

THE SOUND IN THE OPEN

by

Edward B. Ferguson

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Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Edward B. Ferguson has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Politics.

Arash Davari

Whitman College
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I. Introduction

What is the nature of life and death? The received wisdom of our society gives detailed answers to this question in the biological mode. One could surely debate when life truly begins – whether at conception, birth, or somewhere in between - but death seems to be a settled question. When our biological systems cease to function, when the heart no longer beats, simple sugars no longer power electrical firing in the brain, then, most would say, we are dead. Life and death thus have an inextricable connection in modern discourse with the biological. The implication is that “being” a human person means being biologically alive.

I am worried by the obviousness of this line of thinking. I do not doubt there is practical significance to regarding the cessation of biological functioning to be the end of life. But it seems to me that to have death *only* signify this might both collapse the possibilities of life – as a signifier – to the ongoing biological, and to ignore the possibility of another form of death: a living death.

These concerns arise out of an experience I had as a journalist researching solitary confinement. In the course of that research I read firsthand accounts of those held for long periods in isolation, and spoke weekly with one man who had been held for over 35 years in the Louisiana State Penitentiary’s isolation unit. Unlike the others I spoke to, Zulu – as I knew him – had not lost touch with reality. Where others felt a sense of derealization and crushing isolation, Zulu made a simple and powerful claim: “I am free.” By writing to people around the world, Zulu informed me, he had built a life beyond the 6x9 walls of his confinement.

This paper takes as its starting point Zulu's paradoxical freedom. How could it be possible that in the context of solitary confinement, a condition that had driven so many others to a loss of the most basic sense of reality, Zulu thrived? This suggests that some element of Zulu's "life" transcended the physical boundaries of his daily existence. In order to account for the nature of this freedom, and to better understand the kinds of derealization experienced by those in solitary, I will argue that the modern conception of life and death is based on a misunderstanding of human subjectivity. In broad terms, a certain conception of subjectivity presumes that "being human" is a given to biologically functioning homo sapiens; this is the premise from which we analyze violence and domination. For example, in considering the constitutionality of solitary confinement, courts have consistently held that incarceration facilities need only provide the basic amenities and sustenance necessary to sustain the biological life of the prisoner.¹ Implicit in this reasoning is a version of the paradigmatic understanding of being: that keeping someone alive and in the conditions of solitary confinement is not "cruel" and "unusual" in the way outright torture or murder would be.

In response to this misunderstanding, I will attempt to retheorize subjectivity by using – and extending – Edmund Husserl's theory of transcendental intersubjectivity as laid out in the *Cartesian Meditations*. Where the current paradigm would suggest personhood is given in biological existence, Husserl's work demonstrates that the objective world, and our sense of self as "real," is always a socially mediated experience. In other words, while "nature" – as the raw data of embodied biological existence – may be given, meaningful experience – "life" – is the product of a social process. By

¹ See Clayton Libby v. Commissioner of Correction, 385 Mass. 425 (1981) & Wilson v. Seiter, 501 US 294 (1991).

comparing this work with scholars both friendly to and critical of Husserl, I hope to draw out a fundamental shortcoming in Husserl's work: even as he recognizes the social nature of subject formation, he does not give a thoroughgoing theorization of how social mediation takes place *in real human contexts*. To draw out this failing, I will both develop a theory of social mediation in language, and test that theory against firsthand accounts of domination.

My extension of Husserl will allow me to better analyze the kind of violence done by solitary, and to understand how that violence is not isolated to the context of incarceration. Using Husserl's theory of subjectivity, I will argue that a "living death" is engendered by way of "the Whip" and "the Word." On the one hand, "the Word" signifies the means by which we socially mediate the self: language. On the other hand, "the Whip" signifies the means by which differential allocation of force can both enforce and preclude certain concepts of personhood and even *produce* a compliant subject.

My interest in theorizing these dual poles of living death is that they offer a means to understand not only domination, but also resistance to domination. This is crucial because this paper seeks to understand Zulu's assertion of paradoxical freedom. Thus, the second half of this work will reconsider how Zulu could come to assert his freedom against the Whip and Word, what affect his resistive activity has on his lived experience, and how that resistance might affect others subject to similar kinds of domination.

Because domination in this account has two poles, the physical and the linguistic, my theorization of resistance will also have two poles. As Husserl takes the spatial-physical realm to be the basis for the abstract, I will first analyze how subjects come to reassert their embodiedness in resistive activities. Specifically, if violence affects a kind

of alienation from sensory experience, then it will become clear that resistance must take place in a recapturing of embodied perception.

In order to understand the discursive dimensions of resistance, the other pole of resistance, I will consider a number of scholarly work on aesthetics, and in particular, poetry. I will argue that if social death is affected by a dual structure of linguistic and physical domination, that a crucial element to the reclamation of social life is interruptory linguistic acts. By comparing Zulu's assertion of freedom to both aesthetic theory and poetry, it will be clear that his words *do* something more than just signify: they prompt in others the possibility of seeing the very domination against which Zulu must fight as ontological violence, a perspective which would otherwise be seen as "nonsense." In other words, what Zulu's paradoxical claim to freedom *does* is institute an interruption in the compliant ontology that makes possible the reproduction of social structures like solitary confinement.

II. Phenomenological Subjectivity

In developing a theory of subjectivity I aim to take as central and foundational the lived experiences of those who suffer in solitary, incarceration, and other forms of domination. Thus my theory of subjectivity takes as its starting point the very *fact* of existence. This is the theoretical premise of phenomenology: that the world, or rather our experience thereof, is an ontic fact; it is an incontrovertible given that stands against any abstractly rooted metaphysics. In other words, phenomenology takes experience seriously and as the basis for theory.

In his seminal work, *The Cartesian Meditations*, Edmund Husserl gives perhaps the fullest articulation of phenomenological analysis. Husserl begins his analysis from what he calls the “transcendental sphere,” the ongoing stream of undifferentiated experience that precedes, and forms the basis for, cognitive intention. Put simply, this is the fact of us being here as perceiving bodies. This world is “given,” and along with it is given the fundamental positioning of Subject and Object, “here” and “there.”² Husserl roots this “founding stratum” in our capacity for sensual experience, writing,

I then find my *animate organism* singled out... the sole Object within my abstract world-stratum to which, in accordance with experience, I ascribe *fields of sensation* (belonging to it, however, in different manners – a field of tactual sensations, a field of warmth and coldness, and so forth), the only Object in which I “*rule and govern*” *immediately*.³

Husserl gets loose with his language here when he refers to “ascribing” fields of sensation. This would imply some conscious act. But his reference to the “immediacy”

² Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1960), 93.

³ *Ibid.*, 97.

of embodiedness in this quote, and his insistence elsewhere on the transcendental ego as “given” in “straightforward experience”⁴ demonstrates that the position of subject, in relation to the world as object, pre-exists the kind of cognitive intentionality involved in ascription. More crucially, this quote demonstrates that the givenness of the transcendental sphere emanates from the fact of embodiment. In other words, we don’t make ourselves the Subject; the experience of subjecthood is *given* by our embodied positioning.

Because the embodied transcendental ego cannot experience more than one “here” at a time, Husserl’s phenomenology roots objective knowledge – certainty of reality – in human interaction. He writes,

*The intrinsically first other (the first “non-Ego”) is the other Ego. And the other Ego makes constitutionally possible a new infinite domain of what is “other”: an Objective Nature and a whole Objective world, to which all other Egos and myself belong... In this world all Egos again present themselves, but in Objectivating apperception with the sense “men” or “psychophysical men as worldly Objects.”*⁵

To simplify Husserl’s formula here: we form objective knowledge of the world only insofar as we experience the world as “there” for ourselves *and others*. But of course, this requires that we have the experience of “the other ego” available to us in the first instance – in precognitive givenness. Here, the abovementioned process of “Objectivating apperception” is essential. Husserl uses the term “apperception” to signify a kind of knowledge that is given, but not in the sense of the given transcendental ego. When we see a house, for example, our experience of embodiment and space makes it given to us that the house does not simply have the front side we

⁴ Ibid., 95.

⁵ Ibid., 107.

see, but also other sides we cannot see. This is given by the nature of three-dimensional space.⁶ Similarly, because we have a given sense of experiencing as embodied beings, we make the apperceptive leap that the other body standing in front of us also experiences the world *as* we do, but from “over there.”⁷ This is not a one-time leap, but rather is confirmed for us every time we experience an animate organism that acts as if they experience the world the way we do. Husserl calls this “verification.” It is the means by which we continuously confirm the validity of our apperception.⁸

In the community of egos, we escape phenomenological solipsism; the world does not only exist for us, but also for others, “over there.” In this shared world we can form objective knowledge because others are there to verify for us our experience. Indeed, this process “is repeated, *mutatis mutandis*, in the case of subsequently constituted mundanities of the concrete Objective world as it always exists for us: namely, as the world of men and culture.”⁹ The existence of everything given in sense experience finds its confirmation in this verification. The objective world of both space and abstraction is thus the constantly emerging consensus – built in verification among egos – about the meaning of sense experience.

This account ostensibly provides a full articulation of the nature of “being” in the world. But Husserl’s phenomenology has not gone untouched. In a piece with particular relevance to this work, Lisa Guenther extends Husserlian analysis to the context of solitary confinement. In solitary, she notes, prisoners report a sense of derealization in which they cannot determine whether their sense experience is

⁶ Ibid., 109.

⁷ Ibid., 111.

⁸ Ibid., 114.

⁹ Ibid., 125.

correlated to their environment.¹⁰ In explaining this phenomenon, Guenther turns Husserl's intersubjectivity against the formation of the basic ego, which for Husserl was given. Guenther argues that our sense of self as an objectively real "person," as well as our sense of experience as "reality," only emerges in the community of egos. If isolated we lose the verification of our subject-position as "real."¹¹ The result is a world that appears at once as both hallucination and real. In other words, where Husserl assumes the stability of the ego as the basis for experience, Guenther suggest that the ego "happens," but that the stability of that happening is not socially contingent.

Guenther would no doubt accept that the primordial ego emerges from embodied experience. But her application of Husserl demonstrates that the coherence of the ego's perception, and the reality of the position of a perceiving "Subject," both emerge only in the context of verification amongst other egos. In plainer terms, this means "I," and the other as an "I," is a possibility given by my perceiving, but only becomes a stable reality in a community of other egos. This indicates that any theory of subjectivity must not only account for how beings form objective knowledge of the spatial world alone, but also how beings *socially* form a sense of self.

Where Husserl and Guenther both fail, however, is in explaining the nature of social mediation. Husserl refers to the interaction of individuals as the basis for forming both spatial and abstract concepts. And Guenther demonstrates that this embodied interaction is crucial in forming a sense of the ego as real. But neither adequately theorizes the nature of human interaction, or how the sense of self gains stability in that interaction. In order to better understand subjectivity, then, and to

¹⁰ Lisa Guenther, "Subjects Without a World? An Husserlian Analysis of Solitary Confinement," *Human Studies* 34 no. 3 (2011): 258.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 266.

understand living death as something that happens to personhood, it is necessary to understand more rigorously the nature of social mediation.

III. Social Mediation of Personhood

The above arguments should indicate that a phenomenological analysis of social mediation must concern at least two dimensions: the physical and the abstract. The physical, on the one hand, must be an object of this analysis because in Husserlian phenomenology we find others in the physical world. At that level we constitute the basic sense of the *alter ego*, which is itself a necessary condition for a community in which social mediation takes place. This analysis also considers the physical because lived experience takes place in the physical realm. Our bodies are subject to cold, pleasure, pain, etc. These sensations first arise as undifferentiated experience at the transcendental level and thus constitute the raw material of abstractions.

The abstract world, on the other hand, is the world of meaning. The abstract world, from the perspective of this theory, is where the fact of experience is given meaning as something other than hallucination, where we confirm that the fact of experience is a fact for others too. The abstract world is also where we make meaning of the color of our skin, our sexual urges, our physical anatomy, our geo-spatial location – the data given in transcendental experience. And as we have already seen, this abstract world only emerges *among* egos.

In Husserl's spatial world we communicate with each other by sensible action. I *see* the other as an embodied animate organism, and then by analogizing apperception I constitute them within myself as an *alter ego*. Those egos can then confirm my experience of the spatial world as Objective. But in the abstract world, we must rely on some other means, as concepts do not necessarily have a physical counterpart. This is not to suggest that abstractions emerge from nothing – indeed they do emerge from

experiences in the sensory world, but the meaning of some experiences do not find confirmation in the physical. For example, our concept of cruelty may be prompted by physical experience, but the connotations of that word, the various possible boundaries of what constitutes cruelty, are formed in abstraction.

This obviously raises crucial questions: first, if abstract concepts do not gain meaning in correspondence to reality, then from where does their meaning emerge? And if personhood is a socially mediated abstraction, and social mediation does not always find verification in correspondence to spatial experience, then *how* do we arrive at consensus about our sense of self?

The answer lies in language, for by no other means do humans form abstract concepts for themselves and share them with others. In order to better understand mediation in language, I turn to Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein's theory is particularly salient because both he and Husserl reject the pre-existence of objective reality. Put in simple terms, Husserl says objectivity emerges as a consensus, not as something reason must find. Wittgenstein similarly rejects the notion that language exists to "name" things in nature.¹² Objectivity, for Husserl, and meaning, for Wittgenstein, emerge out of social intercourse.

Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* begins with an articulation of the representational concept of language. He writes that in this view of language, objects are given names in "ostensive definition." Ostensive definition proceeds by either literal or figurative "pointing"; I point at a chair and inform someone that "that" is called a "chair." From the representational perspective, this is the origin of meaning, naming the objects of the world. Later, and by repeated ostensive definition, we are

¹² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), section 28.

taught the “names” of objects such that we can use those names in future reference. The “pointing” reveals a correspondence between name and object that becomes the basis of future uses.¹³

The problem for Wittgenstein with this explanation of where words get their meaning is that it institutes a constant deferral of meaning. Wittgenstein gives an example of “naming” the abstract concept of numbers. He writes that in naming the number “two,” I might point at two peanuts on a table and say “that is two.” The difficulty in this ostensive definition is that it presumes the listener will always be able to grasp the intention of the definer in defining. The listener might suppose that “two” refers to the specific grouping of nuts, or is the name given to nuts in general, etc.¹⁴ In other words, “ostensive definition can be variously interpreted in *every* case.”¹⁵ Even the very words we might use to clarify the explanation are themselves subject to interpretation. In other words, we can never reach a totalizing definition that is not subject to misunderstanding or various interpretations.¹⁶

In place of this understanding of language Wittgenstein argues for a use-based understanding of meaning. He argues we learn to use words in certain ways by seeing others doing so, and the meaning we learn is that usage. One particularly salient example Wittgenstein employs to explain use-meaning is in defining a color by using a pre-determined sample of color as a reference point. He writes,

This sample is an instrument of the language used in ascriptions of color. In this language-game it is not something that is represented, but is a means of representation... this gives this object a role in our language-game; it is now a *means* of representation... What looks as if it *had* to

¹³ Ibid., section 28.

¹⁴ Ibid.,

¹⁵ Ibid.,

¹⁶ Ibid, section 29.

exist, is part of the language. It is a paradigm in our language-game; something with which comparison is made.¹⁷

The color sample has the meaning of an authoritative sample simply because we say it does. That is, the sample of color is only efficacious in defining what is meant by “X color” because we make it so. In use we imbue that sample with authoritative meaning as the governing rule, and in doing so determine, roughly, the kinds of things that will qualify as that color. I say roughly because even this definition will remain subject to interpretation. Is something close to that sample in color the same color? What amount of deviation from the sample would qualify the color in question as something else? Wittgenstein recognizes this as actually fundamental to the nature of meaning: there are no clear boundaries of what is, and is not, within the definition. Only because the object to be defined shares enough characteristics with other objects we have previously accepted as “X color” do we accept the new one as “X color” also.¹⁸

In this theory of language we gain significant insight into the nature of social mediation of abstract concepts. Abstractions do not have a necessary correspondence to reality, but rather gain their meaning in the linguistic community’s use of them in a given way. Thus, “death” as a concept does not mean “cessation of biological functioning” because that is what death is in the physical world. Rather, it gains that meaning because in previous usage the linguistic community has used it that way. The “rule” that governs this usage is the very usage that purports to reflect the rule.

¹⁷ Ibid., section 50.

¹⁸ Ibid., section 65.

This would seem to imply that “changing” the meaning of a term like “death,” or the various notions of personhood we ascribe to embodied existence, would be as simple as choosing to use those words differently. But we must remember that just as our spatial experience of the world is subject to verification by other egos, so too is the definitional work we do in language usage. I might say that death transcends the biological, but the broader linguistic community may reject this usage either as not corresponding to the “rule” of correspondence to the cessation of biological functioning – if in fact they believe language to require correspondence to reality – or else they might simply reject my utterance as “not the way we use that word.”

Now consider this in relation to the extension of Husserl I offered above. Experience at the level of the transcendental ego is an ontic fact; the primordial sphere constitutes the *possibility* of making meaning. The kinds of meaning we make – both spatial and abstract – are always subject to the community of egos in their verification. Social mediation takes place in language and is always circumscribed in its verifiability by the rough boundary of consensus, “the way we use things.” Thus, the possibility of making a statement like, “I am free,” *as meaningful*, is subject to the linguistic community’s verification. One individual’s judgment – the meaning they make of their embodied experience – is not *necessarily* “sayable.” Certain conditions must obtain for that utterance to be, in fact, meaningful.

IV. The Whip and the Word

A. The Word

This extension of Husserl and Guenther by way of Wittgenstein makes clearer how one might experience a kind of living death. If personhood is formed in a social mediation that takes place in language, and if there are antecedent conditions for the sayability of a given utterance, then certain assertions of personhood might not be “sayable.” This becomes particularly stark when we consider the unequal distribution of resources that contribute to forming social institutions. States often dominate the use of force, economic elites hold a majority of scarce resources, and numerous institutions – be they medical, legal or academic – function to regulate and determine the kinds of intellectual work worth supporting. This list is not meant to be exhaustive in its description of the social; rather, it serves to highlight that the consensus I have thus far theorized may not come from an ideal Husserlian community of egos contributing equal judgment to forming the Objective abstract world.

In order to better understand consensus formation in an unequal world, and the effects such social mediation has on personhood, I turn to a seminal piece of primary literature on domination in the modern era: *Black Skins, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon’s work on the post-colonial condition of the black man.

Fanon’s work in *Black Skins* resonates on a number of levels with the theory I have articulated above. *Black Skins* is itself a work of phenomenology – Fanon is primarily concerned with articulating the lived experience of black individuals. Just as Husserl begins with the primordial ego as the basis for a phenomenological account of

the world, so too does Fanon declare the primacy of the ego: “I am my own foundation.”¹⁹ Even more crucially, just as the ontic fact of being for Husserl constitutes the *possibility* of making objective meaning of the world, Fanon identifies his own existence as an anxiety “to uncover the meaning of things” and refers to his soul as “desirous to be at the origin of the world.”²⁰ Taken together we can understand both Husserl and Fanon to regard humanity as arising from a foundational egohood that prompts the possibility of forming the world. On the basis of these theoretical commitments, Fanon articulates the lived experience of the black man in the post-colonial world as fundamentally “missing” some part of full personhood.

According to Fanon, “essential” to understanding the experience of the black man is an understanding of language. He writes that to speak is something more than to simply communicate, it is, to “assum[e] a culture and bear[] the weight of a civilization,” to “possess as an indirect consequence the world expressed and implied by this language.”²¹ Where this point becomes crucial, for Fanon, is in the encounter between the black man and the white colonialist. The white man judges the black man’s skin to be a mark of inferiority. Further, he judges his whole nation, language and culture to be inferior and backwards. On the basis of those judgments the colonizer institutes a program of forced assimilation that has as an essential element the proclamation of French as the official language.²²

To speak French is to receive and reinstitute the French linguistic community’s status quo of possible significations as the range of possible ways of structuring the

¹⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1952), 205.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²² Malika Rebai Maamri, “The Syndrome of the French Language in Algeria,” *International Journal of Arts and Sciences* 3 no.3 (2009): 77-89.

world. It is, in Fanon's words, to bear the weight of the French civilization. Or, more radically, it is to *see* a French world. Consider again the color swatch against which all other colors were judged. Wittgenstein showed that the sample was *imbued* with authority and became a means of representing. It was not so before the signifying practice; it was simply sense data. Similarly, speaking French *imbues* the world-object with certain possible meanings, circumscribing what kinds of meaningful experience the ego can form there. But the black man's skin is too an element of sense experience in the world. The black man's skin is in fact one of the central *judged* sense experiences of colonial domination. To institute a language, and thus a world, in which black skin signifies inferiority is to institute in the colonized's world the connection between blackness and inferiority. It is to produce a world in which blackness is meaningful *as* inferiority.

Fanon reinforces the connection between linguistic imposition and the constitution of a meaningful world in his discussion of "pidgin." He uses the term to reference the "child-like" way white people speak to the black man in the post-colonial world. In "speaking down" to the black man as if he were inferior, Fanon writes, the white man conveys a clear message: "you stay where you are."²³ Even more forcefully, pidgin "imprison[s] him at an uncivilized and primitive level"²⁴; it "imprison[s] him as the eternal victim of his own essence, of a visible appearance for which he is not responsible."²⁵ The effects of this transcend simply speaking. It should be clear from the above quotes that Fanon *feels* the weight of the black skin = inferiority connection in the French language, and that he *feels* the effects of that connotation in the mind of

²³ Fanon, *Black Skins*, 17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

the white man. Put simply, because Fanon is excluded from socially mediating a central fact of his existence – his race – he feels limited at the level of ontology in his personhood. His humanity is constrained and “imprisoned.”

My reading of Fanon thus far has been concerned with the social mediation of the self among the community of egos; in Husserlian terms, my reading is concerned with the production of the Objective world. That analysis has presumed that the givenness of sense data remains intact, that the black man meets the colonial consensus with an inferiority *felt* at the level of personhood, but not at the level of the primordial Ego. Fanon, however, calls this separation into question in two contrasting passages that I reproduce here.

I know that if I want to smoke, I shall have to stretch out my right arm and grab the pack of cigarettes lying at the other end of the table.... I make all these moves, not out of habit, but by implicit knowledge. A slow construction of my self as a body in a spatial and temporal world – such seems to be the schema.

[...]

Beneath the body schema I had created a historical-racial schema. The data I used were provided not by “remnants of feelings and notions of the tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, or visual nature” but by the Other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories.²⁶

In the first paragraph Fanon articulates the givenness of the embodied experience, what I have above called the transcendental ego. Knowledge of the spatial world is “implicit” and given by the nature of a body in space. But in encountering the colonial world this implicit knowledge is confronted with another schema, one not rooted in the given data of embodied experience but in imposed meanings, the “details, anecdotes, and stories” of the white colonizer. What this passage suggests is that the

²⁶ Ibid., 90-91.

effect of colonial signifying practices threatens the transfer of embodied experience to the world of meaning. If Fanon confronts his skin not as the source of experience but as an already-determined object in the world, he has lost one element of the connection out of which personhood is born. His body is not only the raw source of abstract personhood, but also the object of another's signifying. He arrives at his body as an already determined object, not a raw experience presenting itself as the possibility of making meaning. Thus, not only do colonial signifying practices deny the black man participation in social mediation of personhood – vis-à-vis the black man's black skin – but also undermine the very connection of embodied existence *to* that process of social mediation. This dual denial of access to social mediation of personhood is a living death. This I call the Word. These are the discursive dimensions of a death that transcends the biological.

B. The Whip

Before we move on to theorizing the possibility of resistance to the Word, I must recognize an element of my account that is thus far lacking. The story I have told about colonial linguistic imposition presumed that the French language was seamlessly integrated into the signifying practices of the colonized people. This is not only an over-simplification on a gross scale, but also misses a major component of the forms of domination I here wish to analyze: force differential. To illustrate the necessity of theorizing force differential, consider again the original colonial encounter. The colonizer invades the native land in hopes of extracting both capital and human

resources. He tells the native population that they are inferior, and must submit to colonial rule due to their inferiority. In my previous telling, this judgment of inferiority obtains in the French language and is imposed *as* language on the natives. But clearly no people would simply accept such a proposition. They have their own language in which their own skin/religion/nationality do *not* signify inferiority. The world is not already prefigured for them as a world in which they are inferior. So I must account for how one “consensus” can become the dominant consensus. In what follows, I will demonstrate that violence – facilitated by the unequal distribution of force resources – gives structuring force to the Word. In other words, I will argue that without violence, the Word cannot produce a “consensus.” While some scholars, including Fanon, have made this claim in a practical sense – the sense that one can literally force another to accept your signifying practice or die – this does not capture the radical effect of violence on subjectivity. So where others would point to violence as a kind of restrictive enforcement, this analysis seeks to demonstrate that violence actually *produces* a compliant ontology.

In order to better understand the relationship of violence to the enforcement of certain signifying practices and the creation of compliance, I turn to another account of colonial domination, Mahmoud Darwish’s *Memory for Forgetfulness*. Darwish’s work is particularly salient here because, like *Black Skin, White Masks*, the text is a firsthand account. From such an account we can better understand the experience of personhood produced under the Whip and the Word.

The siege of Lebanon began in June of 1982 and continued almost entirely unbroken for two months. Jets dropped bombs, naval ships launched artillery, and

tanks and mortars filled in the gaps with their explosive payloads.²⁷ Under siege were the Palestinian refugees of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that began in 1967.

Mahmoud Darwish wrote *Memory for Forgetfulness* in this context. The text gives a powerful testimony to the dual role of violence and discourse in producing a living death. Consider the opening passage of the work.

Three o'clock. Daybreak riding on fire... A roaring that chases me out of bed and throws me into this narrow hallway. I want nothing, and I hope for nothing. I can't direct my limbs in this pandemonium... If I only knew – if I knew how to organize the crush of this death that keeps pouring forth. If I only knew how to liberate the screams held back in a body that no longer feels like mine from the sheer effort spent to save itself in this uninterrupted chaos of shells.

Darwish here blends the mode of reportage with the figurative power of poetic language. Artillery marks the beginning of a day that would otherwise begin at the behest of a waking body. The roar of artillery chases Darwish out of bed and into what? Nothingness, paralysis. The oppressive force of the siege collapses a city both literally and figuratively leaving the author unable to even command his body. Crucially, Darwish gives testimony to an inability to “organize” the “crush of death.” The siege interrupts his ability to make meaning of his experience; an interruption of the fundamental capacity of the ego to structure experience as something other than a happening. But why? This is the crucial question we must answer to understand violence and its relation to a living death: why does violence interrupt Darwish’s ability to “organize” experience?

Because violence here happens as physicality, we must look to something other than my theorization of abstract personhood for an answer to these questions. If the

²⁷ Mahmoud Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut, 1982* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 5, footnote 1.

Word represents a kind of discursive violence, here I must seek to understand physical violence. My analysis of Fanon offers some indication of how we might do so.

Consider that in *Black Skins* Fanon articulates a form of alienation from his body as a source of experiential data. He experiences himself as an object because the colonizer has made his body a *means of representation*. What we see in Darwish is a similar alienation, but an alienation that works by a different means. In order to better understand the nature of this interruption of the ego's embodiedness I return to Darwish's words:

The truth of the matter is that I am terrified of falling among the ruins, prey to a moaning no one can hear. And that is painful. Painful to the extent of my feeling the pain as if the event had actually happened. I'm now there, in the rubble. I feel the pain of the animal crushed inside me. I cry out in pain but no one hears me... I feel the pain of an injury that hasn't happened.²⁸

He who dies here does not die by chance. Rather he who lives, lives by chance, because not one span of earth has been spared the rockets and not one spot where you can take a step has been saved from an explosion. But I don't want to die under the rubble. I want to die in the open street.²⁹

What we see in these words is that the violent siege produces an environment where death is both inevitable and anonymous. Darwish walks in a world built by explosions and always subject to them. Buildings fall and take with them a mass of individuals who die anonymously. Life is an accident, a miscalculation in artillery fire that postpones inevitability. There is no articulation of the limbs, no running or hiding, that will save those under siege from a certain death. The author feels his death under rubble before it has happened. He lives his death in each explosion. In other words, Darwish experiences his body not as the possibility of meaningful life, but as the inevitability of death. The fact that Darwish "feels" an injury that has not yet come

²⁸ Ibid., 24.

²⁹ Ibid., 27.

suggests that the siege has displaced his body-schema with a death-schema.

Embodiedness still institutes the ego as the fundamental differentiation of “here” and “there,” but what is out “there” is the inevitable violent end of the “here.” The body still is the source of sense-data, but what that sense-data provides the judging mind is the certainty of death. What was once a source of possibility *feels* to Darwish as the foreclosure of any possibility other than death.

On top of this, Darwish’s lived death is anonymous; he feels himself die under rubble where none can bear witness to his death. But if none can bear witness, then in Husserlian terms, even the individual’s death or life cannot be confirmed as an objective experience in the world. Without a community of other egos, life is lived as sense-experience without objective sense, it is the living-death-hallucination of isolation theorized by Lisa Guenther. Here, life is an accident that does not conform to a world of totalizing violence and death is an ongoing hallucination *felt* as real. How does one know they are living if not in the repeated verification of their embodied experience as real amongst other egos? And if the sense data of embodied experience is an anticipated foreclosure of possibility, then what exactly does the individual constitute in the community of egos other than the reality of their own death? In an ideal Husserlian world, the individual *is* the ego because of embodied existence. But here, under siege, the embodied experience of violence makes death a *lived* feeling and institutes an anonymity that prevents the individual from verifying themselves as a living ego among other egos. This is the living death engendered by the Whip.

I should note here that it is overly simplistic to insist on the descriptive separation of Whip and Word. There is not always a clear physical-abstract distinction.

Consider the *message* of the siege. Just as the whip of a slavemaster carries the implicit message of “stay in your place,” so too does the siege assert something about the nature of Palestinian identity. To use Darwish’s words: “what this steel and these iron beasts are screaming is that no one will be left in peace, and no one will count our dead.”³⁰ And further, the siege carries the message that has been told over and over to the Palestinian in the invasion of their homeland, as Darwish phrases it, “‘you’re aliens here,’ they say to them *there*. ‘You’re aliens here,’ they say to them *here*.”³¹ What this makes clear is that the Whip can itself signify even as it enforces the signifying practices of the Word. To put this in terms of Wittgenstein’s use-theory of meaning, the bombs’ meaning comes from their use as a tool of colonization. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is truly demonstrative of this. The international discourse around Palestinian national identity denies the existence of a Palestinian homeland or history.³² Zionism frames colonization as self-protection and makes such signifying practices the “consensus” with bombs that *institute* the anonymous physical and living death of those who might disagree. The siege makes true the very message its bombs carry: the non-existence of Palestinian sovereignty. Certainly, those who are biologically or ontologically anonymously dead cannot contest the international “consensus” on anything. Thus, the Whip and the Word are mutually constitutive and supportive, even as the exact boundary between the two is blurred in the empirical.

³⁰ Ibid., 24.

³¹ Ibid., 13.

³² Edward Said, “Permission to Narrate,” *Journal of Palestinian Studies* 13, no. 3 (1984): 29. “The inadmissible existence of the Palestinian people whose history, actuality and aspirations, as possessed of a coherent narrative direction pointed towards self-determination, were the object of [the invasion’s] violence.”

The picture I have painted thus far is of the ostensibly totalizing operations of Whip and Word to produce a living death. This analysis has shown that in certain colonial discursive practices the colonized are excluded from the social mediation of their sense of self. Even further, I demonstrated that internalization of those signifying practices led to an alienation of the synthesizing Subject from the sense data it would synthesize. While this does not mean the ego is lost, it means that insofar as the body becomes an *object* of colonial discourse and becomes a *means of representing* colonial conceptions of personhood, the ego is at least in part alienated from sense-experience as authoritative in giving data for the formation of personhood. This analysis has also demonstrated that in violence we see another form of alienation. When violent domination becomes the status quo, then one encounters their body as constantly imperiled, and lives that imperilment as the present anticipation of certain future suffering. Violence thus displaces the temporal certainty of embodied “hereness” with the objectifying futurity of “how here will be dead/injured in the future.”

But is this account totalizing? Can there be resistance to the Whip and the Word? Can there be a reclamation of social life from this social death? It should be clear that the answer must address two differing effects of discursive and physical violence. First, this analysis must address the alienation of the subject from the body. For if embodied existence is the source of the primordial ego, then a reclamation of social life must begin with the body. Second, this analysis must also consider the possibility of disrupting the “consensus.” If abstract notions of personhood are formed in social mediation, and exclusion from participation in that social mediation denies an

individual participation in forming objective knowledge of Self, then it must be in some interruptory practice that reclamation of social life begins.

V. Resistance

A. Embodied Resistance

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon, working as a doctor in Algeria, recorded the development of the Algerian anti-colonial resistance. Fanon writes that internalized domination – the same condition I have delineated above – manifests itself in the colonized as physical pathology. This emerges as bodily spasms³³ and “dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality... jumping, swimming, running, and climbing.”³⁴ What we see here is the body *reacting* to physical domination. There is no intentional choice in muscle spasm or dreaming. In other words, because violence affects the precognitive realm of embodiedness, reactivity emerges in that realm as well. In Husserlian terms, the body *is* the instantiation of the ego. When violence makes the body a site of foreclosure, there is a clear disjuncture between the body’s nature and the empirical world in which it exists. Out of that disjuncture reactivity emerges.

With this understanding we can reconsider any number of expressions of physicality as born of the body’s inherent capacity for reactivity. Consider the following in Darwish,

I want the aroma of coffee. I want nothing more than the aroma of coffee... The aroma of coffee so I can hold myself together, stand on my feet, and be transformed from something that crawls, into a human being.³⁵

³³ Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 19.

³⁴ Fanon, *Wretched*, 15.

³⁵ Darwish, *Memory*, 6.

In the midst of the same siege that felt to him like a living death, that engendered a feeling of paralysis, the body urges Darwish toward transformation to the human in a simple scent. The body resists paralysis, urging reclamation of possibility in individuated sense experience. It draws man back to embodiedness, away from the imposed schema of violence or racism, to the foundational nature of his senses. The scent of coffee is merely the means here; what is important is that this arises in Darwish as an *urge*.

To put this in a modern context, as a journalist I saw a number of prisoners in solitary who engaged in self-harm behaviors. One man in particular cut his wrists, collected the blood in a cup, and poured it over his own head. We need only return to Guenther's analysis of solitary to demonstrate how he faced a condition of physical isolation that might undermine his very sense of reality. Some might read his self-cutting as an indication of a will to end his life. Perhaps. But we might also read his actions as emerging from an urge to retake control of his own body as a site of embodiedness. While the means in this instance differ significantly from the means of Darwish, the body as the site of an urge to resistance is essential. From that perspective one man's self-harm appears not as self-destructive, but as a vital reaction to domination. By means of his own blood he baptizes himself as a human anew.

But what does this baptism achieve, in tangible terms? While the above demonstrates such a reclamation of the body could restore embodiedness as the source of subjectivity, self-harm does not change the distribution of force relations. In other words, in that context, the prisoner still lives in solitary. Addressing this issue, Fanon writes in *The Wretched of the Earth* that the urge of physicality must drive the

colonized to more than awareness of the body; as the colonized feels the urge to physicality, they must channel that urge into violence against the colonizer. This is because, for Fanon, violence is the structuring logic of colonialism. Insofar as colonialism *works* by violence, it is only violent resistance that can overthrow the colonizer.³⁶

The benefit of the Husserlian analysis I have thus far articulated is that it offers another possibility. While violence may be a natural reaction to violent domination, it need not be the only reaction. If the ontological problem of violence is that it affects a kind of alienation from the body as the basis for personhood-formation, then reclamation of embodiedness *by any means* is sufficient.

One might take issue with this conception of resistance as intensely individualistic. Indeed, if resistance consists in restoring the body as basis for volitional physical and mental activity, then one might see freedom as nothing more than the ability to exercise the will. But this interpretation misses the actual operation of both domination and resistance. What is denied in the anonymous living death of those subject to siege is the fundamental ability to be an ego *among other egos*. A compliant anonymous ontology must also be an asocial ontology. For in the social lies the possibility of contestation of the status quo. Maintenance of colonial power requires the elimination of that possibility. And so what Darwish regains in his resistance to the siege is not only his ability to exercise the individual will, but also individual egohood as a *means* to participate in the social. Resistance thus aims itself towards the freedom to be a social creature, whereas domination aims towards anonymous individualization.

³⁶ Fanon, *Wretched*, 23.

In this sense we can read Darwish's making coffee as a restoration of his egohood – born of the reactive urge to reclaim the body – even as the allocation of force relations remains the same. This is a different kind of resistive practice – while Darwish does not contest the siege per se, he resists the compliant ontology of anonymous living death the siege would produce in him. Acting from a simple urge he reclaims what the siege would steal: the possibility of human sociality. For if in the reactive urge Darwish restores the possibility of engaging in the social, then he also begins a restoration of his ability to contest the signifying practices that undergird and legitimate the siege: the denial of Palestinian history, homeland, and political status. The existence of *Memory for Forgetfulness* is testimony to this possibility. In other words, while Darwish *might* react against the siege in violence, he might also resist in the social realm of the Word. To this I turn in the next section.

B. Discursive Resistance

The prompt for this work was a man in solitary who proclaimed his ostensibly impossible freedom. I sought to understand that freedom and in pursuit of that understanding it became necessary to theorize subjectivity (life), and its counterpart in a living death. Both Guenther and Husserl's spatially focused analysis cannot adequately account for Zulu's declaration of freedom, as his spatial conditions remained largely the same for over 35 years. In other words, the domination he suffered – and conversely the kind of freedom he obtained – must have transcended the spatial. When I asked Zulu about how he could be free, he told me about letters he

wrote to people in Spain, England, and elsewhere. He said he had “been” to these places, and thus was free from the walls around him.

I want to use the preceding analysis to analyze this assertion and its relationship to freedom on two different levels. On the one hand, Zulu’s letter writing is not particularly difficult to understand. Participation in social mediation of the self, and in the formation of the objective world more broadly, takes place in language. Zulu’s writing could thus be understood as a refusal to relinquish participation in the linguistic community. In that writing, he reclaimed his ability to participate as a member of the speaking community, and by extension his ability to participate in defining the meaning of his own personhood. From this perspective his writing letters and his claim of freedom appear as part and parcel of the fundamental human activity of speaking. But these two things are in fact quite different. Zulu’s usage of the word “free” in the context of physical domination and isolation appeared to me as odd. That oddness signals a disjuncture between the sayable and something said: respectively, my understanding of what “freedom” could mean, and Zulu’s assertion that he was in fact free. Zulu was, in essence, saying nonsense. He was using a word in a way that did not have meaning in accordance with the speaking community’s consensus of how one uses “freedom.” This next section will take as its aim understanding this nonsense and its relationship to resistance.

i. Figurative Language in Discursive Resistance

Language makes meaning of the world by drawing temporary and contingent boundaries, by grouping and excluding. By necessity something is left outside of this boundary.³⁷ But what if the boundary that is drawn appears to someone to be incorrect? For example, Fanon encounters a world in which the meaning of his black skin is inferiority; his response is to react by yelling “fuck you” to those who employ that definition.³⁸ This reaction is analogous to the reactivity of those subject to physical violence. It is the subjective sense that the status quo in language is “not right.” Just as reactivity to physical domination emerges from the disjuncture between the physical body’s nature as possibility and domination’s foreclosure of that possibility, so too does Fanon’s reactive “fuck you” emerge from a disjuncture between Fanon’s felt experience and the structuring of that experience given in language.

What this reaction prompts is consciousness of the disjuncture between the “way things are,” the circumscribing consensus of the linguistic community regarding a given meaning, and the subjectively felt “way things ought to be.” This is more radical than it at first appears. To see such a disjuncture is to see a kind of possibility. This is not to say that one actually knows “the way things ought to be,” only that one is prompted to awareness of the meaning-boundary and its intrinsic inadequacy. In that inadequacy is also the possibility of positing a new boundary. Out of the consciousness of a boundary’s inadequacy might emerge an utterance that contests the consensus.

³⁷ Fanon, *Black Skins*, 94.

What this suggests is that inherent to language is a kind of constant destabilization or degradation of consensus. Because language is always the drawing of temporary boundaries, there is always a fundamental incompleteness that threatens to make itself known in a felt disjuncture. In his seminal text on aesthetics, *Poetry, Language and Thought*, Martin Heidegger argues that this space of disjuncture is itself the source of a form of “truth” that finds its truest manifestation in poetry. He writes,

It is due to art’s poetic nature that, in the midst of what is, art breaks open an open place, in whose openness everything is other than usual... What poetry, as illuminating projection, unfolds of unconcealment and projects ahead into the design of the future, is the Open which poetry lets happen, and indeed in such a way that only now, in the midst of beings, the Open brings beings to shine and ring out.³⁹

What Heidegger here refers to as “what is,” I have elsewhere called the status quo in the linguistic community. “What is” is that which is discernible due to its having been imbued with meaning by a common usage. Crucially, the poetic word for Heidegger opens a space in this “what is” for what has previously been concealed, or unsayable. In other words, the poetic word manifests that which is felt but “is” not in the sense of the field of possibilities. The poetic word does not necessarily imbue “what is” with a new meaning, but makes possible other use-meanings. This is due to the figurative nature of poetry. Other forms of language, such as reportage, are constrained by the requirement of needing to make sense, to conform to standard usage. Poetry, on the other hand, is free from this constraint and can make use of words in a fashion that does not have immediate meaning in the Wittgensteinian sense of use-value. The poetic reinstates the conflict that inheres in social mediation by breaking up the givenness of

³⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language and Thought* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers: 2013), 70.

meaning in the community of egos. The poetic word is thus the institution of possibility, the present articulation of the “design of the future.”

In order to more clearly demonstrate the nature of figurative language and its relationship to the signifying consensus, I turn here to a book of poetry written by Iranian poet Solmaz Sharif. I choose Sharif’s work because it has direct relevance to the kind of domination I have analyzed. In *Look*, her 2016 collection of poetry, Sharif writes around the current war on terror, both at home and abroad. I say she writes around the war on terror because it would be incongruous with my above theory to say she *means* a specific thing with her work. Nonetheless, it is clear that Sharif’s work speaks to the way language is complicit in waging war.

Her text begins with a juxtaposition that situates the work in the non-literal mode. The first page offers a definition of the book’s title, “look”:

look – “(*) In mine warfare, a period during which a mine circuit is receptive of an influence.

Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms

United States Department of Defense⁴⁰

What Sharif here gestures to is the definitional mode; the mode in which language *has* a definition that can be written and codified in institutional record. In other words, the mode of foreclosed linguistic possibility in authoritative consensus. Throughout the text Sharif makes explicit usage of this and other terms found in the *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, but at times does so in a way that breaks

⁴⁰ Solmaz Sharif, *Look* (Minneapolis: Gray Wolf Press, 2016), 1.

from “standard” usage. This is the juxtaposition of definitional-use and poetic-use.

Consider the following:

The enlarged ID photo above her mantel
means I can know Amoo,
my dear COLLATERAL DAMAGE,

as only a state or school might do.⁴¹

The text evokes a dichotomy of the intimate and impersonal. The ID photo is a provocative place to begin, as it represents both the institutional and the personal. Institutional insofar as schools and states make use of that format, and personal insofar as the format itself is meant to function as an identifier for an individual. But enlarged and placed over a mantel, the ID photo serves a role it was never meant to, the intimate representation of an individual. The speaker can now “know” the photographed individual, “Amoo,” meaning uncle, who is also “COLLATERAL DAMAGE.” This creates a juxtaposition of the intimacy of a term of endearment and the adorative “dear” against the military classification of casualties.

In this usage, the stability of “COLLATERAL DAMAGE” as a signifier is endangered, as its use-meaning of impersonal identification is implicated by the dearness of the intimate relationship. This is not to suggest that the term ceases to have its meaning as given in the DOD *Dictionary*, but that its usage in the poetic mode opens up a space of possibility. Where institutional and social forces might tend toward

⁴¹ Sharif, *Look*, 68.

the foreclosure of possibility in making meaning, the poetic word escapes the necessity of signifying in the terms of consensus, and thus *becomes* possibility. This possibility, this “breaking open,” makes possible an interrogation of the underlying logic of human identification that governs the definition of “COLLATERAL DAMAGE.” Thus, Sharif’s poetic word “breaks open” the infusion of innocent death with meaning and reinagurates the possibility of structuring that experience in a different fashion, with different meaning.

Where this becomes particularly striking is when we consider the broader linguistic practices around the war on terror. As Talal Asad has shown, the war gains some element of legitimacy through certain definitional moves. Specifically, Asad writes that the terrorist/soldier and state/terror-group dichotomies undergird a broader “just war” narrative used by officials in discussing operations. Classifying an individual as a “terrorist” legitimates in public opinion and the law certain kinds of violence that would otherwise be seen as abhorrent.⁴²

One need not stretch the imagination to see that classifying civilian casualties as “collateral damage” has a similar effect in framing ongoing operations like targeted missile strikes. As the above analysis has shown, such a definitional move has the effect of actually structuring the kinds of meaning we make of the world—in this case, the kind of meaning we make of an innocent’s death. What Sharif’s usage of the term “collateral damage” does, by destabilizing the efficacy of this sign-signified relationship, is create an interruption in that term’s ability to structure experience. Intimacy invades “collateral damage’s” intended meaning and institutes the possibility

⁴² Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 16, 22.

of literally seeing something else there. This is an interruption in a signifying economy that makes palatable the kinds of violence involved in the war on terror. It is, in essence, an interruption in the dominance of the Word.

ii. Zulu's Poetic Word

As I noted above, we can undoubtedly say that Zulu's letter writing is a kind of reclamation of social mediation; by writing to others, engaging in speaking acts, he participates in the linguistic exchange fundamental to structuring the raw data of sense experience. My concern in understanding the domination of the Word, however, was two-fold. On the one hand, to be prevented from writing letters, or speaking, is to be denied access to social mediation. Clearly Kenny has retained this capability to some extent.

But I also showed that the linguistic practices *themselves* are a kind of domination, insofar as past usages structure the kinds of meaningful experience we can have. From this perspective, it is clear that for Zulu the received understandings of "life" and "death" are themselves an operation of power. If we conceive of life in biological terms, then when confronted with a man held in solitary for years, but provided with the necessities of biological sustenance, we might be tempted to say his "living" remains untouched. What this analysis attempts to do, then, is to counter this definitional assumption. The above should demonstrate that meaningful "life" transcends the biological, and requires 1) participation in the social mediation of self, and 2) the preservation of the body as a site of possibility via sense experience.

So let us once again consider the simple phrase, “I am free.” At the time that phrase appeared to me as nonsensical. Bound by chains and walls for 23 hours a day, Zulu’s condition certainly did not fall under my received definition of “free.” For the very reason that Zulu’s words seemed to be nonsense, they were poetic. That phrase “broke open” the stability of “free” as a signifier, and in doing so made “seeable” the entirety of what I have found in this project. Out of a simple utterance that transcended the literally-sayable emerged this investigation of what it means to “be,” what it means to “live,” and finally what it means to be “free.” Zulu’s words, whether intentional or not, had the radical effect of opening the possibility of a new structuring of experience. If we accept that possibility as the fundamental condition of humanity, then Zulu’s words can be read as both resistant to the foreclosure of meaning and as a reclamation of the possibility of possibility, a reclamation of humanity.

iii. Poetry in Society

Zulu is the lucky one, however. His paradoxical freedom is the object of this analysis, but it would be bad faith to say his case is the norm. Hundreds of thousands still suffer in solitary confinement. One need look no further than Guenther’s analysis of solitary to see that many have not escaped alienation from basic personhood. So too do many still suffer the legacies of slavery and institutional racism. Unarmed black people die at the hands of the state on the streets of Ferguson, Chicago, Baltimore and beyond. Their blackness perhaps precludes public mourning, a fact that prompts a radically simple and profound cry, “black lives matter.” In the West Bank and beyond,

Palestinians live the political and ontological half-life of the constant refugee. In Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen, Somalia and elsewhere civilians die under the moniker of “collateral damage,” and so too escape mourning by the citizens of the state responsible for their death.

So what good is Zulu’s freedom or Darwish’s reclamation of the body? The cell and the siege remain. Must we now embrace Fanon’s call to violent overthrow of the master, if this resistance is not to be a resistance for only the individual, if freedom is to be a social condition, not a temporary instance of a resistant ontology? In order to answer that question we must recognize how these institutions of domination function. They *work* by violent and discursive means, yes, but in many societies, especially a democratic one like ours, they are built on tacit consent. Just as the legitimacy of a given utterance is mediated in the community of egos, so too is the legitimacy of the distribution of physical and linguistic resources.

The problem of this legitimacy arises when we consider that most people never level an opinion at all. In literal and figurative terms, we don’t vote. Courts rule that solitary “isn’t cruel,” militaries determine that some deaths are “collateral damage,” the death of a black man at the hands of a police officer goes largely unchallenged as a “reasonable use of force.” These are assertions made by those who hold power resources, and the silence that often meets those assertions – either because of laziness or forced compliance – is itself essential in reproducing the distribution of those power resources. That silence gives legitimacy to what Ranciere identified as the central refrain of the powerful, “nothing to see here.”⁴³

⁴³ Jacques Ranciere, *Dis-agreement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 29.

It is against this silence that Fanon, Darwish and Zulu reject anonymity. They demand the humanity of the social as a *means* to a very specific end. Where oppression would ask for legitimacy in tacit acceptance of social structures like war, prisons and colonial empire, these dissenting voices – and dissenting physicalities – would call *us* back into the primordial moment of judging the world among others, with others. When Fanon writes in the end of *Black Skins* that the key to saving himself is the restoration of the other, this is what he means. That only in the poetic utterance, the call away from the individualized anonymity of the modern condition into the open of art – back into the community of egos who exercise their judging capacity – can we have the possibility of a world that does not produce a living death. For only then can we possibly *see* suffering as suffering, as opposed to Ranciere’s “nothing.” Only then can there be a freedom of the individual that is also an obligation to the other. Only then can we retain our humanity.

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