ABOLISH THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT: NOTES FOR A PRAXIS OF PHENOMENOLOGY BEYOND CRITIQUE

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> . . . *Blackness knowing and studying announces the End of the World as we know it.*
> —Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics"

The world as we know it is structured by colonialism, capitalism, anti-Black racism, heteropatriarchy, carceral logics, and other forms of systemic violence. It might seem obvious, at least from the perspective of a leftist emancipatory politics, that these intersecting forms of oppression call for critique: in order to change the world, we must critically analyze oppressive structures, understand how they work, identify their weak points, and put pressure on these points to organize for change. This basic intuition has guided my own reflections on critical phenomenology (Guenther 2019, 2021). But in this essay, I want to think through another, more radical possibility, inspired by the work of Denise Ferreira da Silva and by abolitionist refusals of critique that identify the practice as "a mode of institutional reproduction . . . . [that] allows us to experience ourselves as if we are outside of the institution while remaining firmly ensconced in its liberal narrative of self-valorization" (Boggs et al. 2019). From this perspective, the liberal humanist tradition of "critical thinking displaces the possibility of sustained, radical critique and thereby remains circumscribed 'within the ivory tower'" (la paperson 2017, 36). The abolitionist argument is not that critique itself is useless or pernicious, but rather that the intellectual activity of critique can become an end in itself for those of us who are situated within academic institutions, both obscuring and justifying the extraction and accumulation of wealth by universities that continue to perpetuate white supremacy, settler colonialism, and capitalism, even while making official apologies or hiring Chief Diversity Officers. In the words of Denise Ferreira da Silva, "we cannot stay in the work of critique, but we must go *through* critique to get to the work" (la paperson 2017, 43).

There are at least two different ways to understand the relation between critique and "the work." The first is reparative: one engages in critique in order to salvage, fix, or

"improve" something, motivated by the hope or belief that it could become a better version of itself. Here, the work is not to destroy or dismantle, but to revise, reform, and ultimately strengthen the target of critique. We could understand critical phenomenology as an example of this approach to critique; it seeks not to bring about the end of phenomenology, but rather to rework and/or elaborate its basic concepts and methods in order to address issues of power and structural oppression that many phenomenologists have arguably neglected. This is not to say that critical phenomenology, understood as an intellectual, political, and even aesthetic practice, is beholden to the insights and assumptions of earlier phenomenologists, nor that it is bound to replicate the university's institutional investments in capitalism, white supremacy, and other forms of oppression. It simply means that the aim of critical phenomenology is not to abolish phenomenology but to affirm and amplify what is powerful and beautiful in existing phenomenological methods, while inventing and elaborating new methods in response to questions and situations that the phenomenological tradition has not (yet) addressed. More pernicious examples of reparative critique include reformist approaches to policing and incarceration, which accept that such practices are necessary and even just, but seek to mitigate the harm caused by "bad apples," imperfect policies, or poor implementation by improving existing institutions.

Another approach to critique is abolitionist: here, one engages in critique in order to bring about the end or collapse of a structure that one believes to be inherently problematic and beyond repair. For example, an abolitionist critique of slavery does not seek to make the practice less harmful or more productive, it seeks to end slavery in all its forms. But as the partial abolition of slavery in the United States teaches us, the rhetoric of abolitionist critique can function as a screen for the re-inscription of its logic, both in law (for example, the Thirteenth Amendment, which allows for the enslavement of those who are "duly convicted" of a crime) and in other practices and institutions (for example, unpaid forced labour in the convict leasing system and in the current Prison Industrial Complex). So we need to be careful about the degree to which something that looks and feels like an abolitionist critique may, in practice, do "the work" of perpetuating, supporting, and even strengthening the target of its critique.

Denise Ferreira da Silva's interrogation of modern European science and philosophy extends this concern to the entire Kantian critical tradition, including Marxist critique and critical race theory, at least to the extent that the latter is based on a demand for equal rights and/or a desire for recognition.[1] For da Silva, Immanuel Kant's critical move to transcendental philosophy, which seeks to uncover the *a priori* conditions for the possibility of X, posits a self-determining Subject whose mind is organized by universal, necessary, and ahistorical forms of intuition and categories, such that the subject finds a reflection

[1] "When commenting on racial critique, I have in mind the kind of engagement modeled after Immanuel Kant's formulation of critique, which he describes as systematic exposition and assessment of the conditions of possibility for X; that is, of its grounds and limits. Since Descartes, but definitely from Kant on, this specific analytical procedure has supported the claim that the rational mind (reduced to understanding) has access to the universal laws of nature because it shares their formal constitution" (da Silva 2019). See also da Silva (2015) on the violence of the assumption of universality and the postcolonial praxis of refusing universality by "making visible without making public."

and affirmation of its own transcendental structure in the shape of the world *as we know it*. Any other sense of world beyond what the transcendental subject could possibly come to know is irrelevant for this critical tradition, as are other ways of thinking, feeling, or being affected by the world that exceed the basic parameters of intelligibility for the transcendental subject, understood as the only possible way to be a subject and to know the world.

But as Kant's own racist anthropology suggests, not every member of the human species has a legitimate claim to the status of this "universal" self-determining Subject. Rather, entire groups of people fall into the category of what da Silva (2007, 2014b) calls "no-bodies" or "affectable others" who are represented by dominant power as heteronomously determined by natural laws and therefore properly subjected to social and political laws that expose them to total violence, beyond the scope of ethical concern. Such no-bodies are made intelligible to (white, European) self-determining Subjects as either instruments for and/or obstacles to their own self-improvement and territorial expansion. What may at first appear to be a contradiction in Kant's philosophical system—how could the author of the categorical imperative also write such deeply unethical apologies for racism and colonialism?[2] — is, for da Silva, not an exception but the rule that structures transcendental critique insofar as it seeks to reconcile the freedom of self-determining Subjects with an orderly world that is governed by knowable laws of nature and absolute juridical laws. It's not just that no-bodies or affectable others are excluded from recognition as self-determining Subjects, in which case a reparative critique of the Kantian tradition of critical philosophy might solve the problem by recognizing racialized others as fully human, just like the rest of us. Rather, the self-determining Subject *requires* as its logical and material condition a category of no-bodies who are separate from itself, determinable by inexorable laws, and developmentally or sequentially more primitive than itself. The historical contingency of this "necessary" condition is both obscured and granted legitimacy through its translation and transposition into the conceptual language of transcendental philosophy. In da Silva's (2014a) own words:

> [B]ecause racial knowledge transubstantiates (shifts them from the living to the formal register) what emerges in political relations into effects of efficient (scientific reason's) causality, its critical tools fail to register how the total (past, present, and future) value expropriated is in the very structures (in blood and flesh) of global capital. (83-4)

In other words, transcendental philosophy is not a neutral conceptual framework for "discovering" the *a priori* structures of intelligibility; rather, it is a discourse for obscuring colonial and racial violence and investing it with dignity, authority, and necessity.

In the wake of this critical inheritance, da Silva (2018b) argues that "we need to move beyond critique":

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[2] For a detailed discussion of Kant's racism, see Robert Bernasconi (2003); Peter P. J. Park (2013).

> [D]ue to its Kantian origins, critique cannot but restate (usually by the
> back door of redress) the premises of modern thought. How? Because
> the juridical and ethical figuring of the subject (respectively authority
> and liberty), both in thought and institutions (procedures, premises, and
> mechanisms), undermine[s] the very critical and emancipatory project
> they are requested to ground. (da Silva 2018b, 25)

Even abolitionist projects that seek to end racism, colonialism, and other forms of oppression
may end up supporting and extending the world as we know it by reinscribing the logic
of self-determining Subjects who know, for example, how to identify the "root causes" of
racism by connecting empirical data with the pure concepts of the understanding that
make this data intelligible and point the way to a "solution." Such an approach to racial
critique remains deeply invested in the master's tools of transcendental philosophy, where
the most one can hope for is inclusion and recognition within an epistemic, ontological,
and political system that continues to be structured by the separation of self-determining
Subjects from externally-determined no-bodies, even if the particular content of these
categories shifts over time.

This brings me to the central question of my paper: to what extent might phenomenology,
even in its most "critical" form, be so deeply invested in this Kantian tradition that it also
perpetuates and extends the logic of the world as we know it? And how, if at all, might a
praxis of phenomenology *beyond critique*—or perhaps a praxis of critical phenomenology
that rigorously connects critique to "the work" of collective liberation—affirm or support
what da Silva (2014a) calls Black feminist poethics: "an ethics, which, instead of the
betterment of the World as we know it aims at its end?" (82).

Classical phenomenology discovers a transcendental subject by bracketing the natural
attitude, or the naïve, unreflective belief in the existence of the world, and reducing the
appearance of the world to its ultimate condition of possibility: intentional consciousness
itself. The intelligibility of the world is grounded in the correlation of *noesis* and *noema*, or
intentional acts and intentional objects, such that *noesis* constitutes the meaning of *noema*
without reciprocity. For classical phenomenology, "the world" is not the sum total of entities
in the universe, nor is it a mere container for these entities; rather, it is a name for the field
of possible ways that consciousness may apprehend the given and constitute its meaning
through acts of perception, memory, imagination, and so on. From this perspective, the
desire to abolish the world as we know might seem absurd; the world *just is* the world as
we know it, and it could not be otherwise. If we want to change the world or to save it—
for example, as Edmund Husserl sought to rescue the European sciences by grounding
them in the apodictic science of phenomenology—then we must work *with* the universal
structures of transcendental subjectivity, not against them. But to abolish the world? No.
The most we can or should aim for is a reparative or reformist critique that restructures the
world as we know it—or so it would seem.

Is this all we can say for the possibility of a critical phenomenology: that it aims to
repair, and ultimately support and perpetuate the world as we know it by revising and/
or extending its own basic concepts and methods? What would it take for a praxis of

phenomenology to become *abolitionist*, beyond and against the Kantian tradition of critique that phenomenology has inherited, albeit not without significant transformation?[3] My aim in this essay is not to provide a definitive answer to these questions but to open and sustain them, listening for both the differences and the resonances between critical phenomenology and an abolitionist poethics beyond critique, and perhaps also beyond phenomenology. Inspired by da Silva's work, and also by experiments in critical phenomenology by philosophers such as Sara Ahmed (2006), Alia Al-Saji (2014), Talia Mae Bettcher (2014), Mariana Ortega (2016), Andrea Pitts (2018), and many others, I want to hold open the possibility of a robustly critical phenomenology without presuming its possibility or necessity. Rather than rushing to defend phenomenology against the charge that it may be complicit in the deathbound logics of the world as we know it, or digging up proof texts to demonstrate that, even if classical phenomenology is complicit in the total violence of racism and colonialism, critical phenomenology is innocent of all charges, I want to stay with the trouble of abolishing the world as we know it—and perhaps also phenomenology as we know it—to get a feel for poethical (im)possibilities beyond critique.

THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT

In her essay, "On Difference Without Separability," da Silva (2016a) defines the world as we know it as "an ordered whole composed of separate parts relating through the mediation of constant units of measurement and/or a limiting violent force" (57-58). Modern European philosophy makes the world as we know it intelligible to self-determining Subjects as a totality of ontologically distinct entities with no intrinsic relation to one another, arranged in an order that some minds can grasp (because they, too, are orderly subjects) while others cannot (because they are ordered objects). The ontological and juridical-political order that arranges entities within the world can be measured and understood scientifically by orderly subjects with the proper instruments, but a "limiting violent force" is also necessary to keep ordered—and potentially disorderly—objects in line. From this perspective, concepts such as sovereignty and justice function as political devices to maintain and/or correct the orderly composition of the world, which separates the self-determining Subjects of Europe and European descent from the affectable others or no-bodies of the rest of the globe, marking the former with a destiny of sovereign (self-)rule and (self-)transparency, and consigning the latter to the position of determinable objects to be used, used up, and/or obliterated according to the needs of the proper Subject (2014b, 122-3, 140). No-bodies are beyond the pale of ethical concern; they are the others one need not care about, who are not just excluded from access to "equality" or "human rights" but directly equated with the danger against which the state and the self-determining Subject must protect itself (2014b).[4] As such, the rights and freedoms of the subject as citizen are not just withheld from no-bodies, they are *premised* on the exposure of no-bodies to containment and control through

[3] See, for example, Gregory Scott Moss (2013) for an overview of Edmund Husserl's critique of Kant.
[4] See also Sylvia Wynter (1994) on the related concept of "No Humans Involved."

a "limiting violent force" that is always already justified by the ontological, epistemic, and juridical correlation of self-determining subjects with an orderly world. This naturalized, racialized hierarchy of Subjects and no-bodies secures the order of the world as we know it from chaos and corruption.

Da Silva (2016a) argues that the world as we know it is constructed on three pillars: *separability*, *determinacy*, and *sequentiality* (64).[5] These pillars support "an image of the world as that which needs to be conquered (occupied, dominated, seized)" (2018a). *Separability* refers to a non-relational ontology of distinct entities, each with their own substance and properties which determine their place in a larger order (da Silva 2016a, 60). As an epistemic principle, separability affirms the importance of making clear, categorical distinctions and judgments, such that otherwise indeterminate or "raw" sense impressions may be refined and clarified by determinate concepts and given expression through propositions that insert the known object in its proper place within a scientifically intelligible order. *Determinacy* refers to both the epistemic norm of clarifying and formalizing otherwise indistinct or indeterminate impressions, and also to the ethical-political norm of self-determination, in which an autonomous subject protects itself from heteronomous affectability and consigns this passive position to affectable others or no-bodies. It is based on an ontological assumption of linear causality, and the cleavage of human existence into those with the power to cause actions and events (both through self-determination and through the determination of objects, others, and ultimately the world), and those whose destiny is to be caused, or to receive the imprint of more powerful forces. *Sequentiality* refers to the ontology of linear time, in which past, present, and future are understood as separable units or segments of time, one of which determines the other (past → present → future; beginning → middle → end). Sequentiality implies a developmental logic, such that one segment of time ideally improves upon the last, gradually perfecting both the order of things and the subject's understanding of this order (2016a, 60).

As should be clear from this preliminary discussion, the concepts of separability, determinacy, and sequentiality overlap and reinforce one another. Separability calls for determination, which in turn takes the form of sequentiality; determination presupposes the separability of that which determines and that which is determined, and the order of these causal relations unfolds sequentially in time; sequentiality is founded on the separability of units or segments of time, and the proper order of a sequence depends on the relation between that which determines and that which is determined. At first glance, these concepts might seem neutral, and therefore unproblematic; they could just as easily be used as tools to construct a racist system as to analyze the harm and root causes of such a system. But this is precisely da Silva's point: domination and critique share a common conceptual toolbox, which is why modernist forms of critique based on Cartesian and/or

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[5] Da Silva (2016a) mentions a principle of actualization, which in Hegelian terms "presents body and mind, space and time, Nature and Reason, as two manifestations of the same entity, namely Spirit, or Reason as Freedom…" (61). But since she does not name this as one of the "three ontological pillars that sustain modern thought" (65), I have not taken it up in my discussion here. It seems clear, however, that actualization undermines or forecloses the virtuality at the heart of Black feminist poethics.

Kantian philosophical systems cannot help but reproduce, repair, and extend the systems they identify as harmful.[6]

Take, for example, the logic of separability. Without separability, raciality would not make sense; one could not divide and protect the division of self-determining Subjects from no-bodies, whites from Blacks, Aryans from Jews, and so forth. Without the logic of determinacy, one could not assign one race the power of autonomous self-determination and the other the status of determinable object. And without the logic of sequentiality, one could not construct a narrative of the teleological development of civilization on one hand, and the stuck or stunted temporality of racialized and colonized no-bodies on the other. But da Silva's claim is not just that these logics play a pernicious role in the science and politics of raciality, while remaining useful as epistemic tools or ontological principles apart from this context; her aim is not to "improve" the world as we know it, or to expand the rights and privileges of self-determining Subjects to no-bodies, but to abolish this world and the ways of knowing, being, and doing that are proper to it. The claim that raciality, and the total violence that both enforces and normalizes it, would not be *possible* without the logic of separability, determinacy, and sequentiality, does not imply that these structures are *transcendental* conditions for the possibility of raciality; rather, these *contingent* epistemic claims and ontological principles have been grasped and formalized as transcendental conditions for the intelligibility of the world to a self-determining Subject, with the effect of grounding raciality—another contingent, historical concept—in a framework of universal truth (2014b, 132; see also 2014a, 84-5).

As da Silva (2015b) explains, the organizing logic of raciality "produces both the subject of ethical life, who[m] the halls of law and forces of the state protect, and the subjects of *necessitas*, the racial subaltern subjects whose bodies and territories, the global present, have become places where the state deploys its forces of self-preservation" (141). In other words, *necessitas* is contingently produced by an historical violence that could have been otherwise, but which both posits itself as inevitable and transposes its own violence onto the ontological status of no-bodies. The mapping of no-bodies onto specific places—onto a geographical "here" to which they are stuck and with which they are identified—both grounds and justifies the colonization of these places as the territory and property of self-determining Subjects who claim to understand how to improve, develop, and extract value from such places. As Locke and many other early modern philosophers have argued, the European subject is not only entitled to this land, but is morally obligated to ensure that it does not go to waste by remaining in the idle hands of no-bodies. Given that raciality constructs "the racial subaltern subject as the sole agent of violence" (da Silva 2014b, 131), its logic "immediately justifies the state's decision to kill certain persons—mostly (but not only) young men and women of colour—in the name of self-preservation. Such killings do not unleash an ethical crisis because these persons' bodies and the territories they inhabit always-already signify violence" (121).

Da Silva (2014a) argues that the epistemic, ontological, and juridical framework of raciality extends even to *critiques* of racism that seek to identify its "cause"—for example,

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[6] See Walter D. Mignolo (2011) and Anibal Quijano (2000) for further elaborations of this point.

in the moral failure of Europeans to encounter phenotypical and cultural differences without forming "stereotypes" or imposing unjust hierarchies (88)—and to work towards overcoming racism in sequential time by revealing the false assumptions at the heart of these stereotypes, including no-bodies in the category of the human, and by improving or correcting the world as we know it rather than abolishing it. In other words, critiques of racism that identify the problem as discrimination, exclusion, lack of recognition, or some other effect of a determinable cause *within* the world as we know it unwittingly reproduce the conceptual and material framework or architecture of racial violence by remaining within the modern episteme of efficient causality, which is founded on the pillars of separability, determinacy, and sequentiality. To put this somewhat differently: the attempt to determine the *cause* of racism (say, in greed, misunderstanding, prejudice, or even racial difference itself) in order to find a "solution" that ushers in new effects—a new post-racist or post-colonial era of sequential time—is so deeply invested in conceptual tools and methods of modern European philosophy that it cannot help but reproduce racial violence in the name of ending it.

Consider, for example, efforts to end racist police violence by requiring police to hire more officers of colour, wear body cameras, attend implicit bias training, and so forth. Such efforts do not end racist police violence but rather inflate the resources available to police departments, providing them with an alibi for ongoing state violence as long as they state their commitment to an interminable process of self-improvement in sequential time. But if racial violence is not merely (re)produced by this or that entity within the world, but by the entire epistemic, ontological, and political order of *the world as we know it*, then reformist approaches to police violence are just a way of tinkering with the machinery of death, not dismantling it or jamming its gears. For da Silva (2014b), "raciality's political/symbolic task, its effect of power… is the very writing of its boundaries" (158). This is why it is so important to pay attention to the formalization of categories, concepts, and transcendental structures.

THE WORLD AS PLENUM

Da Silva refuses the world as we know it—the world that slavery, colonialism, and capitalism have built, and that modern philosophy and science have justified, supported, and extended—while affirming the possibility of another, abolitionist imagining of the World as Plenum. She asks:

> What if, instead of the Ordered World, we imaged each existant (human and more-than-human) not as separate forms relating through the mediation of forces, but rather as singular expressions of each and every other existant as well as of the entangled whole in/as which they exist?... [W]hat sort of ethical opening can be envisioned with the dissolution of the grip of the Understanding and the releasing of The World to the imagination[?] (2016a, 63-4)

To imagine the World as Plenum is to release ourselves from the epistemic hold of concepts like separation, determination, and sequentiality, by affirming a fractal logic of entanglement, indeterminacy, and simultaneity.[7] The World as Plenum unfolds as "an infinite composition in which each existant's singularity is contingent upon its becoming one possible expression of all the other existants, with which it is entangled beyond space and time" (2016a, 58). This imaging of the World as Plenum does not magically bring about the end of racial violence; rather, it suggests that such violence is not best understood as a distinct "problem" to which a separate "solution" could be determined in sequential time. As the structuring logic of the world as we know it, racial violence pervades both our problems and our solutions—which is not to say that it has succeeded in eliminating alternative ways of knowing, being, and doing, but rather to affirm that our access to these alternatives defies systematic identification.[8] An engagement with virtual alternatives to the world as we know it—not as a distant possibility, but as a dimension that is already "here" in the creative praxis of survival, resistance, and invention—calls for open-ended experimentation with the translation, transposition, and transformation of entangled forces, understood not as separable units but as a dynamic relationality that is prior to the separability of relata (2018b, 27-8).[9] Da Silva (2016a) writes:

> [W]hen the social reflects The Entangled World, sociality becomes neither the cause nor the effect of relations involving separate existants, but the uncertain condition under which everything that exists is a singular expression of each and every actual-virtual other existant. (65)

[7] See da Silva (2016b) for a more extended discussion of fractal thinking as "immanent, scalar, plenteous, and undetermined."

[8] See, for example, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's (2016) affirmation of Indigenous resurgence in the midst of dispossession, but also beyond it:

> The primary way my ancestors and I have interacted with the state is through dispossession—the removal of Indigenous bodies from Indigenous lands. My disconnection from Indigenous thought, languages, and practices has been orchestrated by dispossession, as had the erasure of Indigenous bodies from the present. This is a dispossession of every meaningful relationship from my life. In building a radical resurgent movement—and by radical I mean one that addresses the root—I think we need to be centering our attachment to each other, the land, and our intelligence systems. We need to be creating a present that will inspire a radically different future than the one settler colonialism sets out for us. This means taking on heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism, and antiblackness, and actualizing Indigenous alternatives on the ground, not in the future but in the present. Indigenous alternatives that are rooted in Indigenous intelligence, or to again use Coulthard's term, grounded normativity. This means a land base, and nations that are physical, emotional, spiritual, artistic, and creative spaces where Indigenous peoples can be Indigenous. (32)

[9] See also da Silva (2018a, 2019).

In the World as Plenum, there are no self-determining Subjects or no-bodies. Rather, the position of no-body is translated, transposed, and transformed into The Thing or "referent of undeterminacy" (2018a), which explodes the liminal intelligibility assigned to it in the philosophical systems of Kant and G.W.F. Hegel, hacking the correlation of subjects and objects in the world as we know it (2014a, 93, 2018a, 2018b, 38).

Da Silva (2014a) locates a prefiguration of the World as Plenum within European philosophy, in G.W. Leibniz's account of the universe as "an infinite and contingent…, deeply interconnected assemblage of things," in contrast to Newton's account of the universe as "constituted by solid and moving things (bodies) subjected to the abstract rules (laws of motion)" (95-6). She also looks to quantum physics for inspiration, where concepts such as "nonlocality (as an epistemological principle) and virtuality (as an ontological descriptor)" function as "poetical descriptors, that is, as indicators of the impossibility of comprehending existence with the thinking tools that cannot but reproduce separability and its aids, namely determinacy and sequentiality" (2016a, 63-4). She calls her own praxis of imaging the World as Plenum *Black feminist poethics*: an abolitionist praxis that imagines and affirms a world in which entanglement, indeterminacy, and simultaneity generate virtual possibilities for being, knowing, and doing beyond and against the death cult of racial violence (2014a, 81-82). Black feminist poethics does not seek to solve the problem of raciality within the terms of the world as we know it, for example by tinkering with the causal machinery of the colonial world order. Nor does it seek to bring about the end of the world as we know it by closing one chapter of history in order to begin a new, improved chapter in sequential time. Rather, the genius of poethics is to affirm that we *already* dwell in the World as Plenum, that the non-local, indeterminable position of the Thing is simultaneously "otherwise than the World as we know it" (2018b, 38).[10]

This suggests that abolition "is" now, if it will ever be; abolition is a *virtual* possibility, not an actual or empirical state of affairs that will come into being at the end of a sequence in which each and every (separable) prison, jail, and detention center has been closed. Abolition is not a policy directive for building a new, improved world that will eventually replace the world as we know it; rather, abolition expresses itself through ongoing practices of survival, care, and creativity reaching back even before the moment the first slave ship reached the shores of Africa in 1442, and reaching beyond any foreseeable future in which separable, determinable institutions or practices of punishment exist on this earth. There will never be a time when the experimentation and improvisation at the heart of abolitionist praxis is no longer needed because we have perfected a new world order in which the Spirit of Abolition is embodied in our institutions, policies, and personhood. Just as freedom is a constant struggle (Davis 2015), abolition is a continual experiment; the point is not to get it right once and for all, but to respond to the ever-shifting entanglements of a pluriverse in which indeterminacy and uncertainty are constant, but constantly-changing, dimensions. In other words, the challenge is not to "solve the problem" of the world as we know it, but

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[10] See also da Silva's (2018b) engagement with the \X in "Hacking the Subject": "With \X, I illustrate what becomes possible when blackness wonders and wanders in the world, heeding the ethical mandate to challenge our thinking, to release the imagination, and to welcome the end of the world as we know it, that is, decolonization, which is the only proper name for justice" (22).

to express, enact, and embody a plurality of otherwise possibilities that are both radically out of this world and also radically immanent or "here," wherever The Thing happens to find itself.

> In the Plenum, Refraction, as everything mirrors everything else in the "Play of Expression," becomes the descriptor for Existence, as what exists becomes only and always a rendering of possibilities, which remain exposed in the horizon of Becoming. A Black Feminist Poethics becomes here in a World imaged as endless Poethics: that is, existence toward the beyond of Space-time, where The Thing resists dissolving any attempt to reduce what exists—anyone and everything—to the register of the object, the other, and the commodity. (da Silva 2014a, 91)

In an essay on Black aesthetics, da Silva (2018a) calls this immanent power of the Thing *blacklight*:

> When blacklight hits the artwork, its *materia prima* (raw material) shines. As such, this method for reflection and thinking is *critical* only to the extent that it acknowledges, *and* seeks not to remain within, the bounds of the world as imaged for the subject. What happens is that attention goes to what in the artwork resists the reductive apprehensions of critical discourses—their request for a subject—and insists on signifying *in the raw*.[11]

Here we find another way of affirming critique as a praxis of both acknowledging the limits of the world as we know it and *refusing these limits*, traversing and transgressing the boundaries of space-time, flouting the law of *necessitas*, and signifying "in the raw," beyond the mediation of transcendental *a priori* categories.[12] Black feminist poethics not only abolishes the world as we know it, it also abolishes critique as we know it. This is not to say that critique must come to an end or disappear; abolition is not elimination, but rather a praxis of both dismantling oppressive systems and creating, amplifying, and sustaining more liberatory alternatives.[13] But when blacklight a critical discourse like phenomenology, we may no longer know it as such.

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[11] "Framed in a position that refuses the World of Man, pre-posed by (before and toward) Man born in the world, the Feminist Black (racial) Critic becomes in material affectability (relationality, contingency, immediacy). With this gift, the Black Feminist Poet moves on ignoring the past and future, the old and new, asking the question of the World, toward the End of the Subject's apprehension of it, interrupts the desperate reaction—of the questioned" (da Silva 2014a, 91-2).

[12] See da Silva (2014) on the poethical possibilities of traversability (or time travel), transversability (or radical affectability) and transubstantiality (or radical metamorphosis) (93-4). Elsewhere, she writes of "hacking" as a poethical method based on translation, transposition, and transformation (2018b, 27-8), and another, related practice of the "recomposition and decomposition of prior and posterior compositions" (2018a, 93-4).

[13] See, for example, Angela Davis (2003, 105-15).

AN ABOLITIONIST PHENOMENOLOGY? OR THE ABOLITION OF PHENOMENOLOGY?

If modern European philosophy and science are complicit in the construction, naturalization, and justification of the world as we know it, then what does this mean for those of us who practice phenomenology? And to what extent might a critical praxis of phenomenology affirm or express a Black feminist poethics that abolishes the world as we know it, not at a future point in sequential time but here and now?

Is the Husserlian account of a transcendental subject who constitutes the (meaning of the) world through the correlation of intentional acts and intentional objects a further elaboration of the Kantian critical project to construct an epistemology based on the *a priori* knowledge or apodictic structures of a self-determining Subject (or self-constituting consciousness) within a world whose meaning, and even whose existence as such, depends on the Subject without reciprocity or mutual affectability?

Is there also a prefiguration of the World as Plenum in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1968) late articulation of a relationality prior to the existence of separate relata, "the flesh of the world" (248-57), "wild Being" (200), and "a world with several entrances, a pluralist universe" (2010, 47), which might bring the practice of phenomenology closer to Black feminist poethics, even if Merleau-Ponty himself does not call for the end of the world as we know it, but rather affirms our mutual belonging to "one sole world" (1968, 110, 141-2)?

Yes, and yes. My aim in this final section is not to assess whether phenomenology is "good" or "bad" from a poethical perspective—as if such moral binaries made sense in the World as Plenum—but rather to reflect on some questions raised by da Silva's poethical refusal of critique for the possibility of a critical and/or abolitionist phenomenology. Here is a preliminary list of the questions that come up for me personally.

Re-imagining the epochē

How could we re-imagine the *epochē,* not as suspension of belief in the existence of the world, but as a disruption of the world as we know it, and of the racist-colonial natural attitude that sustains it? Rather than centering Husserl's account of the *epochē* as a voluntary suspension of belief for the sake of founding a transcendental science of phenomenology, we might begin with Frantz Fanon's (1967) account of the radical disruption of his body schema in Chapter 5 of *Black Skin, White Masks.* How would this approach to the *epochē*—not as a purely methodological tool but as a defamiliarizing existential disruption with ethical and political consequences—affect the practice of critical phenomenology, including the questions we ask, the experiences we reflect upon, the way we imagine the "we"?

Re-thinking the reduction

How could we re-think the reduction, not as a method for accessing transcendental knowledge (where the transcendental is understood in terms of a necessary, apodictic, universal, *a priori* truth), but as a way of tracking *and hacking* the material-historical and quasi-transcendental conditions for the emergence of the world as we know it? Merleau-

Ponty's (1962) acknowledgement of "the impossibility of a complete reduction" (xiii) suggests a practice of phenomenology not as a transcendental science that aspires to reduce the materiality of embodied experience to pure conditions of possibility, but as an art or creative praxis of experimental reflection, which seeks to express the complex entanglement of the material-virtual World as Plenum. How might we elaborate this art of (ir)reduction, not only as a set of intellectual possibilities but also, simultaneously, through embodied action and through collective experiments in the decomposition and recomposition of the world?

Would the experimental art of (ir)reduction resist the sequential logic of causality while acknowledging the contingency and indeterminacy of conditionality? Husserl's account of conditionality in *Ideas II* (1989) might be helpful here, as might Merleau-Ponty's (2003) critique of the image of a "sack of possibles" (234) out of which self-actualized entities emerge in sequential time.

Would this art of (ir)reduction call for a shift in orientation from the transcendental to the quasi-transcendental, with the understanding that this is not a shift from a pure realm of apodictic structures to an impure realm of contingent, material-historical structures, but rather an acknowledgement and affirmation that the transcendental has always been quasi-transcendental, that the concept itself is an historical invention? Derrida's meditations on the quasi-transcendental may be instructive here (see, for example, Derrida 2007; see also Guenther 2021).

Unsettling the epistemology of constitution

How might we unsettle the epistemology of constitution, which "discovers" the apodictic correlation between *noesis* and *noema* and posits the existence of universal conditions for the possibility of any meaningful experience whatsoever? Merleau-Ponty's (2010) account of institution offers an alternative account of meaning that decenters first-person consciousness, exploring the complex indeterminacy of sedimented meaning and materiality. And yet, colonial violence nevertheless structures Merleau-Ponty's account of institution, orienting his philosophy of history towards a teleological development in sequential time, with European civilization as a "less false," if also "less beautiful" expression of universal humanity than non-European cultures (see Guenther, forthcoming in *Chiasmi International*).

Re-imaging world(s)

To what extent does phenomenology naturalize an understanding of the world as we know it, even in its most rigorous attempts to bracket the assumption that the world exists, by insisting on the transcendental structure of "one sole world" that includes all possible experiences and perspectives (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 110, 141-2)? And to what extent does the phenomenological understanding of worldhood, not as a totality or a self-enclosed globe, but as a concatenation of indeterminate, open-ended horizons, already complicate the world as we know it, suggesting an imaging of the World as Plenum?

Merleau-Ponty's (1968) late writing in *The Visible and the Invisible* suggests a radical

immanence and implicancy that resonates, in my view, with the imaging of world in Black feminist poethics, and Maria Lugones' (1987) reflections on world-travelling implies a multiplicity of worlds that resist or refuse integration into one sole world. A more sustained reflection and experimentation with the world as we know it in phenomenology is needed to engage with these possibilities.

Introducing invention into existence

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1967) writes that "the real *leap* consists in *introducing invention into existence*" (229; my emphasis).[14] Might this also be what is at stake in the leap from critical phenomenology (in the narrow sense of critique inherited from the Kantian tradition) to a robustly critical, abolitionist, poethical praxis of phenomenology?

Shifting consciousness to the double

Da Silva (2014a) affirms, together with W. E. B. Du Bois and Nahum Chandler, a "shift in focus [of] *consciousness to the double*—a first step toward emancipation, that is, Blackness unhinged from self-consciousness" (86, my emphasis). She continues:

> Released from the core of Thought—always in excess of the objects and subjects it creates—Blackness is available to a Black Feminist Poethics, as it charts a terrain by asking Black Feminist Critique to review its Categories, rearrange its project, and interrogate the very premises of its craft, without any guarantees that the craft itself will survive the exercise. (86; see also 89)

Is this not also the challenge facing critical phenomenology: to review our categories, rearrange our project, and interrogate our basic premises, without any guarantee that phenomenology as we know it can or should survive?

CONCLUSION

It may be that phenomenology is too deeply invested in the Kantian critical tradition to be translated, transposed, and transformed into an abolitionist praxis of Black feminist poethics. And perhaps that is not the point: I see no indication that da Silva's poethics requires, or even invites, a phenomenological supplement. The possibility of supplementation moves the other way around, from poethics to phenomenology, posing a challenge that cannot be ignored by anyone who is committed to a practice of phenomenology that seeks not only to interpret the world as we know it, and not even just to change it, but to abolish it—even if this also means abolishing itself in the process.

[14] See also David Marriott (2011).

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