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INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

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In March 2020, the world shut down. We were told to stay in our homes and only to leave if absolutely necessary. If we did leave, we were told to cover our mouth and nose with a mask, and to socially distance. Social distancing—perhaps the most poorly named public health recommendation in history, and likely the one to have the longest lasting and most widespread consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic. In worlds that are increasingly socially and economically fragmented, where everyday human connection is increasingly difficult to find, resulting in a global rise of anxiety, loneliness, and addiction, the last thing we needed to be told was to socially distance. Physical distancing would have better expressed the spatial demand of the recommendation without adding the unbearable affective-ethical-relational demand-cum-shame of denying sociality. It was in response to these foreseeable consequences of social distancing that spurred one of us (Throop) on March 19th, 2020 to organize the first Zoom meeting of what would come to be known by the playful name of Team Phenomenology.

The group formed as a response to an unfolding situation that left many UCLA graduate students who were away from their families and other networks of friendship and care—including a number of students who had just finished taking a seminar on Critical Phenomenology that winter quarter 2020—especially vulnerable to the possibility that the public health mandate to "isolate" and "social distance" would lead them to a growing sense of helplessness, loneliness, and despair. Team Phenomenology thus originally started as a weekly check-in and socializing opportunity primarily for these anthropology graduate students but also for a small handful of phenomenologically-leaning friends and colleagues around the globe (including Zigon).[1]

[1] For being there at the beginning of Team Phenomenology and for our continued opportunities to think-together-with each other, we are deeply grateful to: Farzad Amouzagar-Fassie, Yael Assor, Merisa

The conversations during those first weeks centered on sharing information on the unfolding event, which was being distinctively experienced by individuals who were living in different parts of the city of Los Angeles, the broader US, and Europe. Initial discussions focused on whether or not people had access to food, how their families were doing, and if they had ways to find support if they needed it. In the beginning, Team Phenomenology was thus an effort to create a space for mutual care and support. But as we all know, it is nearly impossible to gather a group of phenomenologically-inspired thinkers in a room— even a Zoom room—for too long before they begin articulating their experiences in relation to this or that phenomenological figure, concept, or approach. Soon thereafter, Team Phenomenology—or as it came to be known even more playfully and as a gesture to the worldwide shortage of an essential household product, TP—began reading a short phenomenological text to be discussed for exactly an hour each week in relation to what was happening in the world and with us.

In the spring and summer of 2020, the world broke down. A worldly breakdown often gives rise to forms of moral breakdown, or those "moments" when some worldly event or occurrence forces a person or persons to critically reflect on their until then unquestioned way of being-in-the-world (Zigon 2007). From the persistence of the global pandemic, to the collapse of the economy, to the murder of George Floyd by police officers on camera, to the worldwide response to that injustice, the world and its human inhabitants experienced a breakdown in those months and it became impossible to ever see, hear, understand, or be in the world in the same way again. For after having experienced a moral breakdown, one's world has shifted—even if ever so slightly—such that one can never return to the world that once was (Zigon 2007). Indeed, for some, such a breakdown can motivate one to begin to act politically, or initiate what Zigon calls an ethics of dwelling that motivates a politics of worldbuilding (2018; 2019).

In response, Team Phenomenology began reading more critically-oriented phenomenology and phenomenological hermeneutic-oriented texts. As the anthropologist Robert Desjarlais already described it in 1997, we understand critical phenomenology not only as a description of "what people feel, think, or experience but also . . . [of] how the *processes* of feeling or experiencing come about through multiple, interlocking interactions" of, for example, political, economic, and cultural forces (25; emphasis in original). Such a critical phenomenology goes beyond classical phenomenology, as Lisa Guenther (2020) has more recently argued, "by reflecting on the quasi-transcendental social structures that make our experience of the world possible and meaningful, and also by engaging in a material practice of 'restructuring the world'" (15). Indeed, with his critical reading of phenomenological hermeneutics, Zigon has described critical hermeneutics as a theoretical-analytic of the otherwise that "not only discloses the normalizing limits of ordinary everyday existence but, more importantly, participates in the opening of new possibilities for thinking, saying, doing, or being" (2019, 15; 2018).

Berwald, Sara Castro, Anna Corwin, Vicki Eagle, Ulises Espinoza, Devin Flaherty, Gregory Flynn-Sollish, Yanina Gori, Nicco La Mattina, Abigail Mack, Matthew McCoy, Eva Melstrom, Vanessa Melo, Paul Melas, Stephanie Keeney Parks, Christopher Stephan, Rachel Parks, Megan Raschig, Alessandra Rosen, Aidan Seale-Feldman, Alexander Thompson, Lauren Textor, Sylvia Tidey and Wesley Wilson.

We also began inviting thinkers who either explicitly take up this critical approach to phenomenology and hermeneutics or engage with it. For example, we invited Alia Al-Saji, Morten Axel Pedersen, Anne O'Byrne, Judith Butler, Ed Casey, Thomas Csordas, Simon Critchely, Robert Desjarlais, Lewis Gordon, Lisa Guenther, Ghassan Hage, Martin Jay, Jonathan Lear, Rebecca Longtin, Ignacio Quepons, Dermot Moran, Fred Moten, Matthew Rattcliffe, Joel Robbins, Hans Ruin, Gayle Salamon, Anthony Steinbock, Dan Zahavi, and others to join us and to discuss their work in relation to current events. Much to our surprise, many of these guests became regular participants in the group, some joining weekly and others more intermittently.

In retrospect, however, it is perhaps not that surprising that what began as a weekly check-in for anthropology graduate students and friends soon became a weekly meeting of anthropologists and philosophers focused on critical phenomenology and hermeneutics. The core organizers of Team Phenomenology—Jason Throop and, eventually, Jarrett Zigon—have had ongoing working relations with phenomenological philosophers for nearly a decade now. A third participant of TP and a contributor to this volume, the phenomenological anthropologist Cheryl Mattingly, has been working closely with a group of phenomenological philosophers and anthropologists at Aarhus University in Denmark for even longer, a group that Throop and Zigon has since joined.[2] Until the world shut and broke down, this group had been meeting, thinking, and presenting together at least once a year for nearly a decade.

Neither is it surprising that Team Phenomenology so quickly and easily turned its focus to critical phenomenology and hermeneutics. Although critical phenomenology, for example, has recently begun to attract much attention in philosophy—due in no small part to the important contributions of Guenther, Al-Saji, O'Byrne, Salamon, and the establishment of this journal, *Puncta*—a strong case could be made that the longest and deepest tradition of critical phenomenology is in anthropology. For example, anthropologists such as Byron Good (1993) and Robert Desjarlais (1997) have been writing about critical phenomenology since the 1990s, and Cheryl Mattingly (2019), Sarah Willen (2007; 2019), and Jarrett Zigon (2007; 2011; 2018; 2019), among others have been ever since (Throop 2014). The field has developed to such a point that many of these same phenomenological anthropologists have begun offering graduate seminars on critical phenomenology and critical hermeneutics over the past few years. The point here is not to tell an origin story or to make a turf claim, but rather to articulate a larger context for understanding the naturalness, as it were, for a group of phenomenological anthropologists to invite a number of phenomenological philosophers to join a conversation on how critical phenomenology and hermeneutics can help us better understand our contemporary condition (Dyring and Wentzer 2021; Wentzer and Mattingly 2018; Zigon 2018).

[2] The Aarhus group consists of the philosophers Rasmus Dyring and Thomas Schwarz Wentzer, and the anthropologists Lone Grøn, Maria Louw, and Lotte Meinert, among others. Our same group has also had close connections and ongoing exchange with the phenomenologically oriented anthropologists Henrik Vigh and Hans Lucht, as well as the philosopher Dan Zahavi in Copenhagen.

While there are many generative resonances between philosophical and anthropological engagements with phenomenology, there are also some important differences (Desjarlais and Throop 2011; Ram and Houston 2015). Indeed, phenomenology has been distinctively recast within anthropology, with ethnographic engagements offering a unique lens to reexamine, rethink, and critique phenomenological insights (Csordas 1990; Jackson 1996; 1998; 2014; Katz and Csordas 2003; Mattingly 1998; 2014; Stoller 1984; 2008; Throop 2010; 2012; 2018; Willen and Seeman 2012; Zigon 2018). Phenomenology has also transformed, and has been transformed by, anthropological forms of writing and representation, which do not simply conform to standard philosophical modes of exegesis. Moreover, from a phenomenological anthropological perspective, the showing forth of any given phenomenon in ethnographic analysis is necessarily tethered to how that phenomenon shows itself in the unfolding of concrete engagements in the life of the ethnographer and the communities they work with and learn from. Indeed, unlike many forms of philosophical phenomenology, phenomenological anthropology is necessarily grounded upon forms of thinking that arise in the actualities of living relations that carry with them forms of ethical being-with and thinking-together-with-one-another that necessarily transcend the scope of any specific project. While the forms of critical thinking that emerge within the context of phenomenological anthropological research bears the traces of the relational and worldly conditions that first gave rise to it, it also exceeds such conditions as thinking remains tethered to generative living forms of relationality that continue along in ways that never simply abide by a given researcher's specific projects, plans, or goals, whatever they might be. Being continually open to unsettlement, surprise, and ungrounding is thus at the very heart of what propels critical modes of thinking in phenomenological anthropological research and writing.

The year 2020—to put it colloquially (and we often did)—was a shit show, and (as of this writing) 2021 is not shaping up to be much better. Phenomenologically speaking, however, it disclosed significant questions concerning the intertwining of conditions for existence and the singularity of any particular existence. The everyday experience of this disclosure, as we mentioned above, could be described as a breakdown that compelled many persons to confront for the first time the conditions of their own and other lives, as well as the many pernicious and precarious aspects of these conditions. Put another way, our contemporary condition—upon reflection—may one day prove to be the year the (philosophical) world realized the singular importance of critical phenomenology and hermeneutics. For if nothing else, the experience of facing such a radical ungrounding has opened up possibilities to see the generativity of this intertwining more explicitly and rigorously than before.

This special issue of *Puncta* brings together anthropologists and philosophers who take up a critical phenomenological or hermeneutic approach for thinking the contemporary condition—each of whom have participated in various ways in Team Phenomenology over the past year. From the possibility of inhabiting a world conditioned by a global pandemic, to the impossibility of dwelling in conditions of systemic racism, from the question of how to face a future that presents itself as looming, to a present that denies the very possibility of truth: this collection responds to these and more in the hope of showing not only the

contemporary conditions of existence, but that other conditions always remain as an ever-present potentiality.

This collection of essays, which each take up unique critical phenomenologically or hermeneutically inspired analyses, are thus rooted in a form of *thinking-together-with* that arose in response to an unfolding and unprecedented situation. The crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing social and political unrest, called forth an otherwise—the formation of a community of thinkers whose mutual care and engagement generated the possibility for this volume to be. We very much look forward to this ongoing conversation continuing and hope that the contributions to this Special Issue are only the beginning as both anthropologists and philosophers continuing thinking-together-with one another about how critical phenomenology and hermeneutics can speak to the myriad forms of crisis that define our times.

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A LIVABLE LIFE? AN INHABITABLE WORLD? SCHELER ON THE TRAGIC

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Regardless of where we are, and we are in many places, we live now, in the early Spring of 2021, under a new set of conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic. I am not saying that the pandemic creates one condition that can be separated from prevailing social and ecological conditions, but, rather, that the pandemic now configures those prevailing conditions a new way. Those prevailing conditions include: environmental destruction, poverty, racism, global inequalities, social violence, including violence directed against women and sexual minorities. In these pandemic times, some of us are doubtless suffering acute losses and others may be observing those losses from safer parts of the world, but all of us are living in relation to ambient illness and death. Death and illness are quite literally in the air. However differently we register this pandemic—and what it means to register it will prove important to what I have to say about the phenomenology of the senses—we do doubtless understand it as global; it implicates each of us in an interconnected world, a world of living creatures whose capacity to affect one another can be a matter of life or death. I am not sure I would say that this is *a common world* we share, since as much as we might wish to dwell in a common world, I am not sure we currently do. Perhaps it is more apt to say that there are many and overlapping *worlds*, for so many of the major resources of the world are not equitably shared, and there remain those who have only a small or vanished share of the world. We cannot register a global phenomenon such as the pandemic without at once registering those inequalities and, in this current case, seeing those inequalities intensify. We sometimes say in English that those with wealth and protection live in a different world than those who do not. That is a figure of speech, but does it not also communicate a reality? Maybe we ought not to be taken seriously when we speak that way if there is, after all, a singular world that encompasses such inequalities. But what if it remains descriptively true that some worlds are not quite part of that one world, that common world, or that there are zones of life that exist and persist outside the common or the commons?

Perhaps those who dwell in such zones do the work for that common world, and are tied to it through labor, but are not for that reason *of* it, if by "of it" we mean to designate a mode of belonging. Indeed, perhaps those who constitute replaceable labor or who dwell

outside the zone of productivity as recognized by capitalist metrics are considered the refuse, the waste of the common world, or the zone of criminality, Black and brown life, poor, in debt, living in the endless time of unpayable debt, a debt that suffuses life and survives the life of the indebted person. So maybe we need to think about contiguous and overlapping worlds that are uncommon or even, as Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2013) argue, belong to an underlying "undercommons." That is a zone of negligence, criminality, but also refuge, experiments in community and art, often undertaken without sufficient funding. If, in light of all this, we still want to talk about a shared world, we might, with Jacques Rancière (2012), talk about "the part of those who have no part"—those for whom participation in the commons is not possible, or no longer is (14). If we were to talk about shares of the world—not financial shares, but part of the common share that is the world—we would have to admit that there is no equitable measure for distributing equal shares of the world. A share would be a form of participation and belonging that could not be measured by economic metrics, and would doubtless demand a measure beyond that metric. For we are not just talking about resources and companies in which a share of stock is to be had, but a common world, a sense of the common, a sense of belonging to a world, or of the world itself as a site of belonging. That is not the same, I think, as a struggle for recognition within the existing social terms, but entails a fundamental transformation of the understanding of value. As such, it is a way of living life with the assumptions that one's life has value, a value beyond market value, and that the world will be structured to facilitate one's flourishing, and that this happens, or will happen, not only for oneself but for everyone else as well.

We are, of course, far from this idea of a common world. The pandemic, and now the distribution of vaccines, illuminates and intensifies racial inequalities, as we know. A large portion of pandemic pain is clustered in some parts of the subjugated and colonized world and in communities of color. In the US, Black and brown people are three times as likely to become infected with the virus as white people, and twice as likely to die (CDC 2021). The statistics cannot explain how it got to be that way, but we can assume that one reason is that it has been accepted within the so-called "common world" that the loss of Black life is simply not as worrisome or grievable as the loss of white life (often described simply as "human life"). Indeed, face to face with such statistical inequalities, we may find ourselves asking, "what kind of world is it in which those statistics are true?" We can mean several things by such a question. We may be asking, "what version of reality do those statistics serve?" Or, "what world is circumscribed by the statistics themselves?" Yet, even as social and economic inequalities are brought into fuller relief under pandemic conditions, and a growing and vulnerable undercommons of abandonment, fugitivity, and experimental life is exposed, there is also a movement in a global direction, one that seems based on a renewed and more acute sense of mortality coupled with a political sense of who dies early, whose death is preventable. For which set of living beings there exist no safeguards, no infrastructural or social promise of continuity, the sense of a life with the supports required to live on? And now we see the global distribution of the vaccine, and the grim reality that countries such as DR Congo and Haiti have access to very few doses, if any at all (Covid-19 Vaccination Tracker). The draw toward a global sense of the world (and let us presume that

a global sense of the world is registered phenomenologically through different senses of the global) is strengthened by a common immunological predicament, even as it is one that we live out very differently depending on where we are and how we socially positioned.

Pandemic is etymologically *pan-demos*, all the people, or perhaps more precisely, the people everywhere, or something that crosses over or spreads over or through the people. It establishes the people as porous and interconnected. The "*demos*" is thus not the citizens of a given state, but all the people despite the legal barriers that seek to separate them. A pandemic operates throughout the world population, but it also afflicts the people as human creatures who bear a susceptibility to viral infection. "The world" that is implied is the everywhere, the *pan*, a world that is threaded together through infection and recovery, by immunity and by fatality. There is no border that stops it from traveling if humans travel, and no social category secures absolute immunity. Indeed, the pretense of power that acts as if it were immune by virtue of its social power is actually one of the most vulnerable to infection, since it throws precautions to the wind, as we see with Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and as we surely saw in lurid detail with the immediate past President of the United States. It is as if the pandemic keeps insisting on the *pan*, the world, but the world keeps dividing into unequally exposed zones. So even though we tend to speak of the world as a singular horizon or even expect that the word, "world," will set the horizon to experience itself, in other contexts, we surely talk about worlds in the plural, and feel that it is imperative to do so. Oddly, we don't generally hear about *worlds of the virus*, but we surely could. If we did, that would suggest that multiple world horizons are operative, horizons that do not always exactly fuse as Hans-Georg Gadamer (2013) expected them to; they would be asynchronous horizons, world-limits, as it were, configured through different temporalities that overlap and diverge but do not fully converge.

Some have thought that we need to shake this notion of the world and turn to the planetary as a decidedly less anthropocentric concept. The planetary can furnish a critical perspective on geographical maps that are invariably geopolitical, whose lines are the accomplishments of those who vanquish, national boundaries usually forged through war or colonization. Achille Mbembe (2019) argues, "[t]he political in our time must start from the imperative to reconstruct the world in common." However, he argues, if we consider the plundering of the earth's resources for the purposes of corporate profit, privatization, and colonization itself as planetary project or enterprise, then it makes sense that the true opposition, the one that does not send us back to our egos, our barriers, and identities, will be a form of "decolonization [which] is by definition a planetary enterprise, a radical openness of and to the world, *a deep breathing* for the world as opposed to insulation" (my emphasis). The planetary opposition to extraction and systemic racism ought to then deliver us back to the world, or let the world arrive, as if for the first time, in a way that allows for a "deep breathing"—a desire we all know now, if we have not already forgotten how to wish for it.

PANDEMIC WORLDS

There are, of course, many ways to approach this question of the world, including the now complicated debates about "world" literature (Prendergast 2004). Sometimes there, we find distinctions like "European" literature and "world" literature, as if the world is every other place outside of Europe or the Anglo-American context. In other words, the center of the world gets a place name, but all those other locations of literature are elsewhere and, therefore, the world. A vast domain and without proper names, the world becomes an elsewhere. In contrast, there is the important work of María Lugones, decolonial feminist who in 1987 wrote on "world-travelling," offering a counter-imperialist account of moving from one's own world to another's world in order to undergo a transformation in the direction of a more loving perception of alterity. That work is now thirty-three years old, but addresses readers across the world at the same time that it marks those separated worlds, underscoring the risk of disorientation in entering another world, another language, or epistemic field. Lugones underscores the importance of letting one's epistemic field—one's very sense of the limit and structure of the world—become upended and reoriented in the course of an encounter in which one becomes willing to suspend or forfeit the coordinates of the world one has known in an effort to reach and apprehend another.

The pandemic has brought with it this oscillation between world and worlds. Whereas some insist that the pandemic intensifies all that was already wrong with the world, and others suggest that the pandemic opens us to a new sense of global interconnection and interdependency, both propositions are wagers that emerge in the midst of contemporary disorientation. No matter how located and differentiated the ways that pandemic registers for people across the world, it remains understood as a phenomenon, a force, a crisis, even a condition, that extends throughout the world, and that in being treated as a condition of the world, figures the world (or gives forth the world) in some quite specific ways. In other words, no one, no matter where they are, is not thinking about the world. Although some nations, like the US, have reverted to hyper-nationalist frameworks for understanding the virus and its effects, competing, even, with the rest of the world to monopolize vaccinations, their efforts nevertheless index the world in some way. And though some regions seem to have escaped the worst ravages of the COVID-19 by chance or have contained its effect through deliberate forms of social conduct, no region is in principle immune. No region, no bounded entity, indeed, no discrete body is by definition immune in advance. For a pandemic names a global susceptibility, a potential suffering, that belongs to human life in its immunological relationship to the world, one that is part of the world for now, and perhaps for an indefinite period of time. Once it becomes endemic, it will be an enduring part of the world. Interestingly, we do not have a noun for that: "there is an endemic unleashed on the world!"—no, such a phrase cannot be: a pandemic can be unleashed, but an illness that becomes endemic becomes part of the very fabric of the world, the experience of the world, a new sense of the world when all the unleashing has come to an end. But even when this pandemic fades, immunological vulnerability will certainly not. And if we hate the virus for the vulnerability it exposes, we ought not for that reason conclude that the absence of the virus will eradicate that vulnerability. Immunologically considered,

the vulnerability foregrounded by the virus is a function of the fact that what is foreign or exogenous is always a part of any organism—a position defended by co-constructionists for many years, including, most recently, Thomas Pradeu (2012).[1] The problem with the virus is not that it is foreign, but that it is new, and that our immunological systems, or most of ours, have no ready way to recognize it and to fight against it. The thesis of co-constructionists is that the organism is constructed by its environment even as it constructs that environment in return.[2] The aim of a co-constructionist theory is less to distinguish what belongs to the self and what does not than to understand the immunological problem produced by pandemics as an unpreparedness for what is unprecedented. Of course, if there were no analogies to other viruses such as SARS viruses, then the adenovirus vaccines would be declared useless from the start. And Messenger RNA vaccines which seek to mimic the shape of the virus so that we develop the immunological capacity to identify, react, and fight it also rely on the possibility of recognizing a similar structure. Both analogy and mimicry are crucial to strengthening the immune system in this context. At the same time, however, the immune system is not only challenged by what comes from outside, but also from the organism itself, which is why autoimmune attacks, those waged by the organism against itself, are very often the inflammatory consequence of new forms of viral infections. I underscore this point because too often the virus is said to come from a place, a foreign place—China, Brazil, South Africa—and described as imported without proper papers into the body politic, at which point it is considered that public and national health is damaged by what is foreign. That seems to me more of an immigration analogy within a nationalist imaginary than an immunological model. I underscore this because the organism cannot survive without ingesting foreign elements, and it can be more acutely at risk from its autoimmune condition than anything foreign. The world is not just out there as the backdrop for human action, but is on a daily basis incorporated into the body itself, suggesting a vital connection between body and world. Call me a Lucretian, if you must, but we won't be able to understanding shared vulnerability and interdependency unless we concede that we pass the air we breathe to one another, that we share the surfaces of the world, and that we cannot touch another without also being touched.

MAX SCHELER'S TRAGIC SENSE

I will turn to phenomenology, and especially the work of Max Scheler (1954), in order to understand better the ordinary language example I referenced above—a question often now uttered in anguish or surprise: *what kind of a world is this in which such a thing like this can*

[1] See Thomas Pradeu (2012). Pradeu argues against the immunological framework that accepts a self/non-self dichotomy in favor of a continuity thesis that emphasizes reactive patterns and memories in the organism's immune system, as it were, and underscores that challenges to that system can be endogenous or exogenous, and that the challenge consists in a rupture of the pattern of interactivity. The problem is not the acceptance or rejection of what is foreign, but the creation of new patterns of interactivity.

[2] We see a version of this theory in Anne Fausto-Sterling's (2000) work as well, with important implications for reformulating the sex/gender distinction.

happen!? But let me first make some preliminary remarks about the contexts in which an enunciation appears. It may emerge because I am living in the aftermath of a regime that happily destroyed democratic institutions in a daily way or because my region is subject to massively destructive fires as the result of climate change, or because white supremacists are on the rise and congregating near or on campus, and that all of this happens within the context of a pandemic that continues to surge and strike after relative periods of abeyance. I would suggest that the question, "w*hat kind of world is this?"*, seeks to fathom the world in which such a virus can happen. It is not just that the virus is new, but that the world is now exhibited or disclosed as a different sort of world that we once thought it was. The aspect of the world is transformed by the emergence of the virus and its effects. Of course, I would not argue that what emerges now is an altogether new idea of the world, since pandemics have happened before, and the world was always a place where pandemics could happen, or so it has seemed for several centuries. I am suggesting only that something about the pandemic makes us reconsider the world as our object of scrutiny, register the world as a cause for alarm, mark the fact that this present version of the world was not anticipated, and register the world as bearing a new kind of opacity rather suddenly and as imposing a new set of limits.

When we exclaim in that way, we are asking about the world, taking the world as our object, or seeing that the world has taken us up in a new way. The world the virus discloses or makes more clearly manifest—and unevenly permeates—is not only a map or a picture, but something exhibited in the course of viral circulation and its effects. Of course, we may be given graphic pictures of the virus with its blue crown and spikes, and when these representations fill our screens, they stand in for a viral condition that they cannot adequately represent. They are closer to the logo of the virus, analogous to an advertisement for Disney World. The pictures function as abbreviated graphic forms that take the virus out of the quick and invisible time of its action and circulation and splash it with color, distill its spikes as a crown. Although the daily graphs and maps which seek to produce a picture of the viral world are surely useful, they provide a skewed understanding of the pandemic character of the virus by virtue of the pictorial form. Martin Heidegger (1977) claimed that the world picture does not mean a picture of the world, but the world conceived and grasped as a picture (129). He raised questions about whether the world could or should be conceived that way, and what it meant that pictures were coming to stand for the world. He pointed out that the subject who stands before such a world picture, seeks not only to grasp that visual version of the world in its entirety, but finds itself exempt from the world it seeks to know. Sometimes we find that conceit operating in the media, and it consoles us by presuming that we are not part of the picture that we see. And yet, the effort to grasp the virus in pictorial or graphic terms does not actually secure the immunity of the perceiving subject. We are in the picture that we see, and the distance established by spectatorship is one that denies or, at least, suspends, what it means to be implicated in the phenomenon that one seeks to know.

Does this sense of being implicated change, though, when we understand the viral world, or the sense of the world given by the virus, as one that pertains to touch and to breathing, to proximity and distance as it works in invisible ways to produce existential

effects? Part of what makes it frightening is that we cannot see it in everyday life without a rather powerful technological instrument. We are left with anxious inference. Do you have it? Where is it? For all those reasons, I am drawn back to phenomenology, or perhaps compelled to draw it forward in order to understand the phenomenon as exhibiting a sense of world, or a world that is given to us in part through the senses.

One text that considers this sudden exhibition of the world in a new way is "On the Tragic" that Max Scheler published in German in 1915, the same year that Freud published his *Reflections on War and Death*, and the second year of the first World War.[3] The text works in a heterodox way with Husserlian phenomenology, taking distance from those who would center phenomenological analysis in the subject. Edmund Husserl had opened up a debate within the field, one that became stronger in the 1930s through the 1950s about whether the correlations between the subjective and objective worlds (called noetic and noematic correlates) should emphasize one pole rather than the other. Is there a transcendental subject who constitutes the world from its own *a priori* structures, or does the world impose itself on our perception in ways that suggest that the ego and the subject are, in fact, superfluous? Ludwig Landgrebe, a Belgian philosopher, in the inaugural issue of *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* in 1940 made a strong case that that the subject is the constitutive origin of the world, and that this does not primarily involve a thematization of the world. Although we are each born into an already constituted world, phenomenology asks us to bracket that world as we ask about its origins. The question of the origin of the world is not, for Landgrebe, a question of causality but rather one of constitution, and for that there has to be a horizon. What is worldly, i.e., what belongs to or is *of* the world, appears within a pre-given horizon at the same time that it must be constituted as an appearance through a transcendental subjectivity. Landgrebe may not have had Scheler in mind, since Jean-Paul Sartre had already put forth his proposition to transcend the ego altogether in 1937, and, even earlier, numerous Husserlians, such as Aron Gurwitsch, were arguing that perhaps there is no transcendental ego or subject, but only, at best, a transcendental field.

Writing twenty-five years earlier, Scheler was deeply influenced by Husserl, but decided that his approach to phenomenology evacuated objective reality, including objective features of the world. The essay treats the tragic as a kind of phenomenon, a noematic cluster, as the Husserlians might say, but one that is not primarily constituted by consciousness or acts of projection or interpretation. In that essay, he offers a way to think about the tragic that clearly departs from an Aristotelian understanding of tragic action according to which the unfolding of a dire set of consequences unfolds according to rules of likelihood and probability. The tragic, for Scheler, is not regulated by rules. Oddly, the tragic is not found in the character of a play nor is it an exclusively aesthetic problem; it neither defines a genre nor a character with a flaw, brought down by *akrasia* or weakness. Scheler's text surprises with its suggestion that we consider the tragic as a way in which the world exhibits itself. The tragic appears by virtue of human events, but it is

[3] The most accessible English version of this essay is "On the Tragic" in *The Questions of Tragedy*, edited by Arthur B. Coffin (1991). However, citations in this article are from the same essay, published as "On the Tragic" in *CrossCurrents* (1954).

not the specificity of the human that it shows. Rather, it is a feature of the world, one of its qualities. "The tragic," he writes,

> is above all a property (ein Merkmal) which we observe in events, fortunes, characters, and the like, and which actually exists in them. *We might say that it is given off by them like a heavy breath* (ein schwerer, kuehler Hauch, der von diesen Dingen selbst ausgeht) or seems like an obscure glimmering that surrounds them. In it a specific feature of the world's makeup appears before us, and not a condition of our own ego, nor its emotions, nor its experience of compassion. (1954, 178)

If we doubted whether his essay could speak to us in pandemic times, consider that, in addition to the heavy breath, the tragic depends, he writes, "on aerobic emanations" (Scheler 1919, 240, author's translation)[4]—just like the virus—leading one to speculate whether the tragic has viral character, moving and encircling as a virus does. It is a heavy breath that gives off something, and some lingering aerosol traces are apparently illuminated by a special kind of light.

Although Scheler (1954) sought to establish the objectivity of a wide range of phenomena that seem implausible, such as "a hierarchy of values" (180), I find it interesting that this term, "the tragic," has an objective aura in his writing. The tragic happens by virtue of events, but it is not an event. At most, on Scheler's account, it is a category under which certain kinds of experiences are gathered. He draws our attention to a relatively simple formulation: "to belong to the category of the tragic some value must be destroyed" (180). I take it that the kind of value destroyed in "the tragic" is one that is difficult to imagine as subject to destruction. What is that value? Or how might that set of values be circumscribed? The tragic is not the same as a sadness that knows and names what it is sad about. When we speak about tragic grief, in his view, it "contains a definite composure" or sense of peace (181-182). And, importantly, it extends *beyond the horizon* of the world. It is less a consequence of our own action than the result of something arriving from the outside and subsequently permeating the soul—his phrase. Even as the tragic is occasioned by *events*—what comes to be understood as tragic events—the tragic can never be reduced to the event which is its occasion; it persists, rather, as *a kind of atmosphere (geistige Atmosphaere)*, one in which an uncompromising and inevitable destruction of a value takes place. In this way, though the tragic event is an occasion for the tragic, something more is exhibited, namely, a set of components that, taken together, constitute the very makeup of the world. It is these components, Scheler writes, which "make such a thing possible" (182). In other words, the event exhibits something about the world: the event is its occasion, but the world is at once its condition and the phenomenon itself: "the tragic is always concerned with what is individual, singular, but at the same time, the constitution of the world itself [eine Konstitution der Welt selbst]" (Scheler 1919, 249, author's translation).[5] So, it is clearly

[4] "Es ist ein schwerer, kühler Hauch, der von diesen Dingen selbst ausgeht, ein dunkler Schimmer, der die umfließt und in dem uns eine bestimmte Beschaffenheit der Welt …"

5 "Das ist nicht eine allgemeine, in Begriffen bestimmbare Weltkonstitution, die angesichts aller fen bestimmbare Weltkonstitution, die angesichts aller tragischen Vorkommnisse dieselbe wäre, sondern

not the case, for Scheler, that the world is constituted through a transcendental subject. Rather, on the occasion of great loss and destruction of something or someone valuable or, perhaps more precisely, some value that they bear, the tragic emerges, consisting not only in the grief over the one lost, but the shock or bewilderment that the world is such that such an event can happen.

My wager is that Scheler names this sense of the tragic residing in the exclamatory fragment, "what kind of world is this in which such a thing can happen?!"; it is not just this event, this loss or the destruction of this value, but the world in which such a destruction is possible or, perhaps, the world in which such a destruction has become possible. The wager of Scheler's (1954) intense anti-subjectivism is that in or through the tragic event, "we are directly confronted with a definite condition of the world's makeup without deliberation or any sort of 'interpretation'" (182). Here is the longer version of his argument:

> This confronts us in the event itself; it does not result from what it does to the things which brought it about. It is only momentarily connected with the event and is independent of the elements that make it a determined event. The depth is brought about by the fact that its subject is twofold. One is the element of the event that has been seen by us. The other is that point in the world's makeup (constitution) that is exemplified by the event and of which the event is but an example. Grief seems to pour out from the event into unlimited space (beyond the horizon of the world). It is not a universal, abstract world-constitution that would be the same in all tragic events. It is rather a definite, individual element of the world's construction. The remote subject of the tragic is always the world itself, the world taken as a whole which makes such a thing possible. This "world" itself seems to be the object immersed in sorrow. (182)

The text suggests that the point is precisely not to say, "oh, the loss of this or that life is not important, but only the loss of a sense of *world* in which those events remained unimaginable." No, it is about the life and the world in which such a life has lived. It is both at once. It is the movement between the two. The sorrow, in fact, moves between life and world, the event of loss, singular and irreversible, and the world, now in its unpicturable entirety immersed in sorrow. In some ways, this is true insofar as the stories of loss overlap: the cell phone at the hospital; the getting barred at the hospital door; the inability to get to a hospital or to gain admission. They refer to this loss and that loss, each very specific losses, and yet as the mode of reference repeats across its occasions, a looming world of loss emerges, or perhaps its ambient atmosphere becomes, or threatens to become, the air itself, or the very way that the air is registered here and now. We breathe, and that means we are alive in some sense. But if potential and actual grief is in the air we breathe, then the breath is now the means of passage for the virus and for the grief that sometimes follows, as well as the life that survives.

But Scheler suggest that, with the tragic, a value is destroyed. What is that value? What are those values? One value is touch. The other is breath. Another is the complex surfaces

immer eine besondere, individuelle, eigenartige, aber gleichwohl eine Konstitution der Welt selbst."

and enclosures of the world—the infrastructure of habitation, figured both as shelter and refuge but also as a potentially dangerous enclosure. I am hardly saying anything new when I make the normative claim that the world of surfaces and the air we breathe should function as supports for life itself. Under pandemic conditions, the very elements upon which we depend for life carry the potential to take life: we come to worry about touch and breath, proximity, loud shouts of joy, dancing too closely. That is a drag, something that drags us down, a kind of perpetual sorrow that afflicts all the joints of sociality. Taking Scheler as a point of departure, then, I want to ask more about how to live a life under such conditions, and more generally ask about the conditions of a livable life. It is as if the basic requirements for life have been laid bare, and that we become aware of the easier, less self-conscious, ways of touching and breathing that we perhaps had before. We lose the kinds of proximity that we valued; we lose touch, tactility as a sense, and connection. We recede into boundaries, if we have them and can afford them, of selfhood and space, of shelter and household, of neighborhood paths, as the value of extra-domestic intimacy and sociality is lost, as we, as it were, lose touch across the enforced distances.

It is of course this or that loved person, or this or that kind of gathering, that we surely miss, or have missed, but it is also the constriction of the horizon that delimits what we call the world. So perhaps the problem is not only the one that Scheler specifies as tragic—the world in which such viral threat and destruction is possible—but also the question of life: what it means to live as a living creature, a creature among creatures, a life among living processes, under conditions such as these? He mentions a kind of guilt that is associated with the tragic, but it is not one that leads back to the actions of the individual. It is a sense of responsibility that emerges, it seems, from the structure of the world itself, from the fact that we are responsible for one another even though we cannot hold ourselves personally responsible for creating the conditions and instruments of harm. In his words, "The tragic consists—at least in human tragedies—not simply in the absence of 'guilt' but rather in the fact that the guiltiness cannot be localized" (1954, 187). In fact, the sense of the tragic increases as it becomes impossible to pinpoint the blame for events.

The restrictions are, of course, occasions for new experimentations, communities of care that are not bound by households, that establish kin beyond the nuclear and normative family. But there is also the sense that a partially stopped economy has given the environment a chance to renew and repair. Strangers treat each other not only with paranoia, but also with remarkable solicitude. Social movements, like Black Lives Matter, take to the streets in masks, and apparently act in responsible enough ways so that no spikes in the virus are traced to those impressive and ongoing movements for social and economic justice. The case for national health care has never seemed stronger where I live; the case for a guaranteed national income is now more possible than before. Socialist ideals are renewed. And the movements to abolish prisons and defund the police are no longer "crazy" pipedreams, as opponents would claim, but are openly debated in city councils and regional authorities. And there is some form of grief and solidarity that cross the social and economic lines that so often tend to separate human creatures from one another. Those who insist on denying the death, the loss, the stunning forms of economic and social inequality may well be losing power.

The pandemic condition links us, establishes our ties as both precarious and persistent. The metric that tells us which lives are worth safeguarding and which lives are not is clear to see and to oppose. As is the metric that establishes acceptable levels of death—universities and business are making this determination even if they do not acknowledge that they do. And such decisions target Black and brown people, the elderly, those with preexisting health conditions, the poor, the homeless, those with disabilities, and the incarcerated, including those stalled at the border or subject to over-populated detention camps. In opposition to all these forms of destitution, there are new and renewed mobilizations, and they appear to be gaining in strength and number. They are each appalled by the world as it is currently constituted and endeavoring to constitute a different kind of world. And yet, it is not fully within their power to make the world anew, for the world has made clear that there are conditions and limits to human action, and that human action is not the center of the world.

HOW TO LIVE?

The question "what kind of world is this?" presupposes another question: how are we to live in this world? And then perhaps a further set of questions: given this world, what makes for a livable life? And what makes for an inhabitable world? For if we radically question the world in which the destruction of basic values is possible, if that world leads us to a certain line of questioning, it seems to me that one reason we exclaim about the world in that way is that we are not sure how best to live in such a world, and what a livable life would be. And we see, perhaps more clearly than before—or in a different way—that the possibility of a livable life depends upon an inhabitable world. In concluding, I wish to think about those two latter questions and see whether Scheler's formulation can help to answer them, or whether it meets its limits there.

To make a demand for a livable life is to demand that a life has the power to live. If we ask the question, what makes a life livable, we do so precisely because we know that under some conditions it surely is not, that there are unlivable conditions of poverty, incarceration, or destitution or social and sexual violence, including homophobic, transphobic, racist violence, and violence against women. Implicit in the question, "how long can I live like this?," is an assumption that there must be other ways of living, and that we can, or rather must, distinguish between forms of life that are livable and those that are unlivable. When the question "how can I live like this?" becomes a conviction—"I will *not* continue to live like this"—we are in the midst of an urgent philosophical and social question: what are the conditions that permit life to be lived in a way that affirms the continuation of life itself? And with whom shall I join my life in order to assert the values of our lives? These questions are different from "what is the good life?" or even the older existential question, "what is the meaning of life?"

As I suggested at the outset, the question of what makes a life livable is linked with the question, what makes for an inhabitable world. This last was not Scheler's question, but

it follows from the world that he describes, the world that he claims is exhibited through the tragic. When the world is an object immersed in sorrow, how is it possible to inhabit such a world? What about the persistence of uninhabitable sorrow? The answer lies less in individual conduct or practice than in the forms of solidarity that emerge, across whatever distance, to produce the conditions for inhabiting the world. Am I restoring the place of the subject to the discussion after Scheler has rather emphatically dismissed it? Or am I shifting the discussion to the question of life, of living, and the livable, and not just in the anthropocentric senses of those terms? We have considered the negative wonder, recoil, even shock: *not the event as such, but the world in which such an event can happen*. But if such an event happens, and the world proves to be a place where it can, then, how to live in such a world? And how is such a world made livable?

This last question is slightly different from the second one I mentioned: "What is an *inhabitable* world?" This last question seems to be close cousins to, "what does it mean to live a livable life?" But these are two different questions. The first asserts the world as primary perhaps in the spirit of Scheler, but it adds the human back into the equation through its form of life, one that is connected to other life forms such that another question is spawned: how, then, can the world be inhabited by human and non-human creatures? The second asserts a distinction between a life that is livable and one that is unlivable, a distinction that actually belongs more properly to a spectrum of more and less livable lives. When we speak about the world, we are already speaking about inhabitation. It would be different if we were speaking about the earth. The earth persists in many places without being inhabited by humans, but a world always implies a space and time of inhabitation. A world includes the temporal and spatial coordinates in which a life is lived. If the world is uninhabitable, then destruction has had its way with the world. If a life is unlivable, then the conditions of livability have been destroyed. The destruction of the earth through climate change makes for an uninhabitable world: it reminds us of the necessity of limits on the human inhabitation of the environment, the fact that we cannot inhabit all of the earth without destroying the earth, and that imposing limits on where and how we live is necessary to preserve the earth which, in turn, preserves our lives. Perhaps it sounds simplistic to say, but there are better and worse ways for humans to inhabit the world. And sometimes the earth can only survive—and regenerate—only if limits are set on the reach of human habitation. Humans impose limits imposed on themselves in order to make for a habitable world under conditions of climate change. The world in which one lives includes the earth, depends upon the earth, cannot exist without the earth. Moreover, a life proves not to be livable if the world is not inhabitable. Part of what it means to live, then, and to live in a way that is livable is to have a place to live, a part of the earth than can be inhabited without destroying that earth, to have shelter, and to be able to dwell as a body in a world that is sustained and safeguarded by the structures (and infrastructures) in which one lives—to be part of what is common, to share in a world in common. To inhabit a world is part of what makes a life livable. So, we cannot finally separate the question of an inhabitable world from a livable life. If we, as humans, inhabit the earth without regard for biodiversity, without stopping climate change, without limiting carbon emissions, then we produce for ourselves an uninhabitable world. The world may not be the same as the

earth, but if we destroy the earth, we also destroy our worlds. And if we live human lives with no limits on our freedom, then we enjoy our freedom at the expense of a livable life. We make our own lives unlivable in the name of our freedom. Or, rather, we make our world uninhabitable and our lives unlivable too often in the name of a personal liberty that values itself over all other values, and that becomes an instrument by which social bonds and livable worlds are destroyed. Personal liberty, then, in some of its variations must be seen as world-destroying power. I am certainly not against personal liberty, but the destructive form seems to me to be less about the person or the individual than about a national sense of belonging and even a market sense of profit and gain. There is another form of freedom that is sidelines by this one, and it emerges in the midst of social life, a life that seeks a common world, a life that is free to seek a common world.

SOCIALITY AND SOLIDARITY

This essay has deliberately veered between philosophical investigation and political reflection in light of a present moment defined in part by the pandemic. I suggested earlier that there are some opposing views on what the pandemic prefigures about the social and economic world. We have seen that precarity and poverty have become intensified, and yet many are hopeful about redefining both sociality and solidarity during this time, and renewing demands for networks of care and interdependency that extend globally. The boundaries of the body presumed by most forms of individualism have been called into question as the invariable porosity of the body, its openings, its mucosal linings, its wind pipes, all become salient in matters of life and death. How then do we rethink bodily relations of interdependency, intertwinement, and porosity during these times? Or, rather, how do these times, and this world, already shifting in intensity, offer a chance to reflect upon interdependency, intertwinement, and porosity? Further, do these very concepts give us a new way to understand social equality and inequality? My wager is that the vexed and overlapping senses of sociality and livability can revise some of our key political concepts. I apologize in advance that I only have questions to answer, but my presupposition, itself part of the phenomenological legacy, is that the questioner is implicated in the question, and that the question to some degree seeks to open up a thought, perhaps beyond the settled horizons of both academic inquiry and ordinary experience.

At the outset of this essay, I noted the distinction between the world and the planet, citing Mbembe, suggesting that the devastation of the planet requires a planetary strategy that would allow us to imagine a world, a common world in which to breathe. I also mentioned that Husserl set up a correlation between consciousness and its world, the noetic and noematic poles of experience. And I noted that Scheler seeks in some ways to displace the transcendental subject with an emphasis on the world in its objectivity, understanding the tragic as a way in which the world leaves its impress and provokes a sorrow that exceeds the limits of experience, the horizon of the world. With Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the entire idea of correlation proves impoverished in light of the embodied character of consciousness. For the salient problem for him is neither that the world is structured in such a way that

I may know it, nor that my modes of knowing are structured in such a way to adequately apprehend the world. It is rather that I am, as a body, part of the world I seek to know, already over there, seen, mobile, and mattering. The spatial limits of the perceived body belie its proper reach, for it is always both here and there, rooted and transported. The world that is usually assumed to be over there, or around me, is in fact already in and on me, and there is no easy way around that form of adherence. My reflexivity, my capacity to see or feel myself, oscillated between subject and object poles of experience. In "Eye and Mind," Merleau-Ponty (1964) puts it this way:

> [M]y body simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize, in what it sees, the "other side" of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive to itself … [It is a self lacking transparency] … through confusion, narcissism, through inherence of the one who sees in that which [one] sees, and through [the] inherence of sensing in the sensed—a self, therefore, that is caught up in things, that has a front and a back, a past and a future. … (162-163)

He continues, "[t]hings … are incrusted into its flesh, they are part of its full definition …" (163).

In his posthumous work, published as *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty (1968) goes even further. It is by virtue of a tangible world that I can touch anything at all. The power of touch does not originate with me. The tangible, rather, understood as a field, domain or even "world" is thus there as I touch something, and as I feel my own touch, or redouble my touch in touching myself touching something else. From the touch springs forth an understanding of the tangible as a field in which these forms of object-relations and self-relations are condensed and intertwined and this reversibility of relations are constitutive of the tangible itself. So, though my body is, for instance, over here (in pandemic conditions, it is emphatically over here, hemmed in, enclosed) and is not elsewhere (except in those instances when it can be), it is still over there, in the objects I touch (I can touch, I do touch) precisely because this body belongs to a field of flesh, or a world of flesh, whose instances are not exactly united, but whose differences constitute the field itself. Flesh (*le chair*) is the understanding of the delimited body from the point of view of inter-relatedness.

Merleau-Ponty (1968) himself puts equal emphasis on the claim that "one cannot say that it is *here* or *now* in the sense that objects are" (147). And though, he writes, "I am always on the same side of my body," what I touch opens up a world of objects and surfaces that are touched and touchable by others (148). So, though I am not joined with that unity or those others who have touched that surface, are touching it now, or will surely touch it in the future, those disparate moments imply one another, are linked with one another, although they are never summarized in a temporal or conceptual unity. Echoing Scheler's contention that the tragic illuminates or discloses something constitutive about the world, Merleau-Ponty insists that in naming the name-able is opened up; in seeing, the visible looms; and in touching, the tangible leaves its impress upon us.

Intersubjectively considered (and I am moving quickly between intertwinement [*entrelac*], interconnection, and inter-relatedness), the touch of the other is something that I feel, and in some sense, I touch what is touching me in the act of being touched. Every passivity fails to become absolute. And if I imagine myself as only doing the touching, the only doer in the scene, my pretensions are undone because there is always this receptivity of the other's flesh, and so a being touched in the act of touching. Receptivity is already a touching back. The polarities of activity and passivity are complicated in this view, as is the distinct way of separating consciousness from its world. The body and its senses introduce a sense of bodies interlaced with one another that moves beyond such binary oppositions. The ways we are bound up with one another are not precisely contingent. To be a body at all is to be bound up with others and with objects, with surfaces, and the elements, including the air that is breathed in and out, air that belongs to no one and everyone.

INHABITABLE WORLD, LIVABLE LIFE

I suggest that this way of thinking has both ethical and political consequences for our times, for it offers a way of understanding interdependency that moves beyond the ontology of isolated individuals encased in discrete bodies. Perhaps this is what we already know pre-philosophically, but perhaps as well phenomenology can articulate this nascent or emergent understanding for our times. To do so, however, it has to be brought into a broader political world. First, then, politics, including the contemporary politics of work and lockdown, and then bodies, a way forward for phenomenology that might link the idea of an inhabitable world to the condition of climate destruction. If life depends on air that is passed among us, and food and shelter, derived from the resources of nature, then climate destruction brings these life requirements to the fore in a different way, and at the same time, as the pandemic.

Air, water, shelter, clothing, and access to health care are not only sites of anxiety within the pandemic and compromised under climate change, but they also constitute requirements of life, of continuing to live, and it is the poor who suffer most from not having clean water, proper shelter, breathable air, access to health care. So, under conditions of deprivation, the question of whether or not one is living a livable life is an urgent economic one: are there health service and shelters and clean enough water for any number of people to live, and for all those who are related to me to live. The existential urgency of the question is heightened by economic precarity, and that precarity is intensified under the present conditions of pandemic.

Of course, humans have different experiences of the limit of livability. And whether or not a set of restrictions are livable depends on how one gauges the requirements of one's life. "Livability" is in the end a modest requirement. One is not, for instance, asking, what will make me happy? Nor is one asking, what kind of life would most clearly satisfy my desires? One is looking, rather, to live in such a way that life itself remains bearable so that one can continue to live. In other words, one is looking for those requirements of a

life that allow a life to be sustained and to continue. Another way of saying this would be: what are the conditions of life that make possible the desire to live? For we surely know that under some conditions of restriction—incarceration, occupation, detention, torture, statelessness—one may ask, is life worth living under these conditions? And in some cases, the very desire to live is extinguished, and people do take their lives, or submit to slower forms of death dealt by slower forms of violence.

The pandemic poses questions that are specifically ethical. For the restrictions under which I am asked to live are those that protect not just my own life, but the lives of others as well. Our lives are knotted together or, perhaps, intertwined. The restrictions stop me from acting in certain ways, but they also lay out a vision of the interconnected world that I am asked to accept. If they were to speak, they would ask me to understand this life that I live as bound up with other lives, and to regard this "being bound up with one another" as a fundamental feature of who I am, since I am not fully sealed as a bounded creature, but emit breath into a shared world where I take in air that has been circulating through the lungs of others. The reason I am restricted from visiting any number of places is both self-protection and the protection of others: I am being stopped from contracting a virus that could take my life, but also from communicating a virus that I may not know that I have, and that could debilitate or take the lives of others. In other words, I am asked not to die, and not to put others at risk of illness or death. The same kinds of actions bear the same sorts of risks. So, I must decide whether to comply with that request. To understand and accept both parts of that request, I must understand myself as capable of communicating the virus, but also as someone who can be infected by the virus, so potentially both acting and acted upon. There is no escape from either end of that polarity, a risk that correlates with the two-fold dimension of breathing itself: inhalation, exhalation. It seems as if I am bound up with others through the prospect of doing or suffering harm in relation to them. The ethical quandary, or vector, that the pandemic produces begins with the insight that my life and the lives of others depend upon a recognition of how our lives depend in part upon how each of us acts. So, my action holds your life, and your action holds mine, at least potentially. If I come from a state like the US where self-interest governs everyday moral deliberations, I am used to acting on my own behalf and deciding whether and how a consideration of others comes into play. But in the ethical paradigm that belongs to the pandemic, I am already in relation to you, and you are already in relation to me, way before either of us starts to deliberate on how best to relate to one another. We are quite literally in each other's bodies without any deliberate intention to be there. If we were not, we would have no fear. We share air and surfaces, we brush up against each other by accident or by design, or consent; we are strangers near each other on the plane, and the package I wrap may be the one you open or carry, or drop at my door at the moment when I open the door and we find ourselves face to face. According to prevailing frameworks of self-interest, we act as if our separate lives come first and then we decide on our social arrangements—that is a liberal conceit that underwrites a great deal of moral philosophy. We somehow exist before and outside the contracts that bind us, and we give up our individuality and unrestrained freedom when we enter those contracts. But why do we assume individuality from the start when it is clear formed and, as psychoanalysis contends, a tenuous achievement at best?

If we ask, how and when did my life first become imaginable as a separate life, we can see that the question itself starts to unfold an answer. Individuality is an imagined status and depends on specifically social forms of the imaginary. In fact, the early stages of infancy are marked by primary helplessness, and survival of the infant depends on a range of materials and practices of care that secure nutrition, shelter, and warmth. The question of food and sleep and shelter were never separable from the question of one's life, its very livability. Those provisions must have been there, even if minimally, for any of us to begin a life which would come to include the imagining of a separate "I." That dependency on others, on provisions, on all that we could not possibly give ourselves, had to be put aside if not fully denied for any of us to decide one day that one is a singular individual, distinct and spatially closed off from others, not only separated, but *separate*. All individuation is haunted by a dependency that is imagined as if it could be overcome or has already been vanquished. And yet individuals fully isolated and on their own in the pandemic are among the most imperiled. How to live without touch or being touched, without the shared breath? Is that livable? If my "life" is from the start only ambiguously my own, then the field of social interdependency enters from the start, prior to any deliberation on moral conduct or the benefits of social contracts voluntarily entered (not all are voluntary). The question "what should I do?" or even "how do I live this life?" presupposes an "I" and a "life" that poses that question on its own and for itself alone. But if we accept that the "I" is always populated, and life is always implicated in other lives and life forms, then how do those moral questions change? How have they already changed under conditions of pandemic?

Of course, it is difficult to shake the presumption that when we talk about this life, we are talking about this discrete and bounded individual life and its finitude. No one can die in my place. No one can even go to the bathroom in my place! Further, what makes a life livable seems to be a personal question, pertaining to this life and not to any other life. And yet, when I ask what makes "a life" livable, I seem to accept that some shared conditions make human lives livable. If so, then at least some part of what makes my own life livable makes another life livable as well, and I cannot then fully dissociate the question of my own well-being from the well-being of others. The virus does not let us think another way, unless of course we turn away from what we know about the virus, as some notorious government officials have done, dragging countless others along with them. If the pandemic gives us one rather large social and ethical lesson to learn, my wager is that this seems to be it: What makes a life livable is a question that implicitly shows us that the life we live is never exclusively our own, that the conditions for a livable life have to be secured, and not just for me, but for lives and living processes more generally. Those conditions cannot be grasped, for instance, if the category of private property describes my body or individualism is accepted as a methodology. The "I" who I am is also to some extent a "we" even as tensions tend to mark the relation of these two senses of one's life. If it is this life that is mine, it seems then to be mine, and the logic of identity has won the argument with a tautological flourish. But if my life is never fully my own; if life names a condition and trajectory that is shared, then life is the place where I lose my self-centeredness and discover the porous character of my embodiment. In fact, the phrase

"my life" tends to pull in two directions at once: this life, singular, irreplaceable; this life, shared and human, shared as well with animal lives and with various systems and networks of life. I require living processes and living others to live, which means that I am nothing without them. This life, I would suggest, is densely populated before I start to live it, and must be for me to live at all. Others precede me, anticipate me to some degree, and their provisioning and early effects on me start to form this person that eventually comes to refer to itself as "I." So, the "I" never comes into being except through the support and company of others, living processes, and social institutions on whom the living human creature depends and to which it is necessarily connected. The desires and actions of those others, their ways of handling me or neglecting me, set me in motion, give me form, imprinting and establishing me as one with desires, capable of action, creating a worldly connection, bringing joy and pain, suffering loss, seeking repair. I cannot come into being without being touched, handled, maintained, and I cannot touch or handle or maintain without having first been formed in the crucible of those practices. And yet, when the conditions of touch are lost, so too is a fundamental sense of what sustains us as living creatures whose capacities for receiving and doing are layered together over time.

Because certain conditions of life and living are laid bare by the circulation of the virus, we now have a chance to grasp our relations to the earth and to each other in sustaining ways, to understand ourselves less as separated entities driven by self-interest than as complexly bound together in a living world that requires our collective resolve to struggle against its destruction, the destruction of what bears incalculable value—the ultimate sense of the tragic.

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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":

[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

[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,

[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

[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.

[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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CRISIS, ALTERITY, AND TRADITION: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION TO CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY

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Delores' five grandchildren, ranging in age from five to thirteen, are piled on her bed, a favorite cozy spot for family gatherings. Delores lives in a modest house in a predominantly Black neighborhood on the eastern outskirts of Los Angeles. She is the matriarch of her household, which is comprised of these grandchildren and two of her adult daughters, the children's mothers. The children are facing Delores' television. Delores sits to one side, outside the main scene of action where the children lean against one another, affectionate, teasing. They have gathered to watch a recording we (on the research team) have made of a local parade where three of them have performed as members of the Pasadena Rodeogirls Drill Team and one of them is in the accompanying, all male, Drum Squad. The parade features a performance competition among local Los Angeles area drill teams. These are judged informally by spectators lining the Pasadena streets and formally by a panel of judges who award prizes.

Delores' grandchildren watch the video footage intently, gauging the quality of the performance of rival teams. They joke as they comment and point out people they recognize. This includes their mother Marcy who stands on the sidelines of the passing parade. She has her back to the camera but at some point she turns and sees that the camera is aimed toward her. She waves with a grin. The children on the bed laugh at this. As their team comes into view, the children's attention stills. One of the girls (Latoya) exclaims, face lighting up "Oh there we go!" She points to the corner of the screen where she and two of her sisters can be seen executing their elaborate stepping routine. The other children lean in, following her gaze. With surprised awe she exclaims, "We look tight! We are SO tight!" And they are. Their performance is expertly choreographed, steps perfectly synced as they prance along the street in front of the judges. The bedroom is momentarily silent as the children stare at the television, mesmerized. Two of the girls on the bed sway along with the dance rhythms of the performers (which include themselves) without seeming to notice they are doing so, their moving arms a perfect muted mimicry of the movements displayed on the television screen.

Once their team has passed out of view and the drum squad follows, teasing resumes. One of the girls jokes with her brother Leroy, who is in the drum squad and not known for his physical prowess, "What is Leroy *doing*?" She laughs. "What are you *doing* Leroy?" she repeats, laughing harder. (Leroy ignores her jibes.) The children are disappointed we have neglected to record the performance of their well-known competitors from South Central Los Angeles, the Compton Sounders. Jeanine, the videographer, tells them that their team, the Rodeogirls, have some routines similar to the Sounders. They are affronted by this comparison. "We don't like them," Latoya pronounces, annoyed. "They think they're gangbangers." Leroy nods. "Sometimes we get into it with them," he adds. "We battle against 'em." He recounts, with gleeful disapproval, an incident in which the Sounders did not act with appropriate decorum. "One time we were battling against them and they got in our faces." (Battles are informal drill team competitions than the parade they are watching. They take place in neighborhood streets when two or more teams "face off" in semi-improvised team exhibitions where no official judges are present but crowd applause determines winners.) Leroy is interrupted as others offer evaluations of passing teams, noting costumes as well, an important ingredient of the performance. The "Blacks and Blues" meets with special approval because their outfits are cleverly kitted out in varying shades of blue and "They have the hats and everything," Teisha explains enviously.

PART ONE: CRISIS AND RESPONSE

The theme of this special issue is crisis, precipitated by a pandemic. How is this small moment, children watching a video of their performance in a local parade, of any relevance? What can we learn about crisis by considering it carefully, by paying close attention? What context is required to recognize this *as* a particular, a part of larger social and historical scenes while *also* attending to its singularity? How might we follow the children's surprise and wonder in that one interruptive moment to perceive an alterity, an unruly "out of orderness"—to paraphrase Bernhard Waldenfels (2011)—that accompanies their engagement in a traditional cultural practice? Finally, how might a certain mode of critical attention to such a moment allow us to rethink our ready generalizations about crisis? The project of this article is to address these questions.

The presence of a pandemic, the crisis it has posed, leads Judith Butler (2022) to ask in their lead article (this issue): What is it to have a world? Butler suggests "that something about the pandemic makes us reconsider the world as our object of scrutiny, register the world as a cause for alarm, mark the fact that this present version of the world was not anticipated, and register the world as bearing a new kind of opacity rather suddenly and as imposing a new set of limits" (13). This alarming world, rendered suddenly opaque, also provokes Butler to ask: What *is* a livable life? "To make a demand for a livable life," they further state, "is to demand that a life has the power to live. If we ask the question, what makes a life livable, we do so precisely because we know that under some conditions it surely is not, that there are unlivable conditions of poverty, incarceration, or destitution or social and sexual violence" (18).

One does not just live in a crisis: a crisis calls for action. Etymologically, from the Greek krisis, it is a turning point or a moment of decision. It not only alters perception; it alters the demands for living. It stands out from the everyday. If we follow Gail Weiss (2008), we could say that a crisis is a moment when the ground called "ordinary life" is interrupted in such a way that it no longer functions as an out-of-awareness backdrop but itself becomes the visible figure. But what happens when the ground is already permeated by crises, large and small? How should we think about crisis when we cannot call upon a simple binary—times of crisis and somehow livable normal times? How to think, conceptually, about those communities who live with what is variously termed "slow death" (Berlant 2011), "slow violence" (Nixon 2011), or "chronic crisis" (Vigh 2008) that make the everyday a source of such continual threat that crisis and non-crisis shade into one another? I ask these questions in the context of my twenty-year history of research in African American communities in which families are caring for children with disabilities and chronic illnesses. The queries I have added to Butler's arise in light of this extended research in the greater Los Angeles area.

I call upon this research, as well as upon the phenomenological concepts of alterity and tradition (as horizon) to deepen what we can learn about crisis. Theoretically, this article primarily confines itself to scholarship in philosophical and anthropological critical phenomenology. Though I cannot pursue it here, the Black radical tradition has much to say about the issues I will raise. They have considered life after, and during, crisis, examining fugitive forms of creativity, experiment, flourishing, that have grown up under historically oppressive conditions, including slavery. Within this scholarly tradition, it has been important to not only expose centuries of horror but also to document practices and traditions of creative response, even what one might call a "fugitive alterity," that have remained largely hidden from view of dominant white society (hooks 1990; Glissant 1997; Moten 2003; Hartman 2019; Spillers 2003; Sharpe 2016).

Social media and news accounts are documenting how the COVID-19 pandemic is currently unfolding within the African American community. These accounts provide a starting place but they can only take us so far in unraveling crisis as a concept and a form of experience that is locally lived.

"WE WERE ALREADY IN A CRISIS": COVID-19 IN THE AFICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY: 2020 – 2021

It was apparent by spring 2020 how much harder the African American community was being hit by the pandemic as compared to the non-Black population. Several surveys conducted by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) documented the raw statistics. A June 2020 survey showed one-third of hospitalized COVID-19 patients were non-Hispanic Black people, though that group represented only eighteen percent of residents in the surveyed communities. Another CDC study, published April 29, 2020, found that Black people made up eighty-three percent of COVID-19 hospitalizations in Georgia, a disproportionate level compared with overall hospitalizations (Gold et al. 2020). Death

rates are higher for Black COVID-19 patients in large urban areas such as New York, Milwaukee, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, and New Orleans. One in ten Americans are Black, but Black people account for one in four of COVID-19 deaths (Collier 2020).

Disparities have been documented in other ways. Several polls done in June 2020, for example, found that eleven percent of African Americans said they were close with someone who has died from COVID-19, compared with five percent of Americans overall and four percent of white Americans (Stafford and Fingerhut 2020). In February 2021, in an opinion piece for *The Guardian*, Gilbert et al. continued to note the disparities of illness and death for Black Americans, citing the latest statistics that "show a persistent racial disparity in Covid-19 cases and deaths." They particularly examined one key factor playing a role in these disparities—lack of access to proper care (Gilbert et al 2021).

These grim statistics are supplemented with chilling personal anecdotes of denial of care. On December 4, 2020, Susan Moore, a Black physician who subsequently died of COVID-19, made a video of her treatment at the hands of white physicians that was widely circulated. *The Washington Post* reports:

> Struggling to breathe and pausing between sentences, Susan Moore mustered enough energy to record herself from her hospital bed, where she was being treated for covid-19, the illness caused by the coronavirus. The message she shared: Not even her status as a doctor shielded her from the inferior medical care long endured by other African Americans. Her White doctor didn't believe she was short of breath, she said—even though he knew he was treating a fellow licensed physician. Staff at the hospital near Indianapolis attempted to discharge her early, Moore said. And her pleas for medication to quiet pain in her neck was met with sneers, she said. "I was crushed. He made me feel like a drug addict. And he knew I was a physician. I don't take narcotics … I put forward and I maintain if I was White, I wouldn't have to go through that. (Nirappil 2020)

Bleak headlines summarize data from polls, newspaper article reports and preliminary research studies. They underscore the intensity of the situation for the Black community, the pernicious intersections of impoverished living conditions, lack of access, stigmatization, and a history of mistrust of the health care system rooted in hundreds of years of mistreatment. All these factors contribute to making African Americans the most adversely affected population in the United States in terms of deaths, anxiety levels, and burdens of care (Snowden and Snowden 2021).

In one sense, it is accurate to say that the Black community faces a distinctive health crisis with the unleashing of a new virus into the world's human population. For African Americans, it has engendered a situation in which denial of care for this specific disease is bound up with a history of institutionalized violence toward Black communities. The rise of COVID-19 has intersected with other lethal threats that have become widely publicized during this same historical moment, most notably the police murder of George Floyd. But another feature of this pandemic is equally chilling: it is all too familiar. It is both a unique crisis and a continuation. Here is how Dr. Uché Blackstock, a Black physician, former

associate at the NYU School of Medicine and founder of Advancing Health Equity, put it in an interview:

> So our healthcare system is founded on racism, and our communities have been essentially made sick by racism. We carry the highest disease burden in almost every parameter. We were already in a *crisis*. (Stafford and Fingerhut 2020, italics in original).

This disturbingly familiar tale is not complete by itself, however. Headlines also hint at a story that does not focus solely on health devastation. Here is one: "*Why Is COVID-19 Killing So Many Black Americans? The answer, according to researchers, is racism. But the Black community is fighting back*" (Collier 2020). Subtitles like this one register something else, a qualifying "but." They underscore the importance of recognizing that the Black community is not only the victim of racism but also a community that mobilizes to respond to crisis. How can we deepen our understanding of what is suggested by this modest qualifier? How can we allow it to gain conceptual purchase and disturb "common sense"?

RESPONDING: MAKING A WAY OUT OF NO WAY

While it has been logistically impossible to conduct in-depth ethnographic research on family life in the midst of COVID-19—at least in the usual way—much can be gained by looking historically to other health epidemics that were also bound up with an array of socioeconomic and structural features marking an enduring, systemic racism. In this article, I consider what I have learned from families about the stakes of life when it is lived in an enduring perilousness that is periodically punctuated or intensified in particular historical moments. In my research, another historical moment has figured in a world shaping manner. In the 1980s, the ordinary dangers of being Black and poor were intensified by the introduction of crack cocaine into Black neighborhoods and the accompanying, infamous "war on drugs" that entailed punitive policing and mass incarcerations.

The epidemic of crack cocaine addiction and the current COVID-19 pandemic are both syndemics for many Black communities. A syndemic, a concept developed in critical medical anthropology and public health, "reconfigures conventional historical understanding of diseases as distinct entities in nature, separate from other diseases and independent of the social contexts in which they are found" (Singer et al. 2017, 941). The notion of syndemics takes social contexts into consideration, highlighting the role of political economy and structural violence in shaping the rise and spread of specific diseases or pernicious health conditions (Farmer 2009; Nguyen and Peschard 2003; Seeberg and Meinert 2015; Meinert and Seeberg, 2022). Syndemics may arise in highly visible ways (like the COVID-19 pandemic) but because they are entangled with systemic conditions, they may also persist, mutating into other pernicious configurations. They are likely to have long histories. The events of the 1980s have had lasting consequences for many of the families I have followed, as they have in Delores' family. Families grapple with questions

such as: What can I/we do under such conditions? What is ethically demanded and what is even possible? Or, to borrow an iconic African American expression, these families are in effect asking: How does one make a way out of no way?

As explained in a major exhibit at the national African American museum in Washington D.C., this expression invokes a core theme in African American history:

> Taking its inspiration from a popular African American expression, *Making a Way Out of No Way* explores themes of agency, creativity, and resilience through personal stories of African Americans who challenged racial oppression and discrimination and created *ways out* of "*no way*." (reference? Italics in orginal?)

A similar narrative is provided by Henry Lewis Gates (2020) as he tells the story of the Jim Crow era. *Making a Way Out of No Way* is the title of an episode that recounts the period. Gates' narration explains the brutal nature of Jim Crow laws but also emphasizes some of the creative practices that arose within the Black community even under these conditions, including the birth of the Harlem Renaissance. According to Gates, the ascendance of Black arts and culture during this historical moment is both an act of resistance, a way of "fighting back," and an expression of creativity and experiment that enriched the world through new forms of aesthetic expression. Creativity and resistance are intertwined in an "errant poetics" (Glissant 1997).[1]

MAKING A WAY OUT OF NO WAY IN ONE FAMILY

With all this in mind, I return, once again, to the opening vignette. When I first met them in 1997, Delores' multi-generational family was still deeply affected by the aftermath of the 1980s syndemic of rising addiction, loss of jobs in the Black community, brutal policing and mass incarceration. These events had torn through the family. Children and grandchildren were in prison. Close relatives had been murdered. Delores, who held her fragile family together, quit her job to raise her grandchildren during the period when her daughter, Marcy, struggling with her own addiction to crack cocaine, could not. For them, the crisis had no end in sight. It not only threatened the life and health of family members, it also attacked their very sense of identity, their dignity and sense of life possibility. It was shame inducing.

Delores was well aware of this. She met this moment in many ways, but one of them was by leaning upon a traditional art form that was popular in her neighborhood. She was insistent that her grandchildren participate in the local drill team. She used her authority as the household's matriarch to make this happen and she faithfully drove her grandchildren

[1] See also Moten 2003 for an elaboration of this line of thinking.

to practice several times a week, though it took considerable effort and planning to do so while also caring for the younger grandchildren.

THE CALL OF TRADITION[2]

Drill teams are a valorized cultural practice steeped in the history of the African American experience. "Drilling" has been associated with public dance and performance since the days of slavery. A drill team is an orchestrated dance group where performers march in unison, like in military drills, but with movements infused with hip-hop, jazz, African dance and other types of choreography. Both drilling and its close corollary "stepping" gained popularity with the formation of Black fraternities and sororities in the 1920s and 1930s. In the post-World War II era, these became influenced by African American veterans who infused African American dance with military style movements.

Contemporary drilling, as a style of dance, exhibits cultural features well known within African American history, combining synchronized movement with rhythm and chanting. Today, drill teams are primarily comprised of young girls from seven or eight through high school. They are generally accompanied by drum squads primarily made up of boys. These are public and community-based art forms. Over the past several decades, they have been especially significant in poor and working class African American communities where they have been promoted as outreach programs designed engage youth after school and offer an alternative to gang life. Drill teams also explicitly commemorate Black culture and history. The most important competitions are in February, Black History Month. The highlight of drill team performances is often a local community's Black History Parade.

On the one hand, their collective family participation in a drill team enacts tradition in the usual sense of handing down a cultural art form to the next generation. Marcy, herself, had performed in this very same drill team when she was a young girl. Along these lines, one could simply interpret the children's behavior watching the video as cultural reproduction. Their activities reflect dominant, deeply held moral norms. They are being socialized into values that are ethnically marked instantiations of American ideals. There is, for example, the cultivation of self-discipline demanded by a performance that can win prizes (as the Pasadena Rodeogirls do): the tightly choreographed teamwork, the physical prowess, the aesthetic sensibility, the creative virtuosity required to master the rules of the game. Performative mastery also trains the moral self in such ideals as: learning to excel, cultivating collective as well as individual pride, loyalty to one's teammates (which includes the enthusiastic denouncement of rivals), the ability to withstand scrutiny and critique by one's peers and superiors, the willingness to be a follower and, for some, a leader.

[2] An earlier version of this case has been published elsewhere but from a considerably different theoretical perspective, as part of a special issue on a New Humanism from a phenomenological point of view (Mattingly 2018).

But in the larger historical context of an epidemic of addiction and mass incarceration, something else becomes visible. This moment, and all that brought it into being, can also be seen as a response to a historical crisis. During the period of family life when this video was made (2001), the children's mother Marcy was still in the early stages of recovery. Her oldest son and her sister (who lived in the same household) were serving time for drug trafficking. There had been a police raid in the house some months earlier which had resulted in their incarceration. Neighbors warned us to avoid the family. "That's a drug house," they told us. In the face of this, Delores responds—she fights back. She tries to provide her grandchildren and her daughter another version of life, another possible future. She does not pontificate. This was not her style. Instead, she directs an embodied realization of an alternative possibility.

THE PLAY OF ALTERITY AND TRADITION

The phenomenological concept of alterity as articulated in critical phenomenology—I rely especially upon Waldenfels (2011) here—speaks to the potentiality for otherwise worlds, to dimensions of experience that have an unruly "out of order" place in normative social life that have been explored in both philosophy and anthropology (Dyring 2018; Dyring and Gron 2021; Gron 2017; Mattingly 2018, 2019; Zigon 2018, 2019). Lisa Guenther (2011), thinking with Emmanuel Levinas, gives us a way to think about alterity in ethical terms that contrasts it with social positionality. It speaks to a singular "otherness" that is a "source of ethical command" and that can be differentiated from the otherness of political exclusion. While the latter "refers to the multiplicity of relational, historically specific modes of differentiation," difference as social positionality, otherness as *singularity* or *alterity* directs us to a contrasting phenomenon: "a singular . . . otherness of one who remains irreducible to anything or anyone else" (196).

In this piece, Guenther emphasizes the way that social identity can function as a marginalizing form of othering. This marginalizing is clearly in evidence when Delores' household is identified by the neighbors as a "drug house." But when Delores taps into their social identity as participants in a proud Black tradition, we see another side to what social identity can offer—its creative potential. This is something Linda Alcoff (2006) has explored, calling upon Gadamer's concept of horizon. She frames social identity as a

> substantive perspectival location from which the interpreter looks out at the world, a perspective that is always present but that is open and dynamic, with a temporal as well as physical dimension, moving into the future and into new spaces as the subject moves. (95)

By adopting Gadamer's concept of horizon to think about social identity, Alcoff (2006) is able link experience to identity while avoiding an all determining position. Identity works to shape what and how we perceive, making us aware of the "*mediated* nature of

experience" (my italics). "Social location is . . . itself indexed to a particular (rather than universal) ethical engagement" she goes on to remark (96).

Tradition offers a horizon that prefigures what we encounter, Gadamer announces. Furthermore, he goes on to claim, this kind of pre-understanding is necessary to knowing anything at all.[3] In Gadamer's (2003) language, we necessarily pre-judge, and this prejudice is what we inevitably bring to any situation. For him, "[t]he recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust" (272). In prejudging, we judge what *will* happen, we anticipate. We approach each present moment with a history we embody, and this means that we pre-understand any present moment. But this also means that we are prepared to *misunderstand*, that is, to not recognize or attend to features of a situation that mismatch the (historically informed and tacit) expectations we bring to it.

We could say, following Gadamer, that when the children respond with such surprise, it is because they encounter themselves in a mirror that disrupts their own preunderstanding of themselves, a preunderstanding in which they are children of drug addicts and dealers, the subject of neighborhood gossip. If tradition is a "perspectival horizon" that offers a "preunderstanding" of what one encounters, it is also, for this very reason, poised to generate moments of alterity. It is precisely the children's mastery of tradition, their extensive prior knowledge of what they are seeing—their background "preunderstanding"—that triggers their surprise. Latoya's cry signals an attentional moment in which she and the other silenced children are struck with stunned recognition that is also misrecognition. The shock in her voice suggests that her directive (her pointing finger, her imperative tone) is also a question. "Can this be us?" she seems to ask. "Can this beauty, this grace, belong to us?" The unanticipated appearance of this "tightness" calls her to an alien beauty in herself and those closest to her. The call is excessive in the sense that it seems to surpass the many normative rules and goals that guide the ready opinions the children have been noisily offering up as they assess the strengths and weaknesses of various performers. They are, for the first time, silent.[4] Things are not as they seem, from the perspective of the state, dominant white society, the neighbors, even perhaps the children themselves.

Gadamer's articulation of tradition as a horizon of significance, in conjunction with the Gadamer-inflected work of Alcoff and Gail Weiss on social identity, prompts a phenomenological consideration of "making a way out of no way" as—in this ethnographic case, at least—the creative appropriation of tradition. Tradition as a vehicle for resistance and refusal (Moten 2003; Spillers 2003). When Delores calls upon it, she is also resisting the normative judgment of her neighbors. Her refusal involves more than saying no. It is also bound up with an insistence that more than *this* life, the one her neighbors so disapprove of, and that threatens her family, is possible. The children's ethical singularity

[3] See also Mattingly 2017.

[4] I have previously analyzed this moment more extensively with Waldenfels' concept of alterity, a term he especially uses to investigate a shadow order that lives beside all dominant social orders, poised to interrupt it (Mattingly 2018). As I return to this same scene with Gadamer in mind, I can better appreciate the role of tradition as a resource for an experience of alterity.

(in the Levinasian sense that Guenther registers in the earlier quote) also emerges. They are not, for this moment on the bed at least, reducible to members of stigmatized categories, tokens of a type. Is it possible that what makes ethical singularity visible here is precisely this play between an out-of-order alterity and a cultural tradition? Is the interplay between alterity and tradition an inextricable element in "fighting back" (as Delores does) when one is in a crisis that is chronic? Does it speak to what is at stake in that paradox: "making a way out of no way"? I leave these as questions, as unsettled perplexities.

PART TWO: THE ETHNOGRAPHIC GESTURE

Careful, close description is foundational to the phenomenological enterprise. Gayle Salamon (2018b) sees it as a key resource for theoretical and critical investigation. I quote her at some length because her articulation of phenomenology's descriptive commitment comes very close to an anthropological position:

> in viewing the world and describing it with all possible precision, we might see the world and all the objects and others within it open, and reveal themselves to be more varied and more mysterious than our imaginations could have conjured, or our schemas of knowledge contain. And we can reflexively consider our own philosophical legacies, including their omissions and their missteps, not to dismiss those older forms of thinking and ways of understanding but to constantly renew them and expand their capacities. (16)

This "promise of phenomenology" that Salamon (2018a) speaks of, and which she exhibits beautifully in her own closely observed study of the murder trial of a transgendered girl, is exactly where anthropology has something to offer. From an anthropological perspective, paying attention by describing something carefully and with precision is our stock in trade. And we are very aware that this is always a matter of interpreting interpretations. In my opening, I offered a description of an event that exhibits this in an obvious way. The children are not merely observing the scenes unfolding in the videotaped parade, they are actively interpreting them. In my description, I am not merely conveying "what happened" or "what was said" but also interpreting their interpretations. Accuracy is essential: I repeatedly watched the videotape to verify the veracity of words and actions. But interpretation enters at the most basic and unavoidable level. I have turned a visual recording into text, oral speech into written word. And I have necessarily been selective—I can't include everything. In my description and selection, I have relied on my extensive knowledge of this family. My task has been to include the kinds of descriptors and background material that can call attention to why this drill team performance mattered so much to the children, and to Delores and Marcy and, beyond that, to why you (the readers) should care about it.

To get at this, I do more than try for accuracy and clarity in my representation. I also offer an account poised for further interpretation in conversation with concepts. I am interested not only in the "facts" of what happened but the significance of those facts from this family's perspectives. And beyond that, to what we can learn in a more general, theoretical way about larger questions (like crisis and response) by paying such close attention to such small matters. My theoretical and the ethnographic avenues of investigation are utterly entangled, as is usual in anthropology. For most anthropologists, sustained, close to the ground ethnography is indispensable. While other approaches of inquiry (e.g., reflecting in the abstract, conducting textual analyses of the works of researchers, scholars, journalists and artists, or consulting one's personal life experience) may be important, they are not usually considered sufficient for formulating anthropological claims and making arguments. Instead, our primary route involves asking, and re-asking, questions as part of research investigations which we are actively involved in carrying out. This ethnographic commitment is not meant to dismiss other disciplinary approaches but merely to signal where anthropology is likely to best contribute to questions that are larger than any one discipline can hope to address sufficiently.

Anthropology belongs to what have sometimes been called the "historical sciences" in which description (of particulars), interpretation and theory development are closely intertwined. Precisely because of this intertwining, Gadamer (1976) considered the special affinities between the historical (or human) sciences and the project of hermeneutic phenomenology. As he put it:

> the true intention of historical knowledge is not to explain a concrete phenomenon as a particular case of a general rule … [but] to understand an historical phenomenon in its singularity, in its uniqueness. Historical consciousness is interested in knowing, not how men, people, or states develop *in general*, but, quite on the contrary, how *this* man, *this* people, or *this* state became what it is; how each of these *particulars* could come to pass and end up specifically *there*." (116, italics in original)

While the historical sciences might initially draw from established, generalizing claims and might make further general claims based on empirical investigations, Gadamer insisted that what was crucial to this historical approach was that it not only passed through concrete particulars to do so, but that these particulars were meant to be visible, to hold their own—as singularities—and not be subsumed as mere cases illustrating general "regularities" or causal probabilities.

A classic anthropological treatise on this subject is Clifford Geertz's 1973 essay "Thick Description" which has close affinity to Gadamer's position. Geertz connected ethnography's close to the ground descriptive approach to its generalizing claims. What do anthropologists do? he asked. They "inspect events," things that happen to people in particular times and places. The small-scale descriptions of discrete events that result from this inspection cannot simply be superseded through increasing levels of abstraction without losing their import. Even when one wants to talk in larger abstractions, like "meaning

systems" or "life worlds," these are not discoverable, do not even exist, as abstractions. They are real only as they emerge, are brought to life, through eventful particulars. Not surprisingly, the work of many phenomenologically minded anthropologists bears a close kinship to a contextualized *substantive* phenomenology that feminist phenomenologists have also advocated, one that resists abstract idealisms in favor of "sweaty concepts" (Alcoff 2006; Ahmed 2016, 12; Guenther 2013; Weiss 2008; Salamon 2018a and 2018b; Al-Saji 2010).

Paul Ricoeur has also considered the centrality of the particular as a feature of the historical (or human) sciences, their insistence on describing and understanding the particular in its singularity rather than merely subsuming it under general explanatory frameworks (e.g., rules, norms, causal laws). He, too, believed that this insistence on the particular qua particular brings the historical sciences into close proximity with hermeneutic phenomenology.[5] But Ricoeur adds something crucial—the *imaginative potentiality* that a descriptive enterprise can disclose. What are these particulars? They are certainly not reducible to information. While the sorts of empirical particulars that we might call "facts" are of concern to the anthropologist, it is not the facts in themselves that are the ultimate point of an investigation. What the anthropologist's facts uncover are the values and concerns of others, people living in different times or in different social locations. This orientation to people's concerns and commitments opens a space for imagining variations of our taken for granted reality. In speaking of the historian's facts (and the values these reveal), Ricoeur (1981) argues that history "explores the field of 'imaginative' variations which surround the present and the real that we take for granted in everyday life" (295).

But if particulars are so important to historical/social sciences like anthropology, and if these cannot be discerned from some neutral, Archimedean perspective, it is especially obvious that the social location of the observer cannot be divorced from what is observed and interpreted. Understanding always happens somewhere, concretely.[6] "There is no zero-point from which meaning is first encountered" (Risser 1997, 67). It emerges through a dialogical experience, an encounter. It *takes place*.[7] Recognizing this demands that we ask: where do these (ethnographic) particulars come from, these singular moments that are also always interpretations of interpretations? And how should they be evaluated for their authority and validity?

Sara Ahmed (2014, 2016) notes the importance of putting the "who" back into the politics of study. Ahmed reminds us repeatedly that when somebody is speaking, not everybody is speaking. Who is speaking? Identify yourself. This is a familiar issue for anthropology. Possibly it has been felt with particular acuteness in my discipline because of the kind of research we conduct. We build arguments on ethnographically-informed cases that have emerged from sustained fieldwork and include the "voices" of interlocutors which

[5] In fact, Ricoeur's (1981) essay, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action considered as a Text" heavily influenced Geertz's "Thick Description."

[6] See Palmer 2010, 122.

[7] Eventness has a spatial as well as a temporal character, Malpas notes (2010, 261).

are gleaned by witnessing social interactions, participation in informal conversations and formal interviewing. Fieldwork ordinarily takes at least a year to carry out, and frequently far longer. For many of us, fieldwork in the same community and with some of the same people continues over decades. Arguments and claims are created through an iterative process, a dialogue of sorts. This involves moving between rawer primary "data" (especially observations and interviews) which are of course already interpretations, more refined interpretative accounts fashioned with close attention to that primary material, and the gradual development of more general, thematic claims. Since there is no single position that can be attached to "the informant" or "the community," this iterative process means recognizing and grappling with the inevitability of multiple and sometimes contradictory perspectives in the community one is studying. There is no easy solution to this except an honest recognition of the partiality of any generalization.

The anthropologist's larger claims are also developed in conversation with theoretical positions and substantive published accounts (e.g., other ethnographies, histories, statistical data) of particular relevance. These, too, are fed into this iterative process in which the initial primary material is not left behind. For this reason, anthropologists tend to include lengthy excerpts from their observations or conversations with their informants in their publications. The whole research process, tacking back and forth among multiple levels of analysis, is exceedingly laborious and time intensive. Published texts emerging from a particular research study generally take at least an additional year to develop after initial immersion in "the field."

Anthropologists acknowledge their own positionality in every aspect of this process. When Geertz famously outlined anthropology's interpretive approach in the early 1970s, he underscored how thoroughly interpretation penetrated observation and interaction: it was interpretation all the way down. But he paid insufficient attention to the structures of power that suffused the postcolonial contexts in which most anthropologists carried out their research. Put more critically and problematically than he did, the anthropologist's positionality was bound up in systems of power and inequality. The discipline increasingly confronted its troublesome entanglement with structures of colonial oppression, its history of intentional or unintentional collaboration with projects of empire building, precipitated a full-blown crisis by the late 1980s and continues to this day, keeping the vexed question of positionality at the forefront of concern.

Nevertheless, anthropology's own reflexive examination has not resulted in a rejection of ethnographic fieldwork. Anthropologists continue to insist that fieldwork offers a powerful mode of research exactly because it challenges the researcher's a priori assumptions about the world. Fieldwork is a descriptive enterprise of a particular sort, one that (usually) takes place "elsewhere"—away from one's familiar surrounds. Anthropologists presume that it is necessary to defamiliarize ones' common-sense apprehension of reality in order to learn about the world. Sustained, systematic fieldwork introduces a reflexive element that prompts challenges to tacitly held assumptions. Discovering the contingent features of one's lifeworld, in other words, is made possible through exposure to life worlds that are not one's own. Carrying out fieldwork introduces an anthropological version of the "*epoché*,"

an "ethnographic *epoché*," as Jason Throop (2018) and others have articulated. Throop describes this as a variation of Edmund Husserl's *epoché*:

> In the spirit of Husserlian phenomenology, the *ethnographic epoché* is a special form of bracketing in which the "thesis of the natural attitude" . . . is suspended . . . Where the phenomenological epoché is an active and willed achievement, the ethnographic epoché is a passive and responsive one—one that arises from, and makes discernible, some of our most deeply sedimented and taken-for-granted assumptions, orientations, habits and dispositions. (204-05, italics in original)

Returning to Gadamer but this time with the anthropologist researcher in mind, prefiguring is an unavoidable feature of fieldwork and disorientation is a necessary part of coming to understand. However, as Gadamer makes clear, we are not destined to stand by these prefigured expectations. The historical givenness of life is not an *ending point* but serves as the *beginning* of understanding. Sometimes we become acutely aware of the misfit of our expectations to what arises. (Anthropological fieldwork encounters supply many such moments.) Disorientation is also something our interlocutors experience. Even the quotidian experiences of everyday life may offer situations where they are struck that their preunderstanding seems inadequate or misguided. They, too, run into interpretive trouble or perplexity and it is precisely this trouble that belongs to the act of understanding itself.

The scene on the bed I described serves as a small example. I had often heard from Delores about her grandchildren's participation in a local drill team and I vaguely remembered this video that we had taken of the children, but for many years I didn't think too much about it. I had published quite a lot about this family without taking it into account. I "pre-judged" this part of their lives as an interesting but unremarkable enactment of a popular cultural practice. It was only when I happened to return to that video some years later that I was struck by Latoya's surprise, by the arresting of the children's movements. Why did their very pleasure at their own "tightness" startle them so? What were they seeing that I had not? There was an alterity present, an "out of order" moment. But why was their tightness out of order for them? After all, they had practiced hard for many months. They came from a family replete with dancers and athletes. Why shouldn't their performance be skilled, beautiful? A perplexity emerged.

Hermeneutic phenomenologists like Gadamer and Ricoeur help to illuminate the stakes and promise of this kind of generative misunderstanding in which close attention and description yield perplexity rather than certainty. Gadamer's formulation reveals a critical dimension to the interpretive enterprise, our own historicity, the limits of an unavoidable positionality. But recognizing our social and historical situatedness does not merely alert us to the finitude of knowledge. It also speaks to one of the most important qualities of understanding: it is an experience that *confronts* us and, in so doing, may open up new worlds for us. To understand something, Ricoeur (1981) tells us, "is at the same time to light up our own situation . . . [the act of understanding] frees us from the visibility

and limitation of situations by opening up a world for us, that is, new dimensions of our being-in-the-world" (Ricoeur 1981, 202).

LOCATING AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PARTICULAR: THE BOUNDARY CROSSING PROJECT

The ethnographic study I call upon in this article is the most intense fieldwork I have ever carried out. For more than fifteen years (officially ending in 2011 but continuing unofficially to this day) a group of us conducted research among a cohort of fifty African American families. Most families chose to participate for more than a decade. Very few left the project once they joined it. We were a multi-racial, multi-ethnic research team (Euro-American, African-American and Asian-American) with backgrounds in anthropology, child psychology, linguistics, and occupational therapy. The three primary and senior investigators (Mary Lawlor, Lanita Jacobs and I) were very experienced ethnographers.

We initially recruited families in clinical sites in Southern California. Most families came from Los Angeles or its close neighboring towns. As the study progressed, some moved far from LA as part of Black outmigration. But many families continued to participate, sometimes driving two hours each way to take part in family meetings. Most participants were mothers and grandmothers. Although they varied socioeconomically between the "working poor" and the chronically unemployed, finances were a day-to-day challenge for everyone. None escaped the weight of serious financial worry. Most faced the threat posed by living in dangerous neighborhoods which were also "food deserts" and lacked safe outdoor spaces for children to play. All confronted the problem of sending their children to underfunded schools. Racial disparities factored largely into the intransigence of these issues, even for those with a bit more economic security. Race, in other words, played a significant role in constraining everyone, including those with more education and more financial resources.

While the study initially focused primarily upon health care encounters and often took place in clinical settings, our fieldwork expanded over the years at the invitation of family members. Many of the families asked us to come and videotape important home and community events in their lives, including baptisms, birthday parties, church services, athletic games, funerals and parades. Our ethnographic approach was familiar in some ways, a mode of extended, immersive participant observation that is easily recognizable in anthropology. As is also common practice, our key questions and lines of inquiry and analysis were informed and reshaped by what our interlocutors told us mattered most to them. However, something happens when one carries out research for such a long period of time among the same people: relationships changed. Lives changed in ways that we would never have been privy to if we had kept to the more traditional one or two year period of fieldwork characteristic of an anthropological study.

We audiotaped interviews, carried out observations that we recorded in fieldnotes, and videotaped hundreds of events. We transcribed almost all of this material (except some of the videotapes), storing everything electronically in secure files. The archive consists

of more than six-thousand pages of documents and hundreds of digital recordings. As is typical for anthropological studies, there is far more "data" than one will ever make direct use of. Although I have written two books and dozens of articles from this study, there are some families I knew well who I have still not written about. But this plethora of material is crucial to how the ethnographer comes to build confidence in a particular line of interpretation. It is not a matter of merely repeating what one's informant has said to you. Direct quotes are important but something more is required to get at the significance of words and actions. Coming to think through what is at stake demands more than literal transcribing. It also demands more than basing interpretations on a single or small number of interviews or events. For every event that I focus on and that finds its way into a published article or book, there is a whole background of material in the archive, and in body memory, that informs my interpretations.

It is not possible in this article to describe the many processes we used to test—and challenge—our interpretations as researchers, but it is worth mentioning the key role of the family advisory groups. At the start of the project, we instituted regular meetings for interested research participants. This became very popular. We met, in smaller groups, three or four times a year. While these groups were only a small part of the overall study, they figured importantly in many respects, shaping the project as a whole. They also provided what some of the families started to call, jokingly, "family reunions," where people had a chance to meet up periodically and talk to others whose children also had similar medical or educational issues. Through them, participants collectively exerted pressure on us, the research team. We had never intended to carry out a research project for so long but the level of commitment by family members encouraged us—pressed us— to look for more funding in order to keep going. During periods when we ran out of grant funding— which allowed us to buy lunches for families and pay transportation and childcare costs to cover meeting times—many parents asked if we could continue in some way. We began to have potlucks where those who could brought food. We sometimes met at the home of one of the researchers.

Group meetings became places where we could ask participants to comment on the themes we were identifying as important in what we were learning from them. We regularly asked them if there were matters we should be considering that we were neglecting or misunderstanding. Of course, participants did not speak as a unified voice—there were often disagreements and differences in perspective. But everyone was interested in what we were doing, with what we were learning. We shared published articles. Though they rarely commented on them, it mattered to many that their own challenges and hard-won knowledge should do some good elsewhere, might help someone else. They wanted to know that we were talking to other parents but they were especially keen that we were educating clinicians and students in training for clinical professions.

Families directed our attention in multiple ways. In the family groups, they led us in prayer on occasion, brought music they thought we should hear, food we should try, pictures their children had made, pamphlets from school graduations and funerals. They joked about our rules—"everyone gets a chance to speak, no judgment"—but many also seemed to appreciate our efforts to create a space for discussion. There was a great deal

of storytelling. We encouraged this through our style of open-ended interviews questions, avoiding overly directive, yes and no structured queries in favor of those that allowed the greatest latitude for respondents to shape the interview.

This open-endedness was also characteristic of the kind of research we conducted, in which we increasingly followed the lead of family members in what and how we observed and participated in their lives. The very existence of the videotape I draw from in this article is an example. Delores was eager to have us see what her grandchildren were doing in the drill team. She requested that someone from the project come to videotape them in one of their performances, which we did. She and the children then asked us to bring the videotape to their house so that they could see it. When we did (videotaping them as they watched) they were so enamored that they asked to see it multiple times. We left them a copy of the parade video, at the children's enthusiastic request. They were quite anxious to show it to the "Miss Hays," the revered woman who had been orchestrating and raising funding for drill teams in their local community for decades.

CONCLUSION

An exciting feature of a still emerging critical phenomenology is its interdisciplinary possibilities, including new avenues of rapprochement between philosophy and anthropology (Zigon and Throop 2021). In light of this interdisciplinarity, I organized this article into two parts. The first half directly concerns the theme of crisis. The second half functions as a kind of meta-commentary on my methods as an anthropological critical phenomenologist. It is intended to position me and to address the kinds of questions that, for example, Ahmed poses: Who is speaking? By what right?

My avenue for considering crisis has been through close consideration of an ethnographic particular. I have suggested that we can learn something about crisis—as a concept and a form of experience—by paying close attention to how a group of children respond to images of their performance in a drill team parade. Including what takes them—and subsequently me—by surprise. A perplexing particular can serve as a provocateur for concept building and destabilization (Mattingly 2019). Such a particular is less like a fact than an impetus for interrogation.

In this article, the particular is a single ethnographic moment, as variously illuminated through the notions of alterity, tradition as horizon, and that fleshier concept "making a way out of no way." I have argued that the binary of crisis and normalcy does not work for the families I have studied and for much of the African American community. Something like "chronic crisis" (Vigh 2008) is more apt. It is essential not to reduce African American history to a tale of victimhood. But it is equally important to avoid other reductionisms. Phenomenological concepts like alterity and horizon resist the reduction of a single heady moment of disorienting beauty and tightness into an episode of another misleading narrative: triumph over adversity. Instead, moments of alterity such as the one I've described live side by side with enduring family crises. Two years after this moment on the bed, Delores has

died from cancer. Marcy has assumed the role of matriarch, maintaining her sobriety as she takes the lead in holding her family together. Three months after Delores' death, Leroy (who figures in the video) has been shot and killed in front of his house as he angrily tries to protect his younger sister, Latoya, from some older boys in the neighborhood who want to take her for a ride. After Leroy's funeral, Marcy, in anguish, tells us that none of her children died when her mother was alive but she has already lost a son. "Making a way out of no way" is not a tale of triumph. It is a response to an enduring crisis, which must be met again and again.

In my argument, alterity and its interplay with tradition figure in two respects. Most obviously, the interplay speaks to the children's confrontation with an image of themselves. But it also speaks to my task, as ethnographer, in attending to those situations that strike me by surprise or perplexity, that I cannot readily fit into my own preconceived notions, my own horizons. Gadamer (2003) tells us that we must direct our gaze "on the things themselves" but of course he does not mean that we should or could come with no preconceptions, no foreknowledge (267). Rather, training one's gaze on "the things themselves" demands an openness that "is prepared for it [the other] to tell him something" (269, 271). It demands a sensitivity to alterity (269). One need not share the perspective of the other, Gadamer notes, but the only way to "break the spell of our own foremeanings" is to recognize that the perspective of this other is not mine and to be prepared to revise my foremeanings in light of what transpires in the experience of the encounter (270).

My engagement with African American families has prompted me to become attentive to the alterities that infuse their lives. Put another way, I am ethnographically attentive to a double alterity. Part of what it means to direct my gaze on the things themselves is to follow the gaze of my interlocutors. Where do they look? What do they pay attention to? What is the world of salient things for them? When are they surprised? When do they discover that they have misunderstood their own situations? (Using misunderstanding in the sense Gadamer intends, as an aspect of an anticipatory preunderstanding.) The ability to discover alterity in an everyday situation, as the children do, illuminates the "how" that is part of making a way out of no way.

My fieldwork and the concerns of my interlocutors *also* prompts creative appropriation of Gadamer's concepts. I have called upon him to contribute to a phenomenological inquiry of crisis and response in situations of "chronic crisis"—of sustained structural inequality and systemic racism. These are topics about which Gadamer (as far as I know) has nothing to say. Although I cannot take it up here, my appropriation also entails considering the limitations of his work (Mattingly 2022). This manner of taking up but also amending classic phenomenological concepts is a hallmark of critical phenomenology in both anthropology and feminist and antiracist philosophy.

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LOOMING

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In 2023, the Compact of Free Association between the US and the Federated States of Micronesia will end. As everyone in Yap State—one of the four States that comprise the Federated States of Micronesia—knows and fears, the end of Compact funding will have devastating consequences for education, infrastructure, and health care. In the case of health care alone, US funding supports 95% of the country's health care budget, which as it stands, barely maintains the delivery of the notably substandard care that islanders are able to receive. The end of the Compact will also spell the end to a majority of government services unless other sources of income to support the state can be found (Throop 2014). It also means an end to accessing US aid in the aftermath of disasters like the ones that have been brought by the steadily rising sea levels and increasing number of Super Typhoons that have either threatened or hit Yap over the last few decades (Throop 2020). 2023 has, in light of such realities, been nicknamed the "coming funeral" by many Yapese. As his Excellency Ambassador Masao Nakayama, who once served as the Federated States of Micronesia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations has put it, "even the dead are no longer safe in my country" (Blakemore 2009).

How can we understand a future in which even the dead are no longer safe? What does it mean to be waiting for a future that is experienced as a "coming funeral"? I would like to begin to trace the phenomenological contours of such a mode of existence with a phenomenon that I have been ruminating upon of late, the experience of *looming*. To do so, I will explore the existential shape of looming by shifting from Yap's pending crisis, which first prompted my thinking on the matter, to the still unfolding situation that has brought the phenomenon of looming into much sharper relief: the slow encroachment of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has gradually and unevenly emerged as an unprecedented global event radically reshaping our possibilities for being and being-together in our contemporary historical moment. 2020, much like 2023, is a year defined by its own unique form of looming.

THE PRACTICE

As a Canadian ex-pat living in Southern California, it felt good to be at the rink to watch my son Jonah at his first post-holiday practice with his travel hockey team—the California Golden Bears. Less than a week after New Year, everyone seemed happy to be back, watching their sons and daughters playing a game we all loved. One exception, however, was Nate. Nate's son, Bean, played goaltender on one of the other Bear's Mites teams. Usually friendly and talkative, today Nate looked tired, pale, and listless. He had a hoodie covering his head and made it a point to keep his distance from the small group of parents who had gathered together to catch up with each other on the events of the holiday while watching their children play. Standing on the fringe of their discussion, and close enough to Nate that it seemed odd not to strike up a conversation with him, I asked how his holiday had been. Nate simply shook his head. "It was horrible. I was so sick. I missed out on Christmas and New Year's and everything." His voice was noticeably weakened and raspy. In bed for over a week with a 103-degree fever, a horrible cough and tightness in his chest, he recounted that at times he had a hard time catching his breath. He was so weak he was simply unable to get out of bed, even for the most basic of needs. So sick, in fact, that his wife had to call a medic to come for a home visit to check on him. The medic was so concerned about the fever and possible dehydration that he gave Nate an IV drip right there on spot. Thinking it was just a bad case of the flu, however, the medic told him there was nothing much more he could do. Nate would just have to ride the virus out.

Nate went on to tell me that it was the sickest he had ever been in his life, "and man, I never get sick. I'm almost 40 years old and I haven't had the flu since I was a teenager!" Having just read a few stories online about a developing situation in China where a mysterious "novel pneumonia" that had afflicted dozens of people, an almost laughable thought emerged—"Could *this* be *that*?" Almost laughable with a stress on the *almost*. Lingering in the margins of my consciousness, the hesitation of that *almost,* would take hold me yet again, even long after our conversation had ended, whenever new information on the "novel flu in China" would come my way. "I am so sorry to hear that Nate," I said, letting the brief thought of the news of a distant "new flu" fade into the background of my awareness. We both turned again to watch the practice, just as Jonah tried out a high wrist shot on Bean who caught the puck with a nice glove save.

ALMOST ALREADY HERE

In terms of its etymology, the English term looming has a hazy origin, perhaps derived from either Low German or Dutch, where terms like *luemen* (to be weary) and *lomen* (to move slowly), capture qualities of a *lumbering drawn out movement-toward* that the contemporary term still very much evokes. Indeed, as the Oxford University Press Online Dictionary defines it, *to loom* is to "appear as a vague form, especially one that is large or threatening." Looming may also refer, however, to a more specific event that is "regarded as threatening

. . . and about to happen." Such qualities of threatening vagueness, pending aboutness, slow encroachment, and gradual revealing are also tied to the nominal form, where *loom* is used to indicate "a vague and often exaggerated first appearance of an object seen in darkness or fog, especially at sea" or "the dim reflection by a cloud or haze of light which is not directly visible, e.g., from a lighthouse over the horizon" (Oxford University Press Online Dictionary, n.d.).

Throughout this definitional range are consistent references to threatening or unsettling forms of appearing, emergence, and approach that are clouded by hazy and indistinct horizons. To say that something is looming is to recognize that something, while still yet indefinite in form, is imposing its impending presence upon us. To speak of the type of *not yet* that defines a looming future, is thus to recognize the saturated and weighed down arrival of a foreboding reality that has already somehow taken form and has, accordingly, already partially penetrated the present, even despite its hazy hovering just beyond our reach. Just beyond our reach, looming is, in this respect, not only the *yet to come*, but in some respect also the already somehow *almost here*.

What's felt to be the inevitable coming into being of what looms fills the horizon of our future possibilities. What looms is thus resonant with the "gloomy disposition" toward an immanent actuality that Adolf Reinach (2016 [1916]) described in his brief analysis of the experiences of foreboding that he encountered on the battlefield during WWI (25). Much like in Reinach's account of the young officer who had given his remaining possessions and a farewell letter to a friend before being killed at the front, what's felt to be the inevitable coming into being of what looms fills the horizon of our future possibilities (25). Such a future engulfs and effectively eviscerates such possibilities, however, through its very approach. The form of possibility that defines a future that looms is thus one that is defined by a palpable sense of pending actualization. This is, in short, a coming into being of a dreaded future whose *not yet* is marked by a soon coming to be.

MEETING

About a month following my talk with Nate at the rink, I had gathered with the other department chairs for our monthly Social Science Chair's meeting with our Dean. People seemed in good spirits and there were a number of friendly conversations happening as we lined up for our pre-meeting coffee, tea, and cookies in our familiar gathering place—a conference room on the second floor of Murphy Hall. Taking my seat, coffee in hand, I remember smiling as our Dean tried, without much success at first, to get everyone's attention. While the agenda covered a range of issues relevant for our division within the college, including a long-anticipated discussion of newly proposed budget model for the university, the Dean began the meeting with a brief announcement about the novel coronavirus that was gaining increasing prominence in the news. He had already been involved in a few meetings with university leadership about the virus and he wanted us to know that while there was nothing to be worried about *as of yet*, that the university was

keeping a close eye on the situation and was in the process of making contingency plans if the situation happened to develop into something more serious than it currently was. As I walked back to my office in Haines Hall with notes on what to report back to our faculty at our next meeting in hand, my chest felt heavy, my mood slightly depressed. I tried to shift my thoughts elsewhere without much success. Looking back, it is clear to me that the first press of a looming pandemic that was already in the process of becoming had begun to seriously take its hold on me.

At this point in early February, the first deaths had already been reported in Wuhan province and China had confirmed that the new "mystery illness" could be spread between humans. On January 20, 2020, I had read a story from CNN confirming the human-to-human spread of the disease (Christensen and Senthilingham 2020) that was posted on the "Yap Development" Facebook page, a group I belong to and check on regularly. The group had initially been made to help organize local resistance to an ambitious Chinese tourist development plan for the island but had over the years also become a place to circulate local and international news that could impact everyday life on the island (Throop 2014; 2020). That day there were a few stories posted to the site about the new strain of coronavirus in Wuhan, with one group member captioning his post to a story from Yahoo News announcing the sixth person to die from the "mystery illness" in China: "Please ban travelers from China. If 1000 people die in China there will be very little impact on the country. If only ten die in Yap, it will be a very big loss." The same contributor then added in the comments section: "Yap does not have a hospital capable of treating this, does not have doctors specializing in this type of disease, does not have the medicine for this disease, and certainly does not have enough people to die."

That same day, my Google News feed was becoming populated with stories about the first cases being reported in Japan, South Korea, and Thailand. A day later, the first case had been confirmed in Washington State. As the news of the spreading infections and death circulated, and bits and pieces of the widely dispersed and dispersing worldly phenomenon now known as COVID-19 began to gradually fold into our daily news, conversations, and worries, what were at first vague intimations that something might be approaching on the horizon gradually coalesced into a more fully formed sense that *it is coming our way* (Zigon 2017; 2018). In fact, *it is already almost here*.

LINGERING

A bat sees a bug with a sound of linger
– The Tragically Hip (1994), *Yawning or Snarling*

As the Canadian singer-songwriter Gord Downie from the Tragically Hip poetically phrased it, a bat's use of echolocation entails a responsiveness to a retentive lingering—a

sonic tracing—of the faint airborne reverberations of an insect's unfolding movements.[1] Pitched toward an unfolding protential future but retaining something of an extended retentional past, lingering thus brings forth a trace of that which has already moved on while yet still underway (Husserl 1964; Throop 2003). It is, in some respects, the inverse of the phenomenon of looming, which entails the bringing forth of the future edge of that which is always already emerging but is not yet completely here. Distinctive from lingering, which retentively holds on to that which seeks to escape, looming discloses an as of yet to fully crystalized future that is in the process of piercing through present. Not an escape away from, but a coming toward. Where lingering discloses what echoes back from what moves along, looming reveals what is in the midst of just breaking through.

Inhabiting the indeterminate between, what looms is not yet, however, an object or event. And yet, it is still an object or event-like in its pending actualization. Pressing heavily against the always already receding veil that separates the unfolding present from the indeterminate horizon of the future, what looms is something whose arrival we must await, that we have no choice *but to* await. Looming and waiting are thus coupled in an intimate way, although it is worth emphasizing that waiting need not always be oriented to something that looms. As Vincent Crapanzano (1986) perceptively observes (and I will quote here from him at length),

> Waiting means to be oriented in time in a special way. It is directed toward the future – not an expansive future, however, but a constricted one that closes in on the present. In waiting the present is always secondary to the future. It is held in expectation. It is filled with suspense. It is a sort of holding action—*a lingering* (In its extreme forms waiting can lead to paralysis.) In waiting, the present loses its focus in the now. The world in its immediacy slips away; it is derealized. It is without élan, vitality, creative force. It is numb, muted, dead. Its only meaning lies in the future—in the arrival or the non-arrival of the object of waiting. Waiting is always waiting for something. It is an anticipation of something to come—something that is not on hand but will, perhaps, be on hand in the future. It is marked by contingency—the perhaps—and all the anxiety that comes with the experience of contingency. It is a passive activity. We can never actively seek the object of waiting. We can, to be sure, do what we can to ensure its arrival if we desire it or to prevent its arrival if we do not desire it, but ultimately its arrival or non-arrival is beyond our control. (44; emphasis mine)

In dialogue with Crapanzano's analysis, looming may thus be understood, like waiting, to be a passive activity of anticipating something soon to come; something *almost already here*. Where waiting can be understood as a form of lingering that "holds on to action" in order to leave room—on opening—for what is yet to emerge, looming gathers its intensity from

[1] According to the Encyclopedia Britannica Online (2021), echolocation is a "physiological process for locating distant or invisible objects (such as prey) by means of sound waves reflected back to the emitter (such as a bat) by the objects."

that which is pressing forth in the process of its coming along toward us, beyond the reach of our expectations. To this extent then, looming is less contingent than waiting, less active than lingering. Looming is, as a result, arguably less open to the possibility that alternate possibilities will emerge. To be waiting for a future that looms is thus to have a sense of a foreboding arrival of the foreclosure of possibilities. A glimmer of certainty that something is coming. It is already on its way.

An experience in which something is looming is, I argue, a form of mooded attunement to the imminent arrival of a *not yet* that is in the process of emerging as an *arriving soon now* (Stewart 2011). While it may be entangled with moods like anxiety, dread, despair, and fear, looming is a distinctively mooded experience, however; one that is *pitched toward the event*. What looms harbors the *shape of what is to come*. The event at the incipient point of its becoming actualized is what catches hold of us in the experience of looming.

MOVEMENT

As I had done for the past few years, I had purchased (as a Christmas present) front row seats for my father and my son to attend a Los Angeles Kings vs. Ottawa Senators NHL hockey matchup. The teams play each other only twice in any given season, splitting their home rink appearances between the two cities. It had become a family tradition to go see my hometown Senators play whenever they were in town (much to my son's dismay given his strong allegiance to the Kings).

This year's LA matchup happened to fall on March 11 (Figure 1). While the tickets were purchased back in what now seems like the dreamlike pre-COVID world of early fall 2020, on the day we were to use the tickets there were a total of 1,267 cases of COVID-19

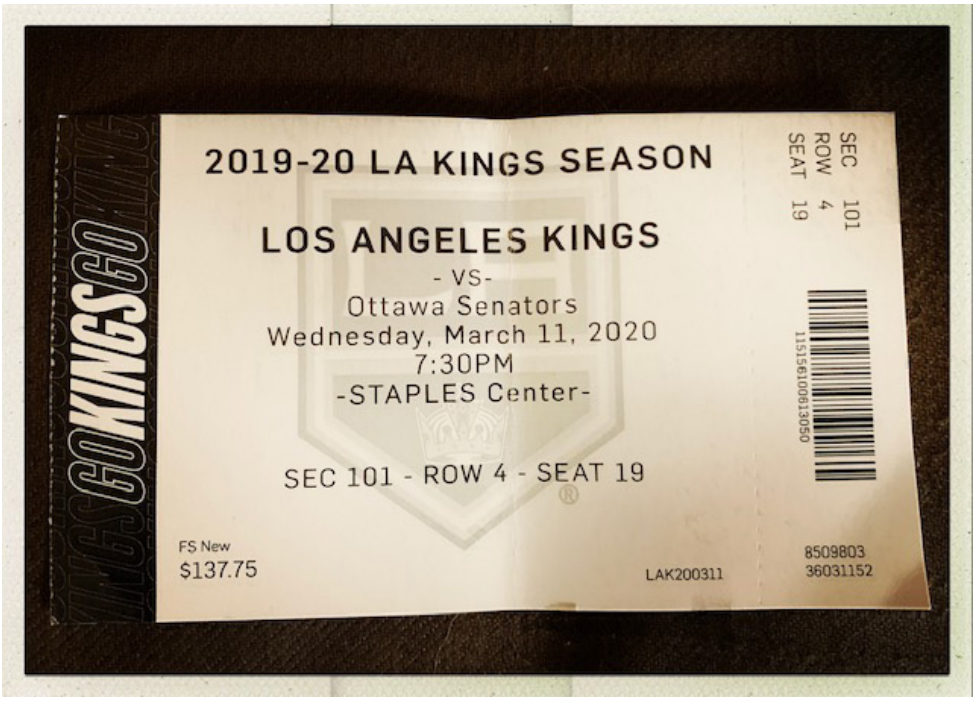

Figure 1.

in the US with the death toll standing at thirty-eight. Given that my father is in his mid-70's and was waiting to undergo medical treatment in the coming months, we were uncertain as to whether we should attend the game. We discussed it at length in the days leading up to the match. A few hours before the puck was scheduled to drop at center ice, we decided to take the risk. While there was still so much that we did not know about the virus, at the time there were relatively few cases in the city (only twenty-seven recorded cases). We felt it was likely safe to go.

As we drove from the house to Staple Center downtown, however, the news broke that the NBA had decided to "suspend" its season as a player from the Utah Jazz had contracted the disease not long after the team had finished a Southern California run. We heard the news from Daniel, the father of Jonah's teammate, who called us *en route* to the game. Daniel and his son, Hudson, had purchased seats near us. We had plans to meet up at the rink. What was supposed to be a fun and exciting event for our boys was turning into a potential nightmare. We all discussed whether or not to continue with the plan and in fact sat for a few minutes in our respective cars in the parking lot, talking through our options. Going over the numbers again, we decided that it was *likely* safe to attend the game.

After parking we walked up from the parking garage to the Staples Center. Given the situation, I was not surprised to see that there were far fewer people than normal at the game. The line to get into the event was short and we found ourselves through security in a matter of minutes. The concourse was sparsely populated with Kings fans milling about and checking their phones. The atmosphere was far from celebratory. Daniel and I kept telling the boys to stop touching things and I became conscious of us both looking around to ensure that we kept as much of a distance as possible between our little group and others. At that point in the pandemic, only first responders had been advised to wear masks. The thought now of us all know walking through the (albeit sparse) crowd maskless gives me chills. Experiencing a rather different but still tangible discomfort at being amongst and exposed to so many strangers, at the time I recall thinking to myself, "we can almost feel it coming."

Emerging from the concourse to the seating section of the arena, we walked as a group down to our seats immediately behind the Kings' bench. What is usually an amazing moment of proximity to the players, coaches, and managers—a thrill for anyone who is lucky enough to experience it firsthand—felt for the first time like we were too close for comfort. Luckily, there were so few people at the game that the seats around us were empty. The unfilled seats surrounding us pulled my attention to them, however, as they eerily radiated a presencing forth of absence of those who should have been seated ready to enjoy the view alongside us (Throop and Duranti 2015; Mack 2019; Throop 2010). While in an odd way somewhat comforting (as they gave us the sense that we were somehow safer apart from others), the empty seats near the glass, which even at poorly attended games where always filled with spectators, shined forth glimmers of a looming pandemic that was still in the midst of just emerging.

While Daniel, my father, and the boys got comfortable in their seats, I headed back up to the concourse to get us some food and drinks. Worried that I might miss some of the

action, I decided to stop at the closest stall, a small corner store-like stand just outside our section's entrance. After moving as quickly as possible to pick up some snacks, two apple juices, and a few beers, I walked straight up to the cashier (again a rather odd experience given that there was usually a fairly long line of customers waiting to be pay). While paying I asked the sullen-faced woman working the cash how she was doing and what she made of the NBA suspending their season. Looking up from the register, she said, "it's all so horrible, I have two children in college, I work three jobs, without the Lakers and Clippers games, I don't know how I am going to pay their tuition or my rent." Wishing to respond to her palpable distress, I asked if she had family nearby or anyone who could help. "No," she replied, as she looked back down at the register. "Thank God the NHL is still going," she said in a voice that carried the weight of her uncertainty along in its wake. "Yeah," I replied, somewhat meekly. The sonic contours our speech no doubt disclosing what the explicit content of our talk would not: the hockey season would be shut down too soon.

Back at the seats I dropped the food off and took the boys up to the bathroom to wash their hands. Remaining vigilant, I repeatedly told them to stop touching everything along way as *everything* radiated a potential new harm. As Husserl's (1989) phenomenological analyses have shown, "things" are intersubjectively constituted, non-totalizable, and temporally unfolding phenomena that variously reveal themselves to us in changing aspects. Significantly, this includes aspects that harbor announcements of what is just about to come into view. In this respect, what looms can also shine forth as an aspect of the various things that we may encounter in our world as well. And indeed, at that moment, every surface of the arena now disclosed a new potentiality of looming danger, of possible infection, sickness, and perhaps even death. While worried about the boys, myself, and Daniel, my father's age, frailty, and preexisting conditions brought into clear focus what was always already the case, even if not always noticeable: the permeable and contagious dimensions of our enveloping world that we necessarily share with and alongside others.

As we walked the concourse, glimpses of the looming pandemic where palpable, embodied, and sensorial. In that moment, while holding both boys' hands as we weaved our way through the sparse crowd toward the bathroom, any illusions of our being independent and self-sufficing beings was displaced by our vulnerable intercorporeal intertwining and worldly emplacement. Supervising their hand washing and again making sure they kept their hands to themselves as we walked back to our section (a difficult task for two seven-year-old hockey players excited to be with each other and there for the game), my thoughts extended out toward what the next few weeks would bring.

The Los Angeles Kings—who had been having a terrible season (at the bottom of the standings along with the Ottawa Senators)—were on a winning streak of late. The team looked sharp, and the game was exciting. Sitting immediately behind the bench, we could clearly see the players faces, their intensity, and athleticism. Jonah and Hudson were taking great joy in every Kings goal. It was a close game, tied at one point 2-2 in the third period.

And then the first puck hit. In a haze of barely visible movement, a puck flew over the boards to our right and hit a woman a few rows above us. There was a scramble of bodies as a few fans nearby checked in to see if she was okay, while others ran and tried to retrieve the puck as it rolled somewhere beneath the seats. The next thing I knew, the boys were

looking to the ground at their feet. A moment later Hudson had bent down and popped up with the puck in his hand. As I watched Hudson show the puck to Jonah, all I could think of was how dirty the floor must be; I would need to take them to go wash their hands yet again. Still smiling with the puck in hand, Hudson turned around to face a man who had walked down from the seats above us. Telling Hudson to hand him the puck so he could give it to the woman who had been hit by it, the man held out his hand a few inches from Hudson's face. Before any of us could react, Hudson complied and handed the puck over. A bit shocked but taking it in stride, the boys sat down and turned their attention back to the game. Daniel and I, less impressed with the situation, spent time discussing how inappropriate it was for two adults to take a puck away from two seven-year-old boys. The benevolent hockey gods must have overheard our complaint, however, as only a few minutes later a second puck flew over the glass this time hitting Daniel in the shoulder before dropping down to the same dirty floor. Daniel bent over quickly and picked it up, giving it immediately to his son (see Figure 2). An unlikely triumph! The boys were thrilled.

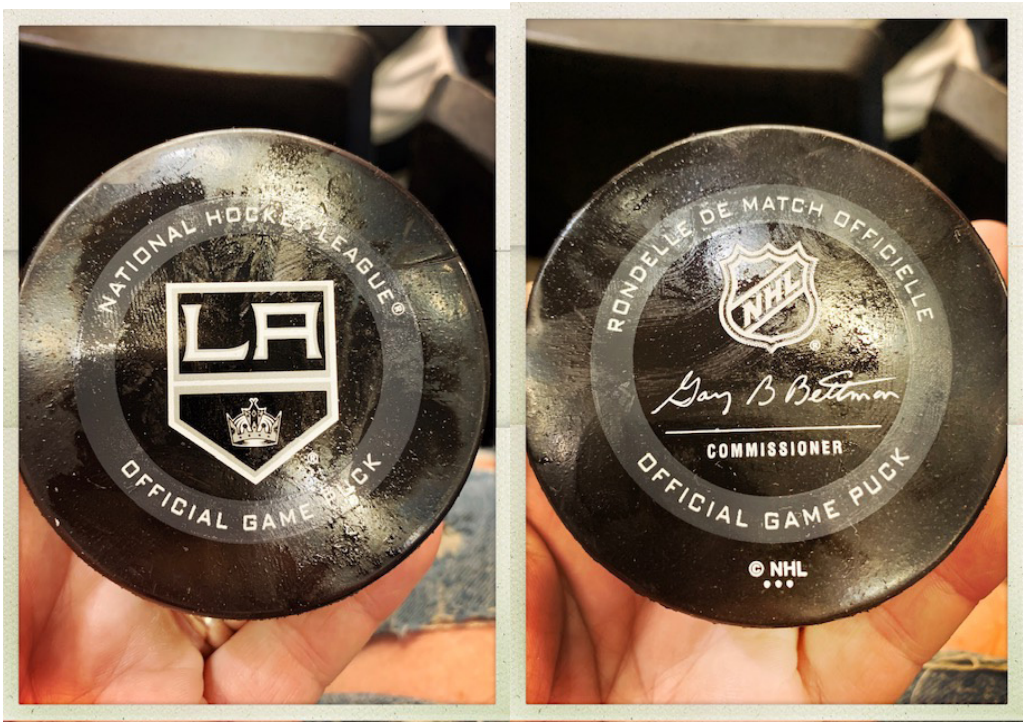

Figure 2.

They were even more thrilled when not long after, Martin Frk of the Kings scored what would turn out to be the game winning goal with less than five minutes left. As everyone stood cheering, I caught the eye of Todd McLellan the Kings' Head Coach, who had, up until that point, been emotionless most of the game, standing stoically over his players who were seated on the bench (see Figure 3). A glimmer of a smile emerged

before he reached up to cover his mouth as he coughed and turned away. And there it was yet again—an embodied glimpse of the looming pandemic shining forth in an instant. *It already was almost here.*

The next morning the NHL announced it would "pause" its season indefinitely until it was safe to resume again. We had attended what would become the last game of the 2019-2020 regular season.[2] Six days later the news broke that an unidentified Senators player had come down with COVID-19. We had been only feet away. *It had arrived.*

Figure 3.

[2] The NHL resumed a "bubbled" round-robin and that led to a playoff tournament in Toronto and Edmonton on Saturday August 1st, 2020. Given their low position in the standings, neither the Ottawa Senators nor the Los Angeles Kings participated.

ATMOSPHERES

> Held back for the first few years by a heart condition (self-diagnosis: "too much sport in my youth"), Heidegger had served as a meteorologist with the frontline weather service number 414 from August until November 1918. At Marne-Champagne, he provided forecasts to the German army from an observation post elevated a little above the battlefield to enable deployment of poison gas. Heidegger did not take part in actual fighting, but through his binoculars he would have seen many thousands of German soldiers emerging form their trenches and running toward certain death (Eilenberger 2020, 45)

Perched at his observation post watching the distant horizon for the formation of weather patterns shifting across the Western Front—as the poison gas deployed below him on the battled field swirled in configurations inflected by the temperature of the air and the velocity of the wind—the theologian cum philosopher cum wartime meteorologist—Martin Heidegger was well positioned to notice the phenomenon of looming in its various atmospheric and existential manifestations. Whether or not his later phenomenological analyses of attunement (*Befindlichkeit*) and mood (*Stimmung*) may have somehow been inspired by his observations of the enveloping dynamic atmospheric surround of the battlefield, such potential connections between looming and mood are quite alluring (Heidegger 1996). And yet, Heidegger was not, however, the first to phenomenologically discern the significance of such forms of affective responsiveness to worldly conditions of possibility.

Fourteen years before Heidegger took up his post on the Western Front, and nineteen years before he became his assistant, Edmund Husserl had already begun generatively analyzing the phenomena of mood and horizon as co-constitutive structures of experience (Quepons 2015). That experience is for Husserl, as Quepons describes, dynamically configured and oriented to a "world-horizon" that is disclosed in moods—a horizon that also implicates other horizonal shifts of foreground and background, of proximity and distance, of pasts, presents, and futures, and of that which approaches and moves away—already captures something of what I have traced the phenomenon of looming to be (Quepons 2015).

Later, in his lectures on passive synthesis, Husserl (2001) engaged in a much broader investigation into the affective contours of the shifting horizons that define our various modes of being with and amongst others and objects in the world. As Anthony Steinbock (2018) notes, Husserl showed in these lectures that "everything coming into relief as a unity of sense does so as an affective relief and as exercising an affective allure on the perceiver" (12). In other words, there is always already an "affective tonality" that is responsive to and shapes our experience of what has already become, what is presently here, and in the process of arriving (12). What is in the process of arriving may loom. Looming is thus disclosive of an aspect of becoming in a specific futural mode. How so?

In his helpful review of Husserl's famous distinction between protention and expectation, Steinbock (2018) points out that whereas protention involves

> an anonymous sketching out of the future that is based on present occurrence and how that occurrence was retained as past. . . [a process that] takes place without any egoic activity or explicit attention to what is to come. . . Expectation is different from protention, however, insofar as expectation is an active comportment toward the future. (2)

In other words, whereas protention is a passively responsive feeding forward to what announces itself as approaching the present, expectation is a more active orientation to the existence of something futural that is "possibly going to happen." Indeed, in "expectation, I count on the futural event as it is foreshadowed in the present" (3). Foreshadowing what is to come, expectations meet the future in its mode of arrival, openly welcoming that which is to come. And yet, what I would like to bear down on and examine a bit more closely is the enigma of both protention and expectation; the enigma that what is in the process of arriving is somehow anticipated by what has already arrived and perhaps has now passed us by. Protention as a passive constitutive stretching toward, and expectation as a more explicit foreshadowing of what is to come, are thus both openings toward that which is both not yet, and yet still quasi-here. The emphasis remains in both cases on the being who awaits the future to come. While necessarily entangled with looming, neither protention nor expectation are equitable with it.

Something more akin to, but still quite distinct from, the experience of looming is found, however, in Steinbock's (2018) insightful analysis of the phenomenon of surprise. When surprised, the smooth flowing of expectation is ruptured. In Steinbock's words, "it is as if what happens comes out of nowhere, precisely because it is otherwise than the expected flow or unfolding of what is to come" (5). Surprise entails thus, "the 'shattering' of the noema, the sense-content of my ongoing intentional acts . . . . What is demanded is a radical reconfiguration of sense, a new one supplanting the old (Husserl also writes of being 'thrown from the saddle')" (6). That something arrives that is not expected— "as if what happens comes out of nowhere" —reveals the instant wherein protention is caught reaching out to meet that which does not merely re-enliven its past retentional horizon of what Husserl (1964) termed the "running off phenomena." This is an aspect of surprise that links it up with that which looms—both are pitched toward the event. In the case of surprise, we are faced with a sudden break with expectation, a coming into being of that which was not yet anticipated. In the case of looming, we are faced with a more gradual, uneven, and vague emergence of something still in the midst of arriving that breaks through and yet becomes entangled in the retentional array. What looms grows and folds into our future horizon like the clouds darkening and moving toward us on the horizon. In this respect looming can perhaps be understood as the inverse of the phenomenon of *decay*—what Ghassan Hage (2021) has described as a phenomenon that gradually reveals a not-yet in the form of a soon longer going to be (Flaherty and Throop 2018b; Harrison 2014).

AIRBORNE

Unbidden, while driving to a hockey practice with a small group of friends now forced to follow strict COVID-19 related guidelines while on the ice, Jonah recalled the day he learned that COVID-19 was airborne. At the time (likely sometime mid-March), Jonah had been spending the afternoon at the small condo my father had rented that past fall across the street from the rink where Jonah's hockey team practices. A memory that had faded into the background oblivion for me, stood out as a striking flash of concern and worry for him. Apparently, I had called my father while the two of them were playing Jonah's favorite Playmobile hockey game. As Jonah remembered it, my father's mobile phone rang, and he listened as we spoke. I had called to let them know that I had read a news story confirming that COVID-19 was likely transmitted through droplets in the air and was thus "airborne." As Jonah sadly recalled, we talked for some time, and he overheard us discussing when and if my father should go back home.

Time was running out, it seemed, as rumors swirled that the borders between Canada and the US would be closing soon. My father, who usually stayed in Los Angeles until late April, was medically fragile and without adequate medical insurance to cover a lengthy hospital stay. We had to get him home. We worried about him traveling in a plane without a mask and talked about the possibility of my driving him cross-country to get him home. Our luck changed however when my wife, Karin, stumbled across two N-95 masks she had bought a few years ago for one of her art projects. One of the masks was still wrapped. The other had been used. The decision was made within a matter of minutes. Dad purchased his ticket home. His flight would leave in a week. It was time to pack up his condo and get him ready to go.

A few days later, on March 21st, a joint-statement was released on a US-Canada Joint Initiative to restrict travel across the border between the two countries to "all non-essential travel." Panicking, we called the airline to ensure that my father would be able to get home. After being reassured that he could enter the country as long as he had his Canadian Passport, we were informed that he would have to quarantine for fourteen days. I made the arrangements to find a place for him to stay as the snow had not melted enough for him to return to our family cottage where he has spent his late spring, summer, and fall months since retiring more than a decade ago. In the meantime, his original flight, and then a second, were canceled due to overbookings. Dad had to wait a bit longer before he could leave LA. The third flight was the charm. They had room for him on an evening flight on March 23rd.

All packed, my father stopped by our house to spend a few hours in our front yard with us before his departure. Having already spent ten days in our house without leaving or seeing anyone, Jonah was at first scared to even walk outside. In his first attempt, he walked a few steps out the door, saw his grandfather and ran back inside. After some coaxing, he emerged again, worried still that the virus was "everywhere." He and my father eventually began playing a social distanced game of ball hockey across the front lawn. When the time came for him to leave the painful hug-less goodbye left us all in tears. Jonah was

inconsolable in Karin's arms as my father waved goodbye from the back seat of our car; we had decided it was best I alone drove Dad to the airport.

To keep each other safe, I had rolled down all the windows in the car and the two of us had our N-95 masks on; his new, mine used. Each wearing blue surgical gloves we passed the eerily trafficless ride down the 101 freeway toward to the airport in silence. Entering a darkened LAX, almost completely empty of cars and people, only served to intensify the feeling of the already almost here of a looming pandemic. As we pulled up to the curb, I noticed that nobody at all was in line at Air Canada's check in counter (see Figure 4).

Parked, I walked out of the car and opened the trunk to retrieve my Dad's luggage. He waited six feet (about a hockey stick's length) from me on the sidewalk. It took all my will power not to hug him. He took his luggage and entered the building. I stayed outside and watched as he checked in and got his ticket from the kiosk. Once ready, he walked back up to the window to wave goodbye. We exchanged worried looks and brief smiles with tears in our eyes. He then turned and walked out of sight toward airport security. To say I felt sad at my father's departure is to miss the mark completely. Something darker, more foreboding had taken hold of me. Something certainly distinct from, but perhaps more akin to despair.

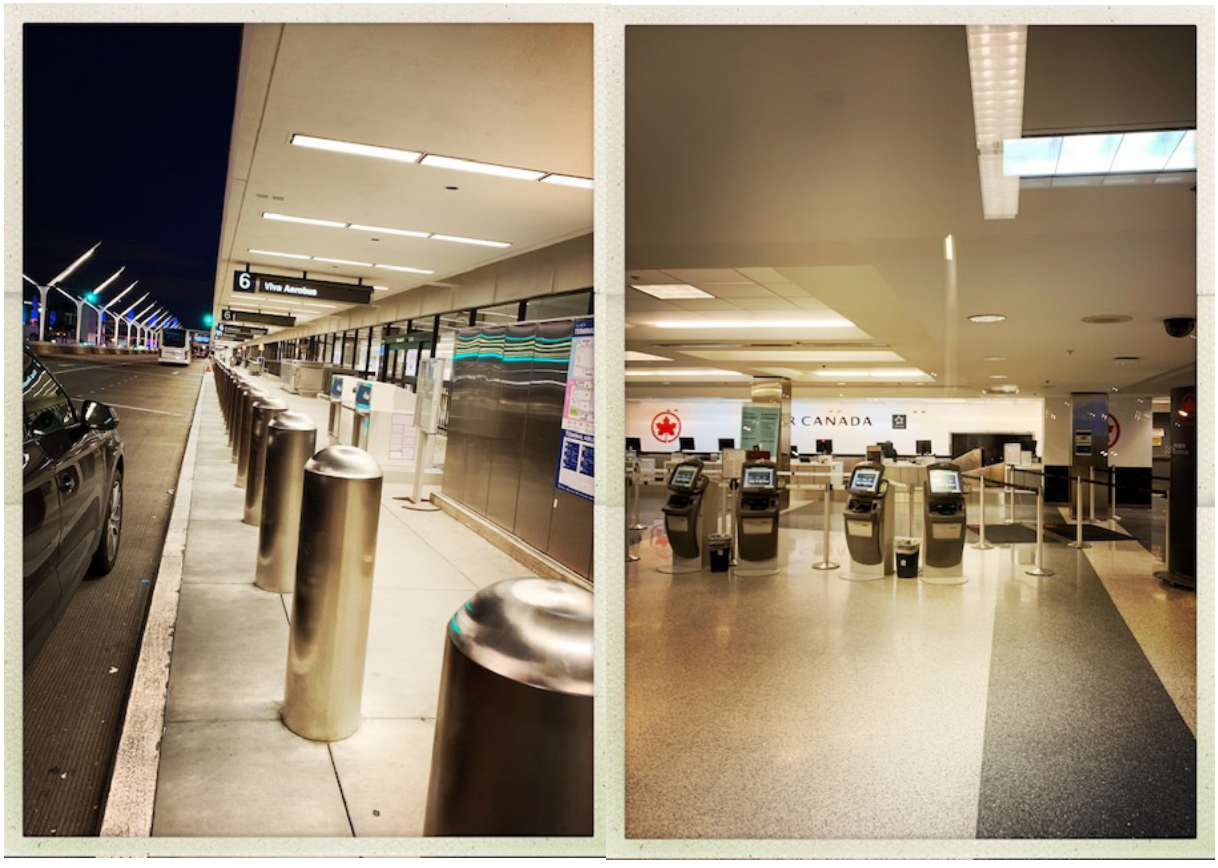

Figure 4.

COLLAPSE

A clearer picture of the particular experiential contours of looming becomes evident when compared to other moods of possibility that may otherwise be also entangled with it (Throop 2014; 2017; 2018a; Throop and Stephan forthcoming). Take, for instance, despair. Despair is, as Steinbock (2014) suggests, a mood that is attuned to a radical loss of worldly possibility—a response to situations where the ground of hope becomes experienced as impossible. In contrast to "hopelessness," which is occasioned in situations in which individuals are oriented to the impossibility of hoping for something specific and is thus geared into specifiable events, situations, or happenings, despair is attuned to the impossibility of hope itself. In despair, while I may still wish that things were different, and while I may regret that things had not gone otherwise, I cannot be openly attuned to the future in a modality of hope. Building upon Steinbock's analysis, Matthew Ratcliffe (2015) observes that despair arises when there is a radical break with one's ability to inhabit the "kinds of possibility the world incorporates" (110). When engulfed by despair, I am thus faced with the impossibility of possibility itself. In despair, events, situations, and the world appear as immovable, unchangeable, beyond my reach and control.

Like despair, what looms also appears as beyond our control. It is coming, we can feel its approach. In contrast to despair, however, where possibilities are already deemed impossibilities, what looms arises amid a still yet possible—a still yet possible that is attuned to the arrival of a radical reconfiguring or extinguishing of such self-same possibilities. It is the incipient breaking through of what is coming to be. As such, what looms is the pending, but not yet completely actualized collapse of possibilities, as new horizons are reconfigured in the wake of what is coming to be. As an attunement to what is to come, looming is thus receptive of a future that is in the process of becoming actualized in the present. Not yet, but soon to be. Not yet, but almost upon us. Not yet, but close.

In this respect, looming is also distinguishable from the mood of anxiety (*Angst*), which Heidegger (1993) famously characterized to be a founding mode of attunement (*die Befindlichkeit der Stimmung*) that reveals to us the nothing. Compared to fear, which inherently bears the intentional structure of being *fearful of* something in particular—snakes or spiders for instance—anxiety is not, as Heidegger puts it, anxiety of "in the face of this or that thing" (100). A mood of anxiety is instead attuned to an uncanny and indeterminate nothingness. As Heidegger recounts:

> In anxiety, we say, "one feels ill at ease [*es ist einem unheimlich*]." What is "it" that makes "one" feel ill at ease? We cannot say what it is before which one feels ill at ease. . . . We can get no hold on things. In the slipping away of beings only this "no hold on things" comes over us and remains. (101)

What looms may also emerge from an indistinct and indeterminate horizon. In contrast to Heidegger's description of the foundational mooded attunement of anxiety, however, looming is not disclosive of a nothing—what Heidegger characterizes as a "no hold on things." What looms is instead precisely some thing, some event, some happening, even if

indeterminate and nascent in form, that is coming upon us, just about to arrive. Between the determinate structure of fear and the indeterminate nothingness of anxiety, looming is again pitched toward the event. It is the breaking through of the event into a present that awaits its arrival. Judith Butler (2022) is speaking to a resonate form of mooded attunement when she elaborates upon Scheler's analysis of tragedy and the intertwining of the sorrow of life and world in her contribution to this special issue:

> The sorrow, in fact, moves between life and world, the event of loss, singular and irreversible, and the world that is now in its unpicturable entirety immersed in sorrow. In some ways, this is true insofar as the stories of loss overlap: the cell phone at the hospital; the getting barred at the hospital door; the inability to get to a hospital or to gain admission. They refer to this loss and that loss, each very specific losses, and yet as the mode of reference repeats across its occasions, a looming world of loss emerges, or perhaps its ambient atmosphere becomes, or threatens to become, the air itself, or the very way that the air is registered here and now. (16)

That *what is to come* has a shape and that the future may have a variety of forms that are experientially distinct, is thus an aspect of the future that looming foregrounds explicitly. That we are beings who can be attuned through moods to the immediate press of future events in the process of their coming to be, also suggests that as beings, we are all responsive and open to the world in its process of becoming – even when what is becoming is the end of our projected and hoped for future possibilities (Al-Saji 2020; Mattingly 2010; McCoy 2018; O'Byrne 2010; Seal-Feldman 2020; Throop 2018a; Zigon 2017).

CONCLUSION

Announced just two days after my father left Los Angeles, Yap (along with the rest of the Federated States of Micronesia) closed its borders and all flights entering or leaving the island were canceled. Over ten months later, as I write the conclusion to this article, they still remain closed. To say that the COVID-19 pandemic once loomed at the dawn of 2020 or that 2023 and the end of the Compact of Free Association still looms for communities in Yap, is to recognize the mooded ways that the arrival of these two distinctive disasters, one still impending another still here, cloud the future's horizon. Such futures both anticipate the coming of funerals and the previously unthinkable end of our everyday modes of being with and among others in our variously shared worlds.

As a specific mooded orientation to our situated condition, looming reveals, as phenomenologists would say, that we are always already attuned to the world—even if that world in the process of beginning anew or fading away (Zigon 2014; Throop 2014; 2020). Given that in both cases— "the coming funeral" in Yap and the millions of funerals that arrived in the wake of COVID-19—it is clear that what looms has critical political

and ethical dimensions. How we prepare for such arrivals in the midst of their coming to be, how we work to mitigate and protect ourselves from such futures that are in the process of showing themselves, even if in uneven and indistinct ways as they move toward us with their own force and formation, is thus of critical significance for anything we might term a critical phenomenology. Given current worldly conditions—which now include the ongoing pandemic, global climate change, and emerging global political and economic unrest and realignment—the stakes for paying much closer attention to the ways individuals and communities are attuned to what is in the process of taking form—to what looms—could not, in my estimation, be more important.

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TRUTH, THINKING, ETHICS

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POST-TRUTH

In 2016 the Oxford Languages named post-truth its word of the year. In doing so, it defined post-truth as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Oxford Languages 2016). Notice that truth is here equated with "objective facts," or perhaps a bit more sophisticatedly, the correspondence between "objective facts," a human subject, and their propositions. This is, to say the least, an extremely narrow, insipid, and one is tempted to say, not very human notion of truth. It is, however, quite a common definition of truth, and particularly so among philosophers of the analytic variety. Simon Critchley (2020a) recalls his former teacher once saying: "Truth isn't interesting. If you want truth, open a phonebook." Indeed. Critchley's teacher surely had the correspondence theory of truth in mind when he said this.[1]

One is inclined to ask: when was it that emotion and personal belief was not more influential on public opinion than objective facts? Here we need simply refer to such phenomena as religion and nationalism to call into question the apparent assumption behind this definition that at some point in the not very distant past public opinion was shaped predominantly (or entirely?) by clear and distinct truths understood as correspondence to objective facts. History suggests otherwise. Rather than post-truth as the new and disturbing feature of our time, perhaps instead, the very idea that truth should be merely equated with "objective facts" is most concerning.

It is understandable how this came about. In the last 150 years, for example, God died and secularism spread, two world wars crushed any good faith belief in Enlightenment ideals, and the capitalist machine transformed the Earth into a resource for profit-seeking individuals. Under such conditions, truth and those who traditionally were recognized to

[1] For an excellent introduction to the correspondence theory of truth, see Marian David (2020).

have the authority to uphold or spread it have increasingly been considered illegitimate. Except, that is, for science and scientists (and even they are increasingly coming into question in some corners). But because since at least the Second World War, science has increasingly become technology obsessed and instrumentarian focused; and because much of what counts today as scientific discovery has been redefined in terms of profit-driven innovation as a result of its unholy alliance with the capitalist machine (Scherz 2019); science today has become one of the foundations upholding the idea of truth as objective fact (Porter 1995; Daston and Galison 2010). This is, perhaps, most clearly seen in the increasing influence of so-called data science, which not only is very comfortably allied with finance capitalism, but also understands the "truth" revealed by data as little more than facts, and science as little more than the technologically efficient reproduction of those facts. When the "truth" of these facts, however, are regularly characterized by injustice and inequality, perhaps these "truths" ought not be reproduced.[2]

Still, Oxford Languages supports its choice by claiming that post-truth is not "an isolated quality of particular assertions," but rather "a general characteristic of our age" (2016). That is to say, we live in times *conditioned* by post-truth.[3] While that may be the case, here we might want to note, however, that considering this condition unique to our time necessitates a particularly Euro-American perspective on history; or perhaps even more specifically, an Anglo-American perspective. For we need not look very far or wide in time or geography to find other examples that might also be characterized as post-truth conditions. Indeed, a good deal of the 20th century could be precisely characterized as just this, and located right there in the center, as well as the periphery, of Europe. This is Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and its satellites.

Hannah Arendt remains today the most significant thinker of the relation between truth and totalitarian politics. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt (1973) writes that one of the primary characteristics of this form of politics is "that gigantic lies and monstrous falsehoods can eventually be established as unquestioned facts . . . and that the difference between truth and falsehood may cease to be objective and become a mere matter of power and cleverness, of pressure and infinite repetition" (333). Importantly, Arendt makes the essential point that it is not the convinced Nazi, for example, who is the ideal subject of totalitarian politics, but rather ordinary "people for whom the distinction between fact

[2] For just a few examples of a growing literature on the reproduction of injustices and inequalities by algorithms and big data, see O'Neil (2016); Cheney-Lippold (2017); Noble (2018).

[3] Similar to Arendt, when I write of conditions I mean something like what we mean when we say "weather conditions" or "skiing conditions." That is, the conditions that enable or hinder or provide limits for possible ways of being, becoming, acting, doing, thinking, saying, and so on, in the worlds where we are. And like weather or skiing conditions, these ontological conditions emerge through the confluence of both human and nonhuman intertwining. Furthermore, because conditions emerge at this confluence they should be understood in terms of having the potential to become otherwise. For just as weather and skiing conditions change as the result of both human and nonhuman activity, so too can ontological conditions change in similar ways. Some questions arise: If it is possible for ontological conditions to change, is there a possibility that they do not? If so, how does this happen? Furthermore, if ontological conditions can change, what are the processes by which this change occurs and what is its temporality? This essay is not the place to take up these questions. However, I do take them up in my book *Disappointment: Toward a Critical Hermeneutics of Worldbuilding* (Zigon 2018).

and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist" (474). Ordinary people in their everyday lives become susceptible to this way of being, according to Arendt, when they are increasingly isolated from one another.

The atomized, isolated, lonely individual is most vulnerable to what is now called post-truth politics. Above all, it is the consequence of this vulnerability that is most concerning. In our contemporary condition characterized by such loneliness and the consequential increase of addiction, anxiety, and despair, where "social interaction" is most regularly done by means of fragmentary social media posts, all of which is supported by a neoliberalism that only recognizes persons as self-responsible and autonomous individuals, and which too often results in persons becoming selfish individuals, it is no wonder that the very possibility of a between that gives way to us is increasingly foreclosed by totalitarian-like—or at least for now more accurately put, authoritarian-like—politics (Zigon 2019a; 2021).

In such a condition, we must ask: what is to be done? Much of the concern today about post-truth revolves precisely around the potential rise of—if not totalitarian politics, then certainly—authoritarian politics. In order to begin to address the question of what is to be done, it will be helpful first to consider an historical example of a similar condition of "post-truth" and authoritarian/totalitarian politics, and query as to how those living in such a condition responded. How was it that in isolating conditions of post-truth some were still able to connect with others, and in so doing, slowly bring about an otherwise?

LIVE WITHIN TRUTH

In his famous essay "The Power of the Powerless," the playwright, dissident, and eventual first president of post-Communist Czechoslovakia Václav Havel (1992) articulates his political, ethical, and existential imperative "to live within the truth." Written in 1978, this essay was his response to life in the post-truth—or perhaps as Havel would say, the ideological—conditions of the Czechoslovakian Communist regime. At first glance, this imperative seems rather straightforward, particularly when contrasted with how Havel describes the opposite, that is, "living within a lie." Such a distinction surely conjures Arendt's (1973) claim that totalitarianism is a form of politics in which "the difference between truth and falsehood may cease to be objective and become a mere matter of power and cleverness, of pressure and infinite repetition" (333). While this is as good a description as any for understanding how ideology is made the "truth" of everyday life under certain regimes of power, such a manner of putting it, nevertheless, too easily slips into an overly banal notion of truth as equivalent with objective fact, such that, for example, the number of persons attending a presidential inauguration becomes a primary battleground over the truthfulness of a regime.

It matters, of course, whether or not leaders can speak honestly about simple phenomena in the world like the number of people at an event, let alone more complex phenomena such as the economy or public health. Still, dishonesty by politicians alone cannot be the

standard by which we define the limits of totalitarianism, for surely, if it were, we would know no other form of politics. Rather, what Havel means by the distinction between living within truth or living within a lie is a matter of one's *comportment* within what he calls the panorama of everyday life. In other words, Havel is not writing about—or at least not primarily so—the veracity of this or that statement, but rather how one is with one's world. To live within the truth rather than living within a lie is a matter of being dispositionally attuned to the panorama of everyday life or its horizon of meaning or what I suggest in the final section of this essay is better considered in terms of the sense of the world.

Again, this is not a matter of the truth or falsity of one's propositional statements—whether or not the greengrocer, to use Havel's (1992) famous example, is attempting to articulate something objectively true about the world and his relation to it when he hangs the "Workers of the world, unite!" sign in his shop window. But rather, to live within truth is a matter of one's comportment with the world, how we "address the world," a matter of "responsibility to and for the world," and as such, has as its "proper point of departure . . . concern [and care] for others" (1992, 147, 194, 195). The articulation of such a moral disposition—or what I call in the next section, embodied morality—Havel attributes to the Czech phenomenologist Jan Patočka with the latter's saying that "the most interesting thing about responsibility is that we carry it with us everywhere" (Havel 1992, 195). By this, Patočka is indicating what we might call an embodied commitment to remain faithfully attuned to the world and those others there with us.

In his otherwise brilliant ethnographic and theoretical description of the performative shift of late socialism's authoritative discourse, Alexei Yurchak (2006) misses this complexity of Havel's argument. Taking up Austin's theory of performatives, Yurchak argues that Havel is too narrowly concerned with the constative dimension of language—the conveyance of meaning that is either a true or false description of facts. In contrast, Yurchak argues that the condition of late socialism is better described by what Austin calls the performative dimension—the felicitous or infelicitous force of language that is neither true nor false but rather does something in the world (19). Admittedly, it is rather easy to read Havel in this way considering his rhetorical contrast between living within truth and living within a lie, and this reading is made even more understandable considering that to some extent the genre of dissident writing taken up by Havel is perhaps most obviously read as articulating certain truths over and against the lies of a totalitarian regime. Nevertheless, Havel's essay is more sophisticated than your run of the mill political statement, and it is precisely the Heideggerian undercurrent of the essay that is missed by Yurchak that makes it so.

For Havel is not an analytic philosopher obsessed with the most logical argument to support, for example, that the statement "'Snow is white' is true iff it corresponds to the fact that snow is white" is more truthful than "'Snow is white' is true iff snow is white," or vice versa (David 2020). Far from it. Rather, Havel is an existentialist; and for this reason, he does not define truth in terms of, for example, a correspondence between a subject and objective facts, but rather in terms of a dispositional manner of being. Put another way, when Havel writes about living within the truth, he is primarily and for the most part writing about the human existential imperative to dwell openly in a world together with

others.[4] As Havel (1992) puts it, there is a "human predisposition to truth" or an "openness to truth" (148). Indeed, it is only because of this predisposition to truth, so claims Havel, that it becomes possible to live a lie.

This notion of truth and the human predisposition and openness to truth is above all a Heideggerian notion. For Heidegger (1996), the full existential and ontological meaning of the "fact" that "Dasein is in the truth" is that Dasein is also "in untruth" (204). (In Heidegger's way of putting the matter here, we can already see his influence first on Patočka and then on Havel). Importantly, then, to be human—to be Dasein—is *to be* the movement between truth and untruth. Again, this is not a philosophical claim about the capacity to utter correspondingly true or false propositions. Rather, to be the movement between truth and untruth is a matter of comportment. Or, as Heidegger (2011) goes on to describe it, it is a matter of being attuned, or the ecstatically relational exposure to a world such that one is temporarily in accord with the latter (75). Heidegger seeks to move beyond the notion of a subject that stands over and against objects and its world by looking to the ancient Greek conception of truth as *alētheia*, which he translates as unconcealment. In contrast to a subject agentively projecting knowledge onto objects and the world such that this projection corresponds "truthfully" with the latter, truth as *alētheia* or unconcealment is the result of having a certain disposition or attunement with a particular object or world such that the latter is let be to show itself as itself. Thus, truth in this sense is neither in the subject nor in the object nor in their correspondence. Rather, truth is the relational attunement—the between—that allows an existent to show itself as itself and allows other existents to let the unfolding of that showing happen.

It is for this reason, then, that Heidegger (2011) writes that the "essence of truth reveals itself as freedom" (75). This is so because freedom is not an agentive capacity for acting as projection; rather freedom "lets beings be the beings they are" to disclose themselves as such, and is thus an attuning (72, 75). This freedom as letting be, Heidegger is quick to tell us, is not a matter of "neglect or indifference but rather the opposite. To let be is

[4] To dwell "is being-in-the-world in such a way that as part of that world one is intimately intertwined with and concerned for it and its other existents, and as such participates in maintaining the openness of that world in its ongoing attunement with itself. Here it is important to emphasize that such dwelling is not about being located, emplaced, or even about the space that one occupies. Rather, dwelling is an existential modality for being-in-a-world, a modality that only becomes possible in an attuned world. Thus, to dwell . . . is to be in a world in such a way that one's being is never pre-limited within a pre-assumed totality, but rather possibilities for becoming otherwise remain open . . . To claim that dwelling is an ethical imperative for human existence . . . is simply to claim that to be human is to be intimately intertwined and attuned with a world for which one is concerned, and which becomes attuned, in turn, with itself. It should be noted that this concern makes no normative claim beyond maintaining the ability to dwell in that world. Because of this mutual attunement between oneself and a world, openness always remains such that both oneself and that world can become otherwise so as to maintain this attunement. To speak of dwelling as an ethical imperative, then, does not predefine how or what a human becomes, nor does it predefine what kind of world this human must become a part of. Rather it is simply to acknowledge that to be human is always to be concernedly intertwined in a world with others, and this being-together always manifests differently. Dwelling, then, is that existential imperative of humanness that allows for the very differences of ways of being-in-the-world, ethically acting and valuing, and socially and politically inter- and intra-acting that" critical phenomenologists tend to focus on (Zigon 2018, 120–22).

to engage oneself with beings" (72). Or as Havel (1992) put it, to live within truth is to be "concern[ed] [and care] for others" (195), and this intertwined concern and care is a matter of having a certain moral disposition and attunement with others and our worlds. Thus, both freedom and truth in this Heideggerian sense are not capacities of the subject to be agentively enacted, but rather are indicative of an attuned relation between existents of the world. Therefore, "'[t]ruth' is not a feature of correct propositions that are asserted of an 'object' by a human 'subject' and then 'are valid' somewhere, in what sphere we know not; rather, *truth is disclosure of beings through which an openness essentially unfolds*" (Heidegger 2011, 74, italics added).

Havel adopted his imperative to "live within truth" from this Heideggerian notion of truth, and Heidegger's argument in support of the claim that "Dasein is in the truth." But he did so through an interpretation of Heidegger by his mentor Patočka, the Czech phenomenologist for whom Havel's essay was dedicated.[5] For Patočka (1998), humans "are the only beings [that] can live in truth," by which he means "life in a relation to the world" rather than the anxiety of "roles and needs" (177). Not unlike Arendt's (1998) distinction between work and labor, Patočka articulates the difference between an existentially meaningful attunement with the world—what he and Havel call living within truth—and an existentially meaningless and unfree emplacement in a world as one with a "role" that is done simply to fulfill a "need." It is this latter condition that for both Patočka and Havel leads to living a lie; not because it is a false correspondence but because it is fundamentally antithetical to the kind of being humans are. For it is only by living in truth as a singularly "irreplaceable" being that one is "at home with" oneself and dwells with others in a world of sense and meaning (Patočka 1998, 177).

Havel (1992) writes: "Between the aims of the post-totalitarian system [his name for the Czechoslovakian Communist regime] and the aims of life there is a yawning abyss: while life, in its essence, moves toward plurality, diversity, independent self-constitution, and self-organization, in short, toward the fulfillment of its own freedom, the post-totalitarian system demands conformity, uniformity, and discipline" (134-35). This is Havel's way of making Patočka's distinction between "life in a relation to the world" and the anxiety of "roles and needs." As in this quote, throughout the essay Havel continuously builds on Patočka in equating, or at least making an essential link between, truth and life. If truth is equated with life, or at least indicative thereof, then living within truth is precisely living freedom; living free *not* as an individualist bourgeois consumer and fulfiller of desire, but existentially as always open to the multifarious unfolding of existence as such and attuning as necessary.

Havel (1992) knows that the greengrocer "is indifferent to the semantic content" (132) of the sign he hangs, and only does it to show his ritualistic adherence to what must be done in order not to stir the pot, as it were. Indeed, for the most part, Havel is not advocating that the greengrocer stops hanging the sign. The real concern for Havel is what the greengrocer does now that he has hung the sign. Havel does not, of course, expect the greengrocer to become a dissident like himself and make speeches and organize strikes—

[5] For this intellectual history, see Gubser (2014).

though he may, and Havel would certainly support that. Rather, and ultimately, Havel urges the greengrocer to help build and participate in what he calls parallel structures, but we can call parallel worlds, of such seemingly minor activities as unsanctioned rock concerts or plays or informal organizations to address particular situational problems that may arise (1992, 192-94).

These parallel worlds are a "rudimentary prefiguration" of "open communities," Havel tells us (1992, 213). Such "existential revolutions," as he also calls them, provide an opportunity for a "new experience of being," which gives way to the "rehabilitation of values like trust, openness, responsibility, solidarity, love," and thus a "moral reconstitution of society" (209-10). I have called this elsewhere a politics of worldbuilding (Zigon 2018; 2019b). It was precisely the various forms this existential revolution and politics of worldbuilding took in the later years of the Czechoslovakian Communist regime that eventually gave way to the Velvet Revolution and the collapse of that regime. Importantly, then, those concerts, café groups, and other forms of sociality that Yurchak describes as possible because of what he calls a performative shift, and which ultimately allowed for the rather quick and easy collapse of the Soviet Union, now seem very similar to that which Havel describes as living within truth and the existential, moral, and political revolutions this attunement gives way to. Perhaps performativity, then, is indicative of the Heideggerian movement between truth and untruth as an attempt to become felicitously attuned to a world.[6]

THINKING

Following Heidegger, Patočka, and Havel, I understand human life as the movement between truth and untruth in just the way described in the previous section. Therefore, I am compelled to ask: if one's disposition or comportment with the world is fundamental for how one is in this movement, then how can we account for the coming to be of a disposition that is adequate to truth? Put another way: what is the process by which one becomes capable of living within truth such that the possibility of untruth is not eliminated—for this is impossible in any aletheiological constellation of the movement between truth and untruth—but that one is capable of recognizing attunement with truth rather than untruth? One response might be, to think.

Recall that Hannah Arendt (2006) did not consider the evil deeds of the Nazi Eichmann in terms of the demonic, but rather in terms of banality. Eichmann, like so many other Nazis (e.g., Browning 1998), committed evil acts not because he was a monster, but because he was thoughtless.[7] Thoughtlessness, Arendt is quick to remind us, is not stupidity. For

[6] For example, Simon Critchley offers an interesting interpretation of Heidegger's notions of repetition, anticipatory resoluteness, care, and selfhood in terms of performativity. See Critchley (2020b); Heidegger (1996, sections 62–64).

[7] See for example Christopher Browning's (1998) book on the "ordinary men" who made up a Nazi battalion responsible for mass killings in Poland.

although Arendt is adamant that all humans are capable of thinking—indeed, at one point she defines humans as thinking beings—she is also clear that sometimes very intelligent people simply do not do so. Furthermore, Arendt insists that in our everyday lives of going about our daily activities with one another we do not think. This is a view of the human that she shares with perhaps the two most significant philosophers of the twentieth century—Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein (Braver 2014, chapter 4). In contrast to the brain-centric view of the human that considers all human activity in terms of cognitive thinking of some order or another, Arendt (1978) considers everyday life more in terms of habits than mind. Still, it is those moments of stepping-away from the habitual flow of the everyday, when we "stop and think," that is the essence of humanness (4). For it is precisely because of such moments, she contends, that we are able to judge such things as good and beauty. Indeed, it was her observations of Eichmann and her connection of thoughtlessness to evil that led her to ask an important question for ethical theory: "Might the problem of good and evil, our faculty for telling right from wrong, be connected with our faculty of thought?" (1978, 5).

Her response is yes. But not because thinking offers us the "right" answer to our ethical dilemma. Arendt is clear: thinking does not produce anything. When we "stop and think" we do not discover a moral law or principle or criterion according to which we should act, thus guaranteeing us moral standing. Neither, it should be added, does thinking produce truth or knowledge. "Science does not think," as Heidegger once provocatively put it (1968, 8). In a quite literal way, nothing—no-thing—is produced by thought that is either universally or situationally applicable to our everyday lives. If this is so, then how is it—one might ask—that thinking is so central to ethics?

Phenomenologically, much of our everyday life is lived without thought, and embodied habit—or, what might better be called habitus or an active disposition—better describes how it is that we are in our worlds. Our habitus is at one and the same time "shared" with most others with whom we may interact—this is its "socio-cultural-historic" situatedness—and deeply personal, as our singular life trajectory significantly shapes the enactment and feel of an otherwise "shared" and publicly recognizable habitus. This duality of "sharedness" and singularity entails that unlike explanations of human action that posit sharedness as sameness or equivalency—for example, some cultural or Foucauldian disciplinarian approaches that understand culture or disciplinary institutions as the conditions for persons coming to share the more or less exact same beliefs or normative dispositions—human action is better understood in terms of "sharedness" in scare quotes, which is perhaps better described as shades of similarity (Zigon 2007).

This phenomenological understanding of habitus as the primary modality of being in everyday life does not mean, however, that "thoughts" do not run through our "mind." Of course, they do. But these "thoughts"—like our bodily actions—are better considered in terms of dispositions. Just as our bodies habitually move in certain ways in certain situations—offering a hand when first meeting someone—so too do our "thoughts." So too, it should be noted, does our speech—"nice to meet you" one might say while offering their hand. And just as our bodies move and speak in ways that are at once "shared" with

others but yet colored, as it were, by one's singularly specific life trajectory, so too are our "thoughts."

This dispositional modality of living our everyday lives in a mostly smooth and unquestioned manner—let's call it living in an existentially comfortable manner—is what I call embodied morality.[8] To live with existential comfort in our everyday dispositional mode does *not* mean, for example, to have a "comfortable confidence of being able routinely to do the right thing," or a psychologized, or even and especially a bourgeois, sense of feeling comfortable (Laidlaw 2014, 128). Rather, by existential comfort I intend an effortless absorption in a world as one's everyday way of being. Indeed, anxiety might be just as likely the mood of this effortless absorption as is "confidence." The etymological root of comfort helps us see it as a possible ethical concept. For the Latin root of comfort (*com-fortis*) would be something like strength together, or communal fortitude, or perseverance, revealing to us how existential comfort as the aim of ethics is not only something always achieved with others socially, but also a modality of being that is not necessarily anything like a "good" traditionally conceived but rather one of withness (Zigon 2018, chapter 5).

This dispositional way of being in the world—one's embodied morality—is enacted smoothly and unquestionably—comfortably—because one has become attuned to one's world and those other beings there—human and nonhuman alike.[9] If asked "how is it between us?" one might reply unthinkingly: "good." Such a response does not indicate that the between is in any "objective" sense "good"—however that may be determined—but rather that the attuned withness of our embodied moral way of being with one another is (more or less) smoothly—because unnoticeably—unfolding. Embodied morality is just one's average everyday way of being in the world with others, who or whatever those others may be.

Notice that this notion of embodied morality does not necessarily entail that there is anything particularly "good" about one's everyday way of being-with. Arendt is absolutely clear on this matter: while everyday lives may be lived mostly in the modality of an active disposition, this habitus (or what Arendt calls habit) can be more or less easily changed for better or worse (1978, 177). The example she uses to illustrate this is how quickly average Germans and Russians were able to change their habituated everyday way of being—their embodied morality—along with the newly imposed Nazi and Soviet regimes. If a German wished to respond to the question of "how is it between us?" with the answer "good," then this entailed the adoption of a different embodied morality with which to dispositionally keep going. This is something, so it seemed to Arendt, that Eichmann did easily and thoughtlessly. Indeed, for Arendt, the ease with which so many Germans and Russians quickly and, to all appearances, seamlessly, adjusted to the new regimes, makes clear that dispositions as such are no deterrent against evil. It was precisely the ease with which they could be adjusted that Arendt considered in terms of thoughtlessness.

Dispositional or embodied morality, then, is *not* ethics. Rather, ethics occurs when there is a moral breakdown, when a dissonance arises between a dispositional normativity

[8] On embodied morality, see Zigon 2007; 2009; 2011; 2018; 2019b.

[9] See especially Zigon 2007; 2009; 2018.

and its founding exclusion, thus forcing one to reflect on and alter one's already acquired way of being in the world in order to account for this discord (Zigon 2007; 2019b, 68). In other words, ethics occurs when one is compelled to think. As Arendt (1978) put is, thinking "interrupts any doing, any ordinary activities, no matter what they happen to be. All thinking demands a *stop*-and-think" (78). Referencing Heidegger, Arendt emphasizes that thinking indicates an "*out of order*" (78, italics in original). It is important to note, however, that when such a moral breakdown occurs and ethics begins, the "stop-and-think" of ethics does not entail a rupturing of the everyday, though there is an interruption of ordinary activity and a stepping-away from one's dispositional mode of being.

Being clear about this distinction between a rupture and an interruption of the everyday is important. For a moral breakdown does *not* force one to run into a secluded non-social space to be alone with one's thoughts, and *neither* does one become frozen, object-like, as the world continues on all around. It does, however, compel one to stop and think —is this really what I want to be doing or saying right now? —and to reflect upon our habitus (to notice that what I'm doing or saying right now could indeed be otherwise), and to *critically* assess how I could act, speak, and be differently. All of this can be done and is done right there in the continuing midst of everyday life. For the thinking that characterizes the ethical moment initiates a more intensely felt and considered relational intertwining, and this relationality is more intensely felt and considered in the moment of breakdown precisely because the demand of the situation has explicitly called "me" to think and, ultimately, to ethically attune. The moment of moral breakdown, then, is that ethical moment when one experiences most intensely the demand to care and attend to the constitutive relational intertwining that gives way to us, and this care and attending occurs as thinking.

What calls us to think? This is a question posed by Heidegger (1968) in his lecture course *Was Heißt Denken?* Although normally translated as *What is Called Thinking?*, the word-play of *heißen* allows the title to be alternatively translated as *What Calls Out to Thinking?* or *What Calls Upon Thinking?* Or, as I pose the question: what calls us to think? Heidegger's answer, in short, is that what calls us to think is that which is thought. This phenomenological conception of thinking contrasts with the dominant conception of thinking as cognitive: the view that thinking originates in the brain or mind and has as its material, as it were, mere images or representations of its object of thought in the world. Heidegger's phenomenological conception of thinking, on the other hand, understands thinking as originating in that which demands or calls out to be thought. That is, thinking originates in the thing, matter, or situation itself.

Some thing or matter or situation in the world calls out to us — it places a demand upon us—to which one must respond. One could, of course, ignore the call: that is, one could simply not think and continue on with one's dispositional mode of being. But as Bernhard Waldenfels (2011) puts it, even this non-response is a response. In other words, one may not heed the call to think, but the demand to respond to the call cannot be ignored. If one does respond in the modality of thought, however, then that which calls us to think pulls us beyond ourselves such that thinking is always an ec-static experience of thinking along *with* the thing, matter, or situation itself. Thinking, then, happens in the world. Rather than

indicating a distanced observation, thinking entails a more intense relational intertwining with that which calls us to it.

Similarly, a moral breakdown is initiated by an ethical demand placed upon one by another person, situation, or event. This ethical demand cannot be ignored: one must respond. But how one responds is vital for answering the question of how it is between us. One can, for example, ignore the ethical demand and continue on in their dispositional mode of being. This, however, is precisely that with which Arendt was so concerned, for this is the thoughtless response that always runs the risk of laying the foundation for evil: an evil which itself becomes dispositional. Alternatively, one can heed the call of the ethical demand, experience a moral breakdown, and step away from one's dispositional everydayness to stop and think. That is to say, one can respond to the ethical demand by becoming an ethical being. In doing so, one shifts from an everyday dispositional modality of withness and becomes even more ec-statically and intensely intertwined with that which has placed this demand upon one.[10] Put another way, one's habitus opens and is exposed to the worldly situation that has demanded one's care, attention, and thought. To become ethical is to become even more worldly.

Thinking, then—as that which one does in ethical moments of moral breakdown—pulls us ever more tightly out of ourselves and into the world. We are perhaps most intensely relational when we think. This is so not only as one goes beyond oneself to the thing or situation to be thought, but also, as Arendt insists, as one goes within oneself. For while Heidegger emphasizes the call of thinking—that pull that brings one ec-statically beyond oneself—Arendt emphasizes the internal dialogue of thinking—that pull that brings one ec-statically to oneself, and as such reveals our dividual nature. Thinking is, for Arendt (1978), the silent internal dialogue that manifests what she calls the two-in-one, or the duality of human-being (185).

In normal everyday life, Arendt claims, the human is One. We can perhaps think of this being One in terms of our everyday dispositional way of being. But when one is called to think, a split occurs such that One becomes two, and a silent internal dialogue ensues between me and myself. Put another way, one becomes relationally intertwined with oneself. Arendt linked her description of thinking with an experience of conscience, but perhaps we might better consider this ecstatic relationality of thinking that pulls one both into and beyond oneself simultaneously in terms of Heidegger's (1996) call of conscience, which he describes as a call coming "*from* me, and yet *over* me" (254, italics in original): a call, it should be noted, that demands that one step away from one's dispositional everydayness (what he calls the they-self) in response to a situation of moral breakdown (1996, sections 54-57).

Thinking is perhaps the most relational modality of being human in that it entails at one and the same time an ecstatic relationality with the thing, matter, or situation that calls for thought, *and* an ecstatic relationality with oneself as the two-in-one. Thinking, in this

[10] Here I have in mind Andrew J. Mitchell's (2010) description of Heidegger's Fourfold in terms of ecstatic relationality such that worldly entities are not "encapsulated things, but always these outpouring gestures of relationality" (215). See also Mitchell (2015).

sense, is for humans that capacity most indicative of ontological withness, and, therefore, that which is most necessary for allowing the between to emerge, where we may dwell together peacefully. This is so because thinking "is for us what is most free" (Nancy 1993, 172).

This link between thinking and freedom is essential to ethics, and helps us move beyond it. Or perhaps better, it helps to further develop the Heideggerian equivalence of truth and freedom that was so central to both Patočka and Havel. Arendt was clear about this link: thinking frees "an open space of moral or aesthetic discrimination and discernment" (Beiner 1982, 112). Such thinking in moments of moral breakdown, then, is critical thinking in that "we constantly raise the basic Socratic question: *What do you mean when you say . . .*?" (Arendt 1978, 185, italics in original). We could add the equally significant question: why is it that you do that? Importantly, such critical thinking does not produce the new moral law or principle that we can then apply to the particular situation that demands us to think, let alone think universally. Rather, this critical thinking "purges us of 'fixed habits of thought, ossified rules and standards,' and 'conventional, standardized codes of expression'" (Villa 1999, 89).[11] In other words, thinking as an essentially critical capacity frees one to respond to the singularity of the situation that has called one to think. As Arendt (1978) so pointedly put it, "thinking means that each time you are confronted with some difficulty in life you have to make up your mind anew" (177).

It is interesting to note that Michel Foucault (1997) articulated a very similar relation between thought, freedom, critique, and ethics. Thus, for example, Foucault distinguished thought from more habituated modes of conduct, and considered the former as a critical assessment of the latter. Thought, he said,

> is what allows one to step back from this [habituated] way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem. (117)

Thinking in moments of moral breakdown, then, clears a space, as it were, for responding to the singularity of the ethical demand free of habituated convention,[12] and, to link back with Heideggerian truth, lets the thing, other, or situation itself be to show itself in its unfolding.

It is necessary to emphasize once again that this is not a matter of thinking producing the law or principle or criterion to be applied; thinking produces nothing. Rather, as Arendt (1978) put it, thinking gives way to or becomes manifest as judgment (193). To be clear: one does not judge in the modality of thought or in the stepping away of moral breakdown. One is able to judge anew only after having *returned* to the existential comfort of one's habitus, that is, after having returned to the everyday modality of embodied morality. For thinking and judging are *not* two aspects of the same modality of being. Rather judgement is the manifestation of thought in the midst of the unthought of everydayness. As Arendt

[11] Cheryl Mattingly (2019) has recently made a similar argument.

[12] See Knud Ejler Løgstrup (1997).

put it: judgement as the "manifestation of the wind of thought . . . is the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly" (193). The capacity to judge anew after having thought, then, indicates a rebirth of sorts as one returns to the busyness and distractions of everyday life with a different—even if ever so slightly—embodied morality for being in the world comfortably and peacefully with oneself and others.

SENSE OF THE WORLD

Arendt (1978) describes this manifestation of thought not as truth but as meaning (61-62). But whether described as truth or meaning, we must certainly agree with Anne O'Byrne (2015) when she writes that there is "a worry that clings to [these terms], an anxiety that what really matters is not here but elsewhere" (193). For indeed the conceptual proclivity (Zigon 2018) of "truth" or "meaning" has become such that try as we might, just saying the words conjures the brain-centric view of being-human, along with all of its Cartesian baggage of correspondence, mental representations, and rational implications. Most certainly, then, "what really matters is not here but elsewhere." O'Byrne suggests instead that a carnal hermeneutics—a bodied hermeneutics as the ongoing interpretation of the intertwined and knotted materiality of the world, not unlike the embodied morality discussed earlier[13]—entails instead an indicative concept such as sense. Engaging with Nancy's conception of sense, O'Byrne (2015) writes that "sense cannot be given in advance but comes to be in the worldliest way, *between us*" (194, italics added). Indeed, as Nancy (1997) writes: "Truth punctuates, sense enchains" (14). Put another way: truth is that which individuates and separates—truth *or* falsity (objective fact); us *or* them (ideology)—and as such brings the flow, the rhythm, the potential for attunement of existence to a halt. Sense, on the other hand, connects us, who or whatever us are, in the ongoing intertwining of relationality. Sense "is the relation as such, and nothing else;" neither the "signified" nor the "message," "it is *that something like the transmission of a 'message' should be possible*" (Nancy 1997, 118 italics in original). Sense is the possibility for communication as communing. This relational enchaining of sense as possibility that gives way to "the matricial or transcendental form of a *world*" (Nancy 1997, 14, italics in original), then, is simply another way of describing the between (Zigon 2019a; 2021).

Ethics and thinking end with a return to the everydayness of a world, a return manifest as having the capacity to judge with sense. Perhaps another way of saying this is that ethics and thinking allow one to return to their world with a sense of orientation, where orientation is a kind of understanding. Again, understanding here is not meant as a cognitive grasping by the brain, but intended existentially and etymologically as "standing in the midst of" the between of a world (see: Zigon 2018, 161). Understanding one's world, standing in the midst of a world, one is able to orientate oneself in an attuned manner toward those others there with one, intertwined and knotted together in a world that makes sense for now. Understanding one's world, oneself, and those others there with one, "things" make sense,

[13] See Richard Kearney and Brian Treanor (2015).

one has "good" sense, and the between us could be described in terms of a "common" sense.

Ethics and thinking can only end in this return to everydayness, understanding can only occur as standing with others in the midst of a between of "common" sense, when the between to which we return is enveloped in the mood of trust. Moods are neither subjective nor objective, but rather emerge "in the space of the between" and, thus, color, if you will, the atmosphere between us.[14] As such, moods potentiate a certain range of possibilities for being-with-together. Similarly, trust does not indicate a psychologized stance of one individual toward another distinct individual. Rather, onto-existentially, trust indicates faith or fidelity that the "common" sense of the between us will hold until thinking is once again called upon, at which time trust becomes a placing of reliance upon thought.

The intertwining relationality of trust is indicated etymologically. From the Old Norse *traust* meaning help, confidence, protection, or support, the relational nature of trust comes to the fore. Indeed, the significance of trust for the existential comfort of everyday embodied morality is perhaps clearest in its relation to the Old Frisian *trast* and the Dutch *troost* meaning comfort or consolation, whereby one receives such comfort from an other when one is most vulnerable, most exposed in one's being. That *troost* is best offered—so I have learned from a very reliable Dutch source—not with words but with an enveloping hug, indicates that trust is precisely the mood necessary for the carnal intertwining between us, where everydayness unfolds as the exposure of myself in/to you and you in/to me.

In light of this, perhaps, we can begin to consider that truth is not so much opposed to untruth as it is to despair. In contrast to the enveloping comfort of trust, despair is a mood indicative of a world "closed to meaningful possibilities that should otherwise be there," leaving one exposed and vulnerable to the abyss of senselessness (Steinbock 2014, 192).[15]Despair is indicative of the loss or lack of a sense of the world, the consequence of which is the impossibility of conversation, understanding, or any other relational connection between. Despair is the impossibility of us that gives way to isolation and loneliness. As such, despair as a social phenomenon oftentimes manifests in the person as addiction and in the political as hate. If anything, these are the consequences of a post-truth condition where all "common" sense has been lost and the only "truth" we are offered is the cold calculative instrumentarianism of objective facts.

All of this is to say that perhaps today truth is no longer (if it ever was) an appropriate concept for considering how it is between us. Rather, perhaps, our worlds more than ever call us to think, and in so doing place a demand upon us to become ethical beings striving for a sense of worlds that are increasingly complex. Such a realization pushes beyond ethics, or perhaps better put, it reveals that as an ethical being one is also a political being in that "the political is the place of the in-common as such . . . the place of being-*together*" (Nancy 1997, 88, italics in original). The question then becomes: in these increasingly complex worlds of ours, how must we attune such that it can be said that there is understanding

[14] Heidegger (1996); Throop (2012; 2014; 2018); Throop and Stephan (forthcoming).

[15] See also Throop and Stephan (forthcoming).

between us? That is, how can we come to dwell trustingly in worlds of "common" sense? How we respond will surely go a long way in determining the future of our worlds.

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"EVEN NOW THERE ARE PLACES WHERE A THOUGHT MIGHT GROW—"

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When we went indoors in March 2020, our minds were racing.[1] The minutiae of a day suddenly demanded inordinate amounts of attention and everything had become an object of anxiety—What food is in the cupboard? How will we get more? Where will the children be able to run around? What must be avoided? Wear a mask? Wash hands? For the most part, academics were not among those called to any front line, so we stayed inside and merged with the internet. An hour by train became three steps from bed to desk. At 7 p.m. we went to the windows to clap and cheer. But before long we found our way into new routines that eased the tiny anxieties of having to figure out the newness of each day, leaving room for the large anxieties. Will the old ones be safe? How will we reach our families, students, colleagues, the people we work with? Do you have a fever? Would the hospital let me visit you? Will our democracy survive? What about the dead? Every day that the worst disasters passed us by, even those anxieties became more routine and perhaps, around that point, there came to be room for thought.

Somehow, the writers in this volume made their way to their desks or found a new place at the cleared kitchen table or patched together a makeshift office next to the washing machine, somewhere they could open a document and write. At the same time, they found that there were ways to think together even without being together in the same place, and they fashioned online an internet version of the nexus of meetings, lectures, dissertation defenses, and conferences that would have been the warp and woof of academic life in any other year. Sparing the earth a few thousand airmiles, we thought together in Zoom versions of all of the above and in new colloquia, not least the Thursday afternoon gathering of Jason Throop's Team Phenomenology, the place common to us all. As Arendt would put it, it was a place where thought was kept in motion.

[1] Thanks to the graduate students, particularly Jake Hook, in the Time and Democracy seminar at Stony Brook University, Spring 2021. Their thinking provoked and contributed to this piece.

The questions were familiar but inevitably now had a new dimension. All the contributions here bring familiar thinking into a new place. So, if we were concerned before with the archi-political question of how we are to live together well, even if that concern had always meant being finely attuned to the "we" as itself open to question, we found ourselves asking it all over again as the wave of sickness and death rose. We marveled at the empty streets and squares of cities while that wave built out of sight behind the doors of retirement homes, hospitals and people's houses. We were told the data, and heard the ambulances in the street, but would rarely catch a glimpse of what so much sickness looked like and could not picture so much death.

The title of this piece is the first line of Derek Mahon's (2011) poem "A Disused Shed in County Wexford" from 1973. There—whether *there* in the line of the poem or *there* in the disused shed—it is not a matter of thought in motion or articulated in an exchange of ideas but, rather, a place of stillness and silence where a thought might grow—or it might not. The poem takes us to places of forgetfulness and oblivion:

> Peruvian mines, worked out and abandoned
> To a slow clock of condensation,
> An echo trapped for ever, and a flutter
> Of wildflowers in the lift-shaft,
> Indian compounds where the wind dances
> And a door bangs with diminished confidence,
> Lime crevices behind rippling rain barrels,
> Dog corners for bone burials;

Perhaps these are imagined places, made real in the telling detail of their descriptions, or perhaps they are firsthand phenomenological accounts of scenes experienced in named parts of the earth. What is essential and piercing is the contingency in each case: someone might pause at the mouth of the mineshaft, listening, but perhaps no one ever does; somebody might pass through the compound and look at the lime accumulated behind the barrel, but maybe that never came to pass and never will. The world is full of unattended nooks, places known to no one living, places hidden from all but a few, places unheard-of, not quite remembered, yet to be discovered or rediscovered, places vastly remote and others close to where we are right now. That is to say, the world is riddled with contingency. It is a condition of worldliness, merely the case, neither here nor there.

But among those sites are places haunted by suffering, even cruelty, and our not knowing them is a cause for concern. Contingency is at work here too—the claim that emanates from such a place may or may not be heard—but now our failure to hear it is a question for us. The very universality of contingency turns out to be trivial, and dwelling on it turns out to be a way of ignoring the suffering that it not permitted to register. Once such a place—of unjust imprisonment, of industrial dying, of disposal—presents itself to consciousness, our not having seen it before is shocking. How can we not have known? What else have we failed to hear? What is it about our particular world and our way of being in it that makes some suffering imperceptible, some screams inaudible, and turns some hidden places into holes of oblivion, as Arendt puts it? How does any such place

come to light, and what does the sight of it do? What brought Hart Island to light in April 2020? What did it call on us to think about the living and the dead?

"The ghost of a scream"

Hart Island, an island of just over a hundred acres at the western end of Long Island Sound, is part of the archipelago of islands and peninsulas that make up New York City. It is owned by the city. On Thursday April 9th, 2020—a day when more than a thousand people in New York died of COVID-19 as the first wave of the pandemic reached its peak in the city—photographer John Minchillo flew a drone over the island capturing scenes of mass burials (Sisak and Minchillo 2020). The images show a long trench, dug by a mechanical digger. A truck is parked at one end and wooden coffins are being transported into the trench using a forklift. Eight figures dressed in white protective clothes are stacking the coffins in the trench, three high and two wide. The figures walk across the coffins, carrying a sheet of plywood to lay over the top, and they spread earth on top of that. Six other figures in dark clothes stand nearby and sometimes help. A ladder leans against the side of the trench. The day is grey and cloudy. The water of the sound is calm. The trees on the island are bare except for a light flush of green on some high branches. Near the trench are several derelict red brick buildings with broken doors and missing windows, saplings growing through the roofs. Apart from the people working at the trench, the island appears to be deserted.

Minchillo worked for Associated Press and, on the news service's website, the photographs and video carry a warning of "disturbing content." They were widely distributed on television, online and in print media on that day and the days that followed, and the tone of the accompanying news reports was one of shock and the certain sort of horror we associate with the bodies of the dead. They were the images of a raw moment. The first confirmed case of the virus in the city had been recorded on February 29th and now, barely six weeks later, as many as a thousand people were dying each day, the morgues of the city were under pressure, the refrigerated trucks outside hospitals were not enough, and over a hundred bodies were being taken for burial on Hart Island each week. We knew things were bad, but just *look* at how low the virus had brought us. These should have been images from another time, but we had been dragged this quickly into the anachronism of stacking bodies of the unclaimed dead in mass graves on a scarcely known island in the Bronx.

Hart Island is a forbidden place. Administered by the New York City Department of Corrections (NYCDOC), it has been completely inaccessible to the public since the COVID lockdowns. It can be reached only by boat and, even before COVID, access was granted only by appointment and tightly controlled by NYCDOC. Visitors were accompanied by Uniformed Corrections Officers. Cameras and phones were forbidden though the officers could take polaroids if the visitors wished. Press were forbidden. When another photographer, George Steinmetz, launched a drone from City Island, half a mile away on April 15, 2020 and took photographs of the graves, NYPD officers confiscated

the drone and issued a misdemeanor summons for "avigation," the infraction of taking off or landing an aircraft anywhere in the city that is not an airport. In a statement, the NYCDOC said: "Out of respect to the families and friends of those buried on Hart Island, we have a longstanding policy of not permitting photography of an active burial site from Hart Island. It is disrespectful" (Robbins 2020).

"They are begging us, you see"

The more we study the images and the more we learn about what we are looking at, the more there is that is unsettling. A shot that gives a wider view of the island shows open green cemetery space where between 850,000 and 1,000,000 unclaimed bodies are buried. The first recorded burial was that of Louisa Van Slyke, aged 24, who died of tuberculosis in 1869 with no known family. In the decades that followed, her remains were joined by those of infants, fetal remains, people who died unnamed, those who died with no-one to claim the remains, those whose families could not afford to bury them, or who could not afford to bury them just then. The rate of burial increased in times of epidemic, astronomically in 1918 when over twenty thousand victims of the Spanish flu were buried there, but also significantly in 1988 in the midst of the AIDS crisis in the city.

The record of burials is incomplete—some graves were reused in the 1930s, a fire destroyed part of the archive in the 1970s, and even now the markers at large cemetery plots could easily be moved—but details of location and identifying information are now logged, and the Mayor spoke of the 2020 COVID burials, like other burials at Hart Island, as a temporary measure. The coffins are marked with names. A photograph from 1992 shows a burial worker standing beside a stack of coffins with a name written in large letters in felt marker on the side of each one: George Cato, Howard Quatley, José Morales (Meier 2020). The name and the place of burial is recorded and the records kept by the Department of Corrections and later passed on to the Municipal Archive. Thus, the Hart Island cemetery can be thought of as a place for a body to rest as it waits to be claimed. It is unsettling to think that these bodies are not yet settled, not yet where they ought to be, not yet in the place where they can each be remembered, but we need not despair. They might yet be claimed.

It is still more unsettling to know that most never will be. About two thousand bodies are buried at Hart Island in a "normal" non-epidemic year; no more than about a hundred are reclaimed and disinterred. Even the NYCDOC (n.d.) acknowledges that the system of recording-keeping is unreliable. Those hoping to visit a grave (pre-COVID) were warned:

> If a deceased person's specific gravesite is either unidentifiable or inaccessible for reasons that cannot be remedied before the date of the visit, the requestor will be notified in advance of the visit and may be asked to reschedule. Alternatively, the requestor is permitted to visit an alternate gravesite or other location reasonably proximate to the requested gravesite.

Elsie Soto, a woman who discovered 25 years after his death that her father, who had died of AIDS, was buried there describes her visit in 2018. She was escorted by a correction officer to a broken marker at a mass grave. "They said, 'He's here in this section.' I'm like, 'But where?'" (Kilgannon 2018).

The shores of the island were partly eroded in Hurricane Sandy in 2013 and bones of the dead were exposed. The bones were gathered and the eroded shoreline reinforced, but not until 2019.

"We too had our lives to live."

The island has been a repository for living bodies too, sorts of people and sorts of bodies with little in common beyond being the focus of a social urge to put them away: Confederate prisoners of war (1865); people sick with yellow fever (1870); poor, sick women (1890s); the insane; prisoner grave-diggers; old men (1900); consumptive women; male misdemeanants aged 16-30 years (1904); old prisoners; excess prisoners from other city jails; members of the Navy and Coast Guard in need of disciplining (1941-1945); 3 German spies who surfaced in a U-Boat near Long Island (1944); more prisoners; male derelicts (1950); still more prisoners; drug addicts in rehabilitation (1966-1976); prisoners again (until 1991) (New York Correction History Society, n.d.). The white-clad workers in the Minchillo pictures are apparently contracted laborers but, in images from the 1890s by Jacob Riis (The Hart Island Project, n.d.) through the 1990s (New York Correction History Society, n.d.) and up until the first days of April 2020, the people pictured performing the burials were prisoners. Another video by artist Melinda Hunt (2020) depicts the final prisoner burial detail on April 8th. A Dickensian penitentiary practice that had survived into the 21st century ended then because the prison was in the grip of its COVID outbreak. In the painful drama of those days, the anachronism itself seemed shocking and inexplicable. Discussions of the island were sprinkled with words that emerged from another, older world: *potter's field*, *decedent*, *the indigent, the unbefriended*. A Mahon-esque forgotten world had been half a mile off shore all along and now it was before our eyes, brought to light by the scale of our present disaster. Who knew?

Many knew, though that knowledge could remain trapped in the routinized thinking of a work life, or the secrecy and shame that often surrounded AIDS deaths, or in the difficulties of articulating thinking in circumstances of poverty and incarceration. Dr. Stephen W. Nicholas recalled treating babies suffering from AIDS at Harlem Hospital in the mid-1980s. He asked a nurse about burial arrangements for one of the earliest victims. "She said: 'Oh no, these babies go to potter's field.'" Robert Ruggiero, who ran a funeral home that was one of the first to be willing to embalm the bodies of victims of AIDS, describes talking to the families of men who had died: "The parents would say, 'It's not our problem—just do what you have to do'" (Kilgannon 2018). A woman whose 76-year-old mother died during COVID-19 in a Brooklyn rehabilitation center agreed to a Hart Island burial because it was free. "I didn't have any money and, at the time, I was devastated and all over the place" (Kilgannon 2021). Hundreds of prisoners have worked

the burial detail; until recently, those who quit were regarded as "disobeying a direct order" and punished with solitary confinement (Gross 2020). It is still the case that the pine coffins are supplied by CorCraft, the industrial work program of the state prison system. That is to say, knowledge of Hart Island has circulated all along through the hospital-mortuary-carceral-industrial complex of which it is a node.

We—any of us—*might* have known. Dr. Nicholas was shocked by the nurse's response, but also by an image. Artist Claire Yaffa conducted a 10-year project at one of the centers he directed in the 1990s; one of her photographs showed the small coffins of babies being buried on Hart Island. "It made me sick to see these crates stacked up and bulldozers just covering them over," Nicholas said. The image interrupted the passage of knowledge and the doctor began to press hospital administration to work with charity groups to fund private burials for the children. The Jacob Riis photographs from the 1890s were lost after his death in 1914, rediscovered and exhibited in 1947, and continue to have a vigorous afterlife. They became an object of artistic and political interest for Melinda Hunt in the 1990s and were the impetus for her *Hart Island Project*, which began in her desire to re-photograph the island as Riis had done a century earlier, using the same technology. A Canadian who had recently become a U.S. citizen, she speaks of this as her first act of citizenship: "[I was] trying to show something that was really invisible . . . At each stage something very new appeared. It appeared through the [archival] documents, it appeared through people coming to me with stories and questions that were unanswered" (Rosenberg 2010). It took six months for her to gain access to the island, and she worked on the photography project over dozens of visits in the course of three years, producing a volume of photographs 1998 (Hunt and Sternfeld 1998). But then came two more decades of activism including numerous Freedom of Information Act requests in order to set up a database of information on those buried, a class action law suit to make it easier for families to visit, a campaign resulting in legislation to transfer the island to the NY Department of Parks and Recreation on July 1, 2021, a new campaign to have the island designated a National Monument, and plans to erect a memorial to the COVID-19 dead of the city.

"Who have come so far in darkness and in pain"

In Mahon's poem, the one who pushes open the door of the disused shed carries a camera. Every day the world had waltzed in its bowl of cloud and, every day, the echo had remained trapped in the mine, the dog bones had lain in their soil, and the thousand mushrooms that strained towards the thin light that came through the keyhole of the shed door had waited. Now they were woken by the creak of hinges and the flash bulb firing squad, and the image of those neglected vegetal selves telegraphed their demand: *Save us!* Yes, of course, though which of us has the power to save? *Speak on our behalf.* We hear you, but how could we deign to know what to say? How could we speak for you without obliterating your voice with our own? *Do something*. Yes, but what? How? *At least do not close the door again*. There, on the threshold of a place where a thought might grow, we are called upon to hold open its possibility, to leave ourselves open to its growth.

An image on our newsfeed, an artwork, a student's comment; something opened the door, and we are no longer oblivious. Poets like Mahon, artists and activists like Riis, Yaffa and Hunt, journalists and photographers like Minchillo, Steinmetz and others have made us to see and hear. *Save us!* Salvation may be beyond us, though all their work and a year of pandemic might have prepared us for something else—pity, perhaps, or outrage or solidarity. *Do something!* What remains to be seen, though now we know that being together, sharing a world, and figuring out how to be together well means being with the living and the dead, and not just with those we have called our people and our dead.[2]

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[2] For a philosophical and anthropological consideration of the relation of the living and the dead after Heidegger, see Ruin 2019.

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