

# ***Interrupted Subjectivity: An Investigation into the Meaning of Racialized Embodiment***

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## *Abstract*

The invention, production, and operation of race are entangled with the processes of subject formation. One of its most evident effects is the degradation of the subjectivity of those who are submitted to its conditions. The aim of this essay is to investigate both the production and meaning of race, especially as it has been either passively neglected or deliberately addressed within contemporary philosophy. This meaning will be discovered by an initial investigation into problems of embodiment found in Rene Descartes *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Then, further exploration of figures in modern phenomenology, namely Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Simone de Beauvoir, will allow us to deepen our understanding of differential forms of embodiment, specifically, gender and racialized bodies. In the last section, a turn to Cornel West's genealogy, George Yancy's phenomenology and Ta-Nehisi Coates's political phenomenology, will lead to the latest development in the analysis of racialized embodiment, which in this essay are profiled as a form of "interrupted subjectivity."

## Introduction

The aim of this essay is to investigate the meaning of race, especially as it has been either glaringly neglected or deliberately addressed within contemporary philosophy. I will follow the following trajectory: First, I will start by exploring some issues of embodiment in Descartes, the founding father of modern philosophy. Descartes is important because in his famous "cogito ergo sum" we can discover what could be called the "Cartesian Ruse," by means of which embodiment is both assumed and concealed. This is relevant to questions of race, which is both presupposed and effaced by the modern subject. Then, I will proceed to explore some figures in modern phenomenology, specifically Edmund Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Simone de Beauvoir, in order to understand the meaning of the experience for different bodies. More concretely, I will explore the implications of racializing stigmatization, how it disrupts subjectivity by disrupting the subject's sense of their own embodiment, and the consequences of the disrupted subjectivity for social agency. In a third step, I will turn to genealogy, as is exemplified in the works of Cornel West and George Yancy. Additionally, I will explore the recent work of Ta-Nehisi Coates, which we could call a form of "political phenomenology" that in my analysis bridges phenomenology and genealogy.

The philosophical steps of these investigations I undertake on the meaning of racializing embodiment are the following: I move from Descartes to phenomenology since the latter finds its roots in René Descartes' famous *Cogito*, in which the subject gives itself to itself by the mere act of thinking (cogitation). Going beyond this individualistic, putatively disembodied, ahistorical subject, phenomenology grounds the subject in a body, which is still not in history or society, and explores how the world manifests itself to this embodied subject. Such manifestations further shape the way a subject arrives to bodily awareness, practices embodied action, and engages in social activity. I argue, however, that phenomenology fails to recognize the construction of consciousness within a paradigm of dehistoricized and delocalized subjectivity, thus ignoring the way society not only constructs the conditions for their own embodiment, but also the way the worlds are constructed instead of discovered through these subjects. Thus, I turn to genealogy in order to examine the construction of subjectivities and forms of agency, and how the constructed subjects and agents interact within a historically contingent matrix of intelligibility; the worlds of what can and cannot be known, experienced, and lived by embodied agents. In order to discover new worlds or matrixes that open up new horizons of experience and agency, the subject must re-construct itself in order to unfold itself into this new world. For genealogists, knowing does not occur first through either experience or cognition, rather modes of embodiment and agency must be first constructed which enable these modes of experience and cognition.

The core questions that motivate my investigation then are: How does this world of constructed subjects within their respective matrixes of intelligibility affect subjects that are exposed to racism, in fact, that are constituted as racialized subjects? Does the existence of racism prompt them to “switch” from one subjectivity to another depending on which matrix to which they are exposed? How does this affect their embodiment? In which way do subjects become objects of race in the contemporary world, and how does it largely disrupt their subjectivity, which consequently limits how a subject embodies, comports, and socializes itself?

### The Invention of the Cogito

To begin an examination of the subject, we must begin with René Descartes. In his famous ‘*Cogito ergo sum*’ (I think, therefore, I am)--, which is to be found in *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), Descartes gives birth to modern philosophy by articulating the subject in a new way. First, the subject is completely reliant on cogitation as a means of knowledge. Any information gathered through the body, or what he calls *res extensa* –*extended matter*--, such as sensory perception or bodily experience, can ultimately be doubted by the cogito. Descartes explains, “For I also judged that to have...the power of sensing or cogitating, in no way pertains to the body” (Descartes, 103). The body’s capacity to gather information from the world is doubted within the Cartesian Subject. However, this doubt does not end with the simple denial of extension; it also conditions the individualism of the “I”. What is radically new in Descartes’ view of the subject is its birthing itself through doubt.

The driving force behind Descartes method is the use of radical doubt to uncover certain truths. This doubt not only constructs how the subject thinks, but it also ensures the ultimate individualistic authority of the subject. By doubting all things that it cannot cogitate with clarity and distinctness, the subject gives itself to itself through the act of thinking. Concretely, “‘I am, I exist’ is necessarily true, as often as it is uttered by me or conceived by the mind” (101). Existence is not contingent on the possession of a body, nor does it find meaning from co-

existing with others. Rather, the cogitating “I” is the stem of existence, and the subject has ultimate authority. This “I” is sovereign, self-giving, independent, and ultimately, solipsistic.

Furthermore, Descartes worked to find a way in which the existence of an infinite, perfect being (God) can be found through ideas rather than through faith in his meditations. This may seem like a useful conclusion to proponents that posit the existence of God. However, this system corrodes the foundations and operation of faith, guides the Cartesian subject to solipsism, and further illustrates the absolute primacy of the Cartesian subject. Descartes qualifies this, “And from this one thing [God] – that there would be such an idea in me, or that I would exist as one having this idea – I so manifestly conclude that God also exists...” (151). So, two things the Cartesian subject can be certain of are the existence of himself and the existence of God, which comes from himself. Although it may seem that the subject is setting God up as an independent entity, God is essentially found through the subject, rather than God revealing himself to the subject. First comes the thinking “I,” then comes the discernment of the idea of God. This causes the practice of faith to become superfluous since the subject is the sole authority in acquiring knowledge. This act of discovering the only thing the subject can be certain of besides itself also points to an extreme solipsism; not only can the subject be sure of itself, but it also is the only means of acquiring knowledge and qualifying certain ideas. The subject can “be” and “think” independently. God becomes a superfluous idea.

This ‘cogito ergo sum’--I think, therefore, I am-- is essentially, I would claim, a ruse of the subject. Within the Cogito, the subject presupposes that the “I” is able to be the sole verification of its self-certainty. This “I” can only trust its act of thinking, and staunchly denies its bodily extension. Descartes is clear about this: “And I have indeed a much more distinct idea of the human mind, in so far as it is a cogitating thing – not extended in length, breadth and depth, and not having anything else from body - , than I have a distinct idea of any corporeal thing” (151). Yet, this presupposition is essentially a ‘trick’ of the mind. Clearly, in order to cogitate, one must be in a body to be grounded in existence. The subject within the Cogito can only know itself through embodiment. There is no “I” without a body or a substance through which to think. This denial of the dependence of cogitation on the body may seem trivial, but it leads to the objectification of the subject’s own body, which is always doubted. If the subject is able to objectify its own body through doubt, how will it handle other bodies? If it can ‘bracket’ its own embodiment, how can the cogito that is imprisoned within its own cogitation ever recognize other minds, when these minds are given to us firstly through their embodied existence? There is no other that is not an other body, first and foremost. However, if this other is a body, and bodies are to be doubted, then Descartes is implicitly saying that other “minds” or “Is” remains beyond cogitation.

Descartes deploys his Cartesian Ruse most explicitly in his example of the melting beeswax. He observes the beeswax, fresh from the honeycomb, and gathers information based on its scent, texture, consistency, and appearance. This technique is a precursor to ‘eidetic reduction’ used in phenomenology, which makes use of bracketing the different qualities of an object in order to arrive at some certain truth. Yet, as soon as the beeswax is exposed to an open flame, the qualities melt into a transformed ambiguity. The beeswax has melted, lost its sense, and is hot to the touch, yet it remains, or so it seems, the same piece of wax. How may the meditator know that the melted beeswax is the same beeswax that was just solid? Simply, “...The perception of the wax is not vision, not taction and not imagination, nor has it ever been...but rather is the perception of the inspection of the mind alone...” (113). Although cognition is needed to synthesize the condition of the beeswax both before and after the event of melting, it is not the

only operation necessary to understand the process of the melting beeswax. The subject must be in a body in order to utilize sensory perception, which then gathers information about the beeswax and its qualities. However, it is through an innate cohesion between the senses, the information gathered through perception, and the force of cogitation, which forms this knowledge of the melting beeswax. Although Descartes is especially interested in the force of cognition, this example reveals that sensory experience and cognition must cohere to access knowledge.

Throughout his meditations, Descartes forms a peculiar subject that finds its individualism, solipsism, and disinterested objectification using radical doubt, the legitimacy of innate ideas, and the ultimate authority of cogitation. Radical doubt separates the subject from a body; the subject can only be sure of the Cogito, “I think; therefore, I am” which gives the subject individualistic certainty. The Cogito is given to the “I” by its activity, and, at the same time, the subject also cognizes an idea of God – infinite perfection that has endowed the subject with an idea of Him. However, it is important to note that God is not *revealing* himself to the subject, but rather the subject is finding this idea within a record of other ideas. These ideas vary in clarity and distinctness, but the two clearest and most distinct ideas of the subject are that of itself and that of God. The subject comes to know things only through its own cognition. Bodily doubt coupled with individualistic and solipsistic characteristics condition the subject to be one that objectifies other subjects. Not only is the subject able to suspend its body from itself through doubt, this doubt also allows the subject to objectify the body. The body is less known than the mind. Since doubt of extension grants the subject the power to objectify its own body, then how will the subject approach other bodies? It is fair to assume that those other bodies will be objectified, but in what way? Will the subject be disinterested in others bodies, as it is in its own body, or will the subject invest in other bodies as objects, rather than subjects, as it does with the beeswax?

### The Body of the World

Edmund Husserl addresses the problems of embodiment found in Descartes *Meditations on First Philosophy* in his own work *Cartesian Meditations*, which is named as such in order to honor Descartes as the precursor to the phenomenological method. According to Husserl, Descartes sparked the phenomenological method by using a primitive version of the eidetic reduction while meditating on melting beeswax. In this *Meditation*, Descartes takes note of the beeswax’s different characteristics in order to arrive at a certain truth. Although the title of the work pays homage to Descartes, Husserl shows through his own meditations that Descartes method in his meditations was not thorough enough and aims to solve the paradoxes and problems found within Descartes individualistic, solipsistic, and disinterested Cogito.

The Cogito that appears as complete in its self-giveness is nothing but an illusion; the Cogito is much more active than simple cogitation. When the subject asserts, “I think, therefore, I am” it is not simply existing according to cognition, but rather, the subject is practicing a process of synthesis. Husserl explains, “The ego [subject] is himself existent for himself in continuous evidence; thus, in himself, he is continuously constituting himself as existing. Heretofore we have touched...the flowing cogito. The ego grasps himself not only as a flowing life, but also as I, who lives this and that subjective process, who lives through this and that cogito, as the same “I” (Husserl 66). By conjoining the acts of “thinking” and “being”, the subject is constantly synthesizing its very being. The subject tries to get ahead of itself by habituating its being in its

act of affirming “I am”, and at the same time is apprehending itself by its “I think.” This disjoint between the simultaneous synthesis and capture of the subject prevents the subject from being one, and thus renders it as a divided entity. This divided subject is caught up in the process of always trying to precede and predicate itself. The subject is not itself; it is becoming. The subject is sustained in a ceaseless process of synthesizing self-giveness.

Not only does Husserl’s Cogito entail the synthesis of the subject as a predication of being and the grounding of thinking, but this Cogito also presupposes a situated subject, a subject that occupies a distinct location in space and time. The Cogito is a situation, one that manifests itself as a space for the subject – a realm for its existence.—or rather, a subject of a given space. More clearly, “When I apperceive myself as a natural man, I have already apperceived the spatial world and construed myself as in space, where I already have an Outside Me” (83). Within the Cogito, “I am” not only establishes the specificity of the Subject as an “I” as such, but it also assumes there must be other things that are not “I”. These things must be part of a “world” where both “I” and “things” exist simultaneously. Thus, as the ego gives itself to itself in the Cogito, it is also giving itself to itself in a *world*. There is no activity of cogitation that does not presuppose the world; “I” and “world” are given simultaneously.

As the subject within the Cogito assumes itself as an “I” opposed to an “other” when synthesizing itself as itself, the “other” is outside and opposite to the interiority of the subject’s cogito. The interiority of the cogito, however, presupposes space, that is, it must be given within space. The process of habituation as a consequence of the subject’s constant synthesis also reveals the need for time as well as space for the subject. Both time and space give the ego a place and an occasion, a here and a now, which allow for cogitation. Time and space motivate the “I think” to continue cognition and fix the “I am” within a situation. The cogito prompts the ego to synthesize itself as “I” in the present moment, in the ‘here-ness’ of the cogito’s synthesizing itself, as well as consider what the “I” is.

The tension generated by the division within the subject, as well as the implicit existence of others, space, and time begins to remove the subject from the individualism found within Descartes’ cogito. Husserl answers to the solipsism and disinterest found in Descartes’ Method though the existence of the other as found through what he refers to as a “Transcendental Clue”. Concretely, “...my "transcendental clue" is the experienced Other, given to me in straightforward consciousness and as I immerse myself in examining the noematic-ontic content belonging to him (purely as correlate of my cogito, the particular structure of which is yet to be uncovered)” (90-91). This clue begins with the self-disruption or division of the cogito. The Cogito is already an ‘other’ to itself. Therefore, to be itself, it must posit what is not itself. A revised Cogito through this transcendental clue could be “I am because I am not that other”.

If the subject can find itself by not being the “other”, then the completion of this clue is revealed through the experience and cognition of the “other” through the condition of one’s own cogito. Others exist as “world objects” in respect to tangible things existing in the world as a physicality. They also exist as “subjects for this world” in respect to the capacity to experience the world and even other egos. Being a “subject for this world” permits individual egos to explicate one another, thus, finding one another.

The Transcendental Clue begins to remove the subject from its solipsism and disinterest by making a case for the other through the transcendence of the subject. Now, the subject is with and shares a world with others. Even in the attempt to disengage from the world and others, the subject finds itself bound to its situation:

“In the natural, the world-accepting attitude, I find differentiated and contrasted: myself and others. If I “abstract” from others, I “alone” remain. But such abstraction is not radical; such aloneness in no respect alters the natural world-sense, ‘experienceable by everyone’... which attaches to the naturally understood Ego and would not be lost, even if a universal plague had left only me” (92-93).

Even in the attempt to isolate itself, the subject always remains in a space with others due to the fact that it recognizes its very “otherness” in relation to other egos. This also points to an important feature of the world itself. The world is shared by a host of physical objects and synthesizing subjects; thus the world is engaged in a synthesizing of its own. The withdrawal of an individual would not stop this synthesis or the potential experience for others.

This subject, although an individual in its own right, is no longer an absolute individual. On one hand, the subject is synthesizing its own being, and on the other hand, the Transcendental Clue involves the “other” as a means of self-definition for the subject. However, the subject now detaches from its prior disinterest of others within Descartes’ method. Husserl explains: “That my own essence can be at all contrasted for me with something else, or that I (who am I) can become aware of someone else (who is not I but someone other than I), presupposes that not all my own modes of consciousness are modes of my self-consciousness” (105). The subject is thrown into a time and a space with other subjects and comes to know them through experience and cognition. The subject replaces its doubt with synthesis, both internally and when being with the other, and thus becomes interested in the world of others it inhabits.

This new interest in the world and others is not conditioned by the subject itself. More clearly, pure cognition and dependence on subjective ideas are no longer plausible sources for knowledge. Instead, interaction with the world and others becomes more essential:

“The fact of experience of something alien (something that is not I), is present as experience of an objective world and others in it (other Ego); and an important result of the ownness-reduction performed on these experiences was that it brought out a substratum in which a reduced ‘world’ shows itself, as an “immanent transcendency” (106).

The world does not exist for the individual, but is rather shared by a host of individuals, giving it its own transcendence. It is occupied by a host of subjects, each practicing their own Cogitos; the world is ultimately the multiplicity of subjective synthesis. Furthermore, the world is occupied by physical objects and otherwise governed by time and space, which reveals its immanence. Then, we have the following interesting conclusion. If the cogito is a ceaseless process of synthesis, and there is no cogito without a world and others in it, and this world is itself a product of an accord among many cogitation, then the world itself is discovered and synthesized. The world also is not one, but many, and it is not given at once. The world itself becomes a task.

How do subjects then interact with each other in this world? In a community, where certain roles are ascribed and practiced as such: “...an Ego-community, which includes me, becomes constituted (in my sphere of ownness, naturally) as a community of Egos existing with each other and for each other – ultimately a community of monads, which, moreover (in its communalized intentionally) constitutes the one identical world. (107). This community of egos constructs the world in which the individual ego exists, and we identify certain objects and groups through objectification. Through this, a collective, transcendental “I” is formed throughout the egos in order to construct a like-world in which the egos share like-experiences.

## Being a Body/Having A Body

So far, we have surveyed how the Cogito has been constructed in two vastly different ways according to Descartes' method and Husserl's phenomenology. Although Husserl's phenomenology answers to the issues of solipsism, individualism, and subjective disinterest that plagued Descartes' version of the subject, Husserl's phenomenology presents issues of its own, namely, the subject's apparent lack of a body. Husserl places the subject in a world guided by time and space with other subjects and other objects, all of which are available for interaction; yet, he makes no effort to place the subject in a physical body. The cogito that is given with the world is strangely disembodied. It is the fleshiness of the cogito that Merleau-Ponty will personify. This embodied subject is explored in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, which investigates the way the world manifests, is lived, and experienced by an embodied subject.

The Cogito exists in its original form, "I think, therefore I am" in Descartes *Meditations On First Philosophy*. This cogito assumes the form of a singular existence, and consequently it harbors a degree of individualism and solipsism. This singular existence is solidified in the self-giveness of the Cogito. This means that the subject gives itself to itself through cognition. This self-giveness is so dominant that the "I" in this Cogito also possesses a deep distrust of its own extension and sense perception. Knowledge, therefore, is only originated through the subject itself.

Husserl departs from this individualism by placing the subject in a world with others. A revised Cogito within his system could be "I am because I am already an "other" to myself". This self-otherness, or self-alienation begins with his transcendental clue, the intuition of an "other". For a subject to be itself, it must already possess an intuition of the "other", which leads the subject to consider its own otherness. Thus, being is being with others, who dwell in their own self-otherness, while "I" dwell in my self-otherness to my subject.

Instead of being solely concerned with its own individual cognition, the subject, or "I" in Husserl's Cogito, is in constant synthesis with itself and with its world. For Husserl, the "I" is its situation, its "circumstances." Husserl argues that there is no "I" that is not in time and space. This, of course, is the world, where other "I"s and other intentional objects exist. More importantly, this world is intersubjectively constituted, which is to say there is no world for the "I" alone. The world only exists because there is a community of "I"s that synthesizes the world. The world partially belongs to the "I", if at all, and this belonging must be confirmed by the others.

However, this "I", or subject, still is not yet a body. Merleau-Ponty responds to this lack with subjective embodiment; his Cogito could be revised as "I am because I am in-the-world". He grounds the "I" on the machinations of the world through the body; there is no world without our embodied existence. He claims that our body is our "vehicle" for worldly existence, but this comparison cannot be understood literally—the body is not simply a vehicle, like a taxi you get on and get off when you are done with your trip. Using the term "vehicle" suggests separation, as if the subject could take on and take off its body when it wills to be in or out of the world. This is not what Merleau-Ponty means. Rather, for him the body is in a dynamic relationship with the world, and the medium through which the subject experiences the world. We are not in the world by being in a body; we are in the world through **being** a body. We are riveted to the world by the quivering of the flesh. The world is our flesh; or rather, the flesh is our being in the world. We are with others, with the world itself, and with ourselves by being embodied. Embodiment,

however, is relational. We are our bodies by how the world touches are. Our bodies are the world and others touching us through our being with each other. The flesh of the world is the touch of others. We cannot be in the world without this touching, this ceaseless contact of bodies.

How do bodies interact with the world? Merleau-Ponty explores this problem using the phenomena of the “phantom limb” to describe the way bodies are conditioned by being in the world, and assert their being in a certain way. More concretely, he explains: “This phenomenon, distorted equally by physiological and psychological explanations, is however, understood in the perspective of being-in-the-world...I am committed to a certain physical and inter-human world...” (*Phenomenology of Perception*, 94). In Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations*, the “I” is in a constant “catching up” with itself, asserting its being while also synthesizing its being, and never truly **being**. Likewise, the sensation of phantom limb shows that we are also in constant synthesizing of our bodies through a more extended form of relationality. For Merleau-Ponty, the “I” is more than an epistemic machine. The world is constantly constituting the “I” to view the world in a certain way, and with this outer-constitution, the “I” works double-time to rewire itself according to the messages sent by the world. The inner subject is involved in a web of relationships with the world, and when the body itself is damaged, it still attempts to perform as it did before the event of damage. This persistence of a “standard” bodily performance further reveals that we understand ourselves and our world not through cognition, but through the edge of our flesh. There is no “I” without the body.

It is clear that the subject’s sense of itself is inseparable from its body, but what about the actions of the subject? Likewise, the subject performs its intentionality in the world in a way, which it cannot be separated from the subject’s being. Subjects, in a way, are their own actions. This makes the actions of others legible to the subject, and the subject is able to compare the actions of the other with its own actions. Merleau-Ponty makes an interesting comparison between the expression of intentionality and works of art:

“A novel, poem, picture or musical work is individuals, that is, being in which the expression is indistinguishable from the thing expressed, their meaning, accessible only through direct contact, being radiated with no change of their temporal and spatial situation. It is in this sense that our body is comparable to a work of art. It is a nexus of living meanings, not the law for a certain number of covariant terms.” (175)

Just as subjectivity cannot be separated from a body, intentionality cannot be separated from being. Thus, subjects are both expressive and expressed, meaning that they can perpetuate their own intentions by their actions, yet these actions are also legible to others. Just as an artist shows her vision in a painting, we share our being and intentionality through our actions.

### The Hierarchy of Being for Others

Through the phenomenological investigations of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, we have arrived at a version of the subject that is grounded in a world and a body. However, we are left with scant clues about how the subject is conditioned by the world and the “others” with whom it interacts. Simone De Beauvoir takes a departure from Husserl, who focuses on the self-estrangement of the Cogito, and from Merleau-Ponty’s focus on the flesh’s unification with the body by examining the situation of a gendered body.

She conducts this examination by enacting the themes within existentialism developed jointly with Jean Paul Sartre. Beauvoir works with these fundamental pillars to existentialist analytics: first, “Existence Precedes Essence.” This means that we are our freedom, and become subjects



by choosing our freedom. Although this subjectively selected freedom may seem like a route back to Cartesian Solipsism, this freedom does not operate independently according to the pure will of a subject. The freedom of any given subject needs the freedom of the others in order to constitute its own subjectivity as freedom; when we choose ourselves, we choose it within the realm of the other's freedom. The second existentialist pillar deals with the "Bad Faith," which is the term given to the refusal to acknowledge the other's freedom, which in turn results in a failure to acknowledge one's subjective freedom. Lastly, "We are God's Useless Passion"; even if there would be a God, he would not prescribe our freedom for us. We would still possess the responsibility of having to be our own freedom – we are metaphysically bound to it.

With these existentialist guides enacted, Beauvoir accounts for how one's freedom (or lack thereof) shapes them into being a woman through the participation of the **construction** of her own freedom by the apparatus of nature and culture. The subject-as-woman is consumed in a "pageantry of gender", which she learns to perform, enact, and stage. Beauvoir asserts, "One is not born, but rather, becomes a woman" (Beauvoir, 267). The woman, then, is a role the subject assumes rather than an *a priori* condition of existence.

In the female performance of gender, the subject-as-woman generally is staged for her other (husband, children, family, other women, etc.). Her performance is for the sake of somebody else, and she finds personal accomplishment in this performance. What motivates this performance and legitimizes this feeling of accomplishment? Not from the subject coming to know it through its own cognition as found in Descartes, not subjective synthesis as stated in Husserl, not even through the edge of their flesh as posited by Merleau-Ponty, but rather comes into the subject through social pressure. There is a sociality, and thus historicity, of this subject's embodiment. Embodiment is also the cite for the sedimentation and accumulation of history.

The superficial aspect of this performance of the feminine requires the subject-as-woman to have a natural embodiment with artificial amendments in order to fit societal expectations, or, the male gaze. Beauvoir claims that woman is "...changed into a doll of living flesh" (501) while staging her gender. These contrasting characteristics highlight significant contrast between the shining plastic of the doll and the raw humanity of the flesh, pointing to the tension between culture and nature for the situation of the subject-as-woman. Her flesh becomes plastic in the performance of her gender; her flesh is colonized by the social via the male gaze. This colonization becomes a type of voodoo of gender performance and the societal expectation impressed upon the subject-as-woman.

Clearly, this performance is operating superficially. The woman does not display her femininity through her projects and actions. How does this show proceed? It proceeds through fashion, which acts as the colonization of female flesh by a male patriarchy. An exploration into objects of femininity will animate this performance, which advocates for the aesthetic value of female bodies, while constraining their own bodily freedom.

Consider the corset, which epitomizes feminine constraint within her gender performance. The corset squeezes and shapes the female body into a silhouette of male desire. She is bound into having a taught waist and bountiful hips as the comfort of her embodiment is disregarded – it becomes 'second' to her feminine appearance.

Let us compare it with the wearing of high heels. A woman's climbing up onto high heels situates the subject-as-woman in a precarious norm of immobility and pivots her to the male gaze. In contrast, men possess the privilege to be firmly planted on the ground in functional footwear that encourages his mobility and projects. Women are subjected to a hazardous situation in which they are always teetering. However, this teetering does not go without an

aesthetic 'benefit'. High heels tense the leg muscles artificially, as women are not expected to have very strong calves naturally, making them shapely and desirable. Such a display of the leg muscles remains unseen and unappreciated by the woman as she wears them, and operates entirely for the male gaze. She is a show. High heels also activate a directional power by accentuating the buttocks, which turns attention to her posterior as opposed to the front of her body, her gaze or her face. Again, her nature is being colonized by culture, as the focal point of her subject is not found in her intentions or projects, but rather found in her status as a perpetual sex object. She is not subject – she is show.

Such as the corset is the epitome of feminine constraints, make-up is the epitome of the distrust the subject-as-woman attaches to her own nature. Cosmetics work either to enhance the more aesthetically pleasing portion of the natural face, or to minimize what are qualified as "imperfections". They work to translate nature into something that is better than nature. The woman cannot trust her natural face, and thus must construct a mask for the world. This mask of nature naturalizes gender into a dual function: there exists a natural male form, which prompts no "need" for cosmetic intervention and denaturalizes the female form, which needs cosmetic and hygienic intervention. The natural female form cannot be trusted; it must be manipulated into something pleasant.

These examples help highlight the conditions of womanhood, which are laden with contradictory restraints. On one hand, the woman ought to be natural, and beauty should not be something in which she strains to perform. Yet, on the other hand, women are also encouraged to improve their natural selves. Advertisements implore women to improve their imperfections while also embracing their natural beauty; in this way, women either live a lacking nature or are hyper natural. She exists in this contradiction: "Through adornment... woman allies herself to nature while bringing to nature the need for artifice..." (498). Woman is in a constant synthesis of her physical condition, always both apprehending and extending it. It may seem that the subject-as-woman holds a degree of control over this embodiment, but it is still constricted to and guided by the male gaze.

Aside from aesthetic availability and the will to please through adornment, femininity is dominated by a subjective availability. As she "...delights with the display...of her own appearance", "her husband and children do not notice" (498), which points to the lack of reciprocity of her subject. Her efforts, although consistent, are not worth recognition. Thus, becoming woman is becoming available for someone else. Beauvoir will contribute this phenomenon to Sartre's modes of being; in itself and for itself, she adds: "before for others". Sartre's existentialism posits that "existence precedes essence," and that the subject is its own freedom. However, de Beauvoir argues that gender disallows this, and instead women passively perform for the male gaze.

Clearly, the subject-as-women exists in a situation that contrasts her against the 'natural', 'rational' and 'independent' male. She is the "Second" sex, but what does it mean to be "second"? Surely, the existence of the "second" assumes the existence of the "first". This means that the "second" is the "other" of the first; it is not the same thing as the thing the "first" is. The "second", in this way, may be subordinate to the "first", an existential afterthought of the "first", and spatially behind the "first". Yet, we may also imagine that the "second" may be the completion of the "first". The mere existence of a "second" may point to the insufficiency of the "first", the inability of the "first's" survival without the "second". One may question the condition of the "first" rather than the presupposed inferiority of the "second". If the "second" is

assumed inferior, is it through a true mark of inferiority, or through the paranoia of the “first”. Must the relationship between “first” and “second” mark a concrete “betterness” of the “first”?

### From Phenomenology to Genealogy

Now, a turn to more modern genealogies will provide a clearer image of racism. First, the relationship between genealogy and phenomenology must be clarified in order to understand how both work together to reveal some truth about racism. Specifically, what does genealogy have to do with phenomenology?

To recall, phenomenology initially worked to analyze Rene Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum*, which formed a problematic subject. Specifically, this subject gives itself to itself by an act of its own thinking. This quality consequently conditions the subject to be individualistic, solipsistic, and both distrustful and disinterested of its own bodily extension. However, Descartes is able to initiate the phenomenological spirit through his examination of the melting beeswax. In this example, he makes use of the eidetic method, a type of phenomenological bracketing, in which he named the characteristics of the wax in order to arrive at an essential truth about the substance.

Both Descartes’ innovation of the beeswax and problems of embodiment are addressed in Edmund Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations*. The inclusion of Descartes’ name in Husserl’s work shows Husserl’s respect for his predecessor, but Husserl still analyzes Descartes method. The *Cartesian Meditations* corrects the subject’s former individualism and solipsism by positing that the subject finds itself through synthesis, which leads to the existence of the other. Since the subject is able to find the other, both exist in the same time and space – the world, which is constantly synthesized by a community of subjects.

Still, this subject is not yet embodied. The radical embodiment of the subject is achieved in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*. This newly embodied subject has a complex relationship with the world; the subject is now a body, practices intentionality, and becomes conditioned by worldly interactions. Most significantly, Merleau-Ponty’s example of the phantom limb proves the way in which subjects absorb an image of a “standard” body; even in the absence of a limb, the subject still *feels* its presence, and is eternally connected to the idea of a standard subject.

This ‘standard’ subject is the subject explored by Descartes, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty, meaning, this subject is not an “other”. All three do little to acknowledge gendered or racialized subjects; Simone De Beauvoir explores this “other” subject in *The Second Sex*, which explicates the situation of the subject-as-woman. In this explanation, De Beauvoir makes the existential claim that one becomes a woman, rather than essentially being a woman. One becomes a woman by displaying a pageantry of gender, in which the woman manipulates her own body in order to adhere to societal expectations. Furthermore, De Beauvoir reveals woman as a subject *for others*, meaning that she uses her own existential freedom for the benefit for others.

Although De Beauvoir makes an important stride to examine the “other”, she as well as Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty all ignore the value of history as a condition of the construction of subjectivity. Simply put, phenomenology, which aims to go beyond the individualistic, solipsistic, and disinterested Cartesian subject, nonetheless remains Cartesian. Even though phenomenology corrects subjective issues, a separation between the subject and any type of historically given *matrix of intelligibility* still exists. All consciousness must go through a process; it emerges, develops, is critiqued, and then fades. This process is genealogy.

Genealogy responds to the problems of phenomenology by asserting that all knowing is a construct; instead of discovering the world, any given subject constructs the world in a certain way<sup>1</sup>. Knowledge is not found, but made. An important dynamic arises out of this construction. On one hand, subjects correspond to worlds that can be known, yet, on the other hand, what can be known depends on what kinds of subjects can know. Thus, knowing within genealogy is simultaneously constructing worlds that can be known and subjects that can know. The question, then is, how embodiment may be constructed, and how this construction may affect the production of subjectivity.

### A Genealogy of Modernizing Racism

A generative and pioneering genealogical account of racism is provided by Cornel West in his work *Prophesy Deliverance!*, which includes the chapter titled: “A Genealogy of Modern Racism”. In this chapter, West explains the conditions that are responsible for the conceptual, discursive, material, and material existence of white supremacy. West is interested in what Foucault would call the matrix of intelligibility of racist discourses, and their material efficacy. Still, West specifically examines modern, Euro-American discourses in his genealogy, and combines analysis of historical conditions, along with other pivotal discourses, namely those of philosophy and science.

Modern discourses on Race, for West, are shaped by three determinate historical factors: the scientific revolution, the Cartesian impact on philosophy, and the revival of classical aesthetic standards. First, the scientific revolution shaped modern discourse because it “...justified new modes of knowledge and new conceptions of truth and reality...” (West, 50), the scientific revolution, named as such, was truly a significant discursive revolution. Specifically, the scientific revolution brought about the principles of observation and evidence as central paradigms of Western knowledge. The scientific revolution did not “invent” these ideas, but rather “...brought these ideas together in such a way that they have become the two foci around which much of modern discourse evolves” (51). Instead of the scientific revolution being an isolated historical event, it gave birth to a new matrix of intelligibility, that of observation and

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<sup>1</sup> Genealogy has two well-known and acknowledged key points of reference: Nietzsche and Foucault. Genealogy examines the interaction between life and history, which ultimately serves as a detector of moments or events that are biologically indexed. Nietzsche, in his “Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life,” arrives at the possibility/impossibility, the benefits/disadvantages, and the chains/liberation that all of historical knowledge entails. On the one hand, the “correct” use of history, a knowledge of past strengths and the capacity to connect them with potential success, ultimately serves life and secures a successful future. On the other hand, too much can weigh on the shoulders of humanity like Sisyphus’ stone. History should not only be understood, chronicled and archived; it must also be used to exult life, to liberate us from the burdens of the past. The uses and applications of history are extended into his “Genealogy of Morality”. In this text, Nietzsche takes a look back to history, but now in terms of a temporal imprint on the flesh, in order to understand the concept of “good” and “bad”. However, these terms are not purely historical, and largely depend on their genealogical construction; the emergence of terms, the transformation from ‘term’ to ‘construct’, and the metamorphosis in which these constructs take on. Michel Foucault correctly observes that “The Role of genealogy is to record its history: the history of morals, ideals, and metaphysical concepts...as they stand for the emergence of different interpretations, they must be made to appear as events on the stage of the historical process” (Foucault, 86). Genealogy is not the mere hermeneutic or even existential understanding of concepts such as ‘good’ and ‘evil’, but rather the capacity to question the totality of such concepts.

evidence, which has shaped and continues to shape modern Western racial and racializing discourses.

Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes's works were determining for the emergence of this newly innovative and scientific matrix of intelligibility. Although widely considered key philosophical figures, both were significant proponents of the scientific revolution. West finds Bacon's importance in the fact that he believed "...the aim of philosophy was to give humankind mastery over nature by means of scientific discoveries and innovations" (51). The security of the human race's own supremacy over nature was perpetuated by science and guided by philosophy. Instead of coexisting with "other" organisms in a shared habitat, the scientific practice of observation and evidence elevated humans over "other" organisms and gave them authority over the habitat.

Going beyond Bacon, Descartes not only was a proponent of the scientific revolution, but also provided controlling themes of western discourse, "...the primacy of the subject and the preeminence of representation" (51). Just as Bacon established the priority of mankind, Descartes followed suit, and granted importance to the manifestations of the subject in addition. The effect the scientific revolution had on his work is clear, for "...he associated the scientific aim of predicting and explaining the world with the philosophical aim of picturing and representing the world" (51). He combines scientific orientation with philosophical motivation in order to establish a more rational reality that is to be both managed through science and mirrored in philosophy. It is important to remember the subject formed by Descartes philosophy, one that grants its own existence, one that is the source for its own knowledge, and enacts a radical doubt to the point where the body of the subject is disavowed.

At this point, a clear practice of observation and gathering evidence is coupled with scientific philosophy and an individualistic subject. The addition of an observational standard will motivate this subject to turn this practice into a method. This observational standard is what West calls the "...normative gaze'..." (53), a method that orders, compares, and categorizes the observations gathered by subjects. Most importantly, this "gaze" finds its root in classical aesthetic qualities and cultural norms. Superficial appearances, such as skin color, body shape, and facial structures as well as personal characteristics, such as temperament, sharpness, and amity were explored by this "gaze", which ultimately valued and continues to value one type of body – the white body. To put it clearly:

"What is distinctive about the role of classical aesthetic and cultural norms at the advent of modernity is that they provided an acceptable authority for the idea of white supremacy, an acceptable authority that was closely linked with the majority authority on truth and knowledge in the modern world, namely, the institution of science" (54).

It is the convergence of these emerging norms, namely the tools of the scientific revolution, the fusion of science and philosophy in order to establish supremacy of humankind, and, finally the standard quality of whiteness as a principle of supremacy, which combined to permit, authorize, and instigate discursive racism. West makes use of various anthropological and scientific studies within the modern period, all of which lead to the fallacy of black bodies that assume how superficial traits –the surface of the flesh— must presuppose a flawed, less-than-“human” character. At the same time, these “findings” served as a justification for the superiority of white bodies, which points to an interesting dynamic.

If Simone De Beauvoir addressed women as the “second” sex, investigations such as those carried out by West, taught us to see how black bodies (as well as other ethnic bodies) were also to be seen as “second” to the paradigmatic “white body.” If woman is second to male, black is

second to white. Still, it is unclear how the “second” compares to the assumed “first”. Yet, this ambiguity is the weightiness and persistence of race. Clearly, the “second” is the “other” of the “first”, but in what way? On one hand, the “second” could be viewed as an existential afterthought of the first, but on the other hand, the “second” may be needed to complete the first. It is clear that the latter is more relevant in both cases of race and gender. The “second” is essential to the extension of dominance, which the “first” has over the “second”. This means, the “second” must not only exist, but exist in a lesser way than the “first” in order of the “first” to exist at the standard it is accustomed to – supremacy. This genealogical relationship between “first” and “second”, the matrix, which they share, yet the subjective difference which divides them, is at the root of racism. Racism exists – but how does it manifest to and have an effect on certain subjects?

### Towards a Political Phenomenology

To answer this question in part, Ta-Nehisi Coates gives his experience with the distinctive take on the effect of racism on “black” bodies in his work *Between the World and Me*. While this work reads as a personal narrative, it can and should be read as a political phenomenology or a radical genealogy of modern, or rather, contemporary, as in the latest version, of racism in the United States. Coates pays tribute to James Baldwin’s *My Dungeon Shook — Letter to my Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of Emancipation*, and frames *Between The World and Me* as a letter to his son, which includes both the specifics of his own experience with interrupted subjectivity as well as instructions for managing his situation. This personal narrative is laden with examples that could construct it as a political phenomenology since Coates emphasizes the exploration of the black body and its situation. However, the work can also be seen as a radical genealogy, precisely because Coates critiques the Cartesian Subject through the allegory of what he calls the “Dreamers” and those bodies who ensure the dream of the “Dreamers”.

Phenomenological ideas become apparent in *Between the World and Me*, as Coates highlights the strife of the black body in a space where it is manipulated, degraded, violated, assumed always expandable, and sacrificial. However, it seems that he has taken on a Husserlian defense mechanism – synthesizing the way in which his country is failing him. As he gives advice to his son, he claims: “The greatest reward of this constant interrogation, of confrontation with the brutality of my country, is that it has freed me from ghosts and girded me against the sheer terror of disembodiment” (Coates, 12). As an interrupted subject, the synthesis within his own Cogito is not enough; Coates is weighed down with the responsibility of synthesizing the atrocities of his own country in order to remain autonomous with his embodiment. In neglecting to grapple with the violence laden within his culture and enacted upon his body as well as other bodies is to reject his own subjectivity. The black body, then, must work double-time in managing the relationship between its subjectivity and its situation in order to ensure the security of its embodiment.

Although this subjectivity may be interrupted, it is not entirely disjointed. Just as Maurice-Merleau Ponty postulates that our body is our vehicle to worldly experience, Coates posits, “...our bodies are ourselves, that my soul is the voltage conducted through neurons and nerves, and that my spirit is my flesh” (79). All bodies internally united in this sense, they are not a soul rattling within a network of bones, but rather a network of subjective attitudes and relationalities. The body is a memory, an emotion, an intelligence, a preoccupation, and a becoming. Spirit and

flesh are not affected separately, but rather work as one mechanism that both reaches out and is drawn into the world.

This body may be one, yet it is also endangered. Phenomenologically, the black body is complete in its existence, but it is subject to disembodiment. Although an interrogation into the black body as contrasted against its situation of precariousness may prevent disembodiment to a degree for Coates, he is able to capture the anxiety of being a black body. When speaking to his son about the anxiety of the black parent, he recalls his own father telling him “either I can beat him or the police” (82). Coates did not understand this principle until the birth of his son; it was then he understood the importance of the security of the black body. He explains the phrase, “That is a philosophy of the disembodied, of a people who control nothing, who can protect nothing, who are made to fear not just the criminals among them, but the police who lord over them with all the moral authority of the protection racket” (82). Fear is the controlling factor in the disembodiment of the black body. It constructs not only fear for the police, an “official” authority, but these fearful subjects will become subjects to be feared, and act out in their own violence. This point of fear and disembodiment lends itself to genealogy, as fear instilled into black bodies becomes fear of black bodies.

This construct of fear is only one genealogical example used by Coates. More vividly, he carries on the mission of West by also critiquing the Cartesian Subject, which can be directly related to what he calls the “Dreamers”. If individualism, solipsism, and radical doubt ground the Cartesian Subject within its situation, then the “Dream” protects and sustains the “Dreamer”. What is this “Dream”? Coates explains:

“I have seen that dream all my life. It is perfect houses with nice lawns. It is Memorial Day cookouts, block associations, and driveways...And for so long I have wanted to escape into the Dream, to fold my country over my head like a blanket. But this has never been an option because the Dream rests on our backs; the bedding made from our bodies...the Dream persists by warring with the known world.” (11)

Paradigmatically, the Dream works in two ways. On one hand, it is nostalgic; it evokes a certain warmth and promise for prosperity. It draws subjects in, and intoxicates them with an image of American success, pleasing homes and landscaping, the celebration of nationalistic holidays, and being submerged in a sea of sensibility. However, not all subjects are “Dreamers” and entitled to this privileged paradise; some are condemned to be the “damned”. These images, along with the feelings of warmth and nostalgia, are all predicated on the historical and contemporary violence inflicted on the black body. The Dream can only exist with a support, a subordinate existence, and its very own “second”. Again, we see the tension between “first” and “second”, and it is becoming more apparent that the suppression of the “second” is quite essential for the comfort of the “first”.

Coates is able to vividly illustrate his experience by placing the fearful embodiment of the black body within the matrix of the Dream. Clearly, Coates is not subjectively entitled to the Dream, but images of the missing Dream were laden within his situation just as much as fear was. He recalls, “Fear ruled everything around me, and I know, as all black people do, that this fear was connected to the Dream out there, to the unworried boys, to pie and pot roast, to the white fences and green lawns nightly beamed into our television sets” (29). This embodiment, which is colonized by fear, is now being drawn into the “Dream”, to which the benefits are flaunted, yet not granted to the black body. This double-offence inflicted against the black body works to oppress in two ways; while the black body is ruled by fear, it is also being exposed to

the freedom from that fear. It is not enough to be stigmatized; one must know that they are being stigmatized, which leads to further subject interruption.

Now, the black body is governed by fear, damned to be “second” to the “Dreamers”, and soberly aware to both factors of their situation. How is one to proceed? One may assume, as Coates briefly does, that the charade be exposed, and the “Dreamers” awake from their slumber and shake them out of their own constructs of whiteness. He gives candid instructions to his son, “...You cannot arrange your life around them and the small chance of the Dreamers coming into consciousness. Our moment is too brief. Our bodies are too precious. And you are here now, and you must live – and there is so much out there to live for...” (146-7). Instead of being concerned with the comprehension that the “Dreamers” lack, Coates suggests that his son focus on his own subject, live for the here and now, and find purpose in it. To attempt to wake the “Dreamers” is to continue the devastation of the black body.

### The Gaze of Those Who Can Look

Both West and Coates speak on the concept of race broadly within both discourse and culture; their specific accounts of racism become apparent through either scientific studies (West), or personal experience (Coates). In order to ground the way race operates in a more universal experience, George Yancy explains what he calls “The Elevator Effect” in his work *Black Bodies, White Gazes*. The “Elevator Effect” is another genealogical tension between the black body and its interlocutor, the white body. Within this tension as well as the white gaze, the black body is phenomenologically limited, existentially controversial, and genealogically enlightened.

Specifically, this “Elevator Effect” speaks to the common situation of two people sharing an elevator. For some, this experience may be mundane, but when Yancy’s black body and a white woman share this space, something different happens. For Yancy, this space becomes transformed into different subjective paradigms, as the gaze of the white woman makes assumptions about his black body. In turn, he habitually synthesizes her behavior and comportment, and ponders the conditions for this construct.

A reemergence of the Cartesian Subject can be observed in the gaze of the white woman. She knows nothing about the person whom she shares the elevator with, but can observe his black body and construct her own image of him. She is the only individual in this space, which is being robbed from her by this “other”. Specifically, “She does not see a dynamic subjectivity, but a sort, something eviscerated of individuality, flattened, and rendered vacuous of genuine human feelings” (4). Through the gaze, she establishes herself as the only true ‘subject’ of the situation, and since she is the only subject, she has no responsibility to reach out to Yancy. Internally, she already holds all the necessary knowledge to judge this black body, which is predetermined by her gaze.

The solipsistic predetermination the gaze holds over the black body interrupts its intentionality. Recall Merleau-Ponty and his analogy between intentionality and a work of art. The artist communicates her message with the world through her art; subjects communicate their message with the world through their actions, which are brought to life by intentionality. The black body is denied this agency, as Yancy recalls as he stands in the elevator, “...it is as if I am no longer in charge of what I mean/intend...” (13). He is no longer able to organically express his intentionality through his actions, as any action will be interpreted by her gaze rather than his



original intention. The black body's ability to make actions legible to others is hindered by the concept of race, which judges actions before they come to fruition.

The combination of the Cartesian subject using white gaze and the freezing of intentionality also constructs the black body to hold a degree of its own solipsism. Since both the intentionality and the actions of the black body are presupposed by the white gaze, the black body is the only authority in truly knowing its own intentionality. To be clear, Yancy elaborates, "...it is if I am forced within an epistemic solipsistic position because her racist interpretive metanarrative chips away at my intended meanings." (16). He is forced into becoming an individual, who gains knowledge through solipsism, and is disinterested in the white woman's gaze. In this way, the black body ultimately is forced into being a Cartesian Subject by their intentions becoming silenced.

How is this submission able to proceed? By assuming the nature of the black body. Mirroring Beauvoir, Yancy uses existentialism as an account for his body, which is considered "other" and made submissive within the white gaze. However, instead of being entitled to the freedom of forming their own subjectivity and instead, constructing it for the other as the subject-as-woman does, the black body is existentially exempt from freedom. Yancy affirms, "From the perspective of whiteness, I am, contrary to the existentialist credo, an essence ("Blackness") that precedes my existence" (Yancy, 1). Existentialism maintains that existence precedes essence, and the subjects find their freedom through this rule. Black bodies, however, are exempt from this, and have an assumed essence based on the status of their appearance.

The racialized subject carries an essence of "blackness", which determines the way this subject manifests to others. However, what kind of manifestation takes place? How is the black body taken up? To answer, Yancy suggests "...one might say that Blackness functions metaphorically as original sin. There is not anything as such that a Black body needs to do in order to be found blame worthy" (5). Now, this predetermined black body is essentially guilty, a subject-to-be-blamed. Inherently, this body is worthy of blind distrust; instead of being a subject in fear, as Coates asserted, the black body is a feared body.

The white gaze shapes this clear image of the black body as something to be apprehensive of, just as the male gaze shapes a clear image of the female body as something to behold. Just as the male gaze distorts the line between culture and nature on the feminine body, the black male body is also naturally distorted. As Yancy and his fellow passenger share the elevator, she attempts to "protect" herself from his black body by the clutching of her purse and closing of her stance. Yancy's sexual status as a black man is evoked in this movement, specifically the "...reality of our dual hypersexualization: 'you are either a sexual trophy or a certain rapist.'" (16). The male gaze sends contradictory messages in standardizing the woman; the white gaze constructs the disjointed nature of the black male body. This body is to be feared, yet to be desired; the black male body is both a horror and a conquest.

What shapes this white gaze? One could reconsider the construct of having a "first" and "second", but that explanation is too direct. Yancy makes a significant judgement on the white gaze of the woman with whom he shares the elevator, explaining:

"Her "reading" of my Black body is characteristic of the epistemology of ignorance. More specifically, an epistemology of ignorance involves 'a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions', producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made. She suffers from a structured blindness, a sociopsychologically reinforcing opacity that obstructs the process of 'seeing'

beyond falsehoods and various modes of whitely body comportment that continue to reinforce and sustain white hegemony and mythos” (22)

To say that this gaze is constructed consciously is giving too much credit to the holder of the gaze; clearly, this gaze is the product of a paradigmatic construction. Such a construction is clearly misleading, and not grounded in any certain truth. Thus, the condemnation of the black body is not an essential fault, but rather a construct of the white gaze. This gaze does not shape black bodies, it determines them; the inner subject of the black body is marked by the indelibility of its own appearance. Furthermore, this white gaze feeds white dominance; it operates on a subconscious level, making those who look with the gaze blind to its consequent damage.

Besides the shaping of the black body, what other power does the white gaze hold? Simply put, it can reconstruct spaces, making an otherwise impartial situation into a genealogical hotbed. In the “Elevator Effect” Yancy takes note on how the elevator transforms in the presence of the white woman’s gaze, “The apparent racial neutrality of the space within the elevator has become an axiological plenum, one filled with white normativity” (15). Suddenly, this neutral space for Yancy has become something he is feared in and unwelcomed to. He is receptive to this shift, and ultimately aware of the paradigm that controls and defines his own body. This conditions him, as well as other black bodies, into being genealogical knowers.

The transformation made in the elevator is not singular in effecting Yancy, but also defines and limits the white woman in a certain way. Clearly, she limits the expression of the black body standing before her, but as she rigidly defines this body, she also adheres herself to a certain standard, “...it is important to note that not only does the white woman in the elevator ontologically freeze my “dark” embodied identity, but she also becomes ontologically frozen in her own embodied (white) identity” (19). Her ontological status as a white body apprehends her to her own ignorance. She is not aware of her white gaze, and how it not only constructs the black body standing before her, but also herself. She is ultimately limited in her own subjectivity as she limits the subjectivity of her other.

The white gaze is limited in its scope, and fails to see the way it limits its own white body. However, the black body, being cast into this matrix of white regularity, gains a certain responsiveness at the inception of this matrix, which becomes clear as the white body reacts to the presence of a black body. Explicitly, “...Blacks do in fact possess a level of heightened sensitivity to recognizable and repeated occurrences that might very well slip beneath the radar of others, who do not have such a place and history in a white dominant and hegemonic society” (6). The black body is existentially shaped by the white gaze, but this gaze is blind. White bodies, especially male white bodies, are entitled to being standard subjects in society. They do not evoke the raising of the eyebrow, or the clutching of a pocketbook, or the façade of a genuine smile. Black bodies, however, are conditioned by these habits while in this matrix of white normativity, in which they become keen in assessing their situation.

### Conclusion: Race as a Matrix of Unintelligibility

After these considerations, then, how does this world of constructed subjects within their respective matrixes of intelligibility affect subjects that are exposed to racism, in fact, that are constituted as racialized subjects? To be more specific, this happens in a number of ways. First, it seems that the embodiment of black bodies begins the disruption of their subjectivity. This embodiment is not mitigated by the subject itself, but rather robbed from the subject. This disembodiment of the black body is a clear response to a fear instilled into their subject given the

violence inflicted upon them in order to sustain the comfort of the American Dream. Merleau-Ponty's embodied subject, who is entitled to be in the world purely, is no longer applicable – black bodies are not free bodies.

More significantly, the black body is exposed to a number of matrixes, all which include the submission of their subject. This requires a Husserlian defense mechanism, wherein the racialized subject not only synthesizes its own being, but also must interpret both racist macroaggressions and general systematic racism and contrast the two. Their cogito is being extended to include a paradigmatic tradition of racism, which ultimately reaches to them and affects their subjectivity.

The underlying interplay between “second” and “first” as seen in Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* can be applied to racialized subjects. West is able to clearly articulate how black bodies became deviant to the standard white body, but is the construct *true*? A great deal of ambiguity exists between the “first” and the “second”; Yancy is able to clearly display this in constructing black bodies as genealogical knowers. Thus, the “second” is not essentially subordinate to the “first”, but rather constructed and suppressed into their situation.

In the contemporary world, subjects become objects of race through the persistence of the Cartesian Subject, which becomes revived as a disinterested scientist in the work of West, an individualistic Dreamer in Coates' account, and manifests as a solipsistic gaze for Yancy. All three accounts provide certain realms in which racism becomes enacted through discourse, personal experiences, and mundane accounts. The recognition of this passive apathy by the modern ghosts of the Cartesian Subject would be a pivotal step towards progress, but whether or not we are to occupy ourselves in the freeing of consciousness for those who wish to remain sedated is unclear. Coates will disavow this effort, and suggest subjective autotomy, but I think these connections are too strong to be taken for granted. The concept of race is grounded in history, develops through genealogy, and made manifest in phenomenology – and that is worth examining.

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