

Race as Phenomena

*Between Phenomenology
and Philosophy of Race*

Edited by
Emily S. Lee

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Contents

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Chapter Seven

A Phenomenology of Seeing and Affect in a Polarized Climate

Emily S. Lee

Since the election of Donald Trump to the presidency in 2016, it has been very difficult for me not to be afraid of him and his supporters. It has been very difficult not to demonize him and his supporters. I have begun simply to dismiss his supporters out of hand. But this is contrary to my usual belief system. I was reminded of my belief system while reading Krista Tippett's book *Becoming Wise: An Inquiry into the Mystery and Art of Living*. Tippett quotes Frances Kissling, the longtime head of Catholics for Choice. Kissling states, "The polarization that exists on the abortion issue, in which people have called each other names and demonized each other for decades, definitely speaks against any level of truth that enables people to come to some commonality."¹ Kissling continues to cite Sidney Callahan, a longtime pro-life advocate, who states that "the hallmark of a civil debate is when you can acknowledge that which is good in the position of the person you disagree with."²

As much as I agree with these ideas theoretically, I find it incredibly difficult to practice in regard to Trump supporters, who include members of my family. I am not referring to the outright white supremacist, alt-right group members who support Trump. I refer to all those who voted Trump into office and do not consider themselves white supremacists, such as the Asian American members of my family who are also members of Californians for Trump. So I find myself not living up to my ideals; I find myself thinking about such Trump supporters in dismissive if not demonizing terms. I realize that many of the Trump supporters only see the poor and immigrants in thoroughly negative terms: as criminals, as opportunists, perhaps even as simply lazy people seeking state handouts. The question of race functions

here because as Trump himself stated, he welcomes immigrants from Norway and those areas of the world. I aim to encourage Trump supporters to see otherwise about visibly specific immigrant populations, especially asylum seekers and refugees, because such Trump supporters are members of my family with whom I share holidays, because such Trump supporters make up part of the community who informs my child's development. The political is personal. I aim to facilitate my ability not to see Trump supporters in dismissive, demonizing ways, in order to live up to my ideals so gracefully recalled by Tippett's work.

I trace the parameters to this possibility of perceiving otherwise within Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, especially his last work, *The Visible and the Invisible*. Merleau-Ponty locates the possibility of seeing differently within the chiasmatic relation between the visible and the invisible. Although he emphasizes the role of the world and the situations one finds oneself in, he also implicates the subject in this moment. In this interstice, I focus on the function of affect, mood, or emotion because so much of the reaction surrounding the Trump presidency is emotionally laden. Kym Macclaren's, David Kim's, and Alia Al-Saji's work repositions emotion in the interstice between the subject and the world—this interstice, I argue, is between the visible and the invisible. I explore this interstice in order to explore the possibility of perceiving otherwise about others, especially others with whom I disagree.

THE FUNCTION OF VISIBILITY IN CONCERNS OF RACE

Racism hinges on the visible features of the body.³ Through the visible differences of the body, one conjectures about the invisible differences of the person. Yet human bodies have visibly similar features as well as visibly different features. Racism and sexism highlight certain features. Certain body features are made visibly prominent; they are made to appear *natural*. But Merleau-Ponty writes, every individual is responsible for every instantiation of the accepted belief. Every interaction and experience is an opportunity to affirm or to deny a shared belief. As Merleau-Ponty writes, a naturalized knowledge "is not an inert mass in the depths of our consciousness . . . what is acquired is truly acquired only if it is taken up again in a fresh momentum of thought."⁴ One engages in recalling, beckoning, and focusing on such body features. Pointing to the naturalized status of the visibly different body features does not suffice; individual acceptance, individual involvement, matters.

Race functions in the visible. As such, I focus on perceiving, not thinking, differently. As a phenomenologist, I have long accepted that changes in perception do not begin in thought but originate somewhere in my engage-

ment with the world. It is not because I think that therefore I see. The relation between perception and thought is more complex, and the world plays a role. In regard to the divide that the United States is experiencing currently between Trump supporters and his opponents, logic and argument do not play a prominent role in persuading the opposing side. The two camps appear to work within two very different frameworks, with each framework following its own logic. The situation reminds me of Friedrich Nietzsche and his position that affective states—emotion, desire, and mood—influence thought. In a rather binary structure, Nietzsche (more or less) prioritizes affect's influence on thought. I am not sure I follow him. As a phenomenologist, I adhere to a more relational and contextual understanding of forces or motivations, particularly for perception. Hence, without reneging all the influence of thought and ideas, but considering the present circumstances around the Trump presidency where the role of arguments clearly falters, I explore the relation between affect and perception. To see otherwise about visibly different body features requires attentiveness to affective states.

Alia Al-Saji's work following Frantz Fanon has already definitively established and explored this relation between affect and perception in the context of race. Al-Saji writes,

Though affect is pre-intentional, on the phenomenological account, it can provide the motivating and material support for the projective intentionality of racializing perception, and is hence implicated in naturalizing its reactive directionality. Affect and perception form two sides of the same phenomenon, linking that which is seen as racialized to its immediately felt effects on the racializing body.⁵

Acknowledging her important work, and in the spirit of building from her work, in this chapter I focus on a specific structure of emotion: its relation to the world. I focus less on individualized affect and perception, but on the structure of affect as situated in the flesh of the world.

MERLEAU-PONTY'S PARAMETERS

Let us turn to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of perception first, before turning to emotion's relational structure with the world. Merleau-Ponty's work makes several controversial maneuvers. First, he conceptualizes the ontological as embodied. Such an ontological conceptualization requires that he relinquish the idea of universal knowledge. Merleau-Ponty argues that all knowledge is situated knowledge. As Richard Wolin writes, Merleau-Ponty shows a "willingness to surrender wholesale the idea of epistemological transparency: that is, the idea that somehow our knowledge of things could ever be exhaustive, consummate, and pure. For it is the perennially situated nature of

the knowing subject that mocks omniscience and suggests finitude as the true transcendental ground of cognition."⁶ Second, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the importance of the experiences that embodied subjects undergo. He writes, "it is to experience therefore that the ultimate ontological power belongs."⁷ Merleau-Ponty takes experience seriously. Experience, which is usually abandoned for its inability to be absorbed into a universal analysis, serves as the site for meaning.⁸ Third, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological framework is a philosophy of becoming. Merleau-Ponty's system separates away from a philosophy of being, toward a philosophy of becoming.⁹ Merleau-Ponty's search for creativity is a search for the possibility of movement, of change, and of development—particularly human development. Fourth and finally, Merleau-Ponty locates the moment of creation within the moment of perception. He argues against the traditional understanding of consciousness as a completely constituting, pure power of signification and representation. It is not through reason alone that man discovers meaning. For Merleau-Ponty, creation occurs in the moment of the awakening of attention.¹⁰

THE FLESH . . . VISIBILITY

To understand how these four positions lead to the possibility of human beings perceiving otherwise, let us more closely examine the process of perception, particularly the perception of something new. In his last unfinished work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty offers an analysis of perception radically different from the traditional understanding of perception.¹¹ In the divide between the visible and the invisible, the invisible plays a pivotal role in the presentation of the visible. The most commonly understood and perhaps the simplest way of understanding the structure of the visible and the invisible is as the body and the mind, the object and the subject. As the subject, the invisible is oneself, the self who cannot be seen in the act of looking upon the object. As the subject, the invisible is "that which we forget because we are part of the ground."¹² As the subject, James Phillips associates the invisible with the unconscious.¹³ But the invisible is much more than simply mind or subject; such a conception aligns much more with Merleau-Ponty's earlier endeavors. The invisible is, as Phillips indicates, the "nucleus of meaning-structures," the "nuclei of signification."¹⁴ Or the invisible is, as Henri Maldiney writes, "the depth of the world . . . the unexpected of the world."¹⁵

The medium of the relation between the visible and the invisible Merleau-Ponty names as the *flesh*. "The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance, to designate it, we should need the old term 'element,' . . . in the sense of a general thing, a midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea."¹⁶ Visibility is the incredible moment when body and mind, subject and

object, internal and external, signification and signified, coincide. The flesh accomplishes this feat, Merleau-Ponty writes, by folding back on itself. As Shannon Sullivan elaborates, "the 'folding' . . . gives birth to both subject and object and their interpenetration. Thus the notion of flesh speaks to us of the intertwining of an exchange ('chiasm') between the subject and the object which results in a fundamental ambiguity and possible reciprocity between them."¹⁷ With the notion of the flesh, Merleau-Ponty collapses traditional, sacred dualities. Alphonso Lingis beautifully states, "this intertwining, this chiasm effected across the substance of the flesh is the inaugural event of visibility."¹⁸

Within the shimmering between the visible and the invisible, through the medium of the flesh, perception occurs.¹⁹ The shimmering occurs between the intentionality of the subject and the transcendence of the object. The intentionality of the subject is reflected in the subject's prereflective direction toward and within the givenness of the world.²⁰ The transcendence of the perceived thing, as Renaud Barbarus eloquently elaborates, "does not qualify a relation to the subject but, indeed, the way of being of the perceived thing. Consequently, we should say that it is because the perceived thing is intrinsically distant—that is, exists as transcendence—that it makes possible a relation with a perceiving subject."²¹

The shimmering occurs also within the function of time. Hence, Gaile Weiss depicts the dialogue as "transcendence as a sense of openness to future projects as an existence-for-itself and immanence as a sense of rootedness to the past stemming from one's objectification as a being-for-others."²² The shimmering occurs not only within the vacillation of movement between the subject and the object, but within a vacillation inherent in the subject herself living in the present within the immanence of one's past and facing one's transcendental future self. Perception occurs, amazingly enough, through this heavy thickness of time and space. Perception occurs through a haze of ambiguity.

The structure of the visible and the invisible clarifies the intimacy of the relation between the visible features of the body and the invisible meanings that appear natural. The two are so entangled that one cannot see without the intertwining of the two. In this sense, it must be that when Trump supporters see refugees and immigrants (especially the refugees and immigrants with visibly racialized body features), they cannot see but with the immediacy of invisible meaning—a host of negative meanings from terrorism to violence and criminality. I recognize that I may be following the same perceptual structure, for I see white people as supporters of Trump. In the day after the election of Trump, I saw the domineering presence of whites at the supermarket and at the aquarium. I viscerally felt disgust and fear. I also felt the absence of Latin American bodies in these public spaces. Living in Southern California, Latin American people are usually a dominant presence. The only

white people I do not fear are the white people I personally knew were as upset as me over Trump's election.

My Asian American family members trouble this relationship, for I do not immediately associate Asian American embodiment with such conservatism and racism and hence as supporters of Trump. I consider them misguided; I expect them to know better, and because they should know better, I am even more repulsed by their support of Trump. They remain an enigma, clearly, for although Asian Americans have lived in the United States for over a hundred years, immigrant communities occupy a part of our history and remain a part of the makeup of our current community.

TOWARD PERCEIVING OTHERWISE

For Trump supporters to see refugees and immigrants with different meaning, and for me to stop dismissing and demonizing Trump supporters, both groups need to see differently. Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor point to the possibility of creativity within the shimmering vacillation of perception. They write that the dialogue "provides a direction for the becoming of both subjects and objects and yet retains the degree of indeterminacy or ambiguity required for the creative contributions of subjects and for the surprises that the world harbors."²³ It is because flesh is so dense, so rich, so indeterminate that Merleau-Ponty ultimately locates creation and newness here. Merleau-Ponty does not simply address the creation of a few anomalies; he addresses the birth of the norms of society and the significations for understanding.

Recall the following oft-quoted line from him: "Being is *what requires creation of us* for us to experience it."²⁴ Merleau-Ponty proposes that for human beings to truly experience the defining quality of humanity, we must participate in the activity of creation in whatever form. He does not isolate the act of creating to a specific form of expression, or to a specific type of life. I suggest that creating is a part of even the banal practices of life, especially in the act of perceiving. The process of creating is integral to living.

So let us consider what entails creation and perceiving differently. Because Merleau-Ponty offers flesh and chiasmic reversibility as the site of meaning, let me turn to Véronique Foti's article, because she aims to locate exactly what is creative within flesh. Foti locates the moment of creativity in the act of dislodging the too readily formed identity between matter and form/*eidōs*.²⁵ She describes normal perception as the ready-made association of matter with its form. Creative perception and expression separate these ready-made formulas and reveal the possible wide dearth of meaning between matter and its *eidōs*. She explains, "Visible Being, because of its very 'doublure' of the invisible, calls forth the effort at expression; it requires us

to create it."²⁶ Because the visible always embodies an invisible, expression provides human beings the possibility of disentangling the visible from its usual relationship with the invisible and perceiving another association with the invisible. Foti provides a springboard to think about creative perception, but let me point out that the visible cannot exist without an invisible, and the invisible cannot exist without a visible. I agree with Foti that creative perception requires hesitating from the ready-made associations of the two, but the two cannot exist in isolation. In other words, in order for the ready-made associations to separate, both features need another relation. I argue that the disruptions in ready-made associations will not occur without an invitation, a motivation for an alternative association.

The usual suspects for explorations of creativity are imagination, attention, expression, and style. Merleau-Ponty and Merleau-Ponty scholars explore these four areas, though perhaps a little less on imagination.²⁷ But I believe that Merleau-Ponty ultimately does not rely on these usual suspects because something in the structure of these features emphasizes too much the internal within the subject projecting outwardly to the world. Such a relation evokes too much the rationalists/intellectualists and the prioritization of subjects acting upon the world.

The materiality, the visible of the world, serves an integral role, indeed provides the inspiration for wonder and for creativity. But of course, the subject plays an active role in this productive, expressive relationship. I turn to emotions because on a phenomenological reading, emotion is not solely internal to the subject. Emotion is situated intertwined between the subject and the world; emotion demonstrates the subject's intertwined state with the world. Emotion is in the flesh of the world.

EMOTION'S CHIASMATIC POSITION BETWEEN THE SUBJECT AND THE WORLD

Because this focus on seeing otherwise already admits that the change does not begin in thought but rather requires a different relation between the invisible and the visible, I turn to emotion and mood. The affective appears underdeveloped. Kym Maclaren's work highlights an understanding of emotion as not simply internal to the subject but as chiasmatically intertwined with the world. Maclaren explains how phenomenology understands emotion differently from prevailing traditional understandings of emotion. Specifically, Maclaren makes three corrections: (1) emotions are not isolatable (or atomistic) and labelable;²⁸ (2) emotions are not irrational and do not prevent agency and freedom;²⁹ and (3) emotions are not projections of something internal to the subject onto the external world.³⁰ Maclaren writes,

On the phenomenological account of being in the world . . . emotion and mood are to be found not inside a subject, as some introspectable feeling or set of beliefs and evaluations, but in the way that the world presents itself to us, in how things exist for us within our immediate perceptual inherence in the world. When I am bored . . . everything I encounter in the world presents itself to me in a lackluster manner, and nothing moves me. When I am happy, on the other hand, things stand out to me in their brightness and harmony, and I am buoyed by them.³¹

Maclaren concludes, “the world, as it gives itself to us in perception, prior to any thought or reflection about the world, is emotionally meaningful.”³² She explains that the world is laden with emotion; as such, subjects do not experience emotion without a context, without a world. In other words, I read Maclaren as arguing that emotion demonstrates the subject and the world as chiasmatically intertwined.

Although Maclaren clarifies the difference between the traditional understanding of emotion and the phenomenological understanding of emotion, let me point out that the more current philosophical treatment of emotion aligns with the phenomenological understanding of emotion. I point this out not to suggest in any way that Maclaren misrepresents the traditional understanding of emotion—because I believe that her portrayal of the traditional understanding of emotion is widely held. But philosophers other than phenomenologists share this position that emotion is not simply felt internally within the subject but in the world. So what exactly is emotion, and what is the force of emotion? David Kim distinguishes emotion from thought, but he also distinguishes emotion from desire or *conatus*: “Such cognitivist or conative accounts divest emotion of affect or feeling, which is the heart of emotion.”³³ Evoking the phenomenological sense of intentionality, Kim continues to include “[Peter] Stocker and [Michael] Goldie as well, [who] contend that whatever else emotion may be, our lived-experience shows that it is fundamentally a feelingful form of intentionality or an affective mode of awareness.”³⁴ Avoiding the sense of intentionality as a projection from the internal subject to the external world, Kim ultimately agrees with Maclaren. He writes, “Goldie contends that one of the features of emotion’s intentionality is that it is a *feeling toward* some relevant feature of the world. In the end, I do not think that this phrase, which suggests outward projection, describes our phenomenology adequately. Our experience [of emotion] is better described in terms of disclosures or presentings.”³⁵ Kim writes that because of emotion, “Something matters or has import in a dangerous way, offensive way, or an intriguing way precisely because of the types of feeling found in fear, resentment, or curiosity. If there was no feeling, nothing would matter to us.”³⁶ Kim highlights the interstitial, entangled state of emotion, for events in the world are already emotion laden. Emotion lies in the chiasmatic interstices between the subject and the world.

I have noticed for a while now how I see differently depending on my mood. The world appears differently based on my mood. I have especially noticed that when I am tired and grumpy, I am inevitably prone to impatience. At such times, I encounter people who are inconsiderate, rude, and ultimately irrational. But when I am calm, relaxed, without any deadlines to meet or a to-do list so long that it appears overwhelming, I encounter the nicest people, people who are considerate and go out of their way to assist me. A significant number of these interactions has helped me to understand that the world and my moods chiasmatically intertwine. This does not demonstrate that the world simply reflects my internal projections. Rather, the mood depicts the intertwining of my subjectivity and the world, in the phenomenological understanding of the intertwining of the materiality of my embodiment and the significations in the world, the visible and the invisible. As such, Maclaren describes emotional tension “as a struggle not with some inner aspect of ourselves at odds with our grasp on reality, but with that very grasp on reality.”³⁷ As Kim concludes, “Feeling and worldly imports are facets of the same structure.”³⁸ What does it mean that emotion and the world share the same structure? How should we understand emotion as phenomena in the interstices between the world and the subject? To the extent that there is an appropriate emotion for an event in the world, the emotion serves both to interpret the happenings in the world and to affirm the events. In this sense, Kim describes the relation between emotion and the world as “world-constituting in addition to being world-disclosing.”³⁹

With this recognition of the structure of emotions and the intertwined state of the subject and the world, I want to think about the antagonistic and polarizing political and social climate since the election of Trump. Perhaps such antagonism was already brewing during the Obama presidency; he experienced very serious opposition from the legislative branch of our government since his inauguration. But in the recent, frequent descriptions of the state of our Congress as so entrenched in its divisiveness that they cannot pass any significant legislation, clearly the state of the present political climate is polarized and antagonistic. The mood of our country is antagonistic. This mood of antagonism contributes to the difficulty of seeing otherwise, of associating a different invisibility, a different meaning, onto certain visibly embodied people. Perhaps why Trump supporters see immigrants as opportunists instead of someone to help, why Trump supporters see poor people as burdens on society instead of people experiencing difficulty that any one of us might experience, is because of the polarized climate, the strong emotions flowing throughout the country.

In this current antagonistic mood, I must admit that the two moods that dominate me are the moods of anger and guilt. I feel anger at the Trump supporters and all the members of Congress who do not resist him and his coterie enough. I feel anger at all the people who voted him into office. I feel

anger at the growing divide between the haves and the have-nots in the United States. As someone who works on the philosophy of race, I am at home with the feeling of anger. And I am very aware that anger has the propensity to proliferate, to grow, to spread. Anger self-perpetuates. Second, I feel guilt for not doing enough personally to resist Trump's cabinet and his agenda. I feel guilt for not doing enough to help all those impacted by his policies, especially the immigrants. Trump supporters clearly feel anger too—witness the rallies in support of Trump, opposing the demonstrations against Trump. Although I am not sure if guilt is felt by Trump supporters, anger is clearly shared. Is the antagonistic mood of our country a chiasmatic reflection of the anger people feel in the current times? And reciprocally, is the anger people viscerally feel chiasmatically reflecting the antagonistic mood of the country? In recognizing the affective deadlock of the country, I realize I need to dig deeper. I am left contemplating Tippett's words and the need to think more holistically, to think more richly, in order to break out of the oppositional stance against Trump supporters and to think about my commonality with them.

I am trying to take a deep breath, to abate my anger and guilt. In taking this deep breath, I am trying to see Trump supporters not simply as deep seated bourgeois racists. I am trying to see Trump supporters as people, and paraphrasing Kissling in the interview with Tippett, see that which is good in the position of the person I disagree with. I am trying to understand them not as simply selfish, and greedy, if not evil.⁴⁰ I am attempting to work on my emotions. This is not to justify, empathize, or in any way to humanize some of the *policies* of the Trump administration—especially separating the children from their parents among immigrants and asylum seekers. But I recognize that my emotional temperament in this circumstance is not helping.

I agree with Elizabeth Spelman and her forwarding (consistent with Aristotle) of the importance of the emotion of anger especially for political awareness.⁴¹ I think that the emotion of anger is necessary in the awakening of political consciousness, but I am not certain that staying in anger is productive for bringing political disagreements to a conclusion. Recall Maclaren's second position in regard to emotion: emotions are not irrational and do not prevent or foreclose agency and freedom. In other words, in recognizing our society and its people as mired in emotion, I do not posit that the emotions of anger and guilt solely negatively impact the people or the country. As Al-Saji writes, "Though it may be tempting to align racializing and responsive affects with so-called positive and negative emotions, such a categorization not only overlooks the way in which emotions can serve different functions (e.g., anger can be blind hostility or the beginning of critique), it also mistakes the nature of the difference between the affects in question."⁴² Anger and guilt can enable as well as disable the self and one's world. More importantly, my emotion of anger and guilt is appropriate because my emo-

tions not only disclose the world but constitute the world. In other words, my emotions do not simply reveal the world as something is going wrong, but my emotions construct the world as something is wrong.

In stark contrast with the history of philosophical debate about the possibility of thought controlling emotions or emotions controlling thought, recognizing emotions are chiasmatically situated between the subject and the world as to be world disclosing and world constituting, let me turn to a question about emotional intelligence. In his book *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*, John Gottman emphasizes that parents respect all the emotions from their children. Gottman explains that only on the grounds of such respect of their emotions will children be open to direction for how to express their emotions. Gottman paraphrases the work of Haim Ginott:

Parents must show genuine respect for their children's feelings. . . . Communication between parent and child must always preserve both parties' self-respect. Statements of understanding should precede statements of advice. Ginott discouraged parents from telling children what they ought to feel, because that simply makes children distrust their feelings . . . Ginott believed that while not all behavior is acceptable, all feelings and wishes are acceptable.⁴³

This is a wildly popular parenting resource. I mention this book because it is consistent with Maclaren's analysis of emotion within the context of Merleau-Ponty's work in child psychology, specifically regarding a little boy of about two years of age named Gricha. But more directly for this present paper, Gottman's call to respect all emotions helps me to understand that as much as we want to let children develop trust in their own emotions, my emotions are important for me. Respect for my emotions validates me. Emotions form an integral part of my subjectivity.

Hence, I am not arguing that my feelings of anger and guilt are inappropriate or unproductive. For to ask me or the Trump supporters to feel otherwise is to invalidate us. Emotions are not irrational or prohibitive of agency and freedom; emotions, including the so-called negative emotions, not only reveal a subject's character but constitute a subject.

THE FLOW OF EMOTIONS

My endeavors at abating my emotions of anger and guilt during this polarized time is not a call to control my emotions. Again, this falls into the traditional philosophical framework that prioritizes reason and its ability to control emotions. So what to do with the current scenario? I have several additional questions:

- How should one perceive and feel about those who disagree with one? Clearly, I should not dismiss or demonize someone because I disagree with her.
- Is there a separate category between Asian Americans who support Trump and people one must oppose, if not demonize, such as white supremacists?
- Is understanding and communication in search of common ground really the solution for all disagreements, especially in regard to race?

Most of my research focuses on the daily interactions, the minute, banal interactions, assuming that white supremacists are a different category. I focus on the banal interactions to highlight how these seemingly little interactions are significant. I treat white supremacists as a separate category. I do not know if this is a luxury today. Jose Medina writes that “just as gender violence and domestic abuse are typically preceded by verbal violence and stigmatizing expressive treatments that weaken subjects and make them vulnerable to harm, collective harms and atrocities . . . are typically preceded by symbolic stigmatizations of the targeted population and by particular expressive harms that become socially accepted and even habitual.”⁴⁴ In trying to see Trump supporters as somehow struggling with a need to protect their own, I hope not to trivialize the very serious dangers they are causing. I do not aim to normalize their inhumane policies and positions, paving the way for accepting them.

I believe some positions must be absolutely opposed. Chantal Mouffe persuasively writes that “too much emphasis on consensus together with an aversion toward confrontation leads to apathy and disaffection with political participation. . . . While consensus is necessary, it must be accompanied by dissent.”⁴⁵ I agree with Mouffe in that certain policies must be opposed; consider slavery, Jim Crow laws, difference in pay based on gender. The problem lies in determining when to oppose and when to work toward consensus building, especially considering Merleau-Ponty’s position that we are all situated beings.

In trying to abate my anger, I am trying to remember Merleau-Ponty’s words in “The Yogi and the Proletariat”: “what if, in the social order, no one were innocent and no one absolutely guilty? What if it were the very essence of history to impute to us responsibilities which are never entirely ours? . . . We would then be in the difficult situation of never being able to condemn with a good conscience, though it is inevitable that we do condemn.”⁴⁶ In my situatedness, I do not have access to some infinite all-knowing truth. I believe in this epistemic position. Under such circumstances, I am aware that I need to address my affect, my emotions, if I am to see otherwise about Trump supporters.

Recall Fanon’s analysis that racializing affect is rigid, racializing affect is stuck. Al-Saji writes, “‘Affective ankylosis’ conveys, at once, the rigidity,

immobility, and numbing that characterize racializing affects; it explains the recalcitrance of these affects. The *rigidity* of racializing affect can be witnessed in its temporality, for this affect is not only frozen in its response but repetitive in its form.”⁴⁷ As my emotions constitute the world and me, I understand that rigidly holding onto these emotions is not good for me. The emotions must flow.

Maclaren posits the role of others to promote emotional metamorphoses. As much as others cause emotional tension, others also model means for emotional metamorphoses. She writes, “Emotion is not an internal conscious event, but rather the experience of a tension within our reality that puts into question our place in reality. . . . Other people play an essential role in producing such a constrained situation . . . others can lend us new existential resources for making sense of our situation.”⁴⁸ Our immediate community matters, but with the opportunity to choose, we tend to surround ourselves with like-minded folks. Of course, we do not completely choose our family members. In the current situation, it is difficult to determine who to model or if there is anyone to model to develop out of this situation.

Al-Saji recommends hesitation in these moments to staid emotions. Al-Saji details five ways hesitation reconfigures affect, but I cite only the last.

To hesitate is to delay and to make affect wait. The incompleteness, both of affect and of that to which affect responds, is here felt. To wait is to testify that time makes a difference for experience, that all is not given in the present. To wait . . . is not only to be open to a futurity that escapes prediction, but also to a past that can be dynamically transformed through the passage of events, and that grounds the creative potential of events. This breaks with the closure of the past and the predetermination of the future found in racialization.⁴⁹

Perhaps this paper is a call for hesitation.

I understand that I am not alone in experiencing discomfort with members of my family making political and moral decisions with which I disagree. In the wake of the Trump election, the amount of time families spend together during holidays has significantly diminished, with some families not meeting at all.⁵⁰ Clearly these are polarized times. In knowing that others play an important role in promoting emotional tension and emotional metamorphoses, such disagreements within the family make a deeper affective impact. Al-Saji forwards the importance of the influence of living with others impacting our affective attachments to them and influencing how we see with these people.⁵¹ So I am not sure that the familial strife during this polarized time challenges Al-Saji’s analysis, or perhaps such divides within families illustrate the lack of attachments among the members of families. I was advised not to engage in political conversations with my family members to keep the peace. Now I wonder if such silence actually does not contribute to nurturing relationships. Or perhaps such political conversations

draw too much on arguments and logic, which do not help our affective conditions. I do not know. I do know such affective discord cannot remain stagnant.

CONCLUSION

Merleau-Ponty's work implies that every racist perception is a result of a specific signification of the visible features of the body; to break out of the framework of racism requires perceiving a new meaning about body features. Because racism hinges on the visible features of the body, which have acquired invisible meaning, it is necessary to disrupt the ready-made associations of the visible and the invisible and to create new relations between the two. This paper explores the function of emotion in the ready associations we draw from the visible features of the body, specifically the association Trump supporters make about immigrants as dangerous and criminals and the association I make about whiteness with Trump supporters that the Asian American members of my family trouble. Within a phenomenological understanding of emotion, emotion both discloses and constitutes the world and the subject.

Without immediate or ready-made solutions and recognizing that others serve as models for emotional metamorphoses, as Maclaren writes, let me end with one last image from Tippet's book:

In 2015, the Confederate flag was finally lowered and transferred from state houses to museums in several southern states, but not before a horrific shooting of nine African Americans inside their church in the center of Charleston, South Carolina, by a young white Supremacist. . . . In the ensuing weeks, an image went viral of a black South Carolina state trooper, Leroy Smith, gently guiding a white supremacist to a seat after he was overcome by heat at a rally protesting the move of the Confederate flag. What he saw, he told a *New York Times* reporter, was a fellow human being, an older man, in trouble.⁵²

I am left with the tried and tested words of Martin Luther King Jr.: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."⁵³ Emotion may entrench us in our current divide, but the solution is not in ignoring the emotion, or controlling the emotion. The solution will lie in emotion as well.

NOTES

1. Tippet, *Becoming Wise*, 32.
2. *Ibid.*, 33.
3. I can cite extensively in this regard. Consider Patricia Williams, who recounts her experiences publishing an article explicating the now quite famous case of her denied entrance

to a Benetton store. Williams writes that the editors erased all references to the fact that she is a Black woman, effectively erasing all means for understanding that she was denied entrance because of racism. Williams writes that "what was most interesting to me in this experience was how the blind application of principles of neutrality, through the device of omission, acted either to make me look crazy or to make the reader participate in old habits of cultural bias" (Williams, *Alchemy of Race and Rights*, 48). See my analysis of this scenario in Lee, "Madness and Judiciousness."

4. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 130.
5. Al-Saji, "Phenomenology of Hesitation," 140.
6. Wolin, "Merleau-Ponty and the Birth of Weberian Marxism," 117.
7. Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, 110.
8. See Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 94–95.
9. Barbarus, "Perception and Movement," 80.
10. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 28–29.
11. Note that a vertical structure of the invisible and the visible replaces the horizontal structure of the gestalt, organized as the figure and the ground. Merleau-Ponty moves away from the notion of the gestalt upon which he had so strongly relied in his earlier works. See Phillips, "From the Unseen to the Invisible," 83.
12. Olkowski, "Continuum of Interiority and Exteriority," 11. The mind and all that is ineffable and ethereal are usually associated with the invisible, whereas the body and all that are sensuous and concrete are traditionally relegated to the world of matter, the visible.
13. Phillips, "From the Unseen to the Invisible," 80.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Maldiney, "Flesh and Verb in the Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty," 56.
16. Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, 144.
17. Sullivan, "Domination and Dialogue in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*," 9.
18. Lingis, Translator's preface, lvi.
19. Evans and Lawlor, "Introduction," 3–4.
20. Reuter, "Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Pre-reflective Intentionality," 77.
21. Barbarus, "Perception and Movement," 82.
22. Weiss, *Body Images*, 10.
23. Evans and Lawlor, "Introduction," 4.
24. Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, 197.
25. Foti, "Painting and the Re-orientation of Philosophical Thought," 116.
26. *Ibid.*, 119. She cites Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, 170.
27. There is a plethora of work exploring imagination for its political influences, but I do not follow this road here, because again this prioritizes a projection of the internal onto the external. See Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*.
28. Maclaren, "Emotional Metamorphoses," 29.
29. *Ibid.*, 26.
30. *Ibid.*, 28.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*, 28–29.
33. Kim, "Shame and Self-Revision," 112–13.
34. *Ibid.*, 113.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*
37. Maclaren, "Emotional Metamorphoses," 33.
38. Kim, "Shame and Self-Revision," 114. Al-Saji agrees with this understanding of affect. She writes, "The structure of affect undermines several dichotomous schemas: it lies at the hinge of passivity-activity, but also inside-outside, or more accurately, self-affection and hetero-affection" ("Phenomenology of Hesitation," 146).
39. Kim, "Shame and Self-Revision," 115.
40. I am thinking of this in the spirit of the work of Arlie Russel Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*.

41. Elizabeth Spelman writes that anger works "to take yourself seriously—seriously enough, anyway, to trust and perhaps express your own strong sense that something really crummy is going on . . . have the right or the ability to pass the kind of judgment on a person or on a state of affairs that being angry assumes" ("Anger," 44).
42. Al-Saji, "Phenomenology of Hesitation," 144.
43. Gottman, *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*, 34–35.
44. Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 250.
45. *Ibid.*, 275. Medina cites Chantal Mouffe, "For an Agonistic Public Sphere," in *The Pragmatist Imagination*, ed. J. Ockman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000), 72.
46. Merleau-Ponty, "Yogi and the Proletarian," 222.
47. Al-Saji, "Phenomenology of Hesitation," 141.
48. Maclaren, "Emotional Metamorphoses," 42.
49. Al-Saji, "Phenomenology of Hesitation," 148.
50. Fox, "Did Trump Ruin Thanksgiving?"
51. Al-Saji, "Phenomenology of Hesitation," 160–61.
52. Tippett, *Becoming Wise*, 114.
53. King, *A Testament of Hope*, 594.

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