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A CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY OF WALKING: FOOTPATHS AND FLIGHT WAYS

PERRY ZURN
American University

It is hardly difficult to imagine writing about critical phenomenology and walking. One might pause over the method of critical phenomenology as a *meta-odos*, a thinking of the path. Or consider the steps critical phenomenology takes and the unique pitch of its gait as it traverses the borderlands between phenomenology and critical theory. One might query how these two have the capacity to walk so well side by side, so much so that they can become as one, barely distinguishable against an open sky. Such an inquiry would no doubt track how it is that phenomenology walks toward things, through things, into things, suspending the eye of the natural attitude and proceeding ever so carefully and yet bluntly in search of what springs toward it. But such an inquiry would also track how that very process is a scripted processual, notwithstanding all the suspensions upon which it steps. Who and what writes and rewrites the script of what appears, when, and how? What inscriptions define appearances in advance and diaeretically cut them clean from one another? And what are the unscripted forces still at work? Ferreting out the work of scripts and inscriptions, such an inquiry would pause over the hidden structures that constrict what might feel like a free flight of the mind, a bit of unfettered rambling in the fields of consciousness. Thinking critical phenomenology as walking, then, means tracking the two moving in tandem. Phenomenology pulls toward the horizon of experience, while critical theory veers toward structural analyses. Together, they tread a uniquely illuminating path.

But musing over this conjunction of critical phenomenology and walking, the very structure and function of this jointure, is not my aim in the present inquiry. Rather, I aim to explore a critical phenomenology *of* walking. The path I take, then, is a different one. It necessarily begins by attending to this ordinary, overly familiar act of walking and making it strange, peeling away the shroud by which it appears a foregone fact and banal practice. I want to ask, what is it to walk? What does it look like, feel like, sound like? For whom, in what time and place, is it so? How is walking experienced subjectively and intersubjectively, insofar as we walk before, behind, and beside one another? I want to attune myself to the way we walk *in a world*, or to the worldedness of our walking. What are the social values and structures that inform and give form to who walks, where and how they walk? How is it that our walk

differs depending on the "we" who walks? But also, how is walking itself a worlding? Why and how does walking have the power to change the social values and structures that impinge upon it, shaping pathways and lifeways as it goes? Embedded in this inquiry is a space for critical phenomenology's ameliorative project, its capacity to transform the world it takes as its object. In this sense, a critical phenomenology *of* walking opens up a pathway for thinking about walking differently, in more liberatory ways. And it points back to that companion project for another day: rethinking (critical, phenomenological) thought as a kind of walking.

In what follows, then, I sketch the contours of a critical phenomenology of walking. I begin by briefly characterizing the critical phenomenological project and marking some of its invitations to think method and movement alongside one another. Then, I explore two modes of doing a critical phenomenology of walking: attending to *how* one walks and *when and where* one walks. I revisit and reread, in particular, the stories of Charlie Howard and Latisha King, whose walks not only signaled a unique comportment in the world, but a comportment so offensive as to be extinguished by a fatal admixture of homophobia, transphobia, and, in King's case, racism. Finally, I close by considering the conditions under which a critical phenomenology of walking can be ameliorative—that is, how it can participate in liberatory projects of thinking and making. Drawing on Michel de Certeau and María Lugones, I argue not only that a critical phenomenology of walking can diagnose how structures of oppression constrain walking chances in the world, but also that it can witness how walking critiques those very structures.[1] Walking can be a movement of resistance and reimagination against the constraints of embodiment and subjectivity so singularly inherited and enforced. Traversing the space of this inquiry, I aim to complexify my understanding of walking as a practice, but also to deepen my appreciation of critical phenomenology as a method.

I. THE PATH OF CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY

Work in phenomenology has recently taken a critical turn; critical phenomenology is coming into its own. And for good reason. Phenomenology and critical theory each, in their own way, walk too quickly past whole realms of things that have a clear bearing on their interests and inquiries. Phenomenology insists on the insight of first-person experience. Focusing less on what the world is than on how it greets us, phenomenology is able to discern specific contours of relation and experience that are otherwise missed. Critical theory, however, insists on the revelatory character of social structures and institutions. Focusing less on how we feel and experience things than on how we inherit structures of meaning and value before we are even conscious, critical theory is able to identify social forces and power relations that organize our world in advance. Critical phenomenologists see in phenomenology and critical theory necessary companions on the path of inquiry.

[1] By "walking chances," I mean to invoke and extend the social science concept of "life chances." If one's chances to live in certain ways are uniquely constrained by social inequalities, so too are one's chances to walk.

Rich analyses of social institutions require an account of personal experience, just as personal experience is necessarily informed by those social institutions. When paired together in an exploratory project, more of what is and what might be stands out in relief.

While many scholars have sought to distill phenomenology into an essence, it is, at its heart, a practice. And it is a practice poised against metaphysical idealities and certain scientific abstractions. Phenomenology aims to get at the root of how things are actually experienced and lived. In doing so, it works to understand what appears and what allows it to appear as it does. What is the content and what are the conditions of experience and appearance? As crystallized by Edmund Husserl, phenomenology proceeds by way of two preliminary steps: the *epoché* and the eidetic reduction. The *epoché* is a bracketing of the natural attitude, or the suspension of everyday beliefs and habits that make the world as easily habitable as it is impossible to truly see. Following on its heels, the eidetic reduction focuses on the first-person perception of an object in order to identify the essence (*eidos*) or essential structures of human experience. These steps directly change the terrain of inquiry. In Husserl's words, the phenomenologist must "parenthesize" the "whole pre-discovered world" of thought in order to open up a "phenomenological region," a new "province" and "domain" which lies "in another direction" (1999, 65-7). As such, phenomenology is a refusal of the paths and landscapes heretofore taken, and an insistent possibilizing of new landscapes of inquiry and pathways within them. Traversing those new landscapes requires, for Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a different "manner and style of thinking," a different "movement" entirely (2002, vii, xxiv). Rather than replicating the spiralized structure of a reflection that only ever returns the inquirer to himself, phenomenological inquiry moves, through "radical reflection" and "wonder" in a starfish pattern, constantly extending the inquirer out into the intersubjectivities and histories by which the phenomenological world is steadily being produced and reproduced (xxiv).[2]

Much like phenomenology, critical theory is a practice. And it is a practice developed in direct resistance to naturalized habits of both theory and critique. Too often, theory purports to be objective, neutral, and universal, while critique capitalizes on that distance to criticize from the outside. Critical theory, however, insists on thinking from the inside out. As Max Horkheimer argues, all theory is not outside the social but inside, produced by and productive of social relations. Insofar as those relations are consistently unequal, buoyed by class and economic inequities, theory must be practiced *critically*, by "radically question[ing]" the state of things here and now so as to contribute to "the abolition of social injustice" (2002, 234, 241). This project of critical theory is a two-step process: identify the conditions that make something what it is and mark the fault lines that allow it to become something else. For Michel Foucault, critical theory aims "to bring out the conditions of acceptability of a system" but also to "follow the breaking points" of that system (1997, 54). Similarly, for Judith Butler, critical theory aims "to recognize the ways in which the coercive effects of

[2] Eugen Fink, Husserl's steady walking companion, spoke most eloquently of the necessity of wonder to the phenomenological method.

knowledge are at work in subject-formation itself" but also "to risk one's very formation as a subject" (2004, 320; cf. Butler 2009). Resisting the habit of theorizing abstractly and judging aloofly, critical theory works to assess the systemic conditions for some things so as to possibilize other things. Such a practice opens up pathways heretofore shrouded, in order to carve out a different conceptual and social space. It highlights this whole new "domain" and "field" of potential, a space of "possible dislocations," which can only be reached by traveling "the opposite route" which stretches out "in the opposite direction" (Foucault 1997, 60-1). Tramping down these pathways requires a habit of "curiosity" for Foucault (Zurn 2021, 74), not unlike the compulsive questions so distinctive of Butler's style. Why are things the way they are and how could they be otherwise?

Phenomenology and critical theory, then, arise from a rejection of certain forms of scientific objectivity and universal theory, and a refusal to disavow embeddedness in the world. That is, both reject a kind of theory that does not walk with us. As such, critical theory is always critique *of*, just as phenomenology is phenomenology *of*. Each is intentional, engaged, beholden to the thing upon which it supervenes. It theorizes by *walking with*. Critical phenomenology insists even more acutely on that embeddedness. It grants that power structures shape, condition, and determine experience, just as experience anchors (and resists) those power structures. It is also reflexive and ameliorative. It grapples with the situatedness of the inquirer who commits to change and be changed in the process. For Lisa Guenther, the perceptual world is seen, experienced, made and remade through patriarchy, white supremacy, heteronormativity, and ableism (2019, 11; cf. Guenther 2013, xiii-xv). For this reason, the critical phenomenologist must "scrutinize," to use Audre Lorde's term (2013, 36, 41), both the patterns "that we see" and those "according to which we see" (Guenther 2019, 16). For Gayle Salamon, critical phenomenology's attention to "power" is just as important as its "reflexivity" (2018a, 14, 12), which she characterizes as the perceptual openness through which one necessarily "loses" oneself in the very process of situating oneself (2018b, 18). In this sense, the method doubles down on the tactic of scrutiny. If to scrutinize is to root through the trash (Latin, *scruta*), the critical phenomenologist roots through the waste of power structures while recognizing that they themselves are waste-born and waste-bred. Theorizing does not arise from a pure place; we are always complicit and contaminated, but also creative and generative, reclaiming meaning in the rubble and life from and in detritus.

Critical phenomenology is a way of walking. It is a way of walking that tries to correct for the missteps of traditional theory and classical phenomenology (Salamon 2018a, 16). No doubt about it. But what I am trying to think, here, is a critical phenomenology *of* walking. So let me follow that thread, with its own steps and missteps. Critical phenomenology promises to correct for real limitations in the walking literature to date, which typically foregrounds a relatively disembodied, depoliticized account of walking.[3] Even nascent contributions to a critical phenomenology of walking already signal the inadequacies of

[3] As exemplary of this depoliticized account, see Gros (2014). As a paradigmatic critique of this account, see Springgay and Truman (2019).

such an approach. While implicitly remarking upon those limitations, my aim here, in the spirit of critical phenomenologists themselves, is to turn the missteps into *mit*-steps of the *Mit-sein*.[4] To theorize walking between beings and within worlds. And to rebalance our methods, our thought tracks, so as to walk more closely in step with the human and non-human beings with and within whom we are worlded.

And I hardly need an excuse. Historically, both phenomenologists and critical theorists have also been walkers, and some have even written substantively about walking. Take Edmund Husserl, for example. Several times a week, and often accompanied by Eugene Fink, he would walk Lorettoberg, a mountain range just south-west of Freiburg. While walking, he would typically "hold forth on whatever problems were uppermost in his mind," as if exploratory thoughts were best subtended by exploratory feet (Cairns 1973, 8). *Solvitur ambulando*.[5] Martin Heidegger, too, walked regularly around Marburg, as well as deep in the Black Forest. There he learned to attend to the contours of a landscape and to what they disclose. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that he characterizes thinking as a path: "Everything here is the path of a responding that examines as it listens" (2013, 184; cf. Lack 2014, 61-62). Like phenomenology, walking, too, is a way of moving in the world, *a way of responding that examines as it listens*. In so moving and so listening, it must necessarily attend not only to present shapes, but also to histories. And it must do more than listen. Walking is also a keenly tuned doing, even a form of protest. In formalizing the figure of the *flaneur*, critical theorist and walker in exile Walter Benjamin asserts that the errant wandering of the *flaneur* constitutes a "protest against […] production" (2002, 338). And it is precisely in that protest movement that the *flaneur* is capable of another kind of thinking; the *flaneur* "botaniz[es] on the asphalt," lifting the veil of late capitalism by attending to life as lived (372). And yet that protest is also productive—productive of another sort of living and a different economy of gait and gesture, meaning and mattering. As Michel de Certeau argues, walking resists and repatriates the rules of urban architecture and government, deploying the turn of the body as a turn of phrase, and thereby torqueing normative scripts as it goes (1984, 91-110). It is to this nascent tradition of phenomenologists and critical theorists walking—and thinking walking—that I aim to contribute.

II. THE HOW OF WALKING

Critical phenomenology attends to the *how* of walking. How is it that walking feels and functions? How is it experienced by the walker and, correlatively, by the onlooker? How is it that walking appears, or enters the horizon of consciousness, and how does it appear differently depending on the structural constraints and histories of those horizons? How

[4] "*Mit*" is a German preposition meaning "with," but also "by, at, through, in, and including." *Mit-sein*, or being-with, is a phenomenological term that insists human existence is always companionate rather than independent. In speaking of the *mit*-steps of the *Mit-sein*, I aim to summon the thought of being as walking-with.

[5] *Solvitur ambulando* is a classic Latin phrase meaning "it is solved by walking."

are experiences of walking differentially distributed across social positions, within networks irrevocably shaped by patriarchal and colonial histories? Indeed, how do sexism, racism, and ableism inform both the gait and its greeting? How do structures determine phenomena? And how might those structures be resisted, even changed? In asking simply "How is it that we walk?", critical phenomenology attends and it listens, it botanizes and it turns.

Judith Butler makes a nascent contribution to a critical phenomenology of walking when they recall the story of Charlie Howard, a white gay man of 23 who was killed in Bangor, Maine, in 1984.[6] As Butler (2006) tells it, his walk was a phenomenon unto itself, one fatally offensive to a homophobic society.

> He walks with what we would call a swish, a kind of, his hips move back and forth in a feminine way. And as he grew older that swish, that walk, became more pronounced, and it was more dramatically feminine. He started to be harassed by the boys in the town, and soon two or three boys stopped his walk and they fought with him and they ended up throwing him over a bridge and they killed him. So then we have to ask: why would someone be killed for the way they walk? Why would that walk be so upsetting to those other boys that they would feel that they must negate this person, they must expunge the trace of this person. They must stop that walk no matter what. They must eradicate the possibility of that person ever walking again.

Often adorned in earrings, eye makeup, and a purse, Howard sank into the roll of his own hips more heavily as he embraced his queer gender and sexuality (Armstrong 1994; cf. Anonymous 2009). There was "a little bit of a 'fuck you' in the walk," Butler observes, a bit of "girling himself in the street," as he fiercely—and fabulously—refused cisheterosexual constraints (2009, 204-05). His walk was a form of embodiment that built belonging, with himself and those he came to love. He rolled the square, circled the box. He took license. And the lived experience, the felt phenomena of that license was like beginning to breathe, like catching his breath. And yet, coming to breathe in a world marked by compulsory cisheterosexuality can sometimes feel like walking in quicksand; your limbs are swallowed up and your breath is gulped away.

Although unremarked by Butler, Howard had asthma. Asthma is a medical condition in which a person's airways become inflamed, constrict, fill with mucus, and spasm. When Howard was attacked on the street by three young men (one a hockey player, another football), that asthma was triggered by his repeated attempts to run from them and to endure the beating he eventually sustained. As indicated by a subsequent autopsy, Howard died from "asphyxiation" exacerbated by an attack of "acute bronchial asthma" (Armstrong 1994, 312). It is twice, then, that he could not breathe; he drowned from fluids inside and out. And it is twice that he could not walk; asthma buckled his knees before the river

[6] Of the three times (to my knowledge) Judith Butler refers to this story, they do not mention the name Charlie Howard, nor do they always recall the story's elements accurately. The story seems to have become for them an oral history, a touchstone for thinking the queer walk and its fate. See Butler (1989, 256); Butler (2006); Butler and Taylor (2009, 204-5).

stopped his feet.[7] It is important to pause here and appreciate the chiastic structure of breath in this scene. Healthy, non-asthmatic lungs expand with exertion to metabolize up to twenty times more oxygen than they do in a resting state (Burton, Stokes, and Hall 2004, 186). As Howard was increasingly unable to breathe, his attackers—landing fists and kicks, and hoisting him over a bridge—took deeper, richer breaths. If this is not the structure of homophobia—and racism, and ableism—what is? One cannot think this chiasm today without hearing the belabored breathing of Eric Garner and George Floyd.[8] Elizabeth Bishop, another queer asthmatic, writes of this unbearable dissymmetry in her 1955 poem "O Breath" (2008; cf. Lombardi 1992). While the world moves "almost intolerably" in the free bluster of her lover's breath, Bishop herself is crushed by weight of the closet; she can barely squeak out a livable life "beneath / within / if never with" (77). It is a testament to the rigidity of this chiasmic structure that Howard's growing freedoms of gender and sexuality constituted such a dramatic offense. As he moved to breathe more deeply and walk more fluidly, a vise clamped around his throat and 600 pounds of river closed over his head.

In her self-styled contribution to a critical phenomenology of walking, Gayle Salamon focuses on a different structure and a different case. Offering an account of transphobia in *The Life and Death of Latisha King*, Salamon (2018a) characterizes the damning logic by which a trans walk can precipitate a transphobic murder.[9] King was a Black-identifying, mixed-race trans girl who was shot to death by a classmate, Brandon McInerney, in Oxnard, California, in 2008.[10] She was fifteen years old. During the trial, King's flagrantly free walk was trotted out not only as the trigger for her murder, but as a synecdoche for her gender and sexuality. Salamon patiently unpacks the how. How is it that King's walk was felt, how did it fall, how did it function? How is it that her walk came to signify King's offense, the sign of her transgression? And ultimately, how is it that transphobia constrained her walking chances in advance?

Salamon grants, fundamentally, that "[a] walk is an elaborate and complex expression of embodied life" (2018b, 51). For King, it came with ease and glee. She proudly waltzed through the school with an outsized fierceness and flamboyance that refused to be reduced to a mere "parading" or "sashaying" (86). In commanding her brown suede high-heeled boots, King became noticeably happier, as if, through the surety of her feet, she found an uncertain home (Cunningham 2013). And yet, as Salamon states, "Her walk was a break with, and in, typicality itself," the typicality crafted by compulsory cisheterosexuality (2018b, 66). After all, it is only in contrast to rectilinear angles and rigorous gestural scripts that the stylistic skew of a queer walk can be measured. While that break was freeing for

[7] As Lucy, a 7-year-old asthmatic, reports: "Sometimes when I get up, I start falling down because I can't walk that much because I can't breathe." See Lucy (2021).

[8] I use the term "chiasm" here in the rhetorical, rather than strictly Merleau-Pontian, sense.

[9] In *Solitary Confinement*, Guenther (2013) notes the intersubjective costs of being made to walk on "neatly plotted sidewalks" (162) in abstraction from grass and stars; if walking creates social and interpersonal depth, its diminution likewise weakens bonds of the shared world (178).

[10] Both King and Charlie Howard had recorded learning disabilities. How much the "behavioral problems" of their queer genders and sexualities played in their diagnoses and treatment plans has yet to be fully established. See Zurn (2019).

King, it was infuriating for most. Her walk was perceived by fellow classmates, teachers, and professionals as "an act, and often as an aggressive act, akin to a sexual advance or even a sexual assault" (30). When her walk was in full swing, she was perceived to be "throwing it at people," provoking and even justifying violence (34). It wasn't so much the lip gloss, the scarf, or the green prom dress, but the high-heeled boots; it wasn't so much the pucker of her lips, the lilt in her fingers, but the swish of her gait. This is what made her "disgusting," McInerney states (59). It was the slant, the tilt of her body, and the shock of her heels on the floor (51-52, 66-80). Within a critical phenomenological analysis, King's walk is something experienced as subjectively as it is intersubjectively. Walks happen within a body, yes, but also between bodies. And that betweenness is structured in advanced by social discourses and institutions, themselves informed by ever longer histories.

How, then, do we walk? Critical phenomenology attends to the how of the body, and to the how of the body between bodies. How is walking, like breathing, a deeply embodied, rhythmic engagement with the world? And how is walking, not unlike breathing, already experienced within norms of embodiment, norms of gender and sexuality, race, class, and ability, as belonging to or breaking social codes and as therefore making room to breathe or refusing the right to breath? These are the difficult, entangled and entangling questions with which a critical phenomenologist is captivated. Attending to the mundane arts of walking, the critical phenomenologist attends to the lived and limbed experience of walking that floats submerged beneath everyday life, but also to the shockwaves by which certain walks pierce that fabric and become objects of explicit attention, whether of appreciation, observation, disdain, or persecution. In considering the anonymity that so often blankets the quotidian, Erwin Straus once wrote: "A healthy person does not ponder about breathing, seeing, walking. Infirmities of breath, sight, or gait startle us" (1973, 232). But health is not the only invisibilizer, nor illness the sole arbiter of shock. Homophobia, racism, and ableism, among other structures, do the work of abnormalizing, of calling out and putting down. Each participates, as Sunaura Taylor puts it, in the ever-expanding eugenic impulse that asserts, "This human doesn't count enough as a human to be allowed to breathe" (Butler and Taylor 2009, 206). This human doesn't count enough as a human to be allowed to walk. In the struggle to breathe and in the struggle to walk, then, lies a fundamental truth, one built in the body just as much as between bodies. And it is to this that critical phenomenologists attend.

III. THE WHEN AND THE WHERE OF WALKING

While critical phenomenology necessarily attends to the *how* of walking, it must also attend to the *when* and the *where* of walking. When does walking break into my consciousness and when does it recede into the background? Where am I when my walking sleeps in a blanket of anonymity and when does it leap forward, insistently crowding out other physical and social perceptions? How does the when of my existence (my history) and the where of my existence (my geography) impact the significance and signification of my walk? How do my when and where inform the style of my walk and the stylization others make of my walk?

Is it in the office, on the street, in the country or the city, is it at rush hour or at dawn? How does it modulate across this border or that, this crowd and context or that? How have historical and geographical legacies become sedimented in normalized gestures such that what stands out differs as though by dialect? And when and where can these sedimentations be resisted, even changed? In asking "When and where is it that we walk?" critical phenomenology attends still more deeply.

It is important to fully appreciate the differential distribution of walking chances across time and place. And the method of critical phenomenology grants as much. Phenomenology is rooted; critical theory is placed. Merleau-Ponty recognized the embodied constitution of objects by "walking around" his flat, while Foucault diagnosed disciplinary power by linking the eighteenth-century French soldier's "walk [*marcher*]" to the rhythms of French incarceration during the same period (2002, 235-6; Foucault 1976, 151-2). The importance of place and time has not gone unappreciated in walking literature, especially within narratives of walkers who walk the thin lines of social belonging. George Yancy (2013), for example, in his ruminations on "walking while Black," recalls being profiled as a young boy, walking the streets of North Philadelphia in the late 1970s, with a telescope under his arm. Erica Violet Lee (2016) reflects upon the difference between walking as an Indigenous woman in downtown Saskatchewan and on the prairies themselves. Sunaura Taylor remarks upon the pleasures of walking in her wheelchair in San Francisco, where a certain level of access is normalized (Butler and Taylor 2009, 189). Even Charlie Howard was free to walk as he liked in the Unitarian Universalist Church, but not down State Street, in rural Bangor, Maine, in the early 1980s. It is, indeed, this specific temporal and geographical confluence that made linking arms with his friend Roy Ogden so dangerous. Many a queer knows the feeling: the simultaneous rush of relief and risk through one's body, all senses heightened, an inner relaxation swaddled in full-body tension, the cradled hand soft but the shoulders hard, the feet ready to swerve, the eyes laughing and searching all at once. Time and place matter.

Sara Ahmed tells the story of being stopped by the police in a "leafy suburb" of Adelaide, Australia, in the early 1970's (1998, 115). She was fourteen and walking without shoes. They read her as a poor, Aboriginal girl who might have been responsible for "some break-ins in the area recently." Her brown skin placed her as out of place. Her bare feet pronounced her walk as illegitimate. After she denied being Aboriginal, but refused to explain her brown skin, they winked at her and asked if it was just "a sun tan." She insisted on her right to walk, to walk without shoes, to walk where she pleased; she dropped the name of her private girl's school and willed herself to be read as white. They let her go with a warning. When she returned home, her sister said she needed to lose weight so she wouldn't get mistaken, again, as Aboriginal. The scene ends in tears. Ahmed carefully unravels this story, waiting patiently beside each thread—gender, sexuality, race, class, body size—and thinking carefully through the braid of complicity and resistance, of her smiles and her refusals. Her walk could only pierce the sheen of everyday life as it did under certain circumstances: in a time and a place where police intervention and racial profiling are routine; in a time and a place where Indigenous people are socially present, geographically segregated, and historically criminalized; and in a time and a place where Ahmed's own

mixed South Asian heritage was unreadable, unthinkable. It is in this context that she was perceived as an outsider, a thief on the run. Insofar as her walk was perceived as a threat, she was always already walking under threat. How this happens, and how this feels, are temporally and locationally contingent.

Attending to the when and where certainly invites us to think more critically, but it also opens up new phenomenological possibilities. Let us return to Latisha King for a moment, and the significance of her walk in different locales. Place is important. King's walk became salient at school in multiple contexts, whether she walked down the hallway and into the classroom, walked onto the basketball court, ran around at recess, or traipsed in and out of the principal's office.[11] And it continued to be salient in the court room in Chatsworth, LA, where it was repeatedly reprised and replayed. While Salamon makes much of these locations to *place* her phenomenological analyses, attention should also be turned to the town of Oxnard itself.[12] Oxnard is a long-segregated town, with significant Mexican, Black, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino populations (Maulhardt 2005; Garcia 2018; Barajas 2012). Walking as a Black trans girl in a predominantly Latinx school, with majority white teachers, King's walk was inescapably enmeshed in the local policing of race and ethnicity—woven across gender, class, religion, and ability. But King also walked in the town of Oxnard some fifty years after Lucy Hicks Anderson, one of the earliest recorded Black trans women in the US (Snorton 2018, 145-51). And this invites a critical, phenomenological turn. What is it for a dehistoricized trans life, only ever conceptualized as one at a time, to belong to a lineage? What is it for a trans walk to belong to a lineage of other trans walks? Did Latisha know? Who would have told her? How might the fact of Anderson's existence have enlivened her limbs, put a spring in her step, changed how her walk felt and functioned in the intersubjective spaces of school and shelter, friends and phobias? What is it when a trans walk is clocked because the onlooker has seen a trans walk before? And what is it for a trans person to learn to walk again? What rebalancing, rerooting, lilting and tilting, grounding and squaring occur as we look to one another and our ancestors to breathe new life into our embodied selves bodying forth?

But there is still greater, richer context for King's walk across Oxnard's history. As a place in time, Oxnard invites us to think about the critical conditions and first-person experiences of *walking away* and *walking back*, *walking out* and *walking in*. Early in 1942, hundreds of Japanese Americans from in and around Oxnard were forced to relocate to internment camps across the United States. This forced *walking away*, however, was answered by a chosen *walking back*. Several years later, most of them returned (Maulhardt 2005). Well before and after these internment policies, however, Oxnard was a place of labor organizing. From the Japanese/Mexican strike of 1903 to the citrus strike of 1940 and the Chavez-led labor strikes of 1970, in which "thousands of defiant workers walked off their jobs," Oxnard has been a place of *walking out*—walking out of factories, out of fields, out of frames. But it has also been a place of *walking in* (Daniel 1995, 393; Barajas 2012; Almaguer 1995). From

[11] King could walk as she pleased at the children's shelter Casa Pacifica, but not walk onto the basketball court, "a sacred space for masculinity," to state her queer desire for McInerney. See Corbett (2017, 164).

[12] Andrea Pitts (2021) begins this work in their commentary on *The Life and Death of Latisha King*.

labor unions to Occupy Oxnard, there is a long history of walking into the room, walking into the assembly, walking into the facility, the administrative building, or the gates, to get things done, make things different, and claim voice. Did Latisha King not also walk in protest? Did she ever walk out, walk away? Whatever the answer to these questions, it is certain that King protested by *walking back* and *walking in*, to the bullies, to the school, to the transphobic teachers, and to her friends. Commentators appreciate the relentlessness of the slurs thrown at her, but perhaps not the relentlessness of her own returns. Indeed, the embodied sense of walking *back to* and *back in* deserves deeper consideration. So much of our framework for walking is forward leaning, pressing down the path, toward the next turn and on to the next horizon. What can we appreciate when we turn that 'round? To what lost phenomenologies of walking are we therewith invited when we hover at the back of walking, in walking back?

To think walking from a critical phenomenological perspective, we must not think only of the how, but also of the when and the where. Too often, walking is not thought, but simply done. And too often still, when walking is thought, it is thought as the activity of a universal subject, whether in the service of utilitarian ends or ruddy freedom. The how pushes us beneath a simplistic who and what and why, demanding a more finely grained analysis of the form walking takes and the formations it sustains. Pushing still deeper, the when and the where locate those forms and formations, anchoring them to habits and horizons as much as to institutions and inscriptions. Here lie the questions that form the trails and gullies of a critical phenomenology of walking. And those questions aim not to settle, but to unsettle, and to unsettle consistently, as a practice, a path of thinking, a way of responding that examines as it listens.

IV. THE POWER OF WALKING

There can be a certain tendency toward passivity in a critical phenomenology, as a description of first-person experiences constrained in advance by social structures, institutions, and histories—as if things are experienced this way because things are made to be experienced this way. Full stop. But there is a necessary activity embedded in the critical tradition, and it is imperative that this element not be lost in the critical phenomenological enterprise. This is the root of critical phenomenology's ameliorative potential. Critical phenomenology can facilitate liberation insofar as it is a way of thinking, or of moving in conceptual space, that attends to the differences of first-person, intersubjective experiences and the sedimentations of structural investments. Thinking those differences and those sedimentations provides not only a way *to diagnose* the present but also *to possibilize* a different future. To assess constructions of habit and inscription, as much as to find ways out from under them. While that analytical work is important, I want to propose a third sense in which critical phenomenology can be ameliorative and that is in its capacity *to witness*. The critical phenomenological project is a way of moving in the world *and* a way of listening to how the world moves. It has the capacity not simply to condition future ameliorative work but to witness ameliorative work already in play. And walking is a case in point.

One of the purchases of a critical phenomenology of walking is its capacity not only to diagnose the histories and institutions that police the place and performance of walking, but to thickly describe the ways in which that policing is differentially distributed and experienced based on the gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, class, and disability status of the one who walks. It matters who walks, how they walk, when and where. And, if the testaments of Sara Ahmed, Judith Butler, Charlie Howard, Latisha King, Erica Violet Lee, Sunaura Taylor, and George Yancy are any indication, understanding how walking appears and how it functions is a critical component of the project of social liberation. But critical phenomenology does not only attend to the fact of walking, or to the feelings of and the forces that impinge on the gait (and how they might be thought and done otherwise). It also attends to the forces generated by that gait. Walking as actant. But also: a specific sort of walking as a specific sort of actant. Walkers from marginalized groups are not simply victims of oppression and sustainers of harm in the delimitation of their walks; they are also revolutionaries, rewriters of history in the very pitch of their gait. They reconfigure space, rearrange horizons, and fracture constraints. Critical phenomenology has the honor of bearing witness to walking as itself an act of resistance and re-formation.

Michel de Certeau (1984) eloquently insists that walking is an act of resistance. When he thinks about walking, he conceptualizes it in an urban context. Government administrators, city personnel, and urban planners all craft and read the text of a city as it should be, or as it was meant to be. But walkers—rambling down city streets, jaywalking from one side to the other, loitering where they will, taking shortcuts, and building pragmatic paths by the sheer force of their feet—recraft and reread the city as it needs to be, in the very moment of its use. "Footsteps," de Certeau writes, "give their shape to spaces. They weave places together" (97). Walkers actualize what the city planners planned, and yet differently. Against the projections of the city, walkers pitch practice. And against the written text of the city, walking speaks. Much like everyday speech, walking obeys certain rules and abandons others, innovates one moment and turns an indifferent ear the next. "Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it 'speaks'" (99). It triangulates need and desire, curiosity and pragmatism, and transforms paths accordingly. As such, de Certeau insists, there is a "long poem of walking" that lays thickly atop a path's literal geography (101, 105). Walking enunciates as it wills, in resistant relation to the city's ought's and must's. And it is in this resistant relation that walking cultivates its own style and sense. It cuts a curb like it turns a phrase, relishing in the license one can still take within signal constraints. And it is for this reason that walking, as a practice of everyday life, has an implicit revolutionary power.

To determine the resistant quality of the walk, however, it matters who walks, how, when and where. Walking, as an act of resistance, shapes and reshapes space. And yet, that work of shaping and reshaping supervenes on the walkers in question. In her response to de Certeau and the long tradition of universalizing the walker, María Lugones (2003) insists on the specificity of "streetwalkers." Streetwalkers (*callejeras*), for Lugones, are at home and at work in the streets, as much as they are unhomed and out of work on the streets. As those who live "at the border, abyss, edge, shore of countersense, of emergent sense," streetwalkers themselves have "ill-defined 'edges'" (236, 209). They are multiplicitous subjects coming in

and out of being in deeply intersubjective, interdependent, and intercorporeal relations. Streetwalkers live and move in hangouts (207, 220, 213). In this context, hangouts are not networking conferences or business socials. Streetwalkers hangout by making home and making space in the streets, hanging out where they are not supposed to, with those they are not supposed to, in ways they are not supposed to. And it is in this place of impurity and illegitimacy, and in this very movement of mixing and mottling, that streetwalkers critically remake and retheorize the world (Hoagland 2019). Through "the alert embodiment of walking and bumping, among and into one another," Lugones writes, streetwalkers generate the "enigmatic vocabularies and gestures" capable of illuminating the "poli-vocal, poli-logical complexity" of their lives (2003, 215, 221, 224). They do this to contest the meaning of the possible, and to create it anew. And this, she insists, is not simply walking. This is a doing and a thinking. This is resistant streetwalker theorizing.

If the footsteps of a normate body give their shape to spaces, certainly the wayfinding of non-normate bodies recontours space in a uniquely resistant way. And critical phenomenology can catch that, the way marginalized bodies walk and bump into one another, reweaving gesture and carriage. Working in the groove Lugones laid, Kim Hall (2021) turns a critical phenomenological eye on their own gait, which they call "a limping swagger or a swaggering limp." Born with "what has been called a malformed hip joint," or a shortened acetabulum, Hall went through a range of early corrective surgeries, braces, and physical therapy. In a sense, these were successful: Hall walks. In another sense, they were unsuccessful: Hall walks "with a difference." There is something not normal, something disorienting about their walk. Strangers ask, "What's wrong? What happened? What did you do to yourself?" Critical phenomenology—specifically a crip critical phenomenology—can analyze the structures that construct the meaning of ability (and disability) in advance, and that, in so doing, shape bodily habits and possibilities. The very structure of what a body is and what it can do is not born but made. Critical phenomenology can analyze that making, but it can also testify. "Limping-swaggering along," Hall writes, "I forge a path between disability and ability where I live, forging paths that rework and resist dominant spaces and meanings." Their queer crip walk undoes, with each step, the ableist and cisheteronormative construction of space, bodies, and their interrelation. It upends the presumption of the universal subject who walks, instead striking out unsteadily, unevenly, with a hint of weakness and non-normative sexuality, into a space that does not expect it. Critical phenomenology can witness that walk; it can catch sight of that resistance.

Critical phenomenology must, in the last instance, attend to the revolutionary character of walking. While walking is, indeed, a horizon of consciousness and a site of oppression, it is also a syntax of resistance. It is not just that Latisha King experiences her walk, or that her walk is experienced by others awash in homophobic and transphobic, racist and ableist frameworks, but that her walk does something in the world, realigning embodiments and rearranging horizons. It does something and it says something. It is a saying, a responding that examines as it listens. And this is how walking comes to matter.

Critical phenomenology is poised to attend with unusual attention not only to the body schema, intercorporeality, and lifeworld of walkers, but also to the socio-political structures and histories that shape them and which they in turn shape. Phenomenology and critical

theory both developed as a kind of thinking that refuses to abstract and consume, but chooses rather to take theoretical steps that are, each and every one of them, a greeting, a welcome, a walking alongside the complexity of the patterns that we see and according to which we see. Together they model a becoming-haptic in the space of thought. In the thought world. Their questions feeling the way. What I have offered here, then, are but a few of the footpaths and flight ways of a critical phenomenology of walking.

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"Fag! Dyke! Fuckin Faggot!" A white supped up truck, jammed with three heads, capped much like mine, their bodies no doubt jeaned and booted much like mine. Zoomed past. It was a commercial intersection in the Philly suburbs some years back. I felt wooden and out of joint, extended limbs awkwardly mimicking locomotion. Like my heel hit the street before my femur hit my knee. I felt hot in my face. And like I couldn't stand up straight. Even as I squared my shoulders, their parts rounded and sunk, as if ducking the next hurling word... or worse. Would they circle back? Did they have friends? Do they know where I live? I kept wanting to look up at every passing car in case. But also not to look at anyone, for fear of the shame of someone having witnessed. Or having seen. I felt a sudden unhomed-ness from the world, as if the sidewalk itself was prying me off to flick me away. I was not alone at the time, but I do not remember who I was with or what they said or did. In that moment, their existence was erased from my scene of perception, not even a blip on the horizon. I tucked down a residential street. I passed the Trump signs and the Quaker retreat center. Windows felt like gaping eyes. Did that just happen? My shoulders, my feet said yes. I stopped walking for a while after that.

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There is nothing special about my story. That's the point. It's not special. It's not the first time or the worst time. It's just there. There in their bodies and here in mine. And yet, this is not simply the story of a particular phenomenological experience of walking, informed by structures of homotransphobia in early twenty-first century East Coast living, for a relatively young white, able-bodied, transmasculine person not dressed to impress. It is also the story of just such a person traversing that intersection, writing that space, walking that story. And walking *out*. Walking in a way that is readable—legible as illegitimate. And walking that way out into the world, where room and space have to be made, possibilities changed and corporealities refigured. Citing Lourdes Ashley Hunter, Susan Stryker (2016; cf. Hunter 2015) states, "Every breath a trans person takes is an act of revolution." So, too, is every step. "Each breath insists on a new ordering of the world," Stryker continues; it is "the instrumentalization of a contested necessity of life as a resistant and defiant act of survival." So, too, is each step. It is a will to move and be moved differently. And to scramble and conspire together for another world. In this sense, it matters that we breathe. It matters that we—the many we's whose walks are forbidden, hassled, constrained, policed, criminalized, derided, and snuffed out—it matters that we walk.

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COUNTERING THE "PHENOMENOLOGY OF WHITENESS": THE NATION OF ISLAM'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF BLACKNESS

E. ANTHONY MUHAMMAD
Georgia Southern University

The Nation of Islam (NOI), a Black nationalist organization espousing a heterodox Islamic doctrine, has intrigued the American public since its founding in 1930. Producing notable adherents such as Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Louis Farrakhan, Khalid Abdul Muhammad, and Imam Warith Deen Mohammed, the NOI has often been heralded for its recruitment and subsequent moral, physical, and spiritual transformation of "the rejected and despised"; the pimps, prostitutes, criminals, drug addicts, and other downtrodden Blacks. Were it just this record of uplift and transformation, the NOI may be viewed favorably in the eyes of mainstream society. In most circles, however, the NOI has been relegated to the margins of serious consideration.

At the heart of this condemnation and dismissal is the contentious and controversial nature of the NOI's religious and social doctrine. Much of the religiously stylized doctrine, referred to as "The Teachings," is viewed as ahistorical narratives and seemingly far-fetched, racially antagonistic myths. Three of the more publicly known and controversial aspects of its doctrine are the depictions of whites as "devils" (Muhammad 1965, 100), Blacks as "God" (NOI 1995, 10), and the organization's endorsement of the geographical separation of Blacks and whites (Muhammad 1965, 226). These assertions, along with the NOI's story of Yacub (the progenitor of the white race), clashes between the NOI and police, the organization's militant and quasi-military posture, and other aspects have resulted in the NOI being cast as a potentially violent organization with a penchant for anti-white hatred and anti-Semitism (Anti-Defamation League).

But are myths and an allegedly hate-filled doctrine truly all there is to the NOI? In the words that follow, I offer an analysis of the NOI that counters the traditional indictments referenced above. In doing so, I argue that the polarizing pronouncements and positions of the NOI are more than just the nonsensical rantings of a hate group. Rather, the seemingly divisive theological and separatist rhetoric of the NOI expresses a liberatory doctrine that interprets, in religious terms, the lived experiences of Black people as they navigate an all-encompassing world of white supremacy. Thus, I argue, the pronouncements of the

NOI work to reclaim and restructure an existence and identity that has historically been negated for Black people. To support my claim, in the second section of this article, I suggest that the NOI's doctrine should be included within the traditions known as Black existential philosophy and Africana phenomenology. I further argue that the NOI uses the phenomenological framework of embodiment to traverse these two traditions.

In the final section of this article, I analyze the purpose and function of three declarations found in the NOI's doctrine: the claims that the white man is the "devil" and the Black man is "God," and that the NOI's goal is establishing a separate, autonomous territory for Blacks.[1] By destabilizing racially dehumanizing metanarratives and reconstructing the agency of Black existence (mental, physical, and spiritual), it is my argument that the doctrine and practices of the NOI can best be characterized as a restorative and recuperative display of a critical hermeneutic phenomenology, or what I consider a phenomenology of Blackness.

I should, however, be clear that this effort should in no way be viewed as an attempt at validation. My aim is not to "legitimize" The Teachings of the NOI by invoking mainstream philosophies, theories, and scholars. The organization's ninety-year record of the mental, physical, and spiritual transformation of its members and their communities has already conferred legitimacy on the organization in the eyes of many. Rather, I have three goals for this paper. Generally speaking, a major goal is to contribute to the increasing body of scholarly literature that engages in the academic analysis of the NOI.[2] Scholars in the burgeoning field of Elijah Muhammad Studies attempt to highlight the multifaceted, interdisciplinary nature of the Teachings of the Nation of Islam (Pitre 2010). This analysis is just such an endeavor. As a phenomenologist, another prominent goal of this paper is to provoke in the reader a phenomenological reduction. By moving the reader away from the natural attitude (the every day, "taken for granted" view of the NOI as a violent hate group) to the phenomenological attitude (a suspension of our taken for granted view and an openness to a deeper understanding of the NOI), this paper can hopefully bracket preexisting assumptions about the NOI and offer an altogether different understanding of the organization, its doctrine, and its motives. Building on the previous two goals, the *primary* goal of this analysis is to retrieve the doctrine of the NOI, commonly referred to as The Teachings, from the dustbin of absurdities to which they have for some time been relegated. This will be done by showing the congruence of the NOI's philosophy with many foundational and widely accepted theorists and philosophies, many of which the NOI predates. I will also show that the NOI's doctrine can also be understood as a creative and potent contribution to a longstanding Black philosophical tradition. By linking the Teachings, philosophy, and phenomenology, my analysis will make clear that, rejecting the NOI's philosophy means simultaneously rejecting many mainstream, highly coveted philosophical traditions. In other words, the aim of this work is vindication, not validation.

[1] Here "Black man" is used in the general sense, encompassing both Black men and women.

[2] See Acevedo, Ordner, and Thomspon (2010); Akom (2003); Berg (2005); Curtis IV (2002, 2005); Finley (2017); Gibson and Berg (2017).

I. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NATION OF ISLAM

Founded on July 4, 1930 by an enigmatic figure named W. D. Fard, the NOI preaches a doctrine of moral uprightness, religious devotion, economic independence, self-determination, and a racialized, esoteric version of Islam that was seen as a drastic departure from Islam as preached and practiced throughout the orthodox Muslim world. Erdmann Beynon, in what is likely the earliest scholarly investigation of the organization, noted that the NOI arose "out of the growing disillusionment and race consciousness of recent Negro migrants to northern industrial cities" (1938, 894). Fard was said to have come to America from "the Holy city Mecca, Arabia." Upon arrival, he initially went door to door in the poor Black neighborhoods of Detroit, Michigan in an effort to teach the residents "the knowledge of ourselves, of God and the devil" (Muhammad 1965, 16). We are told that Fard

> . . . rapidly gained followers and he continued to teach them about the deceptive character and temporary domination of "blue-eyed-devils" or white man, the glorious history and significance of the "Black Nation," the Caucasian race, the religions of Islam and Christianity and, as well, the "truth" about the beginning of creation. (Tinaz 2001, 15)

From its inception, the doctrine of the NOI has been controversial, polarizing, and racialized. As Beynon documented in 1938, Fard himself authored ritualized texts that taught that

> . . . [t]he Black men in North America are not Negroes, but members of the lost tribe of Shebazz, stolen by traders from the Holy City of Mecca 379 years ago. The prophet came to America to find and to bring back to life his long lost brethren, from whom the Caucasians had taken away their language, their nation and their religion. Here in America they were living other than themselves. They must learn that they are the original people, noblest of the nations of the earth. The Caucasians are the colored people, since they have lost their original color. The original people must regain their religion, which is Islam, their language, which is Arabic, and their culture, which is astronomy and higher mathematics, especially calculus. (900-01)

After three and a half years of proselytizing and amassing a following of five thousand to eight thousand Black adherents in Detroit, Fard vanished in 1934 as abruptly and as mysteriously as he appeared (896-97). Before Fard's departure, he bequeathed leadership of the NOI to Elijah Muhammad, one of his most ardent followers. After assuming leadership of the NOI, Elijah Muhammad began professing that Fard (now referred to as Master Fard Muhammad) was in reality Allah/God in physical form (Gardell 1996, 58). This controversial, anthropomorphic doctrine continues to be the bedrock of the NOI's teaching.

From the 1930's through the mid-1950's the NOI witnessed moderate growth as Elijah Muhammad spearheaded the founding of temples in various cities including Chicago, Illinois; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Washington, DC; and Cincinnati, Ohio (Gardell 1996, 65). After experiencing internal strife and waning membership due to Elijah Muhammad's incarceration for violation of the Selective Service Act of 1940, the NOI garnered an explosion in nationwide visibility throughout the 1960's due to the popularity of two of its most captivating and charismatic members, Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali (70-71).

Up through the mid-1970's the NOI witnessed substantial popularity and growth within Black communities nationwide. This growth culminated in the establishment of their own bank, supermarkets, import business, restaurants, bakeries, trucking fleet, printing press, office buildings, slaughterhouses, and other acquisitions that enabled self-sufficiency and independence within the Black community (Muhammad's Temple No. 2 1975). In 1975, however, the NOI would suffer a debilitating loss due to the passing of Elijah Muhammad. Upon his passing, Muhammad's son Wallace assumed leadership of the organization. After assuming leadership, Wallace sold off the assets, properties, and holdings of the organization, changed the name from the NOI to the American Bilallian Community, changed the doctrine to conform with the Islam of the orthodox Muslim world, and renounced all of the racialized, separatist teachings of the NOI (Lincoln 1994, 264-65). This drastic change of course caused several defections from the organization in the months that followed. The most consequential was Minister Louis Farrakhan who, breaking with Wallace's (who had changed his name to Imam Warith Deen Mohammed) new direction in 1977, reconstituted Elijah Muhammad's version of the organization complete with a reinstatement of the name Nation of Islam, the strict codes of behavior, the deification of Master Fard Muhammad, and the original racialized, separatist doctrine (Gardell 1996, 122-35).

The common thread throughout all of the NOI's history, however, has been the considerable condemnation and ire that its teachings have garnered. The Southern Poverty Law Center, an organization itself plagued by charges of systemic racism and sexism, has dismissed the NOI as a "hate group" that espouses a blatantly racist and bigoted doctrine against whites in general and Jews specifically (Valencia 2019; Southern Poverty Law Center). One such example is the charge of anti-Semitism which, to some, is viewed as a normative aspect of the NOI's discourse, doctrine, and practice. But this claim begs the question: normative to whom? Anti-Semitism was certainly not viewed as a defining normative aspect of the NOI by the multitude of black men who attended the Million Man March in 1995. In any case, the charges of anti-Semitism are relatively new (they date to the 1980s) and the focus of the accusations are comments made by the organization's leader (Minister Louis Farrakhan) and not the organization's doctrine itself. It is the organization's doctrine that is the focus of this article.

Although this article does not focus on the claim of anti-Semitism as a normative context in which to view the NOI, this in no way precludes the possibility of discussing other doctrinal aspects that are widely accepted as being normative to the organization. For example, the NOI doctrine on UFOs, the organization's dietary habits (particularly the abstention from eating pork and the group's traditional bean pie dessert), the NOI's visual presentation and aesthetic (the flowing gowns of female members and the signature suit

and bow tie "uniform" worn by male members), and the group's embrace of patriarchy are all significant and commonly acknowledged normative contexts in which to discuss the NOI. Relatedly, the three controversial tenets of the NOI's doctrine under investigation in this analysis were selected not just for their polarizing nature, but also because of their normativity with respect to the organization's discourse. The three doctrinal aspects under investigation are the pronouncements that the white man is "The Devil" (Muhammad 1965, 100) and the Black man is "God" (NOI 1995, 10), and the NOI's official endorsement of the geographical separation of Blacks and Whites (Muhammad 1965, 226-32). Before dealing at length with these assertions, however, a philosophical grounding must be laid in order to properly contextualize these unsettling claims.

II. CONTEXTUALIZING THE NOI: PHILOSOPHY, PHENOMENOLOGY, AND EMBODIMENT

My intent in this section is to view the NOI's doctrine through the lens of two rich traditions, Black existential philosophy and Africana phenomenology. I further argue that it is the NOI's use of the equivalent of the phenomenological concept of embodiment that nestles the group comfortably within the fertile soil of these two philosophical traditions. By viewing the NOI's doctrine through a phenomenological lens, I will be countering the prevailing depictions of the organization. These widely accepted depictions have consistently characterized the NOI's doctrine as "confused and inconsistent" (Lincoln 1994, 79) or as "absurdity" (Clegg 1997, 41). Traditional depictions of the NOI have also framed its members as "ignorant Southern-type Negroes who don't know any better" (Lincoln 1994, 79), have described its patriarch, Elijah Muhammad, as "an illiterate crackpot" (79), and have generally discarded the NOI's entire body of discourse as "fantastic and unbelievable" (xi). Locating the teachings of the NOI within Black existential philosophy and Africana phenomenology neutralizes these superficial, pejorative, and dismissive critiques and at the same time rightly situates the NOI's doctrine within the long-standing tradition of Black philosophical critique. In explicating the deeper philosophical implications of the NOI's doctrine, I will also be confirming Lincoln's assertion that "[a]n ideology, though weird, often means more than it says" (xi).

BLACK EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY

Black existential philosophy is a philosophy of existence that concerns itself with the "freedom, anguish, responsibility, embodied agency, sociality, and liberation" of Black people (Gordon 1997, 3). Undergirding much of Black existential philosophy is the rejection of normative

philosophical assertions grounded in western, Eurocentric premises.[3] A more relevant and localized conception of the world is put forth that "situates philosophical reflective thought within the concrete muck and mire of *raced* embodied existence" (Yancy 2011, 552). Thus, there is a rejection and a reflection inherent in Black existential philosophy that asks and answers the question, "[w]hat is to be understood by Black suffering?" (Gordon 1997, 1). Viewed from this vantage point, contributions to Black existential thought span centuries and have been offered by a multitude of writers and theorists such as Frederick Douglas, David Walker, Marcus Garvey, Ida B. Wells, Richard Wright, Alain Locke, Aimé Césaire, bell hooks, and James Baldwin, among countless others. Similarly, the philosophical foundation of the NOI's doctrine is one "born of struggle" (Harris 1983, ix). Framed in this way, the NOI's exegesis fits squarely within the enduring tradition of Black existential thought that seeks the freedom of Black agency through liberation from an anguished Black existence in anti-Black social spaces. This is discussed in more detail in the sections ahead.

On Black suffering, Charles Mills writes that a racialized, embodied existence has the effect of fashioning Black bodies into a racial subperson, meaning "an entity which, because of phenotype, seems … human in some respects but not in others" (1998, 6). Alternatively, Thomas F. Slaughter's articulation refers to racialized embodied existence as "physiognomic degradation" (1983, 284) For Slaughter, degradation based on Black skin first asserts that "Blackness embodies the ostracized" (284). Then, the duress that naturally accompanies the degradation of ostracization produces a "two-pronged process of externally imposed inferiorization and subsequent internalization of that inferiority" (284). Regarding the interrelation between Black existential philosophy and Africana phenomenology, Slaughter's articulation of the epidermalized existence of Black bodies and his conception of the dual inferiorization/internalization process builds upon the ideas of W.E.B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon, two prominent contributors to Black existential philosophy whose writings vividly charted the landscape of the Black phenomenological experience.

AFRICANA PHENOMENOLOGY

Paget Henry defined Africana phenomenology as "the self-reflective descriptions of the constituting activities of the consciousness of Africana peoples, after the natural attitudes of Africana egos have been displaced by de-centering techniques practiced in these cultures" (2005, 79). In discussing Africana phenomenology, Henry ascribed its motives as being similar to the rejection and reflection inherent in Black existential philosophy (of which Africana phenomenology is a subfield). Highlighting exemplars of Africana phenomenology, Henry identified Du Bois's phenomenological project and featured it prominently in his discussion. It was in Du Bois's phenomenological description of being a Black man in the

[3] Similar if not interchangeable designations are African-American philosophy, Afro-American philosophy, and Africana philosophy.

U.S. at the turn of the past century that we find one of the most fruitful instantiations of Africana thought.

In Du Bois's phenomenology, for example, we find one of the earliest attempts to carve out a Black consciousness separate and distinct from the universalizations of traditional western philosophy. Specifically, Du Bois's rejection and reconceptualization of Hegel's philosophy gave way to the Du Boisian notions of first site and second site, otherwise known as double consciousness. First site refers to the affirming tendency of a Black person to see one's authentic Black self through one's own eyes, while second site indexes the degrading and debilitating tendency of a Black person "to see him/herself as a 'negro,' that is, through the eyes of the white other" (Henry 2005, 89). For Du Bois, this represented an existential dilemma for Black people that was much different from the one proposed by Hegel. Citing an imperfect fit between the tenets of traditional western philosophy and the Black lived experience, Du Bois's phenomenology establishes "a culturally distinct, and hence non-European, site of original meanings, discourses and experiences" (2005, 85). Emanating from this Black, culturally distinct foundation, the goal of Du Bois's phenomenological project was to enable Africana self-consciousness "to see through the darkness of second sight" (90). In many ways, Du Bois's attempt to rectify Black suffering through reclaiming a proper vision of self was identical to the NOI's goal of counteracting the severe deficiency in Black people's "knowledge of self" (Muhammad 1965, 51) that had been brought on by centuries of degradation at the hands of white society. This was summed up by the NOI in its clarion call, "BLACKMAN, ACCEPT YOUR OWN" (50).

In Fanon's phenomenology, we encounter Black suffering as a result of the penetrating and all-pervasive white gaze. Fanon critiqued Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (and western philosophy's) universalized body schema by fracturing it into thirds. First, a de-centering of Merleau-Ponty's universalized body points out that "the man of color encounters difficulties in elaborating his body schema" because, rather than the certainty of white, habitual actions, what reigns around the Black body is "an atmosphere of certain uncertainty" (Fanon 2008, 90). In this critique of a universal, autonomous body schema, Fanon lays bare the fundamental oversight inherent in Merleau-Ponty, the reality that the Black body inhabiting white spaces has no genuine presence in the white world. The fracturing continues when Fanon invokes the historical-racial schema. The white gaze's stultifying effect on the Black body informs the historical-racial schema by replacing the Black body schema with a caricature of a person that the white psyche has woven "out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories" from a contrived Black past (91). The third fracture Fanon introduces is the epidermal-racial schema that synonymizes Blackness with all of the "cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas" and "slave traders" the white psyche has historically attached to the Black body (92). Ultimately, Fanon's tripartite phenomenology speaks to the negating of the ontological reality of Black bodies. As a result of this negation, a Black ontology "is made impossible in a colonized and acculturated society" (89). Fanon, in his rejection of the white gaze, ultimately arrives at a remedy for this negation, a remedy not unlike what permeates the NOI's pro-Black discourse. That remedy was Fanon's decision "to assert myself as a BLACK MAN" (95).

Both the broad expanse of Black existential philosophy and its subgenre, Africana phenomenology, are the logical ground in which to frame the NOI's doctrine. Black existential philosophy and Africana phenomenology are rooted in rejection, reflection, and re-articulation. So too is the NOI's philosophy. In the NOI we see a stern rejection, a rebuke even, of traditional, white narratives and depictions of Black bodies. The NOI's hermeneutic reflections on the Black lived experience indict the white psyche and its white supremacist manifestations. In the upcoming discussion, I argue that the NOI's prescriptive measures seek to rehabilitate Black bodies through an emphatic embrace and a bold rearticulation of Blackness. On these grounds, I make the case that the NOI's doctrine is yet another articulation of Black existential philosophy. Instrumental in this articulation is the use of embodiment as the source and the site of their discursive project.

EMBODIMENT

An integral aspect of philosophical and phenomenological thinking is a concern with the physical body. Our bodies are that which mediate our interaction with and experience of the world. Traditionally, discussions of body have been guided by the Cartesian split that separates mind and body. From this duality, the body is conceptualized as being governed solely by either the physical laws germane to all living organisms (physiological), or a self-constructed, psychological consciousness. In offering a reevaluation of this dualism in phenomenological terms, Merleau-Ponty argued instead for an understanding of the body as that which is produced when the physiological and the psychological "gear into each other" (2012, 79). Describing the intertwined, synergistic nature of the body and the world, Merleau-Ponty metaphorically envisioned "[o]ne's own body in the world just as the heart is in the organism: it continuously breathes life into the visible spectacle, animates it and nourishes it from within, and forms a system with it" (209). Further elucidating his "body schema," Merleau-Ponty notes:

> Bodily existence, which streams forth through me without my complicity, is but the sketch of a genuine presence in the world. But it, at the very least, grounds the possibility of such a presence and establishes our primary pact with the world. (168)

Here we see the vital importance of embodiment for Merleau-Ponty. The phrasing "without complicity" speaks to the effortless nature of bodily existence and his mention of "genuine presence" and "primary pact" reflect the preeminence of the body as we experience the world. Understood in this way, embodiment is the very vehicle through which *Erlebnis*, or our lived experience, is achieved and, according to Merleau-Ponty, universally experienced. However, Merleau-Ponty's universal body schema was rearticulated by Fanon in light of the "disorientation" experienced by Black bodies.

III. THE DISORIENTED BLACK BODY

In describing his experience of disorientation, Fanon shares with us that,

> Disoriented, incapable of confronting the Other, the white man, who had no scruples about imprisoning me, I transported myself... far, very far from my self, and gave myself up as an object…Yet this reconsideration of myself, this thematization, was not my idea. (2008, 92)

Further elaborating on the stifling and negating nature of the Black experience under the white gaze, Sarah Ahmed extends Fanon's discussion of disorientation. The crux of Ahmed's argument is that, far from a neutral world of existence that all embodied souls inhabit and experience with equal agency, the world is in fact a racialized one. This racialized world has been constructed so that white bodies experience the world as a "body-at-home" and Black bodies are "stopped" from naturally and effortlessly inhabiting the same world (Ahmed 2006, 111, 110). Regarding this "stopping," Ahmed notes that,

> For bodies that are not extended by the skin of the social, bodily movement is not so easy. Such bodies are stopped, where the stopping is an action that creates its own impressions. Who are you? Why are you here? What are you doing? Each question, when asked, is a kind of *stopping device*: you are stopped by being asked the question, just as asking the question requires you to be stopped. A phenomenology of "being stopped" might take us in a different direction than one that begins with motility, with a body that "can do" by flowing into space. (139)

For Ahmed, the affirming orientation of the world "around" white bodies is in stark contrast to the negating and stultifying orientation of the world "toward" Black bodies (115). This racialized lived experience manifests as a "phenomenology of whiteness" (138) that invites white bodies into a world of "I can" and excludes Black bodies in a disorienting world of "I cannot" (139). To summarize, Ahmed described this racialized phenomenology of whiteness as

> *. . . the ease with which the white body extends itself in the world through how it is orientated toward objects and others*. To make this point simply: whiteness becomes a social and bodily orientation given that some bodies will be more at home in a world that is oriented around whiteness. If we began instead with disorientation … then the descriptions we offer will be quite different. (138)

It is my contention that, in the doctrines of the NOI, we encounter a philosophy that does indeed "begin with disorientation." By anchoring their doctrine in the disorienting experiences of Black bodies in white spaces, the NOI has in fact crafted a phenomenology that has proved to be "quite different." The following discussion of three aspects of the

organization's doctrine introduces what I term the NOI's phenomenology of Blackness. Their phenomenology of Blackness, contrary to the "phenomenology of whiteness" described by Ahmed, is grounded in and privileges the embodied experiences of Blacks. Aspects of the doctrine under analysis in this article are, 1) the assertion that the white man is the "devil," 2) the assertion that the Black man is "God," and 3) the NOI's endorsement of the geographical separation of Blacks and whites. By analyzing each of these assertions in detail, I further argue that the NOI's discursive project, in total, is actually a critical hermeneutic phenomenology presented through the lens and language of religion.

IV. THE NATION OF ISLAM'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF BLACKNESS

THE WHITE MAN IS THE DEVIL

Throughout the NOI's discourse and doctrine, whites are frequently referred to as devils. For example, in *Message to the Blackman*, one of the organization's foundational texts, a chapter entitled "The Devil" offers the official NOI history of and position on the devil. In it, Elijah Muhammad tells us that whites are "a race whom Allah has made manifest to you and me as being real devils" (1965, 100). In *The Supreme Wisdom*, a collection of catechisms, mathematical word problems, and narratives given to Elijah Muhammad by Master Fard Muhammad, we read another descriptive analysis identifying whites as devils. In the "Student Enrollment" the question is asked, "Who is the Colored man?" (NOI 1995, 9). In response, the answer is given: "The Colored man is the Caucasian (white man). Or, Yacub's grafted Devil—the Skunk of the planet Earth" (NOI 1995, 10). In both of these characterizations we find evocative depictions of whites. But what are these assertions if not ad hominem, racially antagonistic attacks?

In a groundbreaking analysis of this aspect of NOI doctrine, Stephen C. Finley situated these "whites as devils" statements within the historical context from which the NOI emerges. He informs us that the notion of the white man being the devil

> . . . is only *one* small aspect of the narrative that attempts to make sense of an absurd world: a terrifying world for African Americans, in which their bodies were the objects of racial discourses of inferiority and inhumanity that justified their imminent expurgation, destruction, and mutilation for centuries of American history. (2017, 154)

In his analysis, Finley (2017) labels the NOI's summation that white people are devils as "theological phenomenology" and correctly identifies the purpose of this particular claim as describing and interpreting, phenomenologically, the racialized, terrorized existence of Black bodies under white supremacy (157). What Finley goes on to make abundantly clear is that the NOI is first and foremost a *religious* organization. As such, this realization should

come to bear on any interpretation or analysis of the claims made by the group. Given this religious core and

> [h]aving lived in a world wherein whites would viciously and gratuitously participate in violent and degrading acts against Black people, Muhammad needed a way to *make sense* of this terror. That is, he needed a *theodicy*, a way to justify the presence of evil in light of the purported goodness and omnipotence of God. (166)

Through Finley's analysis, one comes to see the summation of whites as devils as a rhetorical device that is not only descriptive of the Black lived experience, but acts also as a theodicy used to make sense of that experience in the minds of oppressed and subjugated Blacks. Viewed in this way, the evocative nature of framing whites as devils sheds light on another of its important functions: its illumination of the fundamental, phenomenological *essence* of the Black lived experience.

In *Researching Lived Experience*, Van Manen (2016) wrote that essence

> may be understood as a linguistic construction, a description of a phenomenon. A good description that constitutes the essences of something is construed so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way. When a phenomenologist asks for the essence of a phenomenon—a lived experience—then the phenomenological inquiry is not unlike an artistic endeavor, a creative attempt to somehow capture a certain phenomenon of life in a linguistic description that is both holistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and universal, powerful and sensitive. So an appropriate topic for phenomenological inquiry is determined by the questioning of the essential nature of a lived experience: a certain way of being in the world. (39)

Van Manen's description captures the "essence" of what is at work in the NOI's "linguistic construction" of whites as devils. The construction itself is an attempt to "describe the phenomenon" of the Black experience under entrenched and institutionalized white supremacy. The racialized language (which matches the violent and viciously racialized nature of white supremacy) grabs our attention in such a way that we easily "grasp the nature and significance" of what it is like living as a Black body in a viciously racist society. By framing Black embodiment in this way, the NOI is giving a "good description" of Black lived experiences in a "hitherto unseen way." By enlisting creatively descriptive religious symbolism (framing whites as "devils"), these linguistic framings are "not unlike an artistic endeavor." By likening the day to day experiences of segregation, lynching, rape, murder, police brutality, and the deprivation of humanity and justice as the equivalent of "Hell," the NOI's reference to whites as "devils" identifies them as the authors and overlords of this Hellish Black existence just as the devil, in theology, rules as the overlord of Hell. In this way, this linguistic framing of Black existence serves as an "attempt to somehow capture

a certain phenomenon of life in a linguistic description that is both holistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and universal, powerful and sensitive" (Van Manen 2016, 39). In short, declaring that white people are devils uses religious language to offer a creatively descriptive way of tapping into the essence of Black life under white supremacy. By doing so, the NOI is offering a disruptive portrayal of "a certain way of being in the world," that is, being Black in a world of white, terroristic spaces.

THE BLACK MAN IS GOD

While proclaiming that white people are "The Devil" is, as we have seen, both descriptive and creatively interpretive, its corollary, the Black man is "God", serves a different purpose. Referring back to the "Student Enrollment" in the NOI's *Supreme Wisdom*, we are asked, "Who is the Original man?" (NOI 1995, 9). In response we are told, "The Original man is the Asiatic black man; the Maker; the Owner; the Cream of the planet Earth—God of the Universe" (NOI 1995, 10). By offering these pronouncements on God and the devil, the NOI is in fact linguistically disrupting the "normality" of "habitual" ("at home in the world") white existence. By doing so, the NOI displays an understanding of the fact that "the Black body has, within the context of its tortuous sojourn through the crucible of American and European history, been a site of discursive, symbolic, ontological, and existential battle" (Yancy 2017, 106). By deploying a disruptive language that intends to boldly re-orient Black embodiment in the world, the NOI becomes a willful and active combatant in this "existential battle" by engaging in linguistic resistance. But just as casting the white man as "The Devil" is deconstructive in its ability to dismantle the psychological pedestal that whites have constructed and perched themselves upon, proclaiming that the Black man is "God" is constructive, serving to rebuild an affirming, authentic, and agential Black existence that the "phenomenology of whiteness" had destroyed.

Bolstering this point, Yancy informs us that, "Black resistance, as a mode of decoding, is simultaneously a process of recoding Black embodied existence through processes of opposition and *affirmation*." He further notes that, "the moment of *resistance*, in other words, is the moment of *becoming*, of being made *anew*" (2017, 108). Yancy's idea of "resistance as becoming" is the driving force behind the NOI's statement that the white man is "The Devil" and the Black man is "God." In an effort to repair centuries of mental, physical, psychological, and spiritual abuse at the hands of white society, the NOI deploys a religiously-styled countermeasure that seeks both to stabilize and destabilize, to build and destroy. For the NOI, the denouncement of whites as "devils" minimizes those who were once deified while the framing of Blacks as "Gods" rehabilitates those who were once dehumanized. Commenting on this type of bi-directional, ontological swing, Yancy tells us that

> [T]here is a moment of renarrating the self at the moment of resistance, which also involves a disruption of the historical force of the white *same*; for to resist is to re-story one's identity, even if that story is fragmented and replete with tensions. (110)

But the invocation of "God" status for Blacks intends to do more than just "re-story" the identity of disoriented Blacks in theological terms. While the ontological reality of whites as "The Devil" serves a phenomenologically *de*-scriptive purpose, conferring godhood on Black bodies is *pre*-scriptive; it aims to prescribe *actions* that will ultimately transform the disoriented Black body through a ritualized process of molding righteous words, ways, and actions. I liken this prescriptive strategy to the idea of *mimicry* as described by Merleau-Ponty.

In *Phenomenology of Perception* (2012), Merleau-Ponty describes the "mimicry" involved when he lays down to go to sleep. He notes that, by mimicking the process of sleep (by lying in bed on his side, knees drawn up, breathing slowed and eyes closed), sleep eventually takes over him. Speaking on the process of mimicking sleep in order to induce sleep, Merleau-Ponty says:

> The role of the body is to ensure this metamorphosis. It transforms ideas into things and my mimicry of sleep into actual sleep. If the body can symbolize existence, this is because it actualizes it and because it is its actuality. (167)

The transformation from Blacks as disoriented to Blacks as Gods is where Merleau-Ponty's words coincide with the NOI's doctrine and practice. Within the NOI there exists a strict code of behavior and an expectation of moral thinking, speaking, and living. This has been codified into what is called *The Restrictive Law of Islam* (Farrakhan 2012, 35). All of the mental, physical, and linguistic activities that one engages in are expected to be carried out in a righteous and morally upstanding manner. This regimented righteousness is akin to Merleau-Ponty's mimicry of sleep. In seeking to transform from a waking state to a sleeping state, Merleau-Ponty adopted the posture, positions, and activities of a sleeping person. Eventually, "[s]leep 'arrives' at a particular moment, it settles upon this imitation of itself that I offered it, and I succeed in becoming what I pretended to be" (2012, 166). In this same way, the regimented actions, thoughts, and behaviors of NOI adherents are enacted in their daily lives in order to mimic righteous, godly behavior. By thinking, believing, and acting as though one is God-like, it is presumed that, like Merleau-Ponty's mimicking of sleep, a "metamorphosis" of the Black mind and body will also "arrive," at which time the NOI adherent has succeeded "in becoming what they pretended to be." Thus, understanding the NOI's claim that the Black man is "God" in the context of the mimicry of sleep allows us to rework Merleau-Ponty's quote to state that: *The Black man is God. The role of the body is to ensure this metamorphosis. It transforms the NOI's idea that the Black man is God into things and my mimicry of God into actual godhood. If the body can symbolize my existence as God, this is because it actualizes it and because it is its actuality.*

SEPARATION

The third doctrine under analysis in this article is the promotion of separation as an objective of the NOI. In keeping with its religious tenor, the NOI's call for separation is also grounded in a theological context. According to Elijah Muhammad,

> This is the great Day of Separation. We heard of this kind of time coming ever since we were born. Right? Time! What Time? Time for the Great Separation of Black and white. The Bible teaches you that there will come a Great Separation…This is what the Bible means when it says, 'He will separate the goats from the sheep.'… They are talking about the Black Man and the white man. The white man is the goat and you and I are the sheep. (Muhammad quoted in Rassoull 1992, 492)

The call for separation was also publicized in more secular terms. In a section of Elijah Muhammad's *Message to the Blackman* entitled "What Do The Muslims Want?", the call for separation is again made in unequivocal language (1965, 161). In point number four we are told that,

> We want our people in America whose parents or grandparents were descendants from slaves to be allowed, to establish a separate state or territory of their own—either on this continent or elsewhere. We believe that our former slave-masters are obligated to provide such land and that the area must be fertile and minerally rich. We believe that our former slave-masters are obligated to maintain and supply our needs in this separate territory for the next 20 or 25 years until we are able to produce and supply our own needs. Since we cannot get along with them in peace and equality after giving them 400 years of our sweat and blood and receiving in return some of the worst treatment human beings have ever experienced, we believe our contributions to this land and the suffering forced upon us by white America justifies our demand for complete separation in a state or territory of our own. (161)

Here Muhammad establishes both a religious and a socio-historical foundation for his call for the establishment of an orienting, habitual, affirming, Black space, separate and distinct from the disorienting, non-habitual, and dehumanizing existence of Black bodies within the white world. The NOI's call for separation is also geo-political in that it is reminiscent of the separation that led to the founding of the nation of Israel in 1948 as well as to the colonial separation from England that led to the establishment of the United States. The religious nature of the call for separation mirrors the Biblical accounts of Moses' separation from Pharaoh, Lot's separation from Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Islamic separation of prophet Muhammad from Mecca resulting in his hegira to Medina. But even though the NOI's call for physical separation is fueled by the daily atrocities experienced under the "phenomenology of whiteness," its specific goal is the ultimate attainment of a Black

"corporeal schema" (Ahmed 2006, 110).

Ahmed, using Fanon's critique of Merleau-Ponty as a point of departure, observes that the universal and undifferentiated "corporeal schema" that western phenomenology promoted is not the most basic experience.[4] Below this "tactile" and "vestibular" experience of the world is a historical-racial schema that supersedes it. This was masterfully exemplified through the notion of an "active body" (the white body) as opposed to the Black body that has historically been "negated or 'stopped' in its tracks" (2006, 110). Simple tasks (such as Fanon's grasping of a cigarette across a table for example) are implicit to us because our bodies are oriented in a space and we know that after initiating a few deliberate steps we will achieve a simple task. This orientation and intentionality toward an object or task represents one of the stalwart philosophical foundations of phenomenology, the notion of "habitual" functioning (130). Drawing from Fanon, Ahmed however informs us that deliberateness is not a given when one inhabits a Black body. White society "stops" Black bodies from gaining such a deliberateness and a familiarity with the world through racism, slavery, Jim Crow, stop and frisk, voter id laws, and other discriminatory realities. This stifling of the most basic elements of consciousness and intentionality "interrupts" the way of being in the world for Black bodies; "*the disorientation affected by racism diminishes capacities for action*" (Ahmed 2006, 111, emphasis added). It is this disorientation that the NOI confronts and seeks to emancipate Black bodies from through its doctrine of separation.

Ahmed goes on to say that, "[i]f to be human is to be white, then to be not white is to inhabit the negative: it is to be 'not'. The pressure of this 'not' is another way of describing the social and existential realities of racism" (2006, 139). The NOI's approach to establishing its own "corporeal schema" is to dis-"inhabit the negative," to depart from this negating existence in white society through physical separation. In their view, given the four hundred-year history of being "not" and the centuries of "historic-racial" "stopping" of Black existence, the only meaningful solution is separation by which Blacks can then be reconstituted in a space of their own and where the Black body can "*extend itself…in order to act on and in the world*" (139, emphasis added). Said differently, the NOI's doctrine of physical, geographical separation is an attempt to return the Black body to phenomenology's corporeal schema, that of a habitual and delberate existence of a "*body at home*" and a "Being in place" (111). For the NOI, this can only be accomplished through the establishment of a separate and distinct Black space (territory) removed from the tyranny of white supremacy. The freedom to act on and act in a world of their own through establishing a separate, physical territory is the manifest expression of the NOI's phenomenology of Blackness.

[4] Ahmed is referencing Fanon (2008, 91).

V. THE NOI'S CRITICAL HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL DISCOURSE: AN APOLOGIA

In this article I've offered a picture of the NOI that departs from the traditionally dismissive posture taken toward the organization. Looking past initially polarizing aspects and surface assumptions about its doctrine, I've made the case for the congruence of the NOI's doctrine with longstanding Black and White philosophical traditions. I've further argued for a depiction of the NOI, its doctrine, and its practices as strategic displays of a critical hermeneutic phenomenology. The NOI's doctrine is critical because of its emancipatory and transformative aims. The NOI's doctrine is hermeneutic due to its creative use of religious motifs as interpretive agents of the world around them. And the NOI's doctrine is phenomenological due to its descriptive and interpretive manner of ascribing meaning to the lifeworld of disoriented Blacks. Additionally, utilizing three examples, I have suggested an understanding of the NOI's creed that offers a deeper, richer explanation of the NOI's complex interplay of linguistics, religion, philosophy, and phenomenology that are tied together through the framework of embodiment.

Despite all that I've presented, there may still be lingering questions about the historicity, rationality, and harshness of the NOI's discourse. As for the historicity of the doctrine, some scholarship, particularly the work of religious scholar Dr. Wesley Muhammad, has indeed defended the veracity of the NOI's claims epistemologically by investigating the evidence for the organization's doctrine and the factual nature of its claims (Muhammad 2007; 2009; 2012; 2013). The current study, however, is ontological and, as such, a more pertinent question should focus on the "workable" and "unworkable" nature of the NOI's doctrine (Yancy 2017, 112). In other words, does the NOI's doctrine work? Does it adequately orient disoriented Black bodies and create a reality of "I can" for Black bodies seeking to escape the "I cannot" of white spaces (Ahmed 2006 139)? Regarding the rationality of the NOI's pronouncements, I offer the words of the hermeneutic philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey who proclaimed that, "all understanding contains something irrational because life is irrational" (2006, 162). Given the irrationality of institutionalized, state sanctioned torture, lynching, discrimination, dehumanization, slavery, and other atrocities of the Black experience under white supremacy, one could argue that the presumed irrationality of the NOI doctrine merely reflects the irrationality of the Black lived experience in white spaces. And finally, on the unapologetic boldness of the NOI's language and the brazen, harsh tone that is often taken, I am reminded of the words of Frantz Fanon when he said,

> I want my voice to be harsh, I don't want it to be beautiful, I don't want it to be pure, I don't want it to have all dimensions. I want it to be torn through and through, I don't want it to be enticing, for I am speaking of man and his refusal, of the day-to-day rottenness of man, of his dreadful failure. (1967, 49)

The critical hermeneutic phenomenology of the NOI, what I label its phenomenology of Blackness, is harsh because the lifeworld of Black embodiment in white spaces has been and continues to be harsh.

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