave oneself open to a Heideggerian anxiety during which "everyday familiarity collapses" (Heidegger 1962, 233). The examples we have encountered so far suggest that, in order to prevent this anxiety, the white person maintains a range of habitual responses waiting to be deployed. Heidegger (1962) writes that when faced with anxiety-producing unfamiliarity, "we flee [back] *into* the 'at home' of publicness, we flee *in the face of* the 'not-at-home'; that is, we flee in the face of the uncanniness" because it "is a threat to [our] everyday lostness in the 'they'" (234; emphasis in original). I suggest that by exercising the racist habits which help constitute this existential home, white people (mis)perceive *ontological* threats to their "worldview"—e.g., a "bookish" Black student or a masculine gay man (Schimel et al. 1999)—as *ontically* threatening so as to avoid the kind of work and existential anguish that altering one's normative expectations would require.

This phenomenon is illustrated perhaps most clearly in Gayle Salamon's (2018) *The Life and Death of Latisha King*. In the next section, I turn to Salamon's work, which not only provides a useful case study of the unsettleable nature of one's familiar understanding of the world but also demonstrates the applications of this concept beyond racism.

SHOCK

On February 12, 2008, Larry King was shot by Brandon McInerney, a fellow student at E. O. Green Junior High School in Oxnard, California. Brandon shot Larry twice in the back of the head at point-blank range with a handgun, one of several kept in the family home. Larry died in the hospital the next day.

– Gayle Salamon, *The Life and Death of Latisha King*

Larry King was a fifteen-year-old male mixed-race student who identified as Black and had decided to go by the name "Latisha" only ten days before being murdered by Brandon McInerney. When asked if he had any doubts about his decision to shoot Latisha, Brandon told Dr. Donald Hoagland—a psychologist called as an expert witness by the defense during Brandon's trial—that he was certain of his decision when he heard that Larry had changed his name. When asked, "What was so disturbing about that name change?" Brandon said, "It was so shocking and disgusting that he would do that" (Salamon 2018, 6). According to Brandon, the inciting incident was when Latisha called him "baby" one day as they passed each other in the hall. "I have never been disrespected like that," he said (58). When asked

why such a seemingly harmless comment would lead Brandon to react violently, Hoagland responded:

> There are multiple things. One was that this boy who was dressing as a woman and secondarily who was gay . . . was coming up and saying these kinds of provocative things to him in front of many other people. (Salamon 2018, 59)

"I knew he was gay," Brandon said, "but he took it to a whole other level. What the hell, high heels and makeup and hairdo? It was surprising and disgusting" (59).

The signs of revulsion in Brandon's answer to Hoagland are demonstrative of the "gay panic" defense mounted by Brandon's lawyers. Salamon writes that the defense showed no evidence of any explicit sexual aggression from Latisha but instead relied on a "submerged logic in which no sexual provocation was required to provide such a panic *because Larry's feminine gender was already a panic-inducing provocation*" (5; emphasis in original). The defense claimed that "Larry's" dressing, sounding, and walking "like a girl" was "provocative" and tantamount to harassment of those around him (31–36). When the prosecution asked Hoagland if he spoke to Brandon about why he found Latisha's comportment so disgusting, he responded: "Yes. He said that it was such a disruption of what he expected from a male that simply seeing [Latisha] was upsetting and disturbing" (59).

Present in this example are the same fantasies of aggression that Ngo (2017) describes. Though Latisha never levied any physical threat against Brandon, aggression was still projected onto Latisha, and her "harassment" was used as justification for the transphobic and racist violence she endured. Latisha's case is useful insofar as it highlights the real source of animosity felt by her classmates and teachers: her "disruption" of the status quo. The testimony suggests that there was, in fact, no need for an inciting incident because the mere presence of Latisha, her particular way of Being-in-the-world, was considered threatening. Salamon (2018) writes that Brandon was "shocked" by Latisha, who broke his "representational frame" and challenged him to shift his normative expectations—his "habits of seeing, [and] ways of hearing" (71, 65, 64). Salamon writes that such disruptions produce a "jarring and unexpected shift" that may prompt a "reconstitution of meaning" (65). But rather than take this opportunity to reflect on the normative expectations which give them comfort, Latisha's teachers and classmates responded with revulsion, anger, and fantasies of aggression. Salamon writes:

> It is the feeling of having our habitual and familiar experience of the world suddenly snapped. This is how many of the teachers at E. O. Green Junior High described their experiences with Latisha. In her appearance, her mannerisms, her comportment, she was a radical affront to their assessment of how a boy should look and behave, and also of what constituted a girl.

The sound of her high heels clicking on the hallway floor as she walked to class "occasioned a break in the familiar everydayness of the school" (66). In one instance, a teacher, Debi

Goldstein, was asked if the way Latisha dressed was a disruption. "Yes, it was," Goldstein said. "He went too far" (154). But, as Salamon notes, Goldstein did not single out any one element of Latisha's attire or behavior; rather, she was distressed by "the general gestalt of her gender presentation" (155). Moreover, Salamon reports that "Latisha's name was almost never uttered, not at the school, not during the trial" (64). It would seem that merely mentioning the feminine name in reference to a male body was too uncomfortable for the people around her. The name did too much to counter their familiar understanding of the world; it produced too strong a shock to their existential home. Latisha's classmates and teachers found her very existence unsettling.

DEFAMILIARIZATION

What does it mean when one group's "ease" requires the permanent unsettledness of those it deems other? My aim has been to draw attention to the role habitual racism plays as a response to the ontologically unsettling nature of interracial encounters—specifically, the use and maintenance of perceptual and physiological habits as a defense against racial "threats" to white normativity. Unsettling encounters highlight the challenges facing those who wish to combat habitual forms of racism, further supporting Ngo's (2017) claim that there are those among us who are "*too much* at-ease" or "too much at-home" (108; emphasis in original). As Heidegger (1996) clarifies, the anxiety that is so fiercely avoided (by white people) via defensive perceptual and physiological habits is not necessarily negative.[3] The uncanniness that characterizes anxiety represents, for Heidegger, an authentic mode of Being in which the individual, who is typically concealed from herself while absorbed in her everydayness is, through anxiety, disclosed to herself: her taken-for-granted understanding of the world is made available for re-evaluation (74). This openness to rethinking one's normative expectations has been a distinctive feature of the call to curb individual and interpersonal forms of racism. For example, Sullivan (2004) writes in "White World-Traveling" that white people need to accept that there are spaces where they do not belong despite the sense of dis-ease this idea tends to produce in them (303). Still others have suggested various forms of "defamiliarization"—by way of speculative fiction, cross-cultural comparisons, and "empathic unsettlement"—in the hope that such methods will encourage readers to question racial, gender, and other social boundaries (Schalk 2018; Shuman 2011; Marcus and Fischer 1999). In a letter titled "Dear White America," Yancy (2015) asked his readers not to "seek shelter from your own racism" or "hide from your responsibility," but to "practice being vulnerable." More specifically, Yancy asked his white readers to open themselves up to the "pain" of anxiety: "I'm asking you to tarry, to linger, with the ways in which you perpetuate a racist society, the ways in which you are racist." The harassment and threats of violence Yancy received in response suggest that

[3] Heidegger (1996) writes: "Yet even though we are making an attempt to grasp the uncanny more decisively as the unhomely, we may still easily fall prey to the danger of thinking this essential trait of human beings in a merely negative way, in accordance with the sound of the word: mere not-being—namely not being within the homely, a mere departing and breaking free from the homely" (74).

even the mere request to reconsider one's standing in the world is too unsettling for many white people.

It should be noted that while the habitual forms of racism discussed here may have a co-constitutive relationship with the institutional and ideological structures that enforce racial boundaries, these systemic factors are not reducible to racism at the local, individual level and must be addressed in their own right. Nevertheless, habitual racism reframed as a defensive measure working to construct fantasies of aggression during interracial encounters demonstrates a particular obstacle to localized progress and deserves further exploration. If phenomenological boundaries of race are to be dismantled, it will require that white people be willing to engaged in the difficult work and existential anguish that altering the conditions of one's live experience often necessitates.

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CRISIS CONSCIOUSNESS, UTOPIAN CONSCIOUSNESS, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

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For many, the George Floyd protests of 2020 seemed like an opening, a watershed moment in the long struggle for racial justice in the United States. Images of multiracial protests and a burning police station seared themselves into the public consciousness as if there could be no turning back. No one could remain unaware that there was something fundamentally unjust in the social order of the United States. Calls for defunding or abolishing the police that entered into the public consciousness seemed to offer the increasingly real possibility that a utopian arrangement of social life was underway. Amid a historic global pandemic and a severe economic downturn, one would be forgiven for assuming that the protests were a moment of extreme combustibility and the social order of the United States would have to give.

Nevertheless, the United States social order proved itself to be quite resistant to any fundamental restructuring. By some measures, the protests were the largest in United States history and crossed racial identities. So why weren't they enough? Should we assume that *nothing* happened in those protests? I believe that answering these questions requires a theory of social transformation that allows us to schematize why possibilities for change emerge and why they are so often thwarted. I will focus on the place of consciousness in social transformation since the George Floyd protests were mostly experienced as a radical reshaping of awareness concerning state violence and racial injustice.

Consciousness seems to have a central, if ambiguous, status in theorizations of social transformation. After all, in the context of hermeneutical injustice we speak of the importance of "consciousness-raising."[1] We point to young people and activists as evidence of a radical consciousness that is aware of injustices to which previous generations are assumed to have been insensitive. We even highlight the importance of changing social consciousness in order to produce more just norms of recognition as it concerns differences in race, gender, sexuality, and ability. On one view, consciousness appears as a site of

[1] See also Miranda Fricker (2007) and José Medina (2013) on the epistemically liberatory effects of the oppressed collectively cognizing unjust social structures.

agency in theories of historical freedom and thus should be the central object of critical attention.

Nevertheless, consciousness just as often appears to be an obstacle to social transformation. In the Marxist tradition, "false consciousness" prevents agents from understanding the influence of noncognitive motives such as economic constraints in their belief formations (Shelby 2003, 170–72). Alternatively, agents may not know or understand the "implicit" beliefs that they hold in reference to other social groups and thus might not grasp essential features of their subject formation.[2] Furthermore, certain strains of Marxist and psychoanalytic theorizing[3] would object to an overemphasis on the capacity of consciousness to alter its social environment or autonomously form itself, respectively. These theories instead urge us to focus on the role of social forces (of the market or unconscious) that are external to agents and will overdetermine the shape of consciousness.

Unless one subscribes to a strictly functionalist-determinist view of social reality, consciousness, however ambivalent, will have some role to play in theories of social transformation and justice. When we refer to consciousness in the context of theories of social transformation, we might mean the minimal capacity for agents to cognize and become aware of what is around them. I argue that this is too thin for a plausible theory of social transformation. According to what I will call the *awareness model of consciousness,* consciousness tends to be figured as mostly passive or reactive and therefore cannot adequately explain why agents attempt to reshape the social order in which they live. After all, we can assume many agents are aware of the injustices they face within a social order, but rebellion and protest are the exception not the rule. If one subscribes to a version of the awareness model of consciousness, then the explanation for the lack of apparent struggle to change our social order will rest on some idea that agents have been duped by ideology.[4]

[2] See Charles Mills (2017, 49–72) and George Yancy (2017, 17–51). It is not the focus of this article, but it is important to note that serious questions have been raised about the efficacy of scientifically tracking "implicit" biases as opposed to "explicit" biases. For instance, Samuel Reis-Dennis and Vida Yao (2021) contend that the IAT (Implicit Association Test) does not sufficiently control for the hypothesis that it captures explicit beliefs agents hold rather than implicit. This means that our approach to belief formations such as racism need not presume that these beliefs are hidden or unthematized by agents. If this holds, then the contemporary focus on agents needing to excavate beliefs that have hitherto remained beyond the reach of their consciousness may be counterproductive. I will address this question more in-depth in my work in progress, "Do We Need a Social Theory of Knowledge to Understand the Construction of Race?"

[3] See Louis Althusser (2001, 85–127) and especially Étienne Balibar (2007, 46–77) on "commodity fetishism" in Marx.

[4] What I mean by the "awareness model of consciousness" indicates what I take to be the common sense orientation towards how social problems are conceptualized. For instance, Jacob Blumenfeld (2022) makes the following observation in the context of climate change: "There is the common belief that genuine awareness and acceptance of the existence of anthropogenic climate change (as opposed to either ignorance or denial) automatically leads one to develop political and moral positions which advocate for collective human action toward minimizing suffering for all and adapting human societies toward a fossil-free future. This is a mistake. Against the idea that scientific awareness of the facts of climate change is enough to motivate a common ethical project toward a unifying good, I argue that climate change awareness can just as well equally motivate heightened divisions of humanity into anti-egalitarian, xenophobic, class-differentiated zones of competitive survival" (2). I will make a similar argument in Section II of this article.

Critical theory should resist an overemphasis on ignorance as a social explanation and instead as Robin Celikates (2018) argues, "tie in with everyday practices of justification and critique, rather than . . . take the historically rare and empirically implausible extreme of total ideological blindness as a starting point" (7).

In place of the awareness model of consciousness, I argue theories of social transformation should describe consciousness as the agential capacity to establish *horizons of normative expectations*.[5] Agents actively construct predictions and justifications for what ought to happen in the course of their interactions with social environments and delimit what they take to be possible or impossible given what they know of their environment. A normative expectation can range from "If I keep my head down, the police should not bother me" to "Assuming society will always be arranged in this manner, I should do *x* if I am going to bring some stability to my life." Horizons of normative expectation allow agents to form a practical relationship of equilibrium with the objective constraints in their life.[6] When we observe agents' behaviors within certain environments, we should be cautious about attributing specific ideologies or beliefs, explicit or implicit, as explanatory for why someone chooses one option rather than another. Instead we ought to examine the incentive structures of the environment in which they are embedded and they enable or frustrate the attainment of specific needs. My use of horizons of normative expectations will show that diverse agents may hold differing beliefs and yet still be induced to engage in similar behaviors due to a shared understanding of their constraints. In other words, horizons of normative expectations are not solely, or even primarily, reducible to individual beliefs, but constitute a common ground for social practices between multiple agents (Táíwò 2018, 309–14).

It is when these horizons can no longer ground an agent's social practices or their rational justification for engaging in certain practices that we can expect the possibility of social transformation. Social environments that can no longer afford agents with insight into how they can meaningfully arrange their lives, that can no longer provide grounds for coherent social practices, will experience turmoil. Thus, a more robust theory of social transformation should take consciousness as actively producing norms while never being completely ignorant of how those norms relate to the surrounding social environment.

To better understand our agential capacities, I contend that we should have two typologies of consciousness that will be operative in conjunctures where an extant social

[5] My conception of "horizons of normative expectations" bears some similarity to Kim Sterelny's (2010) claim that a necessary element of for the success of our cognitive processes is that we can intervene on and engineer our environments to support our projects (466). My focus, however, will consider that our environments are not solely up to us as individuals and thus constrains our activities and expectations. See Valerie Soon (2020): "Expectations shape our cognitive processes, which in turn lead us to respond in certain ways to the environment. Our responses subsequently shape the environment itself, influencing our own expectations as well as those of others" (1866).

[6] Soon (2021) encapsulates my claim here in relationship to Rational Choice Theory and ideology: "Even if individuals are aware that they are acting in response to perverse incentive structures and disagree with the ideology embodied by these structures, it is not instrumentally rational for them to act otherwise as long as sufficiently strong incentive structures remain . . . Ideology should be understood non-ideationally in terms of conventions, or equilibrium solutions to social coordination problems" (6).

order appears to be on the brink of breakdown. Drawing from the work of Brian Milstein (2015) and Ernst Bloch (1995), I will describe these two forms of consciousness as "crisis consciousness" and "utopian consciousness," respectively. Consciousness comes to play a critical role in social transformation in a two-stage sequence, I will argue. First, when available epistemic and normative resources are no longer able to solve problems or functionally predict how to accomplish projects within a social order, a crisis consciousness will form. Second, in the context of a crisis, if it is possible to grasp the social causes of dysfunction and develop insight into the real possibilities in the situation that would allow for the development of an alternative social order that would displace the causes of dysfunction, then a utopian consciousness will take shape. By understanding consciousness as the activity of justification and prediction rather than awareness and cognition, we will be able to develop a more plausible account of social transformation that takes seriously structural constraints of social orders and the necessity for political capacities that can overcome those constraints.

In what follows, I will outline what I take to be a central problematic concerning the relationship between consciousness and social order: if a social order places constraints on consciousness, how can the latter fundamentally reshape the former? By reference to some arguments from the conservative neoliberal philosopher F. A. Hayek, I will demonstrate that the awareness model of consciousness is ill-equipped to answer the preceding question. I will then argue that a phenomenology of crisis consciousness offers a more plausible account of how agents come to challenge the constraints of their social order. However, I will conclude that crisis consciousness is not sufficient, and we require recourse to utopian consciousness if we are to adequately explain how a social order can be structurally altered. I then conclude with an assessment of the current struggle for racial justice in the United States.

ON THE LIMITS OF THE AWARENESS MODEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS

A "social order" is here defined as the relatively stable configuration of economic structures, political institutions, and interpretive frameworks that allow agents to make predictions about what actions stand the best chance of satisfying their needs and desires.[7] If we start with this conception of social order, then we can see that taking consciousness to be primarily an organ of awareness and cognition does not take us very far in explaining why agents do what they do and how they come to participate effectively in social transformation. Living within a social order is not only a matter of recognizing its substantive reality. First and foremost, an agent must justify their actions to themselves in light of their prediction that, given the current configuration of the social order, this action will meet with success.

Certain argumentative strategies and pedagogical approaches take the obstacle of agents' consciousnesses to social transformation to be premised on false beliefs they hold

[7] See Jon Elster (1995, 97–152) for an elaboration of how social norms coordinate behavior through the distribution of shame and expectation.

about the substantive reality of the social order (Mills 2015; 2017; Alcoff 2007). The idea is that the distorted beliefs agents hold can offer a causal explanation for the actions they take and the persistence of social orders. Charles Mills (2015) argues that "[t]he political economy of racial domination *required* corresponding cognitive economy that would systematically darken the light of factual and normative inquiry" (217; emphasis added).[8] Mills is most definitely correct in his contention that racial domination often attends assumption about the innate characteristics of dominated populations. However, taking cognitive distortions as a requirement would suggest that the rectification of our awareness would remove a necessary condition for the continuation of racial domination. For instance, on this view we could reasonably interpret the George Floyd protests of 2020 and their multiracial composition as striking a blow against the cognitive distortions of a broad swath of white people. In the euphoria of this awakening, whites seemed primed to learn and raise their awareness as evidenced by the proliferation of reading lists on race, politicians in Kente scarves, and Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility* rocketing up the *New York Times* bestseller list. Truly, you could hear Sam Cooke singing "a change is gonna come."

What I have been describing as the awareness model of consciousness pervades common sense diagnoses of ongoing racial injustice. These diagnoses implicitly assume that "at the heart of these patterns of racial injustice is a structure of social relations that is *ideologically sustained* in spite of legislative, judicial and individual efforts to change it" (Haslanger 2017, 152; emphasis mine). The idea that our "collective epistemic failings" are sufficiently explanatory for why an unjust social order remains in place suggests that what inhibits our coordinating to transform our arrangements is that "individuals in the grip of an ideology fail to appreciate what they are doing or what's wrong with it, and so are unmotivated, if not resistant, to change" (152). Without denying that this does in fact happen, we should still ask what we should expect from agents once they are no longer in the grip of ideology. Do they feel differently? Think differently? Speak to others differently? Or act differently? One can imagine an agent thinking differently and still engaging in similar behaviors as before. I may be aware that air travel contributes to climate change, but that does not mean that I will hop on a bus to visit my mother who lives two thousand miles away.

It is for the following reason that I find the awareness model of consciousness limited: it would have to explain why it seems possible for a social order to remain in place even as the doxastic beliefs of agents within said order have shifted markedly. One explanation that could be offered is that extracognitive interests in the maintenance of the status quo tend to overwhelm moral awareness and thus we have a problem of *akrasia* or weakness of the will. Another explanation might suggest that the cognitive awareness was not thoroughgoing enough and so did not produce a "true" conversion of consciousness. Either explanation risks admitting that awareness is not a very effective lever for transforming a social order and

[8] Mills (2015) goes on to say later that "'whiteness' must be operative in the right way in producing, at least tendentially, a particular cognitive orientation to the world, an aprioristic inclination to get certain kinds of things wrong" (218). Interestingly, Mills is more circumspect here where he claims that there is a *tendency* to get salient normative and empirical facts about the world wrong in a world dominated by the practices of racial domination.

therefore raises the question of why to make it central to a theory of social transformation.[9]

The deeper problem of the awareness model of consciousness in a social order is that it does not sufficiently distinguish a quotidian lack of awareness concerning the complexity of a social order from the lack of awareness that frustrates social transformation. When I go to the grocery store and see that the price of milk has gone up relative to last week, I most likely do not have an awareness of all the macro and micro interactions that went into presenting this number before me. Instead, I may be frustrated at how this upsets the budget I had planned for myself. But let's say an economist sits me down with an assortment of graphs and the capacity to translate their expertise to me so that I become aware of what economic mechanisms most likely led to the price increase. I may understand my social world better, but when I return to the grocery store, I still have hard and complex choices to make given the constraints of my social order. In other words, given that I am aware, now what do I do?

In the foregoing example, we can see that the awareness of social facts does not necessarily furnish consciousness with practical knowledge. Instead, these social facts may appear to me as *only* external constraints on my social activity that, however regrettably, I must learn to navigate. What I take to be the limit of conceptualizing awareness as one of the central obstacles to racial justice or social transformation is that this theoretical focus does not generate a convincing account of how agents come to have knowledge of their freedom over and above knowledge of their constraints. In the best case scenario, we are often left with a picture of consciousness torn, alienated from an external social order over which it cannot exert much agency rather than grasping the social order as immanent to one's life and practical activity. There is a real, substantive difference between acquiring knowledge of a moral or social wrong and developing the knowledge of how to address that wrong. Why wouldn't increasing awareness of the depth and complexity of systemic racism, economic exploitation, and rampant environmental degradation lead to the conclusion that one's ideological beliefs matter very little when compared to entrenched incentive structures and practical considerations? Indeed, we can imagine that upon realizing how dependent and intertwined our social practices are with the existing social order, I may come to conclude that there is very little *we* could do. Somewhat surprisingly, the awareness model of consciousness tends to coincide with conservative arguments against the role consciousness can play in social transformation when confronted with the reality that most people do not agitate for the radical transformation of social life.

For instance, F. A. Hayek (2011; 2018) provides a sharp rebuke to conceptions of consciousness that entail the possibility that agents can ever fully cognize the conditions of their social order. For Hayek, consciousness is always nested within a complex set of traditions, institutions, and biological processes that limit what an agent can make explicit about their social world. Nevertheless, Hayek does not think the social order only limits

[9] The preceding point is made in Joseph Heath (2000) and Kirun Sankaran (2020). They raise the concern that an overemphasis on ideology as sufficiently explanatory for the continuance of unjust social arrangements fails to explain "the causal connection between the critique of ideology and social change" given that "they systematically ignore the role strategic considerations play in driving and preventing social change" (Sankaran 2020, 1449).

the activity of consciousness: a social order provides the tacit and abstract rules that make it possible for consciousness to provide expectations for itself, make predictions about the actions of others, and critically analyze limited regions of one's social life. Hayek (2011) inveighs against the conception of reason that he calls Cartesian, which assumes "an independently and antecedently existing human reason that invented these institutions" in favor of understanding a social order as having "evolved by a process of cumulative growth and that it is only with and within this framework that human reason has grown and can successfully operate" (112). It is important for Hayek that consciousness be put in its proper place. Consciousness can never become fully aware of all the rich complexity of its social order, in so far as that might throw the social order into doubt, because its activity of coming to awareness presupposes the validity of the very social order that is to be critiqued. Hayek finds such wholesale critique to be implausible because it would assume that consciousness can self-generate an order of complexity greater than the social order that made consciousness possible.

Following the insights of Burkean conservatism and the Scottish Enlightenment, Hayek sees social orders as the accretion of generations of spontaneous and experimental activities that for one reason or another survived their environments against other models of social cooperation.[10] He challenges what he takes to be the hubris of individuals who believe they can replace such a complex and unplanned historical process by conscious fiat.[11] Hayek (2011) defends this position by claiming: "[f]ar from assuming that those who created the institutions were wiser than we are, the evolutionary view is based on the insight that the result of the experimentation of many generations may embody more experience than any one man possesses" (122). For Hayek, attempts to replace social orders with conscious planning inevitably court disaster. He inveighs against Marxists and positivists for what he considers the utopianism of their "constructivist" rationality that supposes alternative social orders can be imposed once we have become sufficiently aware. Hayek's epistemological conservatism (to say nothing of his political conservatism) offers an important challenge to the awareness model of consciousness in theories of social transformation because, if he is right, then it is neither possible nor advisable for agents to become wholly aware and thereby critique the foundations of their social order *in toto*. From an ostensibly less conservative direction, Alasdair MacIntyre (1977) chides Descartes's presumption of "radical doubt" because no one can doubt everything in their tradition at once. Instead,

[10] Bruce Caldwell (2005, 288–323) provides a comprehensive summary of this aspect of Hayek's thought wherein he came to believe that social orders were the slow accumulation of generations long experimentation by individuals and social groups who were simply seeking their own advantage. Hayekian social theory presumes that no amount of knowledge could replace the delicate and complex mechanisms of self-organizing spontaneity and experimentation.

[11] This claim of Hayek's has invited the critique that he has an undue reverence for tradition and ends up in a political quietism. I think there is something to this criticism, but we can understand Hayek to be making the weaker claim that elements of our social order survived because *at one time* it was most advantageous. However, it does not follow that as our environments change this will remain the case. See Gerald Gaus (2006, 232–59). We can always critique *elements* of our social order, but not the social order as a whole.

doubt works by presupposing that some crucial elements of the social order must remain provisionally undoubtable.

Hayekian social theory sets before theories of social transformation a crucial test that we ought not assume we have *a priori* passed. The test is whether we can plausibly explain how and why it is that agents come to demand a structural rearrangement of their social life. I do not think moral or empirical awareness sufficiently answers this question. We can make a number of people aware of injustices that occur within a social order, and we can even make them aware of alternative visions of social life, but awareness is not sufficient to encourage people to upset their practices of justification and prediction as they lead their lives. By Hayek's lights, agents do not enter into crisis voluntarily, but instead seek equilibrium in their social life. Nor should we expect that putting agents into crisis reliably leads to progressive social transformation. More often than not, if the social order can restore some semblance of equilibrium and reliable prediction in agent's social life, radical challenges will dissipate even if the awareness does not.

My aim in turning to Hayek in this section is not to claim that he is wholly correct in his social theory, but to point out how the awareness model of consciousness tends to agree with Hayek in practice. After all, Hayek does not deny that we can make local reforms to our social order. He just insists that that these reforms always remain limited in scope. The awareness model cannot explain why agents would dissolve their links to a social order that allows them to make reliable, local predictions of how to successfully navigate their social life. Because it cannot do so awareness, in practice, often cashes out in acts of token recognition of racial injustice or piecemeal reforms that aim to preserve the extant social order. Undoubtedly, certain piecemeal reforms can make agents lives better, but then we are explaining how a social order conserves itself rather than how it might be transformed.

I think a better explanation of why the George Floyd protests occurred would examine the crisis of the social order brought upon by the pandemic, economic downturn, and the accumulation of reporting on police brutality. This would mean that an objective crisis in the structure of the social order offers a more plausible causal account of why those historic protests emerged than an account that begins from the awareness of moral injustice.[12] A critical mass of citizens found their interpretive frameworks could no longer succeed in predicting how they could successfully live their lives and thus an objective crisis transitioned into a subjective crisis for consciousness. Here we find an important limit to Hayekian social theory insofar as it cannot explain what happens when the social order itself produces the crisis. For this, I now turn to my description of crisis consciousness.

[12] Allen W. Wood (1972) makes this point clearly when he explains: "A historically potent demand, a genuine and effective *need* for emancipation arises in an oppressed class only under certain conditions. This need does not appear merely as a social ideal . . . it arises, according to Marx's theory, only where there is a disharmony or antagonism between the productive forces and the existing production relations" (279). In other words, when the pandemic and economic slowdown made apparent that social needs could no longer be satisfied under the existing arrangements, new and fervent political activity formed. Rather crudely, we can say that *need* rather than ideals of *justice* provide a more robust explanation for the change in behavior that was witnessed in 2020. Of course, this does not deny that many participants in the protests used the language of injustice to describe what was done to George Floyd.

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF CRISIS CONSCIOUSNESS

When we speak of a social system being in "crisis" we are generally designating two phenomena. Seyla Benhabib (1986) distinguishes these two phenomena as "systemic crisis" and "lived crisis" (12). A systemic crisis is the observation of dysfunctionality or breakdown in how a social order distributes wealth, justice, or power. Thus, we may call it "objective." Lived crisis, on the other hand, is the experience for agents of needs, demands, and dissatisfactions generated by the social order in which they live. In this manner it is "subjective." A systemic crisis may be the daily fines, harassment, arrests, and evictions carried about by the police in a poor neighborhood.[13] The lived crisis would be the experience of blocked projects, being unable to reliably predict whether one will have job or housing security, and the moral indignation that one's life ought not be subject to such conditions. Separating out the general notion of crisis into two distinct phenomena allows us to analytically specify the relational structure immanent to crises and ask questions I contend are foreclosed by the awareness model of consciousness.

Schematically, if we accept Benhabib's criteria, we can see the crisis of a social order and crisis consciousness are in a relationship of dependence. For there to be crisis consciousness there must at least be the sense for the agent that this consciousness is the consciousness *of* a breakdown somewhere in their social world. It simply would be incoherent to contend that there is crisis consciousness, yet the agent experiences their world as essentially sound.[14] For this reason, and assuming that agents do not typically invent a sense of crisis, we should suppose that systemic crises or objective crises of a social order have analytic primacy in any social theory of crisis consciousness. However, it is important not to make the mistake in assuming that crisis consciousness is inessential. What we designate as a general crisis is necessarily the objective fact of some dysfunction in the social world *and* a normative demand to resolve the source of dysfunction. As Brian Milstein (2015) puts it: "Crisis belies the traditional distinctions between empirical science and normative philosophy: it

[13] I flesh out what I take to be the formal criteria necessary for designating a constellation of practices as a "crisis" in this section. But in selecting this example, I hope two ideas become immediately clear. First, "crisis" is already a normatively thick concept that presumes an "ethical-functional understanding of norms of ethical life" (Jaeggi 2018, 128). In other words, through *immanent critique* we should be able to assess whether a nexus of social practices contravenes a social order's putative ethical norms *and* whether these practices produce systemic dysfunction or rather solve social problems. Second, a crisis is *always* a crisis for specific, context-bound agents. Fines and evictions may not appear as crises for police and landlords, but for citizens undergoing them they present real problems for actualizing their freedom according to the constraints of the extant social order. While it exceeds the bounds of this article, I should stipulate that this form of critique assumes that "a historically sensitive formal anthropology" (Ng 2015, 401) is necessary for us to adjudicate how and when capacities for freedom are being systemically blocked by the practices of a social order.

[14] I will not focus on this possibility, but I believe this formulation leaves open the conceptual possibility of *manufactured crises* wherein agents may assume a breakdown exists because of ideological conditioning even though in fact the crisis does not objectively obtain. Examples include moral panics over Critical Race Theory being taught in schools and the United States government justifying its war powers by appeal to ever imminent terrorist attacks. However, I think a complex theory of crisis consciousness would not stop at the conclusion that the agents involved are "dopes" (Celikates 2018, 1–19), but would inquire into whether there are actual dysfunctions in the social order that consciousness has miscast.

is an objective event, but it is one whose urgency demands a normative commitment on the part of those involved in it. It is an inherently *reflexive* concept" (Milstein 2015, 143). While an objective crisis does not depend, in the first instance, on the existence of crisis consciousness, there can be no general crisis without the interiorization by agents that there is a crisis.

The generation of crisis consciousness is crucial because it indicates that agents hold "normative presuppositions and expectations" that a social order systematically violates or obstructs (146). A social order functions or retains some patina of legitimacy insofar as its violations of normative expectations are experienced as local and isolated rather than widespread and systemic. If a social order is experienced as no longer capable or justified in resolving normative problems of social life, then a decision will have to be made by agents as to why this social order should be kept in place. I am not suggesting that this indicates that social transformation is imminent, since there may be relevant objective and subjective constraints to the development of an alternative social order. I will cover these constraints in detail in the following section. My only point is that the social order is put into question within agents' horizon of normative expectations rather than tacitly assumed as the condition of possibility for normative expectations.

What I take to be the central difference between the awareness model of consciousness and crisis consciousness is that the latter generates an alienation from the extant social order whose severity goes far beyond moral indignation. When agents are in crisis, they characterize the social order not only as unjustifiable according to the ethical norms of the social order, but *unlivable* in light of its functional norms. This social arrangement of economic imperatives, political institutions, and moral categories systematically obstruct an agent's normative expectations of how to carry out their life projects. Contrariwise, if we imagine one of the goals of social justice is to make those with privilege aware of injustices, then we must also admit the possibility that these agents may be persuaded that their social order is unjust, though they can still find it quite livable in terms of planning their livelihood and security (Kinney and Bright 2021). It is possible to argue that these agents have a moral duty to address injustices upon becoming aware of them, but that is not the focus of my argument. I am suggesting, more pragmatically, that awareness is not a sufficient causal explanation for social transformation. A higher order condition must be met.

Assuming that horizons of normative expectations are essential for the activity of consciousnesses nested within a social order, we should expect crises to incite agents involved in the situation to resolve the dysfunction. This is often felt as both a functional necessity *and* ethical imperative. We need to solve this problem, but also social life ought not be this way. Awareness or consciousness-raising does not necessarily meet these criteria. My awareness may lead me to conclude that the police ought not treat citizens in a certain manner or that banks should be fairer in how they distribute mortgages to Blacks. However, this type of consciousness can often take for granted that the institutions being critiqued are necessary for the functioning of the social order and the problems occur at the point of distributing rights and goods.

Rahel Jaeggi's (2016) distinction between a moral critique and ethical critique

of capitalism is helpful here. A moral critique or "a *narrow* one of internal distributive justice" tends to assume that the configuration of social life functions well, but second order distortions have accrued to its practices (Jaeggi 2016, 58). There is no necessary disruption of an agent's horizon of normative expectations. Indeed, an agent can coherently argue that what the social order is for them it should be for everyone. In the aftermath of highly publicized police shootings of Black citizens, there are always whites who will write columns detailing how when they were in a similar situation, the police let them off with a warning or a mere fine. The argument appears to be "the police should treat Blacks the way they treat whites." The fact that the police shoot white citizens as well leads one to suspect that there is either a fundamental misunderstanding of the functional role of policing in the current social order or that justice demands having a statistically better chance of having a non-violent encounter with the police.

An ethical critique, according to Jaeggi (2016), addresses "*the rationality and ethical standing of a social order*" (58) as such. It would not assume that problems of racial injustice, for instance, are second-order problems of distribution, but that the constitutive relations of social life are both ethically deficient *and* functionally deleterious to social life as a whole. The experience of such a crisis whereby the very conditions of one's life are taken to be ethically deficient and functionally deleterious is different in kind than the distance of abstract awareness. In crisis consciousness, there is the necessity of either reintegrating one's horizon of normative expectations into the social order or producing a new horizon of normative expectations that would require an alternative social order to make it pragmatic for consciousness.

Both tendencies could be apprehended during the George Floyd protests. The response of politicians, local governments, and corporations involved symbolic recognition, charitable giving, and, in some cases, attempts to pare back police budgets (many of which seem to have been quietly restored in the interim.)[15] These reforms were efforts at reintegrating citizens' horizon of normative expectations with the social order, counterposed to the demands found under the slogan of "defund/abolish the police." The ubiquity of the phrase "systemic racism" should not persuade us that those in power experience the exigency to construct an alternative social order. In fact, systemic racism has come to mean that there is a second-order pattern of unfair distribution internal to our social order and that what blacks need is a *fair shot*. We should note that these attempts to integrate radical critiques of a social order by naturalizing an already existing horizon of normative expectations (à la the "free market") are not further evidence of the cynicism of those in power. Cynical though they may be, I am not interested in relying on a psychological account. Instead, we should see this as the rational action of agents who are functionally secure in the present social order but come to be aware of its dysfunctions. I do not think it is sufficient to claim that these agents did not have *true* moral awareness and conclude that if they did, they would voluntarily transform their horizons of normative expectations. I attest that this shows that the fundamental limitation of the awareness model is that it cannot explain what

[15] See Fola Akinnibi (2021) on the restoring of police budgets.

good reason agents would have to restructure their horizons given the fact that the social order remains reliable for them.[16]

Having said all of that, I do not think it is reasonable to assume that even crisis consciousness is *sufficient* to explain the process of social transformation. I want to avoid the risk of romanticizing crisis and the experience of dysfunction or breakdown. Invariably, the experience of the breakdown of one's social order is distressing and violent irrespective of whether observers removed from the situation think a breakdown will be, in the long run, for the "greater good." We should be wary of taking crises or revolution as quasi-messianic events that move the arc of history forward with no reasonable account of the fact that actual persons underwent these painful transitions. People, generally, do not want crisis and will do what they can to avoid it. But beyond this point, we should affirm that crisis consciousness *has no necessary moral or political content*. The breakdown of one's horizon of normative expectations may lead agents to take any number of actions, some of which we may find regressive, unhelpful, or even repugnant. Analytically, crisis consciousness should be understood as a "negative" moment whose positive resolution in a new horizon of normative expectations requires another element. This element I call "utopian consciousness."

UTOPIAN CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE "NOT-YET" SOCIAL ORDER

Crisis consciousness is not sufficient to explain how agents come to constitute a new horizon of normative expectations. If a social order can stabilize a crisis and meet some of the demands of the agents in crisis, then we might expect their horizon of normative expectations to be reintegrated into the social order. However, in the period when a gap opens up between agents' horizons and the extant social order it is possible that an alternative set of possibilities for a social order may be grasped alongside new normative criteria by which a social order ought to be judged. Utopian consciousness distinguishes itself from crisis consciousness in that it develops new norms of justification for social practices and experiences *insight* into the "structural possibility" (Wright 2010, 107) of a social order that is not yet. Breakdown and dysfunction appear to be the structural conditions for utopian consciousness, yet they do not exhaust its content.

I emphasize *insight* in order to address an ambivalence that is at the heart of conceptualizations of utopian consciousness. Modern criticism of utopian consciousness,

[16] My argument allows for the possibility that coming to understand injustice would mean coming to desire to change it. But even still, we would have to ask under what conditions such a desire would cash out in social practices that would directly contravene the reliable reproduction of one's life as they have known it. What insulates this desire from "the famous Hegelian charge of the 'impotence of the moral ought'" (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018, 121)? In other words, knowledge of injustice does not furnish the thick understanding that the injustice is *immanent* rather than external to a social order. Faced with such knowledge, an agent may just as likely aver that life ought to be different, but, alas, things are the way they are.

and utopia more generally, go as far back as conservative critiques of the French revolution and its enthusiasm. The normative expectation that a social order should produce happiness for all and the hubris of thinking the many could, by fiat, bend life away from hierarchy and tragedy struck many critics as dangerous and lacking any insight into the real strictures of life (Losurdo 2021, 86–108).[17] The concern has been that such desires sidestep the complexities of social life. These desires may even misunderstand the necessary role some form of unhappiness play in securing stability. Hayek, for instance, inherits this tradition, making the argument that a healthy dose of pessimism is necessary for a stable social order. We should restrain our expectations of what reason and consciousness can deliver. But distrust of utopian enthusiasm is not confined to more conservative philosophical traditions. We can find Theodor Adorno (2005) in "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis" criticizing student activists in Germany for their voluntarist enthusiasm to transform society that lacks an adequate thematization of the objective blockages to freedom. In other words, they lacked insight into how the world really was.

Much as I want to avoid romanticizing crisis consciousness, I also think it is imperative that we resist romanticizing utopian consciousness as if it immediately follows that all enthusiasm is normatively praiseworthy and functionally successful. However, I register this ambivalence not in order to disavow what I take to be the necessary role of utopian consciousness in social transformation, but to explicate how critics from both the right and the left have painted utopian consciousness with too broad of a brush.[18] What both sets of critics presume is that utopian consciousness and utopias are primarily of the order of the *imagination* and are thus either provide no knowledge at all or, at the very least, a degraded form of knowledge. In "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific," Friedrich Engels (1978) juxtaposes utopia that is made up of fantasies and ephemeral desires against science that grasps objective reality. I think this manner of carving up the distinction between utopia and knowledge has held sway for far too long and we would do well to loosen its grip.

[17] Edmund Burke, for instance, interpreted the French Revolution as a disaster because it overthrew the wisdom of tradition and the participants presumed that they could willfully construct a rational order of happiness. Burke (2003) criticizes the French Revolution by noting:

> The levellers therefore only change and pervert the natural order of things; they load the edifice of society, by setting up in the air what the solidity of the structure requires to be on the ground. The association of tailors and carpenters, of which the republic (of Paris, for instance) is composed, cannot be equal to the situation, into which, by the worst usurpations, an usurpation on the prerogatives of nature, you attempt to force them . . . The occupation of a hair-dresser, or of a working tallow-chandler, cannot be a matter of honour to any person—to say nothing of a number of other more servile employments. Such descriptions of men ought not to suffer oppression from the state; but the state suffers oppression, if such as they, either individually or collectively, are permitted to rule. In this you think you are combatting prejudice, but you are at war with nature. (42)

[18] See Hannah Arendt (1998, 227–230) and Karl Popper (2013, 343–403) for critiques of utopia as totalitarian.

One of the key insights the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch (1986) offers is that traces of utopian consciousness inflect our everyday social practices in the form of daydreams, wishes, and even the somatic experience of hunger (11). Critics such as Jürgen Habermas (1969) have cited Bloch's reliance on naturalistic interpretations of utopia as evidence that he is a romantic who indulged the imaginary and irrational (Habermas 1969, 323–25). But this is not what he is saying at all. Bloch claims that the phenomenological evidence of daydreams, for example, indicate that an extant social order is not satisfying some desire the agent has.[19] Or to use the language I have been deploying: our horizons of normative expectations are never completely isomorphic with our social order. Bloch contends that these average and everyday yearnings are implicit knowledge of dysfunctions in one's social knowledge.[20]

Bloch's project, at varying levels of success, was to argue that philosophy should thematize this everyday, implicit knowledge and bring it into contact with social scientific analyses of objective conditions rather than allow it to languish ineffectually in the sphere of imagination. Bloch (1986) concludes, "*Philosophy will have conscience of tomorrow, commitment to the future, knowledge of hope, or it will have no more knowledge*" (7). The tendency of social orders and its elites toward inertia and conserving the status quo will often systemically distort the "not-yet" as an essential category of social experience.[21] For Bloch, the "not-yet" was not an abstract future that has not arrived, but bundles of tendencies and capacities that exist within a social order that in everyday situations are suppressed and disciplined. Nevertheless, consciousness grasps them in diffuse, inchoate patterns.

Unfortunately, Bloch's dense and literary style, replete with metaphors, obscures the rather mundane and practical point he wants to make: a social order's norms of justification never entirely convince everyone. Consciousness is never fully satiated and strives to both

[19] "As long as man is in a bad way, both private and public existence are pervaded by daydreams; dreams of a better life that that which has so far been given him . . . And even where the ground, as so often before, may deceiver us, full of sandbanks one moment, full of chimeras the next, it can only be condemned and possibly cleared up through *combined research* into objective tendency and subjective intention" (Bloch 1986, 5). The important point to take here is that for Bloch daydreams may contain ideological or distorted elements, but they are not *reducible* to mere false consciousness. Research and social theory can distill utopian knowledge from daydreams since they both emerge from the same objective social relations. See Goeghegan (2004, 127–31) for explication and criticism of Bloch's complex usages of ideology.

[20] I compare what Bloch is doing with the work of Michael Polanyi (2009) in *The Tacit Dimension*, where he makes the argument that "*we can know more than we can tell*" (4; emphasis in original). In the series of lectures that make up this book, Polanyi attempts to demonstrate that knowledge cannot be reduced to explicit propositions, but must be subtended by an agent's background familiarity with a form of life that often resists explication. For my purposes, Polanyi offers a generative account of how Bloch's examination of daydreams and wishes are "tacit foreknowledge" (23) of novel and yet to be solved problems. If knowledge were only explicit formulations, then we would have to explain how problems straddle the border between being identifiable even as we do not yet have the knowledge to solve them. This is why Polanyi insists that "to see a problem is to see something that is hidden. It is to have an intimation of the coherence of hitherto not comprehended particulars" (21).

[21] As Bloch (1986) writes: "bourgeois interest would like to draw every other interest opposed to it into its own failure; so, in order to drain the new life, it makes its own agony apparently fundamental, apparently ontological" (4).

understand why and thematize what state of affairs would bring satisfaction. What frustrates projects of social transformation are a social order's systematic attempts to separate utopia from social reality, to render the former imaginary and the latter real. For instance, calls for abolishing prisons or the police are systematically met with the dismissal that these do not deal with actual social problems and are the exercise of imaginary ideals that may *inspire* us, but cannot give us any relevant knowledge of what is really possible. Appeals to polling data that suggest the relative unpopularity of the "slogans" is marshalled as evidence of an objective limit to social transformation. And so, we have the "dreamers" and the "realists." But Bloch (1986) insists that for those of us interested in social transformation it is "a question of *learning* hope" (3; emphasis in original), and this means that hope can be a mode of knowledge production—perhaps the essential mode of knowledge production—for grasping objective tendencies and latent possibilities permeating a social order.

My point is not to delve into complex questions of polling methodology or how polling plays a role in belief formation rather than only measuring the opinion that is out there. Instead, I want question the criteria we, as theorists, use to decide the difference between real possibility and objective impossibility. Bloch insists that no matter how central and essential one takes the objective sciences to be (what he calls the "cold stream" of Marxism), you will never find the "not-yet" social order in that data. The specificity of the "not-yet" will only be found in agents' utopian consciousness at their points of frustration and breakdown. And so, he insists that we must bid "farewell to the closed, static concept of being" so that we can grasp a world that is "full of propensity towards something, tendency towards something, latency of something, and this intended something means fulfilment of the intending" (18). Unless one's theory of social change is completely functionalist, whereby social orders will automatically do what they will do independent of the actions of various agents or accords primacy to technocrats and elites as in the best epistemological position to decide what is really possible, then I think the conclusion that ordinary agents have a central role to play in social transformation is inescapable.

None of this is to suggest that utopian consciousness spontaneously and automatically brings about a better social order. What I claimed for crisis consciousness follows for utopian consciousness as well: it has no necessary moral or political content. In fact, Bloch (1977) was aware of this as well, as shown by his analyses of fascism in Nazi Germany.[22] The danger was that a social order oriented utopian desires back to a nostalgia for a lost homeland that had been humiliated. A more robust account of utopian consciousness would take it to be crucial to the social learning process of what alternative social orders would allow for the establishment of shared horizons of normative expectations and wellbeing. I follow Jaeggi

[22] Oskar Negt (1976) provides a summary interpretation of this aspect of Bloch thinking concerning utopia. He describes Bloch's philosophy of utopia as navigating "the *tendency towards revolutionary emancipation* of society, borne primarily by the working class and *fascism*, which emerged and grew out of the material nonsynchronous contradictions" (48). What Negt calls "nonsynchronous" (a translation of the German *Ungleichzeitig*) accords with the phenomenological description I gave in the previous section of horizons of normative expectation becoming unmoored from a social order. These crises of temporal and existential experience do not have any automatic or necessary political direction and indeed "in intensified crisis situations, when the solution of the contradictions within the logic of capital is limited," regressive political formations may emerge (48).

(2016) here when she concludes that a "successful form-of-life would be one that has the *feature of not hindering, but facilitating successful collective learning processes*" (65; emphasis in original). A social order that systematically and actively suppresses utopian consciousness deprives itself of *practical knowledge* as well as desiccates the capacity for imagination.

I am insisting that theories of social transformation should take stock of the loss or distortion of knowledge as much as the potential harmful effects that a dysfunctional social order can have on agents' imaginative capacities. Bloch (1986) differentiates between knowledge that distills what has already occurred from prospective knowledge "in the sense of what is becoming . . . decisively contributes to this becoming" (132). Social orders often turn the "not-yet" into disciplinary injunctions to slow down and trust the process since a better order cannot yet emerge. However, for utopian consciousness, the "not-yet" is not a limit, but an epistemic task to understand what tendencies and capacities could establish an alternative social order. In this way, consciousness still does not outstrip the present social order by fleeing into the space of imagination, but instead delves deeper into it and inquires after real possibilities of social life.

Moreover, I think this provides us with a plausible response to the Hayekian quandary of epistemic pessimism. Hayek takes our reliance on implicit or tacit knowledge of our social order as a *limit* to what consciousness can grasp and effectuate. But if Bloch is right that this implicit knowledge also contains a not-yet explicated apprehension of the problems of a social order *and* the immanent resolution to those problems, then we are not resigned to the conservative position as concerns tacit knowledge. By linking tacit knowledge with objective analyses of the social world, we could, hypothetically, establish utopian learning processes from which new forms of problem-solving and social life could emerge. This would allow us to develop a more grounded critical theory that illuminates the complex relays between needs, social environments, and political practice. Indeed, it would require that we incorporate work from the social sciences on how actions become meaningful for us given the environments in which we are embedded.[23]

Crisis consciousness and utopian consciousness should be understood as mutually supportive of the learning process that can crystallize new horizons of normative expectations. Without utopia, crisis consciousness cannot grasp alternative possibilities of normative expectation. Without crisis, utopian consciousness will not understand the breakdowns and dysfunctions that shape social life. These two typologies of consciousness more adequately explain potential processes of social transformation than models that explicitly focus on moral awareness and ignorance. I now turn to contemporary struggles for racial justice and how they can be informed by crisis and utopian consciousness.

[23] I am here thinking of work on "affordances" as found in Bert H. Hodges and Reuben M. Baron (1992), as well as more recent work by Roy Dings (2021).

CRISES AND UTOPIAS OF RACIAL JUSTICE

In the United States, calls for racial justice and critiques of systemic racism as it concerns policing, prisons, and poverty have only become more urgent in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the George Floyd protests of 2020. It is not uncommon to hear the language of crisis being used when describing the situation of impoverished Black communities. In fact, it is hard to think of time when talk of race, racism, and the United States's sordid history with non-white peoples was more ubiquitous. For better and for worse, few are unaware of discourses concerning racial justice. One might expect that after the severe challenges to its legitimacy brought on by a mishandled pandemic and nationwide protests, the social order of the United States was on the cusp of transformation. However, the opposite has proven to be the case. The social order of the United States has shown itself to be remarkably durable even as trust in the government reaches historic lows.[24]

Now, this does not imply that the crises and dysfunctions were not real and that the social situation in the United States was in actuality going well. One can point to any number of data points, such as an increased debt held by the young, decreasing life expectancy among whites, and deteriorating democratic mechanisms to suggest that there are real crises within the United States social order. Instead, what follows is that a social order can persist even as there are widening rifts between it and agents' horizons of normative expectations.[25] My hypothesis is that the general crisis facing racial justice is not a crisis of moral ignorance or a lack of knowledge concerning the situation of Blacks, migrants, or other minorities, but to borrow a famous phrase from Antonio Gramsci (1992): "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (276). The increased reliance on what I have called the "awareness model on consciousness" in discourses of racial justice expresses the real lack of political and organizational capacity to resolve the systemic dysfunction of our social order. If we cannot change the world, we can at least change ourselves. Our moment is a moment of breakdown and transition where new horizons are forming, yet old social relations persist. The aim of racial justice needs to be the establishment of a new common ground for meaningful action, or else we will witness the diminishing returns of our struggles in the guise of increased bureaucracies, token representation, and the decay of knowledge of how to organize ourselves.

There is not enough space to give full and specific details of the social causes of our interregnum, so a broad outline will have to suffice. In the social order of the United States, norms of legitimation and allegiance no longer have a rational structure for many citizens, and yet nothing has come to replace those norms that would bind together some minimal life that we could call the common good (Macintyre 1990, 351). The fragmentation of social life is not only due to market pressures that continue to destabilize increasing swaths

[24] See Pew Research Center (2021) on the development of public trust in government.

[25] I should be clear that I do not think a social order can persist indefinitely in a legitimation crisis (Habermas 1973), but for some time relations of coercion, inertia, and disorganization on the part of agents in crisis will allow a social order to remain in place.

of the general populace with insecurity, but that this social order ideologically takes itself to be "post-racial" despite much empirical evidence to the contrary. I would call this, following Terry Pinkard (2012), a *systemic* form of alienation whereby a form of life "can no longer sustain allegiance because of the incompatible entitlements and commitments such a way of life puts on its members" (148). The increasing absorption of a Black elite and political class attempting to represent and legitimate this social order while presiding over apparatuses of violence and humiliation disproportionately targeting Blacks and other minorities, only heightens a sense of alienation.[26] And so, projects of racial justice find themselves struggling within a social form of life in which fewer people believe, but continue to lack the structural capacity to achieve a new form of life.

However, we do *not* lack vision or imagination in this moment. Activists, philosophers, and even some politicians have been writing and envisioning worlds without police or prisons, ecologically sustainable and just worlds, and worlds without borders or with the right to free movement.[27] It may be difficult to apprehend from within what seems to be a dystopian interregnum, but we are also living through a *utopian renaissance*. Utopias, as I have argued, often attend moments of crisis. These visions are crucial, especially since we can expect regressive visions of utopia to emerge that will demand a "return" to a purer nation-state. These visions ought to be contested. Nevertheless, vision is not enough if we do not grasp the shape of crisis before us.

There is no telling how long interregnums will persist. Given this, if I am right that we are in an interregnum, then racial justice requires both normative critique *and* functional analyses of why it is so difficult in our present moment to establish an alternative social order that accords with our new horizons of normative expectations. Without such analyses the project of racial justice risks becoming an ineffective slogan, or it will be vulnerable to capture by elites (Black or otherwise) who will attempt to mold its horizons according to their interests in the extant social order.[28] The utopian consciousness of racial justice should allow us to specify the difficult terrain and new problems we face in the interest of repairing and nurturing our social learning processes. No doubt this is an immensely

[26] Cedric Johnson (2007) provides an exemplary history of this shift in the post-civil rights/Black Power era in *Race Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics*. See also James Forman (2017).

[27] I take my project here to be different from those like Robin Kelley (2002) and Alex Zamalin (2019), who in their work elucidate the relationship between political oppression and the aesthetic imagination of utopia found in Black thinkers. I think this is important work, but I want to emphasize that utopia not only gives us visions and imagination, but knowledge and insight into our social capacities and the objective possibility of a restructured form of life.

[28] Olúfemi Táíwò (2020) describes this phenomenon as "elite capture," where those who are in position of power within a social structure are able to substitute their concerns and analyses as representative of the concerns of an oppressed group in a manner that reconsolidates the status quo. See also Randolph (1996, 249–50) for an historical example of this phenomenon of capture, where he critiques the contradictions of Black "representation" in the Republican party from the late 19th to early 20th century. Randolph specifies that representation can only be authentic and resist capture if and only if the representative shares the interests of their constituents, belongs to an organization controlled by the constituents, and, finally, is knowledgeable enough to understand their interests. All three conditions rarely obtain in social life as it is arranged presently.

complex endeavor, but if we are to identify real utopian possibilities in our current crisis, we need much more than the awareness of racial injustices.

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WHEN HEADS BANG TOGETHER: CREOLIZING AND INDIGENOUS IDENTITIES IN THE AMERICAS

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In her 2019 book, *The Black Shoals,* Tiffany Lethabo King warns that "settler colonial discourse structures the ways that people think about and simultaneously forget . . . that Black and Native death are intimately connected in the Western Hemisphere" (2019, xiii). This warning is similar in spirit to Jody Byrd's call to decenter "the vertical interactions of colonizer and colonized" and recenter "the horizontal struggles among people with competing claims to historical oppressions" (2011, xxxiv). What happens to the lifeways of creolization when brought under the scrutiny of such analyses? To ask this question differently, how might creolization, as a theory of Afro-diasporic experiences shaped in histories of chattel slavery, displacement and migration, working against structures of anti-blackness, approach a vigilance for what Lorraine Le Camp (1998) names the "terranullism" —a Doctrine of Discovery world-orientation that reads land to be colonized as either vacant or all but vacated of civilized human communities—that grounds much of settler colonial discourse?

I. THE GOAL

My hope is to put together a conceptual space out of which we can theorize the possibility of abolitionist-decolonial alliance-work toward a world beyond white, settler violence. In determining that conceptual space, I foreground the need to acknowledge the non-translatability between/across the singular histories of anti-blackness and anti-indigeneity, *even* as we recognize these violences as co-constitutive of the conquest logics of the Americas. That is to say, both anti-black fungibility and indigenous removability (or erasure) in the form of *corpus nullius* are inextricably entangled in the violent circuits of relations into which colonialism places life, land and bodies. Nevertheless, as I allude to above and aim to flesh out in greater detail below, these are *incommensurate* modalities of violence, which then locate blackness and nativeness, respectively, into incommensurable positions from which resistance against settler violence might unfold.

My aim is to show that, as a consequence of this, the position of the native is such that they encounter the violence of assimilation, of belonging to the state as *subjects of empire*. The position of the black is such that they face the violence of possession, of belonging to the state as *objects of empire*. To be sure, both are technologies of capture, but their "how" are quite different (and incommensurably so, is what I want to argue). Hence, in theorizing the (multi-pronged) necro-political structures of the settler state, such differences already point to an untranslatability across racialized dispossession and occupation of indigenous land and life. It points to an untranslatability that (for instance) needs to centrally contextualize demands for both black Americans and migrants of color to be "disturbed by [their] own settler status" (Tuck and Yang 2012, 9). And so this incommensurability ought to inform both theory and practice of abolition and decolonization (again, as they are pursued *simultaneously* and not at the expense of each other).

I utilize Édouard Glissant's conception of "opacities in relation" to work through these questions. Ultimately, I want to argue that opacity should be at the center when it comes to doing decolonial and abolitionist work together. In the section that follows, I offer some conceptual detail of Glissant's notion of opacity. I propose that, in keeping opacity at the center of work simultaneously devoted to decolonization and abolition, we let go of the expectation for transparent clarity of terms, for mutual, "once and for all" understanding, and for a knowing of our various experiences of colonial violence modeled in what Glissant will name "onto-thinking." As both an epistemological and ethical framework, opacity will orient me toward a knowing (and ultimately, an acting-with) that unfolds *despite* being unable to completely conceptualize (as in, *capture* under a concept) the experience(s) of communities other than my own. This kind of framework joins what Eve Tuck and K.W. Yang offer in their 2012 work as an ethics of incommensurability, a comportment through which "solidarity lie[s] in what is incommensurable rather than what is common across these efforts" toward moving beyond settler colonialism (28). What I hope to add on to Tuck and Yang's intervention are the ways in which this incommensurability captures not only the decolonial singularity they powerfully outline, but a singularity to the radical demand of abolitionism *alongside* and as well.

To say this differently, though there is much overlap between my use of Glissant's account of opacity and Tuck and Yang's conception of an ethics of incommensurability, I aim to highlight that the experiences out of which decolonial *and* abolitionist demands emerge are dynamic and meaningful in a concrete sense. Hence, as Tuck and Yang make clear, these intricacies (everyday, concrete) are never sufficiently static to freeze in some conceptual grasp. I hope to show that opacity at the center would orient us toward a theory and praxis that can attend to the mutually unsettling (and hence never fully reconciled) work of abolition and decolonization together. It is my claim that oriented as such around opacity, the theoretical frames we develop to do this work avoid the following two pitfalls: (1) pursuing decolonization and indigenous restoration of sovereignty in a way that upholds anti-blackness; and (2) pursuing possibilities of black abolition (possibilities that think "black" and "free" together) in a way that props up settler logics.

As a way to translate what Glissant's conception of opacity might look like in an everyday, on-the-ground politics (simultaneously committed to both decolonization and abolition), I

bring Byrd's conception of "horizontal cacophony" and King's account of "shoaling" into conversation with Glissant's formations. My hope is to offer these three frames—Antillean (Glissant), indigenous (Byrd), and black feminist (King)—as a conceptual latticework for making legible the imaginative capacities needed to formulate both decolonizing and abolitionist possibilities together. In preparation for this work, the following section will detail Glissant's conception of opacity.

II. GLISSANTIAN OPACITY

In his work on Antillean life-worlds, formed against a backdrop of violence in the Americas, Glissant (1997) uses the notion of compositeness to name communities whose relational modes center opacity. The composite community is opacity in relation. It is a model of Relation in which difference exists as *both* irreducible *and* in relation, and this is, in large part, a reflection of how compositeness de-priorities certainty and stasis. It is this feature of opacity—its conceptual affordances for thinking what is both *irreducible and in relation*—that captures what is most at stake in the work I aim to accomplish here. Despite the truth of claims like Tiffany King's, which remind us that "Black and Native death are intimately connected" (2019, xiii), it is also the case that the variables of settler colonial violence that shape the Western hemisphere produce competing claims across black and indigenous lines respectively.[1] One example that comes to mind is the four hundred thousand total acres of (at its foundation) stolen/contested indigenous land that was promised to formerly enslaved black peoples at the cusp of the Reconstruction era (Gates 2013). How do we hold together these claims (competing, often to the point of being irreducible with respect to each other) alongside their relational intimacy, their proximities to each other given colonial violence? To pose this in more Glissantian terms, how might we think about the stakes of abolition and decolonization as both irreducible and in relation?

According to Glissant, composite relationality, a mode of relation with opacity at the center, is *errant* relationality. It captures the epistemic and ethical orientation of communities whose indigestible differences remain even as they relate to each other in a way that is both collaborative and in concert. Composite communities, centered in opacity and grounded in errant relationality "gather" together, on Glissant's account. As I offer a trace of this notion of errantry (to highlight how it works and perhaps more importantly, how it *doesn't* work), I hope to show that Glissant's notion of opacity gives us at least one way to think together what is both irreducible and in relation. It is at this juncture that the stakes and/or implications of abolition and decolonization lie.

Glissant critiques what he names "onto-thinking," which describes the reduction of uncertainty for the sake of understanding and epistemological safety. Difference has a place

[1] Though I treat these categories as mutually exclusive, I do recognize that there are subjects in the Americas who are both black and indigenous. My treatment of these categories as mutually exclusive are for the purposes of this paper, which is to delineate how the distinct pillars of anti-black and anti-indigenous violence unfold in the white supremacist settler state.

in this model only at the expense of its reduction, which is to say, no longer as difference in itself. As an alternative to such thinking, Glissant offers the model of errantry, whereby the errant thinker pursues knowledge in a way that can account for the complexity of becoming and movement. In other words, errant thinking is thinking compatible with the irreducibility of difference, and not thinking made possible through a flattening of its object's singularity. My question here is: What are the implications of thinking errantly (or, at the very least, of *not* thinking onto-logically) for making intelligible the incommensurable yet intimately entangled claims of abolition and decolonization, claims that are ultimately informed by and respond to the violences of black fungibility and native elimination that co-constitutes the power terrain in the Americas?

Ultimately, Glissant theorizes the "all" of totality differently (and decolonially) by giving opacity a central role in his determination of relation. As such, relation is not grounded in a transparency of differences, but rather, in their *inaccessibility* to the totalizing reach of the All. That is to say, a Glissantian roadmap brings into relation what will retain its opaqueness, what will *resist* reductionist totalizing *through* its opaqueness as it gathers into the "all" of Relation. It would be difficult to mark a point of relation in such a gathering principle, if that point is of the order of a universal and totalizing gaze that might capture everything on its own terms. Any point of relation in Glissant's Relation would be quite opposed to such colonial cartographies of mapping.

But what we *can* say about the point of relation in Glissant's Relation is that it moves with the dynamism of experience, connects as it diffracts with that dynamism. Hence, if onto-thinking moves toward universality, then errant-thinking moves toward a gathering of singularities that does not universalize (does not sum up what is gathered), even as those singularities exist as mutually inseparable, in Relation. To state this in terms of the work I take on in this paper: though the ontological negations that aim to reduce blackness to possessed *objects* of empire (on the one hand) and the ontological erasures that aim to reduce indigeneity to participating *subjects* of empire (on the other) are opaque to each other, it is *out of that opacity* that decolonization must be inseparable from abolition (and vice versa).

Hence, the world shows up for the errant thinker in its ambiguity, but it is *as* an ambiguity that the world is given over as an object of her knowing. She doesn't anticipate smooth sailing through the world. Instead, she is called to specialize in a bumpy (cacophonous, even, to anticipate the work of Byrd) relational living. For errant-thinking, "world" is a moving totality of *opaque* singularities that are linked together (entangled, one might say) despite their resistance to reduction. I propose, here, that we might also understand Black and Native death in the Western hemisphere, as well as the respective stakes of abolition and decolonization, in this way: as a moving totality of *opaque* differences, intimately entangled in the wake of settler colonial violence *despite* their mutual irreducibility. If we theorize the beyond of settler colonial violence in this way, then these loci of opaque differences—blackness and indigeneity—present themselves as the impossibility of being possessed by some all-encompassing (all-understanding) theoretical gaze. Instead, it is as conceptually uncapturable that we must theorize the entanglement of these matrices of violence, as well as the possibility of moving beyond its logic, in yet another entanglement of abolition-

decolonization. To say this otherwise, with Glissant's account of opacity at the center, there is no surmising or assimilationist move that allows us to reduce the demands of abolition to those of decolonization, or vice versa. And yet, both must be pursued together, given the ways in which coloniality has always functioned out of the entanglements of Black and Native death. It is for this reason that I turn to opacity as a way to think "irreducible" and "in relation" together.

The following sections offer some ground for the claim about this entangled irreducibility between the locations of blackness and indigeneity in the colonial matrix. The hope is that this will support what I summarize as the two pitfalls we avoid when theory and praxis sufficiently attend to the mutual incommensurability across abolitionist and decolonial demands for an elsewhere. These two pitfalls are (1) a pursuit of native sovereignty at the expense of Negrophobia, and (2) a pursuit of black abolition at the expense of indigenous erasure. To reiterate, it is in remaining in this incommensurability—keeping what is unsettling/disruptive as such, so that our knowing is errant with opacity at the center—that possibilities of an elsewhere emerge.

III. WHAT'S INCOMMENSURABLE ACROSS BLACKNESS AND INDIGENEITY?

The Americas is founded on the conquest and settlement of indigenous lands and built out of labor procured through the conquest and enslavement of stolen Africans.[2] As such, the region represents a nexus of bio-power (usurpation and control of bodies) and geo-power (usurpation and control of land/non-human worlds). Decolonial scholars have established that it is this nexus that constitutes the white supremacist, settler violence of this so-called New World. In his work, *A Third University is Possible,* K. Wayne Yang (paperson 2017) points out that it is much more productive for us to understand these technologies of violence in terms of "necro-power": the killing/suspending/stalling of life (non-human *and* human) for the sake of conquest and domination.[3]

The inextricable entanglement of this necro-power calls us to sit with the complex proximities between Black and Native death, between (in other words) these various inflections of the "necro" at play. About the history of black enslavement, Jared Sexton writes that because racial blackness has always been reduced to occupy a "social life of social death," blackness, in the context of settler colonial violence, articulates a radical singularity (2011, 15). That is to say, the abjection of blackness in the Americas is singular to that position, such that it is "indexed to slavery and it does not travel" (21) to other violences of exclusions and dispossessions that exist within the necropolitical web of power relations in the Americas. As this non-universalizable position, the violence of becoming black (on Sexton's account) reveals an ontological divide between what Frantz Fanon (1986) names the "zone of nonbeing" that is lived as blackness, and all other onto-modalities of the

[2] In their work, Eve Tuck and K. W. Yang (2012) trace the ways in which this project rests on a first move that transforms indigenous land to forms of property.

[3] See also Achille Mbembe (2019).

social, political and cultural. Yang puts it this way: "The 'slave' should not be analyzed as a category of labor (we should not 'reduce Blackness to a mere tool of settlement'), but rather as an ontology of total fungibility" (paperson 2017, 11-12). Here, Yang aims to establish the distinction between (on the one hand) occupying a social category through which your humanity is made available for exploited capital labor, and (on the other hand) being part of social arrangements such that it is precisely one's *being-ness as human* that is in question. In this latter case, the enslaved person's use-value is infinite and infinitely exchangeable—it is the currency through which these circuits of capital accumulation operate. Hence, at the discursive level, the humanity of the enslaved person is sufficiently liquefied to allow for the ontological malleability that the category of African chattel enslavement signifies, so as to not only meet the labor demands of a plantation economy, but also and alongside this, the discursive and libidinal demands of white supremacist sentimentality.[4] We might think of this distinction between "exploitable labor" and "total fungibility" as a difference in categories of being whereby blackness as a category, because it falls *outside* of the basic ontological resistance required for exploitation, is "absolute availability" and "absolute exchangeability." Yang continues: "The technologies of anti-blackness create ontological illegibility or criminal presence . . . lethal geographies, carceral apparatuses . . . non-personhood, and so on" (paperson 2017, 11-12). In other words, there is no "there" there, except for use-value. In a similar vein, Tiffany King argues that "Black fungibility—rather than labor—defines and organizes Black value within relations of conquest" (2019, 23). All of this is singular to the production of blackness, or rather, to what necro-power in the Americas needs blackness to be in service to settler violence.

Hence, the abjection that is black social life—a life, to be sure, that "*survives* after a type of death" (Sexton 2011, 23, emphasis added)—is incommensurable with the many other vectors of violence that instantiate life in the settled and colonized landscapes of the Americas. In an important sense, these are ontological claims about blackness as a category, which then serve as an explanation of the enduring parameters in which blackness must be lived (at the more social, cultural and political levels). For instance, to consider blackness as total fungibility is to make sense of the historical arc that connects black life under Jim Crow to our more contemporary prison industrial complex (over-populated as that complex is with black persons). To be sure, this is not to suggest that over-policing and carcerality *only* targets blackened subjects, or that (to bring this back to the specific question at hand) the violence of the settler state does not *also* viciously target indigenous people (or other subjects racialized as non-white, for that matter).[5] However, it is to highlight the singular function of blackness as a category *for* the settler colonial machine. It is to orient our theory around the "*details* of the devil" (so to speak), instead of glossing over the finely calibrated

[4] For a thorough analysis of racial power and multiple modalities of anti-blackness in the United States, see Hartman (1997).

[5] In his discussion of the historical collaboration between black and indigenous intellectuals and activists in the United States, Kyle Mays reminds us that, in the paper he prepared for his attendance of the Universal Races Congress in London 1911, Charles Eastman described the US reservation system as a "miserable prison existence" (Vigil 2015, 374, quoted in Mays 2021, 110). It is beyond the scope of this paper, but I do want to recognize the various forms of carcerality (the prison, the detention camp/center, the reservation) at play in the political economy of the settler state.

differences in how settler necro-power is served by (or feeds on) Black and Native death respectively. As Ikyo Day (2015) reminds us in an analysis of what she names as the hasty "settler/indigenous" binary that sometimes frames settler colonial critiques, the power terrain generated by/through settler violence is hardly a monolithic one. Though the telos of its inner logic ultimately points to material accumulation, *how* that telos determines its realization—at particular nodes of the power terrain—is heterogeneous and often relationally irreducible.[6] This "how" requires an arrangement of being whereby blackness is purely fungible in ways that, as I try to outline below, indigeneity is not. Nonetheless and at the same time, there *are* formulations under the violence of settler colonialism that are unique to indigenous subjects, which is to say, equally as incommensurable with other non-indigenous vectors of violence. They are also (to frame it in Jared Sexton's words) "indexed to and do not travel beyond" the category of nativeness.

In what ways does the anti-indigenous violence of the settler state's necro-politics render the experience of native death untranslatable in other (settler violence) terms? What is the vocabulary of this other kind of singularity articulated by native death? Patrick Wolfe offers the notion of *corpus nullius* to theorize this singularity, citing that *corpus nullius* "express[es] the outer limits of othering that is reached when . . . particular humans [Indians] are excepted from the requirements that govern the treatment of humanity as a whole" (2007, 127).[7] In what follows, I hope to sketch some important variances between the Native death that Wolfe attempts to capture under the grammar *corpus nullius* and the Black death that the vocabulary of black fungibility frames. But for the moment, allow me to reference what is perhaps the most concrete manifestation of anti-indigeneity under the settler project: the historical phenomena of "Indian removals."

Elsewhere, Wolfe details the ways in which legal negotiations between a burgeoning settler United States and indigenous peoples ultimately entangled the latter in webs of abjection and denied sovereignty. He reminds us that, under the Doctrine of Discovery, the right of "preemption" concerned native peoples transferring the right of occupancy of their territories. To be sure, preemption in this context ultimately articulated a mere "pseudo-right," as it explicitly *foreclosed* the right *not* to transfer land or sell.[8] However, more directed to my discussion here is (as Wolfe also reminds us) a native right of occupancy was precisely not a right of domination. Using the so-called Trail of Tears, one of the many early nineteenth century instances of Indian "removal," as an example to illustrate this, Wolfe establishes that, under settler law, Indian occupancy *without* Indian domination

[6] "In the contemporary context, racialized vulnerability to deportation of undocumented, guest-worker, or other provisional migrant populations similarly exceed the conceptual boundaries that attend 'the immigrant' . . . folding them into a generalized settler position through voluntaristic assumptions constrains our ability to understand how their racialized vulnerability and disposability supports a settler colonial project" (Day 2015, 106-07).

[7] We can also imagine the settler violence of anti-blackness being articulated in this grammar. That is to say, we can also read, in the liquidation of black humanity and personhood as expression of another "outer limit of othering," another modality of exceptions (in black).

[8] Robert Nichols reminds us of the Black Hills Acts of 1877, "known colloquially as the 'Sell or Starve Act' which demanded that Sioux relinquish control of the Black Hills in exchange for government rations to mitigate starvation" after the mass killing of buffalo by the U.S. Army (Nichols, 2020, 2-3).

facilitated a discursive "removability" that was (and is) always-already indexed to Indianness. In the words of Chief Justice John Marshall, which Wolfe's analysis references, settler domination simply needed to be "consummated by possession" (*Johnson v. McIntosh* 1823), fulfilled in practice what was already accomplished in a discursive field of legitimacy and legality, namely that the Indian is understood, in advance (as it were) "to be removed" (Estes 2019, 47).[9]

Corpus nullius (or rather, its violent exceptions) should be understood in this sense. In other words, it is across this rendering of the Indian-as-removable that *corpus nullius* removes indigeneity outside the category of the human. I aim to understand this anti-indigenous settler violence as distinct from (and untranslatable in terms of) anti-black settler violence, which catalogues blackness as infinitely fungible. If, as Wolfe suggests, *the* indigenous act of transgression is to stay put, in light of a discursive Indian removability, then we might say that radical blackness (*the* transgressive act of the black position) is to take flight. I expound on this in the sections that follow, showing how the frames of singularity, incommensurability and untranslatability support a clarified reading of such variabilities across settler colonial violences.

IV. PITFALL ONE: NATIVE SOVEREIGNTY THAT COSTS NEGROPHOBIA

How are we to understand the geopolitical and bio-political determinations of belonging, as they show up in the positions of the black and of the native in the Americas? How are these concepts of citizenship and sovereignty already destabilized at the nexus of bio-power and geo-power, as they pass through blackness and indigeneity, respectively? These destabilizations are what scholars like Byrd and Day point to in their analysis of aboriginal communities in the US and Canada. Namely, both Byrd and Day underscore the sense in which, in these political contexts, the indigenous subject signifies as both native *and* foreign to the settler state. To be sure, such slippages result in the ways in which distinct yet interlocking matrices of colonization (as a project of land accumulation and settlement) and racialization (as a system of mapping meaning and value onto bodies in ways that facilitate land accumulation and settlement) within the settler state map onto and/or call for each other. That is to say, this simultaneous nativeness and foreigness marking indigeneity is a direct consequence of the intersecting goals of the geopolitics and bio-politics at play within a settler colonial context. Hence, what appears to be contradictory terms—"native" meaning "original to a place" and "foreign" meaning "not of a place"—align at a point of mutual reinforcement: the indigenous person is native in a way that gives her a right of occupancy and not a right of domination (to facilitate removal and always-already removeability); she is also foreign in a way that her embodied politics and culture (matrices of racialization) remain forever other than/inferior to "properly" embodied,

[9] In his account of the historical violence against which the #NoDAPL struggle unfolded beginning in 2016, Nick Estes reminds us, "Native people remain barriers to capitalist development, their bodies needed to be removed—both from beneath and atop the soil—therefore eliminating their rightful relationship with the land" (2019, 47).

rights-claiming citizenship. If we understand settler colonialism at this nexus of geopolitics and bio-politics, the cacophony (to anticipate Byrd's work) across indigenous demands for sovereignty (on the one hand) and black demands for radical abolition (on the other) begin to come into focus.

As Byrd (2011) tells us, it is out of this confluence of settler colonial power that citizenship in the settler state articulates logical oddities like "foreign/non-belonging citizens" and "native foreigners." Occupying the latter tortured category, Indians in the Americas show up as native to land that never did and would never rightfully belong to them (or belong to them in the "right" kind of way), given their non-proximity to racial whiteness. That is to say, the bio-political determination of black embodiment as improperly suited for civil/political life does discursive work on Indian embodiment as well. Racialized to be both non-proximal to whiteness *and* not entirely demoted to a (black) zone of nonbeing, indigenous foreignness sets the stage for the discordant determinations of treaty negotiations with the state (171). In those negotiations, the state's reading of the Indian's claim to sovereignty is already destabilized via oscillations between racialization and colonization. Indigenous people either become included as "suspect citizens" like other racialized (nonblack) minorities, in which case the position of the state is that it "does not and would not enter into treaties with its own citizens." Or, they become "suspect aliens," cordoned into reservation spaces effectively abandoned by the state, or meted out with the same military and paralegal violence that gets enacted in those "frontier" regions that signify as "open to settlement and (gentrified) improvement" (202).

Stuck in the liminality of a destabilized inclusion, indigenous demands *to* the state (for a return of land and sovereignty) are unrecognizable *by* the state for what those demands actually are. As Robert Nichols reminds us, "American Indians were unilaterally declared citizens of the United States [in 1924], ushering a long period of 'termination'" (2020, 3). Elsewhere, Nichols (2014) describes this inclusion as a "compulsory enfranchisement," making clear how, within this nexus of settler colonial relations, indigenous citizenship is hardly a condition for the possibility of native sovereignty. Rather (and this is the point that Nichols makes in highlighting the historical trajectory that correlates indigenous citizenship with indigenous termination), the state's move away from treaty-making to citizenship also marks the codification of the legal structures that will undermine both tribal identification and, in turn, tribal sovereignty. As such, indigenous enfranchisement (and inclusion, to the extent that we might read citizenship as an expansion of the field of rights-bearing subjects) is constitutively opposed to the possibility of indigenous sovereignty. For these reasons, scholars like Glen Coulthard (2014) problematize platforms of decolonization that pursue state recognition, arguing that indigenous resistance and resurgence must instead be diametrically *opposed* to negotiations with and recognitions by the state.

To return to my earlier account of Indian removability, we can read Coulthard's warning against state recognition as one that acknowledges the limited phenomenological scope of settler colonialism. Within this scope, the Indian appears as either already removed (no longer there in the physical or cultural sense as an impediment against settler expansion) or on their way to being removed (legible only as "what needs to be removed"). State recognition ultimately begins from/within this articulation of indigeneity, which is to say,

already counter to the content of indigenous sovereignty (namely, unmitigated access to territory and decision-making power over the use of that territory). Taking Frantz Fanon as his guide, Coulthard (2007) demonstrates that the social relations of the settler state invariably constitute the identity of native peoples on the state's own terms. What this means is that, via a politics of recognition (and the negotiations for sovereignty rights it often includes), native peoples become "subjects of empire" (6) voided precisely of the cultural and political capacities needed to articulate sovereignty claims against those of settlement.

Coulthard's position troubles Sexton's (2016) claim in "The *Vel* of Slavery" that an inherent "Negrophobia" lives in the very language of sovereignty used to frame indigenous demands for decolonization. To be sure, the value of an analysis like Sexton's lies in foregrounding an urgency for theorizing the colonization of indigenous peoples and the racialized oppression of black people together. At the same time, he argues that, because the brick and mortar of the settler colonial state is one of antiblackness, any interlocution—and he considers the historical treaty-making between the state and native tribes as instances of this— with the state presupposes, at the outset, adoption and/acceptance of this antiblackness (this "Negrophobia"). Sexton cites the work of Frank Wilderson in support of this claim: "treaties are forms of articulation, discussions brokered between two groups presumed to possess the same kind of historical currency: sovereignty" (Wilderson 2003, 236). And so, to the degree that treaties established (or continue to establish) arrangements that determine indigenous land access and indigenous determination of land use alongside the colonial settlement of the land, there is validation of the antiblackness and racial supremacy central to the settler state.[10]

Nevertheless, in reading Negrophobia in articulations of indigenous sovereignty, Sexton seems to miss what Coulthard and other indigenous scholars cite as the dangers of locating indigenous articulations of sovereignty within the fraught framework of the state. In other words, when Sexton writes that "the dynamics of Negrophobia are animated, in part, by a [native] preoccupation with sovereignty" (2016, 592), he seems to suggest that the sovereignty demanded by indigenous communities is mappable (can *afford* to be mappable) onto the (white supremacist) sovereignty articulated by the state.[11] In other words, Coulthard's critique will point out that at base of an assessment such as Sexton's is an understanding of the treaty (as document, as basis for social relations between indigeneity and the state, as a set of legal and discursive tools) as conditioning a return to native lifeworld possibilities. Coulthard's critique of this understanding suggests instead

[10] As a present-day implication of how these settler treaties are entangled with antiblackness, see Lee (2021).

[11] To Sexton's point, there is a historical record of native tribes adopting antiblack policies and politics specifically in the name of the right to act as sovereign nations. Alaina E. Roberts (2022) points to the entanglements between the Five Tribes and their formerly enslaved black members (or freedmen). In the name of sovereignty, these tribes will insist on their right to determine how tribal membership is granted, as well as how rights and privileges are distributed with respect to that membership. Roberts cites a history of tribes adopting policies that work to either marginalize black freedmen or deny them tribal citizenship altogether.

that, perhaps, treaties were one of the few strategic possibilities salvageable out of the indigenous world-ending event of settler colonialism.

The sovereignty that is operational in the indigenous context, Coulthard (2014) writes, *cannot afford* to be of the same historical currency as the state's, because at their core, indigenous demands are antagonistic to the entirety of the settler state, its anti-native violence *and* its antiblack violence. Couching this primarily in terms of free market capitalism, he envisions a notion of indigenous self-determination that "refuse[s] to be coopted by scraps of recognition, opportunistic apologies, and the cheap gift of political and economic inclusion. For Indigenous nations to live, capitalism must die" (2014, 173). To the extent that scholars of political economy like Cedric Robinson are correct in their naming of modernity's capitalism a *racial* capitalism, we might read, in Coulthard's point about the antagonism between indigenous self-determination and capitalism, a similar antagonism between indigenous self-determination and Negrophobia. In other words, if capitalism must die in order for Indigenous nations to live, then so too must Negrophobia.

We might turn again to Robert Nichols's work to further understand the level of antagonism driving Coulthard's critique of a "recognition" approach toward native sovereignty. Nichols's work is centrally concerned with the complexity involved when "dispossession" is used to articulate indigenous claims. The scope of this paper will not allow for a full retracing of Nichols's analysis. However, it suffices to note his clarification that the social relations that make notions of "property" meaningful are unique to colonial settler hermeneutics. In other words, these social relations are (in a general enough sense) absent within indigenous understandings of the world. "To claim property in something," Nichols writes, "is, in effect, to construct a relationship with others, namely a relation of exclusion" (2020, 31). In this sense, the kinds of brokering alluded to in Sexton's (2016) and Wilderson's (2003) analyses, between the settler state and native peoples, would *first* need to interject these (absent) social relations of exclusion so as to prescribe a proprietorial relation between the native and the territory in question. As Nichols (2020) reminds us, "when European colonizers encountered the diverse societies of the so-called New World, they frequently found the Indigenous peoples had no conception of land in [the] abstract and narrow sense" that could be deployed/presupposed by social relations of property. Hence, the imposition of these proprietorial relations to land is just that: an invention and imposition *by* the settler project *onto* indigenous sense-making. But what most acutely underscores Coulthard's point (about indigenous self-determination needing to reject, in its entirety, all of settler arrangements) is when Nichols notes that "the dispossessive process [changes] background social conditions such that the actualization of the [indigenous] proprietary right in question is necessarily mediated in such a way as to effectively negate [that right]" (32). To put this differently, the imposition of social relations that invents the very concept of indigenous property in land cannot be disaggregated from the imposition's primary agenda: the removing of the native for the purpose of *taking away and prohibiting of access to* the territory *cum* land. Any brokering between the colonial state and indigenous subjects begins here, which is to say, constitutively produces what Nichols names a process of indigenous dispossession. For our purposes (and to return to Coulthard's critique), it constitutively produces an *impossible* indigenous sovereignty and/or self-determination.

My turn to Glissant's work on opacity recognizes that, despite the mutual untranslatability of these processes, the settler state's theft of bodies (for use as indefinitely-fungible currency in racial capitalism) and land (invented as indigenous property so as to be *taken* for settlement's extractivism and capital expansion) are inseparable. This inseparability means that if/when indigeneity demands a sovereignty that *includes* Negrophobia (that is, a sovereignty that is legible to the state), it is ultimately demanding a sovereignty that includes the very settler necro-power it aims to resist. (This, I think, is the crux of Coulthard's point.) And so, as a matter of conceptual framing, there exists an articulation of "indigenous sovereignty," the form of which is already beyond and other than what the state is able (or willing) to recognize. By the very nature of settler colonialism, the state cannot afford to hear "indigenous sovereignty" (in this "beyond" sense) for what it means. By extension, indigenous sovereignty cannot mean what it *needs* to mean if it deploys the same historical, Negrophobic currency of the state.[12]

V. PITFALL TWO: BLACK ABOLITION THAT COSTS INDIGENOUS ERASURE

It is undeniable that indigenous communities do have access to a (stolen) sovereignty which they can claim. Said otherwise, there *does* exist a category of sovereignty that shows up as "to be retrieved" via demands that, upon heeding to warnings like Coulthard's, recognize the discursive traps of state recognition/state negotiation. Within these discursive traps, indigenous articulations of sovereignty claims run the risk of reducing the native person to a (*subjugated*) subject of empire. I argue that there is no such risk available to the racialized descendants of black slaves. In other words, configured through the singular violence of anti-blackness, black persons in the Americas are always already the *objects* of the empire: fungible, usable property void of any kind of self that might even be *misconstrued* as occupying a subject positionality. As possessed object, the black never enters into the kind of sovereignty demands available to the native. Hence, I locate this founding premise of "possessed *object* of empire" at the center of pursued possibilities of an otherwise future for black freedom and black belonging. Consequently, work toward abolition would need to

[12] As Kyle Mays (2021) points out, the historical record of the settlement of native land and black enslavement includes fraught moments of indigenous adoptions of antiblackness. For instance, he reminds us of a treaty signed in 1823 "between the Florida Native nations and the US government, explicitly [stating] that tribes that capture Africans who escaped their captivity would be compensated" (Mays 2021, 67). Relatedly, in an opinion piece published with *Aljazeera*, Roberts writes, "[t]he fact that by the time of the [American] Civil War black chattel slavery had been an element of life among the Five Tribes for decades is rarely discussed" (2018). Roberts goes on to remind readers that the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment ended chattel slavery only for enslaved black people within the boundaries of what, in 1865, constituted the United States. Beyond that boundary (in so-called "Indian Territory"), the Five Tribes continued to keep in captivity the black people they owned as slaves. In the context of my current analysis, my use of Negrophobia is not divorced from these concrete historical instances of native practices of black enslavement. However, my intention is to move beyond this historical record—one that, as Mays argues, does not capture in the main the native-black relationalities within the terrain of settler colonialism—to think about the broader theoretical antagonisms and alignments among indigenous sovereignty, black abolition and colonial political economy.

attend to this mode of capture, which "inclusion and/or enfranchisement" historically (and conceptually) prescribes for lived blackness.

This section begins with this founding premise as it articulates a second pitfall to avoid in abolitionist-decolonial theory and practice. This is the pitfall that locates demands for black freedom within a hermeneutics of indigenous erasure. As I will show, in heeding this founding effect of antiblack violence—black as possessed object of empire—the native erasure operational within this pitfall should not be read within the same register as the assimilationist programs of the state with respect to native peoples. To be sure, assimilation has historically worked to "disappear" nativeness, to get nativeness "out of the way" so that the state's political economy might expand unencumbered.[13] However, even in instances when demands for black abolition either align with or leave uncriticized such anti-native violations by the state, the location of blackness within the attending power terrain does not make it possible for a black politics to explicitly engage in its own programs of native elimination. As Mays notes, desires/demands for black abolition might "[reproduce] an idea," but such reproductions are "not the same thing as having the power to use a narrative in order to commit violence," or to explicitly enact the native elimination central to the state (2021, 40). Nonetheless, to the degree that native erasure and black fungibility are of one (settler colonial) piece, a black abolitionist politics that leaves uncriticized the anti-native logics of settler violence is unable to carry out its own abolitionist project of radically dismantling the settler state. As I will argue, such reproductions of native elimination are something for which black abolitionist positions ought to be accountable. I will also argue that such reproductions *undermine* the very telos of an abolitionist demand (similar to how Negrophobia undermines the possibility of indigenous sovereignty). However, for now, I want to stress (along with scholars like Mays) that, because blackness occupies the position of "possessed *object* of the state," the modality of indigenous erasure that can, at times, be coded into demands for black abolition is not of the same modality as the erasure of native sovereignty written into settler programs of native assimilation-elimination. Simply put (and to return to Mays), "discourse is connected to power, and Black people [as possessed, subject-less object] don't have the power to subjugate Indigenous peoples" (Mays 2021, 40).

To return to the more central point of this section, alongside the dangers of scripting indigenous sovereignty demands in the settler state's language are also the dangers of using that language to script demands for black abolition and home-making. As the possessed *object* of empire, blackness is figured as the ontological *negation* of subjecthood. That is to say, out of that zone of nonbeing that Fanon (1986) acutely analyzes, blackness is determined as impossible subjectivity, impossible sovereignty, and incorporated into the US state only as object of infinite use value, infinitely capturable, infinitely fungible.

[13] It is for this reason that Patrick Wolfe (2006) includes settlement's assimilationist policies within its larger commitment to indigenous elimination: "genocide emerges as either biological (read 'the real thing') or cultural—and thus, it follows, not real. In practice, it should go without saying that the imposition on a people of the procedures and techniques that are generally glossed as 'cultural genocide' is certainly going to have a direct impact on that people's capacity to stay alive (even apart from their qualitative immiseration while they do so)" (398-89).

It is as *use value for* a settler colonial agenda that blackness—both in its iteration as chattel slave *and* within a broader abolitionist struggle subsequent to Emancipation—often travels in settler discursive territory shaped by indigenous erasure. As an historical instance of how black emancipation strivings are put to use within settler colonialism's project of indigenous elimination, Roberts (2022) references the complex web of domination that shaped black and native encounters in the aftermath of the US Civil War. She notes that, at the war's end in 1865, the Five Tribes of what is now Oklahoma (Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole) were punished for "siding with the Confederacy."[14] As punishment, the United States forced them to enter into new (post-Civil War) treaties that (i) emancipated their black slaves, and (ii) *required* the tribes to surrender forty acres of their territory to each of their former slaves/their families. I quote Roberts directly in her naming of this historical moment as one in which "black people [more specifically black freedom dreams] are used as a tool to weaken indigenous sovereignty."

I point to this history to stress that, within the context of settler colonial practices, iterations of black aspirations for emancipation/abolition/full humanity are capitalized upon for the sake of undermining indigenous self-determination/landed sovereignty. Does this make the black person's position (within this matrix of settler domination) a settler position? To ask this differently (perhaps with an eye to Patrick Wolfe's assessment), does the formerly enslaved in this historical moment *become settler* as their settling of native territory participates in the structure and "organizing principle" (2006, 388) of native elimination? My argument is that such a reading is both decontextualized and reductive, failing to account for (in a robust enough sense) the backdrop of power structures that prescribe "fungible object" status to blackness. As a further problematizing of this indigenous/settler binary, Wayne Yang notes that, at least in the context of the Americas, "Black people are often confronted by the *impossibility* of settlement, because antiblackness positions Black people as 'out of place' on land" (paperson 2017, 8).[15] What is the content of this "being out of place" on land? Is it a matter of not being where one calls "home"? Is it a matter of relating to "home" in more complex (maybe diasporic) ways?

Whatever the precise nature of this impossibility, it is one that centers a messy yet necessary complexity when it comes to historical moments like the one that marks the black-native relationality of a region like "Indian Territory." As Day (2015) puts it, "the logic of antiblackness complicates a . . . binary framed around a central Indigenous/settler opposition." This binary is one in which one is a settler, *with* access to all the accompanying power and political entitlements, or Indigenous: "there is conceptual difficulty in folding the experience of racial capture and enslavement into the subject position of the 'settler'" (Day 2015, 103).

[14] Roberts (2022) complicates this pronouncement, pointing to a much murkier positioning of the Five Tribes in the historical unfolding of the Civil War.

[15] In *An Afro-Indigenous History of the United States*, Mays (2021) actually argues for an understanding of blackness in the Americas as a modality of displaced indigeneity. And in this sense, it is more apt to find, in so-called New World blackness, an originating connection to place and lineage. Of his readers, he asks, "[w]hat if we remembered that those Africans forced to come to the British colony of Virginia were, actually Indigenous people? How would that help us think differently about early Atlantic encounters between Indigenous peoples from the African continent and those of North America, and beyond?" (3).

Sexton's (2010) juxtaposition of an originary natal alienation of blackness against indigenous landlessness is useful, here. "The nativity of the slave," Sexton writes, "is not inscribed *elsewhere* [available to be retrieved] . . . but [is] rather *nowhere at all*" (41, emphasis added). And so, on the one hand, there is the geopolitical (and cultural) groundlessness of which a resurgence of indigenous sovereignty is a corrective. That is to say, decolonial articulations of indigenous sovereignty is about reclaiming determination over territory, for the sake of renewing the cultural and epistemological organization of lifeworlds that are properly indigenous (Whyte 2017). And then on the other hand, there is the *ontological* groundlessness—what Saidiya Hartman (2007) describes as the irretrievable loss of one's mother —for which no articulable demand can serve as a corrective. Though it by no means exhausts the cultural and existential emergence of blackness in the Americas, this ontological groundlessness does account for what we might call the originating principle of New World blackness. In other words, blackness in the Americas is always in relation (even as black life refuses *reduction*) to this principle. As scholars like Hartman (1997) and Hortense Spillers (1987) show, this is the originating principle that facilitates the kind of radical tearing—from history, lineage, language, culture—that might effectively transform human beings into chattel. Sexton's (2010) formulation of "(black) settlement as impossibility" attempts to capture this. Hence, in this question of the precise nature of "settlement as impossibility" for lived blackness, I foreground this incommensurable difference (a difference that cannot be translated across shared terms) between an ontological groundlessness (of a loss of the mother) and a geopolitical groundless (of a loss of land). My claim is that it is from here that we begin to wrestle with pursuits of black abolition as they move alongside, against, and within a settler minefield of indigenous erasure.

In 1867, Frederick Douglass remarked on the "composite" nature of the United States as he argued in favor of Chinese immigration. He expressed faith in a newly emerging nation that attempted to bring together, under a single national identity, multiple races, religious and cultural commitments, citing the "principle of absolute equality" as that upon which the success of this national experiment rested. "Composite Nation" explicitly wrestles with the place of the formerly enslaved and indigenous peoples in this context. Douglass writes: "Europe and Africa are already here, and the Indian was here before either. He [the Indian] stands today between the two extremes of black and white, too proud to claim fraternity with either, and yet too weak to withstand the power of either." Diagnosing this as an ailment of a white government committed to racial hierarchy, Douglass continues, "The [national] policy of keeping the Indians to themselves, has kept the tomahawk and scalping knife busy upon our borders, and has cost us largely in blood and treasure" ([1867] 2007).

I offer Douglass's remarks here as a curious instance of both seeing and erasing, or perhaps, "seeing *as* erasing" indigeneity in the context of grappling with the stakes of black citizenship (a path that, in 1867, opened onto a promise of black freedom and full humanity). As a newly enfranchised citizen of a nation at least principally built on civic equality for black Americans like himself, Douglass's position in "Composite Nation" lives in a discursive project that leaves unquestioned the legitimacy of US settlement and expansion. By extension, his position also leaves unquestioned the presumption that "the

Indian who was here before" would simply adjust into the alignments of US citizenship, *even as* that citizenship built itself out of the destruction of Indian lifeworlds. Furthermore, Douglass's critique of a national policy that "keeps Indians to themselves" assumes that, were it not for such policies, the Indian *would already* avail herself for inclusion. In other words, Douglass's reading stops short of seeing that the Indian's *refusal* of a composite national project is, in fact, a refusal of the very legitimacy of that project.

Ultimately, Douglass's understanding of black freedom via a pathway of American citizenship (or at least the promise of it) reproduces the indigenous erasure necessary to the founding of the American nation. It is an iteration of indigenous erasure that consigns native peoples to a past, or "'the dustbin of history' . . . precluded from changing and existing as real people in the present [through] regenerating [indigenous] nationhood" (Lawrence and Dua 2005, 124). Against a backdrop of ontological groundlessness, Douglass's position might be understood within a history of New World blackness faced with the task of forging a sense of home on land fraught with multiple matrices of domination. I want to argue that this pathway to black freedom—via a citizenship cut from a fabric of native erasure—is hijacked to the degree that native erasure and black fungibility are of one (settler colonial) piece. Nevertheless, Douglass's participation in a project that (I argue) is ultimately set up to read him (in his position as "black") as an infinitely fungible *object* of empire ought to be appropriately contextualized. We should read his assessment of the pathway of American enfranchisement in the context of a founding black natal alienation (black as ontological groundlessness), which ultimately animates the position of black possessed object of empire.

All of this to say that for a project of black abolition that imagines (within the context of the Americas) conditions for the possibility of black freedom, the starting point is one to which scholars like Sexton (2010) point: ontological groundlessness and ruptured kinship/lineage. Black abolition works against this radical absence of relation to both place and lineage. To be sure, we might read a black enfranchisement project like Douglass's (and perhaps also like Dr. Martin Luther King's centuries later) as more antiracist than it is abolitionist (that is to say, as projects that pursue better and more equitable inclusion into the nation-institution of the United States). However, to the degree that such aspirations ultimately ignore "the ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples in the Americas" (Lawrence and Dua 2005, 123), this perpetuation of the myth of a legitimate nation state (clearly at the foundation of Douglass's "Composite Nation") is out of an ontologically *impossible* "black settler" position. It is also as "impossible settler" that a project of black decolonial abolition would have to be imagined and theorized about.

Unlike the native body's capacity to haunt the settler state with a reminder of its illegitimacy (indigeneity needs to be *removed/eliminated* for the myth of *terra nullius* to take hold[16]), black corporeality signifies as the outcome of a complete "deracination" (Sexton 2010, 41). Blackness as natal alienation rests on a complete *tearing up* from any ontological ground upon which it might haunt what it is already possessed by. Laid out in these terms, we're called to trouble the overdetermining binarisms that drive analyses

[16] See, again, Estes: "Because Native people remain barriers to capitalist development, their bodies [need] to be removed—both from beneath and atop the soil" (2019, 47)

like Wolfe's (2006), which reduce the ongoing dynamic of settler colonialism into "native/settler" terms. In these binary terms, persons within the geopolitical spaces of settler states are either indigenous or (via migration, transplantation, and even captured enslavement) settlers (Euro-descended settlers, non-Euro-descended *and* black descendants of the enslaved). And as settlers (according to Wolfe), they must reckon with their settler complicity. Given the incommensurable difference between landless *subjects* of empire and selfless/possessed *objects* of empire, this "native/settler" binary makes it difficult to ascribe "settler" status to the "experience [and afterlife] of capture and slavery," where (to say again) blackness continues to signify as the deracinated objects of empire (Sexton 2010, 41).

To reiterate, the native faces an eliminationist violence of assimilation, of becoming *subjects* of empire. The black faces the violence of possession, of belonging to the state as fungible *objects* of empire. I point this out not to claim that the ongoing indigenous displacement from stolen land (and indigenous erasure more broadly) is "less bad" than the constitutive natal alienation of blackness. Rather, I point this out to acknowledge an irreducible incommensurability around which abolitionist and decolonial alliances should be organized. How might such alliances unfold, with this untranslatability at its center?

VI. DECOLONIZATION: OPAQUELY ALLIED, HORIZONTALLY CACOPHONOUS, AND ALWAYS SHOALING

One indigenous critique of certain iterations of abolitionist politics is that it misrecognizes the (settler) nature of the state from which it demands civil rights/protections. This critique is similarly structured to Sexton's (2010) reading of Negrophobia into certain iterations of native "sovereignty" demands. In other words, both critiques highlight that, mediated through terms set by the settler state, repairs and returns for native and black people are set up in opposition, such that a pursuit of one is tantamount to leaving the other behind. In her work at these intersections of Native and Black studies, King reminds us that "white colonial and settler colonial discourse [facilitates a forgetting of] the ways that Black and Native death are intimately connected in the Western Hemisphere" (2019, xiii). To say this differently, such dominant discourses aim to *analyze* (as in, break apart into discrete positionalities) what is ultimately always-already an entangled synthesis: the violences of black fungibility and indigenous erasure that, though twinned, are both of a single piece. And so, my turn to both King and Byrd (2011) is to find theoretical frames to think these entangled violences together. Most notably, I turn to their work in order to explore Glissant's (1997) conception of opacities in relation (outlined in section I above) within this contextual terrain. The goal is to explore the theoretical orientation of "opacities in relation" as what might help us articulate what it means to avoid the two pitfalls I note above: *forgetting* the intimacies of this entanglement and *presupposing a translatability* that tries to reduce the terms of one death into another.

Hence, it would seem as though just as indigenous demands for sovereignty must remain *unmediated* (unrecognizable) by the state, so too do black demands for/toward abolition. To the degree that these two matrices of settler violence intersect, it is here: at

their respective loci of radicality, which is otherwise than the state. That is to say, radical iterations of decolonization and black abolition would be impossible outside of them being pursued together. But furthermore, to pursue them together is to already look beyond (elsewhere than) the state. As I read both King (2019) and Byrd (2011), but perhaps especially King, this is more than a claim about alliance or solidarity between black and native communities in the Americas. Rather, it is a claim that asks us to think intimately synthesized entanglements that swirl around an opaque meeting place.

Again, I name this meeting place "opaque" since black fungibility is untranslatable in the terms out of which native elimination signifies, and vice versa. Nonetheless, it is possible to imagine a radical "otherwise" (an elsewhere beyond settler violence) in which *both* modalities of capture are no longer. *How* we work through/toward that "otherwise," *how* we re-imagine our human-to-human (and human-to-other-than-human) relationality beyond settler colonial possession will unfold quite differently (opaquely untranslatable with respect to each other, perhaps), depending on where we start within these settler entanglements of black and indigenous capture, respectively. This "how" (as process, as journey, as striving) is singular to the logics of one's starting point. It will be singular to the (native or black) negation/capture at play, since it matters if my starting point is a fungible object possessed *by* the state or nullified subject assimilated *into* the state. A decolonial abolition (or abolitionist decolonialism) must wrestle with these side-by-side singularities and with their subsequent incommensurability as precisely what conditions its possibility. In other words, though the ontological negations that aim to reduce blackness to possessed *objects* of empire (on the one hand) and the ontological erasures that aim to reduce indigeneity to participating *subjects* of empire (on the other) are opaque to each other, it is *out of that opacity* that decolonization must be inseparable from abolition (and vice versa).

Horizontal cacophony

Byrd)2011) develops the notion of a horizontally-oriented "cacophony" as what allows a decolonial option to show up. Her claim is that horizontal cacophony begins in the *plural* histories within empire, and unfolds in the politics and culture that is beyond the discursive metrics of the settler state.[17] In other words, by "horizontal," Byrd attempts to foreground the dynamics of power that unfold *across* (and among) locations on the receiving-end of racialized settler colonial violence, similarly leveled with respect to power as a consequence of being on the receiving-end of that power. Though ultimately shaped by the state's grammar of violence, this horizontal cacophony points to ways of signification that are "beyond" (and perhaps also "below") the terms set by that violence. As such, it is a cacophony that complicates the story often deployed by the state (from its *vertically*-oriented power position) about a multicultural plurality that moves smoothly

[17] Byrd's notion of horizontal cacophony brings to mind (from the arena of popular culture) Ryan Coogler's (2022) Marvel film, *Wakanda Forever*. In it, Coogler de-centers the geopolitics between Africa's Wakanda and the neo-imperial West, so as to center a fraught (and perhaps cacophonous) geopolitics between Wakanda and Talokan, the underwater indigenous nation that has re-imagined itself against the historical violence of settler colonial genocide.

toward (better) inclusivity. Instead (according to Byrd), in a horizontal cacophony that will "decenter . . . the vertical interactions between colonizer and colonized" (2011, xxxiv), pluralities "bang their heads together" in determining what radical exits might look like, from both the bio-power and geo-power of the white, settler state (Howe 1994, 108). The imagery of "heads banging together" conveys the rather *bumpy* (i.e., *not* smooth) difficulty involved in working across pluralities that aren't simply different and co-existing cultural orientations, but are positioned in terms of incommensurable historical violences, with perhaps incommensurable notions of what it means to resist (and move beyond) those violences.

On my reading, the cacophony of heads banging together conveys that this pursuit of radical exits is always in-process and rarely follows straight (neat) lines of progress. For this reason, these radical exits are perhaps to be found at the level of everyday practice and culture-making, where the virtuosity of living, though messy and beyond codification, is often about resisting, responding to, and sometimes refusing the settler state's claims to have exhausted all options.[18] At that everyday level, politics happens beyond state mechanisms, and as cacophonous, is often unrecognizable to those state mechanisms. Here, I am interested in thinking about these horizontally-oriented cacophonies in terms of opacity (as it is developed in Glissant's work). It would seem as though with a first premise of opacity, we avoid those assumptions of a reductive translatability across terms that are entangled. I return in order to unpack this in a concluding section, but not before turning to King's conception of shoaling work.

Shoaling

King's approach to theorizing the entanglements of decolonization and abolition is grounded in a black feminist ethical framework, whose driving principle is "'we leave no one behind'" (2019, 26). Through her use of the shoal as metaphor and organizing principle, this black feminist ethic moves beyond the rubric of alliance or coalition. More radically, it means that we are *no longer able* to conceptualize black abolition propped up by native erasure, or native resurgence, sovereignty, and rematriation propped up by black fungibility. Much like the cacophonous nature of Byrd's (2011) horizontally-situated, difficult and bumpy "head-banging" work, King (2019) turns to the shoal's geological formation as what will *also* take us beyond a neat, settler-derived dichotomy between landed and oceanic/diasporic sensibilities. In other words, as conceptual metaphor, the shoal complicates readings of black freedom as always creolizing and diasporic and native sovereignty as always landed and static.[19]

[18] In a conversation with hosts of the podcast *Millennials are Killing Capitalism*, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Robyn Maynard (2022) point out that it is often real-world practices (of building coalitions, of living among and with each other) that relational alternatives between black and native peoples become activated beyond the options offered by racial capitalism and settler colonialism. My motivating interest in this paper is to explore theoretical language to articulate what already happens "on the ground."

[19] To reference, again, Coogler's (2022) *Wakanda Forever*, this complication certainly animates the film's rendition of the geopolitics between the Wakanda and Talokan nations.

As a geological formation, shoals are those unanticipated land formations encountered out at sea, at a sufficiently significant distance from where shore/shoreline begins, so as to surprise and catch off guard when they are encountered. Shoals, in other words, *slow sea traffic down*, demand a pause so as to reconfigure plans and paths previously thought to reliably bring you to your desired destination (to perhaps even *reconsider* that destination *as* desirable). "Materially," King tells us, these sites are "where movement" — and perhaps *also business*—"as usual cannot proceed" (2019, 3) and where what constitutes knowledge-production turns errant, in-process, and tenuous. She repurposes this *geological* phenomenon for methodological use, taking the shoaling effect in a physical world to the shoaling of theory itself into a conceptual space in which the intimate entanglements of black and indigenous life might be thought together. The conceptual effect of this shoaling of theory is to ultimately make space to imagine a re-routing of the navigations set by settler colonialism's "business as usual."

And so, "[r]ather than speaking only in the terms or vocabulary of liberal notions of Indigenous sovereignty and Black citizenship" (King 2019, 46), we are invited by both King and Byrd to consider different soundscapes and registers of communication. These alternative vocabularies move us beyond the mediating effects of settler discursivity, which serve to diametrically oppose resistances against native erasure and black fungibility respectively. I would like to suggest that the different soundscapes that emerge from a shoaling framework are then of a similar register to Byrd's (2011) cacophonies. Both of them bring to mind soundscapes that are emergent, indeterminate/in-process, and unanticipated. Hence, we might frame in terms of *shoaling* practices those horizontal "colonized-colonized" communicative practices whose work decenters the vertical "colonized-colonizer" ones that so often pit indigeneity and blackness in the Americas against each other. Via a shoaling of theory itself, possibilities emerge for decolonial and abolitionist work to find "new formations, alternative grammar and vocabularies . . . that reveal the ways that some aspects of Black and Indigenous life have always already been a site of co-constitution" (King 2019, 28).

Far from static. and therefore far from capture-able by some unifying principle guiding the onto-thinker outlined in Glissant's (1997) development of opacity, contact at the foundation of communities in Relation—contact that is cacophonous, that (as with the shoal) unsettles those settler-arrangements of who belongs and who doesn't—is moving, perpetually shifting and unsettling what dares to offer itself *as* settled. Like the geographical navigations that must contend with the shoal, communities in Relation (contending with opacity at the center) proceed indeterminately and tenuously. This is because, as King notes in her work, the happenings in question are neither legible nor knowable in advance. But this is precisely why a shoaling way of theorizing about the Americas allows us to move via paths that are not yet etched out by settler narratives, new paths not yet conscripted to block a thinking about "conquest and colonialism as fundamentally constituted by slavery as much as they were constituted by genocide" (King 2019, 59). We might say that this shoaling of theory is an accomplishment of (or at least a possibility for) Glissant's errant thinker, positioned as she is in a knowing relationship with such unpredictability.

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

"Opacities in relation" re-imagines community as one in which a totality might also be accountable to the relations across plural histories within, even (*or especially*) as those histories are incommensurable with respect to each other.[20] Despite that incommensurability, accountability is shaped by the principle of "no one being left behind." My hope is to have shown that the constitutive open-endedness and movement of Glissant's notion of compositeness foregrounds the productive capacities in Byrd's (2011) notion of a horizontally-oriented cacophony and the imaginative capacities that King (2019) captures in her metaphor of shoaling work. I should also note that, indeed, Byrd's focus on the horizontal picks up a key metaphor for Glissant, which is the errant-like rhizome spread of the mangrove. Both call attention to the significance of movement that is non-linear (*anti*-linear, even) and of anchoring that is *not* for the sake of stasis and entrenchment. (The rhizome, after all, is growth that is shallow instead of deep.) The mangrove grows on swampy liquid-ground. It insists on life where land and water intertwine. Likewise, the shoal *also* lives at the intertwining of land and water, and perhaps can also help us theorize a similar insistence on life *out of* the violent entanglement of black and native death-dealing technologies.

And so when "heads bang together" in the afterlives of empire, it seems apt to say that we have arrived at a point where "[black] diaspora collides with settler colonialism" (Byrd 2011, xix), where any possibility of decolonization and black abolition must emerge as transformative accountability *to* this collision point and must reckon with the entanglement of blackness and indigeneity in the Americas. Community across blackness and indigeneity conceptualized errantly and with *opacity at the center* would be open-ended in the messiness of a rhizome's routings. The compositeness of such community would be less about final resolutions and more about the shoaling communicative practices of ongoing (and bumpy) community-formation. My hope, here, is to have shown that this lattice-work of the shoal, the cacophonous, and the opaque opens productive possibilities for both theoretical and political work committed to taking on decolonization and abolition together in the co-constitutive radical departure from settler colonial capture.

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[20] Glissant's formulation allows for possibilities of political accountability as well. Time does not permit me to elaborate this here, but I do treat this question of political accountability in detail in my book *Creolizing the Nation* (2020).

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