

The Weight of History: From Heidegger to Afro-Pessimism

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Abstract

How does affect relate to time? This chapter offers a phenomenological perspective on the temporal character of affectivity. It argues that the past predominates, and that a concrete, ongoing history prevails within the embodied and embedded unfolding of affect. While affect *happens* in the present and instigates, pre-figures and transitions to the future, it is decisively anchored in *what has been*: in a materially sedimented past which continues to weigh on all conceivable ways of being. With reference to Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Fanon and contemporary feminist and anti-racist phenomenologists, I outline the contours of a temporal account of affectivity that foregrounds the past. Subsequently, I relate this outlook to Christina Sharpe's powerful conceptual metaphor 'the Wake', suggesting that it is not historicity as such but a particular ongoing history of violent appropriation, oppression and displacement that keeps setting the tone for affective being-in-the-world in this day and age. Thereby, the present account makes tentative contact with a strand of work in black studies that is sometimes called 'Afro-Pessimism'.

Keywords: affect, embodiment, institutions, temporality, Frantz Fanon, Martin Heidegger, Christina Sharpe

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1. *Introduction: Affect and the Past*

According to an influential recent approach, affect is event-like: occurrent, momentary – a matter of the *now*. Affective episodes are construed as tangible impacts, they touch sensually and bodily in the present moment. Relatedly, affect is often thought to be an instigator of change: a dynamic transition from one state of embodied existence to another, a process of becoming. Instantaneous and transformative affective stirrings and intensities figure prominently in an influential line of work on affect, spearheaded by Brian Massumi and other cultural theorists.² These approaches have been productive, emphasizing affect's potential as a transformative dynamic that opens up the present towards the nascent and new. Yet, in this chapter, I will take a different route by focusing on affect's foundational relationship to the past.

Underneath the bodily dynamics of a present bout of affect there is an enduring, much less volatile thicket of affective being-in-the-world. It is an affective layer of experience that manifests the past in the mode of its continued weighing on individual and collective being. The past – what *has been* – lingers on, individually and collectively, within the depths of corporeal comportment and within material texture of social, institutional, worldly formations. Affect in this second understanding is not a high-speed, future-directed transition, but an enduring, longer-term situatedness. Only on the grounds – sometimes against the grain – of these persisting sheets of solidified affectivity will situational affective responses with their (sometimes) rapid dynamics develop and become intelligible. The importance of such enduring background affectivity can be brought out by engaging concrete strands of history and the afterlives of particular historical developments. I will refer this here specifically to what Christina Sharpe calls *The Wake* (2016): the weighty path that historical events draw through time; in particular, the afterlife of the ongoing drama of transatlantic chattel slavery. The following is about how the ramifications of this epochal breach of humanity register and endure in the form of a sustained affective texture, and thus about how the past is not over, but remains operative within the practical, material and sensual fabric of the present.

Affectivity and time make contact at a decisive juncture: where the past – 'beenness' – is manifest as concretely and materially weighing on the present. When Heidegger in *Being and Time* claimed that affectivity – in his terms: *Befindlichkeit*, i.e. *attunement* or *disposedness* – discloses facticity, he condensed this line of thought and provided a set of concepts to come

² See e.g. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC, 2002); Brian Massumi, *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts* (Cambridge, MA, 2011). For an overview, see Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC, 2010).

to terms with it.³ I want to revive this perspective in a transformed and concretized guise, for the purpose of motivating and informing a critical phenomenology of historical affectivity.

Heidegger glossed the dimension of affectivity as *Befindlichkeit*—this is on the one hand related to a term from colloquial German, *sich befinden*—which means “feeling a certain way”, “faring so and so”; but also in a literal sense means *being somewhere*, being situated, finding oneself *right here*, in these concrete circumstances. So one might translate *Befindlichkeit* as *findingness* or even as *so-findingness*,⁴ as “where we’re at ness”⁵, or simply as ‘situatedness’. Being in an affective state amounts to finding oneself ‘here’, at a particular juncture, confronted by what has been, what is factual, what has come to be so that we have no choice but to go on from *here*.⁶ There is an obvious link between facticity and the past: a ‘fact’ is that which ‘has been made’. Facticity accordingly refers to what happened or has been brought about so that it is now ‘here’, forming the backdrop, enabling condition and starting point—but also the load, burden, hindering weight—for whatever will unfold from now on.

Heidegger designates this baseline condition with the term ‘thrownness’, a concept that figuratively conveys both the burdensome character of finding oneself situated (or, in his own words: ‘delivered over’ to the world) and the inevitability of having to go on – *from here*. The ‘here’ indicates what we have factually become so that we ended up where we’re at and thus what we have no choice but to carry along moving forward. ‘Thrownness’ is both individual and historical-collective, and it is at the point of fusion of individual and collective historicity where Heidegger’s perspective is most relevant and noteworthy.

For the somewhat overly ‘activist’ Heidegger of *Being and Time*, beenness is only manifest as *summoned toward* understanding projection, and is thus disclosed according to its relevance for prospective ways of going on. This is reminiscent of Husserl’s phenomenological account of temporality in terms of the coordinated interplay of retention, protention and primal impression.⁷ In Heideggerian terms, one might say that affectively disclosed thrownness is the burdensome ‘drag’ that grounds forward-pressing projection (*Entwurf*), i.e. the inevitability of projection unfolding within a factual space of possibilities

³ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen, 1927); *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford, 1962), §29.

⁴ See John Haugeland, *Dasein Disclosed. John Haugeland’s Heidegger*. ed. Joseph Rouse (Cambridge, MA, 2013), p. 196.

⁵ Hubert Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, MA, 1991), p. 168.

⁶ Cf. Haugeland, *Dasein Disclosed*, p. 234.

⁷ See Edmund Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, trans. Anthony J. Steinbock (Dordrecht, 2001).

that one cannot shake free of. In this way, findingness – manifest in each case in certain specific moods or emotions – reveals the inevitability of our factual being, the acknowledgement of which we will likely have already evaded in diverting absorption in some worldly issue or other, since, for the most part, “moods disclose in the mode of an evasive turning away.”⁸

I take this Heideggerian starting point as the foundation for a philosophical approach to affective world-disclosure (*affective intentionality*). This approach can inform a conceptual sketch that might help theorists and critics come to terms with the way a collectively instituted historical facticity continues to shape habits, ways of being, institutions, and life chances in the present. This perspective helps focus attention on the way affect both discloses and occludes one’s relevant surroundings. While affective comportment is a form of evaluative awareness of salient matters, by the same stroke it often works as an experiential smoke screen that diverts attention away from what is manifestly ‘there’, in the world, before our very eyes. As Heidegger points out repeatedly, affectivity crucially works by letting us *not* see or behold certain things or issues, while it highlights, frames and embellishes others.

In the following I will relate this understanding of the double tendency of affective disclosure explicitly to the theme of historicity. This requires bringing out the extent to which affectivity is inextricable from collective historicity, despite widespread efforts – including pre- or semi-conscious evasions – to prevent this circumstance from surfacing explicitly. By taking this into account and to heart, the philosophical study of affectivity can work as a corrective to predominant narratives, representational frames, aesthetic regimes that institute a selective, cleansed, straightened formation of ‘paramount reality’.⁹ If conducted in this key, the philosophical study of affect can help to critically reveal layers of distrust, dishonesty and inauthenticity within contemporary social and political life, and notably also within its official thematizing, in public discourse, in media practices, and within the debates of philosophy. Philosophical approaches to affect are not detached, depoliticized, nor merely descriptive endeavors. Instead they concern the sensual texture of our historical being, and their concepts are not neutral instruments but performative devices for engaging the live tissue of situated existence in the here and now – active and activating vehicles of thought.

⁸ Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 136; *Being and Time*, p. 175 (translation modified). I provide a reconstruction of Heidegger temporality-centered account of affectivity in Jan Slaby, “Affectivity and Temporality in Heidegger,” in *Feeling and Value, Willing and Action*, eds. Marta Ubiali and Maren Wehrle, *Phaenomenologica* 216 (Dordrecht, 2015), 183-206.

⁹ Cf. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London, 2009).

2. *Preliminary notes on affect and the afterlife*

What Saidiya Hartman and others call the “afterlife of slavery” has concrete affective manifestations.¹⁰ In this section, I provide all too brief initial hints in order to set the stage for what follows. A key starting point, from a phenomenological perspective, is Frantz Fanon’s analysis of racial embodiment in *Black Skin, White Masks*¹¹ (1952). Fanon expounds the social genesis of racialized existence in various registers, focusing on language, on psychopathology, on the body, on institutions and much else, with the dual aim to enable ‘disalienation’ of those subject to persistent structural racial oppression, and, on part of his white readers, critical insight into their own involvement in and complicity with racialization. At the outset, Fanon states: “The architecture of this work is rooted in the temporal.”¹² The link between historicity, affect and the lived body finds particularly clear expression in Fanon’s description of the epidermalization of a historical-racial schema:

And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man’s eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. [...]. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty.

Below the corporeal schema I had sketched a historical-racial schema. The elements that I used had been provided for me [...] by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories. [...] I could no longer laugh [...] the corporeal schema crumbled, *its place taken by the racial epidermal schema*.¹³

Fanon outlines an existential phenomenology of the internalization of the colonial gaze: how a hostile, objectifying perception – historically sustained over generations and sedimented deeply within institutions, practices and discourse – gets inscribed into the body schema of the colonized subjects. What he famously called ‘epidermalization’ is a process by which an alien historicity – in the form of a register of cultural (mis)representations, imaginations and stereotypes – gets loaded into the embodied self-

¹⁰ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York/Oxford, 1997).

¹¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York, 2008).

¹² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 5

¹³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 83.

image of the colonized by way of series of incessant micro-acts of dismissive perceptions, judgments and evaluations; a sustained violent process of cultural othering that ultimately takes over the operative body schema.¹⁴

In his acclaimed essay *Between the World and Me*,¹⁵ written in the form of a letter to his adolescent son, U.S. writer Ta-Nehisi Coates describes the embodied affectivity of black life in the U.S. under the ongoing curse of white supremacy. Similar to what Fanon had pointed out, Coates relates how a history of sustained systemic violence, its material manifestations and its schemas of representation encircle and invade black existence at every turn. Coates gives particular weight to capturing the atmosphere, the tangible affective texture and background affectivity of black being-in-the-world:

To be black in the Baltimore of my youth was to be naked before the elements of the world, before all the guns, fists, knives, crack, rape, and disease. The nakedness is not an error, nor pathology. The nakedness is the correct and intended result of policy, the predictable upshot of people forced for centuries to live under fear. The law did not protect us.

[Y]ou are a black boy, and you must be responsible for your body in a way that other boys cannot know. (...) And you must be responsible for the bodies of the powerful—the policeman who cracks you with a nightstick will quickly find his excuse in your furtive movements. And this is not reducible to just you—the women around you must be responsible for their bodies in a way that you never will know. You have to make your peace with the chaos, but you cannot lie. You cannot forget how much they took from us and how they transfigured our very bodies into sugar, tobacco, cotton, and gold.¹⁶

Coates conveys the daunting physical precariousness of black being in the U.S. by way of an account that is cognizant throughout of a deep and ongoing history of violent appropriation of black lives and a pervasive anti-black racism. Thanks to a plain, reduced style of writing Coates gives his scenes a striking immediacy. It almost suffices to just record, in a matter-of-factual way, a series of scenes of everyday life that have in recent

¹⁴ Cf. Alia Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation: Interrupting Racializing Habits of Seeing,” in *Living Alterities: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and Race*, ed. Emily Lee (New York, 2014), 133-72.

¹⁵ Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York, 2015).

¹⁶ Coates, *Between the World and Me*, p. 17.

months and years ended in violence against – often even violent death of – black U.S. citizens. Days after a white gunman shot six black women and three men at Emanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston, South Carolina, poet Claudia Rankine wrote the following in a New York Times op-ed:

Though the white liberal imagination likes to feel temporarily bad about black suffering, there really is no mode of empathy that can replicate the daily strain of knowing that as a black person you can be killed for simply being black: no hands in your pockets, no playing music, no sudden movements, no driving your car, no walking at night, no walking in the day, no turning onto this street, no entering this building, no standing your ground, no standing here, no standing there, no talking back, no playing with toy guns, no living while black.¹⁷

Black existence as such is periled as disposable, constitutively placed on the brink of death. In their respective writings, Fanon, Rankine and Coates – each drawing on strands of a long legacy of black radical thought – make this evident and graspable, they convey the stunning facticity of a world founded on the violent appropriation of black lives. These texts provide a conceptual optic and atmospheric tone that unabashedly reveals a vast landscape of anti-blackness as a prevailing temporal condition. If an existential analytic of human affectivity aspires to enlighten the temporality of present-day affective experience, it is well-advised to start right here.¹⁸

3. Historicizing Affective Intentionality

3.1 *Self- and World-Disclosure*

In this section I sketch a Heidegger-inspired approach to affective intentionality. Briefly put, affective world-disclosure is a matter of finding oneself situated in a context of action and being that always already matters in specific ways. ‘Finding oneself in a context that matters’ might provisionally be unpacked as follows: In affectivity, there is an interplay of self- and world-disclosure as well as one between a background dimension and a foreground

¹⁷ Claudia Rankine, “The Condition of Black Life is one of Mourning,” *The New York Times*, (June 22, 2015).

¹⁸ These texts align with a contemporary current of scholarly writing that is sometimes labeled ‘Afro-Pessimism’. Inspired by Fanon and spearheaded by Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Frank B. Wilderson III and Jared Sexton, this strand of work grapples with the world-building historical force of violent anti-blackness. Several central writings by the named authors are now available in the open access reader *Afro-Pessimism: An Introduction* (Minneapolis, 2017), retrieved from: <https://rackedanddispatched.noblogs.org/files/2017/01/Afro-Pessimism2.pdf> (last accessed August 19, 2018).

dimension.¹⁹ Out of a background sense for what is already significant – manifest in the form of standing cares and concerns – an agent encounters something specific as mattering in such and such concrete ways. The various emotions are such affective encounters with something that specifically matters. For example, a background sense for one’s own vulnerability (fearfulness) lets one approach and register what goes on in the world in terms of potential threats; when a concrete threat appears, the default fearfulness turns into a foreground episode of fear, intentionally directed at that particular threat. Thus goes a schematic outline of the contours of this view.

Temporality figures centrally in this approach: An agent’s concerns make up a standing dimension of background affectivity that has been laid down in the past, while the specific characteristics in virtue of which a given object impinges on these concerns are likewise historical. No matter what is the case with *this particular* policeman stopping your car at night, the history of police practice in a nation build on a legacy of white supremacy and anti-black racism bestows upon the officer the character of threat vis-à-vis your own status and position as a black person. Such a historically shaped and environmentally embedded interplay of self-disclosure and world-disclosure in evaluative terms comes up in one way or another in all manifestations of affectivity.

3.2 The importance of background affectivity

Several things can be taken from this. The first is the general importance of the ‘background’ for understanding any given episode of affective intentionality. This takes us directly to temporality, as ‘background’ is a matter of what *has come to be* – a concrete history as sedimented in the materialities and meaning-structures of a world and in the attitudinal structures of those dwelling in that world. We encounter our current situation out of an evaluative background that is already in place and that does not change in a haphazard fashion. Charles Taylor speaks of a *self-understanding* and of the activity of *self-interpretation* when it comes to specifying this background dimension.²⁰ A key component of Taylor’s position is that emotions and affective compartments make up a focal dimension of an active self-understanding. Emotions both anchor and manifest a person’s ‘deep valuations’, those that she will inevitably draw on in making sense of her situation. In the trajectory of Taylor’s work lies the idea that our entire embodied being – down to its very

¹⁹ Cf. Bennett W. Helm, *Emotional Reason. Deliberation, Motivation, and the Nature of Value* (Cambridge, 2001).

²⁰ Charles Taylor, “Self-Interpreting Animals,” in *Human Agency and Language*, ed. Charles Taylor, Philosophical Papers 1 (Cambridge, 1985), 45–76.

nuances in all those miniscule ways individuals act and comport themselves – is pervaded by profound yet often inchoate evaluative orientations, laid down in the past and inextricable from a formative cultural surround. These orientations are not individual matters but culturally shared patterns, established in the course of cultural history and crystallized, over time, into material-discursive frameworks of valuation to which we are collectively beholden.

This is what Heidegger is trying to get at with his concept ‘*Befindlichkeit*’, i.e. *disposedness, findingness* – an enduring dimension of evaluative world- and self-disclosure, always manifest, if often latently and unacknowledged. *Befindlichkeit*, as an ontological condition, has widely different ontic concretions, ranging from individual emotions or moods to collective atmospheres as “something which in advance determine our being with one another.”²¹ In this sense, then, *thrownness* is not an abstract ontological condition, but it is ‘live’, it figures as a changing dimension of manifest weight, as a felt burden within existence itself – or correlatively in the form of a certain lightness of being. In these cases, thrownness manifests as a levitating tendency of the lived body in case one finds oneself in welcoming circumstances (or if one coasts through spheres of privilege as many white, able-bodied, upper or middle class Westerners routinely do, especially if they also happen to be male).

Often, this dimension of background affectivity is spelled out in terms of ‘moods’; Heidegger speaks of ‘*Stimmungen*’; a category which today tends to be taken in a rather homogenizing way as just a sensorial ‘state-of-mind’. Yet, as the relatively short history of the word ‘*Stimmung*’ shows, there is a direct link to the Latin term ‘*dispositio*’ and its English derivative ‘disposition’, which means ordered arrangement of elements (originally, the verb ‘*stimmen*’ refers to the tuning of a musical instrument: preparing and arranging an assortment of parts so as to have it ready for play). In Heidegger’s adoption, *Stimmung* and *Befindlichkeit* – here aptly translated as *disposedness*²² describe the dimension of a person’s being variously in- or out of tune with their surroundings—thus explicitly including states of disarray (‘*Verstimmung*’): a spectrum between being well- or ill-disposed, either composed or deranged, dispersed.²³

3.3 *Disclosive postures*

The background dimension of affectivity is not all that matters for present purposes. The full

²¹ Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik. Welt, Endlichkeit, Einsamkeit*, Gesamtausgabe Band 29/30 (Frankfurt am Main, 1983), p. 100; *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeil and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington, IN, 1995), p. 66.

²² See William Blattner, *Heidegger’s Being and Time. A reader’s Guide* (London/New York, 2006).

²³ David E. Wellbery, “*Stimmung*,” *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe. Historisches Wörterbuch*, 7 vols. eds. Karlheinz Barck et al. (Stuttgart/Weimar, 2003) 5: 703-33.

story requires a precise understanding of the affective ‘foreground’ as well. It is only in the interplay between background (disposedness and situatedness) and foreground (focal orientation) that affective comportment can be adequately understood. A generic process-term apt for capturing the operative intentionality of foreground affective comportment is ‘posture’. I take this notion from Heidegger expert Kate Withy,²⁴ who speaks of emotions as *disclosive postures*, as the various ways of losing, gaining or maintaining composure; thus, as something that is in the dimension of what we would call postures or stances—*attitudes* in an emphatic sense: “ways of standing or being positioned in our situation and towards it.”²⁵ As Withy outlines, Heidegger’s approach to findingness is influenced by Aristotle’s considerations on *pathé*.²⁶ There are several good reasons for why ‘disclosive posture’ is a good way to characterize the nature and dynamics of affective comportment. First, ‘posture’ bespeaks an involvement of the whole person; all dimensions of one’s embodied being are in play when adopting and enacting a posture, the same goes for emotions and other affective episodes. Second, ‘posture’ captures the mutuality of self- and world-disclosure in affective intentionality: a posture is adopted *towards something*, at the same time the posture manifests in each case our specific, concrete way of being in and relating to the world. Third, postures unfold on a continuum between active adoption and deliberate maintenance and one’s being passively drawn into them. Fourth, postures admit of dimensional modification, they are not necessarily all-out affairs, although they *may* be – we can *firmly* adopt a posture, or *hesitatingly*, wholeheartedly or tentatively. Fifth, postures, while in the dimension of selfhood, are eminently prone to social modulation. We can be drawn into a posture under the sway of a charismatic individual, and we ourselves might likewise, through our posture, exert a noticeable influence on the demeanor of those in our vicinity, either willingly or inadvertently. Sixth and finally, postures are the sort of thing that admits of praise and blame. At one end of the spectrum, there are virtuous postures such as courage, for instance, that you ‘own’ your fear and act adequately out of it. More specifically, our postures can be assessed with regard to a situational standard of good measure: In view of the threat we face, is the fear I display or enact adequately measured to it or is it excessive or inappropriately moderate?

²⁴ Kate Withy, “Owned Emotions: Affective Excellence in Heidegger and Aristotle,” in *Heidegger, Authenticity and the Self: Themes from Division Two of Being and Time*, ed. Denis McManus (New York, 2015).

²⁵ Withy, “Owned Emotions,” p. 23.

²⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie*, ed. Mark Michalski, Gesamtausgabe Band 18 (Frankfurt am Main, 2002); *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. Robert D. Metcalf and Mark B. Tanzer (Bloomington, IN, 2009).

4. *Corporeal Institutions and Lateral Passivity*

“[P]assionately feelings and behaviors are... in fact institutions,”²⁷ says Merleau-Ponty. This can prompt us toward exploring the social and historical dimension of affective intentionality in more detail. Institutions consist of routines and patterns that codify past process so as to facilitate habitualized re-enactment in a given social arena. Part of the point of Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of institutions is that individual corporeal comportment likewise takes on institutional form: there is no robust ontological cut between individual *habits* and public or social *institutions*, but rather a constitutive interplay and transition between these poles. Thus, Merleau-Ponty does not privilege social history over the personal history or vice versa, and in this his view is compatible with the understanding of emotions as disclosive postures. Emotional orientations will for the most part gain an enduring dimension, they will, within limits, solidify into habitual modes of comportment, so that one might call them ‘personalized’ institutions: habits, relatively enduring response dispositions as effective *corporeal* institutions. Yet, at the same time these are constitutively enmeshed with the public institutional landscape of the social world, both with formal institutions (the law, education, public administration etc.) and with all those informal ones laid down in communal ways of living, i.e. shared habitual ways of seeing, judging, evaluating, acting, feeling etc. (cf. Al-Saji 2014). Merleau-Ponty also develops the idea of a self-world-mutuality in the way these embodied institutions come about, where he speaks of an *entre-deux* of our embodied being and the environment, and of a ‘vertiginous proximity’ between subject and object, a co-constitution in the process by which these emotional orientations come about.²⁸

For present purposes, the main point of interest is that in the formation of individual comportment, embodied, intercorporeal interaction plays a decisive role, and this is to such an extent that the resulting habits of perception and modes of affective comportments carry and sustain a *sedimented sociality*. Merleau-Ponty speaks of a *lateral passivity*.²⁹ According to him, receptivity in general – the perceptual and affective openness to the world – is laterally aligned with receptive comportment of others with whom one shares communal ways of life. Vision, for instance, is a habitually engrained, incessantly re-enacted normative structure that is shared among members of a community or cultural group (this pertains both

²⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Phenomenology of Perception,” quoted by Kym MacLaren, “The ‘Entre-Deux’ of Emotions: Emotions as Institutions,” in *The Development of Perception in Merleau-Ponty*, eds. Kirsten Jacobson and John Russon (Toronto, 2016), p. 51.

²⁸ MacLaren, “The ‘Entre-Deux’ of Emotions.”

²⁹ See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Le problème de la passivité,” in *Résumés de Cours* (Paris, 1968).

to *what* is seen and to *how* it gets seen). As creatures of habit, human individuals are intimately aligned with others down to the minutiae of their embodied modes of engaging the world. Accordingly, seeing is *seeing-with-others*... Likewise *feeling*, when it is a matter of sustained bodily comportment, is *feeling-with-others*. This active sociality of comportment has stabilizing effects, we keep one another in line, and also lock arms collectively against unwanted or unseemingly contents. This is both a blessing and a curse, as the socially shared repertoire of forms and modes of world-relatedness, while enabling, at the same time effects exclusions, harbors blank spots, cultivates islands of ignorance.³⁰ There is a notable “conservatism of the visual field,”³¹ as human collectives institute “orderings of the sensible”, with zones of salience and high-resolution next to shadowy zones and outright lacunae. Given this, putative ‘strangers’ will be all the more notable, as they conspicuously deviate from the common modes of world-relatedness, and these deviations will be readily apparent to the ‘natives’. Embodied postures, that which seems most pointedly a matter of self-possession, individual ways of holding oneself together and engaging the world from a personal standpoint, are themselves socially shaped, socially reinforced and stabilized and of course normatively sanctioned.

Another negative flip side of the sociality of corporeal comportment is brought out by Alia Al-Saji³²: In her critical reconstruction of Husserl’s approach to touch and to the bodily ‘I can’, Al-Saji not only critiques the individualist tendencies of Husserl’s view in general, but also his (and many of his followers’) failure to address the ways in which objectifying gazes and touches can take a hold of, for instance, feminine embodiment, contributing to the enforced constitution of inhibited modes of bodily comportment. This resonates with Iris Marion Young’s³³ influential work on feminine embodiment.³⁴ Al-Saji writes:

³⁰ Cf. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana, eds., *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance* (Albany, NY, 2007).

³¹ Al-Saji, “A Phenomenology of Hesitation,” p. 156.

³² Alia Al-Saji, “Bodies and Sensings. On the Use of Husserlian Phenomenology for Feminist Theory,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 43 (2010), 13-37.

³³ Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: “Throwing Like a Girl” and Other Essays* (New York, 2005).

³⁴ Several valuable phenomenological and post-phenomenological studies of gendered and racialized embodiment have been published in recent years, drawing and elaborating on the work of Frantz Fanon and Iris Marion Young among others. Often, Merleau-Ponty serves as a source in the background, to a lesser extent also Husserl and Heidegger. For a subsection of these important strands of work, see Linda Martin Alcoff, “Merleau-Ponty and Feminist Theory on Experience,” in *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty’s Notion of Flesh*, eds. Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (New York, 2000) pp. 251-72; Johanna Oksala, “A Phenomenology of Gender,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 39 (2006), 229-44. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC, 2006); Sara Ahmed, “A Phenomenology of Whiteness,” *Feminist Theory* 8 no. 2 (2007), 149–168. George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race* (Lanham, MD, 2008); Sara Heinämaa, “Sex, Gender, and Embodiment,” in *Handbook in Contemporary Phenomenology*, ed. Dan

[W]omen's bodies, in many modern Western cultures, are perceived to be more touchable than others, to be objects for a reifying and sexualizing, particularly masculine, touch. In response to this possessive touch, feminine embodiment seems habituated to a certain defensive, tactile selfcontainment. [...] feminine embodiment becomes constituted as occupying a narrow and enclosed space, inhibited from touching upon the space of others.³⁵

There is a historically sustained hetero-affection in touch in this destructive sense also – all the more pernicious as even the kernel of the corporeal sense of self might become a site of an invasive hetero-constitution, a forced objectification, in environments with prevailing sexist or racist tendencies. Al-Saji makes clear that this dimension of embodied being is not an afterthought, so that the aspiration to descriptive neutrality in much classical phenomenological work comes out as problematic. The assumption that one must start by analyzing a unchanging core of gender-neutral comportment, universal to all, which is the proper subject of phenomenology, whereas gender-, race- or class-specific formations comprise a thin surface layer clad on top of this, is highly spurious.

There are important similarities between these corporeal patterns of gendering and the 'historico-racial schema' that Fanon speaks of when he characterizes the bodily comportment of the colonized subject. It is another instance of a hetero-constituted corporeal institution that can only be understood in its relation to the past. What Fanon describes as the 'historico-racial-schema' lies beneath the operative body schema as a fleshly layer of manifest historicity injected from without. Its elements, Fanon famously writes, "had been provided for me [...] by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories."³⁶ The result is a severely distorted, inhibited intentionality – while on the other side of the color line we find the stiffened perceptual routines of the white man's gaze. Fanon calls this arresting of vision and receptivity in general *affective ankylosis*.³⁷ When the racializing gaze hits its target, it "interpolates the black subject by identifying him with his skin colour and positioning him within a racialized frame of reference (linked to a black

Zahavi (Oxford, 2012); Lauren Freeman, "Phenomenology of Racial Oppression," *Knowledge Cultures* 3 (2015), 24-44. See also the contributions in Emily S. Lee, *Living Alterities: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and Race* (New York, 2014).

³⁵ Al-Saji, "Bodies and Sensings," p. 33.

³⁶ Fanon, "Black Skins," p. 84.

³⁷ Fanon, "Black Skins," p. 92. Cf. Al-Saji, "A Phenomenology of Hesitation."

past).³⁸ What results are profound feelings of belonging to a stereotyped black past – weighing on the colonized person’s body as a burden, occluding the lived present, simultaneously displacing and inhibiting it.³⁹ Al-Saji writes:

The closed past, with which colonized and racialized peoples are identified, is *instituted* and *inhabited*; it is a lifeworld of habitualities and not merely a representation. This past has taken on reality; it has *been made* through the very processes of colonization and ongoing racialization and by means of the distortions and reactions they produce. Yet these processes of institution are themselves forgotten, covered over by the apparent directedness of colonization to the modern and futural.⁴⁰

This importantly resonates with Sara Ahmed’s phenomenological study of contemporary institutions of whiteness and their impacts on everyday conduct and experience.⁴¹ Ahmed’s analysis concerns the often initially inconspicuous ways in which white privilege is perpetuated and iteratively re-embodied in the spaces and operations of public institutions, and how it becomes manifest within different affective modes of embodied being-in-the-world. Institutions work like a social exo-skeleton – they provide an operative scaffold for embodied being, so here the historical sedimentation is effected on part of spaces, routines and interaction patterns that make up the institutional realities in question (in workplaces, schools, federal offices, courts of law, and so on). To get a sense for this, consider Ahmed’s characterization of bodily comportment within the spaces of “white” institutions:

White bodies are habitual insofar (...) they do not get ‘stressed’ in their encounters with objects or others, as their whiteness ‘goes unnoticed’. (...) white bodies do not have to face their whiteness; they are not orientated ‘towards’ it. (...) Whiteness is invisible and unremarked, as the absent centre against which others appear only as deviants, or points

³⁸ Alia Al-Saji, “Too Late: Racialized Time and the Closure of the Past,” *Insights* 6 no. 5 (2013), 2-13, here p. 5.

³⁹ “[T]he past with which colonized peoples are identified is no longer their past, for the precolonial past has been repressed; rather, it is a past of stereotyped remnants, isolated fragments and colonized distortions extrapolated back from their oppressed and alienated state under colonialism. This is hence a *closed* past, incapable of development on its own terms and cut off from the creativity that gives rise to an open future.” Al-Saji, “Too Late: Racialized Time and the Closure of the Past,” pp. 6-7.

⁴⁰ Al-Saji, “Too Late: Racialized Time and the Closure of the Past,” p. 7.

⁴¹ Cf. Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and the Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham, NC, 2012); Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, and Ahmed, “A Phenomenology of Whiteness.”

of deviation. To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins. (...) White bodies are comfortable as they inhabit spaces that extend their shape.⁴²

Combined with Fanon's observations, we can glimpse here the two sides of the same fatal coin: a deep structure of an operative pre-intentionality, a sheet of engrained past sociality, functioning so as to selectively enable or disable human comportment, at once – and inseparably – within the spaces of social life and in the thicket of embodied being-in-the-world.

5. *Affectivity and the Wake: From Heidegger to Afro-Pessimism*

Collective historicity takes up residency within bodily comportment, and thus within affective as well as perceptual and agentive habits. Likewise, the landscape of shared socio-cultural life presents a reservoir of historically sedimented significance that goes under the skin – this is the upshot of understanding 'institution' in the double sense of personal and social, and with an additional layer of hetero-constituted historicity beneath the operative body schema, as outlined by Fanon. In light of this, the points made above about affectivity's role in disclosing this dimension of existence becomes more evident. Facticity – and thus the past – is "there" in the form of a notable absence, as what is for the most part inconspicuous and thus goes unnoticed, such as the habitual normalcy of institutional spaces. But also, the past can be *there* as an inexplicit, pre-conscious corporeal burden, an ungraspable 'alien within'. Facticity is also *there* through one's having always already turned away from it, as that which has been routinely blocked from view, so that one is now 'living away from it', as it were, dispersed and diverted, busy not to see what is nevertheless right there.⁴³ Yet, still, the sedimented past, as the dimension of beenness, keeps weighing on us; it is there

⁴² Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," pp. 156 and 158. Support for her phenomenological perspective is provided by Ahmed herself in her book-length ethnographical study of diversity work in British institutions, see Ahmed, *On Being Included*.

⁴³ Judith Butler has made a related point in a different conceptual register, drawing on Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud, Derrida and Kristeva, about constitutive exclusion or "loss". Butler grants an important role to melancholia as a kind of broken mediator for registering what is socially excluded, yet her heavy leaning on Freud threatens to transfer the focal point of that debate to the psychic interior of the individual subject. See Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA, 1997), e.g. ch. 6.

mercilessly, in the marrow of our bones. And at times it will even stare us in the face “with the inexorability of an enigma.”⁴⁴

Accordingly, too much would get lost in terms of understanding and complexity when affective comportment was construed only in terms of individual experience or feeling. That is problematic both from the point of view of an adequate characterization of affective being-in-the-world, but more importantly from a political and ethical point of view, as these constitutive omissions will often work so as to shield specific socio-historical conditions from insight and transformative initiative. Thus, paradoxically yet understandably, the unfelt, the unseen, the inexplicit have to be included within an approach to affective world-disclosure.⁴⁵ This is part of the reason why Heidegger gave up the concept ‘intentionality’ entirely in favor of ‘disclosure’: The concept of disclosure is more encompassing in its scope than the notion ‘intentionality’ with its invocation of mental or corporeal acts and their manifest, graspable and determinately circumscribed contents. Not everything we are responsibly in touch with in the course of our situated being is manifestly present in intentional acts. The situation we stand in – “situation” is meant here both in a temporal/historical and a socio-spatial sense – exceeds what we grasp by way of our manifest intentional states.⁴⁶ The notion of ‘disclosive posture’ helps to focus this point, as it encompasses the potential for a graceful positioning, for a circumspect alertness in face of what do not oversee or grasp, an ongoing readiness to let oneself be carried further towards what is there to be known about one’s situation and the world at large.

This finally brings me to Christina Sharpe’s *The Wake*.⁴⁷ ‘The wake’ is a complex conceptual metaphor that gets at the heart of the issues so far discussed. Revolving around but not restricted to its lexical meaning, *wake* refers to the factual aftermath of a massive historical event – so this is a straightforward transposition of its literal meaning: “the track left on the water’s surface by a ship; the disturbance caused by a body swimming or moved,

⁴⁴ “Even if Dasein is ‘assured’ in its belief about its ‘whither’, or if, in a spirit of rational enlightenment, it supposes itself to know about its “whence”, all this counts for nothing as against the phenomenal fact of the case: for the mood brings Dasein before the “that-it-is” of its “there”, which, as such, stares it in the face with the inexorability of an enigma.” Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 136, *Being and Time*, p. 175 (translation modified).

⁴⁵ Jan Slaby, “More than a Feeling: Affect as Radical Situatedness.” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 41 no.1 (2017), 7-26.

⁴⁶ A way to capture the gist of this Heideggerian move while holding on the well-established concept of intentionality is by distinguishing between descriptive and a normative accounts of intentionality. Joseph Rouse does this helpfully. See Joseph Rouse, *Articulating the World: Conceptual Normativity and the Scientific Image* (Chicago, 2015), ch. 1. In Rouse’s diction, Heidegger’s point about disclosure is that the normative *reach* – and thus the normative *accountability* of our being-in-the-world – exceeds that which might be established by focusing solely on what can be descriptively established as going on “in” us when we are directed at the world.

⁴⁷ Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC, 2016).

in water,”⁴⁸ but *wake* also denotes a form of lateral awareness, the state of heightened attention, consciousness, the state of being “woke”. These two dimensions can obviously be in gross discordance: living in the wake (of slavery, of colonialism, of genocide), yet failing to be conscious and knowledgeable of it. So here, the wake links up to the point just made about facticity’s being ‘there’ in a conspicuous absence, in the absence of one’s being actively in touch, let alone concerned with it. The formative past is there like an invisible hand, weighing on our shoulders as a burden, lurking at the margins of circumspective awareness. Most of the time, we stubbornly fail to become cognizant of it.

But there is so much more to the Wake: ‘wake’ can likewise mean vigil or watch, held beside the bodies of the deceased, a ritual of mourning, and a gathering of survivors – so it is a form of commemorating, and a mode of care for the dead and also laterally for those with whom one is thereby united in joint sorrow. Thus, Sharpe’s concept does not just designate an orientation toward a form of historical understanding, but it more specifically denotes a form of mutual care, pointing to a lived ethics of situated knowing and of being in the light of a constitutive historicity of ‘absolute dereliction’ (Fanon). This resonates to some extent with Withy’s notion of disclosive posture: The Wake is inextricably both, a factual condition (“living in the wake of...”), and a mode of living responsibly, a form of care, an embodied ethics of being and knowing (“being aware, awake, and actively aligned”). The descriptive and the ethical are inseparable, and that is part of the point of this concept.⁴⁹

Christina Sharpe refers her concept of the Wake to a very specific history, obviously: “Transatlantic slavery was and is the disaster.”⁵⁰ For Sharpe, and other authors tentative united within the ‘Afro-Pessimism’ movement, this is not just one strand of human history among others, but paramount history. The Middle Passage is the absolute breach – no less than, in the words of Dionne Brand, “a rupture in history, a rupture in the quality of being”.⁵¹ Jared Sexton writes that this breach “establishes the fundamentals of a negrophobic society, an antiblack world”.⁵² This leads to a founding thought of Afro-Pessimism to the effect that, in view of this breach in being itself, the worn-out terms of political struggle, emancipation,

⁴⁸ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, p. 3.

⁴⁹ It would be worth exploring the resonances between the Wake and the concepts of “study” and “planning” as developed by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York, 2013).

⁵⁰ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, p. 5.

⁵¹ Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes on Belonging* (Toronto, 2001), p. 5 (cited in: Jared Sexton, “Unbearable Blackness,” *Cultural Critique* 90, Spring 2015, pp. 159-178, here: p. 165.).

⁵² Sexton, “Unbearable Blackness,” p. 161.

striving for freedom, solidarity, and so on, as articulated in the main currents of euro-modern, aka white, political thought, have no bearing whatsoever.

Saidiya Hartman, on whose work Sharpe draws, explains the condition of slavery's afterlife as follows:

If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery.⁵³

Making direct reference to Claudia Rankine's words and the passage quoted above on the aftermath of the Charleston church shooting, Sharpe expands on the scope of her concept of the Wake as follows:

To be in the wake is to live in those no's, to live in the no-space that the law is not bound to respect, to live in no citizenship, to live in the long time of Dred and Harriet Scott; and it is more than that. To be/in the wake is to occupy that time/space/place/construction (being in the wake) in all of the meanings I referenced. To be in the wake is to recognize the categories I theorize in this text as the ongoing locations of Black being: the wake, the ship, the hold, and the weather. To be in the wake is also to recognize the ways that we are constituted through and by continued vulnerability to overwhelming force though not only known to ourselves and to each other by that force.⁵⁴

"The Wake" transformed from turn of speech into concept headlines an existential analytic of black life as irrevocably formed by the "breach of history" that is the Middle Passage. Sharpe turns this specifically into an analytic of black life at the present conjuncture. What Sharpe designates as wake work is the active circumspection within and subsequent articulation of

⁵³ Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, (New York, 2007).

⁵⁴ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, p. 16.

those many ways in which black life continues to be shaped by the aftereffects of slavery; particularly with regard to socio-economic conditions that ramify widely in everyday comportment and lived experience. Wake work is a way of inhabiting the past, a turning into speech of the otherwise unspoken affective texture and surrounding weather of (anti-)black being. With her efforts, Sharpe enacts a awareness of those injurious aftereffects, an insistent, unapologetic, facing-up-to-reality, a wakeful readiness to go on, devoid of illusions, along with an active solidarity among those equally affected, forms of care. Being, staying in the wake, *living it*: It is a way of gaining and then resolutely enacting a posture – a stance of unmitigated wakefulness, alertness, and critical wisdom with regard to an ongoing history; a way to carry the burden of the past, and carrying on with it, in spite of it.

Practically, this encompasses many different things. Sharpe gives the mundane yet vital example of being vigilant in medical encounters, as black patients continue to be at risk of receiving less pain medication than white patients with comparable afflictions, presumably because of the lingering prejudice to the effect that blacks are more enduring and have a higher pain tolerance.⁵⁵ But the medical domain is just one among a host of areas of life where black being requires constant extra vigilance. Be it interactions with the banking sector, or dealings with the real estate market, or encounters the education system, or be it job applications, not to mention encounters with the police. Wake work in the concrete and mundane encompasses this forced-upon extra alertness, extra effort, extra knowledge, extra tolerance and durability required to cope under conditions of systematic obstruction, discrimination, and in face of those brick walls of ossified anti-blackness. Being in the wake is also the state of heightened circumspection, vigilance and coping power that results from leading one's life under conditions of permanent structural duress.

In light of this, wake work in Sharpe's understanding is a mode of comportment that combines the everyday life with study, practical coping with theoretical articulation. In this it aligns to some extent with the phenomenological attention to the natural attitude, only that the examples that academic wake work draws on will no longer be of the harmless kind, such as "professor sits at his writing desk", which were so prominent in Husserl and other early phenomenologists.⁵⁶ Instead, examples of wake work will concern instances drawn from the daily struggle to survive and cope in a world where the dices are decisively loaded against one. The Wake is a historically specific formation, a singularity, namely the afterlife of the

⁵⁵ Cf. Sharpe, *In the Wake*, p. 10. See also Cardinale Smith and Otis Brawley, "Disparities in Access to Palliative Care," *Health Affairs Blog*, July 30, 2014, <http://healthaffairs.org/blog/2014/07/30/disparities-in-access-to-palliative-care/>.

⁵⁶ See Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness."

Middle Passage – transatlantic chattel slavery and its ongoing ramifications. Yet at the same time it has become a general condition, one that weighs on the global present and the space-time of euro-modernity at large. The Wake has a concrete generality, it describes an enduring collective predicament, an all-encompassing global ‘weather’, and existential condition.⁵⁷ Accordingly, it makes sense to propose that the Wake in Sharpe’s figuration may take on the place (and methodological role) of existential phenomenology’s earlier favorite *Grundstimmungen* (basic moods) such as Heidegger’s anxiety and boredom or Sartrean nausea. There always was an element of randomness and wantonness in the choice of these pet predicaments of the phenomenological tradition. Moreover, moods such as anxiety and nausea come with latently solipsistic male, entitled and self-obsessed prerogatives. With the choice of subtitle for her book – *On Blackness and Being* – Sharpe signals a change of tune: *being* as such, existence is to be approached in a new way, outside the oft-recurring set pieces, figures and tropes of the existential phenomenological tradition. Ultimately, as Sharpe points out, the Wake, in this particular historical concretion, in the last instance designates the predatory, cannibalistic nature of capital and capitalism, given the role that transatlantic slavery has played in the buildup of the Western economic world order. Marx knew this well: “capital comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt.”⁵⁸ Living under the reign of capital is living in the Wake, still embodying, continuing, re-enacting this concrete history. While it is hard to establish a grander historical significance for boredom or anxiety—Heidegger’s Nazism-inflected efforts to this end notwithstanding⁵⁹ — the Wake readily combines individual and collective dispositions, mindsets, existential feelings with what might be *the* dominant strand of recent human history.⁶⁰

As Hartman notes, the first documented employment of the word ‘factory’ was in the context of West African slave dungeons. It was here where human commodities were ‘fabricated’ under gruesome conditions and in acts of brute violence before they were shipped to the new world. The meaning of the term ‘fact’ in this context is thus not merely a marker of the past or of ‘beenness’ in general, but it is directly infused with the bloody

⁵⁷ “In what I am calling the weather, anti-blackness is pervasive *as* climate. The weather necessitates changeability and improvisation; it is the atmospheric condition of time and place; it produces new ecologies.” (Sharpe, *In the Wake*, p. 106).

⁵⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy*, 1, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Moscow, 2010), ch. 31.

⁵⁹ See Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*.

⁶⁰ As I read her well-informed paper on the phenomenology of racial oppression and her critique of Heideggerian ‘dasein’ as tacitly white, male, and conventionally ‘free’, Freeman seems to drive toward a comparable conclusion, arguing for a shift of emphasis of phenomenological and ontological work. See Freeman, “Phenomenology of Racial Oppression,”; see also Yancy, *Black Bodies*.

impregnation of the brutal, de-humanizing domination of slavery. The slave as the paradigm commodity. Hartman writes:

As they [the Royal Africa Company and the Company of the Merchants; J.S.] saw it, the dungeon was a womb in which the slave was born. The harvest of raw material and the manufacture of goods defined the prison's function. The British didn't call it a womb; they called it a factory, which has its first usage in the trading forts of West Africa. (The very word "factory" documents the indissoluble link between England's industrial revolution and the birth of human commodities.) [...] The miracle of the slave trade was that it resuscitated useless lives and transformed waste into capital.⁶¹

Living in the Wake is living in the world as made by chattel slavery, living under the reign of capital – it is here where history and affect, time and life are fused into the concretion of ongoing human suffering.⁶²

In the light of this, I consider Christina Sharpe's work to be more than just a study of one particularly violent and ongoing thread of human history. Much rather, it can lay claim to embody a vision for the future of phenomenological work on the in each case specific historical texture and temporality of human being as such.

How might we stay in the wake with and as those whom the state positions to die ungrievable deaths and live lives meant to be unlivable? These are questions of temporality, the *longue durée*, the residence and hold time of the wake. At stake, then is to stay in this wake time toward inhabiting a blackened consciousness that would rupture the structural silences produced and facilitated by, and that produce and facilitate, Black social and physical death.⁶³

⁶¹ Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, p. 111.

⁶² Restrictions of place prevent me from discussing more areas in which present-day philosophical concerns point back to practices and institutions of transatlantic slavery. I can merely hint at one further example: Simone Browne discusses how Bentham's idea of the panopticon – the founding scene of total surveillance made so prominent by Foucault's discussion of it in *Discipline and Punish* – was in fact profoundly indebted to blueprints and diagrammatic drawings used in the design of slave ships; see Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham NC, 2015), ch. 1. Tyrone Palmer's helpful review of Browne's book brought this to my attention. See Tyrone Palmer, "Review of Dark Matters: On The Surveillance of Blackness by Simone Browne," *Souls* 18 no 2-3 (2016), 1-4. Likewise, it would be worthwhile to engage the insights from Hartman's earlier socio-historical study on racial subjection in the immediate aftermath of the era of chattel slavery, a study that was an early landmark in the movement that some call "Afro-Pessimism", see Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*.

⁶³ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, p. 21-2.

With this in mind, the evaluative neutrality that philosophy often aspires comes out as not far removed from a form of epistemic violence – an atmosphere or, in Sharpe’s words: *a weather* of cold neglect, in which a solipsistic, narrow-minded straightening of matters of concern into a thin stream of ever recurring themes is effected in routine repetition. To analyze human capacities in abstraction from their historical specificity, detached from the shape they take in the wake of their violent formation, threatens to falsify, and what is more, to hazardously infiltrate philosophical work. Philosophy remains complicit with systems of exploitation and discrimination if it continues to aspire to – or to implicitly presuppose – such detached neutrality. Human comportment is shaped by, beholden to concrete history all the way down. Accordingly, philosophical work needs to embrace this actively and be cognizant of it at each step of the way. Such a stance would require practitioners to thoroughly situate their respective subject matters historically and to devise philosophical methods adequate to this task – methods that work performatively so as to crack open ossified formations of understanding and being. Philosophical work on affect and emotion can play an important role here, because human affectivity – as I hope to have made plausible – is a central conduit for the past’s continued weighing on the texture of collective and individual existence.

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