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Sister, You've Been on My Mind: Perceptual, Affective, and Expressive Practices of Lived Flesh

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"Sister, You've Been on My Mind: Perceptual, Affective, and Expressive Practices of Lived Flesh" is an interdisciplinary project that pairs Black Feminist and Womanist Thought with Critical Phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty's thought.

This project intervenes in Merleau-Ponty's construct of the human subject. Merleau-Ponty's account assumes that humanity and subjectivity is commensurate with being *homo sapiens*. This understanding that all *homo sapiens* are the human subjects excludes american Black folk who—in the silence of his texts on racial, gendered, sexed, and class differences—emerge as *homo sapiens* but not human subjects. Where the human subject is never an object for another and can never be perceived by the subject as though outside of itself, the american Black person lives an ongoing historical engagement with objectification, abjection, and double-vision.

I explore and critique Merleau-Ponty's account of the human subject via readings of Black Feminist and Womanist texts notably Anna Julia Cooper, Hartman, Morrison, Lorde, Musser, Sharpe, and Spillers. Through these readings I sound out a geography for the lived flesh of american Black people, propose an "ear-forward" sensorial organ/ization, and offer Blues as an example of the expressive, affective practices, and ethical frameworks that lived flesh creates that distinguish it from the acquisitive and limiting way of being in the world of the (white) human subject.

This work is guided by my interests in the ways that marginalized peoples—especially american Blackwomxn—do more than just endure injustice and oppression, but develop practices of thriving. This is not an interest in those practices as solely oppositional or resistance. This is an interest in the way these practices have and create meaning and relations in themselves and cannot be totalized by the oppressive contexts in which they emerge. This is an interest in these ways of being-in-the-world, as ways-of-being *otherwise*.

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Introduction

My grandmother, who was born at the intersections of black, woman, and poor in rural Tennessee around 1920, pronounced the words "hope" and "help" the same way: "holp." She pronounced and *lived* these words as extensions of each other, words that intertwine and co-constitute one another. As in, "I holp the sun comes out to holp these tomatoes;" or "I holp that was a holp to you, Undra. I love you. Tomorrow is a new day." It is more than just an accent, it is an orientation, a lived experience of a futural hope and a present matter-of-fact help. It is a matter-of-fact way to address the structures and challenges of living in a world that never intended that she survive, let alone *live* that cannot be totalized by either a forward-invested optimism or a present endurance (Lorde 2007, 42).[1] Neither is it pessimistic prognostication; it speaks to a being otherwise, at once concerned with and addressing the present as a way of casting and moving toward a future. It is neither utopian nor nihilistic, but an "immi/a/nent" intervention (Sharpe 2016, 71). It is especially potent, and has propelled so much of my thought because this orientation speaks to a particular loving way of being in the world that is not limited to her or *auto*biography.

Though, throughout this project I do turn to anecdote and autobiography to enliven my argument, this engagement with experience should not be dismissed as navel-gazing. This is a methodological mode—as is my sometimes more conversational tone—that is in line with Black Feminist and Womanist praxis. I turn specifically to Anna Julia Cooper's metaphysical, ontological, and socio-political work in *A Voice from the South* (1892) that takes the personal as a launchpad into the collective; The Combahee River Collective's method of identity politics which mobilizes the personal

[1] For to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call america, we have had to learn this first and most vital lesson – that we were never meant to survive. Not as human beings. …And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength. Because the machine will try to grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak. (Lorde 2007, 42)

into the collectively political and transformative (1978); Lorde's explicit personal engagement in her prose writing for the public as collected in *Sister Outsider* (2007) and The *Selected Works of Audre Lorde* (2020), Devonya Havis' use of "Ancestral Black Vernacular Discourse" (2014), and Christina Sharpe's engagement with the personal in *In the Wake* (2019).

> I include the personal here to connect the social forces on a specific, particular family's being in the wake to those of all Black people in the wake; to mourn and to illustrate the ways our individual lives are always swept up in the wake produced and determined, though not absolutely, by the afterlives of slavery. Put another way, I include the personal here in order to position this work, and myself, in and of the wake. The "autobiographical example," says Saidiya Hartman, "is not a personal story that folds onto itself; it's not about navel gazing, it's really about trying to look at historical and social process and one's own formation as a window onto social and historical processes, as an example of them". Like Hartman, I include the personal here, "to tell a story capable of engaging and countering the violence of abstraction." (Sharpe 2016, 8)

Like Sharpe and Hartman, I use the personal example as evidence of both specific/particular and collective/shared experience and practice. In this project I explore the phenomenological horizon—the particular and collective lived geographies—where one may find holpfulness. This introduction consists of three sections. The first is a short glossary of terms; the second a brief orientation toward the theoretical questions that I explore in this project; and the third a chapter synopsis.

I: Brief note on terms.

Though I adopt and explore several terms in this project—notably (lived) flesh, fleshy, Blues/ing, Afro-Skepticism and (briefly in the outro) homing, I would like to take a moment here to engage with some terms that I deploy throughout the project that inform and are the products of my methodology.

american Black

I use the term american Black to distinguish particular kinship and cultural attunements of the African Diaspora. The use of the word "american" performs two geographical functions. One, the lowercase "a" in american is in line with Audre Lorde's practice of using the lowercase to destabilize taken for

granted notions about supremacy, belongingness, and the norm. The lowercase "a" draws attention to the ways that certain hegemonies (particularly those of the white united states citizen/subject) are centered and normalized as well as the ways that this process of normalization—and its result—have moved into the background of experience, while at the same time centering Black/ness and the non-mythical normative in my project.

In my use, "american" calls to particular ethnicities in the united states context that are ongoing in the wake of u.s. chattel slavery. This distinction is not about a hierarchy of experience among Diasporic kinfolk. It is difference without deviance. The u.s. american Black experience is distinct from the experiences of (broadly used) Caribbean Black, Latine Black, and the Black folks on the continent of Africa. For me and in this project, this difference, rather than being divisive—that is, rather than being distorted into questions of authenticity—opens onto the embrace of and engagement with expressive, affective, and ethical similarities across ethnic differences among Diasporic kin.[2]

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[2] To my mind, part of the world-making practice of philosophy, is making distinctions. This project endeavors to make distinctions of between the affective, expressive, and ethical experiences of american Black lived flesh and that of the american white human subject. While there is great cause to worry for the affective, expressive, and moral integrity for the sutures that bind the american white subject, the heart of this project is in describing, sounding out, and celebrating american Black lived flesh as different rather than deviant. In the course of workshopping this project I have more than once been asked—and only by white askers—whether what I am proposing is a new hierarchy or a social re-ordering. These questions center whiteness, white persons, and emerge from a particular logos that assumes a teleological relationship to difference-naming. To borrow a bit from Foucault, in this ontological, epistemic, and axiological framework, one identifies differences in order to enumerate, categorize, predict, and administer conduct. The end result of difference naming is the docile human subject.

This project is an attempt to relate otherwise to difference. I model my engagement with difference on Audre Lorde's account of difference.

> Often, we do not even speak of human difference, which is a comparison of attributes best evaluated by their possible effect and illumination within our lives. Instead, we speak of deviance, which is a judgment upon the relationship between the attribute and some long-fixed and establish construct. (Lorde 2020, 175)

> Too often, we pour the energy needed for recognizing and exploring difference into pretending those differences are insurmountable barriers, or that they do not exist at all. This results in voluntary isolation, or false and treacherous connections. Either way, we do not develop tools for using human difference as a springboard for creative change within our lives. We speak not of difference, but of human deviance. (Lorde 2007, 115-116)

(american) Blackwomxn

Blackwomxn riffs on Cheryl Harris' use of "Blackwomen" in her piece, "Whiteness as Property" (1993).

> My use of the term "Blackwomen" is an effort to use language that more clearly reflects the unity of identity as "Black" and "woman," with neither aspect primary or subordinate to the other. It is an attempt to realize in practice what has been identified in theory—that, as Kimberlé Crenshaw notes, Blackwomen exist "at the crossroads of gender and race hierarchies". Indeed [Whose Story Is It, Anyway? Feminist and Antiracist Appropriations of Anita Hill] projects a powerful and complex vision of blackwomen that forms the foundation of my construction of this term:
>
> > The particular experience of black women in the dominant culture ideology of American society can be conceptualized as intersectional. Intersectionality captures the way in which the particular location of black women in dominant American social relations is unique and in some senses unassimilable into the discursive paradigms of gender and race domination. (Harris 1993, 1719 footnote)

I deploy "x" instead of "e" or "a" in Blackwomxn to allow for as capacious an understanding of who is a "woman" as possible. I include anyone woman-identifying (even binary never-minding) in this rubric (if it speaks to them). Janelle Monáe has recently come out as nonbinary stating that they, "don't see [themselves] as a woman, solely" and that they "feel all of [their] energy" (Andrew 2022). I intend "Blackwomxn" in such a way that should Mx. Monáe decide to identify as a Blackwomxn their identities are included. The capaciousness of the "x" is an "experiment in how to live" and lends an ear toward what Hortense Spillers might accept as an attempt at first level discourse about the those of us who enflesh the un- and re-gendered realm of the sensual other (Hartman 2019, Musser 2018, Spiller 2003).[3]

Homo sapiens

This project makes a distinction between Human (Subject) as a socio-political and ontological construct. (This is in large part the work of Chapter One.) The ongoing condition of humanity is a

[3] Yet, for as capacious as my understanding of womxn is, I do not include just anyone who is Black-identifying in this rubric. Specifically, the Rachel Dolezal's of the world are excluded.

project of the structures of whiteness wherein white people are the only bodies legible as human subjects.[4] If the human/subject refers to white people, this leaves me with a practical challenge of how to refer to non-white people. I turn to "*homo sapiens*" as a way to refer to bodies that emerge into the world with certain attributes. In this project, "*homo sapiens*" is broader than "human." I take up "human" as a concept that moves in, constructs, and refers to specific and limited relations (of in/humanity). All humans are *homo sapiens* but not all *homo sapiens* are humans.

This is a manner of not simply fleeing from the in/human binary—this is not a fugitive narrative—but of engaging with it otherwise.[5] I adopt this project because I believe that this binary centers the human and is totalized by oppositional relationality. For me, this means that to describe Black folks vis-à-vis this construct, where the white subject is human, is to describe Black folks as inhuman, or as not-human. This description carries a referent to human *qua* white people as a kind of transcendental norm.

Similarly, I worry that describing Black folks as inhuman, or as not human also carries with it the assumption of a kind of lack. This lack strikes a sour note for me; one in which the focus of describing black lives becomes a facet of describing the lack itself that opens onto a kind of veering toward a want of humanity or a reclamation of humanity/subjectivity. I understand and am quite sympathetic toward this impulse, and I see in our current political climate how "be[ing] recognized as human, levelly human" (Combahee Rive Collective 2017, 19) is an integral part in retaining and being

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[4] I acknowledge that "subject" as a construct is historically situated and that the deployment and meaning of "subject/ivity" has been different and will be different in the future. I acknowledge that I am working with a particularly eurocentric ("Western") engagement with the construct.

[5] The race of Humanism (White, Asian, South Asian, and Arab) could not have produced itself without the simultaneous productions of that walking destruction which become known as the Black. Put another way, through chattel slavery the world gave birth and coherence to both its joys of domesticity and to its struggles of political discontent; and with these joys and struggles the Human was born, but not before it murdered the Black, forging a symbiosis between the political ontology of Humanity and the social death of Blacks. (Wilderson 2010, 20-21)

While I remain unconvinced by Wilderson's larger claims about coloniality that surface in his including Asian, South Asian, and Arab folx under the rubric of Human/ism and his privileging of chattel slavery as the singular ordering event of political ontology, I do think that it is helpful to think about who must—in the US context—be made to die for the Human to live. The move that I make is toward an understanding that the social death, the exclusion from Human/ity of american Blacks is not a total/certain/fixed murder.

afforded access to and attainment of basic "human rights."[6] This, I think, is less a question of (always) wanting to be (limited) to the human-subject construct and more a problem of translation, specifically that of precaritized folks working with a discourse that was never intended to include us, and finding ways to massage the oppressor's language enough to use it. Though, surely there are Black and other precartized folks who grieve that lack and want to be human, this project takes up distance from humanity as an opening (both to implicity hight the ways that "human rights" exclude the existence and calls for justice for lived flesh, and as a way to celebrate the capacity of the flesh to create beyond the limits of the subject.)

Kin/Folks

Because this project is engaged with different affective and ethical practices that emerge beyond the human subject another practical challenge emerges. How to describe a group (or generality) of Black lives?

Black folks are folks (or have and are kin) whereas the (white) human subject has person/ality. To be a person is a kind of achievement of atomism. Person/ality is tied to a kind of self-mastery and agonism.[7] The person *qua* subject *qua* human is always already exclusive and oppositional.

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[6] However, as becomes historically and presently clear, mainstream white feminist discourse—and the discourse of the majority of white u.s. women—about the recent leaked draft of the Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe v. Wade (Gerstein & Ward, 2022), Blackwomxn are most frequently included in discourse about "human rights" when the rights that largely benefit white women (or Blackmen) are threatened. That is, when the rights and privileges of white women are (seemingly) secure—or are securable vis-à-vis their proximity to white men—the demands of non-white women for reproductive justice are routinely ignored.

[7] I read Lugones' description of the two different kinds of play (and players) in "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception" (1987) as getting at the distinction I make here.

> An agonistic sense of playfulness is one in which *competence* is supreme. You better know the rules of the game. In agonistic play there is risk, there is *uncertainty*, but the uncertainty is about who is going to win and who is going to lose. There are rules that inspire hostility. The attitude *of playfulness is conceived as secondary to or derivative from play*. Since play is agon, then the only conceivable playful attitude is an agonistic one (the attitude does not turn an activity into play, but rather presupposes an activity that is play). One of the paradigmatic ways of playing for both Gadamer and Huizinga is role-playing. In roleplaying, the person who is a participant in the game has a *fixed conception of him or herself*. I also think that the players are imbued with *self-importance* in agonistic play since they are so keen on winning given their own merits, their very own competence. (Lugones 1987,15),

Anna Julia Copper aligns personality with a lack of accountability and care for others, a kind of disavowal of community engagements, and an absence of "politeness" (1892, 44).

> *That politeness should be one of the most marked results of impersonality* may appear surprising, yet a slight examination will show it to be a fact. Considered *a priori*, the connection is not far to seek. Impersonality by lessening the interest in one's self, induces one to take an interest in others. Looked at *a posteriori*, we find that where the one trait exists the other is most developed, while an absence of the second seems to prevent the full growth of the first. This is true both in general and in detail. (Cooper 1892, 44)

In the Cooperian sense this self-mastery and atomism is when viewed from the affective and ethical framework of american Black folks, an un-aspirational way of being-in-the-world. Rather than an achievement (a kind of triumph of the enlightened) it is a (moral) failing. "Impersonality" is a way of being in the world with an among others to whom one is accountable. This embeddedness, this of-*us*-ness, calls out from a "unique position" a particularly fleshy orientation toward the self and others (Cooper 1892, 62). For this reason, I take use kin/folks to refer to Black folks as a way to subtlely make/pursue the differences in being with others between lived flesh and humans.

Sound/ing

My use of sound/ing is an attempt to think with Sharpe and the wakeful use "sound" that she deploys in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016).

> I am trying to find the language for this work, find the form for this work. Language and form fracture more every day. I am trying, too, to find the words that will articulate care and the words to think what Keguro Macharia (2015) calls those "we formations." I am trying to think how to perform the labor of them. Or what Tinsley (2008, 191) calls a "feeling and a feeling for" and what Glissant ([1995] 2006, 9) refers to as "knowing ourselves as part and as crowd:' This is what I am calling wake work. With Brand and Philip, I want to sound this language anew, sound a new language. (Sharpe 2016, 19)

I believe that she is using this word in its multiple registers simultaneously. There are at least four registers that ring out here:

> 1. Sound (n): "vibrations that travel through the air or another medium and can be heard when they reach a person's or animal's ear."

2. Sound (v): "emit or cause to emit sound;" related, "test (the lungs or another body cavity) by noting the sound they produce."
3. Sound (adj): "in good condition; not damaged, injured, or diseased."
4. Sound (v): "ascertain (the depth of water), typically by means of a line or pole or using sound echoes." (Google Defintions)

In harmony with Sharpe, I too use the word to in multiple registers (simultaneously).

Taken together, these terms direct and orient me in my encounter with Merleau-Ponty's thought.

II: Where I Wade In

Merleau-Ponty's account of the human subject—its intimate embeddedness in the world, a world that is always already populated with other subjects—and then later, his work on a general ontology of being provides a rich starting point for an inquiry on what it means to be in the world as well as resources to think about and describe the limitations of his account of inter/subjectivity.

Critical phenomenology is a corrective that explicitly takes up the silences in the account of the human subject and its way of being in the world that emerges in phenomenology. My project does not specifically aim at correcting phenomenology in this way. Thought I sound out what is unheard in the silence, I do not attempt to reconfigure, rescue, or recuperate the subject.

My critique of Merleau-Ponty is from within the praxis of Black Feminist thought and literature because they resonate with descriptions of lived experience that do not so easily map onto Merleau-Ponty's account of the human subject or the attempts of critical phenomenology to rescue that subject. This body of work is what I explore as fleshy (and as describing flesh/iness) throughout my project.

Fleshy selves do not qualify as lived bodies/humans/perceiving subjects on Merleau-Ponty's account. This is an important intervention in both dialogues. For if Merleau-Ponty and critical phenomenology's account (following Guenther) center the subject and inter/subjectivity as the *sine*

qua non in their descriptions of lived human experience, then there are homo sapiens whose lived experiences are muted. The tremendous affective range of Black folks, particularly those registers of disappointment, anger, hurt, pain, grieving, mourning, joy, and love (all shades of Blues/ing) are beyond the logics of thewhite supremacist account of the human subject that I read in Merleau-Ponty's oeuvre.

It is not a corrective, yet is still a project of intervening—and intervention—in the in/humanity inter/subjective "dysgraphia" of ways of being in the world (Sharpe 2016, 21, 33, 96-97, 115, 123 & 131). This project is a first attempt at going beyond, or pressing beyond Merleau-Ponty's early accounts of the human subject and experience. It makes use of those tenets of Merleau-Ponty's method—its description of experience and perception, its attention to our being with others, and its standpoint-perspectival orientation—with those practices of Black Feminism and Womanism, those ways of being found in Black Literature and Bluesing, to name various terrains of lived flesh.

Where traditional phenomenology (and critical phenomenology) fails to provide accounts of modes of being that are lived beyond the grammar of "humanity" this intervention is necessary. This project takes up the lived experiences of fleshiness as description of lived experience in its own right, beside, adjacent to, entangled with, and yet still just beyond the lived body.

So, where one might say that what Merleau-Ponty offers is an opportunity to think of the body as intersubjective, committed, and inherently non-oppressive or objectifying, I say the lived body is not just *any* body (*qua* body). It is the normal (lived) body, the subject body, the body of the Thief (Spillers 2003) that emerges through intimate relation with the captive flesh. There is ***only*** lived body *qua* subject/thief. What I suggest (and explore) is that this is not merely an accidental insufficiency for the very process by which we come to name the subject is a process, a series of entangled

engagements, that demands and requires flesh as not-subject/not-lived body.[8] The perceiving-subject/lived body that emerges in Merleau-Ponty's account is necessarily coded as white and this coding operates as a norm that is rendered invisible and natural/neutral or as human. It is not just that there are no black bodies on Merleau-Ponty's account; it is that the black body is an impossibility whose utterance destabilize subjectivity.

An afropessimistic account would stop here. In his 2010 *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*, Wilderson offers us a description of "Afro-pessimists" that is instructive.[9]

> The Afro-pessimists are theorists of Black positionality who share Fanon's insistence that, though Blacks are indeed sentient beings, the structure of the entire world's semantic field—regardless of cultural and national discrepancies—"leaving" as Fanon would say, "existence by the wayside"—is sutured by anti-Black solidarity. Unlike the solution-oriented, interest-based, or hybridity-dependent scholarship so fashionable today, Afro-pessimism explores the meaning of Blackness not—in the first instance—as variously and unconsciously interpellated identity or as a conscious social actor, but as a structural position of noncommunicability in the face of all other positions; this meaning is noncommunicable because, again, as a position, Blackness is predicated on modalities of accumulation and fungibility, not exploitation and alienation. (Wilderson 2010, 58-59)

The necessary structural impossibility of Black subjectivity, of Black as lived body, is the very impossibility of any description of lived experience. It would be enough to read the captive body/flesh as the result of the "total climate" or "weather" of anti-blackness (Sharpe 2016, 104-107, 113, 127, 132). It would be enough to read fleshiness and its impossible subject-hood as reason to speed this world to an end to start over anew. But through my readings of them, I am reminded that neither Spillers nor Sharpe are afropessimists—despite Wilderson's use of Spillers in *Red, White & Black* (2010)—though they are fervently and justifiably critical of whiteness, white supremacy, and antiblackness. Instead (as per the Interstitial) they should be understood as advancing what I am

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[8] Let's face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name. "Peaches" and "Brown Sugar," "Sapphire" and "Earth Mother," "Aunty," "Granny," God's "Holy Fool," a "Miss Ebony First," or "Black Woman at the Podium": I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented. (Spillers 2003, 203)

[9] Though in 2010 Wilderson refrained from making the claim for "anything as ostentatious as a school of thought" (58) it seems that he has since changed his mind given his April 2020 monograph is entitled *Afropessimism*.

calling an "afroskeptical" line of thought. That is, while positioning "yonder"—in both the sense taken up by Iris Marion Young in "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality" (1980) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*—or antiblackness/white supremacy as the problem, they also commit themselves to the struggle for a future that requires present acts of inter-fleshial loving, caring, erotic, and sensual affect.[10, 11] Flesh insists beyond the markings of the captive body as only scars. That is, while it lives the experience of the captive body (which is social death created by the lived body so that the lived body is human/subject and is socially alive), it also lives, experiences, creates, and expresses that which is not the "parasitic" product of the Human (Wilderson 2010).[12] Flesh *qua* flesh cannot be reduced to captive flesh/body.

For lived flesh, hope and help, and particularly experiences of/with them as discrete, limited, small, require a capacious holpfulness in order for them to have meaning. Holpfulness points to the lived experience and self-loving practices of Blackwomxn. It is this lived experience that makes a way out of no way and changes the weather of a climate of "immi/a/nent death" of antiblackness and white supremacy (Sharpe 2016, 71), and engages in what I want to call "future-casting" in its modes of living and loving otherwise.[13]

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[10] In describing what she refers to as the "double-spatiality" of the feminine Young writes, "The space of the 'yonder' is a space in which feminine existence projects possibilities in the sense of understanding that 'someone' could move within it, but not I" (Young 1980, 150). On Young's account, space is gendered (and subject-bearing) such that women take up an interior or enclosed spatiality that is in conflict with a thoroughgoing exterior/exposed spatiality (that is coded as masculine). For Young, women experience the yonder as disconnected from them and their possibilities. Young's is a *yonder, I cannot*.

[11] Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. (Morrison 2004, 103)

[12] Whiteness is parasitic because it monumentalizes it subjective capacity, its lush cartography, in direction proportion to the wasteland of Black incapacity. (Wilderson 2010, 45)

[13] Here I follow paths made by Baldwin (1963) and Musser (2018).

III: Where You Wade In

The project unfolds as a series of essays in loose and improvisational conversation with one another. They may be taken collectively or as solos that are informed by the backing of the others.

Chapter One, "We Flesh: Spillers, Musser, and Beyond the Phenomenological Body" considers Merleau-Ponty's account of the lived body/the human subject in *Phenomenology of Perception* via his account of the "originary acquisition" of the natural world. I critically read this account, and note what I take to be a conflation of the natural accident of *homo sapiens* with the cultural project of the human subject. This conflation is integral to Merleau-Ponty's account of intersubjectivity and perception. I take up Spillers' "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Crawley's *BlackPentecostal Breath*, and Amber Musser's *Sensual Excess* to distinguish the lived experience of/as Blacklives from both Merleau-Ponty's account of the human subject (*le corps prope*) and his general account of Being and the carnal body. These works problematize subjectivity (as aspirational) in their focus on flesh as lived (as matter/ing), and so I turn to them to think *beyond* a desire in critical phenomenology to expand the notion of the subject to include non-majoritarian lives. This is an attempt sketch out a geography for/of lived flesh and its own perceptual and expressive relation to arrive at an account of Black lived flesh.

Chapter Two, "Eye Can: Sight and Human Subjectivity" moves from an account of the human subject toward an account of the human subject's sensorial organ/ization. What I consider in this chapter is the way the human subject is said to have (or be in) a world and the habits of perception that inhere in Merleau-Ponty's account of inter/subjectivity. I read Merleau-Ponty's account of perception—synthetic and intimate—as eye-forward. I explore the constitutive role vision/the visual plays in his account of the human subject and contrast what I take to be a privileging of vision/the visual with his treatment of the aural register. I explore the way his attention to language/speech may

collapse into another mode of the visual and distinguish between speech and voice. Finally, I explore the danger of eye-forwardness for lived flesh.

Chapter three, "Listening Flesh: Pitch Complexes and the Social Otherwise" is attuned to the sensorial organ/ization otherwise of the lived flesh. This chapter considers what an ear-forward account of lived experience means for affective world(making). In this way I intervene in what I take to be dominant themes in Merleau-Ponty's account of the lived body/the human subject: inter/subjectivity and the primacy of the visual field in perception and meaning-making. The aural turn in this chapter sounds out the affective and experiential registers that are open in the ear-forward orientation to the world. This distinct orientation is the register that gives range to the holpfulness of american Blackwomxn.

The interstitial, "Smiling Lessons: Toward an Account of AfroSkepticism" is a bridge that connects the theory of the first three chapters with the practice of the fourth. This interstitial sketches out what I take to be a stake in my understanding of Black Feminist and Womanist praxis that informs and positions them as what I want to call an AfroSkeptical praxis. In it, I think through Hartman, Lorde, Morrison, Musser, and Sharpe, toward a way of inhabiting the "*yes, and*" Musser posits to Afro-Pessimism and motivates that speculate turn of the final chapter of this project (Musser 2018, 9). I understand the affective, ethical, and geographical practices of the ear-forward lived flesh that I explore in Chapter Four as modes of this AfroSkepticism.

Chapter Four, "Shamelessly Blue" explores what a sensorial gearing beyond that of the human subject might mean for affective/expressive practices. That is, what arises from a more porous and community-geared sensorial and perceptual organ/ization. What ways of living—not just surviving or enduring—do we creative within, but not wholly determined by, the pornotrope? In the previous chapters I briefly suggest that the human subject need not be aspirational for lived flesh. In this chapter I begin to sound out a way that lived flesh breathes life into its own socio-ethical experience.

This is a project of love.

Chapter 1: **We Flesh: Musser, Spillers and Beyond the Phenomenological Body**

In her 2021 monograph, *Black Utopias: Speculative Life and the Music of Other Worlds*, Jayna Brown makes the case that Black people, though currently *homo sapien* are not human.[14] For Brown "human"—specifically the human *qua* subject and/or the human *qua* lived body *qua* subject—is a construct that is predicated on the exclusion of Black people. And, as I've previously written, Brown takes up the exclusion of Black people from humanity and our displacement from subjectivity as a radical opportunity to explore the scope of being beyond humanity (Brown 2021, 4, 6-9, 13-14, 25, 47, 112, 171-176).

Though Brown centers a Bergsonian account of the durée and affective life in her text, I find that Merleau-Ponty's account of the inter/subjectivity of the lived body also provides resources for thinking through her account of the non-humanity of Black folks. Specifically, these resources reify the human/subject connection in a way that still leaves non-majoritarian bodies outside of humanity and subjectivity. With Brown, I believe that nonhuman corporeality is rich with expressive, affective, ethical, and community-mind life otherwise. I read Merleau-Ponty's accounts of intersubjectivity, sexuality, and anonymity as effacing the lived experience of non-majoritarian bodies, particularly those of female-assigned, womxn, and queer-identifying folx.

This chapter highlights this effacement. First, I consider Merleau-Ponty's account of the lived body/the human subject in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) via his account of the "originary acquisition" of the natural world. I argue that this account conflates being a *homo sapien* with being a human/subject. I then interrogate the role of sexuality in perception and subjectivity. The importance of sexuality to Merleau-Ponty's account positions the lived body a desiring subject. In my consideration of "The Visible and the Invisible" (1964) and notes toward the end of his oeuvre,

[14] The use of "currently" here refers to questions that Brown later explores in the piece that, to paraphrase are "Really?" and "For how long?"

I explore his account of generalized Being and flesh. I argue that this account, while a movement away from the anthropocentrism of the body proper, traffics in a universalization of a particular body's—Merleau-Ponty's—Being in and of flesh that effaces difference (particularly raced, sexuate, and gender difference).

Finally, I take up Spillers' "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," (2003) Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (2004), Crawley's *BlackPentecostal Breath* (2016), and Amber Musser's *Sensual Excess* (2018) to distinguish the lived experience of/as Blacklives from both Merleau-Ponty's account of the human subject (*le corps prope*) and his general account of Being and the carnal body. These works problematize subjectivity (as aspirational) in their focus on flesh as lived (as matter/ing), and so I turn to them to think *beyond* a desire in critical phenomenology to expand the notion of the subject to include non-majoritarian lives.[15] This is an attempt sketch out a geography for/of lived flesh and its own perceptual and expressive relations.

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[15] In his wonderful *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race in America* (2017), George Yancy opens the monography with the inscription: "*For all bodies that suffer.*" Though the book is an especially thoroughgoing account of the ways that white gaze (as an "achievement" [243]), white discursive practice, and white embodiment invent, project, and define themselves against the Black body as nigger, thing, sexual deviant, criminal, and subhuman and the toll of this definition (as well as the ways Black lives live beyond this quotidian thingification), the reader is here (as well as in his collected edition *White Self-Criticality beyond Anti-racism* [2015]) called to understand that white bodies also (morally, epistemically, ontologically, and phenomenologically) suffer under whiteness. Moreover, Yancy holds onto the notion of us "human subjects" even as he problematizes what it means to be human for white folks sutured to antiblackness and white supremacy (2017, 256) and gestures to Black "subjectivity" and the "agency" that is often tied to notions of subjectivity (2017, 25, 33, 247-254). This exploration positions Black bodies as subjects *too* that white bodies fail.

In her reading of "The Racial Epidurmal Schema," Axelle Karera (2019) points out that "Fanon explicitly replaces Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'corporeal schema' with the '*schéma historico-racial* such that the racialized body occupies "space differently that a body-subject would and is exposed to the instrumental will of another," I worry that the historico-racial schema falls back on an anthropocentrism that enriches Fanon's account of the zone of nonbeing that only contrasts Blacklives to human subjects (Karera 2019, 289, 290, 291).

Lisa Guenther's (2019) definition of critical phenomenology—that emerges from her reading of Lorde—is stirring!

> Critical phenomenology goes beyond classical phenomenology by reflecting on the quasi-transcendental social structures that make our experience of the world possible and meaningful, and also be engaging in a material practice of "restructuring the world' in order to generate new and liberatory possibilities for meaningful experience and existence. In this sense, critical phenomenology is both a way of doing philosophy and a way of approaching political activism.
>
> As a philosophical practice, critical phenomenology… open[s] up new possibility for reimagining and reclaiming the commons. It is a way of puling up traces of a history that is not quite or no longer there – that has been rubbed out or consigned to invisibility – but still shapes the emergence of meaning.
>
> As a political practice, critical phenomenology is a struggle for the liberation from the structures that privilege, naturalize, and normalize certain experiences of the world while marginalizing, pathologizing, and

I: The Lived Body of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenological Method

Merleau-Ponty allows his readers to think of the body as intersubjective, committed, and inherently non-oppressive or objectifying. For Merleau-Ponty the body is an "indivisible possession" whose positions are known through a "body schema that envelopes them all" (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2014, 101). As such, the body is not a collection of parts, but a community of imbricating relations. Each part of this body "envelope[s]" all and each other part (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2014, 100). The body is expressive, indivisible, and inexhaustible inhabiting space and time as it turns and reaches toward other subjects and objects in the world (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2014, 105, 139, 142, 144-145, 147). A body's schema is its "manner of expressing" that the body is "in and toward the world" (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2014, 103). Behold the phenomenological body, that holds onto and is held by the world. The "normal" body has many ways of holding and being held by the world. This is because the phenomenological body is more than just an objective fact or object for/of thought. It is simultaneously a habitual and actual living body (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2014, 84-87) open to "verbal and fiction" suggestions (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2014, 111).

Merleau-Ponty's work in *Phenomenology of Perception*, "Eye and Mind" (2007) and "The Intertwining – The Chiasm" (1964) is an intervention into the mind-body dualism that characterizes

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> discrediting others. These structures exist on many levels: social political, economic, psychological, epistemological, and even ontological. They are both "out there" in the world, in the documented patterns and examples of hetero-patriarchal racist domination, and they are also intrinsic to subjectivity and intersubjectivity, shaping the way we perceive ourselves, others, and the world." (Guenther 2019, 15-16)

Yet, as a political practice it falls back on an appeal to inter/subjectivity that seems to undercut its philosophical practice. That is, why are our imaginings limited to notions of subjectivity?

Cartesian thought. Taken together these texts situate the lived body/embodiment of the subject as not a consciousness of—or against the world—but an intimate engagement with and through the world. Merleau-Ponty's account of the subject *qua* lived body *qua* human is an activity, a doing what Olkowski translates as a "being *at* the world" (Olkowski 1983, 99, 101, 103, 105, 111, 115).[16] The way Merleau-Ponty's lived body is at the world distinguishes it from both intellectualism (the mind-forward) and empiricism (biology-forward). For Merleau-Ponty no human behavior is either just consciousness positing, or just biological reflex (Olkowski 1983, 99). Human existence is not a question of the mind and body set against each other on opposite sides. Existence speaks to the inextricability of the physical and the psychical in every action, the sort of which only happens at the human level (Olkowski 1983, 99-101). The body is not an object.

> I never fully become an object in the world; the fullness of being of a thing is always lacking for me, my own substance always runs away from me through the inside, and some intention is always sketched out. (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2014, 168/203).

Though Merleau-Ponty allows things to have a "fullness of being," this fullness is distinct from the fullness of the subject and is a distinction that only the subject/lived body can apprehend. I am reminded here, of Aristotle's differentiation between souls even as Merleau-Ponty rejects the body/soul binary. The lived body of the subject is intentional; it can feel itself going about in the world.

The body "accomplishes" existence—that is, it is in the lived body that existence takes on its full meaning, not in bare intellectualist cogitation. The subject/lived body is an assemblage of consciousnesses that resist a unified "consciousness of" (Merleau-Ponty [1964] 1968, 141)

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[16] Human behavior is directed toward an environment, a *field*. In this gesture, a manner of being at the world, i.e., a manner of existing, reveals itself as a style which is the definition of existence. This style involves the interplay of situation and individual, body and consciousness, and the multiplicity of different meanings available to us because we are a certain kind of body and have a certain kind of world. (Olkowski 1983, 101)

I am aware that Olkowski's reading of Merleau-Ponty—particularly in her attempts to bridge Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze—may be considered idiosyncratic. I include it because her peculiar way of reading provokes me in a way that I find useful. (I also find it instructive as this project makes its own idiosyncratic turns.)

> If the physical and the psychic are intimate to each other in every action, it seems necessary to find a common mode for them. This mode is what Merleau-Ponty calls, in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, "existence." Existence is what gives value to both body and consciousness and makes it possible for us to experience them together as an indistinguishable existential process operating in every human activity. (Olkowski 1983, 99)
>
> Existence, as defined by Merleau-Ponty, is the movement in depth between the body (impersonal largely predictable existence) and personal acts (open and unpredictable), which would not be possible if they were separated from their physiological grounds. (Olkowksi 1983, 101)

The body is a whole/cypher with two inextricable, intimate, simultaneous, but irreducible hemispheres/phases: the sensed and the sensing (Merleau-Ponty [1964] 1968, 138).[17] This intimacy means that the subject that emerges in Merleau-Ponty's account is one of movement, not fixity (100).[18] This body of enveloped enveloping and simultaneity is a body of change and a with-ness of the world. The body is with/at/in the world; with it in that the emergence of a body takes place in a location—the world—and because the world emerges with the body. At it, in the sense that each body as a certain style/schema, a fashion of orienting, hailing, and relating to and experiencing the world. In it, because this experience of the world is from within for just as the lived body is not an object (for the use/consideration of another consciousness) neither is it placed outside of the world, observing it.

On Merleau-Ponty's account, we are not alone in the world and that our being in the world is predicated on there being others. To emerge as a lived body in the world, is to emerge into a world with other lived bodies and things. Worlds are always already peopled and thinged. The challenge of the lived body—and this is also the beauty of Merleau-Ponty's account—is that its perception can

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[17] If one wants metaphors, it would be better to say that the body sensed and the body sentient are as the obverse and the reverse, or again, as two segments of one sole circular course which goes above from left to right and below from right to left, but which is but one sole movement in its two phases. And everything said about the sensed body pertains to the whole of the sensible of which it is a part, and to the world. If the body is one sole body in its two phases, it incorporates into itself the whole of the sensible and with the same movement incorporates itself into a "Sensible in itself." ([1964] 1968, 138)

[18] Only at the human level does life become what Merleau-Ponty calls existence. We live in a world of multiple forms of behavior. This is possible because humans can vary their relations to things by moving both their own bodies and the objects of their desires, releasing the entire situation from the here and now and projecting it into the future, the past or the make-believe. What this means is that every human act is overdetermined. It has not only one value, but a multiplicity of values; behavior on the human level is signification. (Olkowski 1983, 100)

never be total. Experience of the world is horizonal (Olkowski 2002, 20).[19] I take this to mean that the subject on Merleau-Ponty's account can at any moment have a different experience of/with the same "event" (Olkowski 1983, 103). Or, more strongly, just as we can never gain the horizon before us—just as the horizon is an ongoing unfolding—so too is perception for the lived body. This is because of the role that transcendence plays in Merleau-Ponty's account of perception. For Merleau-Ponty, the thing that is *there*, or that is presented in perception is only *partially* presented. This partiality means that that which is there *cannot be exhausted by my perception of it*, even as my perception of if guarantees its finitude (its *there-ness* in space). Similarly, the thing that is "not there" or not observable (a phantasm) is not the sum product of its lack of presentation. The phantasm is not the opposite of the thing that appears. The sensible—what is available to perception or what appears *for me*—cannot *totally* account for the thing which is there. This is because what is there always already contains an element that eludes the sensible**.** Because the thing is not totally observable as part(s) of the thing elude observation the thing that is "there" transcends our perception of it. One can only approach it as one approach the horizon.[20]

What this means is that knowledge is a process. The things and others perceived are their own horizons, and whilst we can constantly approach them, we can never seize them *in totum*. This points to both boon and a limitation for our self-perception. Not only are we constantly opening/emerging into/for/as ourselves, our sensory "organ/ization" (Stawarska 2006, 98) allows for an impartial

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[19] For Merleau-Ponty the world forms the horizon of the body's sensory-motor intentions (the perception-image) to which the human being as a center of indetermination or choice reacts. (Olkowski 2002, 20)

[20] The transcendence of the thing compels us to say that it is plenitude only by being inexhaustible, that is, by not being all actual under the look— but it promises this total actuality, since it is there…

When we say that— on the contrary— the phantasm is not observable, that it is empty, non-being, the contrast with the sensible is therefore not absolute. The senses are apparatus to form concretions of the inexhaustible, to form existent significations------But the thing is not really observable: there is always a skipping over in every observation, one is never at the thing itself. What we call the *sensible* is only the fact that the indefinite [succession] of *Abschattungen* precipitates------ But, conversely, there is a precipitation or crystallization of the imaginary, of the existentials, of the symbolic matrices---- -- (Merleau-Ponty [1964] 1968, 191-192).

experience of ourselves. We transcend what we alone can know of ourselves. More specifically, self-knowledge is impossible without another to experience us.

> As soon as we see other seers, we no longer have before us only the look without a pupil, the plate glass of the things with that feeble reflection, that phantom of ourselves they evoke by designating a place among themselves whence we see them: henceforth, through other eyes we are for ourselves fully visible; …For the first time, the seeing that I am is for me really visible; for the first time I appear to myself completely turned inside out under my own eyes. (Merleau-Ponty [1964] 1968, 143)

When the other seer, sees us—approaches us—then we are given back to ourselves knowledge of ourselves. Yet, we are not given others as ready-made objects in the world. That is because, for Merleau-Ponty others are not, nor can they ever be objects (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2014, 119/93). If the lived body is expressive, un-totalizable, and inexhaustible, then so too are all other lived bodies on Merleau-Ponty's account. This is palpable with a stance toward others, a way of being with other in the world. For though one can turn toward others in perception and experience, they are irreducible to my perception of them. They participate in my perception/experience of them in a way that goes beyond our encounter. This is an account of the lived body as excessive. To encounter another body is to encounter an expressive living of the body (Bredlau 2018, 84). This is the expression of a subject that intends. And this intension, sometimes in chorus with mine and sometimes in conflict with mine provides me with knowledge about myself: "other people are our very route into experience for ourselves—indeed, into experiencing ourselves *as* 'selves'" (Bredlau 2018, 69).

Yet, what we perceive does not ever seem to occupy a space of meaningless to us. We have some affective or attractional relationship to the others and things in our worlds. This is because Merleau-Ponty situates the lived body of the subject within a public and sensual milieu.

> The tactile body that I am is a *public* thing, taking me right from the start into the realm of public relations, that is, relations with other touching and tactile subjects. (Stawarska 2006, 101)

> There is osmosis between sexuality and existence, that is, if existence diffuses throughout sexuality, sexuality reciprocally diffuses throughout existence, such that it is impossible to identify the contribution of sexual motivation and the contribution of other motivations for a

> given decision or action, and it is impossible to characterize a decision or action as "sexual" or "nonsexual." (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2014, 172/208)
>
> There is no explanation of sexuality that reduces it to something other than itself, for it is already something other than itself; it already is, so to speak, our entire being. …[W]e never know if the forces that carry us belong to our body – or rather, such that they are never entirely our body's or entirely ours. Sexuality cannot be transcended, and yet, there is no self-enclosed sexuality. Not one is fully saved, and no one is fully lost. (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2014, 174/209-210)

The lived body of Merleau-Ponty's subject is bound up in intercorporeal relations between others and things. These relations play out—touch and are touched—through sensorial organ/izations of sexuality. Human existence, "the movement by which facts are taken up" is sexual (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2014, 173/208). The facts we take up are sexual. Sexuality is not an object (of consciousness or given in perception); it is the background against which being and things exist as meaningful. The lived body of Merleau-Ponty is a public and desiring body. This account of the body develops four features of the lived body.

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

II: The Lived Body of Flesh

In *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) the primordial orientation of the subject on Merleau-Ponty's account is a sexual orientation. The subject turns in and turns toward a horizon of sexual facts. Merleau-Ponty describes sexuality as "an ambiguous atmosphere… coextensive with life" which means that "ambiguity is essential to human existence, and everything that we live or think always has several senses" (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2014, 172/207). The subject's perception though impartial is conditioned through and through by sexuality.

Yet while sexuality might be that which organ/izes human existence and perception, it is not the grounds that make possible the emergence of the lived body's being. In Phenomenology of Perception Merleau-Ponty attributes this to primordial commonality—the biological facticity of having sensory organs and faculties. These sensory organs and faculties underpin the necessary conditions of our having a world. We have these organs and faculties because we are bodies. Perception is an essential condition of humanity. We are born able to sense/perceive (at least something). To be human, is to be a perceiving body to/for whom a world appears. To be human, is to be a body capable of being perceived (in and for a world). To put a finer point on it, it is because a world appears to **us** that a world appears. A world cannot appear without a perceiver. No perceiver, no world. We are implicated in the world that appears. (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2014, 214-225/251-262, 242-250/280-288). On Merleau-Ponty's account one might say that the first/initial/premiere world that appears is the natural world. This is where Merleau-Ponty shows his existentialism as this account can be read as existence—even though Merleau-Ponty's account of existence is less about biological facticity and more about making sense—precedes essence. So, the body that emerges into the world, emerges first into a biological/natural/anonymous world. A world of *homo sapiens* and not *homo sapiens* that is pre-personal (pre-ego) and pre-cultural world that implicates us as (being) pre-personal or anonymous bodies.[21] The lived body is claimed by (and claims) an "*originary acquisition*"—that supports the ambiguity/impartiality of perception and the inextricability of the organ/ization of sexuality—of the biological/natural or "physical world" (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2014, 224/261). Merleau-Ponty's claim of the "originary acquisition" gestures to a pre-cultural and embodied condition of neutrality shared by all homo sapiens that seems to guarantee the transition from homo sapiens to

[21] I do not think that neither think that existence precedes essence, nor do I think that essence precedes existence. I think that existence and essence are simultaneous and (to borrow from Merleau-Ponty) "accomplish" their meanings simultaneously in each other. Essence is nothing without existence and one cannot exist without essence.

human subject.[22] The lived body that emerges in *Phenomenology of Perception* and "The Child's Relation with Others" has a processional subjectivity in which the subject emerges in two relational steps. The first is the anonymous I, the pre-personal I. The second is the named "I." It is the pre-personal I, the one "for which we are [not] responsible," the one "that has already sided with the world," this other self that experiences sensations. My own being, the named/personal "I" *determines* the sensation.

> Neither my birth nor my death can appear to me as my personal experiences, since if I conceive of them in this way, I must imagine myself as preexisting or as surviving myself in order to be able to experience them, and thus I could not genuinely conceive of my birth or my death. Thus, I can only grasp myself as "already born" and as "still living." – I can only grasp my birth and my death as *pre-personal horizons*: I know that *one* is born and that *one* dies, but I cannot know *my* birth or *my* death. Being at the extreme the first, last, and only one of its kind, every sensation is a birth and a death. The subject who experiences it begins and ends with it, and since he can neither precede himself nor survive himself, sensation necessarily appears to itself in a milieu of generality. …Each time that I experience a sensation, I experience that it does not concern my own being – the one for which I am responsible and upon which I decide – but rather another self that has already sided with the world, that is already open to certain of its aspects and synchronized with them. (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2014, 224/261) (italics added)

Yet, in "The Intertwining – The Chiasm" (1964) Merleau-Ponty fleshes out what Stawarska describes as the "'anthropocentric'" account of the "*corps propre*" (the body proper) that he developed in *Phenomenology of Perception*.

> When Merleau-Ponty moves away from the incarnate subject or body-subject to the esthesiological body, that is, the body defined primarily in terms of a dynamic pertaining to the flesh as a whole and not as a privileged vantage point onto "objects" of perception… [t]he

[22] I read Merleau-Ponty's account of the originary acquisition as the natural body. We happen to be born with certain bodies. *Homo sapiens* hold certain attributes in common that distinguish them just enough from other *animalia*. The attributes of these bodies allow for the acquisition of certain habit/uations. For those reading Merleau-Ponty as resisting a description of the "originary acquisition" as biological/natural versus cultural, one may object that biology (or the concept "natural") is an acquisition, or a habit of retrospection. In her thorough, insightful, and provoking article, Alia Al-Saji (2008) takes very seriously Merleau-Ponty's account of man as historical. In her careful work on the temporality of perception (notably, rhythm and memory) Al-Saji takes this history to be a thick event. If man is an historical event; then the "biological" or "natural" attributes that separate *homo sapiens* from other fauna and flora must also be historical. I take Al-Saji to be saying that not only do we not come into this world as human; *neither do we come into this world as homo sapiens*. Our species distinction—also thought of as the subject/object distinction—is an acquisition/cultural habit (2008, 41-44). I read Al-Saji as nudging her readers to consider that there is a past prior to our past as *homo sapiens*, a past "which has never been present" that Merleau-Ponty takes up when he takes up the "originary acquisition."

We are in agreement that the human subject occurs at the level of culture/history. Yet, I maintain that though the prepersonal might not participate in subject/object distinction, the prepersonal body that is "affectively open to the world" which "is already a tentative rhythm, since it has a sensory history, constituted from previous encounters with the world and others" participates in distinctions at the attributory level that implicates the prepersonal in culture assignations (2008, 55).

> status of the body proper is significantly redefined in the process: it no longer provides the matrix but is turned into an "exemplar" of general sensibility and an instance of the anonymous movement of reversibility running in multiple vectors throughout the flesh. (Stwarska 2006, 95 & 96)

That is, rather than a body that is a "specialized self, familiar with a single sector of being" the body of flesh that emerges in Merleau-Ponty's later work is an example of generalized Being (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2014, 224/261). This body is "a sensible for itself," an event of Being that is inhabited by the sensible (Merleau-Ponty [1964] 1968, 138).

> If one wants metaphors, it would be better to say that the body sensed and the body sentient are as the obverse and the reverse, or again, as two segments of one sole circular course which goes above from left to right and below from right to left, but which is but one sole movement in its two phases. And everything said about the sensed body pertains to the whole of the sensible of which it is a part, and to the world. If the body is one sole body in its two phases, it incorporates into itself the whole of the sensible and with the same movement incorporates itself into a "Sensible in itself." ([1964] 1968, 138)

This is a "carnal being." I suggest that this use of "carnal" here is a nod to the body as a sexed being in his earlier work and to denote their progression in his later work.

> We will, all at once, discover sexual like as an original intentionality as well as the vital roots of perception, motricity, and representation, by grounding all of these 'processes' upon an 'intentional arc' that… for the normal subject gives experience its degrees of vitality and fecundity. (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2014, 160/195).

> The flesh of the body is precisely this sexual style of behavior, this insertion in the world, in relation to the world and to others. (Olkowski 1983, 113)

> The "genital" and even the "sexual" exist because they are the *flesh* (that is, not a "phenomenon" or a "phenomenal body," but a *being with two facets*, which is what it is and also what it is not and has to be, an openness, a "light" in the sense that we speak of "lighting" the canon. If you like a "for itself" (*eine Art der Reflexion*) but which is also a for others, a gaze but which is also gazed upon and therefore relation to a being in proximity. (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 436)

The body of flesh is what "unites us directly with the things" due to the manner in which it comes into being, "by welding to one another the two outlines of which it is made, its two laps: the sensible mass it is and the mass of the sensible wherein it is born" (Merleau-Ponty [1964] 1968, 136). The "two laps" of the carnal body "can bring us to the things themselves" because it is intimately

connected to them and constituted by them through the flesh—the second "lap" ([1964] 1968, 136). The carnal body has two phases—simultaneously—objective and subjective, "from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them" ([1964] 1968,137). Yet rather than discrete, these two phases are inextricable, touching and forming each other in and through the flesh that is the background for their existence.

The flesh of Merleau-Ponty's account in "The Intertwining – The Chiasm" (1964) is the condition for the body; it is what the body shares in and with the sensorial world. So rather than biology being the condition for the body and the sensorial world, it is flesh ([1964] 1968, 131-133, 135, 139-140, 144, 147, 151). Merleau-Ponty largely explores this through the visual.

> When we speak of the flesh of the visible, we do not mean to do anthropology, to describe a world covered over with all our own projections, leaving aside what it can be under the human mask. Rather, we mean that carnal being, as a being of depths, of several leaves or several faces, a being in latency, and a presentation of a certain absence, is a prototype of Being, of which our body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant, but whose constitutive paradox already lies in every visible. ([1964] 1968, 136)

Flesh is the connective medium, a "tissue that lines… sustains and nourishes" the shared world of subjects and things ([1964] 1968, 132). It is "not a thing" but a kind of state, a kind of *manifold* for the emergence of things: "a possibility, a latency" ([1964] 1968, 133). Because of this, flesh is the "means of communication" between the things of the visible and the embodied seer ([1964] 1968, 135). "The flesh is not matter;" it is "an 'element' of Being" ([1964] 1968, 139). To be human is to be *in* the flesh and *of* the flesh as not a thing or an object ([1964] 1968, 141). Flesh as the precondition for the ontological and phenomenological acts as a kind of vestibule, a condition for the existence of a particular being, the realm of latency and possibility through which the sensing/sensed subject emerges. While there is no "outside" of flesh—the subject does not exit flesh—I read Merleau-Ponty as allowing the subject enough distance to be able to recognize others and things as also of and in flesh.

In a way this account enhances the intersubjectivity that emerges in *Phenomenology of Perception* and "The Child's Relation with Others" (2007). Not only do we emerge in a world peopled and thinged, but we also emerge on the same plane as others and things. Merleau-Ponty's work on flesh aims at a general account of Being that distinguishes but does not set up in an (explicit) hierarchy a class distinction between the lived carnal body and things.

> However, insofar as we are beings at the level of things, we are caught up with them at the same level of visibility. We cannot polarize body and world because both have the same flesh. If we are of the world, we must participate in every articulation of the world flesh. The presence of the world to our bodies is the presence of its flesh, its dimensionality and possibility, a sustaining fissure out of which beings are individuated. (Olkowski 1983, 112)

> Subjectivity is truly *no one*. It is truly the desert. What is constitutive of the subject is to be integrally with the things, with the world, to have no positively assignable interior, to be generality. Subjectivity is this foam at the mouth of the world, that the world never dissipates. This is where we find the truth of what Sartre says about nothingness. (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 426)

In the fleshy space of this chiasmatic world our engagements open onto multiple horizons and possibilities.

III: Other Bodies: Feminist and Critical Phenomenologists Problematize Flesh

Merleau-Ponty's fleshy revival at the end of his life suggests a critical reassessment of quotidian interactions. The move away from the body proper brings with it what seems to be a move away from the subject proper that emerges in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945)—particularly when he writes blind people. Whereas "The Visible and the Invisible" (1964) gives us the vision-touch system (with its irreducible but simultaneous phases), *Phenomenology of Perception* can be read as drawing a stark line between vision and touch—if not prioritizing sight altogether. (I will sound out what I take to be Merleau-Ponty's privileging of sight/vision in sensorial organ/ization in the following chapter.)

So, it is encouraging that Merleau-Ponty moves from the limitations of this account of the subject to his more general account of Being in his later work. However, I worry that the

normal/pathologized divide of his earlier work has consequences for his later work. There are only two choices, it seems for life in the flesh: perceivers/subjects and things. And though this is an attempt to avoid the projection of anthropological dominance, the work Merleau-Ponty does to establish flesh as defined by "reversibility" undoes the generality of his account ([1964] 1968, 144). Though Merleau-Ponty moves from an anthropocentric account of the sensing subject in his earlier work to a generalized account of being via the body of flesh in his later work, there is cause to question whether this move insulates him from more critical readings of the lived body (of flesh).

One of the rather beautiful and yet troubling concepts that emerges from Merleau-Ponty's account of the flesh is that of the hollow. The hollow is the space of nonbeing that is enveloped by—and so conditions—the two phases of being. It is not, a hole rather is it the *openness of the world*.

> In short: nothingness (or rather non being) is hollow and not *hole*. The open, in the sense of a *hole*, that is Sartre, is Bergson, is negativism or ultra positivism (Bergson)— indiscernible. There is no *nichtiges Nichts*. Bring to a focus my discussion of Bergson's ideas on nothingness: I am right in saying that Bergson proves too much, but wrong in seeming to conclude from that that Sartre is right. The negintuition of nothingness is to be rejected because nothingness also is always *elsewhere*. The true solution: *Offenheit* of the *Umwelt, Horizonhaftigkeit*. ([1964] 1968, 198)

The hollow is not a void—this is a rejection of nihilism—rather as the openness of the world, it is the latency of being (simultaneously and in both phases). At the heart of flesh is possibility, horizonality. Following Olkowski, I read Merleau-Ponty's account of the flesh as a response to Bergson's account of affective life. Whilst Bergson's account of affective life as the sense of the external world acting upon one's body fraught, what Bergson's account does offer is a way to tease out the implicit claim in Merleau-Ponty's later work that the sensing/sensed being that emerges is both human and a subject. For Bergson, perception and affection are differences in kind (not in degree). Affection and perception orient the body differently. In perception bodies are oriented toward space, "matter… and the world;" in affection bodies are oriented towards "temporality, memory, and mind" (Olkowski 2002, 16). Specifically, affectivity is distinct from perception in that while perception it is received from "'without'" affection is from within: "there is an interval of affectivity, in which one feels the

influence of the world upon one's body" (Olkowski 2002, 2016). In this affective interval we have a unique capacity: hesitation.

> This interval makes it possible for us to reflect and act differently or to choose not to act at all. This means that affective life is a moment of freedom, a moment of indetermination. (Olkowski 2002, 17)

In the *Preface for Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty quickly dispels this as a capacity worthy of perception of the real.

> ***If the reality of my perception were base solely on the intrinsic coherence of "representations," then it should always be hesitant***, and, delivered over to my probable conjectures, I ought to be continuously dismantling illusory syntheses and reintegrating into the real aberrant phenomena that I may have at first excluded. ***But this is never the case***. ***The real is a tightly woven fabric; it does not wait*** for our judgements in order to incorporate the most surprising of phenomena, nor to reject the most convincing of our imaginings. ([1945] 2014, lxxiv/11) (emphasis added)

Where the interval of affection/hesitation for Bergson is a space for innovation and creation and the openness of horizons, Merleau-Ponty locates this first, in the lived body of the subject in *Phenomenology of Perception* and then later in the carnal body of flesh. Yet, in his attempt to hollow out space for himself as distinct from Bergson, he limits the experiencer to the human subject.

> He explicitly denies the existence of a third sort of experience, which would constitute a third image, that of affect, and so named, the affection-image. Merleau-Ponty argues that the notion of "sensation," understood as "the way in which I am affected and the experiencing of a state of myself," is completely "confused" and "corresponds to nothing in ***our*** experience." (Olkowski 2002, 21) (emphasis added)

For Bergson, affectivity can be found in *all* beings.

> [A]ffectivity is not restricted to human beings. Everywhere in the world, every living being with the power of mobility engages in the dual functions of perception and affection. The former is related directly to action in the world, while the latter is the immediate contact with and the influence of the world upon any body. (Olkowski 2002, 2016)

While Merleau-Ponty does not explicitly bar other animals from being, they do not emerge with the same quality—or capacity—of existence such that other animals might fall into the things—and not others/subjects—relation in "The Intertwining – The Chiasm" (Olkowski 1983, 100).

I want to focus on the use of "our" here to further problematize the generality of flesh as underpinning a very particular subject. The full sentence reads as follows:

> Since the authors already concede the point [about sensation as an impression on one], it is unnecessary to show that this notion corresponds to nothing in our experience, and that for animals such as the chimpanzee or the chicken, the most simple *factual perceptions* that we know have to do with relationships and not absolute terms. (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2014, 3-4)

Here we see Merleau-Ponty distinguishing "us" from other animals. "We know" that there is a distinction between sensation and phenomena. Yet, there is a more limited reading of this "our/we" when read through a feminist lens, that of the obliteration of sexual difference and the universalization of the AMAB[23] and man-identified body as neutral.

A central theme of Olkowski and Weiss' 2006 edited collection, *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty* is that of reading Luce Irigaray's oeuvre on sexuate difference against Merleau-Ponty's account of the body proper and the body of flesh. Though Irigaray's attention to difference yields wonder-full openings onto caress, labiality, ethics, and the feminine, her work notably leaves much to be desired where questions of race, sexuate difference beyond a fe/male binary, and class come to bear. This weakness—as it emerges in the chapters I will draw on in their critique of universality in Merleau-Ponty—propels my more particular critique of the *corps propre* and the carnal body.

In "From the Body Proper to Flesh: Merleau-Ponty on Intersubjectivity" Beata Stawarska (20060 points out that the "reversibility" that Merleau-Ponty attributes to flesh is predicated on a conflation of intracorporeal and inter-corporeal touch (Stawarska 2006, 94). This means that his account of intersubjectivity is deeply flawed, for his account of flesh traffics the universal in a way that neglects sexuate difference and effaces the other (2006, 92, 96-99, 101). Stawarska argues that Merleau-Ponty neglects gender difference by substituting the male body as the "standard norm" and

[23] AMAB is an acronym for "Assigned male at birth." This is a term that speaks to the medical assignation of sex (based upon external observation of the genitals of the infant) that might differ significantly for the gender or social identity of the person with those genitals.

"treating the female body as a special case" (2006, 92, 103). On Stawarska's reading this is immediately due to the conception of inter-corporeal touch in terms of intracorporeal touch. That is, Merleau-Ponty's example of the handshake is based upon his understanding of the right hand of Body A touching/touched by the left hand of Body A (and where Body A is Merleau-Ponty's body). He ignores the difference between touching himself and touching another. This is a significant because intracoporeal touch is self-referencing in a way that inter-corporeal touch is not and serves as the grounds for the distinction between myself and another (94). I know another as not myself as *the lack of me in the touch* hails the other as not myself (94). However, on Merleau-Ponty's account this not myselfness, once established, gets buried under the myself of touch. All touch is my/self touching.

> Notice, however, that touching oneself provides the feedback from one's sensible body that is *de jure* missing in the case of touching the body of another person. This presence or absence of feedback distinguishes an intracorporeal tactile experience from an intercorporeal one. …[T]here is a form of corporeal *self*-referencing present when I touch the hand belonging to *my sensible body* and identified as *mine*, but that is absent when I shake hands with someone whose hand is experienced as *other*, as belonging to *the body of the other*. …The distinction self/other thus gets effaced in Merleau-Ponty's philosophical project for the sake of singling out a paradigm case of sensible/sentient reversal on which a uniform explanatory theory of carnal life, defined through a uniform incarnate principle of reversibility, can be built.
>
> It follows that when Merleau-Ponty employs the example of *self*-touching as the norm for any corporeal dynamic, "its concrete specificity [gets] submerged in its collapse into the universal," to employ Bordo's apt phrase for our purposes.
>
> **…[T]he experience of one's own body comes to provide the matrix for intersubjective or intercorporeal relations.** (Stawrska 2006, 94) (emphasis added)

Merleau-Ponty's account of reversibility is predicated on the self-touch of the subject (intrasubjectivity) and falls short of true intersubjectivity. Merleau-Ponty substitutes his (the subject's) hand for the hand of the other in the handshake encounter (Starwarska 2006, 96-97).[24] Inter-corporeal

[24] "When my right hand touches my left, I am aware of it as a 'physical thing.' But at the same moment, if I wish, an extraordinary event takes place: here is my left hand as well starting to perceive my right... Thus I touch myself touching." **Now, when I shake the hand of another man, "his hand is *substituted* for my left hand"** (PS, 168; emphasis added) and his touch is substituted for the exploratory potential of my left hand. **The hand of the other takes the place of the organ belonging to my body and leaves unaffected the nature of the reflexive or bidirectional relation between touching and being touched. In a handshake, my body merely "annexes the body of another person in that 'sort**

reversibility requires that the subject be able to be on the (lived) side of the other. But the subject can only be on the side of its body. So, the subject cannot move from the passivity of being touched in a handshake to touching itself for itself in the handshake. Reversibility in the inter-corporeal encounter is incomplete; it is a "return to the self" having never moved at all (Stawarska 2006, 101).[25]

In "Urban Flesh," Gail Weiss offers an Irigarian reading to point out the danger and violence in Merleau-Ponty's account of flesh as "pure generality" and reversible (Weiss 2006, 148). In her reading of Irigaray, Merleau-Ponty's claim of pure generality breaks down immediately because it is "always already differentiated" through sexuate difference. For Irigaray this differentiation is irreversible, and the misreading of this irreversibility leads to significant harm.

> Irigaray is especially concerned with a very particular form of fleshly differentiation, namely, sexual difference, and she takes Merleau-Ponty to task for failing to acknowledge its irreversibility. Most notably, she argues that women's flesh has historically been understood as a (deficient) mirror of men's flesh, a specular surface that, far from revealing genuine difference, reveals only what men want to see. The danger, on her account, of understanding the flesh as a "general thing" is that the flesh is not pure generality; rather, the flesh is always already differentiated, and some forms of differentiation, most notably sexual differentiation, are misrecognized if they are understood through the model of reversibility that Merleau-Ponty famously illustrates through the example of one hand touching the other. (Weiss 2006, 148)

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of reflection' it is paradoxically the seat of" (ibid.). The paradox of reflection applies therefore to contacts of skin surface within the limits of the body proper and to contacts with other tactile bodies. (Starwarska 2006, 96-97)

The duplicity of activity/passivity is the attribute of a body and its sensibility. As localized in the (reflexive) body, sensations can be identified as mine. The reflexivity of sensations means that the activity of sensing is referred back to the organ and that the organ is aware of itself as it palpates something other. (Stawarska 2006, 98-99)

[25] Yet insofar as *I am* the public body that the other can touch, I remain, as Merleau-Ponty put it, always "on the same side of my body" (VI, 194/148). I remain on the same side of the hand that greets the other but cannot greet itself, for it cannot go to "the other side" of the body, the side of the body of the other with whom I shake hands. It is this inalterable *situation* in my body that prevents the reversibility I experience when my co-present hands touch themselves from fusing with the reversibility I live when I touch and am touched by another person. **It is the unique vantage point of my body that prevents me from adopting the vantage point of the other and grasping the passivity of my hand being touched as the activity of the other touching hand. What distinguishes the intercorporeal relation from the intracorporeal one is that the passivity of my hand touched by the other—unlike the passivity of my hand that I touch—*cannot reverse into an activity (of touching) for me*, even though I can respond to the other touching me by touching them in turn.** The break between my body (the body proper) and the body of the other separates two irreducible forms of bodily experience and makes it impossible to theorize reversibility as a uniform category applicable to the flesh as a whole. (Stawarska 2006, 101)

Flesh is not pure generality, it necessarily differentiates in/as its ongoing manner of stylization—that is it sets as different/apart in its manner of bringing into being, Being—and it unifies. A style is necessarily an identifiable cohesion, a unit of established way of being. But because stylization is ongoing, styles need not become sedentary (Weiss 2006, 148).

In "Language in the Flesh: The Politics of Discourse in Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and Irigaray" Ann V. Murphy explores the critiques of Merleau-Ponty's anonymous sociality even as she provides succinct and thoughtful defense against those critiques—largely of Irigaray—through her reading of Merleau-Ponty. The Irigarian critique that Murphy unpacks—"[T]he other of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is not sufficiently different from the self"—is very much in line with the critique Stawarska provides earlier (Murphy 2006, 258). While Stawarska focuses on Merleau-Ponty's account of touch, Murphy focuses on how "Merleau-Ponty understood the experience of intersubjectivity in language" (2006, 258).[26] To this end, she highlights Irigaray's (and Levinas') critique of the prepersonal and the sociality that inheres in the natural world. For Irigaray—as we see in Stawarska and Weiss—this bid to anonymity, indifferentiation, and generality *sames* the Other (Murphy 2006, 259-260, 264, 267).

> At the heart of Irigaray's criticism is the claim that such an ontology cannot accommodate "an other whose body's ontological status is different than my own," an other who is irreducible to the self (ESD, 157/148). The rendering of the relationship between the subject and language as circular prompts Irigaray's accusation that Merleau-Ponty's discourse is "monosexual," to the extent that it fails to leave a place for the articulation of a differently sexed subjectivity (ESD, 177/165). (Murphy 2006, 267)

Murphy offers a rousing defense of Merleau-Ponty against these criticisms by nothing the role of the transcendental in his account which she ties directly to his appreciation of sexuate difference (2006, 261-263, 268-269).

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[26] Levinas argues that the sense of rupture and noncoincidence between self and Other that imbues Merleau-Ponty's discourse is superficial to the extent that the Other is known within the horizon of a common history and language. Hence the alterity of the Other is not absolute in the Levinasian sense. The Irigarayan critique—while it shares much of the spirit of Levinas's criticism—bends this concern in an explicitly feminist direction. Irigaray argues that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of language retains a problematic tendency toward universalizing and totalizing the experience of an unknowable feminine Other. (Murphy 2006, 258)

> Indeed, when Merleau-Ponty speaks, in the *Visible and the Invisible*, of a negation, or nonpresence, that makes possible the "being in transcendence" of-the Other, he renders the relation between self and other as one of alterity and dispersion (VI, 228/277). Sexual difference is itself located in this transcendence: "[i]t is this negative that makes possible the vertical world, the union of incompossibles, the being in transcendence ... and the male-female relation" (VI, 228/277). Merleau-Ponty's identification of sexual difference as a transcendental difference would seem, counter to Irigaray's protests, to bring the two in striking proximity to each other. (Murphy 2006, 268)

However, following Spillers, I do not think that this understanding of a transcendent sexuate difference gets Merleau-Ponty sufficiently far enough way the dangers of the Subject/object binary.

Central to Merleau-Ponty's account of the lived body (and the generality of Being) is his implication of a common and neutral experience in the first world inhabited by the lived body. That is, I read Merleau-Ponty's claim of the "originary acquisition" as state of always already first belonging to the natural world prior to belonging to a world of culture (no matter how swift the incursion/imbrication of culture is) as gesturing to an embodied condition shared by all homo sapiens. As he goes on to describe perception and experience, this implied common/shared origin is conflated into a presumed/assumed common/shared status—that of the human qua perceiver qua subject—regardless of whatever cultural worlds these *homo sapiens* inhabit. I am troubled by this move from a singular-universal the—in the natural world—to a singular-particular a—of culture. While I am cheered that Merleau-Ponty's account allows for multiple coeval and simultaneous cultural worlds, I am critical of the implication that each of these worlds are inhabited by the human subject. And perhaps more specifically, I am critical of the silence on the ways that not all homo sapiens are human subjects.

I recognize that one of the arguments Merleau-Ponty attempts to shut down in his discussion of the pre-personal/natural body is the subjectivism and egotism of psychoanalysis. By removing ego from the initial question of who the perceiver is Merleau-Ponty is able to distinguish between sensing and sensation (colors, etc.). Sensing is the function of the lived body in its natural state. Or: we sense because we are embodied in the first place. Sensations are the judgements or determinations of the

ego. They are the impressions the sensory data leave. That is, I (this ego named "Andrea Dionne Warmack") see because I have eyes; I see red because I, Andrea, am "sensitive" to red ([1945] 2014, 254/217-257/219). Merleau-Ponty wants to tie perception to the facticity of the natural body and what Kant would call the "inclinations" of the enculturated body.

I have two objections to this. One: *prior to* ego acquisition/development one is assigned to a group. As my grandmother used to say, "I've been a Negro since the day I was born, Undra." *Group-assignation does not require ego acquisition*. Group assignation is sociogenic/cultural. I would suggest that, particularly in the case of american white people and their lived experience of, with, and through whiteness, group-assignation *guides* ego acquisition. To me this means that if there is such thing as ***an*** originary acquisition, it is not singular. Just as group-assignation precedes ego acquisition/development, in some cases it also precedes *existence*. Group assignment is the "immi/anence" of existence and essences as simultaneous. I was Black and assigned female *before I was on this plane*. In her 1984 "Notes Toward a Politics of Location" Adrienne Rich explores the personal-political-ethical nature of group assignation as prior to personality acquisition.

> This body, White, female; or famel, White. This first obvious, lifelong facts. But I was born in the whie section of a hospital which separated Black and white women in labor and Black and white babies in the nursery, just as it separated Blck and white bodies in the morgue. I was defined as white before I was defined as female. (Rich 1994, 217).

I would be a totally different Andrea (actually, that I would have been named "Gladys"), certainly, but they too would have been assigned-Black and assigned-female *in utero*. And this group assignation is concomitant with the arrival on this place of the pre-personal me.

Second: even if there was a moment when the fetus that would open onto the horizon of the named- "I", Andrea Dionne, entered the world as unassigned, as culturally neutral, this is an early example of Merleau-Ponty's fall back onto universalizing speech. If the fact of being *homo sapien* is what all human subjects share in common, and this is the world to which we all belong, a natural world of "originary acquisition" then this a universal account of neutral. Yet the speed of apprehension, the

incursion of the culture, then the "basic structure of history," its initial flaying renders that neutrality irrelevant experientially if not false on its face. Stronger: I remain unconvinced that this neutrality isn't the initial site of white supremacy and sexed, gender, ability, and racial privilege of Merleau-Ponty's account. That is, in practical lived experience: very few people other than cishet white men *aim* at neutrality or *aim* at universality as the central tenet of intersubjectivity. That Merleau-Ponty believes that all *homo sapiens* can be subjects is because his account of the subject (as is his general account of Being and flesh) is predicated upon the various privileges of his body. And as feminist interpreters of Merleau-Ponty have shown, *his* body effaces bodies that are not his in his accounts of perception and experience.

I take this to mean that the very claims that emerge from Merleau-Ponty's description and method—that the body is bound up in recognizing encounters; is never an object for another; can never be spread out in front of one; and is a subject among other subjects—implicate Merleau-Ponty's white, cishet, male, able body qua norm qua human subject. What I take to be Merleau-Ponty's foundational normative claim about what the human body is, I take as a normative claim about who the normative human subject is. And in line with Stawarska, Weiss, Wieseler, and even Reynolds to some extent, I believe that this claim is the result of a normate that Merleau-Ponty is a representative of, a human body that has only been bound up in recognizing encounters, a human body that has never been an object for another or spread out in front of itself. This is a human body that has never been gendered, racialized, and/or had their ability rendered in terms of other.

IV: You can Keep Your Humanity to Yourself, Thank You Very Much. We Good.

What is at stake in the work of distinguishing homo sapiens from the human/the subject? On one hand this distinction sounds out the fact of not just the subject as a construct but the human as well. And in this anthropocentric time, it strikes me as possible that the subject is a result of the construct

of the human. On the other hand, and the one that is a central theme of this work, is that one sees how the construct of human excludes varied diasporas of homo sapiens from its status.

While we may be homo sapiens (for now), Black people/folx—at least in the american context—are not humans. Though this might sound Afro-pessimistic—and while the commentary can be useful and describing structures of antiblackness—mine a project that takes up this nonhumanity as an opening and a privilege. To be beyond the clutches of the human coil is a unique opportunity for expressive and affective engagements otherwise.

> To be alive at such an epoch is a privilege, to be a woman then is sublime. … But to be a woman of the Negro race in America, and to be able to grasph the deep significance of the possibilities of the crisis, is to have a heritage, it seems to me, unique in the ages. (Cooper 1892, 144)

Anna Julie Cooper's turn to the moral authority of women—specifically Blackwomxn—as the necessary force to correct the errors of america's ways are predicated upon the particular ways in which, Blackwomxn are "confronted by both a woman question and a race problem, and is as yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both" (Cooper 1892, 134). Though critical phenomenologists usually turn to Franz Fanon, I find Anna Julia Cooper just as, if not more so, adept at giving voice to the conflict of Black lived experience.

> And when farther on in the same section our train stops at a dilapidated station, rendered yet more unsightly by dozens of loafers with their hands in their pockets while a productive soil and inviting climate beckon in vain to industry ; and when, looking a little more closely, I see two dingy little rooms with "FOR LADIES" swinging over one and "FOR COLORED PEOPLE" over the other; while wondering under which head I come, I notice a little way off the only hotel proprietor of the place whittling a pine stick as he sits with one leg thrown across an empty goods box ; and as my eye falls on a sample room next door which seems to be driving the only wide-awake and [1945] 2014ular business of the commonwealth, I cannot help ejaculating under my breath, "What a field for the missionary woman." I know that if by any fatality I should be obliged to lie over at that station, and, driven by hunger, should be compelled to seek refreshments or the bare necessaries of life at the only public accommodation in the town, that same stick-whittler would coolly inform me, without looking up from his pine splinter, "We doan uccommodate no niggers hyur." (Cooper 1892, 96-97)

So much for the longing to be a man among other men (Fanon [1952] 2008, 92). Fanon writes that the "black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man" (Fanon [1952] 2008, 90).

On one hand, Anna Julia Cooper—by exactly 60 years—anticipates this narrative, whilst simultaneously standing it on its head. The particular experience from and of which she moves testifies to the breakdown of the construct of "ladies" and the human, to create the generalized pejorative other of "colored people" that leaves her standing there both "wondering under which head" she comes and observing the un-aspirational status of the stick-whittler qua human subject. What I suggest is that contra- and preceding Fanon, Anna Julia Cooper interrogates the ethical, moral, perceptual, and experiential failure of subjectivity of the subject while affirming an ontological pre-possession. The stick-whittler subject denudes Cooper of subjectivity, lays bare the flesh of her nonhumanity his use of "nigger." And can we not imagine that part of the power of the word, when used as a slur, is its ability to mark difference and group assignment at the natural level? Before even lifting his head from his "pine splinter"—before Anna Julia Cooper runs up against his named-I apprehension of her as an other—the group assignation, given her position in the train/car, attaches to her such that her homo sapien-ness is simultaneous with her nonhuman-ness. And yet, despite this she remains—she insists devastation—her perceptual horizon from her position of differentiated Being moves outward and she both describes what she perceives and prepares a geography of her own experience. Her being—because it is otherwise—has more capacity than just resistance.

I see the possibility of this capacity beyond that of subjectivity and humanity in Jayna Brown's (2021) *Black Utopias: Speculative Life and the Music of Other Worlds*. It is clear in this piece that on Brown's account Black folx are not human. Yet Brown takes up the exclusion of Black people from humanity and our displacement from subjectivity as a radical opportunity to explore the scope of being beyond humanity (Brown 2021, 4, 6-9, 13-14, 25, 47, 112, 171-176).[27] Brown centers flesh, rather than the body and the subject as the point of departure for thinking about our engagements with others.

[27] I want to note that Brown is not content to interrogate our humanity in her thrilling book. Brown also interrogates our species-distinction and asks: *How* ***homo sapiens*** *are we* (2021, 124-126)? How stable is the notion of species? What are the possibilities for creation and relation that emerge in this space of our fecund and undying nonhumanity (2021, 51)?

On Brown's account flesh has its own affective and communicative register. Flesh communicates via feeling (both in the sense of touch and emotion) in robust expressive acts. Feeling—with and as community—draws its strength from and makes possible diasporic kinships that flourish despite dispersal and practices of creation that mobilize the ecstatic breakdown of the human subject. Brown's turn to flesh is a turn toward opacity, interiority, and an erotic porosity of creation.

> I refer here to flesh rather than bodies—fleshliness as well as embodiment—because to surrender to touch, to our sensations, is to loosen the bounds of individualism, to mingle with other flesh and with the elements. …Flesh can be ripped apart but has the ability to reinvigorate itself, to reach for a condition of liveliness. Flesh is not synonymous with a "captive …subject position"; rather it is free of the need for subjectivity. I contend there is freedom in flesh, in the moments when it is excluded from being marked, as it feels, and responds to, touch. (Brown 2021, 11-12)

Though Brown's work centers the speculative fiction of Octavia Butler and Samuel Delaney (as well as the devotional music of Alice Coltrane and Sun Ra), I am drawn to—and reminded by Brown in this passage on flesh—the "critical fabulation" of Toni Morrison's "recombinant narrative" in *Beloved* (Hartman 2008,11-12).[28] In one of the character, Sethe's, "re-memories" she goes back to

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To whom are we beholden, and how? In the "Conclusion" that is less a conclusion than it is an introduction, there is an opening onto being/with otherwise. Brown's is a call to "join the awesome, the unexpected, already present in this world," a call for us to abandon ourselves to molecularity, to a kind a fleshy stardust ontology that requires an ethics "not predicated on the model of responsibility" (2021, 178). While my work in this project is not this further stellar interrogation, I am intrigued by it and its possibilities. Is it possible that what I am exploring here with these questions of geography and otherwise/beyond and fleshy practices open onto non-*homo sapiens* corporeality? Do fleshy selves require *homo sapiens* grounding?

[28] In the Forward of the 2004 edition of *Beloved*, Morrison writes about the process of *Beloved*.

> A newspaper clipping in *The Black Book* summarized the story of Magaret Garner, a young mouther who, having escaped slavery, was arrested for killing one of her children (and trying to kill the others) rather than let them be returned to the owner's plantation. …The historical Margaret Garner is fascinating, but, to a novelist, confining. Too little imaginative space there for my purposes. So I would invent her thoughts, plumb them for a subtext that was historically true in essence, but not strictly factual in order to relate her history to contemporary issues about freedom, responsibility, and women's "place." The heroine would represent the unapologetic acceptance of shame and terror; assume the consequences of choosing infanticide; claim her own freedom. …To render enslavement as a personal experience, language must get out of the way. (Morrison 2004, xvii & xix)

This tracks with Hartman's explication and use of critical fabulation.

> The conditional temporality of "what could have been," according to Lisa Lowe, "symbolizes aptly the space of a different kind of thinking, a space of productive attention to the scene of loss, a thinking with twofold attention that seeks to encompass at once the positive objects and methods of history and social science and the matters absent, entangled and unavailable by its methods."
>
> The intention here isn't anything as miraculous as recovering the lives of the enslaved or redeeming the dead, but rather laboring to paint as full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible. This double gesture can be described as straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the

the community practices. In her present(ing) loneliness and guilt, Sethe journeys to a place/time, a geography, of the simultaneity of Blackrage, Blackmourning, Blackkin, Blacktime, and Blackjoy that is identified as that of the fleshy, as lived matter(ing).

> When warm weather came, Baby Suggs, holy, followed by every black man, woman and child who could make it through, took her great heart to the Clearing—a wide-open place cut deep in the woods nobody knew for what at the end of a path known only to deer and whoever cleared the land in the first place. In the heat of every Saturday afternoon, she sat in the clearing while the people waited among the trees.
>
> After situating herself on a huge flat-sided rock, Baby Suggs bowed her head and prayed silently. The company watched her from the trees. They knew she was ready when she put her stick down. Then she shouted, "Let the children come!" and they ran from the trees toward her.
>
> "Let your mothers hear you laugh," she told them, and the woods rang. The adults looked on and could not help smiling.
>
> Then "Let the grown men come," she shouted. They stepped out one by one from among the ringing trees.
>
> "Let your wives and your children see you dance," she told them, and groundlife shuddered under their feet.

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same time, enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration.

The method guiding this writing practice is best described as critical fabulation. "Fabula" denotes the basic elements of story, the building blocks of the narrative. A fabula, according to Mieke Bal, is "a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused and experienced by actors. An event is a transition from one state to another. Actors are agents that perform actions. (They are not necessarily human.) To act is to cause or experience and event."

By playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done. By throwing into crisis "what happened when" and by exploiting the "transparency of sources" as fictions of history, I wanted to make visible the production of disposable lives (in the Atlantic slave trade and, as well, in the discipline of history), to describe "the resistance of the object," if only by first imagining it, and to listen for the mutters and oaths and cries of the commodity. By flattening the levels of narrative discourse and confusing narrator and speakers, I hoped to illuminate the contested character of history, narrative, event, and fact, to topple the hierarchy of discourse, and to engulf authorized speech in the clash of voices. The outcome of this method is a "recombinant narrative," which "loops the strands" of incommensurate accounts and which weaves present, past, and future in retelling the girl's story and in narrating the time of slavery as our present.

Narrative restraint, the refusal to fill in the gaps and provide closure, is a requirement of this method, as is the imperative to respect black noise—the shrieks, the moans, the nonsense, and the opacity, which are always in excess of legibility and of the law and which hint at and embody aspirations that are wildly utopian, derelict to capitalism, and antithetical to its attendant discourse of Man. (Hartman 2008, 11-12)

> Finally she called the women to her. "Cry," she told them. "For the living and the dead. Just cry." And without covering their eyes the women let loose.
>
> It started that way: laughing children, dancing men, crying women and then it got mixed up. Women stopped crying and danced; men sat down and cried; children danced, women laughed, children cried until, exhausted and riven, all and each lay about the Clearing damp and gasping for breath. In the silence that followed, Baby Suggs, holy, offered up to them her great big heart.
>
> She did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more. She did not tell them they were the blessed of the earth, its inheriting meek or its glorybound pure.
>
> She told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it.
>
> "Here," she said, "in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. *You* got to love it, *you*! And no, they ain't in love with your mouth. Yonder, out there, they will see it broken and break it again. What you say out of it they will not heed. What you scream from it they do not hear. What you put into it to nourish your body they will snatch away and give you leavins instead. No, they don't love your mouth. *You* got to love it. This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance; backs that need support; shoulders that need arms, strong arms I'm telling you. And O my people, out yonder, hear me, they do not love your neck unnoosed and straight. So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up. And all your inside parts that they'd just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them. The dark, dark liver—love it, love it, and the beat and beating heart, love that too. More than eyes or feet. More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize." Saying no more, she stood up then and danced with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say while the others opened their mouths and gave her the music. Long notes held until the four-part harmony was perfect enough for their deeply loved flesh. (Morrison 2004, 102-104)

I have included the quotation at length because I intend to return to it throughout this project. And I feel that it warrants the space as it sounds out the affective and experiential geography of the otherwise. However, to relate it directly to Brown's use of "flesh" I turn my attention to the practices

of touch, togetherness (us-ness, or commingling), the insistence upon "liveliness" in the face of attempted destruction and freeness.[29]

Baby Suggs, holy, Sethe's mother-in-love (for enslaved people could not legally marry) arrived in Cincinnati, Ohio after her child, Halle (and Sethe's "choice"), bought her freedom from their enslaver (Morrison 2004, 13). Baby Suggs, holy "[a]ccepting no title of honor before her name, but allowing a small caress after it…decided that, because slave life had 'busted her legs, back, head, eyes, hand, kindneys, womb and tongue," to put her heart "to work at once" (2004, 102). This is the work of clearing, of making place and kinship that exceeds the experience and ethical concerns of the human subject.

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

[29] What does it mean to be *free* of (the need for) subjectivity? I worry that this use of "freedom" falls back on utopias that refer to the "humanist project[s]" that are bound to notions of hope and the future she critiques (Brown 2021, 6). These utopias follow from a "narrative of past-present-future" that deny coevality, simultaneity, flux, temporal estrangement, the nonhuman, and "alterity" (Brown 2021, 8, 15, 158, 159). Such concepts are conditioned by the logic of the subject *qua* human. Understood this way, I take "freedom" to gesture to a binary relation of individuated and fixed status positions: Subject/object; Freed/bonded; Human/~human. I suggest that "freeness" better approaches Brown's description of utopia as "the moments when those of us untethered from the hope of rights, recognition, or redress here on earth celebrate ourselves as elements in a cosmic effluvium" (Brown 2021, 1-2). To my mind, freeness describes a lived experience (among others) that allows for ambiguity and collective re/imagining of special designations and relationships that "freedom" does not. I offer "freeness" as a utopian otherwise that attends to extant "illusory freedom" lived by flesh (Hartman 1997, 12, 119, 126).

body/parts. Baby Suggs, holy outlines the constructs of the human "they", the space of "yonder" and their acts that exclude flesh from humanity.

Whereas flesh for Merleau-Ponty is a kind of manifold for the sensing/sensed subject and is the connective tissue for the body and the things it senses—this account of flesh serves as the stage for the emergence of the human. The human lives through and in the flesh and relates to others and things in this world of and through flesh but cannot be reduced to flesh. This account of flesh, even as it aims at a generality of being, is still a normative account that serves as the constitutive element for the carnal body. The carnal subject can know itself as ~flesh. And as flesh is not "matter" as flesh animates the invisible, flesh is not a lived experience. It is that *through which* the subject lives its experience. For Merleau-Ponty, the flesh is not matter and is not a being itself. As an "element" of being ([1964] 1968, 139) it is "unthinkable by itself" ([1964]1968, 140). And since the body accomplishes thought, it is unlivable. The human subject is not lived flesh and does not live *as* flesh. I suggest that this is because the perceiving subject that emerges in Merleau-Ponty's account of flesh retains its socio-natural distinction as "normal" where normal is able, white, cishet, and male. This is the flesh of the Subject that desires to suffocate—not just envelope—Black lives and excludes them from subject qua human status through expressive practices of domination, oppression, and attempted eradication. Brown's turn to flesh and way from the human subject is a turn toward an account of flesh—toward an account of fleshiness—that is radical in that it explicitely centers a raced, gendered, and sexed otherwise. On Brown's account flesh is not vestibular, it is the lived matter of Blacklives. What I suggest is that this, is an account of *lived flesh*. Lived flesh—the "We Flesh" of *Beloved*—on my account is the lived sensor-sensed of the Black self.

What I also note in the Clearing ceremony is the way that "They" need flesh, need flesh to define their subject position against. That is, the li/oved flesh of the Clearing, is an example of the way in which *homo sapien* status does not necessarily result in human/subject status. [The social fact

of race obtains at the natural level despite it being a cultural construct.] Moreover, human/subject status is not the only mode of lived being. Lived flesh is a kind of lived being otherwise that destabilizes Merleau-Ponty's account of the lived body and the body of flesh.

V: We, Specifically, Flesh: Spillers and Insurgent Flesh

Morrison's critical fabulatory flesh allows me to think with and in an otherwise of affective, kinship, and identity. An understanding of the Clearing as a world/region beyond (coeval, simultaneous, and intimate with, but inaccessible by) the experiential/perceptual realm—and I speculate that this is more thoroughgoing than the "natural" impartiality and ambiguity of perception—of the human subject allows me to speculate about different sensorial organ/izations for lived flesh.

Hortense Spillers critical work on grammar and discursive projects opens onto an account of flesh that problematizes the narrative structure of Merleau-Ponty's account of the anonymous, natural, pre-personal world of the human as well as the generality of his account of the carnal body.[30] Spillers' (2003) work in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" and "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words" centers the lived experience—via the discursive practices (that attach to and are)—of the Black female body that emerges in the wake of the Transatlantic Atlantic Slave Trade.[31] Spillers

[30] Beloved was originally published in 1987. So too was Spillers' "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" and while I am not assuming an overlap, I find it intriguiding that both these thinkers explore flesh in these pieces.

[31] Sharpe enfleshes my understanding of this theft.

> So I've been thinking about shippability and containerization and what is in excess of those states. What I am therefore calling the Trans* Atlantic is that s/place, condition, or process that appears alongside and in relation to the Black Atlantic but also in excess of its currents. I want to think Trans* in a variety of ways that try to get at something *about* or *toward* the range of trans*formations enacted on and by Black bodies. The asterisk after a word functions as the wildcard, and I am thinking the trans* in that way; as a means to mark the ways the slave and the Black occupy what Saidiya Hartman calls the "position of the unthought" (Hartman and Wilderson 2003). The asterisk after the prefix "trans" holds the place open for thinking (from and into that position). It speaks, as well, to a range of embodied experiences called gender and to Euro-Western gender's dismantling, its inability to hold in/ on Black flesh. The asterisk speaks to a range of configurations of Black being that take the form of translation, transatlantic, transgression, transgender, transformation, transmogrification, transcontinental, transfixed, trans-Mediterranean, transubstantiation (by which process we might understand the making of bodies into flesh and then into fungible commodities while retaining the appearance of flesh and blood), transmigration, and more. (Sharpe 2016, 30)

outlines the way that the deployment of sexuality affirms the human subject through its denial of the Black female's human subjectivity. Her use of Black "female"—though, at times fraught—retains *homo sapien* facticity, while resounding with the fleshy nonhumanity of this social position.

Reading Merleau-Ponty through Spillers, I encounter the lived body of the human subject as a claim about the normative subject that is Merleau-Ponty himself (or others like him), where a universal account of humanity masks a particular embodied situation being taken as neutral and commonly shared. This normative claim is also a nominative claim (a discursive claim/project) that conditions the grammar we live and use with (and about) each other.

Spillers highlights a tension inherent in the very capacity to speak or write of the lived body (in this way) for it requires a(n American) grammar that always already contains as its referent captive flesh and harm. Captive flesh is the relation that obtains when lived/loved flesh ventures into the yonder of the subject. Their despisal of the flesh; their flaying of the flesh; the picking out of the eyes; the use, the tying, chopping off and emptying of the hands; the breaking and re-breaking of the mouth; the starvation and the noosing of the neck—indeed the vary itemization, what Spillers calls the "'atomizing"' of the lived flesh in this way—is the ongoing attempt to capture and keep captured, to fix, limit, and name, what was formerly the mobile African subject (Spillers 2003, 208).[32] "They" have a sense of subject-status that requires the flesh. And because "they" are human/subjects, theirs are the bodies that are spoken about in discursive projects designed to reinforce their status. Might this be why so much of the Clearing ceremony is touching and sounding—not speaking? Might flesh have a discursive practice that exceeds speech when tied to the written word, because this speech-writing system fixes the lived flesh into captive position?

> Whatever my mother, niece, and I might say and do about our sexuality (the terms of kinship are also meant collectively) remains an unarticulated nuance in various forms of public

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

> discourse as though we were figments of the great invisible empire of womankind. In a very real sense, black American women remain invisible to various public discourse, and the state of invisibility for them has its precedent in an analogy on any patriarchal symbolic mode that we might wish to name. (Spillers 2003, 153)

> [M]y contention [is that this New World order] with its human sequence written in blood, *represents* for its African and indigenous peoples a scene of *actual* mutilation, dismemberment, and exile. First of all, their New World, diasporic plight marked a *theft* of the *body*—a *willful* and violent (and unimaginable from this distance) severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire. Under these conditions, we lose at least *gender* difference *in the outcome*, and the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific. (Spillers 2003, 206)

There is a distinction here between the human and African and indigenous peoples. To be human is to have the written word, and to write it in and against the blood of nonhuman peoples. Moreover, this act is not just representational of an ongoing encounter—it is not just an act of intellectualization, of a brain in a vat—it is written on the people through actual torture and theft. The African body becomes captive—a thing/object for the thief/human subject—in the simultaneous discursive and incursive act.

> They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. *You* got to love it, *you*! And no, they ain't in love with your mouth. Yonder, out there, they will see it broken and break it again. What you say out of it they will not heed. What you scream from it they do not hear. What you put into it to nourish your body they will snatch away and give you leavins instead. (Morrison 2004, 103-104)

Baby Suggs, holy lists the motive will and active desire of the flesh and the ongoing ways they steal it. This is not an accident. This is not an accident of meeting across difference and misunderstanding. This is an ongoing choice to refuse the possible grounds upon which to meet. And yet, I suggest that the captivity of flesh as sounded out in Spillers' work does not signifiy a total enclosure of the flesh. That is, there is captive flesh (for/to the human subject *qua* thief) and the lived flesh of Black being that the hands and projects of the thief are too small to contain.

There are no less than five moving pieces here that help to lay out Spillers' account and distinguish it from the account offered by Merleau-Ponty.

1. Bodies *qua* subjects are historically and socially situated. That is, what a body is, what a subject means or intends is a product of the milieu in which it is, means, or intends. Bodies *qua* subjects are produced.
    a. For Merleau-Ponty this suggests the coevality of different embodied worlds that emerge from a shared original *homo sapien* commonality.
    b. For Spillers this suggest that not all *homo sapiens* are body-subjects.
    c. The production of some *homo sapiens* as subjects and some as captive/flesh is the work of a grammar of race, gender, sex/uality, and the proximity to invasion. [33]
2. Formerly African bodies/subjects are stolen in an ongoing historical encounter of the TransAtlantic Slave Trade.
    a. This "trade" (theft) exchanges the African body for the captive body/flesh.
3. To be captive body/flesh is to be denied motricity, sexuality, and other necessary conditions to be produced as a subject.
    a. The denial of subjective-sexuality is commiserate with an externally inflicted excessive salaciousness.
    b. The denial of sexuality is also the denial of sexuate and gender difference as well as *the imposition of biological otherness*.
    c. The loss of the power to represent and power to ward off is also the denial of the power to name.
4. The captive body/flesh is still in the world, but not as a subject, as a captive/ating object for the use of the subject.
    a. This is a change in the phenomenological situation of the captured body.
    b. Pedagogical practices (a grammar of torture and non-humanization) seek to enact a different kind of entity of lived experience for the captured/captive body to distinguish it from the thieving body.
5. Sexuality, the ability to name, and motility are limited to the thieving body/subject.
    a. The thieving body becomes the only body able to inhabit linear space and time, the only body "free to take up the present and past as it wishes, and in the manner of its choosing" such then we might posit the thieving body, the body living whitely or whiteness as "temporally present, or even, futurally directed" in a way other than the captive body (Ngo, 'Get Over It'? Racialised Temporalities and Bodily Orientations in Time 2019, 247).

[33] Because race is a social fact and historical process—and not a biological fact—antiblackness is not necessarily tied to an immediate phenotype or relations between particular phenotypes. Moreover, because race as a social fact is contingent upon context, I focus on the u.s. american context. This context is the result of and creates a "historical context" which means that what white is and who qualifies as white is and has changed over time. In "The Phenomenology of White Identity" Linda Martín Alcoff outlines the ongoing production of white identities. White people are the result of an historical and ongoing process (Alcoff 2019, 176 & Baldwin, 1984).

b. The thieving body, the body living whitely, is the only body that retains and maintains the kind of gender-difference and gender-specificity required to participate in sexuality.[34]

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[34] What does Spillers mean by "their New World" and what do I mean by "living whitely"? I think that Spillers is staking out a diasporic claim/relation while engaging with a very specific iteration of that relation: that is the experience of lived Blackness in the US American context. She moves from "the New World" earlier in the paragraph—which I believe traces out the human order written in blood, in part myth—to "*their* New World" of actual mutilation, dispersal, and theft. Yancy describes the ongoingness of this theft in the Elevator scenario, as a theft of his body which is then returned distorted and disemboweled. I take the "their" as hailing to the actual experience of those in the context of the "Middle Passage" (to which she explicitly refers 2003, 213-217) for those enslaved in the US and the Caribbean. However, as this is an american Grammar Book, she has conceptually narrowed her focus to particular practices. This is less, I imagine a universalizing as it is a deliberate from general to particular in order to explode the particular in the insurgent acts of re-naming and re-gendering.

This is useful for me. On the one hand I believe that antiblackness as a global anchoring structure that has been constituted by the construct of the white race while it simultaneously constructs the daily iterations of the white race and racial privilege. And so, because race is a social fact and historical process—and not a biological fact or process—antiblackness is not necessarily tied to an immediate phenotype or relations between particular phenotypes. That is, I am willing to allow that non-African diasporic people can and do become *blackened* given the pervasive structure of antiblackness without their being Black—for example the Roma and Palestinians (and during the time of their internment, Japanese americans) are blackened without being Black.

Though I also want to leave room for the ways that non-African diasporic people who are blackened—because of the suppleness, ease of internalization, and flexibility of this power dynamic—can use their non-African diasporic status and their lack of phenotype to distance themselves from (through discrimination) Black people. This is because race as a social fact is contingent upon context—particuarly in the american context. This context is the result of and creates a "historical context" that means that what white is and who qualifies as white is and has changed over time. In "The Phenomenology of White Identity" Linda Martín Alcoff outlines the ongoing production of white identities. For Alcoff it is "helpful…to explore the historical formation of the 'natural attitude' of whiteness through which an increasingly complex social world will be interpreted" as a way to understand whiteness as more than an ideology, but as a purposeful ongoing process which emerges from a specific historical context.

> Whiteness, I will argue, plays a role in constituting and mediating experiences that may seem to be highly individual or, conversely, transcendental and universal. Phenomenologists understand human experience as ineluctably embedded in the world, but there are many worlds, not merely one, with overlapping and complex interrelationships.
>
> One thing that is clear is that whiteness is a historical identity formation, not a natural condition. It emerged out of a combination of historical experiences and state-enforced advantages over other groups. In this sense, it is both a natural result of particular events and the contrived effect of intentional policies. … [T]he lived experience of whiteness has been produced by some large-scale group-related events as well as purposeful state policies. … Beyond whiteness as an empirical object, there is also a substantively distinct first-person consciousness, or lived experience, of whiteness that the empirical approaches can obscure, and that can operate across the intersections. (Alcoff 2019, 176)

White people are the result of an historical and ongoing process—what might be referred to as "the wake" (Sharpe 2016).

> No one was white before he/she came to America. It took generations, and a vast amount of coercion, before this became a white country. …America became white—the people who, as they claim, "settled" the country became white—because of the necessity of denying the Black presence, and justifying the Black subjugation. …White men—from Norway, for example, where they were Norwegians—became white: by slaughtering the cattle, poisoning the wells, torching the houses, massacring Native Americans, raping Black women. (Baldwin 1984)

Becoming white—this history written in blood—is the advent of the New World. What I chose to focus on is the particular iteration of Black lived experience in the american context "their [***our***] New World." I am using Spillers to read Merleau-Ponty to get at an account of perception and experience engaged by a particular diasporic kin: american Black folx, particularly in this project, american Blackwomxn. And I think that "diaspora" or "diasporic" already does so much of

Taken together—and taken seriously—I am compelled reconsider whether or not the basic form of social relationality is not always already a relation predicated on the ability to distinguish, at the basic biological/phenotypic level, difference between those *homo sapiens* taken and then born captive and those *homo sapiens* that did the taking and then later and presently the maintaining of captivity. For Spillers the *homo sapien qua* African subject is effaced in the representative account. In its place in the discursive projects of the archive is the *homo sapien* cum object/commodity/cargo, the othered *homo sapien* cum initial captive body. Moreover, this thingification of certain *homo sapiens* results in the subjectification of certain other *homo sapiens*—most notably the thieves. This instantiation of relational difference—this incursion into the generality of Being—transforms the "originary acquisition" of the proper body of the *homo sapien* such that to become human *qua* subject, an originary acquisition of *homo sapiens* as objects for the subject is also deployed.

What authorizes this acquisition? I speculate that the human subject of the wake cannot sustain itself without destroying difference.[35] On Petherbridge's (2017) account, Merleau-Ponty indicates "that a basic form of social relationality precedes all forms of objectification and contemplative thought, and that such phenomena are indicative of a forgetfulness or denial of primary social bonds and open perceptual horizons" (Petherbridge 2017, 113). This basic form of sociality—of intersubjectivity—is bound up with the ambiguity of perception and the fact that all that is sensed is a question of things being foregrounded from among an ever present and undetermined background. As all humans share the originary *homo sapien* status, this commonality is prior to our

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the work to resist generalization and universalization while at the same time gesturing to the possibility of something shared (without it necessarily being essential).

[35] Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy, we have *all* been programmed to respond to the human difference between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals. As a result, those differences have been misnamed and misuses in the service of separation and confusion. (Lorde 2007, 115)

acquired habits of meaning making. Yet, if we take Merleau-Ponty at his word, then sociality is secondary for the body proper. Sociality occurs at the level of the named-I, so the anonymity of the pre-personal-I does not obtain a social. Or, for the carnal body, sociality emerges at the level of reversibility of the touching/touched, seeing/seen subject. So, contra Petherbridge's reading, I do not believe that this is what Merleau-Ponty indicates. This may be what he *intends*, but I worry following his description something different emerges.

Contra Merleau-Ponty and following Spillers, I believe that the "basic form of social relationality" is one of subsumption or what Spillers outlines as theft and violation. As I've stated earlier, I do not believe that there is only one originary acquisition and I believe that group assignment—and differentiation—can obtain prior to ego development and even existence as a birthed *homo sapien*. In *In The Wake* Christina Sharpe (2016) provides an account of this difference as lived by american Black people as socio-biological.

> Living in/the wake of slavery is living "the afterlife of property" and living the afterlife of *partus sequitur ventrem* (that which is brought forth follows the womb), in which the Black child inherits the non/status, the non/being of the mother. That inheritance of a non/ status is everywhere apparent now in the ongoing criminalization of Black women and children. Living in the wake on a global level means living the disastrous time and effects of continued marked migrations, Mediterranean and Caribbean disasters, trans-American and -African migration, structural adjustment imposed by the International Monetary Fund that continues imperialisms/colonialisms, and more. (Sharpe 2016, 15)

Partus sequitur ventrem is the social code that overrides even phenotype to designate status/subject difference between *homo sapiens* ***at the level of biology/the natural***.

Secondly, I am convinced by critical readings of Merleau-Ponty's account of the flesh that destabilize its generality, undifferentiation, and reversibility. The particular being—the "perceiving thing" ([1960] 1964, 166) that emerges in the and through the flesh sets itself as distinct from other things through its self-reference (reflection). It also sets itself apart as a Subject-thing as it "annexes"—acquires for its own use—others and things in the world. This annexation, this substitution of the self for the other is what distinguishes intersubjective relationships from

subject/thing relationships in flesh. Subjectivity is predicated on the ability to return to the self as simultaneously active and passive, as touching/touched, as seeing/seen, and the return of one's intention. I suggest that this annexation—this description of sensing as annexation—situates the subject as always already acquisational, and that subjectivity is always already objectifying.

> In learning that my body is a "perceiving thing" that it is able to be simulated (*reizbar*)—it, and not just my "consciousness"—I prepared myself for understanding that there are other *animalia* and possibly other men.
>
> It is imperative to recognize that we have here neither comparison, nor analogy, nor projection or "introjection." The reason why I have evidence of the other man's being-there when I shake his hand is that his hand is substituted for my left hand, and my body annexes the body of another person in that "sort of reflection" it is paradoxically the seat of. My two hands "coexist" or are "compresent" because they are one single body's hands. The other person appears through an extension of that compresence, he and I are liked organs of one single intercorporeality. ([1960] 1964, 166)

What I note in this quotation from "The Philosopher and His Shadow" (1960)—published before "The Intertwining – The Chiasm"—is the certainty of "other *animalia*" and the *lack of certainty* of the existence of other subjects. The way that the subject comes to know that there are "other men" is through *incorporation* of the other's hand into his body. The other's hand becomes one of his two hands and the other subject appears immediately at hand (or as hand) for Merleau-Ponty. The subject is ontologically situated as compelled to make use of others. Subjectivity is tied to annexation.

Moreover, subjects recognize other subjects because they are subjects themselves: game recognizes game. Subjectivity—man-ness—is predicated on likeness. "It is true that I would not recognize him if I were *not* a man myself" ([1960] 1964, 170). I take this to mean that likeness *to Merleau-Ponty* is a criterion for recognition as an other subject. Because Merleau-Ponty is writing in the wake of the historical events of mutilation, displacement, theft, and genocide I find cause to suggest that he has taken his body as un-othered, as *neutral*, which is what allows him to use his intracorporeal experience as intercorporeal experience. This neutrality, when combined with the like-to-likeness of inter/subjectivity leads me to suggest that the subject on Merleau-Ponty's account

would not recognize non-"neutral" bodies as subjects. The like-neutralness of the subject confines intersubjectivity to, and defines it against, the unlike-difference/otherness of other *animalia*. Human sociality does not necessarily mean *homo sapiens* sociality. And, indeed, *homo sapiens animalia*—as outside of subjectivity—maybe be said to be without sociality on this account. Because for Merleau-Ponty bodies emerge into a world of intersubjectivity, I suggest that there is room to think about intersubjectivity as conditioned by an understanding of non-sociality.

The subject's here-ness is affirmed in its appropriation of the other subject's there-ness. The subject's sociality and cultural world passes through the non-sociality, non-cultural world of animalia. When read through the wake what is created in this passage is the human subject, modernity, and culture.[36] When read through Sharpe and Spillers—where the animalia is Black lived flesh—the subject's sociality and culture must pass through the Black body—even in the imposed "dishonor" (Wilderson 2010) that is the ongoing wake of antiblackness—must pass from flesh to Cultured Body/Subject/Thief; this passage is a flaying, a tearing through the flesh. Yet this searing is never total, our great red hearts still beat, we *still* flesh, and we love, laugh, weep, and dance, as we re-member ourselves.[37]

Spillers treads these (Middle Passage) waters in "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words" as she explores the vestibular nature of the Black body and the Human experience (2003, 155-56, 164 174).

> Slavery did not transform the black female into an embodiment of carnality at all, as the myth of the black woman would tend to convince us, nor, alone, the primary receptacle of a highly

[36] A reprise and an elaboration: Wakes are processes; through them we think about the dead and about our relations to them; they are rituals through which to enact grief and memory. Wakes allow those among the living to mourn the passing of the dead through ritual; they are the watching of relatives and friends beside the body of the deceased from death to burial and the accompanying drinking, feasting, and other observances, a watching practiced as a religious observance. **But wakes are also "the track left on the water's surface by a ship (figure 1.4); the disturbance caused by a body swimming, or one that is moved, in water; the air currents behind a body in flight; a region of disturbed flow; in the line of sight of (an observed object); and (something) in the line of recoil of (a gun)"**; finally, wake means being awake and, also, consciousness. (Sharpe 2016, 21) (emphasis added)

[37] "The aesthetic sociality of blackness is an improvised political assemblage that resides in the heart of the polity but operates under its ground and on its edge. It is not a re-membering of something that was broken, but an ever-expanding invention. It develops by way of exclusion but it is not exclusionary, particularly since it is continuously subject to legitimated, but always incomplete, exploitation." (Crawley 2016, 37)

> profitable generative act. She became instead the principal point of passage between the human and the non-human world. Her issue became the focus of a cunning difference—visually, psychologically, ontologically—as the route by which the dominant modes decided the distinction between humanity and "other." …[B]lack is vestibular to culture. (Spillers 2003, 155)

I read this vestibular situation as one that problematizes the zone of nonbeing.[38] Fanon describes this zone as the present not-hereness of Black people, what Lewis Gordon (2007) describes as "a zone neither of appearance or disappearance" that distinguishes the psychic, ontological, and life worlds of *le Noir* from *l'homme*. Le Noir is a "no" clanging from cosmic dissonance.

> What does man want?
> What does the black man want?
>
> Running the risk of angering my black brothers, I shall say that a Black is not a man.
>
> There is a zone of non-being (*non-être*), an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential from which a genuine new departure can emerge. In most cases, the black man cannot take advantage of this descent into a veritable hell.
>
> …Man is a "yes" resonating from cosmic harmonies. ([1952] 2008, xii)

If read Afro-Pessimistically, this becomes a comment on those structures which prop up the Human through the exclusion of Black bodies. Blackness is forced through gaps in this scaffolding of being into nonbeing and negation. I speculate that much as Merleau-Ponty's account of the subject implicates him as close to the mythical norm; the zone of nonbeing implicates Fanon's *maleness*. While it may be a case of running up against both gender in the French language and the conventions of the time when regarding the usage of "man" for human, I read Fanon as focusing on the experience of

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[38] In the French version the passage is as follows:

> *Que veut l'homme?*
> *Que veut l'homme noir?*
>
> *Dussé-je encourir le ressentiment de mes frères de couleur, je dirai que le Noir n'est pas un homme.*
>
> *Il y a une zone de non-être, une région extraordinairement stérile et aride, une rampe essentiellement dépouillée, d'où un authentique surgissement peut prendre naissance. Dans la majorité des cas, le Noir n'a pas le bénéfice de réaliser cette descente aux véritables Enfers.*
>
> *L'homme n'est pas seulement possibilité de reprise, de négation. (1952, 6)*

Black men (assigned male at birth).[39] As such the central psychic and relational conflict is between Black men and their desire to be (white) men.[40] On its face, a particular focus on Black men is not bad—though at times it is deeply troubling[41]—it certainly engenders his reading of pathology with great insight. It is not bad, but it is limited. I take up Fanon's account of the zone of non-being as linear: one is in a veritable hell (of non-being) or one is a man. I want to tarry with "[la] rampe essentiellement dépouillée." I want to tarry with *that which has been stripped bare*, such that the point of engagement (for me) is neither the endpoints of hell nor the heaven of man-ness. This is a kind of attention to the birthing/birther and not the birthed.

And so, what I take to be the particularity of Fanon's account—where the ramp *is the background condition* that the Black man passes through to arrive at non-being—in his careful exploration of a lack of "ontological resistance" to be a reason to examine what he has moved to the background and to examine vestibularity otherwise. That is, when looked at (or lived) from the point of reference of the vestibule (themself) then the zone of non-being cannot be overdetermined by negation and exclusion.

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[39] One: he could have used *gens* for people. Two: the description of the zone of non-being is bookended with references to white men.

[40] I wanted quite simply to be a man among men. I would have liked to enter our world young and sleek, a world we could build together. ([1952] 2008, 92)

[41] Three: *Black Skin, White Masks*' deeply troubling second chapter, "The Woman of Color and the White Man" reads as proto-misogynoir wherein he casts Black men as victims of Blackwomxn's practices of "lactification," a whitening of the race in service of which they refuse to pair with Black men ([1952] 2008), 29). Aside from an astonishing lack of nuance and outright derision of the novels he uses as source materials, there is also a lack of consideration of the lived experience, social, and epistemic practices that result in certain political issues around pairings that arise from living as, Anna Julia Cooper says, "confronted by both a woman question and a race problem, and is as yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both" (Cooper 1892, 134). Further, an implicit claim that emerges in this violent chapter is that Black men are *entitled* to Blackwomxn.

I attribute "misogynoir" to Moya Bailey's work in 2010 on the Crunk Feminist Collective Blog. In her March 14, 2010 post "They aren't talking about me…" she unpacks the misogyny in hip hop that is specifically directed at Blackwomxn and the way that Blackwomxn listeners and fans of hip hop protect themselves by disassociating from the Blackwomxn-as-object in those songs. In this piece she describes "misogynoir" as the "[w]ord I made up to describe the particular brand of hatred directed at black women in American visual & [1945] 2014ular culture" (Bailey 2010). Specifically, misogynoir is anti-black misogyny—from which Black people are not excluded as practitioners.

In a April 27, 2014 post on Tumblr, Bailey provides more context.

> I say all this to say that it is important to me and to at least one other non Black person of color that the term is used to describe the unique ways in which Black women are pathologized in [1945] 2014ular culture. What happens to Black women in public space isn't about them being *any* woman of color. It is particular and has to do with the ways that anti-Blackness and misogyny combine to malign Black women in our world. (Baile7 2014)

I speculate the primary struggle for Fanon's Black man *is to be a Man* (that is, to unblacken his subject status) that is a single-axiid struggle which seeks to retain Subject/object relation and, as such views distance from humanity as total and a lack. There is a lack of imagination here, a lack of respect for difference *within* the racio-historical schema that understandings non-being in the logic of the human subject where non-being is a failure. If we read the zone of non-being as a vestibular, if we read it in terms of a multi-axiid status and engagement with the world, then the failure is not the denizens of the zone.[42]

Put another way, I read the vestibule/the zone of non-being as an *alterity*. Brown deploys the term in Black Utopias (2021) as part of her critique of the notion of futurity in black utopias. I think it is useful here as well as it gestures to what I take to be a weakness in Fanon's account: the unifocal conflict between he who would be subject but if for being Black and he who is subject.

> Alterity is nonlinear and multidirectional and suggests altogether different relationships to time and space. It implies an entire paradigm shift, a jump into the unknowable. (Brown 2021, 159)

The jump into the unknown funks up the sterility and aridness of the zone of non-being. The vestibule, because of its nature, is always becoming. It not fixed. The zone of non-being is not, then, an arrival. It is the possibility for arriving otherwise where non-humanity is not the same as *in-humanity*.

This is a distinction, I believe between the non-being and ontological capitulation of Fanon, where flesh may be read as inhuman, and the We Flesh of the Clearing ceremony and the insurgent vestibular flesh (that is not just captive flesh) of Spillers. I take seriously the intimate and ongoing relationship between whiteness/anti-Blackness and Black lives. I believe that—particularly in the US american context—the white/thief/subject defines itself against and through Black/ness being. By

[42] Here, I want to leave open the possibility of reading the flesh of "The Intertwining – The Chiasm" from the position of the vestibule. I speculate that such a reading destabilizes Merleau-Ponty's assertation that the flesh is not matter. When the flesh that unites the subject to the things (and other subjects) in the world is read as a kind of being (for itself), a mode of being that is both required for the subject and taken for granted by the subject, flesh emerges as something—in AAVE—something that exists beyond the description methods of phenomenology.

marking/seizing/stealing/capturing and creating the nigger—based upon annexation, a self-referential taking up—the american Subject/citizen emerges. As Spillers writes from her situation as "a marked woman," "I describe a locus of confounded identities a meeting ground of investments and privates in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented" (Spillers 2003, 203). Yet, I want to push back against the understanding of Black/ness as nonbeing as the same as not-being or the opposition of being. I want to resist Black/ness as an opposite relation—or as defined by the terms set forth the privileges the (logics of the) Subject. While in/unhuman attends to the intimate relationship, this binary relationship, to my mind, suggests lack and loss for the situation of the in/unhuman. Specifically, this understanding centers the human subject's narrative. Nonhuman is an attempt to attend to the intimacy of lived situations while making the mouth linger in the "non." Non goes beyond not-, in-, and un- and opens onto space for lived practices that are coeval (and sometimes simultaneous) with that of the human subject but cannot be apprehended by the human subject. Further, my investment in using "non" in this way, enlivens and enfleshes the zone of non-being. Non-humanity/non-being or Lived Flesh is the lived situation of beyond humanity. Where human/ity is a kind of ethical, phenomenological, and moral limitation.[43] This informs my use of "exceess/ive." When I use excess to describe Blackness or the lived projects, orientations, and relational practices of Black folks, I do not use "excess" to gesture to whiteness as the norma. That is, in my usage, it is not that Blackness is excessive because

[43] What I propose is that consideration of the infinite changeability of biological matter potentially shifts ontological ground. It means to dream of the possibility of different modes of being, alternative understandings of existence, and different kinds of entities. This is particularly powerful, I argue for those positioned as deviating from the dominating, hierarchical norms by which the human is defined. Such considerations dissolve the notion of universalism and give us license to envision, and practice, other forms of belonging and relationality. I argue that being categorized as inhuman, or not quite human, is a privileged position from which to undo the assumptions not only of race thinking but of the other systems of domination with which race thinking is linked. When not served by the category human/man, we can detach from our investment in belonging to such categories and instead marvel at the potential modes of existing as biological entities such exclusion opens up. We can foster the ways of being alive some of us on the planet already tenaciously practice in the spaces of our exclusion. …My provocation is that utopia may not include humans at all. This may not be a bad thing. (Brown 2021, 112)

its limits are determined by the limits of whiteness. I take excess to refer to the well and good volume, character, intensity, shape, depth, weight, sound, smell, taste (to mention a few attributes) of Blackness, such that Blackness is understand by its own norms that sound out whiteness as impoverish, deadening, shriveled, and lacking in the resources for an engagement with Blackness.

With this in mind, I suggest that Spillers—beginning in "Interstices" and returning again in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe"—also offers a sixth moving piece, that Amber Musser takes up in Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance (2018).

> Because black American women do not participate, as a category of social and cultural agents, in the legacies of symbolic power, they maintain no allegiances to a strategic formation of texts, or ways of talking about sexual experience, that even remotely resemble the paradigm of symbolic domination, except that such paradigm has been their concrete disaster. (Spillers 2003, 159)
>
> [B]lack women do not live out their destiny on the borders of femaleness, but in the heart of it. (Spillers 2003, 174)

Femaleness as sexed differentiate that often operates as a so-called gendered differentiate, "woman" must pass through the simultaneously unsexed and ungendered yet also black female body. This passage, when examined from the situation of the vestibule (the tarrier, rather than the hurried passer-through), opens onto horizons other than that of the Subject/Thief/Woman. It horizons *otherwise*, or beyond the fixed grammar of the Subject/Thief.

> In this play of paradox, only the female stands *in the flesh*, both mother and mother-dispossessed. This problematizing of gender places her, in my view, out of the traditional symbolics of female gender, and it is our task to make a place for this different social subject. In doing so, we are less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness than gaining the *insurgent* ground as female social subject. Actually *claiming* the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to "name"), which her culture imposes in blindness, "Sapphire" might rewrite after all a radically different test for female empowerment. (Spillers 2003, 228-229)

I read being out of the "traditional symbolics of gender" as to be in an ongoing unfolding of the beyond. I return to Brown's ecstatic exploration of nonhumanity in *Black Utopias* (2021) and C. Riley Snorton's use of "transitivity" in *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (2017). When

beyond the limitations of the human subject, flesh is able to develop its own practices, its own relations and forms of accountability.

> In resisting the impetus to nominalize "trans" as a category of gender, sex, or species, Claire Coloebrook argues for the primacy of transitivity, defining "trans" as "a not-yet differentiated singularity from which distinct genders, race[s], species, sexes, and sexualities are generated in a form of relative stability." For Colebrook, transitivity "is the condition for what becomes known as the human." As "trans" expresses primordial being from which difference is formed. Rather than reading race as a secondary order of difference, which would presume that race is principally a biologized form (and consequence of reproduction), I propose that "blackness" is an apposition to Colebrook's formulation of "trans"—that is, that they overlap in referentiality—inasmuch as blackness is a condition of possibility for the modern world and insofar as blackness articulates the paradox of nonbeing, as expressed in its deployment as appositional flesh. (Snorton 2017, 5)

Snorton's project is to trace the imbrication of "trans" and "blackness" through the ungendering of captive Black bodies, to the relationship of Blackness to modernity, to and through the negation of Blackness in current trans*-studies, to finally opening onto a need for the otherwise, "theoretical and historical trajectories that further imaginative capacities to construct more livable black and trans worlds" (Snorton 2017, 14). What I find useful is the understanding of Blackness and transness (and particularly Blacktrans-ness/Transblack-ness) as the vestibule of the human, while being always already beyond the constructed subject position. In this way, I read the situation of not being in the "traditional symbolics of gender" of standing as the flesh as standing in desiring practices and relations that are do not completely collapse into the traditional symbolics of the subject/thief's sexuality. To horizon otherwise than the fixed gendered and sexed concept of "woman" or "man" is to be simultaneously aware of and intimate with but not constituted by them. The traditional symbolics are grammars of pain, searing, truncating, hobbling, of bondage, fungibility, and unspeakability. Who would want to be in this symbolics? That is, wanting to hear my name sounding from my lover as she participates in pleasure/bliss, is not the same thing as wanting to be in this symbolics that denies me my naming. If we tarry with the non-humanity of flesh as fecund with different possibilities, then we will find its practices always already exceeding—or as I like to think of it: revealing the paucity and

pusillanimity of—the subject. So "Sapphire" may once again "rear her head"—as one of my generous and engaging reviewers from *Puncta* has so evocatively put it—but, if she rears her head as the flesh, self-named/naming—then she will exceed capture with her motion, her becoming (rather than arrival) and her flux.

> My central exploration is how desire and its fulfillment both form and diffuse the individual self. Letting our desire—our physical desire—loose, I propose allows for the self to be in motion, in transformation, in becoming. (Brown 2021, 138)

Our task is not to give the Subject/Thief another thing to grasp. Our task here is to love, to honor, to caress the difference of those of us who stand "in the flesh."

6. Lived flesh—particularly the flesh lived by the Blackwomxn—can announce itself, can sound out its own sensual doings and beings-with that are neither totalized nor crushed by the thief's grasp.

In *Sensual Excess* Amber Musser offers an account of flesh and "Brown Jouissance" (Musser 2018, 13-14, 39, 107-109).

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

I find in Musser the taking up of the work Spillers tasks us with. I find the opening toward the sixth point—through pleasure-pain—in a fleshy, kin-making, open and opening existence. Spillersian flesh, particularly as taken up by Musser, allows us to think—contra Merleau-Ponty—that the body proper is not a shared originary acquisition; that it is not *any* body (*qua* body). This attention to flesh allows me to read the phenomenological body as that of the Citizen/Subject/Thief. Spillersian flesh demarcates the breakdown, the ground of the insurgent, Musserian flesh fingers the scar and revels in a shiver of pleasure.

What, for the human subject is a common/shared pre-personal biological fact of subjectivity is, for the flesh, a seared, scarred, disparate, diasporic and stolen socio-biological fact of objectification.

For Musser, following Spillers, flesh is always *first* the product of the pornotrope. Pornotroping speaks to the ways in which black and brown bodies are constructed not as desired *subjectivities*, but as desirable objects, denuded of subjectivity and gender in the first gaze (Musser 2018, 6-7). Musser's reading of Spillers' "pornotrope" draws from Weheliye. In "Pornotropes" Weheliye (2008) takes up pornotrope the (political) means through which Black bodies are transformed into "bare life" (2008, 71-72).[44] Where the "bare life" of the *homo sacer* is the condition for the fullness of the life of the human subject.[45]

> Pornotroping, then, names the becoming-flesh of the (black) body and forms a primary component in the processes by which human beings are converted into bare life. (Weheliye 2008, 72)

> For Spillers, pornotroping is a process of objectification that violently reduces people into commodities while simultaneously rendering them sexual available. …Through its discourse on fleshiness it emphasizes the way that power and projection produce certain bodies as others, thereby granting them a mysterious quality of desirability, which is always already undergirded by violence and the assumption of possession. (Musser 2018 6)

Pornotroping brings to light the ways in which the affective expression of sexuality as lived by these bodies is limited to these bodies. The desiring body/Subject who moves in sexuality *intends* captive bodies/flesh as un-gendered desirable objects. For Spillers and Musser gender is an organizing scaffold of subjectivity; captive flesh is ungendered; to be ungendered is to be denied subjectivity (Spillers 2003, 220, 222, 224, 227). "To exist in a state of un-gendering, then, denies the possibility of subjectivity" (Musser 2018, 108).[46] To live as flesh is to live as beyond Subject/Thief, beyond

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[44] Pornotroping unconceals the literally bare, naked, and denuded dimensions of the homo sacer, underscoring how political domination frequently produces a sexual dimension that cannot be controlled by the forces that (re)produce it. (Weheliye 2008, 71-72)

[45] The *homo sacer*, a human being that cannot be ritually offered but whom one can kill without incurring the penalty of murder, first appears in the city-states of Roman antiquity. Taking this figure as his starting point, Agamben infuses it with Michel Foucault's concept of biopower, Walter Benjamin's concern with mere life, Carl Schmitt's thoughts on sovereignty and the state of exception, and Hannah Arendt's notion of statelessness. The *homo sacer*'s ban from the political community facilitates a double movement that is contradictory but necessary: on the one hand, these subjects, by being barred from the category of the human, are relegated to bare or naked life, being both literally and symbolically stripped of all accoutrements associated with the liberalist subject. Conversely, this bare life stands at the center of the state's exercise of its biopower, its force of legislating life and death, which, in this framework, provides one of the central features of the modern nationstate. (Weheliye 2008, 68)

[46] If we think of the 'flesh' as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship's hole, fallen, or "escaped" overboard. (Spillers 2003, 206)

sexuality, and beyond a guarantee of an emphatic, empathetic, and positively-affirmative intersubjective encounter. Or, as Brown articulates, to live as flesh is to practice a black utopia removed from the ethical violences of the subject whilst intimately tied to the dystopia created by those violences.[47]

> [D]ystopia forms the terrain of our existence. But forms of black life and liveliness are claimed and created in the terror. These forms do not end with death, social or otherwise. What is on the other side of death, where we reside? What kinds of strange ways and world do we inhabit there? Looking past death, or considering it a limited construct, I am not arguing for life according to a model in which we have been restored to some original state, or for life in which we have been granted rights according to some social contract. I don't hope for that. In fact, I don't think utopia needs hope at all. Hope yearns for a future. Instead, we dream in place, in situ, in medias res, in layers, in dimensional frequencies. The quality of being I find in the speculations considered here is about existence beyond life or death, about the ways we reach into the unknowable, outside the bounds of the past, present, and future, of selfhood and other. This is what I call utopia: the moments when those of us untethered from the hope of rights, recognition, or redress here on earth celebrate ourselves as elements in a cosmic effluvium. (Brown 2021, 1-2)

I read Musser's account of being outside the traditional symbolics of sexuality and gender that constitutes a "den[ial of] the possibility of subjectivity" as not a loss. Reading Spillers through Musser, and Musser's jouissance through Brown's black utopian dreaming/practicing allows for the refusal of the subject's logics where sexuality and gender are concerned. I read it akin to what Tina Campt might consider a "practice of refusal" (2019). Campt mobilizes refusal as a method of thinking (about), doing, and being otherwise in moments of "everyday practices of struggle" (Campt 2019). For Campt, refusal is a quotidian—but not mundane—experiment. It is a meaningful and improvisational mode of creatively engaging with the otherwise, the monstrosity of naming, monstrosity of "irrepressible" life and the "aesthetic sociality of blackness" (Crawley 2016, 37).

> The transformation of flesh into bodies could not reduce the irrepressible life that those on the receiving end of violence carried within and dispersed. The breath, literally of life, was in them and the brutality was fundamentally because of this irrepressibility. (Crawley 2016, 72)

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[47] [T]he procedures adopted for the captive flesh demarcate a total objectification, as the entire captive community becomes a living laboratory. (Spillers 2003, 208)

For what is more monstrous than the Lived/Living Breathing Flesh? What is more resplendent and sensual?

What is more loving than the monster? Here I turn to the etymology of "monstrous" and specifically the unnaturalness of its formation, its deviation from the natural socio-biological order of our New World in the wake, and its role as a "divine omen" as articulated by Gordon and Gordon below.[48]

> [W]e refer to the etymology of the term in Latin, namely, *monere*, which means to warn and its noun correlate *monstrum*, which means divine omen, portent, sign, warning, or abnormality. …Monsters are themselves, thus, etymologically, divine warnings, signs that something has gone wrong that are often mistaken as causes and events in themselves. (Gordon and Godon 2016, 331)

The "natural order" the "traditional symbolics" is not aspirational. That is, we should neither aspire to it, nor does it give us breath. To take up the monstrous, to "*clai[m]* the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to 'name')," is to take up the divinity of the lived flesh, live as a warning of/about the failure—all the way down—of the human subject. To *refuse* the normal or—perhaps to engage without centering/reifying the normal—to otherwise, beyond, is to take up the dread of the pornotrope even as one exceeds it in the course of desiring the self.

> If air was there at the scene of subjection, and breath was the desired object to be stolen, this slightest breath at any moment of enframing, of eclipsing, evinces the life that escaped, through screams, through moans, through pleas. Whiteness would have itself be totalizing, pure, gratuitous violence. Totalizing, pure, gratuitous violence is the desire of whiteness but has not been achieved. (Crawley 2016, 75)

The monster in all her glory—perhaps not free, but all kinds of mystery, ungendered and always already re-gendering; orphaned but always already diasporic and kin-making—is a warning to the

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[48] **monstrous (adj.)**
mid-15c., "of unnatural formation, deviating from the natural order, hideous," a variant of earlier *monstruous* (late 14c.), from Old French *monstruos, monstrueuse* and directly from Late Latin *monstruosus* "strange, unnatural, monstrous," from Latin *monstrum* "divine omen, portent, sign; abnormal shape; monster, monstrosity," figuratively "repulsive character, object of dread, awful deed, abomination," from root of *monere* "to admonish, warn, advise," from PIE **moneie-* "to make think of, remind," suffixed (causative) form of root ***men-** (1) "to think."
(Harper 2001)

Subject/Thief. Not, a warning *for*—lived flesh is not object-*for* Subject/Thief. There is no way the Subject/Thief could grasp, could caress the Lived Flesh—the Subject/Thief. Flesh is not lived in opposition to the lived body (flesh is not *körper*), it is a beyond/beside the lived body (and, indeed, it is *necessary* to the lived body's transparent, common, subjectivity and speech).[49] In this Clearing—even in the wake—where "We Flesh" our lived flesh cannot be totalized as the lack of human subjectivity. Lived flesh is a kind of enacted first order discourse (as well as a second order discourse, a warning to the subject). It is, as one of the reviewers for this piece has noted*: more than just the lack*. Specifically, lived flesh, is the irrepressibility of sensual and affective encounters—pleasure practices and engagements—that insist beyond the objectification of the pornotrope. That we please ourselves, that we create ecstasy in the breakdown is abnormal but not abject. This a kind of guerilla loving the flourishes despite occupation.

> The "body"—through sex, through rhetoric—is a categorical coherence, it is a theological-philosophical concept of enclosure, a grammar and logic producing something like bodily integrity. But breathing flesh makes apparent the importance of openness, of otherwise grammars, against borders. (Crawley 2016, 59)

Flesh is the irrepressibility of sensual and affective encounters, even in the pornotrope.

Merleau-Ponty's account of the body of flesh determines itself through flesh—and specifically through the use of others and things, such that the sexed, raced, gendered, and classed being that is Merleau-Ponty is generalized. What starts off as an account of openness and indetermination falls back upon the desire to apprehend. What starts off as a kind of flux—a perceiving thing—a somewhat fluid phasing around a hollow of potentiality returns as the subject set apart from non-perceiving things and other subjects. The flesh dries up, so to speak, and loses the liquidity of anythingness.

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[49] Spillers begins "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" with the subject's need.
Let's face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name. …I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here I would have to be invented. (Spillers 2003, 203)

Following Musser, I find that lived flesh retains a mobility that the carnal flesh (and certainly, the body proper) does not (Musser 2018, 3, 11). Musser refers to this as "liquidity," the ability of the lived flesh to exist as always just beyond the total grasp/apprehension of the subject. Rather than evasiveness or fugitivity this is a kind of volitional motility. Because of its ontological reliance on the lived flesh *qua* vestibule, the human subject has only one option for signification. The pornotrope fixes the human as the thief and imposes the limitations of sexuality on this subject position. By describing the human subject as the "thief" Spillers makes an implicit claim about the tactile projects available to the subject. From this I infer that thieves have a limited range of tactile and affective engagements. Their tactile projects are unifocal and oppressive. They annex, appropriate, steal, clutch, and grasp. They do not touch as in caress, they do/can not feel. The pornotrope creates the unfeeling yet sexing subject. *In* the pornotrope, and yet outside of this noose, lived flesh has the shining capacity of opacity and the oceanic quality of erotic touch. [50]

> [The] mutability of the flesh and the and the flesh's ability to signify multiply is a mark of what I am term *liquidity*. Liquidity indexes flesh's mutability. (Musser 2018, 14)

However, on my reading of Musser, flesh, liquidity, is not an achievement—in and of itself—though it makes certain achievements possible. Lubrication. It is the *condition for the existence* of achievements. Musser highlights the pleasures that might inhere in bondage, transforming captive/deadened flesh into a kind of kinky flesh, a kind of self that *lives* rather than endures, and futures rather than pasts (Ngo 2019). Musser takes up and caresses the other, sounding out its social commitments. This "adjacency", what Campt describes as "The reparative work of transforming proximity into accountability; the labor of positioning oneself in relation to another in ways that revalue and redress complex histories of dispossession" (Campt 2019, 6:04) is what refuses to drown in the wake of the

[50] In contrast, brown jouissance emphasizes the production of selfhood in relation to the social. …Brown jouissance emphasizes the social relations at work in enfleshment and suggest that the pornotropic network of projection and objectification can coexist with Thingness and its opacity. (Musser 2018, 13)

pornotrope. It is a beautifying of the molecular (or the molecular as a method of beauty). We come into our better/fleshier selves in this geography beyond the limits of Subject/Thief.

Musser's unfolding of flesh allows us to witness the wakefulness of the erotic fleshy-self rather than the static sexual citizen. Lorde's account of the erotic, while engaging sensuality, also engages other practices that the human subject's grasping/objectifying sexuality does not. In her account—written specifically from her situation as raced, sexed, and gendered in such a way that she is excluded from the mythical norm—Lorde distinguishes the erotic from the pornographic. For Lorde, "pornography… represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling" (Lorde 2007, 54). The unfeeling yet sexing subject/thief of the pornotrope is the site of an overwhelming pornography (that it projects onto the captive/ating flesh). But the excessiveness of flesh, its situation as always already otherwise the subject's logic, is not totalized by this project. As such the eroticism of the lived flesh opens onto different engagements/relations. On Lorde's account the erotic is a site of deep feeling shared with and among others (2007, 56-57). This is demonstrated in her use of "our/s," "we," and "us" significantly more often than she uses "I," "me," "my," or "mine" in the text.[51] There is an emphasis on community and togetherness, on difference without domination/objectification in the erotic.

For Lorde the erotic is a "resource," a "source of power and information within our lives" (Lorde 2007, 53). It is "an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are not reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives" (2007, 55). Where sexuality is a paradigm of the thief/captive flesh, the

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

- "We" is used 52 times. "Our" is used 56 times. "Ourselves" is used 13 times. "Us" is used 13 times.
- "I" is used 15 times. "Me" is used 6 times. "My" is used 9 times. "Myself" is used 2 times. "Mine" is used 2 times.

erotic is that paradigm shift that does the (monstrous) work of naming and making connections (kinships). The erotic calls on us to demand better of ourselves and our shared engagements.

> It is never easy to demand the most from ourselves, from our lives, from our work. To encourage excellence is to go beyond the encouraged mediocrity of our society is to encourage excellence. …This internal requirement toward excellence which we learn from the erotic must not be misconstrued as demanding the impossible from ourselves nor from others. Such a demand incapacitates everyone in the process. For the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing. …The aim of each thing which we do is to make our lives and the lives or our children richer and more possible. (Lorde 2007, 54 & 55)

> This is one reason why the erotic is so feared, and so often relegated to the bedroom alone, when it is recognized at all. For once we being to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we being to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of. Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forming us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives. And this is a grace responsibility, projected from within each of use, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe. (Lorde 2007, 57)

The liquidity of the flesh allows for the affective, sensual, political, and communal capacity of the erotic.

There is a flashing here from the deep, a shimmering, shining "we"-ness of lived flesh, that to me, echoes Lorde's encounter with Afrekete in the last chapters of *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982). In being with Afrekete, Lorde offers us a witness' account of the social relation and the production of selfhood, of enfleshment in the fleshy encounter.

> We had come together like elements erupting into an electric storm, exchanging energy, sharing charge, brief and drenching. Then we parted, passed, reformed, reshaping ourselves the better for the exchange. (Lorde 1982, 253)

In Lorde, there is a "we" not an "I", a connection through tension, pleasure and non-pleasure, creation and transformation, and of coming and going rather than a destructive, atomic, hierarchical Subject-

object relation. There is play here in the mention of coming together. Bluesing/Beautifying the line, this drawing the ear toward simultaneous orgasmic connection and political intertwining.[52]

This witnessing is of movement, flux, change, and commitment—but not a static consistency. For the lived flesh, the lived body is more a site of failure than a site of aspirational and normative relation. Nor does flesh aspire for whites to be flesh—it aspires to full beyondness, one that surpasses even the achievements that inhere in the fleshy body divide.

I would suggest, following Lorde, that these achievements may be uniquely feminine—that is, a feminine otherwise—in that they emerge as an example of what Musser refers to as "re-gendering". Though my turn to Lorde for the following sections/examples, and particular bodies (cis-female) implicates me as assigned-female at birth, I would like to be clear that the account of femininity I wish to engage is one that is not tied to or only found in bodies assigned female at birth. While I am not entirely taking up Snorton's "fungible fugitivity" of Blackness and its "neuter bound" potential, I do think it is useful to think about lived flesh as feeling/living/pleasuring beyond the tradition symbolics and referents of the Subject/Thief's "femininity" and "masculinity" (2017, 55-97). I speculate that there may be referents, but they are referents of a fleshy kind, referents of the horizon, of the opaque, and waywardly regard the determinations of the Subject/Thief. That is, while the Subject/Thief may have ungendered captive flesh, only lived flesh re-genders itself and this is an ongoing and unfolding way of being (with others) in the world.[53]

"Re-gendering" is lived differently from the gender of the Subject/Thief (Musser 2018, 107-109). This is gendering as a gerund, as an ongoing, open, supple, painful, pleasing, practice of the

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[52] By Blues/ing I am thinking with/through both the musical category of Blues and the lived practice of Bluesing. See: Chapter 4.

[53] One of the places I locate this ongoing and unfolding way of being (with others) in the world is taking place in the world of drag. I am living for and gagging over femininity as taken up and run with in the queeniverse.
See: "Chicago Drag Excellence" https://youtu.be/VQi1AEsEb00

community.[54] It is an insistent work—a Black Feminist life project—of imagining and committing to a future. It is not making absolutely claims about what the future will be; it is about the living praxis of this is not all there is, there will be someway else (and it will be arrived at through struggle).

It is a kind of future-casting; a particular fleshy achievement that is distinctly feminine. This re-gendering is volitional—pun on "vol", the French word for flight and to steal, intended—a flight toward a feminine otherwise. The flesh sings of the simultaneous yes/no (not maybe) and of the unseeable, unknowable open moment to come.[55] This liquid, supple, lubricated movement, this nonlinear relation of moments, opens simultaneously onto acceptance and rejection, pleasure and non-pleasure, delight and devastation. There is pleasure to be had in abjection, there is self to be lived fully and freely within the object, and there is community to be made outside of a subjecthood (Musser 2018, 13, 86-89).[56] This is the soft-tough self, the comingling and co-constituting of joy and tears.

> Once we talked about how Black women had been committed without choice to waging our campaigns in the enemies' strongholds, too much and too often, and how our psychic landscapes had been plundered and wearied by those repeated battles and campaigns.
>
> …And we held each other and laughed and cried about what we had paid for that toughness, and how hard it was to explain to anyone who didn't already know it that soft and tough had to be one and the same for either to work at all, like our joy and the tears mingling on the one pillow beneath our heads. (Lorde 1982, 250)

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[54] Kin is made (Musser 2018, 109-115, 168-170). Kin is the work, not of a liberal individual, not of a subject, but of a collective.

Making kin stands as a rebuke against slavery's dismantling of nuclear families and removal of agency. This is not a project to recover the individual; it is one that insists, instead, on highlighting the production of a collectivity. (Musser 2018, 115)

[T]hinking with Spillers and brown jouissance, I argue that queer femininity is not necessarily attached to motherhood or self-denial, but it emerges through an insistence on keeping the mother at the center of projects of selfhood and intimacy. (Musser 2018, 168)

[55] "'Can you spend the night?'…

For beyond the assurance that her question offered me—a declaration that this singing of my flesh, this attraction, was not all within my own head—beyond that assurance was a batch of delicate assumptions built into that simple phrase that reverberated in my poet's brain.

…Even the phrase "spending the night" was less a euphemism for making love that it was an allowable space provided, in which one could move back and forth" (Lorde 1982, 247).

[56] "Brown jouissance is about pleasure, abjection, and embracing alterity—either one's own of that of the Other. …These pleasure of brown jouissance inhere in the body's fleshiness and opacity" (Musser 2018, 88-89).

On Lorde's and Musser's accounts flesh is the powerful, possible, opaque, uniquely interior, and triumphantly perverse condition for the appearance of "possibilities that inhere in inequality" and the lived otherwise (Musser 2018, 39-40, 43, 60-63, 87, 98-102).[57] For Musser flesh has meaning in itself, that is, flesh is intentional. Flesh simultaneously turns toward/opens itself unto object and self. Flesh is "inseparable from the processes of objectification *and* the production of selfhood" (Musser 2018, 4). Flesh is inextricably bound up with self-making and undoing. Flesh is indeterminate, but it has a peculiar relation to determination. The excessiveness, or the beyondness the too-muchness of flesh, means that it cannot make the kind of same holds on others in the world as the lived body. Because intentionality is tied to subjectivity, flesh can only be *with*, it cannot be *as* through projection, and so it resists some of the more troubling aspects of Merleau-Ponty's intentional body.[58] There is no relation in subjectivity that is *being fo*r the fleshy. What this means is that lived flesh must turn otherwise for pleasure, lived flesh must turn toward the self. In "Interstices" Spillers reads Bessie Smith's Blues/ing as an example of this other horizon (Spillers 2003, 165-167). In reading/witnessing Smith, Spillers offers a turn toward the singer as "being-for-self" and the model of Blackwomxn's wayward/otherwise sexuality.

> My aim in quoting Michele Russell's valorization of the singer is to trace her proposal that the dancing voice embodied is the chief teaching model for black women of what *their* femininity might consist in and to highlight Russell's discussion of the project implied in some of the Smith discography. The attention that the vocalist pays to building a relationship of equality in the woman's own house with her male lovers is quite explicit in "Get It, Bring It, and Put It Right Here"… (Spillers 2003, 166)

Such an understanding or reading practice embraces the gerund, the during, the insurgent claiming of and naming of space for the social being of Blackness, the waywardly beautiful experiment of being

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[57] "Perhaps a form of brown jouissance can be found in this understanding of the body as object and abject? …It explores and revels in the affects and opacity that accompany objectification. It is a space without subjectivity (as traditionally defined), but it is a space where there is pleasure in embodiment and the radical possibilities that being an object provides" (Musser 2018, 87).

[58] Shannon Sullivan raises some cause for concern about intentionality and the way it lends itself put in service to of theft. Sullivan's critique of Merleau-Ponty's appeal to projective intentionality is that in projecting one's intentionality onto another, one overrides another's intentionality in a dominating way (Sullivan 2000,196).

in the process of, the care-full erotic doings that mark a Black Feminist and Womanist engagement with struggle as simultaneous with but irreducible to celebration. Smith's Blues/ing, is a testimony of experiences and practices of struggle and celebration that are not exhausted by the other, even if they are cotemporaneous. Simultaneity is not sameness. Christina Sharpe (2019) offers what I read as an example of this, in her recent piece on method, "Beauty Is a Method" that she begins with an epigraph from Sharpe (that is itself a nod to Lorde's "Poetry is a Not a Luxury").[59]

> Beauty is not a luxury, rather it is a way of creating possibility in the space of enclosure, a radical act of subsistence, an embrace of our terribleness, a transfiguration of the given. It is a will to adorn, a proclivity for the baroque, and the love of *too much.* —Saidiya Hartman

This method of creation (of beauty), this love of too much, of the flamboyant, is necessary for and a mode of the self-invention and self-regard of fleshy pleasure.

> Whatever luck or misfortune the Player has dealt to her, she is, in the moment of performance, the primary subject of her own invention. Her sexuality is precisely the physical expression of the highest self-regard and, often, the sheer pleasure she takes in her own powers. (Spillers 2003, 167)

I do think that Spillers' retention here, of "sexuality" or a retention of the Subject/Thief's grammar leaves room open for the articulation of fleshy pleasures in the Subject/Thief's discursive projects. As such I turn toward Lorde's "the erotic" for lived flesh as I worry that "sexuality" is a mode of a

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[59] This citation is a riff on Lorde's "Poetry is Not a Luxury" wherein she writes:
The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes. Which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized. This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are – until the poem – nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt. (2007, 36)

I speak here for poetry as a revelatory distillation of experience, not the sterile word play that, too often, the white father distorts the word poetry to mean – in order to cover a desperate wish for imagination with insight. For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives. (2007, 37)

Sharpe and Hartman and Lorde, Beauty and Method and Poetry, participate in the practice of beautifying. Beauty as a method is an orientation and practicable relation to the ongoing. Beautifying—a way of being in the world. It is by this light that we engage in Black Feminist and Womanist praxis. It is the too much-ness of that which is "about to be birthed, but already felt" the affectively palpable dreaming toward the simultaneity of "survival and change" of flux and now. It is the too much-ness that cannot be read in "to begin".

grammar that forecloses the possibility of the "highest self-regard" and "pleasure… in [flesh's] own powers". To regard the flesh then becomes the work/project of the flesh, a pleasuring opacity.

The sensuality of the encounter cannot be apprehended solely though the sight of the scene. It is irreducible to surface spectacle. This kink is lived, rather than seen. This is a tribadistic mode of being towards, an un-money shot that undoes the finite limits of the absolute spectacular through a being with of witnessing. Lorde transforms both the notion of origin and nourishment in her time with Afrekete.

> "I got this under the bridge" was a saying from time immemorial, giving as adequate explanation that whatever it was had come from as far back and as close to home—that is to say, was as authentic—as was possible.
>
> We bought red delicious pippins, the size of French cashew apples. There were green plantains, which we half-peeled and then planted, fruit-deep, in each other's bodies until the petals of skin lay like tendrils of broad green fire upon the curly darkness between our upspread thighs. (Lorde 1982, 249)

With Afrekete, there is lived of experience of time otherwise (than bodily linear time). "I got this under the bridge" the "saying from time immemorial" echoes her mother's sounding out home/mother/tongue in a strange land. Lived time that loops, swirls, spirals, keeps pace with itself, lived at a voluptuous depth unavailable to the Body's time. Fruit, feeling, and family are simultaneous, and are simultaneously longing and fulfilment. In our witnessing, we come to feel the fleshy self, come to sound it out, come to be with, come with an insurgent simultaneity (but not sameness). We come in due time, with all of our songs, ears and hearts forward. The fleshy self that is witnessed by Musser relates to the visual/sight differently than the phenomenological body. It evades, *undoes*, or destabilizes the determining operation of sight. The liquidity of flesh sounds out its opacity and unfathomable interiority. That is, what is seen is not just a profile of the flesh, it might merely be a

ripple of the light striking its depths. Liquidity floods, overflows the speaking mouth, the profile at the same time that it flows toward its horizons.[60]

I would like to suggest, in line with Spillers and Musser, that prior to theft, flesh was the primordial status of all homo sapiens. The bewildering encounter transformed freely relational African flesh/body into the captive/stolen body and flesh. It also transformed relational pre-european flesh into European, then white, subject body. This transformation instigates a subject-object relation in which the subject-body is isolated from other subject-bodies but requires intimate relation with the captive flesh/object. The Thief/Citizen body maintains its subjectivity by fleeing from its fleshiness and turning toward surface, transparency, and determination. The Subject/Thief tears itself apart from fleshy being with and projects that wounding onto the captive flesh through continued violence. Antiblackness and white-supremacy are the structures that have been produced to keep the captive flesh as an open wound, so that the flesh may be lived as only a site of un-selfhood and pain.

Coming with and through Spillers, what Musser allows for us is the not just the persistence (not just endurance), but the *insistence* of lived flesh as *something*, as a lived experience otherwise and beyond this ongoing need of the thief to deny (pre-captive) flesh.[61] It is the existence of flesh as the primordial condition that allows for Musser to take up the pornotrope and make flesh the star. Whereas the phenomenological body "hopes" that is not taken as an object, the lived flesh has no such hope. However, it is holpful. Holpfulness is the lived experience of a futural hope and a present matter-of-fact help (a matter-of-fact way to address the structures and challenges of living in a world that never intended that flesh *live*, or that its existence is always forever totalization by the flaying (Lorde 2007)) and speaks to a particular fleshy and loving way of being in the world. Holpfulness is

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[60] "[W]e see that opacity functions as a minoritarian strategy because it disrupts the assumption that visuality is equivalent to transparency by alluding to something else, a different set of norms or even an interiority inaccessible to others. (Musser 2018, 10)

[61] (Like a song scratched out of a head "I'm something! / I hope you think you're something too!)
See: Walker (1982, 53 & 74)

the opening of the flesh to the encounter and the ability to make a way out of the no way of being ripped to shreds. The fleshy is a turning toward what is beyond the impossibility of pleasure for the lived flesh living through conditions of antiblackness. This is jouissant nonpossibility, a not studyin' the binary that puts possibility on the side of the Subject/Thief and impossibility on the side of the flesh. This is Blues/ing of pleasure in the break down, the ecstatic break between speaking and sounding that happens as the seared flesh houses also the most exquisite of delights. Self and other-induced subspace low moan of release, sounding as touching, flaying as caressing, self as flagrantly opaque, a deep well of feeling. "[A]bjection as form of black power reveals the sensualities that reside outside of blackness's sexualization through the pornotrope" (Musser 2018, 87). It is these sensualities this connected to the primordial holding and a through-line from the hold of the slaver and provide us with the capacity for care in the wake. How does one hold the liquidity of flesh? Care-fully, holpfully and on the tip of one's tongue.

Chapter 2: Eye Can: Sight and Human Subjectivity

God ain't a he or she, but a It [say Shug].
But what do it look like? I ast.
Don't look like nothing, she say. It ain't a picture show. It ain't something you can look at apart from anything else, including yourself.

…[I]t is like Shug say, You have to git man off your eyeball, before you can see anything at all. (Walker 1992, 196-197, 198)

For Merleau-Ponty, perception is an essential condition of *homo sapiens*. In *Phenomenology of Perception* ([1945] 2014) he offers an account of consciousness as: consciousness of something ([1945] 2014, 221-223/259-260).[62] What I take up in this chapter is a particular gearing of experience for a particular iteration of sentience: the human subject.[63] To take seriously Merleau-Ponty's description of the body proper/human subject suggests to me that I must also take seriously the perceptual organ/ization and habits of the human subject.

What I consider in this chapter is the way the human subject is said to have (or be in) a world and the habits of perception that inhere in Merleau-Ponty's account of inter/subjectivity. I start with reading of Merleau-Ponty's account of perception—synthetic and intimate—as eye-forward. I explore

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[62] The sensing subject of Merleau-Ponty's account is just that, a "sensing being [*le sentant*]" for whom "the sensible" and the self as sensor are "not opposite each other" ([1945] 2014, 221/359). Sensing implies an embeddedness in the world, a deep and thoroughgoing implication, of the sensor in the world as sensed.

> The subject of sensation is neither a thinker who notices a quality, nor an inert milieu that would be affected or modified by it; the subject of sensation is a power that is born together with a certain existential milieu or that is synchronized with it. (219/256)

> The sensible give back to me what I had lent to it, but I received it from the sensible in the first place. Myself as the one contemplating the blue of the sky is not an acosmic subject *standing before* it, I do not possess it in thought, I do not lay out in front of it an idea of blue that would give me its secret. Rather, I abandon myself to it, I plug into this mystery, and it "thinks itself in me." (222/259)

What is at stake in this description, is the account of being is coextensive with perceiving. Consciousness is *consciousness of something* that is encountered through and in perception ([1945] 2014, 221-223/259-260). The sensing human subject is not, for Merleau-Ponty, a thinking subject that grasps object solely with its mind. Experience is not a thought experiment. This is a rather evocative and exciting implication for Merleau-Ponty's practice and description. Experience—like Lorde's erotic—cannot be felt secondhand. Though Merleau-Ponty's specific description in his chapter "Sensing" pertains to the human subject, I read this notion of deep erotic embeddedness in the world is a quality of sentient beings in general.

[63] But I remain committed to Merleau-Ponty's notion that we are projects of worlds and worlds are projects of us. *Homo sapiens* are worlding/enworlded beings.

the constitutive role vision/the visual plays in his account of the human subject. I then contrast what I take to be a privileging of vision/the visual with his treatment of the aural register. I explore the way his attention to language/speech may collapse into another mode of the visual and distinguish between speech and voice. Finally, I explore the danger of eye-forwardness for lived flesh.

I: The Body Proper

A shorthand for describing what is at stake in Merleau-Ponty's account is that to be human, is to be a perceiving body to/for whom a world *appears*. To be human, is to be a body capable of being perceived (in and for a world). It is because a world appears to **us** that a world appears. As such, perceivers are implicated in the world that appears.[64] In the introduction to Part Two of *Phenomenology of Perception* (the section that contains "Sensing" Merleau-Ponty writes:

> The theory of the body schema is implicitly a theory of perception. We have learned to again sense our bodies; we have discovered, beneath objective and detached knowledge of the body, this other knowledge that we have of it because it is always with us and because we are bodies. It will be necessary to similarly *awaken the experience of the world such as it appears to us insofar as we are in the world through our bodies,* and insofar as we perceive the world with our bodies. But by reestablishing contact with the body and with the world in this way, we will also rediscover ourselves, since, if one perceives with his body, then the body is a natural myself and, as it were, the body is the subject of perception. ([1945] 2014, 213/249) (emphasis added)

This chapter lingers with what is at stake in a description of inter/subjectivity that hinges upon a world *appearing*. How diverse is this "we" who "rediscover ourselves" our bodies as "natural myself[ves]"? On what grounds does Merleau-Ponty stake this claim about what is achieved through this rediscovery?

There is a world we all share, a world that claims as all, that, on Merleau-Ponty's account, we call claim: the originary acquisition, the natural world. I understand Merleau-Ponty's appeal to the natural world—what I shall also refer to as the biological world/body—as the world of bodies prior-

[64] I borrow this shorthand from Susan Bredlau's Fall 2019 graduate seminar (largely) on *Phenomenology of Perception*.

to or underneath/underpinning the cultural world. This is the past which is never present, the body to be lived (for some as the human subject) prior to the implication in the various layers of culture. This is the body—any body—that emerges with certain attributes which are then used to develop or developed by certain capacities and cultural practices. Perception is made possible through the having and use of certain attributes—sensory organs and their attunement to sensory data. These sensory organs and faculties underpin the necessary conditions of our having a world. I have a nose because I am a body, and smell is one of the sources of sense data that my body will engage with for both a bare navigation of the world—i.e. detecting food that's turned with my sense of smell—and for making my way in the world toward and with others—like the way thick smell of salt pork that slides, honeylike, all around the kitchen to meet the low, cool, oblong green smell of the lima beans when they have just the right amount of black pepper percussing them, meant that my grandma both missed her mother and wanted to share her favorite dish with us.[65]

Though this world is pre-personal (prior to the developmental stage of "I/Me"), it is not a world of *lonely* bodies, but of merely seemingly anonymous bodies. The world of the "specialized self" who interacts with the world of sensations, the anonymous and partial world of naked biological sensing, a "physical world" ([1945] 2014, 224). It is the world of sensory data (rather than information), of sensing rather than perceiving. It is a world of sensations. I read Merleau-Ponty as gesturing to an account of intersubjectivity which demonstrates the priority of the natural world for

[65] Merleau-Ponty's account of perception is a departure from what he terms "intellectualism" and "empiricism" in that it is an account that directly implicates the perceiver as a perceiving body (rather than an abstract or merely observing mind). As such, experience is not merely a mental activity—one cannot simply think it—nor is it a flat transaction with a permanent external. The perceiving body is not a body with a subject inside of it—it is not a skin suit—it is both the condition for the subject and the subject themselves. The body that Merleau-Ponty is concerned with is a living engagement with the world (taken-up within the world) that also makes the world possible (for herself). This body is furnished with sensory faculties (which "belong" to the ears, eyes, hands/skin, nose, and tongue) that necessitate and facilitate not just a gearing of the sensory organs, but also a certain sensitivity/receptivity of these organs to certain sense data ([1945] 2014, 209-213).

being with others.[66] For Merleau-Ponty cultural worlds may already be present but can only be lived via one's implication in the natural world. Cultures transact with and through bodies. Perception dictates our experience/our getting to know society and its cultural objects that opens onto and are made possible through a shared whole ([1945] 2014, 230).

> Rather than presenting us with a unique space or a universal condition of all qualities, each sensation gives us a particular manner of being in space and, in a certain sense, of creating space. It is neither contradictory nor impossible that each sense constitutes a small world within the larger one, and it is even because of its particularity that it is necessary to the whole and that each sensation opens onto the whole. ([1945] 2014, 230)

There is an appreciation of synthesis, of distinction and simultaneity within Merleau-Ponty's account that gives it a wonderful richness. Cultural worlds may exist as "small world[s] within the larger one," as particular and distinct, but never closed to or from the larger whole. I read Merleau-Ponty as making space for a natural/biological world that is always already polluted with difference/cultural worlds. One of the things that is particularly exciting about Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is his focus on the cultural world, and, in fact the plurality of cultural worlds.

> The cultural world is, thus, ambiguous, although it is already present. There is a society here we must get to know. ([1945] 2014, 363)

> The very first cultural object, and the one by which they all exist, is the other's body as a bearer of behavior. ([1945] 2014, 364)

For Merleau-Ponty, there are always-already present cultures worlds for our bodies to encounter. Yet, the existence of cultures worlds does not, on Merleau-Ponty's account, mean that we have nothing in common with those outside of our cultural milieu. Though I disagree that this commonality is palpable enough to intervene with difference in perception, what initially drew me to Merleau-Ponty's account of the human subject was his attention to different cultural worlds and their bearing on perception and experience. I think that this attention to difference is more productive than an

[66] Bodies cannot engage with others without first being bodies, and without first being bodies capable of perceiving others. The cultural world requires that there first be a body, first be a world of bodies as capable of sensory perception. The natural world allows us to see our way to others in the cultural world.

attention to the primordial past that was never present, the originary acquisition of emerging into certain bodies with certain attributes, for I believe, following Lorde, that it is our ability to relate across difference—rather than try to get back to an originary sameness—that can lead to the necessary transformations for the good of our world.

This world is the world prior to perception, which requires the unity of senses and a transcendence of the empiricism of sensation. The unity of senses—the univocity of sensorial spatiality—is only possible with the gearing in of sensory organs: "for us the unity of space can only be found where the sensory domains gear into each other" ([1945] 2014, 231). Each sense has its world, those unique worlds are only possible because we are bodies that sense. Our perceptual gearing—which is the inter-sense organ unity or functioning-together through the unique transactions with the sensory data to which they are sensitive ([1945] 2014, 229 & 231)—is made possible by this natural world ([1945] 2014, 224-225). Gearing makes perception possible. Perception is what makes possible the appearance of others to us. The body's gearing opens up a communion to what is beyond the self, acts as a portal to the social, and allows for the acquisition of knowledge about one's body and another's body.[67] The human subject is a site of tremendous interaction, embeddedness, and sensorial engagement. To perceive is to affirm the human subject as sensing (both the taking on sensory as well as in the making sent of said date—making sense of the self). I am curious about what this means for the human and those who fall beyond Merleau-Ponty's account of the human. How does lived flesh make sense?

[67] The anonymous body/world that is the site of the gearing, the site of the organization of the unqualified sensory data, doesn't so much give way to the cultural as it, on Merleau-Ponty's account, remains distinct from but in intimate contact with the cultural/social body/world. The "I" does different kind of work than the pre-I. Yet it is impossible for the I to do that work without the pre-I. Without the pre-I's gearing into the constantly unfolding/enfolding, renewing and receding horizon, the cultural/personal I cannot step into that opening to commune with others. Sociality is made possible by pre-sociality.

II: Eye Can

Merleau-Ponty's attention to gearing and perception relies heavily on visual terms/metaphors. I do not think that this is coincidence. I think that this is because vision assumes a descriptive, normative, and operative function across his oeuvre.

In "Language, Vision, and Phenomenology: Merleau-Ponty as a Test Case" Eugenio Donato (1970) notes that Merleau-Ponty's description of perception is eye-forward. In this paper he makes the case that the end of Merleau-Ponty's work, at his death, constitutes a transition to a solidly discontinuous relationship between vision and language.[68] This suggests a similarly discontinuous relationship between eye-forward gearing and other gearing. Vision, in this case, emerges as the primary mode of description of perception (and perceptual organization) (Donato 1970, 804-805).

> From the vantage point offered to us by *L'Oeil et l'Esprit* one might say that one of the characteristics of the *Phenomenology of Perception* consists in the recasting of the phenomenological conception in visual metaphors and the systemic elaboration into a coherent web of these same metaphors. It would be a tedious and unnecessary task to do an elaborate analysis of the visual metaphors used by Merleau-Ponty. Let us simply gives a few examples. (Donato 1970, 805-806)

Donato then lays out examples of these visual metaphors and their use (1970, 806-810). Following Donato's account, I take seriously that it is not just that Merleau-Ponty resorts to visual metaphors to describe experience and perception; it is that the visual metaphor is used because it designates the primacy of sight in its relation to experience and perception, and is the most significant sense organ in perceptual organization.

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[68] If Merleau-Ponty became interested in the problem of language, and if he talked about it at great length throughout his entire philosophical undertaking, his conceptualization, or more exactly his attitude towards language, did not remain constant. May it suffice for us to recall that his work does not end with a meditation on language or literature but with a meditation on painting which refers us to the more primordial phenomenon of vision; and vision coextensive with silence, does not find an easy adequation with the vocation of language. Besides, the careful reading of his work notes collected in *Le Visible et l'Invisible* might lead us to believe that had Merleau-Ponty ever finished his work he would have gone even further to assert that vision and language are by essence mutually exclusive and that it is to the former and not to the latter that we ought to give ontological primacy. (Donato 1970, 804)

> The act of vision is in face so primary and so fundamental it rests the bond that will join in an unresolvable fashion, and object: "*Je pense fermer les yeux, me boucher les oreilles, mais je ne peux pas cesser de voir, ne serait-ce que le noir de mes yeux.*" (Ph. P. p. 453) (Donato 1970, 806)[69]

This use of visual metaphor privileges vision and subordinates the aural to the visual, as it subordinates language—both heard and read/written—to sight.

One example of this that Donato doesn't list occurs in Merleau-Ponty's section, "The Body as Expression, and Speech," when he writes of the body as expression and explores gesture as mode of expression. For Merleau-Ponty "[s]peech is a gesture" and "[c]ommunication or the understanding of gestures is achieved through the reciprocity between by intentions and the other person's gestures, and between my gestures and the intentions which can be read in the other person's behavior" ([1945] 2014, 190-191). This description of speech—aural—in visual terms has consequences for his normative claims about human intersubjectivity and subjectivity as I explore in Chapter 3. Don Ihde (1976) attributes the possibility spatiality to the aural. I want to distinguish between Ihde's attempt to draw our attention to the heard shape of sound, the sonorous dimensionality; and what I understand as Merleau-Ponty's reduction of the aural to the visual here. It also has consequences for the claims that we can make about what is good, beautiful, or pleasing—and affective states—in light of our intersubjective entanglements.

When gearing is described by Merleau-Ponty in primarily visual terms/relations, vision emerges as a primary mode not just of sensorial organ/ization, but of perception, experience, and evaluation. I also this privileging of vision to mean that for Merleau-Ponty, the primary way that we make community and encounter others is through sight.[70] We do not just encounter another in the visual realm, this encounter with the other, confirms one as a seeing-seer (confirms both our point of

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[69] *I think I can close my eyes and plug up my ears, but I can never cease seeing, even if it will only ever be the blackness of my eyes.* (Translation, mine)

[70] I would say that on primary level, dating apps such as Tindrr, Bumble, Grindr, Hinge, and OKCupid demonstrate this. Who we want to meet (or "swipe right" on) largely relies on whose visual presentation appeals to us. We reach out to them with our eyes.

orientation as well as our capacity to be seen, the reversibility of sensorial perception and subjectivity). This confirmation is made all the more palpable because seeing the other see us shows us ourselves. This is what Wiskus (2021) points to as the privileging of transcendence that occurs in the *The Visible and the Invisible* ([1964] 1968). In "The Intertwining – The Chiasm" and his notes on the text, Merleau-Ponty makes the case for the other as being our way of truly/fully seeing ourselves. It is "through the other's eyes we are for ourselves full visible" ([1964] 1968, 142). The other gives us to ourselves (as subjects) through sight. And it is flesh that allows for the necessary condition of my being and my being seen. Though, Merleau-Ponty does pivot to sound and its bearing on being and subjectivity later in the text, I read him as denying the aural register the inter/subjectivity and reversibility he appears to privilege.

> Among my movements, there are some that go nowhere— that do not even go find in the other body their resemblance or their archetype: these are the facial movements, many gestures, and especially those strange movements of the throat and mouth that form the cry and the voice. Those movements end in sounds and I hear them. Like crystal, like metal and many other substances, I am a sonorous being, but I hear my own vibration from within; as Malraux said, I hear myself with my throat. In this, as he also has said, I am incomparable; my voice is bound to the mass of my own life as is the voice of no one else. ([1964] 1968, 144)

While in his earlier work he afforded potency to behaviors/gestures, in his transition to a general ontology of being, he reconfigures these as movements of the body. In "The Intertwining – The Chiasm" this shift supports his claim that neither vision nor the visible are reducible to one another. The visual does not (and cannot) give all of itself to vision (this accounts for the invisible), vision always the product of an approach or manner of "palpating it" ([1964] 1968, 131) another. And it is through the space of the vision-touch system that one differentiates (names and knows) things, others, and the subject in the visible ([1964] 1968, (130-139). However, the aural register, for Merleau-Ponty does not allow for any kind of differentiating distance. We "hear [our] own vibration from within" ([1964] 1968, 144). I take this to mean that he believes that unlike touch and (especially) sight, I *can*

fully hear myself without the other ([1964] 1968, 144). If this is the case then the hearer cannot affirm its subjectivity in the aural register, as no other voice confirms the hearer.

I read a through-line between the *Phenomenology of Perception* and "The Intertwining – The Chiasm" in the return of a kid of primordial acquisition that surfaces in his general ontology of being. Because sight obtains in the natural/past which has never been present we can encounter others *before* we have developed a personality. And it is this ability to reach out at others through our senses that forms a prerequisite for perception, and it is perception that makes possible the movement from pre-personal to the *in media res* of personality.

The pre-personal world's foundational status to relation with others is demonstrated in "The Child's Relation with Others" (Merleau-Ponty 2007). In this piece, Merleau-Ponty explores the development of personality via the child's use of vision. Orion Edgar, in *Things Seen and Unseen* (2016), points to this operation of sight in perceptual and experiential gearing (Edgar 2016, 136-137).[71] For Edgar, that one sees and *how* one sees dictates our desire and ability to reach out to who we see. Sight is intertwined and makes possible intertwining with the world (Edgar 2016, 138). The visual is how we get into the world/how we become and remain intermeshed in the world. Our enmeshment with the world allows one to say, "Here I am; there You are; this feels good."

I take this to mean that on Merleau-Ponty's account before one is an "I," on is implicated in engagements with others through a global visual apprehension/mapping of the conducts of each other (within our own conducts). This follows from Winnicott's account of infant and early-childhood psyhic development in, "Transitional Objects and Transition Phenomena—A Study of the First Not-

[71] For Merleau-Ponty, in "The Child's Relation with Others," it is because I am "a consciousness turned toward things" (because I can see the actions of others as relating to my own possibilities for action) that I come to see behaviors, and then come to understand these behaviors in relation to the schematic bodies by which they are borne and so to see the psyches to whom such behaviors belong. But all this depends on a tacit recognition of my own intertwining with the world, an understanding that my body is not an "agglomeration of sensations" but a part of the body-world system that is always postured in relation to the world. This body-world system develops into a self-other system, or perhaps a self-body-world-other system. (Edgar 2016, 136-137)

Me Possession" (1953). Humans are immediately sensitive to facial expressions. Humans take up and move through facial expressions with their eyes in such a way that one is intimate with the expressions of another's face prior to the expressions of one's own. The personal "I/Me" emerges in and through this taking up and mirroring (Winnicott 1953).[72]

Merleau-Ponty's eye-forward description of perception and experience and eye-forward entanglement with others has normative consequences. It makes space for an account of a normal body or a normal mode of gearing, perception, and experience. That is, one may read in Merleau-Ponty's "Sensing" an account of fields and scopes where it is the visual field that is afforded the greatest perceptual and experiential scope.[73]

> A twelve-year-old blind boy defines the dimension of vision quite well: for those who can see, he says, "they were bound to me through an unknown sense, which entirely surrounded me even from a distance, followed me about, penetrated through me and somehow held me in its power… from morning to night." But these indications remain notional and problematic for the blind person. They pose a question to which vision alone could response. And this is why the blind man who has been operated upon finds the world to the different from what he had anticipated, just as we always find a man different from what we knew of him in advance. The blinds person's world and the world of the normal personal differ not merely in the quantity of matter available to them, but moreover in the *structure* of the whole. ([1945] 2014, 233)[74]

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[72] Winnicott does a rather wonderful job of describing the plenum and indeterminacy (as well as the stages of I/Me identity development) of infancy and early childhood, but I think that literature has a wonderful way of describing the experience of this indeterminacy.

> Before I even say myself, I saw my sister. That face was me and I was that face and that was how the story went. (Senna 1999, 5)

> I am Beloved and she is mine. …I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too a hot thing (Morrison 2004, 248)

Senna describes the temporal limit of this lack of distinguishing. Soon after this, the narrator sees her own face and begins to develop a Me. She moves out of the pre-personal or pre-I and into the personal. The pre-I allows for an apprehension, through sight, of the conducts of the other (and the other's psyche as conduct) (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 116-117). The infant's experience is very much this pre-I/anonymous existence "I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own" and it is in the robustness of this existence that makes the function developmental achievement of puberty and then adulthood possible ([1945] 2014, 380-383).

[73] Let us conclude that the tactile field never has the scope of the visual field, the tactile object is never wholly present in each of its parts like the visual object, and in short, that touch is not vision. ([1945] 2014, 233)

[74] It does feel important to note that Merleau-Ponty describes blindness as a *deprivation* of vision. By this, one can infer an implicit taking up of blindness as unnatural. A deprivation of a loss of sight does not see to jive with an understanding of blindness as the natural condition of millions of people. That is, if on is born blind—at least according to the blind people I've known—one does not experience it as a deprivation or a loss. One experiences blindness as the routine gearing of one's sensory functions. Merleau-Ponty's use of blindness implicates him as sighted and as having an understanding of blindness from a particular stance that takes vision to be privileged such that blindness is not a natural "lack" (which would

Sight is able to cross—and yet preserve—distance to bind one to another. And, in his later work it is the capacity of vision, to observe and preserve distance—to separate out—that becomes integral to his account of the carnal body in his general ontology of being (Wiskus 2021, 256-258). The ability of the visual realm to distinguish heightens the extensiveness body and world. And this *in media res* re-orients consciousness. It is through the visual that Merleau-Ponty makes the leap from body proper to the carnal ontology of transcendence. In this later work, sight, for Merleau-Ponty appears to exceed the immanent body.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, the visual field is the par exemplar of synthesis and world-having. The visual field anchors normal entanglements with others. Sight's field is thick and it one that we all move through, even those who live without sight. Vision can speak to experience and perception in a way that other sensory data cannot. And it is sight that allows for the apprehension of knowledge or clearer perspective of the profiles of intersubjective of life that open to us.

> Through touch, a blind man knows precisely what branches and leaves are, as well as what an arm and the fingers of the hand are. After the operation, he is amazed to find "so much difference" between a tree and a human body. Clearly vision has not merely added new details to the knowledge of the tree. It is a question of a new mode of presentation and of a new type of synthesis that transfigures the whole. …The total signification of our life—of which the notional signification is never but an extract—would be different if we were deprived of vision. ([1945] 2014, 233)

This is not, I want to suggest, a mere account of difference on Merleau-Ponty's account. That is, this is not the account of different worlds sighted and non-sighted. This is an account of normal and not-normal. The blind person's world and the world of the normal person different not merely in the quantity of matter available to them, but moreover in the *structure* of the whole. Because the sensory organs open onto their own distinct worlds, and because perception requires synthesis,

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still be a troubling stance) but as an unnatural lack and a forced/loss deprivation. It seems that for Merleau-Ponty to be blind is to have something taken from you: to be robbed.

"synthetic perception is the rule" ([1945] 2014, 238)—sensorial unity—there must be a primary point of sense data: a top gear. The structure of the whole adjudicates meaning and value.

> Entendons que jamais le champ tactile n'a l'ampleur du champ visuel, jamais l'objet tactile n'est tout entier présent à chacune de ses parties comme l'objet visuel, et en somme que toucher n'est pas voir. … Le monde de l'aveugle et celui du normal diffèrent non seulement par la quantité des matériaux dont ils disposent, mais encore par la *structure* de l'ensemble. … La signification totale de notre vie - dont la signification notionnelle n'est jamais qu'un extrait - serait différente si nous étions privés de la vision. (1945, 259-260)[75]

> Let us conclude that the tactile field never has the scope of the visual field, the tactile object is never wholly present in each of its parts like the visual object, and, in short, that touch is not vision. …The blind person's world and the world of the normal person differ not merely in the quantity of matter available to them, but moreover in the *structure* of the whole. …The total signification of our life – of which the notional signification is never but an extract – would be different if we were deprived of vision. ([1945] 2014, 233/269-270)

> We conclude that the tactile field has never the fullness of the visual, that the tactile object is never wholly present in each of its parts as is the case with the visual object, and in short that touching is not seeing. …The blind man's world differs from the normal person's not only through the quantity of material at his disposal, but also through the *structure* of the whole. … The whole significance of our life—from which theoretical significance is merely extracted—would be different if we were sightless. ([1945] 2002, 260-261)

I have included two different published translations here because, while they are similar there are differences that might lead to more or less sympathetic readings of Merleau-Ponty on this account. Landes (2014) and Smith (2002) translate *l'ampleur*—which I read as, the amplitude—differently. The use of "scope" in the Landes translation (2014) can be taken to mean what one aims at, goal, or purview.[76] The tactile field has a different purview than the visual field; the two are not the same. Yet, it is the Smith (2002) translation that gives greater weight to the conclusion Merleau-Ponty builds to

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[75] We hear that never can the field of the tactile have the amplitude of the field of the visual; never can the touched object be wholly present in all of its parts like the seen object, and so touch is not sight. …The world of the blind person and that of the normal differs not only in the quantity of the materials at its disposal but moreso in the *structure* of the whole. …The total signification of our life – of which notional signification is never but an extract – is to be different if we are deprived of vision. (Warmack translation)

[76] "scope, n.2". OED Online. June 2021. Oxford University Press. https://www-oed-com.proxy.library.emory.edu/view/Entry/172974?result=2&rskey=vCr7Hc& (accessed July 30, 2021).

6b. The sphere or area over which any activity operates or is effective; range of application or of subjects embraced; the reach or tendency of an argument, etc.; the field covered by a branch of knowledge, an inquiry, concept, etc.

about the structure of the whole of the world of the non/sighted. The Smith use of "fullness" indicates a *lack* in the non/sighted a "normal" person/subject as a privilege sighted subject/body. My reading of "amplitude" speaks to both purview *and* fullness simultaneously. It is also notable that they take different readings of "privés de" with Smith (2002) opting for the more gentle "sightless" and Landes (2014) choosing a more straightforward "deprived of". This less gentle translation suggests that physical blindness is—is on Merleau-Ponty's account—understood largely in terms of how a sighted person feels about blindness. This is blindness as a deprivation of sight (a loss or a lack) rather than blindness as a natural facet of embodiment.

I read this section—particularly when re-examined with "The Visible and the Invisible"—as an explicit hailing to what Reynolds (2017 & 2020) calls the "normate," and, stronger, the use of the normate as the background condition for the reflection and articulation of a normative subject that, is distinguishable at even the level of the originary acquisition of the anonymous, pre-personal, common shared body of the *homo sapien*. Despite readings of the incorporation of the cane of the blind person—that puts the cane on par with the feather in a person's hat—and of the multiplicity of worlds/horizons in his section on Freedom, I turn to this section in Sensing/*Le Sentir* to insist upon a reading of Merleau-Ponty's human subject—above identified as "*du normal*" and "*notre / nous*"—as that most closely aligned with the "*mythical norm*," specifically that of Merleau-Ponty himself.[77]

Reynolds turns to the language of "normate" and "non-normate" to highlight the operating background structure that enriches dis/ability narratives as well as to use Merleau-Ponty (despite what Reynolds identifies as his vacillation) via the cane/feather analogy and the freedom exploration, as

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

providing the methodological framework for the respect of different worlds. Reynolds reads Merleau-Ponty useful for disability theory and "cripping" studies because of his attention to worlding and world-building.[78] This is partially why I turn to the section above: because it speaks, explicitly about the *nature* of those worlds.

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

> As [Garland-Thomson] puts it, the normate is "the veiled subject position of the cultural self, the figure outlined by the array of deviant others whose marked bodies shore up the normate's boundaries. The term *normate* usually designates the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings. Normate, then, is the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them." The normate is the tain of the mirror of ableism. It is the invisible mechanism that allows slippage from being to being-able, buttressing forces from toxic individualism to social eugenics. …[T]he normate shapes now things are and ought to be from *behind the scenes*. (Reynolds 2020, 244-245)

> The pair "normate/non-normate" thus better picks out the range and lived contexts of meanings captured by that of "ability/disability." By fusing norms, values, and desires, the concept of the normate brings into relief the way in which categorization by ability is irreducibly social. Powers and histories are always at play in the constitution of any given ability or disability. (Reynolds 2017, 420)

Though he critiques the ways in which Merleau-Ponty falls back into ableist notions when he describes the ability non-blind people to simulate blindness and the seizing of the cane as at hand (in the way the organist seizes the organ), he also reads Merleau-Ponty as turning ableist notions about the good life against itself (2017, 422-426). This turning is in line with Merleau-Ponty's work in service

[78] Insofar as the historical, cultural, and social cannot be split from the natural, biological, and individual, the historical traces of ableism and the ableist conflation cannot be erased from the form and materiality of the body. A successful crip phenomenology will always seek to bring such traces into relief. "Cripping" is here understood as a method of, first, exposing the able-bodied assumptions of a given conceptual terrain or methodology and, second, articulating a conceptual reconstruction of that terrain grounded in non-normate experience. (Reynolds 2017, 426)

of non-philosophy, in the intimate hollow of experience and the inextricability of embodiment and meaning.

> Non-normate phenomenology constitutes a form of non-philosophy through its insistence on the *irreducible multiplicity of worlds created through the constitutive phylogenetic polymorphism and ontogenetic variability of human corporeality*. There is, for such a method, no fundamental split between subject and object, body and mind, consciousness and nature, being and beings, or ability and disability. (2017, 427).

I appreciate these care-full and engaging readings of Merleau-Ponty and the lived bodies of difference. Yet as much as there is concern by Reynolds for the possibilities that a focus on worlding opens, I am not sure that Merleau-Ponty's account provides the horizonal expanse that Reynolds hopes. I remain unconvinced that Merleau-Ponty is able to be recuperated for non-normate theorizing—unless it's as a foil—precisely given the insufficiency of his account of intersubjectivity (which is largely due to his self-referential account of the reversibility of the flesh), as well as what I read above, as an account of the worlds of people who are blind as lacking (in both material and in the structural whole). That is, while Merleau-Ponty may be open to the existence of other worlds, he does not go beyond the normate for an understanding of those worlds as different and not deviant. And so, "we do not develop tools for using human difference as a springboard for creative change within our lives. We speak not of human difference, but of human deviance" (Lorde 2007, 115-116).

Drawing on Reynold's account of "ableism" and Garland-Thomson's account of "material anonymity" Christine Wieseler challenges "conceptions of the 'normal' subject in phenomenology" (Wieseler 2019, 69-86). My reading of Merleau-Ponty positions me in line with Wieseler who critically reads Merleau-Ponty's "primary interest in examining case studies of people with illnesses and injuries is to gain a better understanding of the 'normal' subject by way of contrast" (Wieseler 2019, 71). Specifically, Wieseler turns to Garland-Thomson's account of mis/fit to develop her critique of Merleau-Ponty's implicit normative claim that the normal human subject/lived body is white, male, cis, and abled. The characteristics of the mythical norm/ative body allow these bodies to be lived as

anonymous—and, to my mind, form the basis of an understanding of non-differentiation at the level of the natural/biological and pre-personal *homo sapien* body—and it is this "material anonymity" that assures and secures fit in the world.

> Garland-Thomson states, "A fit occurs when a harmonious, proper interaction occurs between a particularly shaped and functioning body and an environment that sustains that body." When there is an adequate fit between a person and her environment, one has what she calls "material anonymity," in which one is "suited to the circumstances and conditions of the environment, of satisfying its requirements so as not to stand out, make a scene, or disrupt through countering expectations." (Wieseler 2019, 71)

A "misfit" occurs when there is an insufficient fit, when one has a *material conspicuity* that is experienced as an arrest of the "I can" or being "stopped" (Ahmed 2007, 161).[79]

> A misfit lies not within the characteristics of one's body or the environment; it occurs when they do not mesh. Garland-Thomson uses the term to indicate not only this disjunction but also the individual who experiences it: "to misfit renders one a misfit." (Wieseler 2019, 72)

Wieseler notes that for Garland-Thomson, this account of mis/fit and material anonymity can incorporate racialized, gendered, and additional othered lived experience in the world (Wieseler 2019, 72-73). This is an important extension because it betrays the shaping work material anonymity does in Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the lived body. The normal subject that emerges in the *Phenomenology of Perception* is one marked by ease and/or comfortable (or non-fraught) intersubjective relations with others.

> Merleau-Ponty sometimes does not recognize that he is generalizing the experiences of particular bodies that fit well enough to attain material anonymity. …Merleau-Ponty does not consider instances in which one finds it uncomfortable, onerous, or impossible to fit with one's milieu. He centers the experiences of those who are able to obtain material anonymity rather than those who misfit. (Wieseler 2019, 73)

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[79] 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 that you 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. To stop involves many meanings: to cease, to end, and also to cut off, to arrest, to check, to prevent, to block, to obstruct or to close. …How does it feel to be stopped? Being stopped is not just stressful: it makes the 'body' itself the 'site' of social stress. (Ahmed 2007, 161)

For Wieseler, (the ease of the) fit is a privilege that obtains to particular bodies; Merleau-Ponty universalizes this particular account through his use of case studies and his descriptions of people who are blind. If I follow Wieseler correctly, I suggest that the *Phenomenology of Perception* reifies the normate and as such there are two kinds of perceivers/bodies that emerge from the text: normal and pathologized.

Merleau-Ponty is also offering normative account of meaning production. *That is, though I may be able to feel the kisses or bites, hear the murmurs and smell the scent of my lovers, I cannot know what they mean. A world of meaning is not as readily available to me as it is through sight*. For it is only through sight's grasp of their behavior (the way one's eyes crinkle, the way the other's cheeks rise her lashes) that I am able to discern whether they are happy, playful, loving, or not.[80] Moreover it is their seeing me, or rather my being seen as I see them that holds us together in our world (Edgar 2016, 149).

But what happens when this world breaks down. Or, more pointedly what happens when the world that we share limits our appreciation of the other to the visual, and our approach to the other in vision must be made through this larger world?

> Although the sexual dimension of perception should not be given priority here, we want to say that in contrast to Sartre's pornographic or onanistic voyeurism, Merleau-Ponty's idea of vision will be more full-bloodedly sexy. The one I look at is a "thick" subject, desirable precisely because she escapes me, because she is not reducible to an object, but constitutes a second person. This Thou, in the best case, in mutual recognition confirms my bodily existence as an expressive realization of an "I," though there is not full coincidence between our subjectivities, because expression is not transparent. In sexuality I relate to the other as another subject-object or body-subject; but this does "not mean that the body is the transparent envelope of Spirit [*l'Esprit*]." (Edgar 2016, 115)

Edgar retains an optimism in his reading of Merleau-Ponty yet what does "full-bloodedly sexy" mean to the lived flesh of the pornotrope? In this reading of Merleau-Ponty (contra Sartre) and the role of vision, Edgar turns a blind eye to the worst case, the breakdown of the "Thou" and the apprehension

[80] One might say that Merleau-Ponty's account makes consent and negotiation of pleasure a primarily visual activity. This strikes me as ***deeply*** troubling.

of the body-object denuded of subjectivity. One example of this is in a response Billie Holiday records to her performance of "Strange Fruit."

> Over the years I've had a lot of weird experiences as a result of that song. It has a way of separating the straight people from the squares and cripples. One night in Los Angeles a bitch stood right up in the club where I was singing and said, "Billie, why don't you sing that sexy song you're so famous for? You know, the one about the naked bodies swinging in the trees." Needless to say, I didn't. (Holiday 2006, 95)

"Strange Fruit" has been described as "haunting," tense, and deliberate. The "naked bodies swinging in the trees" are the "Black bodies swinging in the Southern breeze" in the "poplar trees" with "blood on the leaves, blood at the root." That her spectator, transformed a clear illusion to lynched bodies into a bump-and-grind, speaks to the ways in which the "thick" fugitive subject that Edgar sees in Merleau-Ponty's account of perception falls apart specifically because of the fact that it unfurls within a sexual milieu.

In *Black Resonance* Emily Lordi offers a wonderfully textured and considered listening of Lady Day's various iterations of the song (Lordi 2013, 157-164). I include a link to the *Chelsea at Nine* version that she mentions in footnotes for your reference.[81] This is not a sexy song. And, as Davis (1999) and Lordi (2013) note, it is a challenging song to perform. It takes great musicianship as well as a certain ear and affective stance to be able to engage it.

> "Strange Fruit" is a song that poses serious problems for the singer. Its metaphors are so forceful that an overly dramatic rendition might have transformed its powerful emotional content into histrionics. The intent behind the song—both Allen's and Holiday's—was to evoke solidarity in its listeners. This kind of art sometimes misses its aim and occasions pity instead. If those who were touched by "Strange Fruit" were left feeling pity for black victims of racism instead of compassion and solidarity, this pity would have recapitulated rather the contested the dynamics of racism. It would have affirmed rather than disputed the superior position of whiteness. (Davis 1999, 194)

When Holiday chose to perform then song, it was always used to close the set. She describes how hard that song was for her to perform. "When I sing it, it affects me so much I get sick. It takes all

[81] https://youtu.be/-DGY9HvChXk

the strength out of me" (Holiday 2006, 95). One way of reading Holiday's account of her relation to the song—that it reminded her of how her father died and "because twenty years after [1945] 2014 died the things that killed him [were] still happening in the South" (Holiday 2006, 94, 95). Another way of reading this song is by reading Lady Day through Davis, to bend an ear toward the challenge of meaning creation in the non-subject position for a mixed audience. Holiday describes how she works collaboratively with other musicians to turn the poem written by Lewis Allen into the song.

> I also got a wonderful assist from Danny Mendelsohn, another writer who had done arrangements for me. He helped me with arranging the song and rehearsing it patiently. I worked like the devil on it because I was never sure I could put it across or that I could get across to a plush night-club audience the things that it meant to me. (Holiday 2006, 94)

Lady Day realizes that she must work through and against this sexualized speculum. This quotation indicates an understanding of the risk involved in performing the song and having its "thickness" thinned out by the viewing subject. On Merleau-Ponty's account the breakdown experienced by Lady Day (and other non-majoritarian people) can be treated as an aberration as opposed to a regular part of the worlds we inhabit.

III: Eye Cannot

In her article, "Expression and Silence: Music and Language in Merleau-Ponty's Existential Phenomenology" Rhonda Siu (2018) explores a "link between musical and linguistic expression" through her reading of Merleau-Ponty's account of language. She points to the inextricable connection between the expressive body and the languaging body to position language as both bodily and expressive (Siu 2018, 1095-1096, 1100). In this way she is able to also find that meaning is not

just an operation of the visual, but that music also has meaning.[82] That is, the aural also allows us to know things.

> Merleau-Ponty states, "alone of all expressive processes, speech is able to settle into a sediment and constitute an acquisition for use in human relationships." By this, he is referring to the difficulty of abandoning the conventional yet misguided belief that a thought can somehow be extracted from another's speech and be repeated or at least rearticulated in one's own. (Siu 2018, 1103)

For Merleau-Ponty, meaning in language is not conceptual/propositional. It is not the result of deductive reasoning. It is the result of feeling, specifically of feeling in/with the body. Our bodies know language. All bodies language. This is affective relationship between language and feeling, means that language (especially written language)—at least in "The Intertwining – The Chiasm"—is more robust than a kind of proxy or simulacrum for thought. Siu's article lingers on the way that Merleau-Ponty's account of the aural deepens as he shifts toward the carnal body in his later work. And this languaging has much to offer both the human subject and the lived flesh.

In "Merleau-Ponty on Consciousness and Affect through the Temporal Movement of Music" Jessica Wiskus (2021) makes a similar connection. In this piece she traces Merleau-Ponty's account of consciousness from the I Can/Consciousness of in *Phenomenology of Perception*, to consciousness as transcendental in his general ontology of *The Visible and the Invisible* (Wiskus 2021, 253-262). For Wiskus, Merleau-Ponty's attention to the connection between "the flesh and the idea, between the

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[82] Meaning, in music, cannot be grasped in its totality in a single moment but is rather gradually revealed and evolves as a piece is being performed over a particular duration of time. A "musical idea," for Merleau-Ponty, must thus be expressed through the means of an actual performance to be understood. (Siu, 1103)

For Merleau-Ponty, the locus of creativity in linguistic meaning resides in the notion of "existential meaning," that is, in the "emotional" dimension of speech that permeates the "accent, intonation, gesture, and facial expression" of the speaker. These elements of accent, intonation, etc. communicate the more nuanced, ironic, poignant, and/or enigmatic qualities of our messages in ways that the conceptual content of our words cannot. For example, a quivering tone of voice could betray a speaker's fear despite his/her declaration, "I am not afraid." Importantly, these elements of speech allow for creativity in linguistic expression by enabling the speaker/listener to convey or interpret messages in diverse, and often surprising, ways.

"Existential meaning," Merleau-Ponty argues, is more fundamental than "conceptual meaning" because the latter is derived by "deduction" from the former. ...The distinctiveness of one's style of speaking, writing, composing, or playing in reflects turn the distinctiveness of one's wider "style of being," or the way that one experiences the world. (Siu, 1104-1105)

visible and the interior" invisible is most clearly articulated in his turn to Proust's character Swann and his experience of being inhabited/possessed by "the little phrase" that "makes present to Swann" "the essence of love" ([1964] 1968, 149).

> Literature, music, the passions, but also the experience of the visible world are—no less than is the science of Lavoisier and Ampère—the exploration of an invisible and the disclosure of a universe of ideas. The difference is simply that this invisible, these ideas, unlike those of that science, cannot be detached from the sensible appearances and be erected into a second positivity. The musical idea, the literary idea, the dialectic of love, and also the articulations of the light, the modes of exhibition of sound and of touch speak to us, have their logic, their coherence, their points of intersection, their concordances, and here also the appearances are the disguise of unknown "forces" and 'laws." ([1964] 1968, 149)

For Merleau-Ponty, music and affect obtain in the visible (via the invisible). The aural, "the musical idea" exhibits itself even if only invisibly. The musical idea is in some ways distant from sound/ing. *This* interior resonance can be thought of has a visual register. We can only "get at" the musical idea "*as ideas*" as embodied in this general ontology ([1964] 1968, 150). For Wiskus, we are only able to apprehend the depth of these ideas though our ability to separate them out, from an attention to that which is between them, connecting them.

> In his account of *la petite phrase*, Merleau-Ponty is careful to distinguish between the audible notes of the melody and what her refers to as "the musical idea" – an idea "that is not the contrary of the sensible that is its lining and depth." (In musical terms. This "idea" might be understood as the rhythm or the phrasing of the performance.) From Merleau-Ponty's descriptions, it is clear that the musical idea operates according to a temporal structure of transcendence. The musical idea is not contained within or bound to the limits of the sounding notes; rather is it "behind the sounds or between them." (Wiskus 2021, 262)

We set them apart through and because of our ongoing relationship to flesh ([1964] 1968, 151). What this suggests is that the musical idea is a kind of fecund negativity—not a negation—but an element necessary for positivity, perhaps even a mode of the flesh.

> We do not possess the musical or sensible ideas, precisely because they are negativity or absence circumscribed; they possess us. The performer is no longer producing or reproducing the sonata: he feels himself, and the others feel him to be at the service of the sonata; the sonata sings through him or cries out so suddenly that he must "dash on his bow" to follow it. ([1964] 1968, 151)

> There is a strict ideality in experiences that are experiences of the flesh: the moments of the sonata, the fragments of the luminous field, adhere to one another with a cohesion without concept, which is of the same type as the cohesion of the parts of my body, or the cohesion of my body with the world. Is my body a thing, is it an idea? It is neither, being the measurant of the things. We will therefore have to recognize an ideality that is not alien to the flesh, that gives it its axes, its depth, its dimensions. ([1964] 1968, 152)

"Here… there is no vision without the screen" the screen of the carnal body in whole the aural exhibition resounds ([1964] 1968, 150). That is, we would neither here nor feel without the body. This is, beautiful. Such an account of embodiment, of consciousness in the midst of sensorial input and affect, approaches a kind of fleshiness for even the subject. Yet, its resonance is out of tune with lived flesh because, when the lived body is taken up as a "screen" the resonance of the subject falls flat. Even here, in his general account of being, subjectivity is rendered in terms of the visual, and affect is tied to what we can see or understand through sight.

Though *The Visible and the Invisible* marks Merleau-Ponty's movement away from some of the themes (notable the body proper) of his earlier work, I find in it some consistency of concepts. One of which is that Merleau-Ponty focuses on language *qua* speech rather than the polymorphic character of sounding. I contend that sound contains *but is not limited to speech* and that a focus on language/speech instead of sound/ing limits the openings that emerge in Merleau-Ponty's account of language. Even though for Merleau-Ponty, language is not merely a verbal image (which is why musical language/notation—as demonstrated by Swann—will always miss the totality of the musical idea. That is, the part of the musical idea that resounds is beyond the visible and representation but is still there-ish for the subject in the invisible ([1964] 1968, 179-181). I read his turn to the written "little phrase" of Swann/Proust as suggesting that the musical idea is accomplished through the notating subject, even as it eludes direct facsimile.

On Merleau-Ponty's account of language/speech, speech implicates the speaker. Language, as an embodied project of sense means that *the word has a sense* ([1945] 2014, 182). And it is this sense that can be shared and transmitted to another. This is perhaps why Merleau-Ponty turns to Proust's

writing about the musical idea—the little phrase—rather focus on the sound itself. In turning to language/the musical idea, Merleau-Ponty is able to turn to the subject implicated in the idea, and the subject/sense relation. Language/speech collapses into the eye-forward subject.

IV: The Little Phrase

If language/speech is invested with inter/subjectivity and the subject is a concept that excludes lived flesh, then how does one make sense of lived flesh? If language/speech refers to the subject, then a register more robust than language/speech is necessary to attend to lived flesh. An attention to sounding—and a turn to the aural—resounds in such a way that swells beyond the limitations of the perceptual and affective register of the subject. I take seriously Merleau-Ponty's account of the sense-bearing quality of words—what I tune into is that sounds, as well as words, as among-ness and the porous self, lived flesh are implicated in certain sounding practices. In this project I am particularly interested in certain--which is to say that there are many more practices beyond the scope of this project—musical practices of american Black folks.

Flesh shines rather than appears. For Musser, shine sings the jouissance of flesh for "blackness is spectacular but not knowable" (Musser 2018, 50). This tension with the visual—and here we might say that vision/sight on Merleau-Ponty's account *confirms* subjectivity whilst opacity keeps the fleshy self buoyant—also slides into a tension with language. Spillers' description of "American grammar" (Spillers 2003, 209) is useful here.[83] Musser picks up on Spillers' critique of American grammar as subjective violence to make the case for sounding, voice and listening as a way of being with otherwise.

[83] The symbolic order that I wish to trace in this writing, calling it an "American grammar," begins at the "beginning," which is really a rupture and a radically different kind of cultural continuation. The massive demographic shifts, the violent formation of a modern African consciousness, that take place on the sub-Saharan Continent during the initiative strikes which open the Atlantic slave trade in the fifteenth century of our Christ, interrupted hundreds of years of black African culture. We write and think, then, about an outcome of aspects of African-American life in the United States under the pressure of these events. I might as well add that the familiarity of this narrative does nothing to appears the hunger of recorded memory, not does the persistence of the repeated rob these well-known, oft-told events of their power, even now, to start. In a very real sense, every writing as revision makes the discovery all over again" (Spillers 2003, 209).

It is voice/listening/sounding that flesh inhabits. Whereas for Merleau-Ponty, speech exceeds voice. Speech is thought, gesture, and the completion of the body's thought. Speech belongs to the Subject/Thief. Speech is the formal grammar that is structured by white supremacy and antiblackness that is the being-at the world of the Subject. For Merleau-Ponty, voice is insufficient for intercorporeality, it goes nowhere.

> Among my movements, there are some that go nowhere— that do not even go find in the other body their resemblance or their archetype: these are the facial movements, many gestures, and especially those strange movements of the throat and mouth that form the cry and the voice. Those movements end in sounds and I hear them. Like crystal, like metal and many other substances, I am a sonorous being, but I hear my own vibration from within; as Malraux said, I hear myself with my throat. In this, as he also has said, I am incomparable; my voice is bound to the mass of my own life as is the voice of no one else. ([1964] 1968, 144)

In voice, I do not need the other to know my own sound. While Merleau-Ponty stops short of describing sound/ing is entirely solipsistic he still does not give listening/sounding the full utterability akin to sight or touch. That is, he requires that the other be close enough to hear the breath and feel the "effervescence" which gets the listener *almost* to the fullness of listening.

Because he requires the ability to be "close enough" to hear the sounder, what he actually wants is to be able to see the sounder, to feel the breath and to see the formation of the words (this is translated as phonetic). This is an attempt, it seems, to map sound/ing and hearing onto the visual and the tangible, he wrestles it into the "touch-vision" system so as to make it conform to "reflexivity." This is to think of sound/ing without the gerund, to think in a percussive sense, without resonance.

> But if I am close enough to the other who speaks to hear his breath and feel his effervescence and his fatigue, I almost witness, in him as in myself, the awesome birth of vociferation. As there is a reflexivity of the touch, of sight, and of the touch-vision system, there is a reflexivity of the movements of phonation and of hearing; they have their sonorous inscription, the vociferations have in me their motor echo. This new reversibility and the emergence of the flesh as expression are the point of insertion of speaking and thinking in the world of silence. ([1964] 1968, 144)

Indeed, he goes so far as to understand the sounds heard of another as confirming *him*. The echo of/in his own body is then less sympathetic vibration as much as it is a solo. Speech, unlike voice, is

more easily mapped onto the touch-vision system of the written word and formal grammatical practices that fixed expression in time and space.

Voice is beyond speech. This is not to say that voice is without words. It is to say that voice/ing is not just words, not just written language, and is changeable, motive, and supple. Voice opens onto poetry as well as moans. Voices refers to the way words—when used—are lived, the way they enflesh expression that drops out of an account of speech. If speech accomplishes thought, we are given an account of an epistemological orientation that falls back upon a subject with a kind of consciousness (of). Lorde shows us an orientation otherwise where epistemology starts with feel/affectivity—not as opposed to thought, but as the originary of thought. Voice emerges from and in this orientation.

On Musser's account voice is the fluid intertwining of the "materiality" of flesh with its "ineffable qualities of interiority" (Musser 2018, 95). Crawley (2016) breathes life into Musser's account as he turns toward the wayward aspirations of Blackpentacostal breath.

> Whooping is the moment of celebration, the moment when the sermon is unleashed. Whooping allows for the deep and intense modes of improvisation, often breaking off to what almost sounds like song but stops short of singing. Whooping is the intentioned apportioning of breathing, the making of breathing stylistic, the making audible the flow of air into and out of lungs. The whooping moment incites the congregation to ecstasy, heightens the intensity of emotion, is the solicitation to which congregants respond with energy and conviction. That this would be celebratory, that this would announce joy and pleasure, is what I wish to attend to. (Crawley 2016, 42-43)

Voice *exceeds* speech. On Musser's account flesh feels and acts—and in this way flesh is erotic in the Lordean sense[84]—and sounds and interiority unintelligible and unimaginable to the speaking body (Musser 2018, 107). "Voice links physicality to spirituality" (Musser 2018, 95). Self calls out the

[84] "The white father told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us – the poet – whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free. Poetry coins the language to express and charter this revolutionary demand, the implementation of that freedom.
…Our poems formulate the implications of ourselves, what we feel within and dare make real (or bring action into accordance with), our fears, ours hopes, our most cherished terrors" (Lorde 2007, 38 & 39).

beginnings of an insurgent grammar to be heard above the dysgraphic orthography of thieves (Spillers 2018, 228-229 & Sharpe 2016, 20-21).

So heard a praxis like Blues is a way of passing of thought and feeling back and forth, or rather around the room of listeners. The song is the thought. And yet, Blues is not a musical idea, it is a theoretical and practical project of the community. "[T]hought tends toward expression as if toward its completion" ([1945] 2014, 183). Thought exists for itself and makes itself available to become our own in expression ([1945] 2014, 184). Thought comes within reach ([1945] 2014, 183), is apprehensible, through expression.

> During the performance, the sounds are not merely the "signs" [of Blues]; rather, the [Blues] is there through them and it descends into them. ([1945] 2014, 188)[85]

One example of this occurs in Blues songs in call and response and in the line repetitions. In the self-penned "Billie's Blues" Lady Day adheres to fairly common song structure that includes rhyming couplets, repetition, and a shift. I have included the second verse of "Billie's Blues" below with the lines of verse presented as three (rather than six) lines for ease of presented and explication (and because that is how I hear it and make sense of it). This song moves takes the form of a three-line verse. With Line 1 operating as the introductory, single thought, Line 2 as a restatement of that thought; and Line 3 as a response to the first two lines. There is often a shift in tone between the paired lines and the response, a provocation or a decision (and this shift is more readily apprehended by listening to the song than by reading the lyrics). Lady Day often incorporates slight note modulations in the second line.

> I've been your slave, baby / Ever since I've been your babe
> I've been your slave ( ) / Ever since I've been your babe
> But before I'll be your dog / I'll see you in your grave

[85] I have replaced the word "sonata" in the original translation of the text with "Blues" here for effect. However, I do think that one should take note of the fact that in this section, and other other sections referenced in Siu, particularly, "music" is understood to refer to instrumental music, often classical. It is in this way, through the instrument external to the musician, that Merleau-Ponty is theorizing music, rather than in the direct/immediate embodiment of the vocalist. (This strikes me as yet another privileging.)

Though Lady Day sings both of the repeated lines in the verse herself, there is an opening, a passing of thought, of the sense of the song to the audience. An invitation for them to sing, or hum, or rock, or mmm-hmm, or snarl, or laugh the second line together. The second line is a communal copula that moves into a new thought (that we have made).[86] This is the accomplishment of a demand for one's freedom to be recognized.

> [S]peech accomplishes thought. Even more so, it must be acknowledged that the person listening receives the thought from the speech itself. … Through speech, then, there is a taking up of the other person's thought, a reflection in others, a power of thinking *according to others*, which enriches our own thoughts. Here, then, some sense of the words must ultimately be induced by the words themselves, or more precisely, their conceptual signification must be formed by drawing from a *gestural signification*, which itself is immanent in speech. ([1945] 2014, 183-184)

Blues accomplishes this habit of "thinking according others" and the enrichment of thought.[87] The sense of "slave" is self-induced and is fully heard in the gesture of "babe" and the repetition in the second line. This return and invitation distinguishes the babe-slave from the dog, from dehumanization and objectification. I take seriously this account of language as a deeply intersubjective commitment/experience that requires the speaker and the listener to "[slip] into this thought's particular manner of existing" ([1945] 2014, 185).

> Communication is accomplished when my behavior finds in this pathway [indicated to me by the other person] its own pathway. I confirm the other person, and the other person confirms me. ([1945] 2014, 191)

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[86] This sounds a bit like Merleau-Ponty's thoughts on writing and its relation to concepts and performance. "The operation of expression, when successful, does not simply leave to the reader or the writer himself a reminder; it makes the signification exist as a thing at the very heart of the text, it being it to life in an organism of words, it installs this signification in the writer or the reader like a new sense organ, and it opens a new field or a new dimension to our experience" ([1945] 2014, 188).

[87] But I remain conflicted on is how we are given—if we are in fact given—to be good listeners. I take seriously Merleau-Ponty's claim that speech is not a "language machine" a discrete construction that the speaker engages with at one end and the listener engages with at the other end, but not necessarily according to each other, not necessarily with each other, and not a completion of thought.

Blues/ing as an expressive and affective practice of lived flesh, goes beyond mere implication of the speaking subject speaking to/for the hearing of another. In Blues/ing to be listening is also to be and intimate and co-primary participant in communal meaning creation.

I can now hear the way in which Siu (2018) is able to argue for mapping music onto languaging. Language is expressive and communicates in a way that connects people to each other. For Merleau-Ponty speech is the expression of thought and it is just as expressive as aesthetic expression.

> Aesthetic expression confers an existence in itself upon what it expresses, installs it in nature as a perceived thing accessible to everyone, or inversely rips the signs themselves — the actor's person, the painter's colors and canvas — from their empirical existence and steals them away to another world. No one will object that here the expressive operation actualizes or accomplishes the signification and is not merely a matter of translating it. But despite appearances, the same is true for the expression of thoughts. ([1945] 2014, 188)

Though music may speak, on Merleau-Ponty's account we should not be so quick to assume that this is an accurate, easy, or congruent mapping between the two ([1945] 2014, 194). Languaging, though expressive, is linguistic rather than artistic.[88] Moreover, speech, "spoke speech" ([1945] 2014, 202-203) comes prior to—and makes possible—aesthetic expressions.

> Speech is the excess of our existence beyond natural being. But the act of expression constitutes a linguistic and cultural world, it makes that which stretched beyond fall back into being. This results in spoken speech, which enjoys the use of available significations like that of an acquired fortune. From these acquisitions, other authentic acts of expression — those of the writer, the artist, and the philosopher — become possible. ([1945] 2014, 203).

Yet, I speculate one may hear in blues—and other expressive practices of non-subject folks—is aesthetic expression as containing an ethical layer of culture. Taking seriously the fleshy vocal self opens onto listening for the social otherwise. We attune to a kind of "sensuous knowledge" in feeling the unspeakable excess of flesh lived and loved, of the ripening of the self/us (Salami 2020, 11-42).

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[88] This is because, for Merleau-Ponty there is something particularly reversible about speech that does not obtain in forms of art, even music.

> [T]he fact remains that the expressive operation in the case of speech can be indefinitely reiterated, that one can speak about speech, whereas one cannot paint about painting. ([1945] 2014, 196)

In the moaning low and the sharpened 7th tonic intervention, there is a No-Yes; a bearing witness beyond the limits of sexuality and into a listening/resounding, glistening flesh.

> I took a ripe avocado and rolled it between my hands until the skin became a green case for the soft mashed fruit inside, hard pit at the core. …*The oil and sweat from our bodies kept the fruit liquid, and I massaged it over your thighs and between your breasts until your brownness shone like a light through a veil of the palest green avocado, a mantle of goddess pear that I slowly like from your skin*. (Lorde 1982, 251)

To consider sounding flesh is to consider the limitations of the body as citizen's utterances, and the beginning strains of what Mecca Jamilah Sullivan refers to as "queer honesty" (Sullivan 2017, 145).[89] Fleshy answering/truth feels toward and with answering rather than an answer. Fleshy answering is evidence of relation, of overlapping selves, and listening with. This answering involves witnessing (or bearing witness).[90] Witnessing points to the fleshy self as both "collective and diasporic" the *process* of

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[89] Stallings's tethering of 'honesty and being honorable,' however, may risk enacting the very sort of troubled theoretical slippage she seeks to challenge. While the imperative of "being honorable" may reaffirm patriarchal schemas of capitalist value, logics of honesty and truth telling have been a crucial concern for black queer feminist artistic, spiritual, and erotic practices for decades—a concern particularly vulnerable to contemporary misreadings via Western postmodern and poststructuralist discourses eager to point out the impossibility of stable, singular 'truths.' Black queer feminist cultural expression offers definitions of truth telling that are useful specifically because of their ability to incorporate multiplicity and change. The bisexual black poet and theorist June Jordan, for example, imagines honesty as a major "currency" of language, which she views as 'a means to tell the truth in order to change the truth.' Taking up Stallings's critique of ethics from a black queer feminist cultural lens, we might ask what potential a model of queer honesty, for example, could offer in acknowledging both the complex, shifting, and transcendent dimensions of erotic subjectivity and the usefulness of sustained practices of care, sincerity, and mutuality between (queer, freakish, antimoralist) partners and communities? How might such expressive practices make space for what we might think of as an erotics of narrative consent, a fluid mode of discursive intimacy that might expand the terrain of sexual possibility, rather than limiting it? (M. J. Sullivan 2017, 145)

Queer honesty acknowledges the ways in which "straight" honesty posits the idea of total self-transparency, self-knowledge and the ability to committee the entire self to a statement. This honesty is atomic, isolated, and liberal. That is, "straight" honest belongs to a "straight" subject. Fleshy answering takes up the implicit claim in queer honesty that certain selves cannot make this kind of statement. Fleshy selves, who we have already established as not being subjects, do not give voice to the kind of answers that subjects offer.

[90] Musser lays out the resonance of witnessing through an "empathic reading" of Carrie Mae Weems' "From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried".

> [A] reading practice, a critical hermeneutic, and a methodology… [that] highlights how we can discern the structure of sensation in various texts/performances and it works to give those sensations meaning, which in turn allows us to read difference in a sensational mode. (Musser 2018, 17)

> Weems performs witness through her emphasis on the relationship between her and the images and in the way that she acts as a mediator between the images and the installation spectators. This performance of witness is about fleshiness and relationality. Witnessing announces Weems as a self who exists profoundly in relation to others. She produces her own opacity by juxtaposing text and image so that the relation between her, these photographic ancestors, and museum spectators becomes complicated. We are presented with voices, but we do not know whose. Are we listening to Weems, the people in the photographs, or an unannounced voice from elsewhere? (Musser 2021, 2018, 103)

an affective and sensual knowing and the work of flesh that delights in the abject and shines (Musser 2018, 107). But how is it that our black selves continue to shine? How is it that we have not been completely totalized in the stolen/theft relation? That if, what is prior to the aesthetic there is affective, where embodied affect comes prior to aesthetic and perhaps even prior to spoken speech.

In his 2021 chapter "Human Beginnings and Music: Technology and Embodiment Roles" Don Ihde posits that music was prior to or, at the latest, coeval with the development of speech (2021, 99-100, 105).

> We do not even know for sure which hominids first attained language; debates are currently raging about whether Neanderthals had it. But in this regard, maybe musical praxis—or at least archaeological remnants of it—preceded language, since there is some evidence they had musical instruments. Although some DNA has been extracted, the fossil remains of the Neanderthals are not good enough to prove that their laryngeal development was sufficient for speech. Yet current animal studies now show that many creatures of the animal kingdom produce songs, have learning patterns similar to ours for learning songs, have cultures of song with different dialects, and have songs that evolve (many birds, most cetaceans, mice, possibly a few primates, etc.). (2021, 99-100)

> So here is my own relatively conservative speculation: I suspect the first human musical practice was bodily, at least singing and dancing, and was practiced by our predecessors the Neanderthals and possibly their newly discovered contemporaries the Denisovans. …Others assume that since many of the cave rooms are large and acoustically excellent, they may have served regularly for ritual singing and dancing. (100)

Idhe's speculation is instructive. Two things stand out to me. One: there is evidence of both the musical idea and the sound of music in proto-homo sapiens history. Two: songs do not require language. It may even be—to speculate on Idhe's speculation—that these proto-homo sapien forms of musking indicate an intervention in Merleau-Ponty's account such that the musical idea and the sound of music are inextricable from one another, and are embodied.

Moreover, even if speech—as it does for Merleau-Ponty—goes "beyond natural being" and emerges as a cultural project, language/speech is still rooted to embodiment in general and the particular attributes homo sapiens have in particular. While for Merleau-Ponty, speech exceeds voice, it does not exceed the attributes of the homo sapiens body. What it sounds out is the intimacy—the

enmeshment—of the cultural with the natural. Though his project in "The Philosopher's Voice: The Prosody of Logos" is to critique the unaccented muteness of "linguistified philosophy" by returning voice/ing to philosophical theories of language, Medieta (2021) makes the case for the self as primarily sonic. If one is a traditionally bodied homo sapiens one comes into the world always-already hearing. One emerges in, with, and through sound.

> To hear may be inevitable for humans, and only injury or congenital disorders can prevent us from entering the world conically. Voicing, the twin of hearing, on the other hand, commands an incredible array of skills that must be learned, slowly and deliberately. Compared to all the other skills a child must learh, learning to voice is simply amazing. (Mendieta 2021, 151)

We emerge in relations of sound/ing. And then we learn to speak (and *then* we learn to write).

> Even before we speak we have an ability to distinguish the sound of what which is familiar from what is strange. We come into the world enveloped in sound, already ready to voice at its rhythms. (Mendieta 2021, 148).

At the end of "The Body as Expression, and Speech", Merleau-Ponty turns to the case of the patient with color amnesia. He clarifies—in his reading of this patient—his claim that the word has sense, that language speaks itself, and that speech is neither purely biological nor purely cultural, but a meeting of the two. For the color amnesiac, the names of colors are meaningless: "[W]hen it loses its sense, the word alters even in its perceptible appearance, it becomes empty. …[T]he name is no longer useful to him, it says nothing to him…" ([1945] 2014, 199). That is the patient's "certain manner of relating to the world" ([1945] 2014, 197) has altered what the word can give. This sounds like the same kind of arrangement that Idhe and Mendieta explore. Language is a particular cultural process that must arise through the natural attributes of one's emergence as homo sapiens.

However, it is his discussion of world—an orientation, a relation that implicates the worlder—that sounds out what I take to be his desire for an ordinal/originary of the natural world that allows language—and, as this is a primary expressive act of the human subject—and the human subject to escape enculturation.

> The term "world" is here not just a manner of speaking: it means that "mental" or cultural life borrows its structures from natural life and that the thinking subject must be grounded upon the embodied subject. ([1945] 2014, 199)

I take there to be two things happening here. One: the term "world" has a sense because it is language. It speaks its sense. And in this speaking exceeds mere laryngeal facticity. "World' is not a grunt. [And, perhaps most tellingly, grunts contain no sense. Language refers to that which can be rendered in written form.] Two: the term "world" always speaks to/about an originary past, a body of attributes prior to cultural and personal distinction, where even speech contains a moment of the past prior to culture.

A third thing that calls out to me from this passage is the use of "structures." I hear a reference to the visual in this appeal to structure—particularly as this emerges from his account of the color amnesiac. Though he does accept some sensorial analogy in his 1948 *World of Perception* lectures, color inhabits space in a visual realm that can only be approximated in the aural ([1948] 2008, 37-43). I take this to mean that the primary world that cultural worlds take as their model is sighted.

> [W]hen I perceive, I am directed toward the entire world through my point of view, and I do not even know the limits of my visual field. ([1945] 2014, 344)

> My point of view is for me much less a limitation on my experiences than a way of inserting myself into the world in its entirety. …The natural world is the horizon of all horizons… ([1945] 2014, 345)

I take this to mean that for Merleau-Ponty nothing is able to participate in experience not just in a way that is *comparable* to the eye, but also in a way that is as powerful as the eye. As I note earlier in Merleau-Ponty makes a clear and disparaging distinction between the powers of the eye and the power of another sensorial field, touch in *Phenomenology of Perception* ([1945] 2002, 260-261). Only sight can give us a meaningful structure of the whole of experience. What does this say about the aural field?

> And even Music, at the other extreme, it too far on the hither side of the world and of the designatable for depict anything but certain sketches of Being—its ebb and flow, its growth, its upheaval, its turbulence. (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 353)

The ear remains mired in ineffability and is merely subject to the "ebb and flow, its growth, its upheaval, its turbulence" of Being. It cannot make meaning from/with it or aesthetically designate it. Even though "The Intertwining – The Chiasm" with his "vision-touch system" reads as an expansion of Merleau-Ponty's account of sensorial organ/ization, and, as Wiskus points out he earnestly engages with Proust's musical "little phrase" he retains sight as the primary method of differentiate and inter/subjectivity.

V: Eye and Mind

This becomes loud and clear in "Eye and Mind." Merleau-Ponty privileges painting as the primary example of art and so, by extension, privileges the sensorial organization that allows us to engage with painting, sight/vision. Though this is, in its straightforward way, an example and extension of his thought, it also implicitly may be seen to function as an aesthetic judgment. Painting might be read as servicing Merleau-Ponty's work because it is his preferred *aesthetic* expression.

> [W]e have often had recourse to painting because painting thrusts us once again into the presence of the world of live experience. In the work of Cézanne, Juan Gris, Braque and Picasso, in different was, we encounter objects — lemons, mandolins, bunches of grapes, pouches of tobacco — that do not pass quickly before our eyes in the guise of object we "know well" but, on the contrary, hold our gaze, ask questions of it, convey to it in a bizarre fashion the very secret of their substance, the very mode of their material existence and which, so to speak, stand "bleeding" before us. This was how paining led us back to a vision of things themselves. ([1948] 2008, 69-70)

In "Art and the World of Perception" (1948) he returns to the previous reference he has made in the preceding chapters to painting and perception. For him, painting is the paradigmatic example of perception and lived experience. In this way, it is it painting and its engagement with sight that demonstrates the primary way in which we "encounter objects" in the world.[91] And it is painting both

[91] This feels like a key distinction Merleau-Ponty is making between encountering—particularly the temporal component of visual apprehension/hold—as a deep and unfinished engagement and a kind of bare naked seeing. Though vision appears to be the primary organization, it is the compresent operations of immanence (naked seeing—biological seeing) and transcendence (projective seeing beyond a given profile) that serves as the primary grounds for perception.

the object and the activity of painting that demonstrates perception's ability to open us to worlds, and worlds to us for a "vision of things themselves" that engage our deep interest with "the particular *way*" something has of being in the world ([1948] 2008, 70).

> So painting does not imitate the world but is a world of its own. This means that, in our encounter with a painting, at no stage are we sent back to the natural object; similarly, when we experience a portrait *aesthetically*, its "resemblance" to the model is of no importance… Suffice to say that even when painters are working with real objects, their aim is never to evoke the object itself, but to create on the canvas a spectacle which is sufficient unto itself. ([1948] 2008, 71-72)

How are these silent signals given? Is Merleau-Ponty referring to the negative space of sound, the rests and measure breaks, or is he referring to signals that can only be apprehended by the eye (even if they are invisible)? I push this because he talks about the paint itself and the signals which emanate from it, thickness, brushstroke, saturation, placement, texture, when applied to a painting, this predominately refers to an eye-first organization. We forget ourselves with the painting through our eyes and perceive/watch—rather than think (or hear)—a new world open before us.

This might be why he does not spend too much time on music. (Indeed, he affords it one paragraph in this chapter.) Yet his treatment of it is curious. He describes it as "too straightforward an example" of experiencing through perception for it is "quite clearly impossible in this case to make out that the work of art refers to anything other than itself." Music is a world. And yet one wonders why it is described as "too straightforward" as though our encounter with it—through listening—is less keen than our encounter with a painting. It "comes very close to being no more than a medley of sound sensations," how it is that painting does not come similarly close to being a medley of light sensations?

So in the presence of a painting, it is not a question of my making ever more references to the subject, to the historical event (if there is one) which gave rise to the painting. Rather, as in the reception of things themselves, it is a matter of, of perceiving the painting by way of the silent signals which comes at me from its every part, which emanate from the traces of paint set down on the canvas, until such time as all, in the absence of reason and discourse, come to form a tightly structured arrangement in which one has the distinct feeling that nothing is arbitrary, even if one is unable to give a rational explanation of this.

> Merleau-Ponty discusses, with respect to Cézanne's paintings, the emergence of a polymorphous spatiality from the unstable modulation of colors, and in general, painting's abandonment of represented space. (Fóti 1996, 13)

It is as though, on Merleau-Ponty's account, listening to music or the ear-forward experience does not ask enough of us. It is simply too easy. "All I have to do here is listen without soul-searching, ignoring my memories and feelings and indeed the composer of the work, to listen just as perception looks at the things themselves without bringing my dreams into the picture" ([1948] 2008, 74-75).[92] Perception *looks*, it does not listen.

In "Eye and Mind" Merleau-Ponty provides a rather throaty account of the importance of sight to the body by looking at the painter and painting(s).[93] The painter painting demonstrates that what vision offers to the body—in additional to movement, opening, freedom, and community—is creativity. Vision is what is made in us (Toadvine and Lawlor, eds. 2007, 358) and the painter makes from it. The painter makes herself from it. She colors her opacity, shapes it, makes it external enough/or enough of it external to talk about (to see). The painter gives birth to the resemblance of experience; we are all invited to name the baby.

> "I think the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it… I expect to be inwardly submerged, burred. Perhaps I paint to break out." What we call "inspiration" should be taken literally. There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration in Being, action and passion so slightly discernible that we no longer know who sees and who is seen, who paints and who is painted. We say that a human is born the moment when something that was only virtually visible within the mother's body becomes at once visible for us and for itself. The painter's vision is an ongoing birth. (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 358)

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[92] It is worth noting, that Merleau-Ponty understands music as composed (classical) instrumental music. Which is curious given that the 30s-50s were the height of Blues and Jazz and various forms of vocal music. It is also curious that here perception is qualified as a sighted capacity.

[93] The painter—eye-forward—is the obverse of the person who is blind. The painter moves freely in and through the painting. She moves herself in accordance with her eyes and through the creation of the painting assure the viewer's movement. I apprehend—that is, I grasp—the painting as more than a mere outline, but as a representation of the imaginary. In the painting the opacity of the opacity, the omnipresence of dimensionality is obtained and is it obtained through a momentary shift of the veil to my interior and takes me out of my body (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 356). The painter offers us, through her body/her work, resemblances. We attend to the visual hailing through its *vraisemblance* as well as its dissimilarity. We see it breathing; we see it as more than a mere copy. Because in/through it, we see the body of the painter and, complete the whole of our inter-corporeal system—our shared world. "The painter 'takes his body with him'" (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 353). Whereas the person who is blind may move sluggishly or incompletely, being unable to great into the whole, perceiving as an "I try" rather than an "I Can", the painter moves herself (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 356). The painter/the painter's eyes make their own ends.

Vision—particularly the painter's—is a miracle of the perceiving body. Seeing brings into being (for me). A change in gaze does the opposite. "Expiration" is an apt description of the other point in the process. One reading is that the experience of Being means the death of Being. The aversion of gaze, de-intentionality or de-cathexis is a kind of death of the visual I can. But expiration, to draw on the respiratory language that immediately follows, points to the complement to inhalation. It frames painting, vision, the painter's sight as a completed personal system whose respiratory capabilities necessitate the anonymous natural body/world. And it is this anonymity that is returned to us, of which we are reminded when we no longer know who sees and who is see. And yet, in a move beyond the mere natural, we also have an account here for gestation and labor that—as vision does in its ability "to possess the voluminosity of the world" (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 357)—goes beyond the bare biological given of creation. That is, painting is other than reproduction, and it is this quality that implicates the painter in her freedom to move toward a different kind of loving motor project/product and our ability to mirror this behavior.[94]

The painter exemplifies what is at stake for Merleau-Ponty in perception and in privileging vision (and in not wanting to reduce the visual field to a Cartesian etching (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 360-363).[95] Vision makes other bodies appear for us. We cannot do this with touch, which only rests on the surface (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 362) and provides us no way to turn our own insides out. The hand cannot "decipher the signs given *within* the body" (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 361). The "visualization" afforded by the hand is not a vision of the interior.

In "Bound Transcendence and the Invisible: On Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Painting", Véronique Fóti (1996) interrogates the operation of the visible in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. The

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[94] Essence and existence, imaginary and real, visible and invisible—painting blues all our categories, spreading out before us its oneiric universe of carnal essences, effacious resemblances, muted meanings. (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 360)

[95] "But what Descartes likes about engravings is that they preserve the form of objects or at least give us sufficient signs of their forms. They present the object by its outside, or its envelope."

visible is much more than just naked sight. The visible is the implication of the seer, of the seer's involvement in the visible through her projection of intention. What we receive through our eyes is not merely given to us passively. It requires that we be there, that we be doing something with it, that we be visible (both able to be seen biologically and intercoporeally engaged) too.

> Merleau-Ponty characterizes the visible as a fleeting crystallization formed from out of a matrix of latencies and participations, rather than as an atomic sense datum that is passively offered up to the seer. The seer, for her part, is not contracted into a detached and purely active gaze, but is caught up in the visible which, so to speak, folds back upon itself by passing through the density of her "flesh." This density that seems to set apart the seer and the seen is, quite to the contrary, their one means of communication. In its separative capacity - as a spacing or gap (*écart*) - it guards that communication against being collapsed into an undifferentiated "coincidence" that would be a sterile as it is illusory. (Fóti 1996, 8)

Painting attests to the power of vision, or rather the role of vision in Merleau-Ponty's science of experience.[96] The visual is a continual opening (or at least provides the biological capacity for the extra-sensory opening) into inhabited worlds. "The visual arts remain, for him, arts of the visible which claims ontological primacy" (Fóti 1996, 18). Perhaps this ontological primacy is due to that fact that—following Donato—the aural opens onto a problem—rather than a problematic world. And so, we find that the question is not about whether Merleau-Ponty attends to the aural or not, but whether his attention to the visual is lopsided. And it seems that in *Phenomenology of Perception*, *World of Perception*, "Eye and Mind", it is. Donato writes:

> Phenomenology was not indifferent to language, far from it; from Husserl to Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty the problem of language recurs persistently. Yet it recurs as a problem, as a phenomenon to be described, or at times as something with an inherent opacity which blurs the contemplation of the essences revealed to the phenomenological consciousness. For phenomenology, language has always been a problem rather than that primordial element that governs the articulation of problems. (Donato 1970, 803-804)

This harmonizes with Merleau-Ponty's tepid treatment of music in *World of Perception* (1948). It is this blurring opacity, this… retardation of contemplation that resounds in his statement that *all he has to*

[96] Painting attests, for Merleau-Ponty, to the ontological structure of vision by its refusal of any complete appropriation or reflective closure, by its attention to the inter-involvements of sentience and sensibility, visibility and the invisible, self and other - as well as by its recognition of the translucent screen of manifestation or figuration. (Fóti 1996, 10)

do is listen. On another reading, if language is a problem, then it acts as a buffer to the opening of a world rather than a world itself.[97]

Donato points out that Merleau-Ponty ends his thought—or rather the end of Merleau-Ponty's thought given his death—is not an integration of the aural through language into primacy, but to further distance the visual and the aural and to privilege the visual (through an exploration of the in/visible (and here we see traces of Deleuze's still yet to come non/sense) (Donato 1970, 804). Donato turns to the opening of *The Visible and the Invisible* to have us tune into the increased volume of language's problematic position in Merleau-Ponty's thought. It is through the visual that we understand the intertwined unity of our world and or relations in it.

> There is no clearer statement of Merleau-Ponty's view of the discontinuity of vision and language than the very first sentence of *Le Visible et l'Invisible*. Vision partakes of the undivided unity of Subject and Object, Self and Other, whereas the universe of discourse is one of contradictions. That is to say a world of dualisms incapable of resolving themselves in an original, forever lost unity and if we are to take the metaphor of the labyrinth seriously, language provides us with a space whose beginning and end are lost, whose rationality escapes him who has the misfortune of being in it and who will have to submit to the cipher of its meanderings without the hope of ever unravelling it. (Donato 1970, 805)

Sight unifies. Language dissipates.

VI: The Sonic Subject?

I pause here, to think about the intervention Weheliye makes in *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (2005) that seeks to remix accounts of the subject—and, by extension, intersubjectivity. In this work to sound out the sonic subject of Afro-modernity, Weheliye expands upon his reading of Nahum Chandler to suggest that it is not necessarily the subject or modernity that are troubling in

[97] But again, this is to follow Siu's work of pairing language with music. And I am still not entirely sure that this is a clean mapping. But it is adequate for the time being to use to problematize what I take to be the primacy of the visual in Merleau-Ponty's accounts.

themselves, but where we have located their origins and teleologies (Weheliye 2005, 67).[98] For Weheliye, following Chandler, if we start with an account of the subject from or within Black Studies—that is orient subjectivity and modernity in Blackness or the Afro-ancestral rather than in Western/Eurocentric Studies—and then move outward in a contingent relationship with Western/Eurocentric studies we are attuned to a different account of subjectivity that doesn't position Black bodies as lacking subjectivity, or outside of constructs of subjectivity or modernity. Weheliye remains committed to the subject and modernity but enacts what he takes to be a break from Western subjectivity/modernity (Weheliye 2005, 67-71).[99]

Weheliye makes this move by tuning into the aural—not as *excluding* the visual in favor of the aural, but as giving voice to the way that the visual is contingent upon the sonic (and vice versa—and amplifying the sonic subject (Weheliye 2005, 50-72).[100]

> While the sonic may indeed provide a more receptive metaphor for the subject, it does so only in relation to the visual. That is to say, rather than repeating the fallacy of current critical idioms that locate the subject *only* in the fields of language and/or the visual, focusing on sound not only opens our ears to the opacities of the sonic but also, and no less germane, necessitates a reconfiguration of the visual and the linguistic, in that they fail to function as the sole determinants of subjectivity. Once the sonic is introduced into this mix, the category of the subject transmutes into a multifarious constellation that does not rest on mutual exclusives but instead enables particles to bounce off one another and bring to the fore their vortexes. (Weheliye 2005, 50)

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[98] "Insisting on the subject from the vantage point of black studies transacts at least a repositioning of this unfortunate trajectory. Moreover, because it is uttered from the perspective of the minoritarian, it throws this classification, so very central to Western modernity (at least from Descartes onward), into the maelstrom of catachresis." (Weheliye 2005, 67)

[99] "Locating a subject in the sonic grants a quite different notion of this concept (which does not mean that the subject as a linguistic category is rendered null and void; it just relocates to a new analytic neighborhood without losing its ties to old friends), one that does not posit meaning and/or intelligibility as its teleological end point, but that enables "opacities [to] coexist and converge, weaving fabrics." (Weheliye 2005, 69)

[100] "In addition, rather than suggest that this dimension (subjectivity) can be converted into or represented in sound, I would like to retain its "scandalous" qualities, since the sonic realm grants aural "opacities" qua subjectivity: pathways to moments of subjectivity set off against subjectivity (a subject rather than the subject); a sonic subjectivity that does not lose sight of the black subject's visual interpellation but noisily "rings" and "clangs" beyond, above, below, and beside the optic nonetheless." (Weheliye 2005, 70)

For Weheliye this turn is subject affirming/configuring and is particularly potent for Black people (Weheliye 2005, 22-23).[101] When subjectivity is looped through the sonic and technologies of and by the sonic this subject reverberates with the songs (and souls) of Black people.

> Sound occupies a privileged place precisely because it manages to augment an inferior black subjectivity—a subjectivity created by racist ideologies and practices in the field of vision—establishing venues for the constitution of new modes of existence called for by Hall. Thus a (black) subject inhabits the spatiotemporal terrain between sonic modernity and visual modernity: the crossroads of subjection and subjectivation. (50)

Weheliye's thrilling and trilling project vibrates with the possibility of "'modernity otherwise' [that] disrupts and displaces the grand narratives of reason and technological progress by incorporating those who fall outside of these categories into the mix, which disrupts, in turn, revamps the meanings of modernity as it resists separating these two spheres (modernity and minority cultures) into neatly distinct categories" (Weheliye 2005, 22-23). In the cut of this otherwise is the subject otherwise, the Afro-Modern subject, a (sonic-) technological achiever and achievement. This is a moving subject that remixes accounts of Western Modernity and Subjectivity. So that rather than the Afro-Modern Sonic Subject as a fugue or a mere variation on a theme, we find pulled out, dubbed, and reconfigured a wonderfully new (way of) being.

I am very sympathetic to Weheliye's groove. However, what I offer in my reading of Spillers, Musser, Musser's reading of Spillers, and Lorde in Chapter 1 and what I will speculate in the following chapters is a deep-cut (or a B(e)-side). Weheliye's groove still samples some problematic parts of subjectivity experienced by the lived body of the Subject/Thief. The Afro-Modern subject as offered by Weheliye appears to be located outside of the pornotrope, or is ahistorical, and possess/requires

[101] "For black music is not merely a byproduct of an already existing modernity, ancillary to and/or belated in its workings, but a chain of singular formations integrally linked to this sphere, particularly as it collides with information technologies. …This 'modernity otherwise' disrupts and displaces the grand narratives of reason and technological progress by incorporating those who fall outside of these categories into the mix, which disruption, in turn, revamps the meanings of modernity as it resists separating these two spheres (modernity and minority cultures) into neatly distinct categories, asking us to rethink the very source of this putatively universal and homogenous sphere." (Weheliye 2005, 22-23)

the ability to enclose the self *in able to* consume objects in the world. One example of this is Weheliye's turn to the "Auditory I" (Weheliye 2005, 50-51) who is able to take up recordings as "raw sonic matter" (89). Raw sonic matter divorces the sounding from the sounder (a benefit for Weheliye, as it allows for the remixing and DJing of this matter; that is, the use of technology to affirm the subject as the manipulator of technology and matter, and the creation of a new subject as the project). Such a turn/project requires adherence to a particular and damaging subjectivity. Specifically: a move to "locat[e] the aura not in the original musical utterance, but in the mode of mechanical reproduction" (47) might also be a move to dis-locate the black feminine—particularly the utterer that lives as a Blackwomxn—from the uttering, and retains notes of the mythical norm and the Subject as somewhat, if not entirely self-enclosed. Subjectivity is tied to mastery. This mastery is tied to nominative and normative practices. So, I read the Afro-Modern Subject *qua* DJ as engaging directly in this process of mastery and naming. Weheliye's account of removing the utterer from the uttering, of re-situating the utterer as the DJ *cum* MC—the *master* of ceremonies—as mastering the affective and expressive state of the listener, as projecting and imposing their will on the listeners, as differentiating themselves from the listener *vis-à-vis* their not being subject to external shuffling, positions the Afro-Modern Subject *qua* DJ as somewhat not-interfered with.

On my reading, Weheliye's DJ *qua* Afro-Modern Subject is engaged in kind of projection or "projective intentionality" that marks the lived body of the (Phenomenological) Subject.

> The problem with projective intentionality as a description of human existence… is that it tends to construe one's being-in-the-world as an activity of projecting one's intentions, values, and meanings onto objects and others in one's world.[102]

[102] Projective intentionality is too unidirectional, as it were, not allowing sufficiently for a "two-way," co-constituitive back-and-forth between my world and me—what I would call a transactional account of human experience. If I were to attempt to represent it pictorially, it would be an arrow always starting with me and arching itself outward into the world, but never the other way around. In this way, the description of human existence provided by the notion of projective intentionality rends toward solipsism, focusing always on the meaning and value of my intentional arc and thus preventing me from noticing that of others. (S. Sullivan 2000, 184)

> Merleau-Ponty often insists that "[m]y life must have a significance which I do not constitute; there must strictly speaking be an intersubjectivity" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 448). And indeed, characteristics of his phenomenology, such as its emphasis upon embodiment and situation, lend themselves to an account of human life as always already part of a world of shared meaning that is not the making of any one person's intentions. Nevertheless, for all its hard work explaining the ways in which the world is intersubjectively constituted, because of its problematic inheritance of Husserl's notion of intentionality Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology still retains the notion of a solitary self (now in the form of the body, rather than the transcendental ego) whose own projection is its primary preoccupation. (S. Sullivan 2000, 184 &185)

This reverberation of Merleau-Ponty's account of subjectivity in Weheliye's account, underscores the through-line of the Western Modern Subject. The DJ's time, even if not necessarily linear is then substituted as the ruling time. The DJ's space, even if minimally porous, is still first and primarily set apart and, in some ways, impenetrable by the listener. Weheliye thinks of this as the "public performance of sonic privacy" in his reading of "I Like It Like That" but we also find a truer account of this in his description of the DJ's process (Weheliye 2005, 87-92). The club-goers, the dancers, are not privy to, cannot approach, cannot share what the DJ hears/creates. They are excluded from this space, this zone of ultimate being and determining/determination that only the DJ inhabits.

Weheliye's turn to the aural (Afro-Modern) subject returns to the kinds of relationality that upholds the foundations of the pornotrope: ahistoric (or history determining) consumption. True, Weheliye's is a more integrated sonic subject—with its private zone within the public—but this account of consumption is still more line with that of the Thief *qua* Subject of Spillers and subjectivity as the expectation of self-enclosure of Musser and Crawley. That is, to engage with sonic subject in the practice of consumption, is to the engage with the idea of taking something external in as an object for the use of the subject and then the subject putting something out. This is distinct from a Musserian account of the molecular fleshy self that has no expectation of (or logic presuming) self-enclosure (Musser 2018, 42-45).

> As monuments in Walker's [A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby…], the blackamoors bring together disparate histories of labor, but they also resist commodification through the act of melting. Melting not only signals these objects' ephemerality…but also illuminates the

> power of becoming-molecular. As molecules they permeate the atmosphere, becoming unassimilable to an economy of racialized consumption in which their bodies give other people pleasure. They cease to become recognizable bodies, and their molecularization means that they permeate the viewer intensely and perhaps more intimately. (Musser 2018, 43)

That is, the molecular fleshy self that re-turns in pornotropic jouissance, metabolizes rather than consumes. The metabolic (rather than metamorphic and rather than consumptive) function/event engages with and transforms. When the fleshy self takes "in" something, this self sits with it and gives of itself to it in a productive co-constitutive act of creation. The affective metabolics of the fleshly self are present in Crawley's account of air and breath as read through Blackpentecostalism.

> Air is an object held in common, an object that we come to know through a collective participation within it as it enters and exits flesh. The process by which we participate in this common object, with this common admixture, not only must be thought about but must be consumed and expelled through repetition in order to think. The always more than double gesture of inhalation and exhalation is a matter of grave concern given the overwhelming presence of air as shared object, the overwhelming presence of breathing as shared, common performance. In each movement of dilation is a displacement of one kind of matter into the space and plane of another. To fill lungs with air is to displace the carbonite matter that was previously within. …So we turn to instances of breathing as an intentionally aesthetic production, a mode of life, a politics of avoidance. (Crawley 2016, 36-37)

Weheliye's Afro-Modern Sonic Subject with its ear tuned to "raw sonic material"—sound apart from sounder—is flight from the molecular and, as such non-aspirational. This Subject aims for purely private experience, a separateness from, and ability to distinguish, create distance, or set against, a desire of breathing pure oxygen/air, or the desire to bracket out all of that fleshy commingling.

Even Weheliye's description of the primacy of imbrication for the DJ, the DJ emerges as a master of the politics of enclosure. The imbrication over the "raw sonic material" is only audible through the privileged voice of the singular, the atomic, the mine/yours (rather than the *ours*).

> Sonic technologies—with their attendant use and the sounds they transmit—allow for overlapping singular spatialities that are neither wholly random nor neatly discrete, instead coming together at certain points and falling apart at others; they enable us to apprehend these spatialities as intersecting without "losing sound" of their relationality. (Wehelye 2005, 144)

This lack of neat discretion is not the same thing as indiscretion, indetermination, or the always-already, the *too-muchness* (Sharpe 2020), the waywardness (Hartman 2019), the promiscuous

molecular flux (Musser 2018) of the fleshy self. To "allow for overlapping" is to whisper the implicit claim of the probability of non-collision, the falling apart and coming together that might simply not happen.

That is, Weheliye's account of the "manner in which subject strategically employ recorded music to shape and reshape the private and public spaces they inhabit" (Weheliye 2005, 144) is an attempt to master, to wrangle, to dominate space. To re-produce something from these fixed and definable spatialities. This is very much an account of the projects of the subject. Each of these imply the precondition of a kind of self-mastery, an individuation and automatization of the subject that makes possible the ordering of one's social milieu. This ordering strikes me as an attempt to blunt the horizonal unfolding, to fix the partiality as total, and to turn away from the very commitments that porosity and molecularity encourage us to confront. So, we find that even if we take Weheliye seriously and locate our account of subjectivity in sonic temporality and spatiality of the Afro-Modern subject, we are wracked by the reverberations of the master's tools.

On my reading, a stronger claim can be made for witnessing Weheliye's *Phonographies* as a description of the fleshy self, or the listening and expressive practices of a fleshy self. This move keeps alive Weheliye's project of reading Blackness as neither counter- or anti- the Subject (of Modernity).

> At its broadest, *Phonographies* hopes to establish the centrality of both sonic blackness—here characterized as an unwieldy compound comprising all the discourses (black and nonblack) that imagine and circumscribe racial formation within Western modernity—and black culture (the totality of cultural marks produced by those who have been labeled and/or define themselves as black) to Western modernity. (Weheliye 2005, 5)

What I want to suggest is that this interdependency is foreclosed on the account of inter/subjectivity (Afro or otherwise) of Weheliye and of the eye-forward inter/subjectivity both of the body proper and the carnal body of Merleau-Ponty. So, if we take Weheliye's groove seriously, we with hear

flesh/funk, instead of the Classical subjective register of the subject. If we think with the sonic beyond the limits of subjectivity and specifically situated in the wake of the pornotrope,

In order to take Weheliye's suggestion, that we start claims/explorations about the subject in Black Studies or Africana Studies seriously, then we must also take seriously the method he deploys that structures this claim. Weheliye engages with Black Studies (and the Afro-Modern Subject) though the work of Black men. In this way Black men stand in for the Black experience. The works of men, these soundings of men's relation to technology, engenders a Subject legible and audible in the logos of Western subjectivity/modernity. His maleness (as a kind of fixed sexuate difference that turns toward a mode of fixed gender difference) is implicated in his phonographic subject. So, Weheliye's Afro-Modern Subject does not go far enough. His grip on the subject, grip on the human and the possibilities of a Human Afro-Modern Subject seeks to fix flesh—as though it is only that which is flayed; as though it is a site of negation. This love affair with the Subject is an acrid romance.

VII: The Bluest Eye

In this final section I add the preceding thoughts to my claim in Chapter 1 that through there may be a past which has never been present, the cultural world is the primary world of perception.[103] First I

[103] Darian Meacham notes that in the working notes to *The Visible and the Invisible*, "Merleau-Ponty writes that perception is always cultural, claiming "what he means by this is that the meaning formations that structure our cultural world are not an ideal layer projected by a constituting subject over the perceptual field, but are through and through in the perceptual world itself, in the things themselves."

This is not wholly resolved; it is true (for Merleau-Ponty) that the meaning-formations from which culture is built originate in the perceived world, but the perceived world is also shaped by cultural transformations. Merleau-Ponty's key example here is that of artificial perspective. "I say that the Renaissance perspective is a cultural fact, that perception itself is polymorphic and that if it becomes Euclidean, this is because it allows itself to be oriented by the system." And this is about more than just paintings. In proposals for an ontology among these working notes, Merleau-Ponty proposes to "take topological space as a model of being," as Euclidean, geometrical space has been made the model for "*perspectival being*" (my emphasis), and he notes that there is an "underlying appropriateness" of the notion of space that belongs to Euclidean geometry "with the classical ontology of the *Ens realissimum*, of the infinite entity." The linear relations of movement and time, and presumably of volume, and of causality of the snooker-ball type beloved of some analytic philosophers, are imposed upon reality in what Merleau-Ponty calls perspectival being. A different culture, a different model of space, would result in a different framework and different perceptions. "The topological space, on the contrary, a milieu in which are circumscribed relations of proximity, of envelopment, etc., is the image of a being that, like Klee's touches of color, is at the same time older than everything and 'of the first day' (Hegel) [. . .] that is a perpetual residue." (Edgar, 2016 140-141)

attend to a description of the danger of eye-forwardness particularly in a world structured by (largely visual) anti-Blackness. Then I attune to what Douglas calls "Blues bodies" to provide a sketch of ear-forwardness and fleshy feeling.

As he traces the primacy of "visualism"—starting with Greek thought and a reduction *to* vision before transitioning to modern philosophy and the revelation of a profound reduction *of* vision (and sense in general) to a kind of geometric bareness[104] (Ihde 1976, 8, 9-)—Ihde makes the case that vision is tied to Being and objective knowledge. Specifically, he explores Aristotle's valuation of sight as the "principle source of knowledge" that differentiates between objects (Ihde 1976, 6-7). For Ihde, this explicit tie between vision and objects blazes the path for vision to be the "objective" sense and a "reduction to vision" (Ihde 1976, 6-8).

> *Intuition* comes from the Latin *in-tueri*, "to look at something." Even *perceive* is often implicitly restricted to a visual meaning. Vision becomes the root metaphor for thought, the paradigm which dominates our understanding of thinking in a reduction *to* vision. (Ihde 1976, 8)

I take Ihde's text as a demonstration of the problem of theories of sight/vision. That is, Ihde effectively articulates the problem of sight as theorized. On one hand, I take quite seriously the possibility that these theories—these understandings of Being as visual, and of the subject as sighted—have become naturalized. This, I think, is one of the angles of Al-Saji's (Bergsonian) intervention of hesitation [and Ngo's exciting return to Al-Saji in *The Habits of Racism*]. If I look to vision as habitual, or as a habit of the sighted body, the there is room to think about particular habits of vision and habits of thinking about vision are acquired, to then pause or hesitate in our deployments of sight, and then see anew (or with more care). This understanding suggests that we vision might yield more—or yield

[104] What Descartes accomplishes, here using what happens to vision as a symptom for what happens to experience overall, is a division of experiences into two realms so that one region of experience is made to rule over all others. The reduce abstract object (extended object comes "objective" and its appearance within perceptual experience with the significant exception of those ghostly remaining visual qualities becomes "subjective." Simultaneously reason, understanding, the geometrical deductive process, become disembodied as "pure" acts of mind. (Ihde 1976, 12)

to more—than just categorization and objectification. Hesitation, reflection, and re-orientation might break down the subject-object relation of dominant modes of sight.

I must be honest; I love this possibility. Reading Al-Saji through Ngo and vice versa allows for accountability and compassion and, while it might not be entirely optimistic (or even optimistic at all), it opens onto something other than fatalism or pessimism. I want it to work.

Yet, I read Ihde's summary of Aristotle's account of vision another way. I read it as pointing to a particular alacrity of vision that is deeply embedded in its axiomatics. Heraclitus' fragments on nature point to the complexity, simultaneity, and flux of the ontological (which I read as also extending to encompass the natural world).[105] All things/beings are in transition and movement. While some of these passages may be gradual—coming to hear—I speculate that the movement of vision is not gradual. Sight has a kind of all-at-onceness, that even when we can come to see things more or less clearly, the experience of sight is not typically gradual. My vision works just as quickly with or without the prescription to correct my astigmatisms. Sight grabs; it is speedy. So, while Heraclitus does prize the aural as well as the *visual en route* to knowledge, and while he does allow for vision's (and hearing's) insufficiency when engaged with those who have "barbarian souls," his hierarchy of the senses

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[105] Pessimism has more than one meaning. As a colloquial ascription it may describe a mood, or it may mean something like a refusal to indulge in wishful thinking. Philosophical pessimism, on the other hand…is centered in the doctrine that there is more evil in world than good, or that the evil is somehow more fundamental than the good; and to this one-sided view of reality Heraclitus, on grounds of logic and taste alike, did not subscribe. His philosophy, ever dynamically serene, asserts that good and evil are two sides of the same coin, interpenetrating aspects of the one manifold and ever-changing reality, … and that the wise man looks at the ambivalence unflinchingly, seeing the bright and the dark, the ugly and the fair, with calm freedom of mind. (Wheelwright 1966, 65)

See Wheelwright 66-67 for "ontological paradox."

Heraclitus' fragments

11. The things of which there can be sight, hearing and learning—these are what I especially prize. (55)
12. Eyes are more accurate witnesses than ears. (101a)
13. Eyes and ears are bad witnesses to men having barbarian souls. (107)
20. Everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing stays fixed.
23. It is in changing that things find repose. (84a)
42. You could not discover the limits of soul, even if you raveled by every path in order to do so; such is the dept of its meaning. (45)

positions sight akin to his treatment of fire with relation to the elements (Wheelwright 1996, 70, F11 & F13). Sight is primary.

I extend this to Aristotle to position his "visualism" as not just epistemological but ontological and based on an understanding of sight as both the ground for the virtuous subject, but because of vision's ability to quickly differentiate. Sight apprehends objectively; or more to my point: sight first sees objects. Vision does not allow for the un-differentiated. Immediately we see *things*. We know they are things if if we do not know what they are. What this means for Merleau-Ponty's projects is, on one hand, beautiful.

On Merleau-Ponty's account we emerge into a peopled world—we emerge into an intersubjective engagement with others. This engagement with others is how we learn about ourselves (Bredlau 2018, 45-70). It is also how we confirm what is within our reach. Subjectivity is harmonious with capacity. For Merleau-Ponty this is *pouvoir*, or the *I can* (Ihde 1976, 32-33). Yet, one's "can" is predicated on the recognition of others. Intersubjectivity is subject-affirming.

> The implication—again quite properly "anti-Cartesian" in the phenomenological radical alternative—is that I do *not* "know myself" directly in Cartesian fashion. What I know of myself is "indirectly" as a reflection *from* the the world. This also applies to others: I know myself as reflected from others. What is primitive is the "immersion" in the world, as Merleau-Ponty puts it. (Ihde 1976, 37).

What I take this to means is that immediately we see instantiations, instances of things. For Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* (and a bit in "Eye and Mind") many of these things are other subjects, are bodies touching and touched by sexuality. We, or at least the normal subject, grasp at others—immediately in sight—as bodies conditioned by desire. We do not hesitate upon seeing the other to place them in our sexual-social practical imaginary. This then, strikes me as what Ihde picks up in his reading of the pre-Socratic thinkers and Aristotle through Heidegger. For Merleau-Ponty, the lived body "shows forth" and the immediacy of our intersubjectivity is predicated on the

immediacy of this showing, the speediness of sight itself. Intersubjectivity is predicated upon one's sight of another and another's sight of them.

> As soon as we see other seers, we no longer have before us only the look without a pupil, the plate glass of the things with that feeble reflection, that phantom of ourselves they evoke by designating a place among themselves whence we see them: henceforth, through other eyes we are for ourselves fully visible; that lacuna where our eyes, our back, lie is filled, filled still by the visible, of which we are not the titulars. To believe that, to bring a vision that is not our own into account, it is to be sure inevitably, it is always from the unique treasury of our own vision that we draw, and experience therefore can teach us nothing that would not be outlined in our own vision. But what is proper to the visible is, we said, to be the surface of an inexhaustible depth: this is what makes it able to be open to visions other than our own. In being realized, they therefore bring out the limits of our factual vision, they betray the solipsist illusion that consists in thinking that every going beyond is a surpassing accomplished by oneself. For the first time, the seeing that I am is for me really visible; for the first time I appear to myself completely turned inside out under my own eyes. ([1964] 1968, 143)

We are taken up by and participate in the world through our sensorial organ/izations. Sight gives us others. Others give us ourselves. Inter/subjectivity is co-constitutive. If intersubjectivity is an ontological condition of the human subject on Merleau-Ponty's account, then so too is sightedness.

Where this becomes problematic is the in the operation of differentiation and objectification that Ihde attributes to Aristotle. If sight gives us others, it does so through differentiation—which, given infant development "The Child's Relation with Others" may be acquired at the level of culture—which is mobilized through objectification. While the infant may be engaged in a plenum in which its understanding of itself is undifferentiated from all it sees, *that* it sees things, suggests a primordial objectification in the visual realm. So, when it begins to differentiate, and then even later, when it begins to personalize the originary objectification is supplemented by habits of differentiation. Again, it is these habits that I take Ngo and Al-Saji to be suggesting that it is possible and necessary that we interrupt and re-learn. What I suggest is that this work is made ever more difficult by the speed/immediacy of sight itself. And, as Ngo and Al-Saji expertly point out these habits are so sedimented as to have become taken for granted (by others, though not them) as naturalized. To my mind, this naturalization suggests is that even when we make a distinction between cultural and pre-

cultural levels of experience, vision itself has a particular quality that contributes to the stickiness of particular habits.

Merleau-Ponty's treatment of synesthesia and the movement from binocular to monocular vision can be useful here. With, but in tension I take up his account of the unity of the senses and the synthetic nature of perception and the wholeness of the lived body's engagement in perception in his description of synaesthesia ([1945] 2014, 237-244/274-282). For Merleau-Ponty, rather than a cumulative product of disparate parts (an image for the eyes, a smell for the nose, a sound for the ears, etc), perception is the mobilizing of all of the sensorial organs in service of the whole unified (though impartial) experience. Though the senses are distinct, they are not disassociated. The senses "communicate among themselves" (238/275). They are distinct and simultaneous, in intimate and relation, geared toward the projects of the unified subject. Merleau-Ponty uses the movement from binocular vision to the monocular "unique object".[106]

Though we are originally given to sensory plenum, perception requires the ability to focus—to apprehend meaning. It seems then that focusing is less a narrowing than an appointing, a regulating, of the sensorial process ([1945] 2014, 237-243).

> The synthesis is not accomplished by the epistemological subject, but rather by the body when it tears itself away from its dispersion, gathers itself together, and carries itself through all of its resources toward a single term of its movement, and when a single intention is conceived within I through the phenomenon of synergy. ([1945] 2014, 241)

> The vision of sounds or the hearing of colors comes about in the same way as the unity of gaze through the two eyes, insofar as my body is not a sum of juxtaposed organs, but a synergetic system of which all of the functions are taken up and tied together in the general movement of being in the world, and insofar as it is the congealed figures of existence. ([1945] 2014, 243)

[106] One passes from the double vision to the unique object not through an inspection of the mind, but when the two eyes cease to function in isolation and are used as a single organ by a unique gaze. The synthesis is no accomplished by the epistemological subject, but rather by the body when it tears itself away from its dispersion, gathers itself together, and carries itself through all of its resources toward a single term of its movement, and when a single intension is conceived within it through the phenomenon of synergy. ([1945] 2014, 238/279)

The body is a synergetic system that experiences through the pulling together, ordering, and synthesizing of its diverse resources to make meaning. The broad scope of the visual positions it as the primary way that we are in the world. "My body is the common texture of all objects and is, at least with regard to the perceived world, the general instrument of my 'understanding'" ([1945] 2014, 244). That is, everything I experience through perception, I experience through and because I am a body. If my body is "normal" then sight is the commonest of those textures. Not only is eye-forward the normal mode of perception, the sighted body is the normal perceiver/experiencer.[107]

What vision gives and what distinguishes it from other senses is what it performs for the perceiver: organization. Sight illuminates what our bodies can organize and live.

> To live a thing is neither to coincide with it, nor to think it straight through. …[T]here is a logic of the world that my entire body merges with and through which inter-sensory things become possible. …To have senses such as vision is to possess this general arrangement, this schema [*typique*] of possible visual relation with the help of which we are capable of taking up every visual constellation. To have a body is to possess a universal arrangement, a schema of all perceptual development and of all inter-sensory correspondences beyond the segment of the world we are actually perceiving. ([1945] 2014, 340-341)

Vision is the primary mode of the process of reconstitution that makes possible the living through things and the living with others. Sight, on this reading of Merleau-Ponty's account, drives (or operates in such a way as to drive) the union of the senses—the gearing—the inter-sensory

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[107] On Edgar's reading sight covers what is both visible and invisible. (Which is still a distinction between blindness.) One might say that the sighted can see what is invisible and in doing so demonstrates and participates in the reversibility of sensorially and perceptival engagement for the invisible can only appear with the visible (negative space). Meaning inheres in the invisible. And so, meaning is embodied through sight.

> The fundamental embodiment of sight has been developed in terms of the intertwining of perception and movement, of reversibility and the intersensoriality of an originary synaesthesia. What we see in our environment and in animal and human others is not simply information, but meaning. The perceived world is not composed of pure facts, but also of values, of opportunities and dangers, desirable things, persons, and situations, and undesirables, of needs and wants and hopes and fears, rather than simply of sensations that are to be brought under judgments. (Edgar 2016, 138)

> Meaning appears in perception not *as* what is seen, but *in* what is seen; what appears is not brute nature or the *bloße sachen*, but *things* and *persons* in all their richness, ambiguity, and inexhaustibility. (Edgar 2016, 139)

The heart of meaning of intelligibility is in what we see, on Edgar's reading of Merleau-Ponty. And so on our reading, this is why his concern about blindness is so prevalent. What meaning can the blind person make on this account? Or rather, if a blind person, who is sensorially organized to not be sight-forward is unable to apprehend meaning then we have reason to believe it is because sight is the necessary precondition, and so the normative, correct, and primary mode of organization.

communication. Sight organizes our experience in the world. This also has consequences for what we value as and how we are with each other. Vision then becomes the primary of accessing and accessing what and who we prize in the world.[108] What I like, what I find aesthetically pleasing is conditioned up what I can see and my ability to see.

What this means for Merleau-Ponty's project in *Phenomenology of Perception* is an account of the lived body/human subject as thoroughly directed at the world through a plastic but unified sensorial gearing. The human subject is enmeshed in the world both as perceiving and as perceived and has a total schema that unites its multiple organs toward the goal of being *in the world*. This suggests a level of profound intimacy. This opens the subject—quite radically given the intellectualist alternative given by the "inspection of the mind"—to others in the world.

The tension comes in when I consider Merleau-Ponty's account of the way this gearing happens. In his description, I detect a hierarchical ordering of sensorial organ/ization wherein sight/the visual emerges as the primary and privileged gear. In Don Ihde's *Listening and Voice: A Phenomenology of Sound* (1976) he takes this quite seriously. Ihde describes the four elements of the visual world moving from the most immediate "focal core"—that upon which I am explicitly focused and emerges in the foreground of my experience—least immediate, to the horizon.

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[108] Vision is truly extraordinary on Merleau-Ponty's account. We can see now—and even here, our language of understanding, of apprehension is a tango with sight[108]—how he might arrive at such a despairing engagement with blindness. On Merleau-Ponty's account a person who is blind may be described as somewhat disorganized and impaired from community building (or even the ability to bring certain things to language). How could the person who is blind speak of a sunset? What meaning does the word hold for her? How does she organize her living? Can she / does she live it? For Merleau-Ponty it is sight, or the gaze, that opens the world to the body. What, on Merleau-Ponty's account is opened to the blind person? Does she move as free or freely through the world; or is her movement limited/constrained? On Merleau-Ponty's account what we can see, that we can see organizes our possibilities. Vision is an "eye can". I move as I can see.

> Everything I see is in principle within my reach, at last within the reach of my sight, and is marking upon the map of the "I can." Each of these two worlds is complete. This visual world and the world of my motor projects are both total parts of the same being. (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 354)

> Moreover, our ability to see, and our implication with movement privileges the perceiving body. Movement is the body's purview. The body moves itself guided by the eyes (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 354). We are present as human bodies in this comingling of seeing and touching/moving: in this perceptual and practical grasping (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 355)

> Together (i), focus, and (ii), fringe make up the totality of the visual field, the totality of explicit to implicit visual *presence*. The horizon (iii) is sensed as a limit to the "opening" which is the visual field, and this sense of the limit is the first sense of horizon. But beyond the "edge" of the visual field *nothing* is given as present, the "beyond" of the horizon is an absence, or emptiness (iv). (Ihde 1976, 39)

In this "first phenomenology," the beyond is a void (Ihde 1976, 25-46). The subject's engagement with and relation to the horizon of lived experience is given through vision and contains an implicit no-man's land that opens onto the unseen not-subject. I think of this as an implicit case of what Morrison describes as the difference between out and outdoors.

> There is a difference between being put *out* and being put out*doors*. If you are put out, you go somewhere else; if you are outdoors, there is no place to go. The distinction was subtle but final. Outdoors was the end of something, an irrevocable, physical fact, defining and complementing our metaphysical condition. (Morrison 1994, 17)

The first three elements of Ihde's description, "focus," "fringe," and "horizon" all tarry with out-ness whilst what is "beyond the 'edge' of the visual field" is outdoors.

What this suggests is that what is not immediately grasped by vision, that which is beyond focus and even fringe is also outside of intersubjective relation. The structure of vision is exclusive. There is reason to believe that this void is the realm of non-white lives. In *Black Bodies, White Gazes* (2017) Yancy gives rhythm to lived experience within this void. In "The Elevator Effect" he describes the way in which he is *not seen* by the white woman sharing the elevator with him (2017, 17-49). As a response to Fanon's call in *Black Skin, White Masks*, "Look! A Negro" Yancy sounds out the way his *lieb* is stopped, rendered strange, and returned to him as unrecognizable (Ahmed 2000 & 2007). This is also especially potent in his chapter, "The Return of the Black Body" (Yancy 2017, 51-104).

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* resounds with a testimony to this failure of inter/subjectivity in the lives of Black folks in her description of a transaction between Pecola Breedlove's—a little Blackgirl who dreams of having blue eyes—encounter with Mr. Yacobowski, owner and proprietor of Yacobowski's Fresh Veg in the fictional world of Lorain, Ohio where *The Bluest Eye* unfolds.

> [Pecola] pulls off her shoe and takes out the three pennies. The gray head of Mr. Yacobowski looks up over the counter. He urges his eyes out of his thoughts to encounter her. Blue eyes. Blear-dropped. Slowly, like Indian summer moving imperceptibly toward fall, he looks toward her. Somewhere between retina and object, between vision and view, his eyes draw back, hesitate and hover. At some fixed point in time and space he senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance. He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see. How can a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant storekeeper with the taste of potatoes and beer in his mouth, his mind honed on a doe-eyed Virgin Mary, his sensibilities blunted by a permanent awareness of loss, *see* a little black girl? Nothing in his life even suggested that the feat was possible, not to say desirable or necessary. (Morrison 1994, 48)

Morrison describes Yacobowski's eye-forward sensorial gearing. "He urges his eyes out of his thoughts to encounter her." It is through his eyes that Yacobowski experiences Pecola and that experience is first an objectification "between retina and object", revulsion "his eyess draw back, hesitate and how", and rejection "he senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance." It is instantaneous. In a curious and telling turn, his eyes apprehend her as unworthy of further consideration. Not only is she aesthetically displeasing, but she is also *affectively irrelevant*, "for him there is nothing to see". He is a "fifty-two-year-old white immigrant storekeeper" with a certain style of being in the world, that has a palette, but most importantly a reference of beauty, goodness, and relevance—"his mind honed on a doe-eyed Virgin Mary"—that immediately disqualifies Pecola.

> She looks up at him and sees the vacuum where curiosity ought to lodge. And something more. The total absence of human recognition—that glazed separateness. She does not know what keeps his glance suspended. …Yet this vacuum is not new to her. It has an edge; somewhere in the bottom lid is the distaste. She has seen it lurking in the eyes of all white people. So. The distaste must be for her, her blackness. All things in her are flux and anticipation. But her blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edge with distaste in white eyes. (Morrison 1994, 49)

Pecola, "all things in her are flux and anticipation" is fixed by the vacuum suction of Yacobowski's (white) eye-forward practice of inter/subjectivity. Her "motive will" is "stopped" (Spillers 2003, 206; Ahmed 2000 & 2007). She ceases even being "Pecola" (and not to her benefit) she is simply blackness,

"static and dread". I turn to the aural as an example of sensorial and affective organ/ization that opens onto lived experience that makes care-full space for non-white lives.[109]

I can imagine that there are two questions that might arise from this reading. One: Does this mean that the subject—Mr. Yacobowksi can achieve a sensorial organ/ization of something other than eye-forwardness? Two: If he cannot be anything other than eye-forward, then how might a proposed turn to the aural benefit Pecola.

At this unfurling historical present, I am not convinced that he sensorial organ/ization and meaning-creation practices of the subject/thief can be other than eye-forward. This is perhaps why ultimately, attention to—as per Ngo (2018) and Al-Saji (2008)—the habits of racialization and racialized perception are so useful. Attention to the habitual level unsticks some of the sedimentation that inhere in this historical sensorial organ/izational mire. I do leave open the horizon of something *else*. Though what would have had to have happened is a cataclysmic "unsuturing" from subjectivity (Yancy 2015, xi-xxii). And think, following Baldwin, how of much fear is in the way of that (Baldwin 1993, 9).[110]

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[109] Shannon Sullivan writes about the danger that Merleau-Ponty's projective intentionality (in perception/experience) holds for feminism. Her fear is that this projection allows for body to be used as neutral—denuded of difference or flattened.

> [M]erleau-Ponty assumes too easily and quickly that the generality of human bodies, i.e., the similarities found in human bodily structures, allows one to understand the meaning of another's intentions as communicated in their bodily gestures. … "[T]he body" should not be use as a shortcut to an (assumed) commonality between people. …That is, bodies cannot be appeal to as some sort of foundational "given" that easily solves the problem of communicating across our differences. Neglecting this fact, as Merleau-Ponty's notion of the anonymous or impersonal body tends to do, can lead feminists (and others) to overlook the different ways in which other take up their world and the different meanings that their bodily gestures have as a result. (Sullivan, 185-186)

I would add that it also overlooks the ways in which this difference is misread or misinterpreted by interlocutors coming from a different social world and the ways that this interpretive failure leads to oppression, discrimination, and all manners of violence. Sullivan's critique of Merleau-Ponty's appeal to projective intentionality is that in projecting one's intentionality onto another, one overrides another's intentionality in a dominating way (Sullivan,196). That is, her concern is with a normal body that may emerge in Merleau-Ponty's text given his reference to the natural. When one projects their intention out to another body, one rejects that body's difference, that body's gearing, that body's world as being worthy of its own encounter, and fills it with and engage with it on one's terms. When one *sees* another person, one make them conform to our projections/standards.

[110] To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger. In this case, the danger, in the minds of most white Americans, is the loss of their identity. Try to imagine how you would feel if you woke up one morning to find the sun shining and all the stars aflame. You would be frightened because it is out of the order of nature. Any upheaval in the universe is terrifying because it so profoundly attacks one's sense of one's own reality. Well, the black man has functioned

So, if what I currently give voice to, is the currently entrenched eye-forwardness of the subject, then why turn to the aural at all? On one hand, a turn to the aural sounds out an important distinction that allows for not just resistance, or endurance, but a kind of flourishing. Pecola is harmed because of a turn away from the aural by most of the people—but not *all* of as I'll explore very briefly in Chapter 3—in Lorrain, Ohio.[111] In the moments when she is able to engage with the aural, this with its experiential, expressive, and sensorial difference allows for an affect of wonder and care. On the other hand—I do so in an attempt to celebrate, and to invite you to celebrate with me what have "have shaped into / a kind of life" that which we have made up "here on this bridge between / starshine and clay." This is an attempt to celebrate "that everyday / something has tried to kill me / and has failed" (Clifton 1993).

in the white man's world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations. (Baldwin 1993, 9)

[111] Her mother, Mrs. Breedlove, effects an especially potent and damaging turn away from the aural (Morrison 1994, 113-126).

Chapter 3: **Listening Flesh: Pitch Complexes and the Social Otherwise**

My mother much prefers Broadway to the Blues. When I was very little, she told me stories of her summers in NYC as a late adolescent (18 or 19) visiting her older brother. This was NYC in the 1970's. She described the smell of it, the noise, the oceanic rush of multivalent possibility, the electricity of simply not-knowing what could happen, the grey of it all. And she described the shows she saw on Broadway in the 1971 and 1972 seasons.

More specifically, she *sang* them.

Perhaps I should back up. When my mother was pregnant it was considered good practice to play music for the fetus. She would pick out a record to play and either sit close to the speakers or put headphones around her growing belly. She favored classical music and Broadway showtunes. She credits this for my love of opera—but oddly does not take this into account with my desire to join the theatre. She repeated this practice for my two siblings as well, though I seem to remember them getting more (Black) pop than classical music.

Throughout my childhood she sang. (She still sings.) Little snatches of songs she made up about the weather or washing dishes or braiding thickthickthick hair. She sings our names. She sings when happy; when frustrated or sad; when we were little she sang to create some space for herself—for Elaine—in a day full of being Mommy. She'd mix "established" tunes with her own musicology. To this day, *O Sole Mio* has more resonance for me as mother' s comment on the weather or her baked chicken—Pavarotti's joyful rendition notwithstanding. When I think of my mother, it is often with the sound of her voice in mind.

This might be because her habit of creating space (as creative) through song is something we share. But it might also be because when I was very little she sang "The Impossible Dream" to me as a lullaby. In 1991, Luther Vandross made the song a mainstream hit with his sold-out show—and the televised airing—at the Royal Albert Hall in London. But in Panama City and then Tampa, Florida

from 1980 until about 1983 it was a song just for me sung in my mother's sweet and witty mezzo-soprano. The singing created a space for and *of* us, especially when I began to hum along with her. Nancy describes timbre as a necessary condition for the possibility of resonance and listening (Nancy [2002] 2007, 36-40).[112] Timbre is not an outcome of listening, we don't listen to timbre, we listen because of timbre. The timbre of my mother's lullabying voice resonates in me still.

I never learned all of the words—despite my love of Luther Vandross—and it wasn't until looking up the lyrics—and the song's significance in *Man of La Mancha*—for this project that it occurred to me that my mother probably didn't either. She remembered what we needed. What she got "right" what made the song sound like being called home was her approach to the melody and what the melody felt like, where it resonated in my body when my mother sang it and where it resonates now when her past singing of it echoes within me. The singing, the sounding beckoned to me, claimed me, much in the same way that chicks are claimed by their parents, and learn their songs to orient themselves in the world (and, for some species of birds, to pass on generationally).[113]

What my mother's singing allowed for was an opening into a geography of a shared dream, a shared beyond, sometimes off-key but never out of tune. And despite the discord that has happened since those earliest times, I carry with me a certainty of the capacity for and power of love, and the certainty of being among others, of a community based upon sounding.

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[112] Timbre is thus the first correlative of listening, and it is through it that we can even better approach what is straying here from a simple phenomenology. Rather than speaking of timbre and listening in terms of "intentional aim," it is necessary to say that before any relationship to object, listening opens up in timbre, which resounds in it rather than for it. ([2002] 2007, 40)

[113] This habit, specifically among US swamp sparrows is usually referred to do demonstrate "conformist bias" given the accuracy with which the younger birds replicate the songs of their elders in their immediate population (Lachlan, Ratmann & Nowicki, 2018).

Of late research has shown that endangered birds—birds whose population has decreased—have been unable to learn the songs of their people that allow them to attract mates. Being generationally out of tune leads to the further precaritization of these birds' populations (Crates, Langmore, & Ranjard et al, 2021).

I: Eye'd Rather Not

In the first chapter of this project, I described Merleau-Ponty's account of the human subject and argued –via a reading of Hortense Spiller's "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" (2003)– that Merleau-Ponty's account is limited and cannot include non-majoritarian bodies. Specifically, I suggest that american Black people fall out of the construct of human subject (and inter/subjectivity). In the second chapter, I explored the primacy of vision/the visual in Merleau-Ponty's account of perception and the sensorial organ/ization of the human subject. I end with an implied question: if the subject is eye-forward and Black folks are excluded from subjectivity, what horizon does that for the sensorial organ/ization of non-subjects?

What I want to think about in our time together in this chapter is what an ear-forward account of lived experience means for affective world(making).[114] In this way I intervene in what I take to be dominant themes in Merleau-Ponty's account of the lived body/the human subject: inter/subjectivity and the primacy of the visual field in perception and meaning-making.[115]

On my reading, Merleau-Ponty's account of inter-subjectivity is predicated on an account of the human subject as implicated within a sexual and acquisitional milieu wherein the subject is never an object and comes to know objects by its ability to differentiate itself from them and others via sight and touch. This account of the human subject as not/never an object runs counter to the lived experiences of a number of precaratized peoples. Elsewhere in my research, I explore this lived experience as what I call lived flesh, which draws on Hortense Spillers and other Black Feminist thinkers. For Merleau-Ponty, the sight of the other, or rather the subjects' sight of the other seeing them affirms the subject (as well as the other) for the subject. Specifically, in "The Intertwining –

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[114] One way that we might consider ear-forwardness as distinct from eye-forwardness is both in terms of temporality (sounding is, in some ways "slower" than sight) and embodiment. To attend to an ear-forward account is to resonate with being guided by the ear, or the project of turning the ear toward sound/ing which entails and describes a physical reorientation in the world, an embodied shift in physical and affective comportment.

[115] I am specifically engaging with *Phenomenology of Perception* ([1945] 2012), "Eye and Mind" ([1964] 2007) and *The Visible and the Invisible* ([1964] 1968)

The Chiasm" the subject's non-objectness and distinction from "other *animalia*" is predicated upon a sight-touch system, whereby the subject takes up the other (grasps the other) as an extension of itself. The subject grasps the object in and through sight and via this annexation confirms this object as another subject or not; and itself as the seeing-seen subject. Intersubjectivity is the result, not just of emerging into a world that is always-already populated—that is, it is not enough that one is always-already among others—intersubjectivity is predicated on an eye-forward (eye-confirmed) subject and acquisition.

I hear this—especially when I take up Black Feminist Thought—as a way that Merleau-Ponty's account of the lived subject is limited, and—at best—missing non-majoritarian bodies (and a worst, actively excluding them).[116] My specific interest is the body that has been created and insists in the wake of the Transatlantic theft of the "motive will" of formerly African peoples (Spillers 2003, 206). I focus on the lived experiences american Black people, particularly american Blackwomxn in what I call "lived flesh" to explore the ways that subjectivity is deeply problematic. Specially, I explore the possibility of a non-eye forwarded way of being. In this talk I will engage a turn to the aural. In this turn I hear a "deliberate decentering of a dominant" not in order to establish another hierarchy, but to explore the social otherwise that is lived beyond the eye-forwardness of the subject (Ihde 1976, 14).

> A turn to the *auditory dimension* is thus potentially more than a simple changing of variables. It begins as a deliberate decentering of a dominant tradition in order to discover what may be missing as a result of the traditional double reduction of vision as the main variable and metaphor. (Ihde 1976, 14)

The aural turn allows me to think about the lived practices that inhere beyond the horizon. When I take up Merleau-Ponty's account of the human subject for interrogation, in Chapter 1 I posited an ontologically acquisitive nature. In this chapter I suggest that this is largely because of the eye-forwardness of the human subject/thief. The immediate grasp of vision allows the subject to

[116] I am specifically engaging with Spillers (2003), Hartman (2019), Sharpe (2016), Musser (2018), and Lorde (2007).

apprehend in a way that appears to limit the subject body to a narrow affective and perceptual register. A turn to the aural is a turn to flesh, as turn away from reduction to the eyes/mind of thief qua subject.

> As an exercise in focal attention, the auditory dimension from the outset begins to display itself as a pervasive characteristic of bodily experience. Phenomenologically I do not merely hear with my *ears*, I *hear* with my whole body. My ears are at best the *focal* organs of hearing. This may be detected quite dramatically in listening to loud rock music. The bass notes reverberate in my stomach, and even my feet "hear" the sound of the auditory orgy. (Ihde 1976, 45)

Ihde teases the reader here in the way that he frames the auditory in image of the visual. We see what he means as he talks about sound and hearing. This notion of the aural being recast in terms of the visual is in line with Merleau-Ponty's own denigrating description of music in terms of sight of the written word in "Art and the World of Perception" ([1948] 2004, 78). Yet, beyond this play of words, what Ihde's much more care-full description gives us is an account of the aural as being lived, being felt, of resounding in the listener. This is an account the aural as caressing, as having a hold on the listener and strumming, palpitating the listener in ongoing ways. What I want to suggest is that a turn to the aural might also be a turn toward the synaesthetic in a way that Merleau-Ponty rejects.

Through his critical account of synaesthesia, Merleau-Ponty clarifies his exciting concept of the unity of the senses and the synthetic nature of perception ([1945] 2012, 237-244/274-282). For Merleau-Ponty, we are able to speak of seeing a sound (and vice versa) because what we are actually giving voice to is the wholeness of the lived body's engagement in perception. That is, rather than perception between the cumulative product of disparate parts (an image for the eyes, a smell for the nose, a sound for the ears, etc) perception is the mobilizing of all of the sensorial organs in service of the whole unified (though impartial) experience. Though the senses are distinct, they are not disassociated. The senses "communicate among themselves" (238/275). They are distinct and simultaneous, in intimate and relation, geared toward the projects of the unified subject. Merleau-Ponty uses the movement from binocular vision to the monocular "unique object".

> One passes from the double vision to the unique object not through an inspection of the mind, but when the two eyes cease to function in isolation and are used as a single organ by a unique gaze. The synthesis is no accomplished by the epistemological subject, but rather by the body when it tears itself away from its dispersion, gathers itself together, and carries itself through all of its resources toward a single term of its movement, and when a single intension is conceived within it through the phenomenon of synergy. (238/279)

What this means for Merleau-Ponty's project in *Phenomenology of Perception* is an account of the lived body/human subject as thoroughly directed at the world through a plastic but unified sensorial gearing. The human subject is enmeshed in the world both as perceiving and as perceived and has a total schema that unites is multiple organs toward the goal of being *in the world*. This suggests a level of profound intimacy. Or, specifically, this suggests that experience is a profoundly intimate experience with the world and of the subject as whole. This opens the subject—quite radically given the intellectualist alternative given by the "inspection of the mind"—to others in the world, as also intimately enmeshed.

What this also means for the lived body on Merleau-Ponty's account is that dispersion is largely from within and not from without. This is at once a description and a demand (of perception) of a kind of mastery or governance on the part of the subject. This capacity to "tea[r]" the subject "away from its dispersion" to "gather itself together" and then to guide itself "through all of its resources" suggests intimacy and a kind of inviolability. This is the account of a lived body that cannot be an object that cannot precede or trail behind the subject. And it is this body, this human subject, that might resist the possibilities of being-molecular (Brown 2021) and the pleasures that inhere in abjection (Musser 2018), this yonder body tries to mute the dispersed but not obliterated, but not unfocused—the diasporic—the polymorphus sensorial soundings of the aural. Perhaps synaesthesia—and not just the kind that is artificially induced as is the kind that Merleau-Ponty explores—is a register of fleshy perception, perhaps the synthesis of perception sounds in many voices.

The aural opens onto lived experience as feeling that which is inhere/ant felt in a way that the visual does not. In "When Black Female Presence in Beauvoir's *L'Invitée* Is (Seemingly) Not Invited to *The Second Sex*" Jones (2019) critiques the description of the club that centers in Beauvoir's apprehensive treatment of Blackness without Black folks. In so doing she writes of the affective difference between sight/ing and sound/ing—what I take up as an ontological difference between the sensorial organ/ization and affective practices of the subject/thief and lived flesh. She writes, "Partitions separate. Sound permeates." Ihde writes, "Sound permeates and penetrates my bodily being" (Ihde 1976, 45). Despite Ihde's evocative description, I am not entirely convinced that the permeate/penetration of the aural can be appreciated by a conquest/mastery ontology. To be permeated, penetrated from without, but to persist as something other than merely permeated is the situation of lived flesh.

To put it another way: Ihde's phenomenology in *Listening & Voice* (1976) may be heard as a phenomenological description of the subject who sees and hears *as well*, who is penetrated but unbothered; somewhat distinct form the activity of sounding. To live as flesh, to be ear-forward, suggest a kind of porosity, a kind of openness to touch, the habitual turning in the touch – the intimate relation to/with/in the pornotrope. In so saying, I do not aim as a pessimistic inviolate/violated relation or binary of Subject/Slave. Instead, I sound out the nonpossibility of what a former movement teacher referred to as a "joy in the movement" (of "leap[ing] over the shit).[117] That is perhaps, if a binary relation is needed, it would be more likely phrased as inviolate/celebratory. There is no celebration without the negotiation and non-reduction of/to another's' touch! This touches on the intervention I hear between traditional accounts of sound and sight. Typically, sight is considered spatial—I find examples of this in Merleau-Ponty's attention to the role vision plays in distinction and determination—and sound is considered in terms of the temporal or duration.

[117] Joanne Edelmann, "Master Teacher" at the Stella Adler Conservatory in New York City.

II: Eye Hesitate to Say

In his chapter "The Shapes of Sound" Ihde argues contra "traditional" accounts of the auditory as being only temporal (whilst the visual is spatial) and without the capacity to differentiate in the way that the visual can (56-71). Ihde understands listening as intentional. He takes up intentionality as a particular "shape" of experience.

> First phenomenology contends that once underway *all* experience, whether fulfilled or remaining "empty," is found to have a specific shape in that all experience is "referential," "directional," and "attentional," All experience is *experience of* ____. Anything can fill in the blank. The name for this shape of experience is intentionality. (Ihde 1976, 35)

Listening is listening *to* something. "Sounds are 'first' experienced as sounds *of* things" (Ihde 1976, 59). Moreover the things to which we to listening have certain "shape-aspects" that are present in the auditory domain (60-). "At first such an observation seems outrageous: *we hear shapes*" (61). As outrageous this sounds, what this also demonstrates, for Ihde's project is that the auditory is not just limited to the temporal. Shapes occupy a spatial register—an audio-spacio register.

> The shape-aspects which are heard, however, must be strictly located in terms of their auditorily proper presentation and not predetermined or prelimited by an already "visualist" notion of shape. The shape-aspects which are heard are "weaker" in their spatial sense than the full outline shape of a thing which is ordinarily given *all at once* to vision. But a "weakness" it not necessarily a total absence, for in this "weakness" there remains an important, if primitive, spatiality for hearing. (Ihde 1976, 61) (italics added)

In this sounding out of the audio-spacio register of shape-aspects Ihde gestures to what I take to be a central difficulty in eye-fowardedness and vision itself: its all-at-onceness. "What is to be seen is *there*" – sight requires close proximity – it is there and apprehended/grasped in a way that is not necessary for the aural (63).

One question that arises is perhaps: why is eye-forwardness considered the norm? One answer is because listening takes time. Ihde writes:

> So, with listening for shape-aspects it often takes repeated and prolonged listenings until the fullness of the shape appears. This serves no useful purpose in daily affairs when a mere

> glance will do the same in less time. Thus we fail to hear what may be heard and pass over an existential possibility of listening. (Ihde 1976, 66)

I agree with Ihde about the kind of attention that is necessary to approach the fullness of a shape, but I disagree about its lack of "useful purpose in daily affairs." To my mind, what Ihde gives voice to here is the intimate and somewhat inherent mode of hesitation within sounding projects. In her piece, "A Phenomenology of Hesitation: Interrupting Racializing Habits of Seeing" Alia Al-Saji (2014) argues that hesitation interrupts racialized and racializing habits of visual perception. These habits are comprised of two orders of phenomenological *powoir* (I can). I can see you as raced, and I can *only* see you as raced.

> Racializing vision thus wears "blinders" (to borrow an expression from Bergson). It is a representational and objectifying way of seeing. This inability to see otherwise—what I call the "I cannot" of racialization—should be understood to belong to social-cultural horizons, historically tied to modernity and colonial expansion in the West and motivated by imaginary and epistemic investments in representation and the metaphysics of subject-object. But the logic of racialization dictates its own self-forgetting; the horizon, to which the construction of "race" owes, is elided by the visual naturalization of "race." To see "race" as belonging to certain bodies is to overlook the social, historical, economic dimensions that contextualize "race." Here, I would claim that there is a kind of "I cannot" that structures racializing vision and that is not in contradiction with its "I can." This "I cannot" institutes, circumscribes and indeed makes possible the objectifying teleology of the racializing "I can": I can see bodies as raced only because I cannot see them otherwise. (Al-Saji 2014, 139)

These two orders become "sedimented" (Ngo 2018) and naturalized, fixing these habits and fixing the racializing gaze. This observation provides context for a particular concern I have with eye-forwardness. If vision is a grabbing conditioned by all-at-onceness, then racializing habits of vision become hard to both unlearn and to recognize. Al-Saji (and later, building on this work, Ngo) points to these habits as the point of entrance for new practices of being in the world. These practices find their root in hesitation.

Al-Saji pushes back against this notion of all-at-onceness with a reading of Bergson. For Bergson and later Deleuze she notes that "the whole is not given… there is no completion or closure for an enduring reality" (2014, 143). The whole is not given (this is the partiality of perception on

Merleau-Ponty's account) and it is impossible for it to be grasped in any sensorial organization—no matter how we might take that for granted in the realm of vision. Moreover, because there is no sensorial organ/ization that can grasp the whole, what this means is that all whom we encounter are horizonal, ongoing, and always emerging. The phenomenological method makes room for the uncertainty, curiosity, and knowability of becoming. And it is this that hesitation re-orients us toward.

> Hesitation does not only delay, it also opens onto elaboration and becoming: otherwise. Since all is not given, what happens in the interval is becoming. Affective hesitation can thus make felt the historicity. contingency, and sedimentation of habitual actions and perceptions, as well as their plasticity. (Al-Saji 2014, 143)
>
> Hesitation is a deceleration that opens up the affective infrastructure of perception, in order both to make it responsive to what it has been unable to see and to make aware its contextual and constructed features. (2014, 147)

Al-Saji's account provides a rich response and contextualization to Ihde's claim about the impracticality of listening. Here, I apply Al-Saji's use of Bergson's claim that time makes a difference in perception to Ihde's claim that the fullness of the visual shape can be apprehended in a glance. Time makes a difference in our visual apprehension.[118] What I mean by this is that sight takes time—but that the speed of sight (light) makes mis-apprehension ever more possible, ad leaves opportunity for reconsider what we've seen. We see, while not *at* the speedy of light, but because of and through the speed of light bouncing off of our world.

III: Pitch Complexes

What, then does this mean for the shape-aspects the emerge in the auditory field? These shapes do not rely on light and refraction for their coherence. What is a shape of a moan or a blue note? I turn to Blues as a unique expressive act of american Black folks. Beyond the facticity of

[118] Al-Saji's account is very compelling! Yet, for Al-Saji the problem of racializing vision is at the site of habit. That is, vision itself—or eye-forwardness itself—is not the problem. I take her (and Ngo's) accounts of racializing habits seriously. But I remain unconvinced that the problem of racializing habits of seeing are only problems of habit/uation.

microtones[119] (and microtonal music), Blues resounds in a space-time that is shared/made up of a communal register and so in some ways goes beyond a subjective account of a shape-aspect that appears to the hearing subject. Microtones, as wave phenomena can be aggregated as data points (Hayashi et al 2014 & Cutting 2018) and analyzed for their frequency, pitch, duration, and tonic relation. Microtonal analysis of music—in general—allows for a proliferation of digital "artists" or songs without singers (in a way that is distinct from instrumental music as computers and algorithms are still largely excluded from the connotation of "musical instrument").[120]

In his 2001 piece, "Is there such a thing as the 'blue note'?" Hans Weisethaunet takes up the rather challenging argument that the "blue note" or references to a "blue note"—usually thought of as the flattened 3rd and 7th notes of the 12-tone scale—take for granted a european 12-tone as the formal structure from which Blues harmonies are derived (2001, 100, 112, 114). In his critical reading of other musicologists Weisethaunet suggests that when music is theorized and researched in terms

[119] Most modern music is composed and played in the equal-tempered 12-tone scale (hereafter, 12-tone scale). This 12-tone scale is made by equally dividing one octave into twelve intervals. On the other hand, the Blues music originated in US early twentieth century has a specific musical scale called "Blue note". It is well known that some notes on the blue note scale are beyond the 12-tone scale. The interval of less than a semitone used in the blue note is called 'Microtone' and music using microtones is referred to as microtonal music. (Hayashi et al, 2014)

Academic studies of the early blues concur that its pitch scale has within it three microtonal "blue notes" not found in 12 tone equal temperament intonation (Evans, 1982; Kubik, 2008; McClary 2001; Titon, 1977). Furthermore, they find that these notes, together with their tonic, perfect fourth and fifth, constitute a minimal scale structure in the early blues that does not correspond to any of the scales characteristic of the 12 tone equal temperament tradition. It is widely acknowledged that the three blue notes must be "bent" in pitch from a standard note played on a host instrument using 12 tone equal temperament tuning (hereafter 12 tet) (Benward & Saker, 2003; Evans, 1982; Titon, 1977). Weisethaunet (2001) used this conception to define a blue note as representing *a deviation from the standard 12 tet note*. From the Africanist perspective of Gerhard Kubik (1999, 2008) this formulation belies a European musical bias toward 12 tet. Kubik, an ethnomusicologist/music theorist expert in the musical systems of Africa (2010), describes musical scales containing notes derived from the harmonic series, including those above the third harmonic, to be the norm in African music rather than the exception. Ethnomusicologists Kubik (1999) and Oliver (1970) provide compelling arguments that the blues is the result of a musical scale of west African origin, forced by the institution of slavery, into compromise with 12 tet instruments and harmony. They postulate that the outcome is a uniquely American music that not only continues today, but provides an important basal element in contemporary jazz and rock music. (Cutting 2018, 84)

[120] One has to wonder if this attention to microtones, and the disembodiment of voice/voicing or sound/sounder is what Weheliye attempts to locate as "raw sonic matter" (Weheliye 2005, 89).

of formal structure Blues emerges as a simple or primitive derivative of a complex and developed norm.[121]

> Discussing the topic of 'blue notes' with numerous – well-known as well as lesser-known – blues musicians and scholars, has further supported my view that the concept of 'blue notes' is derived from Western musicology and that the 'blue note' may not even exist as an element of emic theory: its origin was surely invented to describe the structure of 'Negro' music as opposed to that of European music… (Weisethaunet 2001, 100)

Here he follows Titon (1994, 137-174) and considers "pitch complexes." In Titon's description, pitch complexes refer to relations in frequency and approach (either arriving at a subsequent note from a higher or a lower note) between notes in a blues scale. Titon posits that most scales in blues—this work largely concentrates on "downhome blues" are a 10-tone scale (rather than the 12-tone suropean standard). This describes a unique standard beyond that of the european standard of harmonic tonic organization. I speculate that these complexes are situated within and sound out the geographies of certain affective/kinship practices. I take note of the fact that Titon describes complexes as component of what he calls Blues "families." Families are groupings of sounds based upon their aural relations/commonalities. Yet, these sonic relations often suggest a practice relation between the Blues artists themselves. For Titon "blues families" are inferred models "capable of production, according to a derivable set of instructions, a large number of blues songs" (Titon 1994, 141). Yet, Titon's careful and attentive descriptions sound out this practice of both modeling and production as something more than a player-piano-style approach. Titon's account describes apprenticeships—social relations—wherein the Blues/ing practice is communicated and constructed (Titon 1994, 41).[122]

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[121] Weisenthaunet specifically mentions Schuller (1986), Stearns (1957), and Tirro (1993).

[122] Titon describes the learning process.

> Down-home blues singers learned by imitating others, usually local musicians. …Once the learner had an instrument, he approached the skilled musician for help. The expert, like the devil which Tommy Johnson saw at the crossroads, showed him how to tune it and how to accompany songs.
>
> …The novice often sat at the master musician's feet during a Saturday night dance. If he was bold enough, he picked up the master's guitar or used his own during an intermission to test the crowd's reaction.
>
> …It took up to a year of steady practice before a novice could consider himself an adequate guitarist; it took longer for him to build up a large stock of blues stanzas, although he could perform one or two songs in a matter od days or a few weeks after he began. (Titon 1994, 41)

In their 2021 article, "Deep neural network models reveal interplay of peripheral coding and stimulus statistics in pitch perception" Saddler et al explore the ways that the hearing ears of *homo sapiens* perceive pitch.[123] By asking the question "why does pitch perception have the properties that it does" instead of trying to answer the question "mechanistically" relying on "front end" models of sound perception, the paper focuses on the wholistic constitution of the sound by taking into account background sounds. That is, rather than an attempt to analyze pitch as a raw sonic event—a pure event—these scientists analyzed pitch as it emerges in its relational environment (MITCBMM 2021). I read the focus of the scientists on pitch's relation to the "natural sounds" *homo sapiens* encounter when hearing as an understanding that perception is co-constituted by sensorial and community interrelation.

> To investigate how pitch behavior may have been shaped by the need to hear in noise, we varied the level of the background noise in our training set. Networks trained in noisy environments… resembled humans in accurately inferring F0 even when the F0 was not physically present in the stimuli...
>
> Networks trained in noiseless environments also deviated from human behavior... Collectively, these results suggest the ability to extract F0 information from high numbered harmonics in part reflects an adaptation for hearing in noise. (Saddler, Gonzalez, & McDermott 2021, 12)

Quite simply, the hearing ears of *homo sapiens* are designed to discriminate within, among, and through background "noise." Which, in some ways complicates the notion of "natural sounds" these scientists have considered. For my project these "natural sounds" are cultural sounds, such that hearing the pitch complex of what is classified as a "blue note," emerges from within the culturo-biological driven sensorial organ/ization of the listener.

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[123] The focus of this work is designed to be used to improve pitch perception of cochlear implants (Pryor 2021). I am sensitive to and in sympathy with the critiques made by disability theorists of medical invention in the lives of people who live with disabilities and non-majortarian bodies (such as people on the deaf spectrum). Notably, Schriempf (2001), Tremain (2010) McCarthy et al, (2016), Walhert & Gill (2017) and Bailey (2019) raise the concern about interventions as commensurate with euthanasia projects, designed to eradicate disabled folks by forcing interventions to correct impairments. My inclusion of this study should be understood within a context of hesitancy about the future use of its findings.

A turn to the tonal similarities between Klezmer and Blues echoes this speculation. This suggests why *Porgy and Bess*, despite the Gershwin's appropriation of ragtime, sounds more like a Klezmer opera—which, is awesome because klezmer is awesome—than Blues or even Jazz.[124] "Summertime" becomes a jazz standard when removed from *Porgy and Bess* notably by Billie Holiday in 1936. This period in Lady Day's oeuvre was a potent time for her coming into voice as a singular musician. Though she sings what a most often considered jazz tunes (or ballads), it is *how* she sings them that situates her work as deserving inclusion in a Blues family.[125] The rhythmic, "motional", and tonal choices Lady Day makes bring her within the standard the Titon records. Moreover, in her listening to Holiday attuned as she is to "understatement," Lordi (2013,99-136, 155-166) draws out the affective dissonance Holiday deploys in her performances. She blues songs turning them into Blues. Titon describes the inability of Bluesmen to sing the same song, the same way twice. This appears to be a rather significant quality for Titon as he includes an excerpt from a conversation with a noted Bluesman about it and uses this ephemeral quality of Blues to propose a model for producing Blues songs (Titon 1994, 139-41).[126] This is a quality Lady Day shares.

> Everyone's got to be different. You can't copy anybody and end up with anything. If you copy, it means you're working without any real feeling. And without feeling, whatever you do amounts to nothing.
>
> No two people on earth are alike, and it's got to be that way in music or it isn't music.

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[124] Notes from the Metropolitan Opera offer this description of the music.

> Far beyond being a compendium of classic songs, the score of *Porgy and Bess* maintains a level of musical unity and a rich, descriptive language that compares with the greatest operatic achievements. Much of the work's dynamism comes from Gershwin's explorations of the Gullah music of Tidewater Carolina, melded with his mastery of jazz and Eastern European Jewish roots to create a personal, idiomatic, brilliant, and thoroughly convincing musical canvas. (2021-22 Season, The Met)

[125] I echo Davis' point about her inclusion of Holiday in her exploration of Blueswomxn, "[H]er originality consists not so much in what she sang, but rather in how she sang the popular songs of her era" (Davis 1999, xvii).

[126] When I asked [Lazy Bill Lucas] what might account for the variation, he said, "It doesn't really matter which way you put it down because the tune is basically the same."
"But why does it come out different?" I asked.
"I'm not thinking about it when I do it, it just comes natural."
"How come you can sing different words to the same tune, so that sometimes you'll singe two note where you only sang one before with a different word?"
"Well, yeah, I do that," he said. "I remember the tune from the first. It just comes natural. I must have it somewhere at the back of my mind. Not from the notes, you see, I don't do it like that." (Titon 1994, 142)

> …I can't stand to sing the same song the same way two nights in succession, let alone two year or ten year. If you can, then it ain't music, it's close-order drill or exercise of yodeling or something, not music. (Holiday 2006, 53-54)

As far as her sound production, she writes that she aimed at the "feeling" of Louis Armstrong and the big sound of Bessie Smith—the two artists she fell in love with as a child—and yet, she astutely describes herself as something in the middle (Holiday 2006, 43 & Gourse 1997, 63).

> I think I copied my style from Louis Armstrong. Because—I always liked the big volume and the big sound that Bessie Smith got when she sang. But—uh—when I was quite young, I heard a record Louis Armstrong made called "The West End Blues," ad he doesn't say any words, you know?—and I thought, "This is wonderful" you know? And I liked the feeling he got from it. So I wanted Louis Armstrong's feeling and I wanted the big volume that Bessie Smith got. But I found it didn't work with me, because I didn't have a big voice, you know? So anyway, between the two of 'em, I sort of (smiling) got Billie Holiday. (Gourse 1997, 63)

I hear this in-betweenness in her approach to "Summertime." The first verse that begins with the word "summertime" and the second verse that begins with "Oh, your daddy's rich" share the same notes as written in the score (and as sung by Audra McDonald). Not only does Holiday not sing those notes in her recording of the song, but she also doesn't repeat the same notes for "summertime" and "oh, your daddy." She sings them with a find of stance that is neither romantic or elegiac. Somewhere in the middle of "Pop's feeling" and Smith's "big sound" resides the hazy, thick, wry (rye), approach of Lady Day. Not only does she choose different notes, she moves the song to an entirely different rhythm. This rhythm is palpable when she speaks. Neither fast nor slow, garbled nor crystalline she sounds to an impeccable and irrepressible time.[127] I pause here, to take up Alia Al-Saji's careful and exciting approach to rhythm and affectivity in her 2008 piece, "A Past Which Has Never Been Present". In her reading of Bergson, affectivity—feeling (and the subject feeling itself)—is a matter of time/rhythm (Al-Saji 2008, 51).

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[127] "The Billie Holiday Experience" YouTube channel has a variety of different interviews with Lady Day (including an early recording of "Strange Fruit" where Bessie Smith's influence on her style is noticeable. For a succinct example of Day's lyricism as a speaker, I recommend the Part 3 of her September 10, 1949 interview on the Art Ford Show. (The Billie Holiday Experience 2008)

> [For Bergson] Affects prefigure possible future actions and institute a delay in the body so that it has time to choose. The body waits before acting; it has the time not only to perceive but also to remember (MM 11-12). It is in this way that affectivity symbolizes, for Bergson, a body's hold on time. For to feel is to no longer repeat the past automatically but to imagine, remember and actualize the past and, with it, to influence the future (MM 251). … And this rhythm represents a way not only of living time in the present but of actualizing the past and opening up the future. According to Bergson, the rhythm of a life-the tension of its duration-is mirrored in the affective complexity of its body. (Al-Saji 2008, 51)

I want linger here, for a moment, with how this might work in tandem with Blues families. If, rhythm is a kind of style of the lived body and jams with the body schema, then might I be able to think about a phenomenology of Blueswomen? Or, to pose a sympathetic question, this might give some credence to consider a non-eye-forward sensorial organ/ization as a distinct way of having a world.

> [A]ffectivity for Merleau-Ponty is not merely a symbolization of the body's past. Affectivity is, more importantly, an opening onto the rhythmic differences of the world. Bodily rhythm incarnates a past and thereby opens a future, but for Merleau-Ponty this is a future of responsivity. (Al-Saji 2008, 53)

> For Merleau-Ponty, bodies are individuated by their style or rhythm (Al-Saji 2008, 53).

Here is a way one might push Merleau-Ponty to reconsider the primacy of the visual, or the primacy of vision in his accounts of the lived body. Rhythm is a way of being touched and moved by the world. The rhythm, if we take the Miami Sound Machine seriously, "is going to get you."

In part through rhythm, Holiday, along with Nina Simone's treatment of "I Loves You, Porgy" situate the song *in the community* about whom the show is written. Nina Simone's rendition of the aria on "Little Girl Blue"—her first album, recorded in 1957—resounds with a certain kind of stance, a certain orientation, a certain way of being-in-the-world that goes beyond certain attempts of

apprehension/description. The liner notes, written by Joseph Muranyi, from the album refer to Ms. Simone as a "new singer" of jazz.[128] [129]

> Her unusual combination of classical training, the ecstatic and serious quality of negro church music which has influenced her vocal delivery and the 'funky' and modern school of jazz with which she has come into close contact all make for a novel and often inspiring jazz singer and instrumentalist.

Though otherwise engaged with Simone's affective commitments and fleshy schema as heard in her work—he makes a point to include a direct quotation from Ms. Simone about her approach to singing, "'You got to get to people"'—the notes somehow miss the stakes of Ms. Simone's project. She says in a later interview that her desire is to "open people up so that they can feel themselves and let themselves be open to somebody else;" (:23-:28). Her project is to "shake people up" to make them vibrate from the inside so that they leave having an emotional response; a cataclysmic encounter with the pitch complex she inhabits (:40-:50). With her version—it is hard to call what Simone does with songs that she has not herself written, covers—of "I Loves You, Porgy" the listener is bound up, in an immediate way, with what is at stake for Bess, Porgy, and the community of Catfish Row beyond the racist dog whistles in Gershwin, DuBose, and Heyward's problematic book (2021-22 Season, The Met).

This is no shade (at all) to Audra McDonald's transcendent performance in the 2012 revival (or the 2019-2020 and 2021-2022 Met performances of Angel Blue) (Audra McDonald 2012). McDonald's velvety elastic instrument is in rare form in this recording. We hear both the difficulty and the subtle nuances of the score as written. It takes a virtuousa to bring out all of these textures

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[128] Muranyi rose to mainstream fame first with the Village Stompers and their 1963 tune "Washington Square" and later as the last clarinetist with Louis Armstrong's All Stars. Prior to both of these achievements, Muranyi received formal music training (and history) and received a Bachelor's and Masters of Music from Columbia University. During his academic training, he also playing with New Orleans jazz bands in the NYC scene while writing liner-notes for record labels (Vacher 2012). Muranyi's familiarity with both academic and practical jazz schools of thought give his liner notes a particular feel (even when they read as a bit restrained, as is the case with his notes for Ms. Simone).

[129] Though, my readings of Titon (1994), Lordi (2013), Holiday (2006), and Davis (1999) cause me to consider—*for a future project*—whether Blues/ing exceeds what it typically considered to be a genre.

without being overwhelmed by the task or having Bess recede to the background of her demand for Porgy, or to be overshadowed by her fear of Crown (and additional).[130] There is something here in both of these performances that exceeds despair—in a way that renders despair too small an affective register for Black life—something that is not totalized by negation, and yet something that is not quite hope, that tremolos darkly on the horizon of their sound. Yet the pitch complexes (and possibly also the tessitura) of *Porgy and Bess* (the opera) do not hail to the same community as do the versions by Holiday and Simone. Pitch complex hails to and from community in a way that creates affective, ethical, and potlicial differences between similar notes/tones.

Weisethaunet's account approaches this in his understanding of music as a collaborative process. "Musiking" is a way of being-with-others-in-the-world, a way of being-with-others in the world unfolding in the music making process. This world is textured—the ongoing process of layered spatial and temporal relations—creating space and time for harmonic affect (Weisethaunet 2001, 102-104).[131] Sound (sounding) refers to a whole and evolving relation between co-constitutive layers.

Such an understanding of sounding—as both spatial and temporal, and to my mind social—registers in a such a way that certain sounds hail to certain sounders/communities. This is what emerges in Weisethaunet's account of "Blue harmony" (which he positions as a richer description of a musiking practice than "blue notes"). In "blue harmony" the exactness of microtonal analysis is undercut by the fact that "Blues phrases rarely seem to be made out of 'one scale', rather they will be

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[130] To my ears, McDonald's treatment of the song is a bit more supple than Leontyne Price's 1963 recording, and this suppleness combined with the sheer force Bess coming through resonates more with Leontyne Price's performance of Con Onor Muore (from *Madama Butterfly*) at Carnegie Hall in 1976.

[131] Rather than thinking of music as the structure of 'objects', I think it is wise to view music as a mode of performance: as a process involving musicians and participants. Following Charles Keil, 'the power of music lies in its participatory discrepancies': a concept Keil uses to describe the intentional 'out-of-tuneness' and 'out-ofsyncness' of music performance: the 'process' of 'vital drive', 'groove' or 'beat' and the 'texture' of 'timbre', 'sound', 'tone qualities', etc. (Keil and Feld 1994, p. 96)

A similar point of departure is taken by Robert Walser's argument that music should be revived as a verb rather than a noun in order to challenge the common practice of analysing and understanding music in terms of objects. In doing so he takes as a starting point Christopher Small's notion of 'musicking' (see Small 1987 and 1998): 'Musicking embraces composition, performance, listening, dancing – all of the social practices of which musical scores and recordings are merely one-dimensional traces.' (Walser 1993, p. xiii) (Weisethaunet 2001, 102-103)

based on interplay" collaboration and a kind of horizonal, ongoing process of sounding (Weisenthaunet 2001, 108, 112).[132]

> The concept governing Western functional harmony (at least in theory and up to a certain point in history) is the diatonic principle: in short, the C-major scale works with C-major, a-minor, G7, e-minor, d-minor chords, and so forth. However, C-minor scales are not considered to go along with C-major chords: this will usually be thought of and experienced as 'dissonance'. *In the texture of 'blue harmony', however, this does not sound 'dissonant' at all to blues people*. That is why I think the concept of 'blue harmony' may be a good one, as *it is experienced* as a kind of mode of texture which is known from the blues, but which is not limited to this genre/style. (Weisethaunet 2001, 105 – italics added)

Weisethaunet's account makes space for bluesing as a particular auditory place that is "experienced." This shape-aspect of sounding emerges, on Weisethaunet's account, as something that can be shared and created within a group.

I hear this as in tune with Ihde's account of listening as the primacy of the aural (1976, 117-119). "[T]here is a primary listening which precedes our own speech" for "[w]ithin auditory experience there is this *primacy of listening*" (1976, 117 & 118). For Ihde, the world hails to us, sounds out to us long before we are able to return its call with our own words. The world resonates within us. Here, I am reminded of Al-Saji's "The Past Which Has Never Been Present" and the horizonal and ethical possibilities of the pre-personal (Al-Saji 2008, 41-45). While I struggle with the notion that this originary non-presentable past is extricable from a cultural past—"the common historical ground, the socio-political order of the New World…with is human sequence written in blood" (Spillers 2003,

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[132] The question then is whether it is time for musicology to start measuring the pitch discrepancies of blues performance to 'crack the code', to find out what blues is 'all about'. Recent articles by Keil, Pro¨ gler, Ale´n and others (1995) take on the task of measuring PDs (as they have come to be called). The main problem with such approaches may be the danger of confusing music with mathematical representation. For what is there to measure? In the participatory processes of performance, time and tonality are felt rather than measured. Hence, musicology may never be able to measure experiences of 'blue harmony' and 'bluesness' because what is measured is not necessarily what is experienced or felt as significant. Accounts of cultural discourse thus seem more relevant than the reified structuring of applied mathematics or computer formalism. Having heard Buddy Guy perform at the club Antone's in Austin, Texas, and at other venues – with everyone screaming back, interacting, yelling, and 'having the blues' in a positive sense (i.e. I am stressing the point of process/event as the ultimate aspect of music) – the question is: How can the measuring of pitch ever take any account of blues experience? The main question still is: What aspects of the musical material are conceived of as significant to listeners and performers? (Weisethaunet 2001, 112)

206)—that excludes Black folks from the construct of human, it is here in Ihde's construct of listening that I hear the echoes of Al-Saji's possibilities.

Ihde takes the primacy to indicate the primacy of language. In this originary aural past there is no "prelinguistic."

> Listening comes before speaking, and wherever it is sought the most primitive word of sounding language has already occurred.
>
> The presence of word *already there* for listening is also what I find if I inquire into myself. For wherever I find myself I already stand in the midst of word. My memories do not give me that "first word" which I uttered as a child nor even the "first word" I heard from my parents. This lies beyond the horizon of my memory and appears if at all as an already mythical tale related to me by others. (Ihde 1976, 118)

Ihde takes the always-alreadyness of word as both existentially and ecumenically established.

> In the ancient mythologies the word for soul was often related to the word for breath. In the biblical myth of the creation, God breathes life into Adam, and that breath is both life and world. (1976, 3)[133]

Yet, in this appeal to the always-already linguistic to words, I worry that Ihde destabilizes the potential of a "primacy of listening." I worry, specifically, about non-linguistic soundings such as moans and cries falling out of his account of "meaningful" sounds (Ihde 1976, 118). I worry about the very sounding practices/approaches by African disasporic peoples that are not words but are loaded with meaning. I am thinking here of the "clicks" of the Xhosa language practices, the "mmhmm" and "mmph" of american Black folks, and the verbal unworded cries of our ancestors. Notably, Frederick Douglass' begins one of his autobiographies with a description of his "own aunt" Hester being whipped. While most readers turn to the primal terror of Douglass *seeing* the carving of these "hieroglyphics of the flesh" (Spillers 2003, 207) on Aunt Hester, the "most terrible spectacle" how he actually begins the account is through a description of its sound (Douglass, 1986, 51).

> I have often been awakened at the dawn of day by the most heart-rending shrieks of an own aunt of mine, whom [Captain Anthony] used to tie up to a joist, and whip upon her naked

[133] Ihde points to the story of creation in Genesis, yet John 1:1 is more apt, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

> back till she was literally covered with blood. No words, no tears, no prayers, from his gory victim, seemed to move his iron heart from its bloody purpose. The louder she screamed, the harder he whipped; and where the blood ran fastest, there he whipped longest. He would whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush… (51)

His experience of a slave is constituted through the primacy of listening to meaningful non-language. It is the sound/ing of Aunt Hester, the pitch complex of her cries—intelligible and beyond words—that forms the basis of Douglass' social understanding. As he listened to the sound/ings of Aunt Hester, he also heard the moral degradation of whiteness. The world hailed to him with both kinship and violence. The simultaneity of being open for use and closed for total apprehension.

IV: Social Otherwise

Ihde's account appears to flatten voice to language (Ihde 1976, 118-121, 152). That is, meaningful sounds are spoken sounds (that can then be representation in written language). Ihde understands the intersubjective in this light. Subjects talk to each other. Subjectivity is a coming to language and the exchange of language with others. This is not to suggest that fleshy selves do not have language. This is to suggest that the voicing of lived flesh (and even the hailings it receives from the world) are not limited to speech, or what Ihde calls, "the voices of language" (1976, 120, 149-157). Ihde appears to anticipate this tension when makes the distinction of the "'linguistic' form of language" that stands out from "language' as the significant" (1976, 149). This distinction allows him to take up "[l]ingusitic' language" as "language-as-word. [That] is the center but not the entirety of language in the broad sense" (149). He argues that meaning-baring language is "experiential rather than 'merely' linguistic" such that language-as-word is implicated in the "meaning-acts" of language-as-signification (1976, 150). He moves from these two modes of language to the languages of gesture and touch to demonstrate the polymorphous possibilities of the center (1976, 150-151). This account of gesture, and particularly of touch is very useful for thinking about the languaging practices of lived flesh (which,

perhaps is a different project), yet remains mute on non-linguistic vocal soundings which, at times, do more than exist as "co-presence" with "the word" but also exist *instead of the word* (1976, 151).

Merleau-Ponty's account of the human subject is an account of an eye-forward and worded subject, for whom speech-as-language is a possible use of the body ([1945] 2012, 185/219-190/224). This expressive subject speaks/languages as a way of accomplishing thought (189-190/224). This is not, for Merleau-Ponty, to say that one thinks before one speaks; "speech is not the 'sign' of thought" (187/221). Speech is not the container or representation of sense. Sense "caught in speech" and it is through the speaking word that thought is embodied in the world (187/222).

> I do not primarily communicate with a "representation" or a with a thought, but rather with a speaking subject, with a certain style of being, and with the "world" that he aims at. (189/224)

The human inter/subject accomplishes itself through discourse with other speaking subjects. Perhaps, one might speculate that subjects cannot even hear lived flesh. Think of the clear communication of Aunt Hester and the disavowal of her expressive acts by Captain Anthony. Think of George Floyd's repeated exhalations that he couldn't breathe.

I am also curious about what this means for the moan in american Black musical practices both religious and secular. My grandmother was not a Blues-lover. And while she did not go so far as to align it with the Devil, or sin—perhaps those battles had been fought by her own mother and perhaps she'd fought other battles with my mother and aunts over R&B and Soul Train—it was not her go-to choice in times she needed to sound a way through. Neither was Gospel—and particularly not the pop turn Gospel has taken since the mid-90's with the rise in popularity of Kirk Franklin's sound that with is cross-over appeal that blared out of radio speakers on the Black radio stations of Hartford, CT (89.9) when I was an adolescent.

My grandmother, a Primitive Baptist, preferred sounds that resonated, sonically in the same space as Blues and, I believe shared an affective range (or pitch complex). The significant difference being that what the hymns considered "sin/ful," Blues merely, considered.

Primitive Baptist theology emerged as a response to the evangelical turn in the Protestant Church. Indeed, some followers do not even consider themselves Protestant as much as they do Calvinists. Opposed to the notion of evangelical work in general and revivals in particular (in their early history), with its underlying belief that sinners/unbelievers could be brought to The Lord, made whole, and saved; Primitive Baptist theology insists upon a strict interpretation of the Bible that follows from the reading that G-d has already Chosen the Few and that works of faith cannot alter the fate of those not chosen. (Guthman 2015, Peacock & Tyson 1989, Sutton 1982).

This strict interpretation of the Bible has influenced the liturgical practice and this is heard in the unique shape of the aural register at play in worship. Primitive Baptist churches are typically small and unadorned, the Elder is usually an autodidact, (affectively) *called* to speak the word, Church-governance is led by lay-people and can be communal in nature—though, in my experience Deacons tend to occupy a higher status than Mothers—only Brothers (men) can become Deacons and only Sisters (women) can become Mothers (Baklanoff 1987). There is no instrumental accompaniment. All of the hymns are sung acapella in what may be considered "line singing" (Burnett 2013)[134] a kind of get-in-where-you-fit-in but get in harmony and the rhythm was faithfully thumped in a call and response between the Elder, and Mothers and Deacons.

> Beginning with the first verse, a leader lines out the melody line, establishing a tonal and rhythmic framework for what will follow. …Each individual sings his or her own version of the melody, sometimes an octave lower or higher (men rarely use falsetto) than the leader,

[134] Sutton (1982) does refer to this practice of singing as "shape note" or "sacred harp" singing. There are similarities in the communal nature of sounding between these and line singing. And there are some Primitive Baptists, as Sutton notes, that have taken up the use of hymnals (which aid in the shape note and sacred harp singing. However, modern shape note and sacred harp singing tends to sound like traditional European major chord progression sung in 2-4 part harmony. (See: "146 Hallelujah - Exeter Regular Sacred Harp Singing, 2/19/17" https://youtu.be/TtprEV-y9rY)

Line singing does not map so easily onto this structure. (See: "Primitive Baptist Singing at Pilgrim's Rest Church on December 17, 2011" - https://youtu.be/-QmHRNQ0O5Y & "Thornton Old Regular Baptist Church: I'm Going Home (lining hymn) (1983)" - https://youtu.be/vrDLj_dmugE). Though Sutton does make careful observation of different harmonic practices of white and Black churches and attribute the difference perhaps to line versus shape singing; some of his observations trend toward backhanded compliment or even disparagement of the practices of Black aurality (Sutton 1982, 20-24). What he describes as comparison or a "search for published parallels" comes across as taking white harmonics as a norm from which the aurality of Black Primitive Baptists is a derivative (and ultimately incomplete) (Suton 1982, 23).

> which produces occasional though unintentional harmony. This phenomenon causes a feeling of horizontal rather than vertical harmony. Further, the highly melismatic melody frequently contains improvised embellishments.
>
> The group produces sounds with a relaxed glottal region and a relatively wide opening of the glottis. This results in a considerable amount of resonance and richness. Any departure from this rich and resonant vocal sound is a result of the age and health of the singer and is not intentional. Singers slur consonants, especially at the ends of phrases. … *Humming, referred to by informants as "moaning," is another vocal device the participants employ usually on the last verse of a hymn. An occasional ecstatic groan or scream punctuates the singing*. (Baklanoff 1987, 385-386) (italics added)

What was most striking to me, listening, and participating in the songs as an adolescent, was that rather than the big major-chords and movement away from dissonance to a joyful and predictable harmonic praise that dominated popular Gospel music of the time, these songs seemed to start in a minor chord, or slightly off the major chord and used the closeness of the different voices pairings that might otherwise be considered discordant—tarried with that sonic uncertainty—to allow everyone to come together, to attune to each other in harmony, such that though a melody soon emerged, the iteration of each song was different every time it was sung. Each singing was a shared becoming that reverberated long after the service had passed but could not be repeated. This required, of everyone involved a particular orientation to and practice of listening—listening that exceeds hearing and cannot wholly be represented in written notation. Listening to the welcoming and orienting (and so meaningful) moans of the song.

What a turn to the ear-forward organ/ization of lived flesh—rather than an account of a stable sighted subject who also hears—sounds out is the attention to a wider range of affect and expressive practices than the subject. In *Beloved* Sethe re-memory's of her flight and how she arrived at the nickname of soon-to-be-Denver is marked by Morrison's rich imagery as well a particular attention to sound and movement. Flayed, exhausted, with bleeding feet and famished, a heavily pregnant (and lactating already for her walking-already? child) Sethe collapses in the field of wild onions.

> Well, at least I don't have to take another step. A dying thought if ever there was one, and she waited for the little antelope to protest. And why she thought of an antelope Sethe could not.

> Imagine since she had never seen one. She guessed it must have been an invention held on to from before Sweet Home, when she was very young. Of that place where she was born…she remembered only song and dance...
>
> Oh but when they sang. And oh but when they danced and sometimes they danced the antelope. The men as well as the ma'ams, one of whom was certainly her own. They shifted shapes and became something other. Some unchained, demanding other whose feet knew her pulse better than she did. (Morrison 2004, 36-37)

In this excerpt, song and dance—or the expressive as song (which goes beyond the spoken) and dance (touch)—reverberate within a geography of fleshy relations. The sense this lived flesh makes for and among itself is accomplished not through the spoken word, but through soundings and touchings that are beyond the limits of human apprehension. I am reminded here of cake walks that were misapprehended as aspirational rather than parodical (Ellison 2002, Journal of Blacks in Higher Education Winter 2002/2003, & Jamison 2015).

Further, an appreciation of the different sensorial organ/izations and the possibilities of theorizing, mourning, and celebration that inhere in the lived flesh echoes a particular kind of theoretical praxis. In "'Now, How You Sound': Considering a Different Philosophical Praxis" Devonya Havis (2014) makes an argument for the particular expressive practices that inform (her) Blackwomxn's philosophy. Havis turns to "Ancestral Black Vernacular discourses" to highlight what she takes up as "the critical attitude" of Blackwomxn's philosophical praxis (2014, 238-239, 241).

> Ancestral Black Vernacular Discourses include African diasporic expressions, oral comments, gestures, and attitudes. Such discourse provides varied contexts for making sense of the world. As an epistemological ground for cultural expression peculiar to Black communities, these discourses are a repository of ideas and practices, strategies, and tactics for negotiating life and framing experiences associated with living in a racialized context. Such discourse is not a unitary body of knowledge but functions, nevertheless, as collective knowledges that are informally and formally communicated to members of the Black community. Such knowledges often go beyond what is explicitly stated, which means that these discourses often proceed by means of structural indeterminacy and arise within the context of ongoing critiques that inhabit the domain of performance, revision, and ironic parody. (Havis 2014, 238)

What I find telling about this description is that discourse goes beyond the spoken *word*. Havis' attention to "African diasporic expressions, oral comment, gestures, and attitudes" is an attention to

what Minna Salami (2020) might describe as "sensuous knowledge" (Salami 2020, 14-15).[135] Sensuous knowledge is as propositional (rational) as it is multiple, affective, collective, and informal. Ancestral Black Vernacular discourses are expressive acts that belong to and sound out the flesh. They resist being fixed, absolute complete whilst still be whole, caressed and given to productive and nuturing uptake, partially because of the "ongoing contexts of critiques" in which they arise. This Discourse might be a form of witnessing a form of being with flesh in the world.

Havis' Ancestral Black Vernacular might be taken up as a pitch complex for a fleshy praxis that requires a sensorial organ/ization otherwise. One in which sound/ing both perception/reception of and making sound is integral in self and community knowledge practices. For Havis, this praxis emerges from lived experiences of Blackwomxn (within the american context). Attention to these experiences allows her (and me) to hear the possibilities of theory otherwise that form the basis for a particular "critical attitude" (Havis 2014, 241). In her account of this "critical attitude" Havis turns to relationality, flux, and references to the aural/auditory realm. I am particularly attuned to Havis'

[135] We need an approach to knowledge that synthesizes the imaginative and rational, the quantifiable and immeasurable, the intellectual and the emotional. Without feeling, knowledge becomes stale; without reason, it becomes indelicate. …We need knowledge that affects the interior as well as the exterior. *Ogbon-inu* [a Yoruban facet of knowledge—*ogbon*—that translates to "knowledge of the gut"] and *ogbon-ori* ["knowledge of the head." *Ogbon* occurs when both the head and the gut/heart work together simultaneously (12)]. Sensuous Knowledge.

By *sensuous*, I don't mean sensual. While sensuality is related to bodliy appetites and a self-indulgent pleasure involving the physical senses (touch, taste, sight, smell, and hearing), sensuousness transcends the instincts. When something is sensuous, it affects not only your senses by your entire being—your mind, body, and soul.

…*Sensuous Knowledge* is thus a poetic approach; it is the marriage of emotional intelligence with intellectual skill. It is perceing knowledge as a living and breaking entity rather than as a packaged produce to passively consume… (Salami 2020, 14-15)

appeal to the productive and creative qualities of "discord."[136] [137] This orientation, this situated reaching is conditioned by a radical notion of the self that thrives where the subject does not. This fleshy theorizing that requires a particular sensorial organ/ization that is other than (or perhaps more robust than) eye-forward; it is a "paradigm shift" wherein the 'established social" and epistemic practices "lose their critical edge" in attending to Black lived experience (Collins 2019, 41-45).[138] [139]

> [T]his essay joins a larger conversation about how one might utilize Black women's lived experience to derive noncanonical philosophical tools and note practices of living that could constitute a unique philosophical tradition. In this respect, my proposal about a philosophy derived from some Black women's experiences does not provide a definitive statement but is, rather, *an invitation to hear the possibilities that emerge when we seek to understand the multiple ways that one might do philosophy*. (Havis 2014, 241) (italics added)

Through Havis, Salami, Morrison, and Baklanoff I hear, more richly, the importance of Ihde's turn to the auditory. Though his turn leaves the eye-forward notion of the subject somewhat untroubled—I take his rather engaging work as souping up the eye-forward subject in a way that is akin to an account of the seeing subject as *also* hearing. It is this understanding of the seeing subject as also a hearing

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[136] This critical attitude:

1. Understands theory in terms of its *relationship with* practice.
2. Holds *dissonant* paradoxes in harmony while remaining *relational, context aware*, and activist.
3. Understands that power operates in creative, not merely repressive, ways and tracks the material ways in which hierarchies mark peoples as privileged, raced, gendered, and classed.
4. Employs ancestral *discourses, narratives, literature, folk wisdom, music, and other cultural repositories* as a basis for knowledge-creation and preservation.
5. Values community that nurtures and supports its members, enabling them to better think and act in ways that are not *static but continually evolving*.
6. Engages in *performative play* as a means of affirming rites, rituals, and creative practices that contest, celebrate, and *continually redefine how one conceives of individual and group identity*.

(Havis 2014, 241 – italics added)

[137] The role of difference and creativity is vital for understanding this vision of community. Community entails an interdependence and relationality with others that does not strip one of a certain form of individuality nor does it require absolute agreement. (Havis 2014, 247)

[138] A paradigm shift is a change not just in ideas, but also in how a field of study reorganizes its practices to facilitate its problem-solving objectives… Paradigm shifts are significant because they describe what happens when traditional frameworks no longer sufficiently explain social realities and thus become ineffective. In this sense, the concept of intersectionality as a critical social theory in the making, because a paradigm shift identifies a significant turning point when established social theories lose their critical edge and when other social theories displace them. (Collins 2019, 42-43)

[139] One might read Afro-Pessimism description of the structures of antiBlackness, social death, and the Slave, as a social theory that has emerged to displace these established norms. But one would miss that Wilderson (2020) describes Afro-Pessimism as a "commentary" and not a praxis. So, it is an attempt to reveal and lay bare rather than address, transform, or displace.

subject that we mustn't ignore that in our phenomenological descriptions—it does provide the beginnings of a register for the constitutional and perceptual/experiential and affective differences between the human subject and lived flesh.[140]

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[140] In her challenging and rigorous work, Nina Sum Eidsheim (2015, 2019) gives voice to a relationship between the voice, the listener, and enculturation. One of Eidsheim's claims is that there is no such thing as a raced voice or sound; that what we perceive as, say, a Black sound is based upon enculturation and training. Specifically, we are trained as listeners to anticipate and expect certain sounds. We learn to hear race and gender. We also, learn to make certain sounds/tones as a result of our cultural education. Much in the same way that siblings or family members might have similar cadences or timbres because we conform our vocal production to those around us (or we get ostracized for not, i.e. criticisms of sounding or "talking white"). We learn to speak like our community. For Eidsheim sound has no essential truths and cannot reveal to use any intrinsic knowledge about the sounder.

Eidsheim is making the claim that the non-uniqueness, the instability of the voice as bearing identity-markers means that it is not the voice that is raced, but the listener. Or, specifically that the listening hears through their own racial situation. That is, we hear race because we are listening for race. Voice is dynamic and engaging, but racially neutral. The listener is not.

This aligns with the claim that there is no biological fact of race—there is no race gene or what have you—there is merely the occurrence of phenotype difference/diversity in the species. So, discrimination based upon skin color that assumes race is wrong and cannot be supported by an appeal to biological difference. Discriminating in timbre is also wrong because of this. She writes, "I seek to create awareness of timbral discrimination in the same way that consciousness has been raised around, for instance, skin color and hair texture" (Eidsheim 2019, 4). I worry, however that she only has a negative account of discrimination and that this is over-represented in her account. The ability to make observe difference and make distinctions is not always destructive. Moreover, the ability to live distinctions that are intended to immobilize, denigrate, and dehumanize beyond these intentions and externally imposed limitations, is effaced when considered in only the negative sense. That is, there might be a way of taking up a "Black" voice by those who live as Black (particularly in the us american context) that frustrates the notion of discrimination as unjust in the thick sense.

Now, she does allow for the "entrainment" of certain timbres as demonstrated in "technique and style" as "a vocal practice's resistance against hegemony" (Eidsheim 2019, 32). But this, for Eidsheim only strengthens her case that voice/timbre are not essential and are not raced in themselves.

> Entrainment may take place within a constrained existence, such as the conditions of slavery or gender inequality, where the entrainment of the body is total. Entrainment can also take place within the choice to undertake a particular vocal practice, within a vocal practice's resistance against hegemony, and in a play whose vocal roles may be forced upon a person, within which the vocalizer may potentially redefine the very definition of that vocal practice. …By closely examining entrainment's complex condition, we may conceive of certain uses of entrained vocal features as *technique and style*. (Eidsheim 2019, 32)

While I appreciate this, I want to suggest that Blues/ing isn't *just* resistant and that it's techniques and styles should not be reduced to merely opposition.

It seems important to note that in some ways Eidsheim is giving a different account of listening than Nancy. While on some level, Nancy's account of listening—versus hearing—leaves open the kinds of spaces around identification, consolidation, theorizing, and apprehending that is foreclosed on Eidsheim's account. On her account, listening is the process through which we "enact and activate" the voice (2019, 24); the process by which we measure and authentic the sound with the assumption that through the knowable sound we can know the sounder in a socio-historic sense—that voice demonstrates the material essence of the voicer. Eidsheim doesn't seem to be making a distinction between listening and hearing—listening and hearing are in unison.

What I am after, is less an essentialist claim of Blues/ing with a stable, absolute, fixed, and atomic notion of Black voice, but a leaning into the collaborative nature of the practice of Blues/ing. I want to lean into as an expressive and affective gesture through which I take up certain voices. This gesture is aural rather than visual. Here is where I think that Eidsheim's second intervention, that of voice being communal, or of voice as "co-articulation" as part of a "continuous material field" (2019, 5, 10) is especially apt. However, I want to veer away from what I take to be an underlying however unconscious push to universalize the sound—even as she offers an immanent critique of the inaccuracy of the measurements in listening and the solidly *a posteriori* nature nature of voice "voice is that it does not exist *a priori*" (2019, 28, 32)—or to gesture at the possibility of a raw sonic emission/event of a sound rather than a voice. Certainly, I she might reply that she is not interested in that event, per se, but how that even loses its rawness, or even the

V: Mostly Ears

What I consider is the possibility of lived flesh as not eye-forward or of the lived flesh as having a more fluid sensorial organ/ization that cannot be reduced to the lived flesh as sighted and hearing *as well*. To my mind, this is not an attempt to describe a hierarchy of sensorial organ/ization. This project does not amount to a proposal that one *ought* to be ear-forward, though at times in the process of making this project, I have engaged with anticipated questions about how one might become ear-forward. I am les interested in the propositions that arise from those kinds of questions and more interested in the exploration and celebration of these practices that hail to me of a kind of practice of making the fleshy self *live*, or of making a way (or a home).

In his short work, *Listening* ([2002] 2007) Jean-Luc Nancy distinguishes between listening and hearing, the role of each capacity in philosophy (1), as well as an account of the kind of self involved in listening (versus hearing).[141] On my reading, Nancy posits what I consider to be an ear-forward way-of-being-in-the world that opens onto a listening that is affectively richer—more and uniquely resonant ([2002] 2007, 2, 7)—than the hearing of the eye-forward subject. He takes quite seriously the idiom, "To be all ears" and asks what this might mean as a lived experience, or as an originary orientation.

> What does it mean for a being to be immersed entirely in listening, formed by listening or in listening, listening with all his being? (Nancy [2002] 2007, 4)

What this means, for Nancy is a conception of the self as radically open, marginal, porous who listens, where listening is "the opening stretched toward the register of the sonorous" ([2002] 2007, 7, 10, 12).

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impossibility of that event being approached by the listener. That is, the raw sonic event of a tree falling in the forest, for Eidsheim is not as interesting as the listener's orientation toward "tree" "falling" and "forest".

[141] Philosophy can certainly understand, but can it listen? The philosopher can hear, but they cannot listen. Is listening something of which philosophy is capable? Or—we'll insist a little, despite everything, at the risk of exaggerating the point—hasn't philosophy superimposed upon listening, beforehand and of necessity, or else substituted for listening, something else that might be more on the order of *understanding*?

> Isn't the philosopher someone who always hears (and who hears everything), but who cannot listen, or who, more precisely, neutralizes listening within himself, so that he can philosophize? (Nancy [2002] 2007, 1)

The milieu of and matter of being constituted by the sonorous remixes Subject/object distinctions and frustrates the acquisitive ontology of the Subject/Thief of the lived body. In the sonorous the self is returned/referred to the self; in the visual the self is returned as an object.

> The sonorous here makes clear its singularity in relation to the optical register, where the relationship to the intelligible as a *theoretical* relationship (*theoretical* is linked, in Greek, to seeing) is more manifestly, if we can use this word play. In terms of the gaze, the subject is referred back to itself as object. In terms of listening, it is, in a way to itself that the subject refers or refers back. … [T]he visual is on the side of an imaginary capture (which does not imply that it is reduced to that), while the sonorous is on the side of a symbolic referral/*renvoi* (which does not imply that it exhausts its amplitude). In still other words, the visual is tendentially mimetic, and the sonorous tendentially methexic (that is having to do with participation, sharing, or contagion)… ([2002]2007, 10)

Though he does not specifically engage with Merleau-Ponty, his account of a relationship between the visual, apprehension/capture, and objectification is in line with my reading of Merleau-Ponty's account of the lived body/subject. The subject's annexation of the other—taking up of the other for the completion/accomplishment of the subject—that begins with an intersubjectivity predicated in the visual, is echoed here in Nancy's account of these two registers. An important distinction is that for Nancy all subjects are returned back to themselves as objects in the visual register. This is not entirely true on Merleau-Ponty's account. However, I want to suggest that the opening to objectification might be a way in which Nancy's account of the other/self is less narrowly construed than Merleau-Ponty's. What this distinction does yield is the possibility that perhaps *it is only though the auditory register that our way of being in the world approaches the Merleau-Ponty's horizonal possibilities*. Further, I take Nancy's claim that the visual is not reduced to mere "imaginary capture" seriously to heighten a violence of Merleau-Ponty's eye-forward subject.

To my mind the visual is *more* than just "imaginary capture." It does not just theoretically capture or only apprehend the image. When it encounters *another*, particularly a non-subject an othered being, the eye-forward sensorial organ/ization of the lived body—the human subject qua white person

seeing whitely—*stops* the othered being, the stranger (Ahmed 2000 & 2007).[142] [143] The sensorial organ/ization of the human subject fixes the other, the other who is not taken up intersubjective

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[142] "[W]hiteness [is] a category of experience that disappears as a category through experience" (Ahmed 2007, 150).

[143] Through strange encounters, the figure of the 'stranger' is produced, not as that which we fail to recognise, but as that which we have already recognised as 'a stranger'. In the gesture of recognising the one that we do not know, the one that is different from 'us', we flesh out the beyond, and give it a face and form. It is this 'fleshing out' of strangers in encounters with embodied others that I examine. The alien stranger is hence, not beyond human, but a mechanism *for allowing us to face that which we have already designated as the beyond*. So we imagine, here, now, that we are facing an alien stranger: it allows us to share a fantasy that, in the co-presence of strange and alien bodies, we will prevail. (Ahmed 2000, 3)

In a sense, Ahmed's project is more hopeful than mine. This attention to the structures which figure the stranger carries with it the implicit claim that thouse who are constituted as stranger retain a kind of inherent human-ness. In some ways this leaves the question of the subject intact, where the stranger is is co-constituted by the relationships from which some emerge as subjects.

> '[T]he stranger' is produced through knowledge, rather than as a failure of knowledge. I suggest that it is by 'knowing strangers' that the 'we' of the epistemic community is established, even though that 'we' is called into question by the very proximity of 'the strangers' through which it comes to know. (Ahmed 2000, 16)

My project, in its exploration of lived flesh, is not, to my mind a kind of "fetishism" of the stranger that Ahmed's project opposes (2000, 3-6). For even though I think that one can be lived flesh—or that lived flesh is a way of being-in-the-world—this is not an attempt to universalize lived flesh (2000, 6) or flatten the differences intra-lived fleshiness (5-6). Specifically, the lived flesh to which I attend is in an u.s. american Black context—particularly those folks who know or believe themselves to be descendants of enslaved persons [but it is important to note that not all american Black folks are or believe themselves to be the descendents of enslaved people while a very particular relation to the Middle Passage. Yet, contra the work of Michelle Wright (2018), and specifically following Spillers, Morrison, Sharpe, Hartman, Lorde, I am persuaded to consider the Atlantic the passage that predominately governs the structure and relations national, economic, identarian, and political in its wake. We are not all the descendants of formerly enslaved people, but we all rise and fall in the wake of the practice's hold on the world. And it is this hold that structures but does not totalize the lived flesh as a way of being in the world.

Ahmed pushes back against accounts that "ontologize" the stranger and understand it as "having a life of its own" as this obfuscates the relationships through which some bodies have been made strange (2000, 5). It is an exploration and critique of these processes that I take Ahmed to be gesturing to an account of human-ness as prior to or untouched, fundamentally, by the processes. That is, Ahmed holds onto the stranger as "not beyond human" but a mechanism that she calls on us to use to interrogate what "we have already designated as the beyond" (2000, 3). Human is not the problem; our limits are. I take this as implicit suggestion that the stranger cannot be lived. *One is not a stranger*, even as one is rendered strange. I want to suggest that lived flesh can have a life of its own—or, more strongly, that lived flesh does have a life of its own and it is this "irrepressible life" (Crawley 2016, 72) that is under quotidian and minute assault—and that this life is intimately co-constituted by not exhausted by the structures through which it emerges and is beyond. So, lived flesh figures large in terms of the human subject, but it is irreducible to it and destabilizes any implicit claim of the human/subject as an *a priori* condition of commonality. The otherwise, the geography of the beyond that lived flesh inhabits is not extra-.

Crawley writes:

> Lynching, of course, is extrajudicial, but to be extrajudicial is to consider the judicial as the grounding principle, the foundational theological-philosophical claim such that to be "extra" or in excess of the judicial is to still make claims about the rightness of the judicial system itself. But what of other modes of life that do not assent to this judicial system, such that breathing is not the apposite response to extrajudicial killing, but is the otherwise? (Crawley 2016, 70)

And this is a really nice critique here: that extra- leaves unquestioned/challenged and reifies its predicate: the juridical. Or perhaps more specifically, as a prefix, extra- stabilizes and gives nominative and normative force to the subject it modifies: juridical. And I like this very much. Particularly the way that Crawley turns toward the otherwise to indicate the subject as the very problem. However, I am concerned that the way that he links the otherwise to excess, does not get far enough away from what the "extra-"in "extra-juridical" does. That is, I think that excess modifies and reifies the capacities of whiteness as the norm. So rather than being just enough in an of itself, Blackness, is in excess of whiteness. This is not a critique of whiteness, but a gentle centering. A soft centering, perhaps, but a centering nonetheless. His account of irrepressabilty goes farther toward the use of excess as a way to reframe whiteness as limiting.

relation—and through whom intersubjective relation is predicated—the stranger, the stopped body, the lived flesh as seen for the taking, for the objectives of the human subject.

> Husserl and Merleau-Ponty describe the body as 'successful', as being 'able' to extend itself (through objects) in order to act on and in the world. Fanon helps us to expose this 'success' not as a measure of competence, but as the bodily form of privilege: the ability to move through the world without losing one's way. To be black in 'the white world' is to turn back towards itself, to become an object, which means not only not being extended by the contours of the world, but being diminished as an effect of the bodily extensions of others.
>
> 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. (Ahmed 2007, 161)

The subject who hears—that is, the eye-forward but hearing as well human subject—grasps at the object in front of it *in theory* and stops up its ears to the resonance of its living frequency. To be seen is to be grasped as an object of thought. This, for the flesh, is a particularly dangerous action. For the "false" knowledge of the Black body is what is immediately apprehended. The Black body arrives—full stop—as a problem to be stopped; and the Blackwomxn's body, and the Black feminine do not seem to arrive at all (Spillers 2003, 152-175). Or, sexuate and gender difference is lost (Spillers 2003, 203-229). For me, however, this is not total lack, this is an opportunity to train our ears to the ways in which sight is too poor, is relation of paucity, with regard to lived flesh. If we listen for lived Black flesh as engaging in re/sounding, as an ongoing sonorous event, then we can think of the Black self in contradistinction from the totalization of anti-Blackness and Afro-Pessimistic accounts. This is, then the sound of an unprecedented arrival.

> The transformation of flesh into bodies could not reduce the irrepressible life that those on the receiving end of violence carried within and dispersed. The breath, literally of life, was in them and the brutality was fundamentally because of this irrepressibility. (Crawley 2016, 72)
>
> Performance of air, breath, breathing is the enunciation of excess, of Blackpentecostal aesthetics, grounded in otherwise possibilities. (Crawley 2016, 72)

The sonorous does not manifest—it does not aim at, nor can it be approximated through representation (Nancy [2002] 2007, 13-16); it evokes. It moves, touches, and leaves itself open as does the listening self.

> To be listening is to be *at the same time* outside and inside, to be open *from* without and *from* within, hence from one to the other and from one in the other. Listening thus forms the perceptible singularity that bears in the most ostensive way the perceptible or sensitive (*aisthetic*) condition as such: the sharing of an inside/outside, division and participation, de-connection and contagion. ([2002] 2007, 14)

This openness, this relation to arriving, this resonance—this turn toward the gerund, the becoming, flux rather than fixidity—is echoed in Nancy's call to listening as a mode of being. "To be listening" hails to his earlier question of what it means to be all ears ([2002] 2007, 4). On Nancy's account listening as habit is coextensive with a way of being-in-the-world ([2002] 2007, 21).[144] Nancy makes this claim in response to his reading of Husserl as a thinker who "persists in 'seeing' the melody instead of listening to it" and I suggest that this eye-forwardness is also present in Merleau-Ponty's tension around the aural and music (in particular) ([2002] 2007, 21). Yet to be listening to music is privileged on Nancy's account. Music, for Nancy, remains open in a way that the visual/painting does not ([2002] 2007, 65-66).[145] Music sounds out the becoming, the spatial and temporal encounter with possibility (here, now, and the future). Music is edgy, and its horizons stretch toward what will "have had to have happened."

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[144] While the subject of the target is always already given, posed in itself to its point of view, the subject of listening is always still yet to come, spaced, traversed, and called by itself, sounded by itself… (Nancy [2002] 2007, 21)

[145] What distinguishes music, however, is that composition, in itself, and the procedures of joining together never stop anticipating their own development and keep us waiting in some way for the result-or outcome-of their order, their calculations, their (musico)logic. Whether or not he is a musician, for someone who listens, the very instant a sonority, a cadence, a phrase touches him (of which he can, if he is a musician, determine the value, measure, etc.), he is propelled into an expectation, urged towards a presentiment. Whereas painting, dance, or cinema always retain in a certain present-even if it is fleeting-the movement and opening that form their soul (their sense, their truth), music, by contrast, never stops exposing the present to the imminence of a deferred presence, one that is more "to come" [a venir] than any "future" [avenir]. A presence that is not future, but merely promised, merely present because of its announcement, its prophecy in the instant. Nancy [2002] 2007, 66)

And so, if, on Nancy's account, music "does not stem from a logic of manifestation" if it is discordant with a concern with presentation and visual apprehension, then what can be said about the listening subject? Nancy's account of being is attuned to resonance. Nancy's listening subject is not the phenomenological subject (of Merleau-Ponty) who hears ([2002] 2007, 20-22).

> To be listening will always, then, to be straining toward or in an approach to the self (one should say, in a pathological manner, a *fit of self*: isn't [sonorous] sense first of all, every time, a *crisis of self*? ([2002] 2007, 9)

> The subject of the listening or the subject who is listening (but also the one who is "subject to listening" in the sense that one can be "subject to" unease, an ailment, or a crisis) is not a phenomenological subject. This means that he is not a philosophical subject, and, finally, he is perhaps no subject at all, except as the place of resonance, of its infinite tension and rebound, the amplitude of sonorous deployment and the slightness of its simultaneous redeployment—by which a voice is modulated in which the singular of a cry, a call, or a song vibrates by retreating from it (a "voice": we have to understand what sounds from a human throat without being language, which emerges from an animal gullet or from any kind of instrument, even from the wind in the branches: the rustling toward which we strain or lend an ear). ([2002] 2007, 21-22)

From this I infer that the self/subject is not fixed, is not an arrival, but is always already in the processing of arriving. This is self as gerund. This is the distinction that I aim to make between *le corps propre*/human subject and lived flesh. For the ear-forward flesh, this understanding of self as arriving is what differentiates it from the subject that emerges (even though, in some ways as conditional) in Merleau-Ponty's account. That is, sonorous sense is a crisis of/for the subject, whereas it fits the self of the lived flesh. The aural/sonorous, that rings out in and through resonance—where resonance is a referential practice—attunes us to a different situation (both phenomenologically and ontologically) of the self when consider to be the subject ([2002] 2007, 12). Where, in the visual, with its apprehension its "imaginary capture" ([2002] 2007, 10) theorizes a fixed, given subject, that is bound in subject/object, Thief/captive sensorial and affective organ/izations, the sonorous, the ear-forward situation and orientation sounds out itself exceeds the subject.

I read through Black Feminist and Womanist Thought and a commitment toward the communal, affective We/Us that "has to do with participation, sharing, or contagion" ([2002] 2007, 10). Further, this passage echoes an understanding of a self that extends arrival (or given-ness), a self that echoes and is always in the process of arriving. The self reverberates as gerund. Though, Nancy does, in fact say that "sonorous presence *arrives*" this is in contrast to the subject's givenness, its quality of being "already there, available" ([2002] 2007, 14). I take this up as a question of motion (and direction) where the subject is fixed/locked in place—"trapped in a history" as Baldwin might say—and the self-referential sonorous presence, that is in movement.

> Whereas visible or tactile presence occurs in a motionless "at the same time," sonorous presence is an essentially mobile "at the same time," vibrating from the come-and-go between the source and the ear, through open space, the presence of presence rather than pure presence. ([2002] 2007, 16)

> While the subject of the target is always already given, posed in itself to its *point of view*, the subject of listening is always still yet to come, spaced, traversed, and called by itself, *sounded* by itself… ([2002] 2007, 21)

This is a kind of porous self—not rigid, atomic, or isolated—this is a orientation to the world and a practice in the world of being open. I want to think through flesh as intervening in this intervention. Flesh, as vestibular, but not exhausted by its vestibularity sounds out the possibility of the listener as always already caressed by affective relations that enflesh "the place of resonance". When I think about ear-forward in this way,or specifically when I think about non-eye/vision forward as a way of being in the world and of sensorial organ/ization, what I am thinking with and through is a distinction between listening and hearing. Where I want to hold listening as simultaneously carrying perception/experience and affection. Listening, then plays with what Charlotte Mandell, the translator for the Fordham University 2007 pressing of Listening, describes as Nancy's creative and deliberate ambiguity with regard to the use of *entendre* and *sens*. To be ear-forward, to listen, is to sense. This, to me, opens onto a Lordean epistemology of the erotic self, where sense, feeling, listening is the necessary condition for the kind of erotic being in the world that flesh practices. Nancy writes, "to

listen is to be straining toward a possible meaning, and consequently one that is not immediately accessible;" I take this to mean that listening is not an arrival, it is an ongoing, excessive, and elastic practice that, in many ways is beyond the scope of the subject—or at least the subject that emerges in Merleau-Ponty's account of the lived body (and even of the carnal body) ([2002] 2007, 6). To be ear-forward is perhaps to follow an "unreachable star," "no matter how hopeless, no matter how far," to orient within flesh and vestibularity, in what must have had to have been coming, in a kind of affective and ethical reorientation away from sight.

Interstitial: Smiling Lessons: Toward an Account of AfroSkepticism

When I was about 12, my grandmother told me a story about her time as a girl-child in the american South. She and her family were sharecroppers in Humbolt, TN. Or, as she said, she and her family were "slaves in the country." One day, when she and her younger brother, Bud, were working a plot of land a girl, "poor, white, mean, and ugly; ugly to the bone, Undra" started harassing Bud; threatening Bud for looking at her. This went on for about a week and Grandma, when she was known as "Jack's girl" or "Ella Mae," had had her fill.

> "I went up to her, Undra, real quiet, real close, and looked her straight in the eye and tol' her to cut it out. Or else.
>
> And she had the nerve to laugh, nasty mean little dirty thing that she was could laugh wi'out smilin'. And she said, 'O yeah? Or else wut, gaaaal?
> So the next day, here she come, tryin' mess with My Buddy. And she had been warned. So she shouldn' been surprised when I cut her. I cut her across her face. I taught her to smile."

That night, the Klan came to Ella Mae's house. Telling me this my grandmother shrugged, "The important thing is that little girl never messed with My Buddy again. Now come on and holp me with these tomatoes."

In an endnote in his 2016 essay, "Afro-Pessimism: The Unclear Word" Jared Sexton replies to what he understands to be a smug (and misguided) critique of Afro-Pessimism. He writes (equally smugly):

> [T]hose erstwhile critics of Afro-Pessimism, who smugly excoriate it for failing, as it were, to provide an account of resistance or survival, only pull tighter the knot of their own insistence. For the immediate question facing such judgment is: *resistance or survival in the face of what, precisely*? (Endnote 6)

This interstitial sketches out what I take to be a stake in my understanding of Black Feminist and Womanist praxis that informs and positions them as what I want to call an AfroSkeptical praxis. This is, thinking through Hartman, Lorde, Morrison, Musser, and Sharpe, as way of inhabiting the "*yes,*

and" Musser posits to Afro-Pessimism and motivates that speculate turn of the final chapter of this project (Musser 2018, 9).

Paul C. Taylor offers a generous reading of Afro-Pessimism, both the analytic and Wilderson's 2020 monograph of the same name in his review of Wilderson's *Afro-Pessimism* for the Washington Post (2020) and his Op-Ed for ABC (Australia 2020) "Living on the Knife's Edge: George Floyd and the Appeal of Afro-Pessimism). In his Op-Ed, a meditation on our time in the afterlife of George Floyd (with only a passing mention to Breonna Taylor), he describes this moment as an attempt to "begin again," one in a long sequence of such moments. He lists various attempts, starting with the Civil Rights Movement and working backwards, linearly through time, to Reconstruction, and then forward again, linearly, from Reconstruction to the "audacity" of Obama's hope in 2006. These are fixed moments, archives of starts and stops. And though while it is devastating, this temporal orientation demonstrates and phenomenological and ontological difference between a Black Feminist and Womanist praxis, the Black geography and temporality it engenders, and the kind of linear (and fixed) thought of Afro-Pessimism and even this studied regard of it by Professor Taylor.

To begin, again, is to understand the verb as exclusive of the gerund and always already and only in conversation with progression/enlightenment. That is: a middle and an end. Such an understanding or reading practice evicts the gerund, the during, the insurgent claiming of and naming of space for the social being of Blackness, the waywardly beautiful experiment of being in the process of, the care-full erotic doings that mark a Black Feminist and Womanist engagement with struggle as simultaneous with but irreducible to celebration. That is, there are experiences and practices of struggle and celebration that are not exhausted by the other, even if they are cotemporaneous. Simultaneity is not sameness. Christina Sharpe (2019) offers what I read as an example of this, in her recent piece on method, "Beauty Is a Method" and her revisiting of her mother's beautifying. She writes:

> Knowing that every day that I left the house many of the people that I encountered did not think me precious and showed me so, my mother gave me space to be precious—as in vulnerable, as in cherished. It is through her that I first learned that beauty is a practice, that beauty is a method… (Sharpe 2019)

It is also worth noting that Sharpe cites Hartman in an epigraph.

> Beauty is not a luxury, rather it is a way of creating possibility in the space of enclosure, a radical act of subsistence, an embrace of our terribleness, a transfiguration of the given. It is a will to adorn, a proclivity for the baroque, and the love of *too much*. —Saidiya Hartman

This citation is a riff on Lorde's "Poetry is Not a Luxury" wherein she writes:

> The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes. Which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized. This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are – until the poem – nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt. (Lorde 2007, 36)
>
> I speak here for poetry as a revelatory distillation of experience, not the sterile word play that, too often, the white father distorts the word *poetry* to mean – in order to cover a desperate wish for imagination with insight. For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives. (Lorde 2007, 37)

Sharpe and Hartman and Lorde, Beauty and Method and Poetry, participate in the practice of beautifying. Beauty as a method is an orientation and practicable relation to the ongoing. Beautifying—a way of being in the world. It is by this light that we engage in Black Feminist and Womanist praxis. It is the too much-ness of that which is "about to be birthed, but already felt" the affectively palpable dreaming toward the simultaneity of "survival and change" of flux and now. It is the too much-ness that cannot be read in "to begin".

For "to begin again" is always "to end". It is a teleology. And, we find cause then, to read, as it appears to me Taylor does, these ends as failures. Yet, where do we end with Ella Mae Jordan's encounter with the white girl in the field? The knife drawn smile? The Klan at night? With my Grandma's move to Hartford, CT in the mid-century, or death a few years ago? With me? I would

say that it does not end, because it is always in the process of becoming—and this horizonal nature, this arrival way of being, unique, perhaps to those of us who are the descendants of "arrivants"—always in the process of making itself so that it cannot be totalized in a way that would fix it entirely to linear time.[146]

A practice of and orientation toward beginning—to be becoming, to be emerging—is temporality otherwise, is to read the present for both its betrayals (of its better self) and its beautiful moments of possible of what "will have **had to**" and what must be about to have happened.

> The grammar of black feminist futurity that I propose here is a grammar of possibility that moves beyond a simple definition of the future tense as *what will be* in the future. It moves beyond the future perfect tense of *that which will have happened* prior to a reference point in in the future. It strives for the sense of possibility that grammarians refer to as the future real conditional or *that which will have* ***had to*** *happen*. The grammar of black feminist futurity is a performance of a future that hasn't yet happened but must. It is an attachment to a belief in what should be true, which impels us to realize that aspiration. It is the power to imagine beyond current fact and to envision that which is not, but must be. It's a politics of prefiguration that involves living the future *now*—as imperative rather than subjunctive—as a striving for the future you want to see, right now, in the present. (Campt 2017, 17)

This is not an account of Black Feminist praxis as transcendent. It is an account of the praxis as simultaneously "immi/a/nent" (Sharpe 2016, 71) and futural. We may find it in Baby Suggs, holy's ceremonies in the Clearing (Morrison 2004, 102-104); in Shug Avery's erotic theology and love of the color purple (Walker 1992, 193-199); in Janie Crawford's sensuous/sensual empathy with a "pear tree—*any* tree in bloom" (Hurston 1990, 10-11); and in Carrie Mae Weems' recent collaboration with Carl Hancock Rux in "The Baptism" (2020). "The Baptism" ends with an image of water/waves in full color as Rux recites:

> This is the nature of baptism. A thank you of water in company with the web of Reason, entangled to it. Nothing can be wasted. … They are over and over, and never die. Almost clear now. Storm resolving its fury. Sheer stocking of light coming over, coming through the

[146] "Indigenous critical theorist Jodi A. Byrd (Chickasaw) suggests that we understand enslaved Africans in the colonized Americas as 'arrivants' (a term borrowed from Barbadian poet and Afro-Caribbean literary scholar Kamau Brathwaite), meaning people who came to the colonized Americas by force, and she asks, 'How might we place the arrivals of peoples through choice and by force into historical relationship with indigenous peoples and theorize those arrivals in ways that are legible but still attuned to the conditions of settler colonialism?'" (Smallwood 2019, Footnote 33)

> floodgates. Two strokes of copper arching over dayspring. Almost clear now. Keep on! Keep on! Clouds braiding over the moss basin, shaking the valley, glistening its illusions. Everything washed clean soon, even the soot-stained air. Keep on keep on. (Weems & Rux 2020)

How bright the light is that shines from the baptismal font. This is different then, from the tragicomedy that Taylor (October 2020) credits to West, because this isn't a Godotean fantasy—despite Lucky's resplendent st/utterings (Beckett [1948], 1982, 28-29)—that is… this isn't about hope—though we may question if hope is the note upon which Godot ends.[147] Nor is it entirely a "Kings of Comedy" distinction between wishing and hoping (Sexton 2016). Though, I wish a motherfucker *would* try to convince me it is. This allows for a distinction from Afro-Pessimism in affective commitments and orientations otherwise, toward simultaneity, difference, and sensuality.

Hartman (2008) asks, "How does one revisit the scene of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence" (4).[148] This is not a conclusion, but and opening toward a return—perhaps what

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[147] Estragon: You say we have to come back to-morrow?
Vladimir: Yes.
Estragone: Then we can bring a good bit of rope.
Vladimir: Yes.
Silence.
Estragon: Didi.
Vladimir: Yes.
Estragon: I can't go on like this.
Vladimir: That's what you think.
Estragon: If we parted? That might be better for us.
Vladimir: We'll hang ourselves to-morrow. (*Pause.*) Unless Godot comes.
Estragon: And if he comes?
Vladimir: We'll be saved.
Vladimir takes of his hat (Lucky's), peers inside it, feels about inside it, shakes it, knocks on the crown, puts it on again.
Estragon: Well? Shall we go?
Vladimir: Pull on your trousers.
Estragon: What?
Vladimir: Pull on your trousers.
Estragon: You want me to pull off my trousers?
Vladimir: Pull ON your trousers.
Estragon: (*realizing his trousers are down*). True.
He pulls up his trousers.
Vladimir: Well? Shall we go?
Estragon: Yes, let's go.
They do not move.

[148] What are the kinds of stories to be told by those and about those who live in such an intimate relationship with death? Romances? Tragedies? Shrieks that find their way into speech and song? What are the protocols and limits that shape the narratives written as counterhistory, an aspiration that isn't a prophylactic against the risks posed by reiterating violent

Musser will think of as a "recuperation"—that is lived beyond replication. This is about grammar. Grammar is the science of the principles of language; the art of speaking of writing with correctness or according to established usage. I take this to mean that grammar is a praxis, a way of theorizing and a way of doing/being (both of which implicate and are implicated by power dynamics). The nominative is normative.

When I turn to consider Wilderson (2010) and Sexton (2016) I get a sense of the grammatical pronouncements of Afro-Pessimism. Wilderson provides an account of an "ontological position" of the "Slave" or "niggerness" that affirms the humanity and lives of the nonnigger/Subject/Thief (Wilderson 2010, 37). "Black" is coextensive and synonymous with "Slave" and "Slave" is coextensive and synonymous with social death (Wilderson 2010, 11). On this account to speak of blackness or black identity and living in the same breath is to be naïve (at best) for Blackness is always already and forever (at least in this world) abject/object, fixed, and irredeemable (Wilderson 2010, 58-59). While Wilderson gives descriptive voice to the ontological situation of the Slave I am left to wonder what we are to do, or how we are to *be* in this situation of antiblackness. Sexton is quick to assure us that this kind of questioning generates its own defeat: *in the face of what, precisely?*

> In a sense, Afro-Pessimism is not an intervention so much as it is a reading, or meta-commentary, on what we seem to do with, or how we relate to, what black creative intellectuals continue to generate without being able to bring fully into account. It is a reading of what is gained and lost in the attempt—the *impulse*—to delineate the spatial and temporal borders of anti-blackness, to delimit the "bad news" of black life, to fix its precise scope and scale, to find an edge beyond or before which true living unfolds. It is an attempt to resist that centrifugal force that overwhelms us like fear or exhausts us like fatigue.[8] (Sexton 2016, [16])

Grandma was not an Afro-Pessimist. That is not to say that she couldn't read with the best of them or provide (meta-)commentary. And it is also not to say that she wasn't deeply distrusting and skeptical about "the ways of white folks" (Hughes 1990). But it is also to say that she met that white girl in the

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speech and depicting again rituals of torture? How does one revisit the scene of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence? (Hartman 2008, 4)

fields, on turf that became hers through the intermingling of "bad news" and truly living "black life". Grandma ***intervened***.

> Intervention (n) : early 15c., "intercession, intercessory prayer," from Middle French *intervention* or directly from Late Latin *interventionem* (nominative *interventio*) "an interposing, a giving security," literally "a coming between," noun of action from past participle stem of Latin *intervenire* "to come between, interrupt," from *inter* "between" (see **inter-**) + *venire* "to come," from a suffixed form of PIE root ***gwa-** "to go, come." Later "act of intervening" in any way; in 19c.-20c. often of international relations; by 1983 of interpersonal intrusions by friends or family meant to reform a life felt to be going wrong. (Harper, Intervention n.d.)

And this intervening, this manner of being in the world, of "seizing" space (Dotson 2013), of saying "where and when" she entered (Anna Julia Cooper 1892, 31) doesn't study the edge of bad news|true living, it knows that its living is neither exhausted by the thin margin, nor by the bad news. We may be overwhelmed by bad news, but we are not overdetermined by it, for "[b]eing overwhelmed does not mean that [one] has been annihilated" (Musser 2018, 37).

I am *glad* that Afro-Pessimism is a reading. As such there is little need to try and convince the Afro-Pessimist. Readings are allowed to be different. Yet, I am troubled that Afro-Pessimism is *just* a reading. As such it evacuates the responsibility and commitment of a praxis. That is, as a meta-commentary and a reading, it turns away from the affective, or at least a lived affective that calls on our better angels. It a/voids the sacredness of making a way out of no way. It cannot permit the light, the precious moments, the beautifying. "*But the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which can not be uttered*" (Rom. viii. 26). There is neither ought, will, nor future. There is only an intractable now.

> There is an *ars vita* here, maybe the truest one, because it emerges from within a global catastrophe so total that the creation or production of a black poetry, a black art, a stylization of the black body, a black sense of place cannot but be invented wholesale, which is to say made or devised without recourse to a reliable memory or tradition, a law or language or land, a body or kinship or community—no line to follow. So, too, without a future promising anything different or, rather, better. (Sexton 2016, [17])

In the way that Afro-Pessimism highlights the "procrustean nature of whiteness" and the mythic reach of antiblackness it speaks to the ***certainty*** of only impossibility for lived flesh (Yancy, Notes from "Critical Phenomenology" 2018). (It might as well be called Afro-Certainty.) On this account, antiblackness is total, totalizing, and there is no room for doubt. Doubt is crucial for the Black Feminist and Womanist praxis; because if we can doubt, we can imagine otherwise. This is not, then, a Cartesian doubt that leads to a fixed, immobile, and masterful certainty. Those tools will not serve us. This is a horizonal doubt, a doubt of movement, turning, and openings. This is phenomenological doubt that follows from and understanding of time as trebled and history as those doings/livings between points in history books. This is a doubt that requires our imagining the grace we want (but presently and in the future) for "the only grace [we can] have [is] the grace [we can] imagine" (Morrison 2004, 103). And this imagining allows us the affective commitments and responsibilities that are the necessary preconditions for Black Art, Black Literature, Black Love, and Black Lives. That is, this imagining "makes a way out of no way," a future out of no future, while getting on with the business of living this present.

So, though I can see how Afro-Pessimism may be useful as a lens for reading the structures of this "afterlife of slavery" (Sharpe 2016, 15), it also functions as a blinder. As a follower of RuPaul Charles, I know that reading is fundamental. And my virtual drag mother has taught me that reading is fundamental to shade. That is, reading is *along the way* to intervening. Intervening is neither hoping nor wishing, and so this is not an account of hope (Sexton 2016, [19]). It is an account of the affective and practicable otherwise beyond hope. Ella Mae Jordan, born at the crossroads of precarious identities used "holp" (and what I extrapolate as "holpfulness") to intervene in the given. And I am nothing if not her granddaughter.

The intervention that I am making is precisely one that argues for, and believes in, the livings of identity, love, and transformation. "*And how does one tell impossible stories?*" (Hartman 2008, 10).[149] By turning to an alternative beyond the binary of possibility and impossibility, to a method that requires sound, beauty, poetry, and an erotic commitment/commandment; toward nonpossiblity. This not an attempt to ignore/avoid/turn from this "afterlife of slavery". It is an attempt to posit a way of being in the world that can never be exhausted by this watery grave. Nonpossibility fuels the inexhaustible (simultaneous with tired) and goes beyond Black life-projects understood as only endurance or struggle. To read it and enact it. To intervene in an affirmation of livings and beings, even if not of Subjects. The im/possibility binary is a product of the discursive practices and logic of the Subject/Thief. That is, the Thief/Subject, as the *sine qua non* of possibility can only understand two options: possibility and impossibility. (To take up Blackness as only intelligible within this binary as does the Afro-Pessimistic account, is to leave this binary untroubled, to position Blackness as exhaustible by the Slave and social death.) Here "non" functions neither as negation nor as opposition it gestures to what is lived beyond the im/possibility binary.

To take up Blackness beyond this binary logic is to take it up *Afroskpetically*. Afroskepticism is deeply, critically, and vehemently skeptical about the worlds creates by whiteness and antiblackness while maintaining and encouraging a deeper, ongoing, and loving commitment to black identity and its ways of beautifying those worlds, or the method of beauty that is demonstrated in the ways of living/loving beyond those worls. This is the "beyond" of turning toward—both in habituated orientation and in practicable movement/actions—a future otherwise instead of arguing only for true living outside of bad news. It is this perceptual, epistemological, axiological, and ontological

[149] And how does one tell impossible stories? Stories about girls bearing names that deface and disfigure, about the words exchanged between shipmates that never acquired any standing in the law and that failed to be recorded in the archive, about the appeals, prayers and secrets never uttered because no one was there to receive them? The furtive communication that might have passed between two girls, but which no one among the crew observed or reported affirms what we already know to be true… (Hartman 2008, 10)

organization that to my mind distinguishes Black Feminist and Womanist Thought as praxis and re-genders Afroskepticism.

The Afroskeptical praxis takes up antiblackness as a tremendously intimate and largely overlapping relation/situation that cannot and does not overdetermine every facet of black identity. This is the "not absolutely" of Sharpe (2016, 8) as she embraces Hartman's autobiographical turn.

> I include the personal here to connect the social forces on a specific, particular family's being in the wake to those of all Black people in the wake; to mourn and to illustrate the ways our individual lives are always swept up in the wake produced and determined, ***though not absolutely***, by the afterlives of slavery. Put another way, I include the personal here in order to position this work, and myself, in and of the wake. The "autobiographical example," says Saidiya Hartman, "is not a personal story that folds onto itself; it's not about navel gazing, it's really about trying to look at historical and social process and one's own formation as a window onto social and historical processes, as an example of them" (Saunders 2008b, 7). Like Hartman I include the personal here, "to tell a story capable of engaging and countering the violence of abstraction" (Hartman 2008, 7)." (Sharpe 2016, 8) (emphasis added)

Black*living* happens *throughout* this intimacy. Yet, is not only this intimacy. Part of the "kernel" of Black Feminist and Womanist praxis takes root in this non-totalized geography (Lorde 2007, 57) of beautifying. Beauty is a method, an experiment in living.

> My mother's symmetry: even the bent pins have a place. It was a shock to encounter them again—the way that beauty shocks. But more. What is beauty made of? Attentiveness whenever possible to a kind of aesthetic that escaped violence whenever possible—even if it is only the perfect arrangement of pins. (Sharpe 2020)

In this praxis of attentiveness that we live a Womanist love of struggle (Walker 1983).[150] This is an affective commitment, a *loving* struggle which cannot be reduced to, celebration or endurance of social

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[150] The first printed definition of Alice Walkers term "Womanist" appears in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*: Womanist Prose. Copyright 1983

> WOMANIST
> 1. From *womanish*. (Opp. of "girlish," i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "you acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous,
> audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be
> grown." Responsible. In charge. *Serious*.

death as the total of Black being. The certainty of the Afro-Pessimistic reading is both that the struggle will end in failure and that there is nothing other than struggle for the Slave.

The afroskeptical approach with its deep investment in identity and the future is present in critical fabulation (Hartman 2008, 11-12). Critical fabulation throws side-eye at the archive and *doubts* its offerings. This doubt—characterized by Hartman's questioning—militates a doing otherwise. This is in intimate conversation with a Lordean (2007) account the erotic's role in knowledge production: feeling:action:knowing (56). Doubt is an affective criterion for and afrosketical praxis (both reading and doing). Furthermore, following the theory and praxis of such thinkers as Combahee River Collective, Anna Julia Cooper, Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis, Kristie Dotson, Garcia, June Jordan, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, Amber Jamilla Musser, Christina Sharpe, Alice Walker, and Ida B. Wells around struggle, commitment to community/identity, and love praxis, I suggest that it is Afroskepticism and not Afro-Pessimism that is most in line with Black Feminist and Womanist praxis.

> 2. *Also*: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men,
> sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally a universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are
> white, beige and black?" Ans. "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It
> wouldn't be the first time."
>
> 3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*.
>
> 4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.

There is an earlier version in her archives that does not include which is entitled "The Color Purple, the first womanist novel" which only has 3 points. In this version the third point is defined like so:

> "3. Love purple. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle." (Alice Walker papers)

This change to follow the love of struggle with an emphatic love of "the Folk" and "herself. *Regardless*." Pivots toward the self- other- love that makes holpfulness possible.

M. Shawn Copeland offers a very thoughtful reading of *Beloved* in "Enfleshing Love: A Decolonial Theological Reading of *Beloved*" (2020) that demonstrates this non-possibility. Sethe, a refuge—with just 28 days of freedom about her—faces recapture and performs a grammatical mathematics that will not compute within a structure of anti-blackness as tabulated by Afro-Pessimism but completely adds up when read afroskeptically.

> Simple: she was squatting in the garden and when she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher's hat, she heard wings. Little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thought anything, it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there. (Morrison 2004, 192)[151]

She attempts to kill all of her children. To push them through the veil to the place where they would be safe. She only succeeds in killing the "crawling-already? girl." Now, in a grammar of im/possibility Sethe's actions are neither a choice, nor a loving practice. Her actions only speak to what is open to the impossible subject: the killing of your own children that allows the white world to go on. An afroskeptical reading shows that Sethe defies the "necropolitics" of the plantation.

> Through murder she affirms, preserves, and acts for the sacredness of life, she acts for the beloved.
>
> In the shed, behind 124 Bluestone Road, Sethe faces down "Man" (Man_2). The sight of the bleeding boys in sawdust and dirt, Sethe holding the blood-soaked crawling-already? girl, while swinging the infant by her heels confounds. Spitting his annoyance, schoolteacher concludes, "There was nothing there to claim." Sethe's action has upended his plans for productive labor and the labor of reproduction. …Sethe overturns the power of Man; she dares enflesh love. (Copeland 2020, 102-103)

This does not just confound the schoolteacher and his nephew. It also confounds those who only understand an im/possibility binary where death is on the side of impossibility and the anti-Human and possibility is on the side of the Human/Subject.[152] When I first read *Beloved*, as a senior (and the

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[151] I note also, that what propels Sethe to action is not the sight of schoolteacher's hat, but the *sound* of wings—of fleshy determination, beating, thrumming in the deep tendrils of hair.

[152] "'Beg to differ, Garner. Ain't no nigger men.'" (Morrison 2004, 12)

only non-white person) in an AP English class, many of my white classmates confessed that they struggled to get into the novel. They struggled with the central figures and their distance from the Human *qua* white *qua* Subject. Some of them, pressed for time with the various other commitments that high achieving, Ivy League-bound students have, managed *not* to read the book, opting for Cliff's Notes. One of the few that managed to read it in its entirety commented that Sethe was "like an animal". And that she didn't understand how anyone would do that. And that there was *nothing that had happened to* Sethe that warranted this reaction. She echoed schoolteacher's necropolitical organization. An Afro-Pessimistic reading reifies her reading and schoolteacher's and his nephew's necropolitical organization and stops there.

> But now she'd gone wild, due to the mishandling of the nephew who'd overbeat her and made her cut and run. Schoolteacher had chastised that nephew, telling him to think—just think—what would his own horse do it you beat it beyond the point of education. Or Chipper, or Samson. Suppose you beat the hounds past that point thataway. Never again could you trust them in the woods or anywhere else. You'd be feeding them maybe, holding out a piece of rabbit in your hand, and the animal would revert—bite your hand clean off. …[Y]ou just can't mishandle creatures and expect success. (Morrison 2004, 176)

My classmate had made it through the rape/theft of Sethe's milk, her flight, the water birth of Denver,[153] and the Clearing sermons and could only mis-understand Sethe as "no better than a caged animal". I say, "mis-understand" but it was a willful, pornographic (Lorde 2007) demonstration of the "orthography of the wake" (Sharpe 2016, 20-21). This is what the im/possibility binary fixed for her: Sethe's anti-humanity, Sethe's creatureness. Sethe's *reversion* to an innate and natural anti-Humanity. And, within that binary, she empathized with the nephew!

> What she go and do that for? On account of a beating? Hell, he'd been beat a million times and he was white. …But no beating ever made him … I mean no way he could have … What she go and do that for? (Morrison 2004, 177)

[153] Denver, born in water, on the way to "freedom", who communes with those beyond the veil—Denver is otherwise *par excellence*.

If we are reading with Wilderson and Sexton in mind, we would understand that the nephew and my classmate as simultaneously confirming Sethe's Slave position, while denying it in a way that further entrenches their position as Human Subjects. Suggesting that there is a commonality of beatings, that the beating received by the Subject is the same—for the same reasons, to the same end, for the same pedagogical import (for schoolteacher does understand beating as leading on to the "point of education") and with same ferocity—is a sleight of hand. The beating received by the Subject is situational and would rise to Wilderson's understanding of conflict. Beatings can *happen to* the Subject and Subjectivity is underpinned by this as possibility and not certainty (that is, beatings can also *not* happen to the Subject and the Subject can guard themselves from beatings [or complain and have their injuries redressed]). That is, any subject can receive a beating and not come out beaten.[154] The beatings received by the Slave are ontological and are beatings because the Slave *is* the Slave; and because the Subject is the Subject. The Slave "magnetizes" beatings (and bullets) (Wilderson 2010, 83). The slave (as a non-Subject) is beaten (necessarily) in virtue of being a Slave; the Subject is beaten (contingently) in virtue of some act of disobedience or infraction. Slave is to being Beaten as Subject is to beating. So, this is a false but necessary comparison. False for the reasons above, necessary because only by feigning that the Subject has been in the same position as the Slave can the Subject prove themselves worthy of Subjectivity/Humanity and the Slave worthy of her treatment. This afro-pessimistic account, though powerfully useful to drawing attention to the stakes of anti-Blackness, does not disrupt the im/possibility binary and so cannot "witness" Sethe and her doings otherwise (Musser 2018, 95-118).

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[154] Wilderson writes:

> Jews went into Auschwitz and came out as Jews. Africans went into the ships and came out as Blacks. The former is Human holocaust; the latter is a Human *and* metaphysical holocaust. (2010, 38)

While I think that this is a rather sweeping claim about those people who survived Auschwitz—that is, some folks went in who were Germans (and perhaps came out as Jews) and some folks went in as Jewish and came out as not Jewish (or not Jewish but a Jew)—I do think that this distinction about a Human and metaphysical holocaust is useful.

On an afroskeptical reading we are attuned to the exhilarating way Sethe takes flesh into her own hands and her own heart.

> "I stopped him," she said, staring at the place where the fence used to be. "I took and put my babies where they'd be safe." (Morrison 2004, 193)

A reading of the nonpossible allows for the Slave to be beaten *and* capable of stopping (in this case, beatings for others). On this reading Sethe is an intervening, a prayer, a winged escort to the "over there". It accounts for the Slave having "every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful" and can account for her care for them, for her carrying them and her understanding of an "out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there" (Morrison 2004, 192). It allows for *more* than the Slave, it allows for Sethe (and Denver). This death, confirms and extends the living of the flesh in a way that is unaccountable if the only options are im/possibility and social death of subjectivity. It is the living beyond the veil of the fixed Slave/Subject binary that an afroskeptical account interrogates. This feels especially potent when we consider that Sethe is a critical fabulation of Margaret Garner.[155]

It feels especially timely when find winter encroaching after a spring and summer of dual pandemics that leave us gasping, "I can't breathe." We rise even in rarified air. We rise with a "healthy loves for ourselves" (Taylor 2017, 18) a love "regardless" (Walker) that blues all over the ecru menace of social death. I think afroskeptically with Hartman's "wayward" (Hartman 2019, 227-228).

> [Waywardness is] the practice of the social other-wise, the insurgent ground that enables new possibilities and new vocabularies; …It is a queer resource of black survival. It is a *beautiful experiment* in how-to-live (Hartman 2019, 228).

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[155] In the forward of the 2004 edition of *Beloved* Morrison writes:

> A newspaper clipping in *The Black Book* summarized the story of Margaret Garner, a young mother who, having escaped slavery, was arrested for killing one of her children (and trying to kill the others) rather than let them be returned to the owner's plantation. …Her sanity and lack of repentance caught the attention of Abolitionists as well as newspapers. She was certainly single-minded and, judging by her comments, she had the intellect, the ferocity, and the willingness to risk everything for what was to her the necessity of freedom. (xvii)

Hartman queers survival, ushering it "over there," to the otherwise. This "queer resource" is a hailing to doubt and doing. That is why it is an experiment in "how-to-live" (227).

> Waywardness is a practice of possibility at a time when all roads, except the ones created by *smashing out,* are foreclosed. …Waywardness is an ongoing exploration of *what might be*; it is an improvisation with the terms of social existence, when the terms have already been dictated, when there is little room to breathe, when you have been sentenced to a life of servitude, when the house of bondage looms in whatever direction you move. It is the untiring practice of trying to live when you were never meant to survive. (Hartman 2019, 227-228)

Ella Mae Jordan was wayward. In her experimentation she carved a permanent grin where there was formerly scowl. In her exploration she grew beautiful tomatoes in a small patch of land, her land, in Hartford, CT and taught her granddaughter that the smell of their leaves is one of the most beautiful smells in the world. In the face of this, *precisely*.

Chapter 4: **Shamelessly Blue**

Sister
You've been on my mind
Sister, we're two of a kind
So sister,
I'm keepin' my eyes on you (Vega 1985)

One of the first women I fell in love with was the character, Shug Avery, as portrayed by Margaret Avery in Stephen Spielberg's movie adaptation of *The Color Purple*. Like Celie, I was hopelessly committed to her in her Blues-love song "Miss Celie's Blues". I loved her openly and completely and with a particular kind of relation to myself and to the other black women and girls watching it around me. The demonstration of Shug's full-throated and willful self-loving (and Miss Celie loving) moved beyond and in shameless disregard of the looks others directed at her (and Miss Celie by extension) and galvanized in me a sense of the transformative possibility of self-love and community it engendered. Years prior to RuPaul's now famous "If you can't love yourself, how in the hell you gonna love somebody else" it demonstrated to me—as sung by Táta Vega and beautifully performed by Margaret Avery—the importance of black women's self-loving voices as flamboyant, shameless, and necessary prerequisites for loving others and building community.

In this chapter I explore what a sensorial gearing beyond that of the human subject might mean for affective/expressive practices. That is, what arises from a more porous and community-geared sensorial and perceptual organ/ization. What ways of living—not just surviving or enduring—do we creative within, but not wholly determined by, the pornotrope? What kind of ethical framework might be at play here, *in this here place* versus yonder? What practices might emerge from a love of too much, waywardness, or Beautifying? How are these practices and the pitch complexes in which they are constituted and also constitute, the lived experience of a social otherwise what resists and neverminds the ethical frameworks of the human subject? Earlier in this project I briefly suggested

that the human subject need not be aspirational for lived flesh. In this chapter I begin to sound out a way that lived flesh breathes life into its own socio-ethical experience.

This chapter sings out the possibilities that inhere in pitch complexes as lived geographies, or as communities of listening selves in a consideration of Blues.

> While the blues reject an "object transcendence," they do not reject "historical transcendence." …Through the sheer power of melody and rhythm of song, black people transcend historical restrictions and affirm a meaning for their lives not made with hands. They refused to accept white rules and regulations as the definitions of their community. To be sure, they cried, "I got the blues a' can't keep from cryin'." They were hurt, and they were bruised. But through the sharing of their troubles with each other, black people were able to move to another level… (Cone 1992, 114)

I take up Blues both as a genre of music and as an affective and ethical orientation; a fleshy way of being-in-the-world and a mode a way of being-in-the-world as flesh. In this way I sound out (and celebrate) a particular affective practice/orientation that resounds with an understanding of lived flesh as open, porous, fluid, and irrepressible. This practice begins an exploration of what is lived the status of "being overwhelmed" but "not annihilated" (Musser 2018, 37), or of the pleasures and relationship practices that inhere in abjection (Musser 2018, 39, 69-94). That is, inhere in – and are irreducible to – abjection.

I turn to Blues as an example of aural sensitivity and the sociality of pitch complexes. But I also turn to it because of the particular roles and practices of american Black Blueswomen. Blueswomen resound in what I take to be a particularly fleshy ay of being in the world—specifically in regard to self-love, accountability, and shame. I hear a sforzando in the differences between the human subject and lived flesh when I sonder accounts of shame/lessness. In this chapter I will consider the shaming/shamed inter/subjectivity and the role of the visual in this ethical framework to suggest that shame/lessness is a more productive and transformative framework for lived flesh.

Shamelessness is an affective and ethical framework for a kind of flamboyance of the fleshy self. I take seriously Sharpe's understanding of beauty as a necessary method—a love of the too

much—that sounds out the geography of Black life that is not totalized by white terror (Sharpe 2019). Shamelessness blues structural antiblackness making it not just bearable but also tuning the shameless flesh in to those registers of virtuoso life, flourishing, and ethical commitments otherwise.

I take up shameless/ness with the understanding that shamelessness is both an affective and phenomenological stance/register and a method. It is a mode of a creative, communicative, liberatory, transformative, and interdependent self-love of marginalized peoples (particularly queer black women).[156] I turn to Blues because I consider it to be a unique american Black expressive and affective practice. I turn to american Black Blueswomen, because I consider the musical work of these Blackwomxn to be a kind of praxis. In *Liner Notes for the Revolution*, Daphne Brooks (2021) describes Blackwomxn's musical projects in a way that sounds out the necessity of my attunement.

> Black women's musical practices are, in short, revolutionary because they are inextricably linked to the matter of Black life. Their strategies of performance perpetually and inventively philosophize the prodigiousness of its scope. But also—and quite crucially—Black women's musical practices are revolutionary because of the ways in which said practices both forecast and execute the viability and potentiality of Black life. (Brooks 2021, 3)

In this passage, I hear Brooks suggesting that the musical projects of Blackwomxn are unique both in terms of their sonic interventions as well as in what these interventions mean. In her definition of "Womanist" Alice Walker writes, "3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*." Walker starts the third section of her definition with a love of music. What follows from this is a love of "dance," "the moon," "the Spirit," "love and food and roundness," "struggle," "the Folk," and herself "*regardless*." The musicality is integral to womanism—organizes the pitch complex of self-loving struggle for the folk.

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[156] That said, this paper remains open to individual expressions of shamelessness *and should not be read as* an attempt to suggest that shamelessness occurs for all marginalized peoples in the same way. Shamelessness is necessarily a personal and particular engagement of the self and the world.

> We might use our position at the bottom… to make a clear leap into revolutionary action. If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression. (Combahee River Collective 2017, 22)

I turn to american Black Blueswomxn in harmony with my exploration of what an ear-forward sensorial organ/ization of lived flesh can mean for a way of being in the world with and among others. I turn to Bluesing in an attempt to sound out the kinds of connections and commitments made beyond the scope of the Subject. american Black Blueswomxn register for me as voicing the social otherwise, for exploiting and frustration the limits of visual apprehension, and for a kind of futurecasting that reverberates with something more fleshy than mere endurance, something more throaty than perseverance, a kind of flourishing—a shimmy of life.

The question here, I think, is the question of: What is Blues and who makes it? Is it an affect, it is an example of aesthetic expression and how is it experienced? That is, how, when Lady Day sings a Frank Sinatra tune, or a Hungarian Suicide Song, or even a rather sweet ditty about pennies from heaven, is it Blues? The short answer is because Blues is an affect, and ontological situation, and an example of aesthetic expression of certain lived beings. Baraka traces the Blues to an "African Aesthetic …an expression of the Animist world view of our earliest ancestors" where Blues embodies the sound of completion, the wholeness, and the shared world for "everything is one thing, one living thing" and "the one and the many are one thing" (Baraka 1991, 103). Depending on who you ask Blues (people) is tragic, sorrowful, an artistic expression of feeling or being blue/down, bawdy, sensual, sinful, extravagant, and joyful. While the structure of Blues may appear relatively straightforward, the lived practice of Blues/ing resonates with meaning and meaning/sense production.

I: Little Girl Blue

It appears to be a rather common hearing of the Blues—and particularly where the work of Billie Holiday is concerned—to hear it as only tragic. In *In the Break*, Moten (2003) describes his truly frustrating and uninspiring hearing of Billie Holiday (which, rather tellingly is also an encounter of Holiday's *work through the poem* of Baraka. That is, Moten's approach to the aural register is mediated through the visual.).

Moten believes Blues "always seems to foreshadow" a "tragic-erotic end" (2003, 119). His is a flattened account of Blues/ing—a feeling/being Blue as in down. A navy Blue.—this is truncated understanding of Blues/ing. One that traffics in the im/possibility with Blues registering the various impossibilities of Black experience. Blues is the anti-Subject. Instead, I want to read Blues as fleshy work. As the work of selves.

> The blues is what Lady sings and—in singing and in the excess of singing, by way of an improvisation through the overdetermination of the recording and the determination of the blues as tragedy, in the more than illuminative, undertonal expense and expanse of her dark, fantastic laughter—exceeds. (Moten 2003, 120)

Billie Holiday does not exceed the Blues. What would be the point of that? Blues is beyond im/possibility, the otherwise of flat tragedy, and shows the shallowness of the transparency of being relegated to mere muse. One can only understand Blues as just being down, if one assumes that there is only one way to be Up. That to Be Up is the goal. That to be Blue is to be drowned in the wake. It misses "But Beautiful" and Blues/ing as Beautifying. It misses the fleshy open horizons of non-possibility. It misses the ecstatic non-possibility of flesh. Moreover, it demonstrates the way that an eye-forward account—evidenced by Moten's privilege of Baraka's poetry: written form, visual register (even when it is close to the aural) cannot attend to the affective and expressive practices of Blackwomxn.

Echoing Houston Baker's description of the practice in, *Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* (1984) I turn to Blues as a "matrix" a geography of porosity and creativity, of contradiction and simultaneity, a fecund Clearing for Black lives.

> [A]fro-American culture is a complex, reflexive enterprise which finds its proper figuration in blues conceived as a matrix. A matrix is a womb, a network… a point of ceaseless input and output, a web of intersecting, crisscrossing impulses always in productive transit. (Baker 1984, 3)

What I want to linger with for a moment of the c(h)ord between the matrix and the woman.[157] In this pause, this hesitation, I consider again the notion of the vestibule. In keeping with Blues mythobiography—that of the Bluesman going to a train crossroads late in the evening and making a deal with the devil in order to learn to play music that becomes Blues—Baker figures this vestibularity in semiotics of the motive will as travelin'.

> To suggest a trope for the blues as a forceful matrix in cultural understanding is to summon an image of the black blues singer at the railway junction lustily transforming experience of a durative (unceasingly oppressive) landscape into the energies of rhythmic song. The railway juncture is marked by transience. …Polymorphous and multidirectional, scene of arrivals and departures, place betwixt and between (ever *entre les deux*), the juncture is the way-station of the blues.
>
> The singer and his production are always at this intersection, this crossing, codifying force, providing resonance for experience's multiplicities. Singer and song never arrest transience—fix it in "transcendent form." Instead they provide expressive equivalence for the juncture's ceaseless flux. Hence, they may be conceived as translators. (Baker 1984, 7)

Baker's description is evocative and surging, but unintentionally flat on some notes and sharp on others. (And it is this lack of control over pitch, this lack of awareness that strikes the ear as not entirely Blues/ing.) I hear an instance of being off-key in his phrase "the singer and his production" which Blues-er as man-identified. While this may be another case of the changing conventions in pronoun usage in academic writing, I am inclined to believe it's something a bit more specific. The examples of Blues in literature that Baker takes up are predominately written by men, and even where they are not—see his reading of Harriet Brent Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*—he focuses on

[157] I note, with some consternation, the ease in deploying this matrix as womb language despite the infrequent and insincere gestures to Blueswomxn in the work of Baker, Titon, Cone, and other ethnomusicologists. This is not to make an essentialist claim of Blueswomxn = uterus; it is to draw attention to the fact that literature and study on Blues has historically focus on the Blues man, his practices, his virtuosity and motility in masculinist terms and configurations. This appeal to the womb strikes a rather sour not in this Boys Club chorus.

male protagonists (in his sumptuous over-readings). Where this is not as possible, as in his reading of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, he subtly denigrates the "romantic" approaches to the text in favor of his own more, "essential, traditional, and subtextual dimensions of Afro-American discourse" (Baker 1984, 60). His intellectualist appeal to the language and figure of economics (via Marx, Hegel, and Foucault) superimposes masculinist world view on the texts. In his reading of *Incidents* he goes so far as to suggest that economics ameliorates sex and gender difference (curiously, while simultaneously detailing the sexed and gendered violence lived by Brent Jacobs).

> [I]t is possible to assert that gender does not alter a fundamentally commercial set of negotiations represented as liberating in the black narrative. The gender of Brent and her narrator does, however, immeasurably broaden the descriptive scope of "commercial deportation" and the "economics of slavery." The implied domain of sexual victimization (so briefly represented in male narratives) becomes the dramatically foregrounded *topos* of the woman's account. And the subtextual dimensions of Afro-American narrative that receive full voice *only* in the work of black woman include representations of the psychologically perverse motivations of the patriarch-as-rapist, the female slave's manipulation of a sexual and financial partnerships outside the boundaries of the master's power, and the strategy of retreat that leads to commercial advantage and physical freedom. (Baker 1984, 54-55)

This is a powerfully troubling misreading of *Incidents* and Blackwomxn's literature in general. It strikes not just the wrong chord but is altogether a different song from what Spillers sings in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" (2003) with its exploration of un-gendering and "Interstices" (2003) with its turn to Bessie Smith to articulate the discursive (affective and ethical) practices of Blackwomxn. Moreover, it willfully mis-hears the work of american Black Blueswomxn in the early 20th Century.

In *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, Angela Davis (1999) offers a striking listening of the work of Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith (15-41). Though a number of the songs Davis listens to in this chapter speak to gendered and sexed violence, they do not speak to sexual violence.

It is curious that Baker's turn to Blackwomxn's texts omits Blueswomxn's work. In these texts destabilize his claim about the narrative of Blackwomxn and sound out a far more capacious, invention, and self-possessed strategy of living. In fact, Baker's archetype of "patriarch-as-rapist" traffics in three implicit violences. 1. The thinly veiled, "Not all patriarchs" of "patriarch-as-rapist"

suggests that there can be a patriarchal relation that is not problematic and even possibly good. While not all patriarchs are rapists, patriarchy in general in its current and most recent (in the us american context) irrevocably flawed. Moreover, given his fascination with the ideology of economics, he ought to be suspicious of patriarchy in general given its origins in capital. 2. The pairing of patriarch with the "master" suggests that Black men cannot occupy the patriarchal role. While this might be the case in a larger structure of anti-Blackness, where Master/Patriarch = white cis het man, it is not at all the case in the lived experience within the american Black communities. Misogynoir and hoteps are testimony to the pervasive and ongoing presence of patriarchal motivations many members of our community. 3. This account reduces the work of Blackwomxn to a very limited realm and so doing centers patriarchy instead of the voices of Blackwomxn's narrative. This, when combined with his early trope of the blues(man) as a figure at the crossroads does not falls short of his aim for a decentralized subject; it merely replaces the cis het white man with the cis het black man and leaves the misogyny and heterosexism in place.

This is the work that Blueswomxn subvert, satirize, undo, and disregard in their performances. In the songs of Blueswomxn one hears something other than just tragedy (Davis 1999). Blues is not simply about feeling/being sad… Blues is often—particularly the experience of it through and with black women—about making a way out of no way.

Baldwin understands this way-making as the evidence of a kind of self-knowledge (Baldwin 2013, 66). This self-knowledge requires a kind of unsuturing that many people who heed the hailing of the subject/thief situation cannot accomplish (Yancy 2015). To come to know the self, to come to make sense of the self is not the same thing as being subject. It is take up the work of the self *as a process*, as arriv*ing* (rather than arrival), to be flawed "but beautiful." Blues/ing is a kind of process.

For James Baldwin's the Blues are more capacious than just a musical genre. For Baldwin, "Blues" refers not to music but "to the experience of life, or the state of being, out of which the blues

come" (Baldwin 2010, 57). Blues is a way of giving sound to a particular affective/phenomenological horizon (or register) that is, itself (capable of) a kind of joy. Yet, for Baldwin this joy is specific and constricted. Joy is not the same as happiness.

> But I want to talk about the blues not only because they speak of this particular experience of life and this state of being, but because they contain the toughness that manages to make this experience articulate. I am engaged, then, in a discussion of craft or, to use a very dangerous word, art. And I want to suggest that the acceptance of this anguish one finds in the blues, and the expression of it, creates also, however odd this may sound, a kind of joy. Now joy is a true state, it is a reality; it has nothing to do with what most people have in mind when they talk of happiness, which is not a real state and does not really exist. (Baldwin 2010, 57)

For Baldwin, Blues is the "acceptance" of a particular historio-social anguish. And this is where the joy, "a true state" but a somewhat cool state—cooler than, perhaps the flush of presumed happiness—comes in. I hear echoes of this account of joy in Zadie Smith's essay "Joy" (2013). Smith registers joy and pleasure as two distinct notes. Pleasure is quotidian and graspable. Pleasure can be had. Joy, on the other hand, is purely experiential and non-representational; it can only be lived. For Smith, rather than pleasure (or, to Baldwin's point, happiness) joy is "rather that strange admixture of terror, pain, and delight" (Smith 2013). Joy, with its entanglement with terror and pain, is magnificent, is sublime. But, for both Baldwin and for Smith (and possibly even for Moten's reading of Holiday) joy is commensurate with sorrow.

For Baldwin this joy comes in the form of accepting suffering with a laugh; a process of making the self in the wake of making disaster bearable.

> Now, I'm trying to suggest that the triumph here—which is a very un-American triumph—is that the person to whom these things happened watched with eyes wide open, saw it happen. So that when Billie or Bessie or Leadbelly stood up and sang about it, they were commenting on it, a little bit outside it: they were accepting it. And there's something funny—there's always something a little funny in all our disasters, if one can face the disaster. So that it's this passionate detachment, this inwardness coupled with outwardness, this ability to know that, all right, it's a mess, and you can't do anything about it ... so, well, you have to do something about it. You can't stay there, you can't drop dead, you can't give up, but all right, okay; as Bessie said, "picked up my bag, baby, and I tried it again." This made life, however horrible that life was, bearable for her. It's what makes life bearable for any person, because every person, everybody born, from the time he's found out about people until the whole thing is

> over, is certain of one thing: he is going to suffer. There is no way not to suffer. (Baldwin 2010, 59)

This sounds a lot like Sharpe's (and her mother's) project of beautifying. Where Beauty is a method for cherishing and filling those we love with a capacity for wonder, love, and transformation. Beautifying is an ongoing practice of neverminding remixing the wake. I take up Beautifying and Blues/ing as a means confronting and intervening in disaster.

Baldwin's attention to distance is instructive, this "passionate detachment" resounds with a kind of refusal. Lordi (2013) hears this as an example of Baldwin's fascination with "black expressive 'understatement'" (Lordi 2013, 100).

> [U]nderstatement describes a contrast between the tragic lyrics a vocalist sings and the resiliency her performance conveys… For Baldwin, this contrast between vocal delivery and lyrical content signals the singer's heroic assertion of emotional distance from her own painful experience (represented by the lyrics). She can now understate that experience, which means she can move on. …Baldwin privileges the concept of "laughing to keep from crying"—of encoding the cry within the laugh… Baldwin resists the white embrace of black music…by claiming black musical understatement as a form of expression that is uniquely legible to and useful for, black people. (Lordi 201, 100-101)

Yet, in "The Uses of the Blues" Baldwin conflates acceptance of disaster with facing disaster. The confrontation (facing) is totalized by an *acceptance* of disaster. This move reduces the confrontation or intervening stance to the opposition; and centers the disaster and creates a geography whose topography of Black lives is suffering. "We agree / about the suffering / disease / decrepitude / and incremental / death" and that "[t]here is no way not to suffer" but Blues and Black life is *not totalized* by suffering. "We disagree / about desire" (Jordan 1997, 9-11). It is possible to confront disaster without accepting it. Lived flesh is routinely devasted by disaster but we are not annihilated by it; we negate its negatory aims by moving toward desire, toward a certain quality of the neither-nor. The songs of Blueswomxn resonate with this otherwise, a kind of funk that is celebratory even as it emerges within, or is boundaried by disaster. *The Bluest Eye* has a careful meditation on funk and anti-Blackness, in Morrison's description of the "sugar brown" girls from Mobile and Meridian in her description of

Geraldine. Geraldine—who seeks always to distinguish herself and her son, Junior, from niggerness—who engages with her Blackness through the lens of the Thief, is in constant flight from funk (Morrison 1994, 81-85). Armed with dis-ease and discomfort in her bodily doings, she gives voice to a kind of danger of respectability politics and an embrace of shame.

Yet, Claudia MacTeer—even though she does not sing—Blues and so frustrates the consequences of respectable shame. For one thing, Claudia loves her body. Claudia loves herself fully—even her funk. Claudia's extreme displeasure with bathing—in fact with cleanliness as the opposite of pleasure, the opposite of ecstatically crafted experience of "all [her] creations and accumulations of the day" (Morrison 1994, 22)—might also be displeasure at having her expansion limited to the eye-forward register. The collecting and categorizing of the chorus of dirt is the song of her being. And it is the doorstep, the threshold of her home. Of course she hates baths!

> There is something about "dirt" that suggests the opposite of being sullen, which gives character to Claudia's body. She sees something humiliating in being so clean, perhaps so "white." She would rather the dark ink creations and accumulations to remain, marking her body's identity with countersigns that militate against cleanliness (whiteness). To forge an interpretive leap, perhaps this was Morrison's way of having Claudia engage in her own self-scripting, putting up a fight against the "washed cleanliness" of the Black body as symbolic of whiteness. (Yancy 2017, 205)

Dirt, not being dirty, sullen, disheveled, or rundown—but merely a little good clean funk—is, in Claudia's case, self-ownership, or as Yancy so helpfully puts it, "self-scripting." It is loving oneself enough to invest in play, in *living*. It is loving oneself enough to write one's own rules/stories and, most importantly, to recognize and mourn when that ownership is white-washed away.

More still, there is something about Claudia's love of funk that positions her to hear, in her mother's singing of the blues, harmony (Morrison 1994, 25-26, 98). The blues are, one might argue, the adjustment that one makes when body cleanliness—and its relation to whiteness—becomes less fraught. The important thing here that we should notice about the kind of funk-love that Claudia displays is that this adjustment is not attunement as in assimilation; it is not an embodiment of the

habits of whiteness through the internalization of cleanliness. It bending an ear toward. Funk will out. Songs find ways to get sung. Blues, then, is this way, is singing. Blues is homing too. Yancy describes blues singing—or "enacting a blues ontology"—as a "subjunctive mode of being … a site of *becoming*" that "deparalyzes the spirit" (2017, 203). The blues is "a way of making a way out of no way." Blues singing is a Clearing, and an invitation to movement (and entrance). It is a retention of the blessed funk, the decadent dirt.

It is also—in the words of the movie version of *The Color Purple*'s, Shug Avery—the proof that "sinners have soul" (The Color Purple 1985, "God is Trying to Tell You Something). Angela Y. Davis has a very clear and instructive critique of this scene in defense of her argument about the hostility between many churchgoers and Blueswomxn (Davis 1999, 124). What I am concerned with is *less* the reconciliation—the moment when Shug's father embraces her in return—than with the moments leading up to it. As a "blues body" (Douglas 2011, 115) Shug is "non-bourgeois, sensuous, and rejected" but this rejection is not internalized. Shug sings—funks--her way, sweat, tears, laughter, dust and all into her father's house and declares herself emphatically, gloriously, and full-throatedly as deserving of love. This is a moment of self-scripting, of kin-making, and accountability-confirming. It is shameless(ly funky). It is also fully in line with Shug's theology (Walker 1192, 194-199);[158] both in the intervention she performs in Celie's relation to herself, her body, pleasure, and a notion of g-d, as well as Baraka's riff on the wholeness within the African aesthetic and american Black expressive creation (Baraka 1991 & 2009). Maybe God *is* trying to tell you something. Maybe it's that she's/I'm

[158] She say, My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. …I knew just what it was. In fact, when it happen, you can't miss it. It sort of like you know what, she say, grinning and rubbing high up on my thigh.
Shug! I say.
Oh, she say. God love all them feelings. That's some of the best stuff God did. And when you know God loves 'em you enjoys 'em a lot more. (Walker 1992, 197)

beloved. Shug Avery, holy. Most importantly, *Shug's* embrace is an embrace without needing or expecting one in return. In the face of no way she has made a way for herself.

This wholeness and this funk, destabilizes the demand that Blues makers necessarily have a personal relationship to the lyrics of their songs. Baker offers a capacious account of Blues that is sung by a decentered "voice" (Baker 1984, 4-5).

> Rather than a rigidly personalized form, the blues offer a phylogenetic recapitulation—a nonlinear, freely associative, nonsequential mediation—of species experience. What emerges is not a filled subject, but an anonymous (nameless) voice issuing from the black (w)hole. (Baker 1982, 5)

While Baker figures his account through the semiotic; I hear in his description a melody that is distinct to those who negotiate and harmonize the porosity of the pornotrope. The "black(w)hole" Baker hails is a glissando of the always already among—the I am because we are of lived flesh. Titon (1994) includes interviews with Bluesmen who describe their process, including one with a Bluesman, Rubin Lacy. According to Lacy: "'I've sung [blues] on many a day and never thought I had 'em'" (Titon 1994, 40). According to Davis, Blues is realistic without necessarily being autobiographical.

> The realism of the blues does not confine use to literal interpretations. On the contrary, blues contain many layers of meanings and are often astounding in their complexity and profundity. Precisely because the blues confronts raw emotional and sexual matters associated with a very specific historical reality, they make complex statements that transcend the particularities of their origins. There is a core of meaning in the texts of the classic blues women that, although prefeminist in an historical sense, reveals that black women of that era were acknowledging and addressing issues central to contemporary feminist discourse. (Davis 1999, 24)

So, if understatement is the product of having overcome—having accepted and then faced something down—a kind of distance as triumph, then non-autobiographical songs might not be said to qualify.

II: Sun's Gonna Shine in my Backdoor Someday

On the other hand, Lady Day does describe an immediate relation to her songs. All of the songs she wrote and performed have "got something to do with" her (Holiday 2006, 43). She describes some songs—particularly "Strange Fruit" as being painful to perform (Holiday 2006, 95). This suggests a

lack of distance, or, rather, an intimate tarrying with, a kind of facing that I take up as distinct from a mere acceptance of disaster. Holiday uses this tarrying with to hone a performance, sound, interpretation that—like Simone in years to come—is an attempt to touch the audience. She describes one performance of "Strange Fruit" as "flailing" the audience (Holiday 2006, 96). That is hardly understated. And that is hardly acceptance of suffering.

Though, it is possible that Baldwin's use of "acceptance" strikes a chord with Blues' relation to the ontology of Black folks. This is the note that James Cone's *The Spirituals and The Blues* (1992) takes up as a dominant canon. For Cone, Blues "cannot be understood independent of the suffering that black people endured in the context of white racism and hate" (1992, 110). The meaning of Blues can neither be understood nor exist without the suffering of Black folks.

> The blue mood means sorrow, frustration, despair, and black people's attempt to take these existential realties upon themselves and not lose their sanity. The bleus are not art of art's sake, music for music's' sake. They are a way of life, a life-style of the black community, and they came into being to give expression to black identity and the will for survival. (Cone 1992, 111)

> The blues people believe that it is only though the acceptance of the real as disclosed in concrete human affairs that a community can attain authentic existence. (Cone 1992, 113)

This is useful, and given Cone's overall liberatory thrust, I can see how his use of "acceptance" functions as a prerequisite for an attending to. However, I worry that taking up Blues as acceptance of "sorrow, frustration" or "despair" may trend toward an Afro-Pessimistic commentary and kneecap its transformative coda.

Blues, with its social and tonic "families" (Titon 1994) is rich with meaning—and indeed is meaningfull without being static. The W.C. Handy Anthology (1926) describes Blues in terms of a 12-line formal structure, with stanzas that employ repetition (with a difference), dissonance, and a method of construction and performance that is largely improvisational and conversation in approach

(1926, 10-17).[159] This structure engenders a communal experience. In Blues/ing joy and pain are shared between the singer and audience. In this way hardships are collectively commiserated, and triumphs celebrated within the community. Blues/ing stands in opposition to the one-way experience of other music (that I think Merleau-Ponty is engaging with). This is difference in what is performed and *how* it is performed. On Merleau-Ponty's account, music—instrumental and over there—sings to you (or *at* you) of its own world, Blues sings *with* you of our world. Blues songs are property of the community. Though Davis does note that a palpable difference between Blues and Spirituals is the emergence of the individual Blues-er, I take up this difference as distinct from traditional liberal account of the atomic subject. I hear this distinction in Davis' repeated articulation of Blues as shared. "This socializing character of the blues renewed conscious the shared nature of emotional experience as well as the collective character of the blues form itself" (Davis 1999, 136).

I contrast this with Merleau-Ponty's account of the expressive and affective practices of the eye-forward subject *par excellence*, the painter. I read "Eye and Mind" ([1964] 2007) as clarifying the impressive and necessary role of the visual in Merleau-Ponty's account of the human subject and perception as well as a description of the painter's self-experience as the subject in the activity of

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[159] Abbe Niles is credited with writing the introduction of the Anthology. It is his more academic musicology that precedes Handy's transcriptions of Blues songs, including his own original lyrics and music—notably "St. Louis Blues."

> The thought would not necessarily be expressed in a single line, twice repeated without variation. There might be and usually was one repetition, but instead, the second line might slightly modify, by way of emphasis, the first,' while the third would introduce something new: lines one and two having expressed, say, some grief, wistful reflection, or some unhopeful "if," line three would now supply a reason for the grief, some collateral conclusion, or the course which would be taken should the "if" come true; the third thus became the important line, releasing the tension accumulated during the repetition of the first… (Handy 1926, 10)

> The structural peculiarities of the blues tunes may be the result of those of the stanza, more likely the reverse is the case, but suffice it to say that the blues architecture is admirably adapted to impromptu song and versification alike. Just as the stanza had three lines instead of the two or four normal to simple verse, so the voice would sing (always in two-four or common time) twelve instead of the normal eight or sixteen bars to the strain, each line being complete in four bars of the air. As each line usually expressed a thought which, with a period after it, would still make sense, so the air with the last syllable of each line would return to the keynote or the tonic third or fifth, so that the whole presented a period of three semi-independent phrases, – three wing-clipped hops (separated as will be shown, by noticeable intervals) instead of one sustained flight– with successive bizarre effects of internal finality and of final incompleteness. Where one expects the melody to stop it resumes; just as one is waiting for a fourth, and final, phrase, it stops, and instinct calls for a repetition. (Handy 1926, 14)

painting. The painter paints for themselves. They do not need or require an audience to complete the work of art. It is a solipsistic practice. They paint because *they* must. Because they are trying to give birth to their own interior, or to prevent its death by suffocation (Merleau-Ponty 2007). The audience comes after the work is completed. And while the viewer may have their own experience with the completed work, this experience is severed from the experience the painter had while painting, and is severed from an experience of the artist. The line of encounter is painter → self → painting and viewer → painting. This eye-forward practice is one of objectification and results in an *objet d'art*.

Blues/ing, on the other hand, is for the self and her community. Blues/ing is a *we* must. Blues/ing is an outwardly concerned consciousness and aims at inter-corporeal completion through culturally tuned listening self. Blues is embodied in a way that is distinct from painting.

> [Blues] is in touch with the feeling of blues bodies. Blues does not begin with an idea in the head, but with the experiences of the body. Blues does not intellectualize those experiences; rather it passionately expresses them. Blues listens to the call of the body and responds by conveying what the body is communicating…blues boldly utter what the body feels. (Douglas 2011, 117)

For Cone, Blues are the expressive and political practice of diasporic folks. In Blues we hear a home we have never known and sound out the tension of american Black situation of non-indigeneity and nowhere-else-to-go-ness here in this inhospitable place we have been thrown (Cone 1992, 97-127). The Blues are a "signifying lament" (Douglass 2011, 118-119). Cone agrees.

> No black person can escape the blues, because the blues are an inherent part of black existence in America. To be black is to be blue. The blues express a black perspective on the incongruity of life and the attempt to achieve meaning in a situation fraught with contradictions. (Cone 1992, 103)

Yet what I hear when I listen to Blueswomxn is what Anna Julie Cooper calls "progressive… conflict" (Cooper 1892, 72), the ability to inhabit this "yes, and" (Musser 2018, 9) space of simultaneity and contradiction and shimmy shamelessly. Taken together, this suggests that certain bodies–largely those

who are ear-forward—are Blues organized. I stretch Blues beyond the aesthetic and toward praxis—Bluesing—a particular doing of the particular body that is "naturally" american Black (and, for me, womxn-identified). In "Black and Blues" Kelly Brown Douglas outlines what she refers to as a "blues body". On Douglas' account there are three distinguishing aspects of the blues body, "it is non-bourgeois, sensuous, and rejected" (Douglas 2011, 115). For Douglas "[b]lues bodies are of black people who are not embarrassed by their bodies and in what their bodies feel" (Douglas 2011, 117). That is, the blues body is a body constantly implicated in and taken up by its world. It is also a body that sounds out the well of her interior. Moreover, blues bodies are oriented toward the world through an aurally driven gearing in. Their sensory faculties, organized aurally, are aligned such that they can, through their ears, archive a hearing that is comparable to—and is, I would argue, *preferable* for those bodies to—what the painter can achieve with their painting.[160]

This is what I hear when I listen to Blueswomxn and why I turn to them in my exploration of the aural register and an ear-forward way of being in the world. When I listen to Alberta Hunter, Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Lady Day, and Nina Simone, I hear lived flesh that "oughta-be shame" but isn't; lived flesh that is constantly touched by the logic of the subject/thief, but it not entirely grasped by it, that finds these normative handlings too small, arid, and sterile and makes a way out of no way. I hear a queer strategy, a beautiful experiment in how to live—not just survive. I hear shamelessness. I hear what may be available to those who are beyond the limits of an eye-forward inter/subjectivity.

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[160] Baker describes this as a Black (w)hole (Baker 1984, 151-157).

> Transliterated in letters of Afro-America, the *black hole* assumes the subsurface force of the black underground. It graphs, that is to say, the subterranean *hole* where the trickster has his ludic, deconstructive being. Further, in the script of Afro-America, the hole is the domain of *Wholeness*, an achieved relationality of black community in which desire recollects experience and sends it forth as blues. To be *Black* and *(W)hole* is to escape incarcerating restraints of a white world (i.e, a *black hole*) and to engage in the concentrated, underground singularity of experience that results in a blues desire's expressive fullness.
>
> The symbolic content of Afro-American expressive culture can thus be formulated in terms of the *black hole* conceived as a subcultural (underground, marginal, or liminal) region in which a dominant, white culture's representations are squeezed to zero volume, producing a new expressive order. (Baker 1984, 151-152)

III: Tell the Truth, Shame the Devil: Positive Accounts of Shame

Shame is an eye-forward affect and worlding framework. There are both positive and negative accounts of shame that are applicable to the subject. As will emerge in the following accounts of shame, shame is predicated in the visual register and works to surveil the subject in an effort to make the subject presentable to the larger group. In this way shame—both the positive and negative accounts—traffics in Merleau-Ponty's understanding of an always already inter/subjective implication in/with the world as well as his understanding of the role of sight in affirming the subject.

However, I suggest, that when considered in the historio-social experience of lived flesh, modes of shame collapse into attempts to seize, handle, fix, and stop the motive will in a way that keep that lived flesh incarcerated within the norms and logics of anti-Blackness and white supremacy. Shame apprehends Black lives in a hostile and thieving grasp. For this reason, a turn to Blues/women and the affective and political stance of shamelessness is more fruitful for lived flesh.

Positive accounts shame understand shame as both self and community affirming. On these accounts, shame draws the shamed self into relation with community norms and traditions in a self-improving encounter. Shame implicates the subject in intersubjective relations with other and the world, for the betterment of the subject (and the world). I read these positive accounts as advancing the claim that shame as an important ethical framework, the regular and sincere engagement with which is integral to an moral and social life.

In his writing, affect theorist, Silvan Tomkins, offers an overwhelming account (though positive) of shame. I take up the essays collected in *Shame and Its Sisters* (Tomkins 1995). In these essays, shame effects one's whole person. On Tomkins' account, shame is marked by profound psychic discomfort that goes to the core of the subject (and exposes subject). The discomfort of shame is the discomfort of exposed failure, exposed *inner* lacking, and can be a site of profound disavowal.

> [S]hame is the affect of indignity, of defeat, or transgression, and of alienation. …[S]hame is felt as an inner torment, a sickness of the soul. It does not matter whether the humiliated one has been shamed by derisive laughter or whether he mocks himself. In either event he feels himself noticed, defeated, alienated, lacking, in dignity or worth. (Tomkins 1995, 133)

Shame is a speculum. The subject is given a glimpse of itself from another (even in self-mockery). Shame is the moment of being unable to bear the other's eyes—a failure to meet the intimacy, inquiry, and impression of the gaze—and to deny the immediate possibility of future communication (Tomkins 1995, 134). Shame is heightened self-consciousness. Explicitly visually organ/ized it penetrates to the interior of the subject via lines of sight.

> [S]hame is the experience of the self by the self. At that moment when the self feels ashamed, it is felt as a sickness within the self. Shame is the most reflexive of affects in that the phenomenological distinction between the subject and the object of shame is lost. Why is shame so close to the experience of self? It is because the self lives in the face, and within the face the self burns brightest in the eyes. Shame turns the attention of the self and others away from other objects to this most visible residence of self, increases its visibility, and thereby generates the torment of self-consciousness. …The self lives where it exposes itself and where it receives similar exposures from others. (Tomkins 1995, 136-137)[161]

For Tomkins, in shame the subject is implicated in the object of shame. It is not that the shamed becomes and object, it is that the subject's phenomenological embodiment becomes apprehendable to the subject as it encounters the object. Merleau-Ponty's account of the subject as seeing/seen is very useful here. When read with Tomkins in this way, the subject can see how it is seen. Shame is an opportunity and instance of inter/subjectivity as reflexive and reversible. Moreover, for Tomkins, the subject lives in its facial gestures, lives in those behaviors that are open to the eyes of others.

And so, shame once received/experienced, cuts off further interest and communication. When shamed the subject temporarily withdraws (from the world). The eyes, face, and head all drop, and the shamed subject essentially closes its face to the cosmos to train a telescope on their own inner

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[161] [T]he eyes both receive and send messages of all affects and thereby increase the ambivalence about looking and being looked at; that the awareness of the face is more salient in shame than in other affects; that the shame response itself heightens the visibility of the face; that shame involves an ambivalent turning of the eyes away from the object toward the face and self; finally that the earliest universal shame experience generate self-fulfilling prophesies this is why shame is such a self-conscious state (Tomkins 1995, 142).

galaxy. To see, perhaps which of their stars is out of place, or whose orbit is misaligned. It searches, not merely to know, but to know how and what to correct. Tomkins' repeated use of the word "sickness" is instructive. The heightened self-consciousness is a selfsame search for a cure. This is not self-abandonment; on the contrary, this is the hyper-awareness and investment in the subject that desires to look and be looked at, and the horror of such an interpersonal investigation (Tomkins 1995, 144-149). Yet this is not self-abnegation. In shame, the subject abandons temporarily the eyes of others until able to present to them a better self.

This demonstrates a continued investment of the shamed in the world. That is, this account of shame indicates that the shamed is always already in a world with other who have the capacity to shame. On Tomkins' account, the ability to experience shame is a necessary prerequisite to experience and be a member of a particular kind of community and to respect and abide by its practices (Tomkins 1995, 156-159). Shames allows for empathetic feeling *with* the community (Tomkins 1995, 162).

> Shame enlarges the spectrum of objects outside of himself which can engage man and concern him. After having experienced shame through sudden empathy, the individual will never again be able to be entirely unconcerned with the other. But, if empathy is a necessary condition for the development of personality and civilization alike, it is also a necessary condition for the experience of shame. If there is insufficient interest in the other, shame through empathy is improbable. (Tomkins 1995, 162)

Shame requires an interest in the others always already there in the worlds we inhabit, and this interest must engender a desire to feel with. Shame, though disquieting, ultimately leads the subject to a deeper and more potent inter/subjectivity. Feeling with the community aids and secures an orientation to its norms. Shame then, provide us with the desire to better ourselves, to hold fast to our communities (by which we identity and measure ourselves). This positive account of face rededicates our eyes to our community so that we might all see better together. It triggers an about face.

Tomkins' turn to communal feeling with is evocative. To be able to experience shame is to be able to participate fully in the erotic milieu that attracts us to others. Shame, in this appeal to interest and empathy, expands those to whom we are attracted in the world.

Similarly, for Steinbock (2014) shame is a profound intersubjective experience. It is an affirmation of a "me". Shame is fecund. It is a ground of positive, dynamic, and productive encounters in which we are orientated in such a way as to receive the gift of ourselves with love.[162] "[S]hame is most radically an interpersonal phenomenon as an Inter-personal self-revelation" (Steinbock 2014, 75). When the subject is invited/encouraged to return to itself in "diremptive experience" the subject is invited to tarry with itself in light of another. In this moment subjectivity emerges in conjunction/community with another (Steinbock 2014, 72-75).[163] This crossroads is taut with promise: the promise of becoming a subject with/among another.

> Shame emerges as an experience when the lived-diremption is given as more than a mere infraction, that is, when the event of action qualifies me in some way and threatens a "re-configuration" of my character. …[S]hame is a qualitatively unique emotional experience that bears on the becoming of the person. (Steinbock 2014, 73-74)

In shame, the subject is qualified—by both the self and the other—and this mutual viewing/coming into view, also signals coming into view as different and as self-reparable. For Steinbock this is a deeply moving/felt qualification, one that traffics with self-love.

> *Summary: Shame as a moral reduction*. Allow me to summarize the role that shame plays thus far. Shame, at its core, is a positive self-givenness grounded in self-love, and essentially cannot be equated with a debilitation modification of shame. I am called into question in shame (from another), and this being called into question is self-revelatory. While being called into question is felt as the negative valence of shame, I am given to myself in a way that is both critique and affirmation. It is critique insofar as one orientation or way of being is experientially contested, and it is affirmation insofar as the latter occurs on the basis of a "root" orientation as who I am. Such a tension or diremption in the unity of experience, as instigated from the outside, constitutes a *self-givenness; I am turned back on myself before another* where this self-givenness reveals to me who I am (even against my will or my liking). As such shame is precisely self-revelatory, self-opening, and not self-dissembling or self-limiting. In shame, I am "reduced" in the phenomenological sense, to Myself, as who I am before another. (Steinbock 2014, 82)

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[162] It also allows us to receive the gift of ourselves as profoundly potentiated: ripe with the possibility of better and more.
[163] Steinbock describes a diremptive experience as "an experience of a unity in difference of orientations, where one orientation is more basic than another and, as it were, "measured" against another" (Steinbock 2014, 72).

Subjects come into view as a part of a pre-existing whole, and are given themselves as the change they wish to see in the world.

> [Shame] is a creative, original emotional experience (not an affect); I must be so oriented or disposed in such a way that I could be stricken by shame. Otherwise I would not experience shame at all. Shame is not caused… The creative personal dimension of shame as self-revelatory enables shame to have a critical dimension; it can modify how I understand myself and how I am to be. (Steinbock 2014, 76)

To be stricken—to be capable of being stricken—by shame one must have a certain ethical orientation. One must be oriented toward both the creative *and* the critical. One must be oriented to motion—to moving toward the better—to *others*. One must be situated in such a way as to receive the self with love and then redirect that love outward, back toward the other(s).[164]

> Contrary to many theories of shame, shame is not possible without a genuine self-love and positive self-valuing. …[B]y genuine self-love, I mean the self-givenness of *personal* uniqueness, and being oriented toward the depth of who I can become as person, relationally, as Myself. Shame concerns who we are as persons. (Steinbock 2014, 77)

Aristotle's account of shame in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, also suggests that shame is to be embraced. The *Nicomachean Ethics* is an exploration of how one becomes good through various use and practices (NE, 1103a14-1103a19, 1179a33-1179b3). Aristotle describes modes of use in terms of extremity, temperance, and lack which govern passions and excellences and mark them as either "praiseworthy" or blameworthy.[165] Aristotle's ethics is an ethics of means—general averages between extremities—to which all things are subject.[166] So oriented, his ethics offers a positive account of shame.

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[164] While Steinbock does account for negative valence of shame and "debilitating shame" (Steinbock 2014, 78-83), it seems *very* important to note that this negative valence is not a necessary part of the experience of shame.

> Debilitating shame arises from what we might call, according to Scheler, a "disordered heart." In debilitating shame, I am given to myself through distortions of value, whether on the part of others or myself. ...*The problem with debilitating shame, however, is not shame, but the disordered heart at its root*. (Steinbock 2014, 80) (emphasis added)

[165] We must therefore speak of these too, that we may the better see that in all things the mean is praiseworthy, and the extremes neither praiseworthy nor right, but worthy of blame. (NE, 1108a15)

[166] That moral excellence is a mean, then, and in what sense it is so, and that it is a mean between two vices, the one involving excess, the other deficiency, and that it is such because its character is to aim at what is intermediate in passion and in actions… Hence also it is no easy task to be good. (NE, 1109a20-1109a24)

For Aristotle the positive possibilities of shame have much to do with how one relates to passion. Too much shame can lead to inaction (what Aristotle refers to as being "bashful" and what I will refer to as shamefulness). Too little shame leads to indiscretion (what Aristotle refers to as being "shameless"). The appropriate amount of shame (which he refers to as "shame") positions the individual toward proper virtuous modesty (NE, 1108a31-1108b1). Shame is generative. Its intermediacy—the balance between excess and deficit—produces a correct and virtuous relation between the individual, themselves, and their community. This is because Aristotle's account is intimately bound up in the sight—and esteem—of the community.

> Shame… is defined, at any rate, as a kind of fear of disrepute and produces an effect similar to that produced by fear of danger; for people who feel disgraced blush… (NE, 1128b11-1128b13)

On Aristotle's account shame is motivated by a fear of being thought of badly by others. Moderation seems determined by one's relation to the community and its norms. Modesty and moral excellence aim at the middle, and it might be said that the individual, the moral individual, is at the middle of the community. Shame is a mode of finding the middle and acting with an aim at the "right extent" to the "right person" (NE, 1109a24-1109a29). Shame helps orient the individual away from what is disgraceful in the eyes of others and distinguishes itself from the mere avoidance of pain. It is immediately concerned with being seen by others as something out of line with grace and excellence (NE, 1116a23-1116a35).

While these accounts differ in some ways, they are in accord with the fundamental claim that shame, though it may be "discomforting and perplexing" is bound up with a "conscious, unconscious, or preconscious, *cognitive-affective awareness* of the gaze of an 'other' that reveals a certain inadequacy in the self or in the 'others' by which one currently measures the self" (Tarnopolsky 2004, 475). This, what Tarnopolsky refers to as the "occurrent experience of shame," is the moment of being seen and being given myself. The compresence of gaze and self-evaluation is a necessary condition for shame.

Williams writes: "Shame need not just be a matter of being seen, but of being seen by an observer with a certain view" (Williams 2008, 82). We must have some cause to be oriented toward the one(s) who sees us. We must have some cause, some orientation to them *as* valued/valuable. It need not be a special person, but they must be of some worth to us in terms of how we want to live and who we want to live among.[167] What all of these accounts agree on, is that while shame may *feel* bad—and for Tarnopolsky, in order for shame to rise to the level of respectful shame, the kind that Plato demonstrates via Socrates, it must have the sting of *aporia* (Tarnopolsky 2004, 470, 478, 485-487)—it is there to make one *do* better. It is there to hold us accountable to others and our community. To live without shame is to live an incorrigible life—a life of disassociation—and to be unknown to oneself and others.

IV: Go Way Devil, Leave Me Alone: The Negatives of the Positive Accounts of Shame

I read these accounts as suggesting that loving somebody else comes prior to loving yourself. I challenge these accounts using recent feminist work critical of shame as well as Black Feminist and Womanist Thought that speak to other ways of knowing and making connections, communities, and loving the self. I understand even positive accounts of shame as centering whiteness as a transcendental norm. As such, there is not enough positivity in these accounts to account for fleshy life.

Positive accounts see shame as self-redeeming because they *first* see the other as being upstanding, respectable, good for us, or a community to which we could want to—or *ought* to want

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[167] The silly mistake is to suppose that the reactions of shame depend simply on being found out, that the feeling behind every decision or thought that is governed by shame is literally and immediately the fear of being seen.

…Even if shame and its motivations always involve in some way or other an idea of the gaze of another, it is important that for many of its operations the imagined gaze of an imagined other will do. …To overlook the importance of the imagined other is what I just called the silly mistake.

The second and more interesting mistake concerns the identity, and the attitudes, of the other whose gaze is in question. Shame need not be just a matter of being seen, but of being seen by an observer with a certain view. (Steinbock 2014, 81-82)

to—or do belong. These accounts take for granted the idea that the one who sees us is always ethically situated as virtuous; or, if not virtuous, a kind of neutral. This is problematic in the u.s. american context where precaritized bodies emerge against a background of whiteness. Shame, then, is an operation of the gaze and best conforms to the acquisitive violence of the human subject/thief.

When positive accounts of shame suggest that one can only be shamed by the righteous such accounts ignore these oppressive structures and power dynamics. Positive accounts of shame may cause the shamed to rely on the gaze of an unworthy shamer. In this context, oppression and certain damaging dynamics of power get internalized in such a way that one's tolerance for surveillance and impure shamers is high (Bartky 1990). Relying solely on the gaze of the other and attuning to community norms means relying on both the master's tools and the master's house, particularly when it comes to those "forged in the crucibles of difference" (Lorde 2007, 112).

Shame can be an enemy, not just to compassion as is Nussbaum's claim (Nussbaum 2013, 315, 359-364) but also to the self. In these descriptions shame might be understood as the product of the ethical gearing/frameworks of inter/subjectivity and eye-forwardness. Shame is also in the eye of the beholder. Here I am thinking about the description of what many who call themselves Christians to be the first shame, that of Adam and Eve. After eating from the forbidden Tree of Life, Adam and Eve realize they are naked and experience what sounds like shame.

> And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.
>
> And they heard the voice of the Lord God waking in the garden in the cool of the day; and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. (Genesis 3:7-8)

What is most interesting about this experience is that it was *in the eyes of each other* that they recognized their nakedness. They did not look down at themselves and recognize it. It happens in the moment when they are fixed within each others' gaze. Once apprehended, they set about to cure themselves, to right themselves, to make themselves conform to an (as yet in the Bible) unspoken norm or

standard. The context in which they experiences themselves as shameful already has these norms *in the air*. Eve and Adam adapt themselves to them almost reflexively. The move to cure, to remove the "sickness" from oneself, or even to "re-configure" oneself in accordance with another can be particularly damaging for members of marginalized communities who live under norms of whiteness antithetical to their very lives. Shame serves to further embed precaritized peoples in systems/norms built towards their undoing.[168]

Jennifer Manion (2003) and Jill Locke (2007) apply a feminist analysis to suss out the problem shame poses for marginalized bodies. In "Girls Blush, Sometimes: Gender, Moral Agency, and the Problem of Shame" Manion gives a critical reading of Gabrielle Taylor's account of shame (1985, 1995) in order to make a pivot to her own account of "self-concern". On Taylor's account there are two kinds of shame: genuine and false. Genuine shame "has a useful function to fulfill" and aids the one who experiences it, it helps them to check in with themselves about their own (self-given) personal values and allows them to critically assess whether or not their actions live up to those values (Manion 2003, 22). In Manion's reading of Taylor, shame preserves/secures self-respect and serves as not just a moral good, but a criterion for morality itself (Manion 2003, 26-28). Shamelessness then, is a lack of self-respect and a moral failing.

False shame is "ill-founded". False shame is pernicious because the experience of false shame allows the shamed to be "muddled about her values" and erodes rather than preserves the shamed's "personal integrity" (Manion 2003, 27).

> False shame arises when one judges oneself against what Taylor calls "alien" measures of values that, once the chock of shame eases, one sees one does not personally endorse. (Manion 2003, 27)

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[168] The fact of white-supremacist ableist heterosexism in the united states is the fact of all us as being touched and shaped by an anti-black, anti-non cis man, ableist world. This should render the virtuous position of the seers in Tomkins' and Steinbock's accounts—if these accounts were actually responsible—suspect. But just as marginalized and precaritized peoples have been socialized to live with the indignities of white supremacy—which has also positioned many of them to "make a way out of no way" in spite of these indignities—to dissemble or die, or even to *love* our oppressor as ourselves, so too have Steinbock and Tomkins been socialized to take for granted the operations of these streams of oppression—these apparatuses that make us intelligible as shame-able.

But false shame does not entirely work against self-respect. False shame is temporary and presumably distinguishable from genuine shame. One retains and affirms her self-respect when she sloughs off the dreary coil of false shame. False shame has positive effect.

> [For Taylor] one is always better off having the capacity to feel shame even though this means risking feeling false shame, because feeling shame on any particular occasion indicates that an agent possesses some set of values to which she is committed. (Manion 2003, 28)

Manion points out two significant weaknesses in Taylor's account and present an alternative. She notes that the temporality of false shame is dubious. This is because it takes time to come to understand the shame as false. It *feels* like genuine shame. If felt often/consistently enough, who is to say that it's not. Second, Manion points out that Taylor's account shame privileges stability/equilibrium over self-reflection. To this I add that one can take this to mean that Taylor's also privileges stability/equilibrium over *undoing* oppressive norms, especially the kind that lead to "false" shame (Manion 2003, 34-35).

Because "[a]ll shame experiences cause distortion" Manion pivots to an account of self-concern (Manion 2003, 35). On Manion's account, it is the very reflexivity that Taylor's account only hints at, and only in "genuine" shame, that is most useful. Self-concern is the mode of this reflexive stance that Manion wants us to take up. Self-concern is connected to others.

> [It is a] reflective stances [that] requires that a person regard herself from an intersubjective, impersonal perspective...from something very much like the moral point of very. ...My engaging in self-concerned reflection requires me to step into the effective position of another who knows me and cares about me. (Manion 2003, 31)

Manion's self-concern is concern for myself as another might care for me. This is not a "minority of one"—for I am not alone in my self-concern.

Manion's self-concern has three key positive features. One: the other whose perspective I take cares about me and presumably wants the best for me. This other is, then, an adequately morally positioned viewer. Two: self-concern situates the concerned-with self in a larger caring community.

Self-concern is not the same thing as other-disinterest. Three: this reflective stance allows the concerned-with self to effectively adjudicate concern that is not so caring—and seems like a way to avoid false shame.

Locke similarly explores the limits of genuine/false or good/bad shame in her 2007 article, "Shame and the Future of Feminism." She turns to Woodward's account of "traumatic" shame (Locke 2007, 155) to read Arendt's account of the "conscious pariah" Rahel Varnhagen. Locke attacks the "whole being" impact of shame's "negative global self-assessment" (Locke 2007, 149). On Locke's account, which I take seriously, shame prevents connection with others (full stop). It is consumptive, greedy even. It *feeds on* the ashamed. Contrary to Manion's self-concern, Aristotle's virtue, Steinbock and Tomkins' community-desiring/making, and Tarnopolsky's political suturing, Locke sees shame as deeply isolating. The shamed cannot reach out because shame has gnawed off her arms. She cannot cry out because shame has swallowed her voice (Locke 2007, 151-152). Shame is paralyses (Locke 2007, 153).

What Locke advocates is "world-building". She is careful to avoid positioning world-building as "politics... devoid of shame or shaming" (Locke 2007, 159). These worlds may be imperfect or incomplete, but they will shift the focus away from "focusing on shaming those who shame us". And in doing so they "may loosen shame's grip" (Locke 2007, 159).

In her 2016 chapter, "An Apology for Moral Shame" Chesire Calhoun doubles down on a positive account of moral shame by locating it in a kind of worlding and the socious. On Calhoun's account, shame is a social practice of morality that turns on the "representativeness of the shamer's viewpoint" rather than the evaluative commitments and reasoning style" of the shared moral practice (Calhoun 2016, 68). Moral practice precedes our engagement and evades our (personal) choice (and creation) (Calhoun 2016, 71).

Manion, Locke and Calhoun underscore what emerges for me as a palpable concern about the usefulness and applicability of shame for non-white folks. If shame is about exterior/communal attunement, then we find that precaritized people are better serve by having an internal pitchfork, rather than harmonizing with the sharps and flats of oppression. To my mind there is no positive account of shame for Blues/ing bodies. Specifically on Calhoun's account we cannot choose or *Blue* our "we". This means that the Blues/ing body is fixed within whiteness and its transformative choices are understood by Calhoun as "refusing to take morality seriously" and a failure to achieve moral immaturity (Calhoun 2016, 48, 71-72). Shame silences the possibilities for the kind of transformative work with and in the community that it purports to underpin. The underlying structure that makes shame possible is a structure implicated by and implying whiteness. Positive accounts of shame merely silently reinforce the benevolence of whiteness, the transcendental norm of whiteness, and the eye-forward subject.

IV: I Love Myself When I am Laughing...

What makes my account of shamelessness different from defiance or certain understandings of refusal that are ways of defying or resisting shame? The primary difference is that shamelessness is a method that enlivens the life-projects. Shamelessness inheres in a kind of Blues/ing jouissance, or what Musser describes as "Brown Jouissance" that way of being-in-the-world that can find/create pleasure in abjection (Musser 2018). This making a way out of no way to pleasure (and), to non-totalization by the "dishonor" of antiblackness is a particular affective/phenomenological stance that simultaneously undoes and does otherwise (Wilderson 2010). It is an affective condition of a kind of transformative and expressive unbotheredness—even as it tarries with the most bothersome realities. In this way shamelessness is akin to defiance in that both are ways of being in the world—general traits (shameless or defiant)—with ways of doing in the world (shamelessness or defiance). I suggest

that defiance is not shamelessness because of a difference in the powers of orientation of the defiant, versus that of the shameless. Defiance centers what is being defied. Shamelessness is a doing/being that decenters whiteness. I turn to Blues/ing as an example of this simultaneous doing/being and decentering.

Sarah Haley performs a lovely reading of the Blues/ing episteme in her chapter "Sabotage and Black Feminist Refusal" (2016) that, through her reading of Blues/ing and refusal moves me to make such a distinction. On her reading, Blues/ing shamelessness is refusal, is a defiance of the oppressive norms of whiteness (such as reason, intellect, erotics, sexuality, capacity, beauty, and humanity). The norms that exclude black people (particularly the black bodies that are not assigned male status) as creators, knowers, reasoners, and innovators (Haley 2016, 205-6, 210, 211, 217, 245) foreclose the possibility of Blues/ing bodies as capable or worthy of self-respect/love. The Blues/ing/ing of incarcerated women she frees up in her readings of the songs on the album "Jailhouse Blues/ing" are understood as immanently *bound* to oppression.

> Every day rebellion or defiance must be understood within the overall context of domination; such practices of resistance "have neither the means to securing the territory outside the space of domination nor the power to keep or maintain what is won in fleeting, surreptitious, and necessarily incomplete victories. (Haley 2016, 205-206)

I read Haley's account of refusal/defiance and shamelessness as one that understands them solely in terms of being totally and solely conditioned by the ties that bind—this, I think ignores the theme of movement that is present in so many Blues/ing narratives, including those that she profiles in her chapter. That is, if we take seriously Haley's reading and its account, we cannot seamlessly map it onto shamelessness as I intend it.

On my reading of Haley, "every day rebellion or defiance" centers the norm and can only be understood through it in a way that reifies/defines both poles. Haley writes, of Bessie Smith's "Sing Sing Prison Blues":

> Smith illuminated and rejected the mandate to offer narrative in service of maintaining structures of legal authority and power, arguing that legal objectivity is a violent ruse. In asserting the judge's inability to understand her actions, experience, and state of mind, she emphasizes the gulf between her and him, which would manifest in the imposition of his reasonableness over hers. (Haley 2016, 213)

She is correct about the illumination, the ruse, the epistemic oppression, the phenomenological paucity and the gulf. But I want to push back on her work of attributing this to refusal—or solely to an act of refusing regardless of how "ostentatious" (Haley 2016, 213). Haley's account of refusal suggests a reading that centers the judge in the narrative/song. The judge—even when it about the judge's (a stand in for white supremacy) many failures—becomes the protagonist. As such, this refusal remains bound by/limited by the very oppressions it seeks to transgress.

Shamelessness understood and lived as something beyond refusal/defiance centers Smith in the song. On this reading what is performed is the shameless centering of Smith's experience, rationality, and state of mind not *despite* the judge but rather **because** she, Bessie Smith, is present. This song is a presenting. This becomes clear when one *listens* to Smith. The verse that Haley highlights is the fourth out of five verses in the Blues/ing. I find that this is the least interesting/informative verse of the Blues/ing and suggest that the entire song be considered.[169]

The first verse centers movement.

> Gonna journey up the Hudson, goin' on a lonesome trail
> Gonna journey up the Hudson, goin' on a lonesome trail
> They can put me in the Death House, or keep me in the Sing Sing Jail

This movement is framed as primarily Bessie-driven. Though its lower tessitura—Smith is a contralto—might give this Blues/ing a mournful quality, it is worth noting the strong rhythm, the forward movement of the beat the Smith's voice keeps—if not sets—stride with. Though she is facing "they" who "can put [her] in the death house, or keep [her] in the Sing Sing Jail," she is moving under her own power.

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[169] Davis (1999) contains the complete lyrics on pages 336-337.

In the second verse I hear Smith emerge as an equal interlocutor with a power-structure.

> I wrote and asked the warden why they called the jail the Sing Sing
> I wrote and asked the warden why the called the jail the Sing Sing
> He said, "Stand here by this rock pile and listen to them hammers ring"

She writes to inquire, not to entreat. She writes, perhaps, to enquire about what is being sung. Does Smith listen "to them hammers ring"?

In the third verse, Smith presents her perspectival experience and standpoint which is reflected in the rather cheeky flair of the clarinet around 1:23.

> Big doin' at the courthouse, paper sellin' for fifty cents
> Big doin' at the courthouse, paper sellin' for fifty cents
> All the judge tryin' to tell me, my lawyer pleadin' self defense

She has achieved this epistemic and phenomenological position through her travel and her inquiry. She sees herself being seen and then comments on how she is being seen, how she is being commodified. But in the final verses we see that despite this, Smith fells herself for herself and in so doing retains her voice and her own understanding of worth.

Only in the fourth verse, does *she,* Bessie Smith allow the judge to speak.

> The judge said, "Listen, Bessie, tell me why you killed your man."
> The judge said, "Listen, Bessie, tell me why you killed your man."
> I said, "Judge, you ain't no woman, and you can't understand."

Even then she quickly takes control of the narrative and asserts her way of being-in-the world as distinct and beyond the apprehension—both in the sense of grasping/holding and understanding—of the dominant/destructive logic. Smith is, in black vernacular, "not even studyin'" the judge.

The fifth and final verse, is an example of what Tina Campt outlines in "Black Visuality and the Practice of Refusal" (2019). This piece, that emerges from her membership in the Practicing Refusal Collective, offers an account of refusal that does not center that which is being refused.

> [R]efusal [is] a generative and capacious rubric for theorizing everyday practices of struggle often obscured by an emphasis on collective acts of resistance. For us, "practicing refusal" names the urgency of rethinking the time, space, and fundamental vocabulary of what

constitutes politics, activism, and theory, as well as what it means to refuse the terms given to us to name these struggles.

> ***refusal:*** *a rejection of the status quo as livable and the creation of possibility in the face of negation i.e. a refusal to recognize a system that renders you fundamentally illegible and unintelligible; the decision to reject the terms of diminished subjecthood with which one is presented, using negation as a generative and creative source of disorderly power to embrace the possibility of living otherwise.* (Campt 2019)

The Collective's (and Campt's) refusal is more than recognition of the gulf or an opposition to juridical and white supremacist norms. In this way we hear that Smith refuses the majoritarian norms by showing up as herself (*regardless*) (Walker 1983) by testifying to her own movement in the world. This Blues/ing/ing is the "urgen[t] rethinking" and an embrace of the otherwise. We hear this in the harmonic flourish of the two clarinets and the piano when combined with the heretofore unused brightness of Smith's voice. This is triumph and self-naming/creation, not just mere rejection/defiance as a norm-opposition binary.

In "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words" Spillers takes this up as a "being-for-self" modeled on the particular sexualities of Blackwomxn that is sounded out by Blueswomxn (Spillers 2003, 165-167). This "self-invention" and "self-regard" is—when performed by bodies beyond the mythical norm—an expressive act/a performance of the otherwise that sings us away from shame and toward shamelessness. Smith sings this song.

> You can send me up the river or send me to that mean old jail
> You can send me up the river or send me to that mean old jail
> I killed my man and I don't need no bail.

The world enters Smith's Blues/ing as an attempt to control and limit her—an attempt to dictate to her her actions/options. And while some may read the fifth verse as acquiescence or resignation to fate that would be assume that Smith's Blues/ings is entirely contained on the surface, entirely transparent. As such, it is to miss entirely, the winking and shimmering if the opacity of the Blueswomxn, of Smith. I hear it, I hear the glimmer of it, in the upturn of "need."

To read this as Black Refusal and shamelessness is to take this final line of the Blues/ing as a being-for-self, as "self-regard" as taking up the self as the work of the self. "I killed my man and I don't need no bail." The focus of the shameless is on her own self-loving and self-directed flamboyant living.

Which is not to say that shamelessness allows one to ignore (particularly harmful) norms. To be shamelessness is not to be without an awareness of the world. It is more like the refrain from Cardi B's "Bodack Yellow": "If I see you and don't speak / it means I don't f*@k with you". Shameless sees but does not f*@k with (as in center) the norms that understand black people and blackness as the transcendental abnorm: shame-able, shameful, and shamed. Understanding shamelessness as contrariness or the embrace of contrary norms, opposition, trafficking in sub-norms, or occupying the status of other in a self/other—norm/other binary is merely a capitulation to the norms. The fluid, responsive, and communal norms of shamelessness are different in the Lordean sense, different and interdependent but not deviant (Lorde 2007, 116). Shamelessness is a "yes, *and*" where the *and* is the lived geography of that which the yes is too small to contain (Musser 2018, 9). In the shameless-*and,* Blackness can never just be always already social death—even if that cannot be seen. This living, this *and*-ing is fleshy work, work that alludes the shaming/shameful subject, and work that caresses kin even as it is flayed by the citizen. Blackness *refuses* the prison of the subject and turns otherwise: "Here, in this place, we flesh. Yonder they do not love your flesh" (Morrison 2004, 103-104).[170]

In *Black Pentecostal Breath* Crawley (2016) offers an account of what he calls an "aesthetics of possibility." He understands Blackness and flesh as aspirational—not to which white people can aspire—but a living, breathing, re/sounding, and distinct hailing in the world. In this way, I take him

[170] Blackness is an abolitionist, decolonial project that resists the role of the subject and, thus, has no capacity to produce the thought of the would-be theologian, the would-be philosopher. In contradistinction to the desire for subjectivity, *Blackpentecostal Breath* elaborates upon the extra-subjective mode of being together that is the condition of occasion for envisioning, and living into such envisioning, a critique of the known—the violent, oppressive, normative—world. (Crawley 2016, 4)

to perform the loving and flamboyant work of breathing life in the shameless otherwise through an interrogation of joyful noise. The shameless Black living flesh that practices Black Refusal has/is on Crawley's account a calling in the world it is "released into the world": breath and song, quiet and not quiet, voice and heart (Crawley 2016, 3).

> Blackpentecostalism is an intellectual practice grounded in the fact of the flesh, flesh unbounded and liberative, flesh as vibrational and always on the move. Such practice constitutes a way of life. The practices I analyze are a range of sensual, affective, material experiences… (Crawley 2016, 4)
>
> Black aesthetics are Blackpentecostal; they are unbounded and found in the celebration of the flesh. (Crawley 2016, 5)
>
> These sensual experiences were not merely performed through duress but were the instantiation and sign of life and love. As life and love, these performative dances, songs, noises, and tongues illustrate how enjoyment, desire, and joy are important for the tradition that antiphonally speaks back against aversion, embarrassment, and abandonment, against the debasement and denigration of blackness. (Crawley 2016, 7-8)

Shamelessness then, is a way of being—a general trait—that in acute occurrences is also an activity or resistance. But it is not solely resistance for it is not solely reactive. Shamelessness as resistance is a mode of the shameless ontology—an ontology that operates from, with, and through (self-) love. Shamelessness might be understood, especially when read through the affective life-project of Blues/ing with is commitment to self, diasporic kinship, and the otherwise as both a way of being in the world as well as a method for taking up and transforming the world. "The Blues ain't just the lyric. The Blues is enfleshment; the Blues is material" (Crawley 2016, 19). Blues/ing is a resoundingly felt experience of Black living that slips past shame and into ethical and loving commitments otherwise.

VI: Til You Do Right By Me: Toward Shamelessness

I bet you think I don't know nothing
But singing the Blues/ing (well)
Sister, I got news for you:
I'm something!

I hope you think you're something too!

If shame is about getting in tune with the dominant norm (whiteness) then Blues/ing Black flesh never gets the chance to sing its own songs. This is what strikes me when I encounter Titon's method of hearing and recording Blues practices. I hear strains of this in the distinction Titon (1994) makes between "downhome" and vaudeville performances (xvi-xvii).

> Before proceeding, I would like to make the distinction between the two kinds of earl blues songs, vaudeville and downhome, more precise. Early vaudeville singers, such as Mamie Smith, Edith Wilson, Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Ida Cox, Ethel Waters, and Alberta Hunter, were black women with backgrounds in vaudeville and musical shows; versatile professional, they took pride in their ability to deliver any kind of song. Billed as "queens" of the blues – advertisements picture them with crowns – they dressed and acted the part, perhaps burlesquing the opera prima donna. By contrast, most of the men who sang downhome blues songs were farmers (or drifting seasonal laborers) entertaining their neighbors… [M]ost downhome blues singing was more intimate, taking place at Saturday night parties in crowded juke joints, or outdoors, where listeners and dancers clustered around the singers.
>
> Vaudeville blues was popular music, not folk music… Not surprisingly, most vaudeville blues songs from the 1920s reminder today's listeners of musical comedies. Influenced by genteel white taste, the singers – with few notable exceptions –strove for a sweet, mild vocal timbre and enunciated their words precisely. …Downhome blues singers, on the other hand, obtained their lyrics by borrowing and trying to memorize traditional stanzas from other singers, which they mixed with idiosyncratic and improvised stanzas in most of their performances. Downhome blues timbre often was noisy and raspy; and the singers slurred their consonants…
>
> The woman who sang vaudeville blues ordinarily did not accompany themselves on a musical instrument… Like the singers, the accompanists were music hall professional, veterans of countless tours on the black stage circuit, or talented youngsters (such a Louis Armstrong). Downhome blues singers, on the other hand, almost always accompanied themselves, usually on guitar. (Titon 1994, xvi-xvii)

Titon's distinction between musician and singer is explicitly gendered and suggests that, where Blueswomxn are concerned, there is spectacle instead of musicianship. That is, one goes to *see* Blueswomxn, one goes to *hear* Blues men. More alarmingly—and particularly coming from a white man—what emerges in this distinction is an implicit claim about authenticity that disqualifies Blueswomxn. Despite Titon's often very considered and useful analysis of Blues/ing practices, this

whispered suggestion—that there is real Blues and show blues with its gendered politics is incredibly troubling. It is a way of mis-apprehending the affective and expressive practices of non-majoritarian bodies, particularly those of american Blackwomxn. Titon's eye-forward differentiation occludes the musicianship of some of the most transformative Blues/ings of american Black folks.

It is also incorrect. By the very standards that he describes in his chapter, "Musical Analysis: Toward a Song-Producing System" Alberta Hunter, Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, Edith Wilson, and Billie Holiday deploy the rhythmic organization (Titon 1994, 144-152) and pitch complexes (154-163) of downhome blues. Despite the fact that these songs may have been written by white people or for white audiences—these musicians still employ syncopation, dupled and "thrupled" rhythm (on top of a "standard" 4/4 time), and dissonance. Moreover, two notable songs that were performed on (vaudeville) stages, "(What Did I Do To Be So) Black and Blue" and "You Can't Tell the Difference After Dark" were written by Black folk. "Black and Blue" features lyrics by Andy Razaf with music by Fats Waller (Songwriters Hall of Fame 2022). "You Can't Tell the Difference After Dark" was penned by Alberta Hunter. In both these songs, the singers—as musicians—make careful choices about tone and "pitch movement" that are attuned to downhome blues. While there are differences between the two modes of Blues/ing, what Titon elevates to a formal and authentic difference, might better be understood differences in social expectation—though, I to my ears the "sweet, mild vocal timbre" and "precis[e]" enunciation of Blueswomxn on stages is less cotton candy than it is blood orange. It is belied by the throatiness of Hunter, Rainey, Smith, and Wilson. Even where Mamie Smith's voice might fit a Eurocentric expectation of sweetness, the fact that it is she who holds the honor of being the first Blues/ing vocalist on record is also transformative and wayward (Titon 1994, 199; Bourgeois 1996, 119; Howe & Noble 2019, 25; Brooks 2021, 3).

> The profound urgency of Black women's culture work cannot be overstated, and it is perhaps best conveyed by simply suggesting that one consider just how "riotous" as act it was for Mamie Smith to break the sound barrier in the anti-Black recording industry on August 10,

> 1920, one year after America's "red summer" had told Black folks that no "new deal" with democracy was on the table for them following the First World War. Smith's "Crazy Blues" effectively blew up the segregated pop cultural scene by seizing hold of modernity's new sonic technologies, the kinds that had been used to continue the centuries-old tradition of turning Black cultural labor into forms of capital from which they were systematically denied the returns. If white folks had controlled the conditions of Black folks' sonic reproduction since the origins of modern recording age… and if white folks had also effectively colonized the blues, a Black vernacular form that white artists raced into the student to record before them[171]…then Smith's breakthrough was a rejoinder to all that. And yet, it was also more, If Black thought, Black rage, Black desire had few free and unhindered channels for expression in teg e of Jim Crow terror, "Crazy Blues" was a missive sent out to Black publics who bought her joint in droves. It said to them that all that feeling, all those strategies for living could be improvised in the music, in sonic performances that bucked convention, mixed and made new forms, and expressed the capaciousness of Black humanity. (Brooks 2021, 3-4)

I speculate that what Titon might be misapprehending in his critique of the spectacle, or the way that Blueswomxn engage with spectacle is the affective stance of these musicians and the lack of transparency of lived flesh. To be sure these musicians engaged with the visual realm. From Walker's sumptuous description of Shug Avery which bears striking similarity to descriptions of Ma Rainey (Davis 1999 & Lewis 2012), Alberta Hunter's sartorial choices to distinguish herself from other performers, and Billie Holiday's gardenias, to be onstage means to be keenly aware of the logics of the visual. However, this awareness is not the same thing as capitulation to or willingness to be totalized by the spectacle.[172]

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[171] Brooks parenthetically writes, "looking at you, Victor Emerson, Marion Harris, Sophie Tucker, and a parade of your peers." In his biography of Alberta Hunter—which Taylor enfleshes with conversations with Hunter as they worked together on the book—Taylor shares an anecdote from Hunter about Sophie Tucker.

> Sophie Tucker, called a coon shouter because she tried to sing like a black, wanted to learn whatever it was that was making Alberta such a start. Before long she sent her maid, Belle, to ask Alberta to come back wih her to the Tucker's dressing room at the Palace Theater, where she was appearing. She wanted Alberta to teach her how to since "A Good man Is Hard to Find"…
>
> "I never did go," said Alberta. "Something wouldn't let me. I think she would have liked to learn some of my tricks and to take advantage of me by getting popular on my style…'
>
> Finally Sophie sent her pieanist, Ed Shapiro, over to take down notes as he listened to Alberta sing. (Taylor 1987, 39)

[172] Perhaps this is why attempts to visually dramatize Lady Day's life fail (so spectacularly). When considered as a vehicle for Miss Diana Ross—which set the stage for *Mahogany* (1975) and *The Wiz* (1978)—as opposed to a biopic, the 1972 film *Lady Sings the Blues* strikes not as many wrong notes as the 2021 film, *The United States vs. Billie Holiday*. *The United State vs. Billie Holiday* takes up the challenge of Lady Day's challenging self-narrative, archival artifacts, and the general narratives

Perhaps this is why, in *In Search of Billie Holiday: If You Can't Be Free, Be a Mystery* her wonderful meditation on what Holiday means to others and to her, Farah Jasmine Griffin (2001) turns toward the aural rather than the visual to provide a rich account of Holiday.

> On Monday, August 22nd, 1955, Billie Holiday, pianist Jimmy Rowles and bassist Artie Shapiro met at Shapiro's home in Los Angeles to rehearse prior to an August 23 recording date. …As Rowles tells the story, he retrieved a drunken Holiday from her hotel room so that they could rehearse, "set the keys and figure out if there was anything special she wanted to do with the chords." He took her to Shapiro's home because he knew there was a piano there. According to Rowles, neither he nor Holiday realized Shapiro had turned on the tape recorder. …Though not entirely unmediated…the tape is perhaps the closest we get to Holiday in her own words, her own voice, her own shaping of her tale. In this tape she comes forth as a figure quite different from the tragic songstress of her autobiography or the bourgeois matron on [the magazine] *Ebony* Lady.
>
> Here, hers is the grainy voice of a woman who has spent a lifetime in the fast lane, seeking pleasure, drinking and smoking till dawn. It is a voice that is street-smart yet loving, at times vulnerable and self-doubting and most often in control—clapping out rhythms, setting the key, directing the other musicians, as leader, collaborator and peer. Here is a Holiday who talks, shares stories, givers her personal history, plays with her dog. (Griffin 2001, 84-85)

What I hear when I listen to this recording—"Billie Holiday: Songs and Conversations" (1973)—is the way that shamelessness makes it possible to bridge differences to arrive at a collaborative—but still Lady Day-led—arrangement. It is she who quite literally keeps the time of her arrangements and re-memories for the two men with her. She tells her own story in her words, pauses, laughs, and murmurs. She cajoles, commandeers, carouses, and collaborates. All of this happens as an extension and an enhancement of getting the song ready—the ear hears Blues/ing as a process a way-making.

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that surround Holiday, and presents a shallow, wholly surface, transparent, and galling account of Holiday in particular and trauma and addiction in general.

Critics and audiences panned the writing and direction of the film but largely praised Audra Day's performance as Billie Holiday (Seitz 2021). I find even Day's performance troubling, given Day's understanding of Billie as only self-destructive/abusing and tragic. This uninspired and amateur consideration of the character lead to many scenes being flattened to meet the needs of this limited narrative, if not soured entirely by Day's own self-abuse (largely smoking and disordered eating) to fit the "look" of Lady Day in her more troubled years.

The record reverberates with a brazenly playful and wholly committed earworm of the work of the artist in meaning creation. In her autobiography, Holiday describes her approach to the work.

> Unless it was the records of Bessie Smith and Louis Armstrong I heard as a kid, I don't know of anybody who actually influenced my singing, then or now. I always wanted Bessie's big sound and Pop's feeling. Young kids always ask me what my style is derived from and how it evolved and all that. What can I tell them? If you find a tune and it's got something to do with you, you don't have to evolve anything. You just feel it, and when you sing it other people can feel something too. With me, it's got nothing to do with working or arranging or rehearsing. Give me a song I can feel, and it's never work. (Holiday 2006, 43)

This passage has been read by some so as to disqualify Billie Holiday from the echelon of "musician." That is, for some—and here I would point to the kind of work Titon does, to tie blues to an non-vocal instrument (notably the guitar and the Blues man)—Billie's statement that "you don't have to evolve anything" and that working or arranging or rehearsing" are not work if you find a tune that's "got something to do with you" points to a disavowal of craft and an overemphasis on merely singing songs that are personally resonant.[173] And yet, with "Billie Holiday: Songs and Conversations" there is audible record of her rehearsing, crafting, cajoling, joking, straining, failing, trying again—we have record of her taking charge of herself in community with others, in making something together through collaboration. What we hear in Holiday's own voice(s) is an embrace of the flesh and a singing to create and to sound out a clearing.

The songs of Blueswomxn are the communal, beautiful, and necessarily flamboyantly *something*. Blues/ing is a queer/ing practice. Blues/ing is the glottal sopping, the measure cutting, the syncopating of the center. The shameless re-centering of the Blues body. That is, if whiteness/heterosexism is "The Song that Never Ends", Blues/ing is the pause, the vocal fry, the

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[173] There is also evidence of her rather impressive sense of musicianship just a few pages later when she describes Lester Young's tone and approach to solos. Here she comes through not merely as a fan of Young, but as a fellow musician capable of appreciating and relaying the beauty of his craft to others (Holiday 2006, 51-53, 66-67). Moreover her "blindfold test" in February of 1950 with Leonard Feather demonstrates her as considerably well-versed in a variety of Jazz and Blues musicians, both in terms of vocalists and instrumentalists (Gourse 1997, 57-62).

> Billie revealed her self-assurance and taste in music. These are the words of the singer who had the courage of her convictions and refused to alter her style to please club owners. (Gourse 1997, 58)

sudden and expressive semi-colon, the flattened 5th note that goes beyond, transforming it into something for and by those Blues/ing bodies hitherto unimagined and left unsung. Yet more than flourish, Blues/ing is flourishing. Blues/ing' use of dissonance, pitch complexes, and syncopation can be read as a "playful resistance in the face of oppressive" classical music norms valorized by whiteness. Blues/ing explores the whole range of human engagements, love, desire, anger, betrayal, triumph, movement, restlessness, and homing. In addition to its libidinal highs, it also plumbs the depths of depression, suicidal ideation, desertion, and desolation. In Blues/ing joy and pain are shared between the singer and audience. In this way hardships are collectively commiserated, and triumphs celebrated within the community. It is meaningful sounding. It is a hailing. It calls others to join it. It *makes* community.

And so, via Blues/ing, shamelessness as I intend it is neither an ethical nor a moral failing, a lack of self-respect, nor a turning away from community. Shamelessness is a practice of and requires a deep well of self-love that makes possible the self-concern of Manion and the worlding of Locke. Shamelessness is the understanding and the loving of the self as *something*. This something is neither thingification nor objectification. It is an understanding of the fleshy self as capable and as a capable worlder. Shamelessness is a method—a *wayward* method—a "beautiful experiment in how to live" of the resplendent Black flesh (Hartman 2019, 227).

> [Waywardness is] the practice of the social other-wise, the insurgent ground that enables new possibilities and new vocabularies; …It is a queer resource of black survival. It is a *beautiful experiment* in how-to-live.
>
> Waywardness is a practice of possibility at a time when all roads, except the ones created by *smashing out,* are foreclosed. (Hartman 2019, 227-228)

This "practice of the social other-wise" takes up what Spillers tasks us with at the end of "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" it gains the "insurgent ground" and in that geography embraces/loves the flesh, "Loves the folk." (Walker 1983) and gets busy living in the face of structural antiblackness and death. This method is a method of worlding.

The shameless fleshy—shamelessless fleshy—worlder is engaged in what Mitchell refers to as "a critical demeanor of shamelessness" (Mitchell 2014, 144). A critical demeanor of shamelessness takes, rather than an objective of "conquering", rejecting, refocusing, or "resisting" shame, as its object the ability to look at the self without the lens of the "dominant representations".

> The demeanor does not require pretending that one can ignore mainstream images. Instead you recognize not only the power of dominant assumption but also how little they have to do with you and the communities to which you belong. (Mitchell 2014, 144)

This is not defiance, refusal, or resistance only. This is a shameless ontology and a phenomenology, an account of experience and an account of the experiencer as powerful, powering, connected, connecting, and creating in and of herself. It is self-conditioned aspiration, the what might be—what *we* might be—"what will have had to have happened" (Campt 2017, 17).

While shamelessness makes a way for the otherwise of shame it is particularly sensitive to accountability. That is: shameslessness is an ethical method. The shameless is particularly accountable to herself and her people. Her people being the cared-for result of a self-loving commitment and engagement with herself. Shamelessness is a loving practice. Love requires openness, vulnerability, and folx. Billie Holiday strikes this chord in Lady Sings the Blues when she describes the harassment she faces from the Federal Government in May 1947 (Holiday 2006, 141-153). Despite the risk to her, she gets her accompanist, Bobby Tucker, who was "as innocent as a babe" out of jail (Holiday 2006, 143). Despite her addiction, she remains accountable to him. While incarcerated at the Federal Woman's Reformatory in Alderson, West Virginia, she is also accountable to her neighbor, Marietta (who teaches her to knit. She makes cable knit sweaters for Bobby Tucker "and his little boy"). "After I got to be a wheel in the kitchen, I used to take care of Marietta by saving her the best of the food, especially when she came home for lunch" (Holiday 2006, 162). She also shouts out the women in the prison system who showed her kindness and accountability (163). This is marked contrast to the

Bluesmen in her entourage who were also brought up on drug charges. They got their charges dismissed even as she served time.

One must not mistake fleshy shamelessness for those who are not operating with and through love. To call these individuals "shameless" is a misnomer is only possible through an understanding and centering of shame as positive (for marginalized folks). People who commit monstrous acts are not shameless and are not practicing shameslessness. What they are is brutally unaccountable.

I read Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1994) as an example of this experiment, this shameless ground, this method of loving-regard and creation in the encounter between Pecola Breedlove and her upstairs neighbors. To the "good church-going women" of Lorain, Ohio, where the novel unfolds, these neighbors were just "whores" with all the grammatical and social violence that comes with that word/status. Yet, in this interstitial encounter (50-58), a visit one "October morning" they were simply Blackwomxn, neighbors who "did not despise" Pecola. In this visit, this reader finds Pecola in one of the only non-judgmental, and loving (not pitying) exchanges of her short life. This visit is a sensorial delight with the deeply intimate and comfortable (to some) sounds, smells, imaginings, and signs of folks—in this case, Blackwomxn—getting ready. Poland, "her voice sweet and hard like new strawberries" scores the visit with Blues/ings. In this engagement, I read Marie, China, and Poland as engaging in the melodic diasporic, these "whores in whores clothing" (57) are frank and funky in their experimentation, yet they belong to each other. And it is this, shimmering, shimmying, flashing from the opaque, busting out of the confines that want you to be nothing but death, this song that astounds Pecola. Shamelessness is astounding. "Pecola looked at the women. Were they real?" They are accountable to themselves, they call—through their Blues/ing game of rememory dozens—each other into account. They are a problematic trio, certainly, but for Pecola, they represent the only people who respect her as an equal, as what the CRC call "levelly human"

(Taylor 2017, 19). They show her a way to be a way to regard, love, and create herself: brown eyes and all.

So, I would like to make a point of distinction/clarification between my notion of self-love and Steinbock's. On my reading, for Steinbock self-love is an important indicator of who one can become. This love of self appears conditional—i.e. the love will be warranted or fulfilled when one *becomes* the future/better vision/version of oneself. This is problematic on two accounts. One: it suggests that the self can *become* (or come to a fixed way of being or expectation) rather than self and a self-loving that is an ongoing engagement/negotiation/encounter. A self that *becomes* is a self as a teleology, somewhat closed off to possibility. Two: This love is contingent upon a goal that does not originate ***solely*** from the self. It is therefore, not a self-givenness that can truly be said to be a "personal uniqueness". That is, who the self becomes, on this account, is always bound up in a larger hegemonic structure that dictates its fixed end. This is not a sense of self as a *becoming* that engages in encounters that require and respect a certain irreducible otherness (a liminality) (Lugones 1987). This kind of self-love is a self-love *if* others have already approved the self that is loved. And so, for marginalized people Steinbock's account of self-love emerges as a possible site of internalization of oppressive norms.

The self-love that underpins the notion of positive shamelessness takes itself as its point of origin *and* as its first loving encounter. This self-love is solely ours, ancient, and potent. It is self-constitutive (and self-constituting). Such a self-love must be nurtured. It must be treated as an essential, as a necessity for our continual becoming and for our continual living. It is, "what we need to dream, to move our spirits most deeply and directly toward and through promise", and is not a luxury (and I would wager, the inkwell of our poetry); "it is the future of our worlds" (Lorde 2007, 39).

> For each of us as women, there is a dark place within, where hidden and growing our true spirit rises, "beautiful/and tough as chestnut/stanchions against (y)our nightmare of weakness/" and of impotence.
>
> These places of possibility within ourselves are dark because they are ancient and hidden; they have survived and grown strong through the darkness. Within these deep places, each one of us holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. (Lorde 2007, 36-37)
>
> Guileless and without vanity, we were still in love with ourselves then. We felt comfortable in our skins, enjoyed the news that our senses release to us, admired our dirt, cultivated our scars… (Morrison 1994 , 74)

The self-love that I am concerned with is precious in a world that hates you and wants you to hate yourself. This is what the givenness that is operative in Steinbock's account of shame and self-love cannot contemplate: being given nothing. Self-love is radical. For what is more radical, both in a sense of a return to the root (the source of the self, the well-spring of inner voice) and the site of an uprising, a rupture, as looking straight in the eyes of the world that expects you to lower your head? Loving yourself, which requires knowing yourself to be a self and self worthy and deserving of love is radical. Self-love is caring for and nurturing interiority and one's voice. Self-love is holding oneself firmly—but with tenderness—accountable for the flourishing of oneself and one's other loves. Self-love is the necessary condition for truly communicative and creative loving and living encounters with otherselves. It is not dependent on another's norms but reaches out for others. Where the self-love of shame is predicated on the ability to view the self as a place of lack, the self-love of shamelessness is predicated on the ability to view the self as place of possibility, mobility, and futurity. Christina Sharpe (2019) offers what I read as an example of this, in her recent piece on method, "Beauty Is a Method" and her revisiting of her mother's beautifying. She writes:

> Knowing that every day that I left the house many of the people that I encountered did not think me precious and showed me so, my mother gave me space to be precious—as in vulnerable, as in cherished. It is through her that I first learned that beauty is a practice, that beauty is a method… (Sharpe 2019)

One of the things we ought to consider in terms of the difference between these accounts of shame and my account of shamelessness is its directionality, or rather the point of origin from where these experiences/affects originate. Positive accounts of shame are bound to an exteriority; shamelessness to our interiority, specifically a kind of fleshy opacity; bound to the self as a beautiful geography, the self as the geography of the beauty. One of the distinguishing factors of this shamelessness is the role that voice plays. On my positive account of shamelessness, the operative voice is that of the self-lover/the interior. It is a voice that desires to be in conversation with others—to *make* conversation/connection/community—to move toward the beauty of self- and us-creation.

For Blackwomxn to speak is to be and to do their fleshy selves as shameless (hooks 2015). This is partly because to speak is to connect intimately with what has come before, what is here now (it is what it is), and to open an inquiry about what the future holds. Voice is aspirational. To speak is to take time into one's own hands and to make it the tool—of a precaritized or ignored body—for scrying; to breathe into this work. Our voices put us in immediate danger as well as in immediate proximity to make the community require for the change we need.

> I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. …Perhaps for some of you here today, I am the face of one of your fears. Because I am woman, because I am Black, because I am lesbian, because I am myself—(Lorde 2007, 40 & 42)

To speak—to be shameless—to mobilize shamelessness as an ethics, is far more precarious and requires far more risk that to negotiate positive shame. It is to embody the oppressor's fear; it is to confront the turned away face, not shame but in the denial of the speaking/knowing self. It is to be *here* where you are wanted not—or have been displaced as unwanted. It is to speak/sing Blues/ing.

Shamelessness, unlike shame, requires reaching out through and beyond the fear to the other hands waiting to be grasped (because you love your own hands). And it means, often doing this with the voice.

And of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an

> act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger. …[T]o survive in the mouth of this dragon we call america, we have had to learn this first and most vital lesson—that we were never meant to survive. Not as human beings. And neither were most of you here today, Black or not. And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength. Because the machine will try to grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak. (Lorde 2007, 42)

On positive accounts of shame, the voice of the transformable subject is *not* a function of the work. These accounts seem to allow to an orientation toward community but without a dynamic two-way flow of communication.

VII: Prove It On Me

Blues/ing connects generations through the rich and evocative vocabulary of call and response and the Blue note. Hearing Blues/ing, hearing women's language is a beacon for developing one's own voice.

> [B]lack women spoke in a language so rich, so poetic, that it felt to me like being shut off from life, smothered to death if one was not allowed to participate. (hooks 2015, 22)

Blues/ing is an act of claiming the self for the self with love and in the hopes of finding/bridging an audience, a community that listens with open hearts. Blues/ing songs are property of the community. "This socializing character of the Blues/ing renewed conscious the shared nature of emotional experience as well as the collective character of the Blues/ing form itself" (Davis 1999, 136). Shamelessness is the activity of declaring the self-worthy and deserving of right treatment, of recognition, and declaring oneself not alone. Blues/ing and Blues/ing singers seek out and look out for their community, make it one song at a time. The Blues/ing woman says what need to be said for herself and for her community to affect the changes they both need. That is, rather than shamelessness being a denial of love and a disavowal of community and a one-sided communication, Blues/ing is the language of the community, its norms and the singers its voice.[174] Blues/ing shamelessness utilizes

[174] "The symbolic economy of the blue refutes and simply refuses to be subject to the symbolic economy governing mainstream American popular forms" (Davis 1999, 106).

"…song as an emancipatory process" and this emancipation can also be mapped onto the desire for doing/being/becoming better (Davis 1999, 135).

> [B]essie Smith recorded numerous songs involving problems emanating from racism and economic injustice—crime, incarceration, alcoholism, homelessness, and the seemingly insurmountable impoverishment of the black community. In this sense, she further developed the legacy of Gertrude Rainey, whose socially oriented music constituted an aesthetically mediated community-building and assisted in developing a specifically African-American social consciousness. (Davis 1999, 91-92)

What makes Blues/ing an especially potent ethical example is that it is the "public articulation of complaint" or "contestation of oppressive conditions" of hegemonic shaming (most notably from the norms[175] of whiteness). Blues/ing protest always has communal concerns (Davis 1999, 101).

> Interwoven in the broad comedy of this piece is an all-important message about the perseverance and survival of the community. The key is togetherness and solidarity: "Let's both go to the poorhouse together. …We better go to the poorhouse, try to live anyhow." (Davis 1999, 105)

One of the things that marks shamelessness as necessary for precaritized peoples is that it is not merely reactionary. That is, one is not shameless because one has been seen, judged, harassed; one is shameless because one *is* and is oneself wholly (and often flamboyantly). And is, as themselves, loving themselves.

Shamelessness is the mode of a general trait of the shameless and is an ethics that creates the possibility for community and communion beyond the imagination of whiteness. It is a re-orienting of the center as facilitated by self-love and a desire to be with and loving others. Shamelessness Blues the lifeworld of Blues bodies and their loves much in the way that Shug Avery Blues (and purples!) herself and lovingly invites Celie to do for herself.

So let me tell you somethin' Sister:

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[175] The Blues idiom requires absolute honesty in the portrayal of black life. It is an idiom that does not recognize taboos: whatever figures into the larger picture of working-class African-American realities—however moral repugnant it may be to the dominant culture or to the black bourgeoisie—is an appropriate subject of Blues discourse. There are, for example, numerous Blues about prostitution, from both the male perspective—as procurer, as customer, or as the unfortunate man who falls in love with a prostitute—and from the perspective of the prostitute herself. As a rule, these songs do not criticize the institution, but simply treat it as an existing reality. (Davis 1999, 107)

Remember your name!
No twister,
Gonna steal your stuff away.
My sister
(We) Sho' ain't got a whole lot of time.
So shake your shimmy, Sister
'cause honey this Shug
Is feelin' fine!

Outro: Songs Toward Home

I originally started this project thinking about my grandmother's particular, funny, and instructive way of pronouncing the words "home" and "help." The particularity and "funniness" of her pronunciation are holdovers from my encounter with her sounding, this lived practice, as a child. My maternal grandmother's caramel dips and delights tickled, challenged, and compelled me. I was (and am) convinced that she made up her own words and the lexicon of "sugarfoot", "SantaClaus punk", and "sneeckling", enriched an already potent soundscape of mmph, ungh, pshew, and sharpened quiet. She had a way of sounding "girl" that made one girl refer to my sister and other to me, and still another to my cousin. When she said our given names, she singularly gave the giveness, something else, something beyond: Andrea was Undra, Devin was De'h'bin, Janae was Jeh'nny, and my brother, Bernard, was Boy or B'nard(y).[176] This practice was taken up by my aunts. My Aunt Bev (which my

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[176] Baraka riffs on this idea a kind of never-minding the given practiced by Billie Holiday in *Digging* (2009).

> [Holiday] is also never tied to "the given," either the form or the intended content. Billie handles them, changes them, she comes from behind the beat sometimes, sometimes rolling on top of it, sometimes running ahead, her voice stretching or shortening the vowels, the sounds, like a singer, but also with the attention to the specific emotional charge in each syllable like a poet. (Baraka 2009, 220)

In his otherwise masturbatory writing (both in general and specifically) on Lady Day, Baraka does manage, occasionally, to tune into pleasures other than himself. In this moment he speaks to what I consider to a mode of the different social subject, the insurgent flesh of Blackwomanhood. This in/attention to the given resontates with what I take to be the ways that american Black folk in general and american Blackwomxn in general shape and inhabit geographies that at intimate and coeval with but not totalized by white supremacy and anti-Blackness.

In *Black Aliveness, or A Poetics of Being*, Kevin Quashie (2021) compels the reader to "Imagine a Black world" (1-14).

> The invocation of a black world is the operating assumption of black texts, a world where blackness exists in the tussle of being, in reverie and terribleness, in exception and in ordinariness. This black world is not one where the racial logics and harming predilections of antiblackness. are inverted but one where blackness is totality, where every human question and possibility is of people who are black. (Quashie 2021, 1-2)

He invokes Morrison's essay, "Home" and the theme of race-specific (but not mattering) sovereignty to explore this geography of being through Black Literature. His attention to "Black worldmaking" is a kind of nonattention to the Afropessimism currently on trend in Black Studies. This is a project that blues the given.

> In a black world, every black being is of *being*, the verb that infers a process of becoming. Near the conclusion of *Red, White and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*, Wilderson writes, "To say we *must* be free of air, while admitting to knowing no other source of breath, is what I have tried to do here" (338; emphasis in original), an admission that resonates both with the impossibility of imagining a black world and with the sheer urgency of doing just that. I am writing out of that urgency, trying to conceptualize a black world as an aesthetic totality that is free of air and full of ways to breathe. It is why, throughout this work, I hardly use the term "nonbeing"; the human who is black is a being, is of being. The gambit of *Black Aliveness* is that the black one's ontological dilemma is not in regard to not-being or being-against; the ontological dilemma, as such exists, is being. (Quashie 2021, 11)

mother pronounces as Bay-eb) calls me Anj and my Aunt Mary (which my grandma pronounced May-ry) calls my brother Burn (Burn-baby-burn). The sounds of Blackwomxn have shaped a place for me to shape a place in the world, to call it ours and to invite others in.

I: Co-Work

Writing is a lonely process. So, there is something about the project of writing a dissertation, of demonstrating either mastery or promise as a unique and individual scholar, that runs counter to the ideas explored in this project. What situates this work otherwise is the fact that I did not make this project alone. This project is the work and result of a community.

Alongside the work with the members of this committee, this project is the work of my wife, Johanna, whose frustration with the abstract means that there must always be concrete, material, and practical matter of expressing the idea, who reinforces the 8PM hard stop of work for dinner, dogs, and television, and who reminds me that life does not begin and end with grad school.

It is also the work of Jordan Pascoe and Linda Martín Alcoff. If grad school is anyone's fault, it is theirs. Linda for getting me in, and Jordan for keeping me in and sane-ish throughout. I wholeheartedly blame them.

It is the work of dear friends and love(r)s, including (but not limited to) my NYC chosen family who were there, cheering me on when I decided to enroll at Hunter College to complete my BA, and cheered—though sometimes through tears—when we made the move to Atlanta for graduate school, and finally are Zoom cheering me on right now.

Through a careful taking up of Black aesthetic and Black literature he sounds out "black aliveness" which he distinguishes from black life.

> The word here is "aliveness," a quality of being, a term of habitat, a manner and aesthetic, a feeling—or many of them, circuits in an atmosphere. Like breath. We are totality: we are and are of the universe; we are and are of a black world, this us who are cited by that great poetic riff—"they do / they do / they do." This is a conversation of us, black us and our aliveness. (Quashie 2021, 14)

It's the work of my mother, sister, and my grandmother. Two significant events occurred during my writing of the last chapter (proper) of this project. My sister got married and my aunt died. These events happened within two weeks (each a week to the day) of each other. My aunt died; my sister wed; we buried my aunt. We moved in grief, joy, and celebration in that time. And if that ain't fleshy, I don't know what is. One must be capable of simultaneous conflicting emotions to approach a kind of wholeness of feeling/interaction.

What became clear in those difficult and beautiful weeks was the practical bits that Johanna likes, the way the seemingly abstract is a literal engagement with those around us. Those events were kinds of Clearing where "each and all" of us tarried in aspirational geography. We breathed together, we laughed together, we cried and were present for the crying together. We witnessed each other—where witnessing is more potent than mere sight, and is thick with the turning to one another.

Here, in those spaces, we flesh, we turn to each other in sound. For many members of my family at both events it was in shared prayer, or weeping, or song, or dance, or laughter. The loving flesh of my family came together in laughter and lamentation, mourning and merriment, wailings and wild joy, beyond the binary, neverminding death as gone-ness. We were all there. In celebration.

In these two events that might be taken up as disparate in white logic there is an opportunity to think practically about the affective practice of american Black folks. There is also an opportunity to think about geography and orientation, particularly as these concepts stake out notions of place and belonging.

In Baby Suggs, holy's Clearing ceremony she registers a distinction between "here" and "yonder." While these are at once practical—cartological—designations, they do not necessarily conform to a logic of "purity" or discreteness (Lugones 1994). Rather they speak to practices of relation formation and different affective practices of creating and inhabiting space than trouble the cartographical pursuits of whiteness.

In Chapters Three and Four I consider Blues/ing and sound/ing as they open onto affective, expressive, and ethical meaning-making and relationship-making for american Black folk. I also consider for myself, the space in which these relations are formed. One such space is that of the jukejoint or club. But there are other places. And in these ceremonial places—kitchen, Clearing, and church—often it is Blackwomxn who sound out the register of these geographies and Blue the spaces that could otherwise be read as limited places. This particular act of Blues/ing, I take up as a inhabitation otherwise or a practice of the lived flesh, that can be considered homing. This is what I experienced at my sister's wedding and my aunt's funeral.

In the weeks that have passed since my aunt's death, my sister's wedding, and my aunt's funeral, I have thought a lot about how the people in my family sound, both as the sounds we make and what we make in and how we are made with the sound. I have been thinking about the sound of my sister's voice. I have known my sister's voice for her entire life. And through her voice (as well as the voices of my family members), I come to know myself, and I can come to know the shape of this here space. The two weeks between my aunt's death and her funeral, are sounded out, for me, in the voice of my sister. The profound, oceanic grief of breaking the news of our aunt's death to her, the heady, lush cumulonimbus joy of her vows to her husband, and then the hymnal grey of her graveside cries. They way (both the sound and she arrives at the sound), the thickness of specific sonic variation of how she pronounces "Sister" of "Anj" announces as shared and co-created place of being. My sister's voice—as an echo of the voices of other women in my family—is homing.

II: Home-Work

For flesh that has been denied subjectivity, indigeneity, the conflation of familiarity and comfort (Jacobson 2009, 356-359 & 372)[177] and the certainty of place/location in the U.S. american context, is still making a way, making a life. On my account, a white logics of "home" as belonging to the subject or denoting the subject's certain location in the american context, is insufficient to describe the creative achievement/endeavor of fleshy homing.

Homing is part of what McKittrick—in comments made during the April 2017 Conversation between Robin Kelley and Fred Moten (YouTube 2017)—refers to as a "geography." In this conversation McKittrick says, roughly, "We have to think of Black geographies as surveilled, but always working underneath, and across, and outside of those logics and that's where the Blackjoy comes and that's what we have to sort of notice – not the restrictions, but the joy as unmappability of Black geographies." I take up this comment to explore the mapping of blackjoy as that which goes beyond an account of Blackness as (total) social death and Blackidentity as a form of impossibility (or even self-harm). In this sounding out of Blackjoy as "always working underneath, and across, and outside of those logics," I am able to think of a geography as something more insistent than the logics of external space, something beyond the cartographic desires and reach of the logics of whiteness. Homing insists upon this geography.

When I think of homing, I think of a practice ("of love overflowing") that serves as a staging ground for an insurgent flesh and an insurgent mattering that is at home within a Black Feminist and/or a Womanist theoretical praxis. It is *wayward* (Hartman 2019, 227-228).

Another way of putting this is that I understand homing and holpfulness as extensions of the Lordean erotic, which describes a self-love that reaches out for others and both makes possible and

[177] I read Jacobson (2009) as making and working with an implicit claim about home (as being at home) that enacts this conflation. This is an account of home as a physical location (external to the lived body) where one is/feels at home and feels at home because the location feels/is familiar.

requires community.[178] One cannot home without being holpful. Homing is a home-otherwise (and otherwise is a stance beyond opposition or existence-for/as-resistance). Homing supports, but is irreducible to opposition; the way it houses—simultaneously—blackjoy, blackrage, blackgrieving/mourning, and blacklives; as well as the way it makes it possible for one to persist through a deep, vibrant, and winged existence that flies beyond endurance—the endurance of whiteness.[179]

Whiteness is evicting in the sense that racialized bodies emerge into a world as an other—and out—and then through transaction with the world (and the transaction can be at little as daring to breathe) find themselves put outdoors.

> There is a difference between being put *out* and being put out*doors*. If you are put out, you go somewhere else; if you are outdoors, there is no place to go. The distinction was subtle but final. Outdoors was the end of something, and irrevocable, physical fact, defining and complementing our metaphysical condition. (Morrison 2004, 17)

The metaphysical condition of eviction, of outdoors-ness has—as Spillers notes (2003, 206)—"a common historical ground"—a material point of origin. Hartman, in *Lose Your Mother* (2007) performs a powerful meditation on forgetting—a necessary kind of magic—and natal alienation that must be performed and endured to survive the crossing.

Moreover, the daily minute assaults by papercuts of whiteness—"Can I touch your hair?" "Affirmative Action is reverse-racism." "Black people say call each other 'nigger' all the time; why can't white people do it?"—are transactional facticities that put black bodies outdoors. These evictions attempt to mitigate our foreshortened past in such a way as to foreclose our futures.

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[178] The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.
Another important way in which the erotic connection functions is the open and fearless underlining of my capacity for joy. (Lorde 2007, 56)

[179] Not only is endurance not enough; it is not a robust or theoretically loving—particularly when I think along with Yancy, of love in Baldwinian terms, as a "profound risk" (Yancy 2015, xxi) (Baldwin 1993, 9-10, 86, 95, 102)—account of Blackliving. For no "intelligent person [is] content merely existing" (Hartman 2019, 214).

Whiteness says to us you came from nowhere *and* you have nowhere to go. It says that we are locked, fixed, objects in the rapidly diminishing present. It is, as Morrison describes the difference between death and being dead. Whiteness means to engage with us only as unlived experience. It does not know of the magic we have held onto and deploy in practices of self-love (like homing, which allows us to become neighbors) so that we flourish and Blues the white.

Yonder is what is given, the emerging inhospitable world that rejects and tortures black and brown lived flesh, and puts them out as body-objects. Baby Suggs, holy's "this here place" in the bluebright and green cathedral of "The Clearing" is the here that has been created beyond the reach of yonder. It is an invocation of a loving practice that carries its resistance in its weeping, laughter, and dance, in these spaces made together that are carried in the flesh as lived and loved, and burst through the scars on formerly enchained skin. Some of us are our homes. We carry our homes in ourselves, make them brick by brick from the stuff of us and so claim our flesh's lived-in-ness; to claim our flesh as receptive and to take up the flesh as generative and creative. Our homes are not given. We make them.

III: Sounds of Homing

Sounding, self, and loving combine the practice of homing such that my sister's voice can be an example of this practice of way- and home-making (homing). Claudia MacTeer, the narrator of *The Bluest Eye* provides an example that rings true to me. Claudie, the youngest daughter of the family that takes Pecola in after her father has put them outdoors who opens the windows to her home to invite us to witness a homing practice.

> The real question would have been, "Dear Claudia, what experience would you like on Christmas?" I would have spoken up, "I want to sit on the low stool in Big Mama's kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone." The lowness of the stool made for my body, the security and warmth of Big Mama's kitchen, the smell of the lilacs, the sound of the music, and, since it would be good to have all of my senses engaged, the taste of a peach, perhaps, afterward. (22)

Claudia displays a loving and sensual understanding of herself as *deserving* of delights and love. She carries with her a clear and architecturally sound home. Her home is ripe with sensory/bodily pleasure and possibility as well as things that reach and are made for her. She identifies things in her favourite world and uses them to ornament the home that she has built. Though from her attention to what the "real question would have been" we see that her home is a space made in interaction with others and aural and olfactory delight. Though Claudia says that the addition of the "taste of a peach" would engage all of her sense, one sense—sight—is curiously omitted. Instead, it is the porous and fleshy sense of touch, sound, smell, and taste that guide her experience and being-amongness. Her geography is boundaried less topography—or even boundary at all—as it is the more promiscuous and contiguous senses.

What is also powerful about Claudia's homing practice is that she is concerned with the experience. This is not a place of stasis. There is movement in the home. Who knows, after the violin playing there may be dancing or singing! Anything could happen and she will embrace it when it does. She is committed to this comfort not merely being a secret she keeps to herself, a refuge or a hideaway. She desires to *live* it. To have it in her world. This experience is one of her perceiving and of her generously and lovingly making room for others to join her. She expands entirely in this space, and then, with the perhaps of a peach, expands the space itself. She loves herself and so can love others without losing herself, without compromising herself, and without regret. She can invite other into her room/experience. My sister's voice is an invitation, a sensorial and affective opening for some way through, to be create. And in joy, sorrow, and celebration hers was the voice that my way to the Clearing in those beautiful and terrible weeks.

IV: Coda

Come on

in my room[180]
Come on in
my room
Jesus is my doctor
and he
writes out all of prescriptions
and he
gives me all of my medicine
in my room

The man at the pulpit is too young to know these songs, to feel them where the marrow meets the bone—as my grandma might say. He knows the songs because he was "raised right" raised to lead, to sweat sorrow into the pulpit oiled to the height of possibility by arthritic hands working in spite of their gnarling past wood, the knees shot from kneeling, and the ankles antagonistic to further standing. These old women dressed in white learned these songs from their mother's mothers, learned these songs from just this side of emancipation. My grandmother's grandmother might not have known she was born free.

(Because, was she?)

Of the time the Klan came to burn the cross in my grandmother's yard after she cut the whitegirl in the fields for insulting her and her brother, for her snarl of a laugh and illiterate smile, my grandmother said:

> "And all for what? Because I taught that whitegirl to smile. She couldn't even *spell* smile. She smiled at me all the time after that. Had to. I fixed it for her."

The church is small, dingy, unless the old ladies are in it. Filled with some kind of something that makes them light on their feet and their hands filled with clapping. This here room.

They carry around their rooms all day, a home in the Lord, the Lord in their heart, a home in themselves forever and ever ahem—and ain't He good? All the time—and then every second Sunday in the month provided Deacon Smith can get the boiler started in the winter. My mother calls them

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[180] Note: various sites on the internet attribute this song to The Georgia Mass Choir and list the lyrics as: Come on in *the* room. That the women in my grandmother's church substituted "my" for "the" makes my case all the more, I think.

"dearths", the low moan of testimony and tribulation, the glacial upheaval of the Ways they have been brought through. Though my mother prefers tambourines and organs she knows and respects this clearing made and settles herself into the formerly refurbished movie theater seats cum pews with their *too old for this shit* sighs.

`This… sharing of that which had been cared for independently all month, the careful way my grandmother unwrapped her Juicy Fruit gum, the only time she ever chewed gum. And the fact that nearly every song was about a space that had been fought for, created, maintained—with the help of or grace of Jesus or THE LORD, but not dependent on THE LORD or Jesus for its existence—by old women that O my people! yonder they did not love. These sounds that are prior and after me. They smell like the ocean, like what has and has not been lost in the great journey to me. Ours.

They loved themselves. Used special blue laundry detergent to keep their whites white. Bathed clean in borax and the blood of the lamb their self-concern was sanctified, holy. Jesus came into *their rooms* to meet *Them*, holy. They invited him into space that *they* had made. He did what he could. They did all the rest.

In their room.

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