

Material and Affective (Re)shapings within Unspeakable/Uninterrupted Territories of Violence

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AS THE VERY FOUNDATION OF AMERICAN SOCIETY is built first and foremost of land theft, dispossession, and the genocide of Indigenous peoples, unspeakable/uninterrupted acts of violence have and continue to define the parameters of life and death in the project known as the United States. Despite these insidious tendrils be(com)ing inescapable and intra-actively¹ entangling (Barad, 2007) themselves in the (lived) experiences of all human and more-than-human² bodies (Sharpe, 2016), there is an historical and contemporary asymmetry to how these violent contexts enfold, unfold, and re-fold in specific ways *for* and *through* specific bodies.³ Within intersecting figurations of land, people, nature, things, and violence—or what Wozolek (2021) has referred to as assemblages of violence—awaits an irrevocable paradox. That is, these entities and intensities are co-constitutive, affective, and always-already inseparable and symbiotic. Whereas “relationships to land and place are diverse, specific, and ungeneralizable” (Tuck et al., 2014, p. 8), as humans create things, things in turn create people (Ahmed, 2010b). Moreover, in amplifying Syliva Wynter’s work, McKittrick (2021) reminds us that people’s material and discursive relationships abound with stories and storytelling that “have an impact on our neurobiological and physiological behaviors” (p. 9). Going further, Ahmed (2010a) suggests that *orientations* comprise an important frame for how matters relating to matter are taken up:

If matter is affected by orientations, by the ways in which bodies are directed toward things, it follows that matter is dynamic, unstable, and contingent. What matters is itself an effect of proximities: we are touched by what comes near, just as what comes near is affected by directions we have already taken. Orientations are how the world acquires a certain shape through contact between bodies that are not in relation of exteriority. (p. 234)

From this perspective—and to (re)trace the commonly traversed phrase—the mattering of matter indeed matters. Extending the arc of this thought, how we orientate ourselves around matter is of great significance. These orientations, thus, become a determinant for the mattering of specific pieces of matter by affecting how and what things “materialize or come to take shape in the way that they do” (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 235). With this in mind, this work is (re/mis)shaped by the multitudinous roles that more-than-human bodies or entities—and their entanglement with specific affects—play in (re)producing ecologies of antiblackness.⁴

Returning to the opening logic of settler colonialism, once land was stolen by settlers, those same settlers abducted Black people and forced them to work (through chattel slavery) purloined landscapes—hence providing outcomes benefiting distinctly white bodies and positionalities. This information is not new, and it is not our intention to merely persevere the obvious—although we would argue for many, the oblivious—nature of the historicities that underpin modern American life. Rather, our goal is to further complexify and perhaps hazard these problematic coordinates, by storying the assemblage⁵ of affect, materialism, and antiblack violence. Here, via Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and more recently Gregg and Seigworth (2010), we are drawing on the Spinozian conceptualization of affect as being embodied, which complicates boundaries between feeling and movement by accounting for points of contact, lines of variation, and fields of potentiality that perhaps can help us understand how (violent) intensities of the world are encountered and (re)articulated (Seigworth, 2021). In what follows, we invite readers to think about how each of these registers enfold the material and discursiveness of education into a broader assemblage of violence: the various intersections and movements between time, space, and human and more-than-human bodies; the liminal texture of conscious knowing and subconscious feeling that is always-already in flux; and the incalculable and perhaps unfulfilled possibilities/futures that await all encounters within the more-than-human world. From the position that forms of matter and the affects they produce can be capacious in understanding the “very boundaries in which the individual and group interact” (Zembylas, 2007, p. 63), what are the implications of these material-emotional-discursive entanglements remaining muted or unaccounted for in classroom encounters and discourses?

On January 7th, Tyre Nichols was severely beaten by three Black police officers in Memphis, Tennessee. He died three days later. In the weeks that followed, each of the officers was terminated from their positions and charged with second-degree murder. Devastatingly, Tyre became part of an assemblage of violence responsible for cutting short the lives of beautiful/brilliant people, murdered simply for being Black. George Floyd. Michael Brown. Philando Castile. Breonna Taylor. Ahmaud Arbery. Trayvon Martin. And, and, and...

As social studies scholars (and beyond) who continue to try to make sense of these assemblages of violence and grapple with Sharpe’s (2016) profound provocation, “how does one mourn the interminable event?” (p. 19), we turn our attention to three more-than-human bodies (e.g., cotton plant, computer, and skateboard), their entanglement with specific affects (e.g., fear, suspicion, and joy), how both *things* and *affects* have been fundamental to (re)animations of antiblackness within the context of American life/death, and the implications of these entanglements in/on education. We recognize that two of these objects, computer, and skateboard are human made, whereas cotton is not—however, it is the thingification of the cotton plant that led to the development of a human creation, the plantation, that is of importance to this work. Just as the framework of settler colonialism contains machinery that is always in motion and not simply a static epoch (Wolfe, 1999), it is our hope that this engagement with things and the affects they produce for specific communities—within the register of antiblackness—will work towards a more

imbricated understanding of the historical and contemporary undercurrents guiding the story of antiblackness in America and perhaps why/how senseless death continues to be enacted upon Black bodies time and time again.

Adjacent to our pairing of materiality and affect to complexify “the relations between bodies [that] often come into sharp relief during moments of violence” (Wozolek, 2021, p. 18), there has been sharp uptick recently in educational scholarship leaning into affect theory. There are significant schisms within affect theory, e.g., those drawing from the philosophy of Deleuze (e.g., Protevi, 2009) in contrast with the work of interdisciplinary scholars like Sedgwick (2003). This article will not outline all the possibilities and permutations of affect theory, for that is beyond our scope, but rather we will highlight a few educational scholars whose work highlights the collective and political aspects of affect.

Although perhaps tempting to see affect on an individual level, it is beyond a singular encasement of flesh. As Helmsing (2014) summarized:

Whereas *affectations* are particular sensations and feelings located in those who are affected, or perceive to be affected (when I “feel” boredom or I “perceive” anger), Deleuze and Guattari—using examples from art, cinema, and literature—showed that affects are not located in a single individual’s point of view but, rather, move around and outside of the subject. (p. 129, emphasis original)

McKenzie (2017) aptly described collective affective conditions linked to policies; specifically, how/why *affective bodily encounters* interact with policy documents, meetings, data, and policy actors. There are registers of collective affects of people entwined with places, such as the “affective atmospheres” (Sellar, 2015, pp. 141–142) of in-person meetings, “which influence the reception of policy approaches (McKenzie, 2017, p. 196).

As an embodied and visceral constellation of “shuttling intensities” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 2), affect is entwined with power relations. In this way, educational research benefits from critical emotional reflexivity (Zembylas, 2008); for example, Brown’s (2016) development of a Race Critical Researcher Praxis entangles critical emotional reflexivity with a “bricolage lens” that includes critical reflexivity on race and Black political thoughts, as well as positionality reflexivity. This framework invites researchers to “actively attend to how emotions and research intertwine when centering race in one’s critical reflections of the process” (p. 188). Such considerations can run parallel to “the affective symptoms of precarity elicited by neoliberal policy” (McKenzie, 2017, p. 192) as well as precarity in Butler’s (2004, 2009) sense of it in relation to vulnerability and grievability—and as performative instead of representational. Zembylas (2016) clarified the difference:

Butler theorizes affect and emotion from a ‘performative’ rather than a ‘representational’ perspective; the latter falling into the trap of trying to figure out what a subject really means or feels, while the former frames affect not in terms of an essentialized inner reality but rather as a force that cannot ever be entirely transparent to us. (p. 203, see also Braunmühl, 2012)

Like other conceptualizations of affect, it is relational, but for Butler (2004, 2009), it is also notably historicized as well as political, such as the disparities in who is mourned or grieved among the public. According to Zembylas (2016), the methodological implications of this conceptualization

of affect for educational research is the need to “critically evaluate the conditions under which people live their lives, acquiring certain subject positions based on regulatory norms of social and political affect” (p. 206). Scholars who study race need to account not only for emotions, but also specifically how emotions are racialized (Bonilla-Silva, 2011). Emotions have “socio-historical underpinnings and are relational and group-based” (Tichavakunda, 2022, p. 424). One can be moved, for example, both emotionally and geographically as well as emotionally and sonically (among other interlocking affects and contexts) in these socio-relational ways (e.g., Gershon, 2019; Hirsch, 2021).

Helmsing (2014) brought emotional and affective entanglements into the realm of social studies educational research. Specifically, he invited educators to consider the effects of pride and shame in the contexts of civics and history. Having been asked by a student why he “hated” America after presenting examples of racism in popular culture from the era of Jim Crow, Helmsing (2014) considered how interrogating emotions and affects of students and teachers is key to understanding historical social formations and their ongoing reverberations. Extending Helmsing’s (2014) work, Jones (2022) highlighted the significance of foregrounding emotions, specifically fear, in history education. By analyzing Virginia’s U.S. history standards and social studies framework for moments that traverse how Black and white people encountered/experienced fear, Jones (2022) found that while “discourses on white fear are explicit, essentialized, and weaponized within Virginia’s U.S. history standards and framework” (p. 456), engagements with Black fear are non-existent. Here, Jones (2022) works to highlight the complexity of affect—specifically fear—and how, within educational contexts, affect is always-already affinitive:

for fear of being labeled racist, for fear of white kids feeling guilty, for fear of coming to terms with white violence, writers of the standards would rather omit Black emotions and accentuate white fear instead of displaying how white violence against the historized Other produced emotions such as fear. (p. 453)

Explicitly considering what lies beyond the human entangles affect further between human and nonhuman entities. Wozolek (2021), for example, brought attention to how power and violence are “nested and knotted” (p. 15) within the co-constitutive agency that Barad (2007) identifies as intra-actions between the human and non-human. Such intra-actions do not require awareness or intent, and so approaches based solely on rationality fail to address the complicated and entangled nature of affectual domains.

Positionality/ies

In pausing our journey down the material and affective path, we want to acknowledge that our attunement to our educator and scholarly positionalities matters greatly to this work. These identities are nested and knotted within settler colonialism and structural racism and impact all aspects of our entrance/departure to/from pastpresentfuture (Varga, 2022) accounts of antiblack violence. Importantly, we acknowledge that, while “description is not liberation” (McKittrick, 2021 p. 44), remaining silent flattens any attempts at cultivating *thick* solidarity (Liu & Shange, 2018), which is “based on a radical belief in the inherent value of each other’s lives despite not being able to fully understand or fully share in the experience of those lives” (p. 190). Going

further, being attuned to the role our identities play in all attempts to (re)articulate sensibilities beyond our own lived experiences works towards an orientation of swarming solidarity (Varga & Ender, 2023) that is open, active, and always-already becoming. For as Mitchell Patterson (2022) asserts, “*solidarity* is a verb; it’s an action that requires critical analysis of systems of oppression, empathy, listening, visioning, sacrifice, learning, or more important, unlearning” (p. 38, emphasis in original).

We are writing this article at a time when antiblack racism is both highly visible and yet nonetheless left intact. Historically white colleges in the United States continue to treat Black bodies as property (Dancy et al., 2018). Indeed, an anti-Black spatial imaginary permeates U.S. social institutions, including educational spaces (Jenkins, 2021). Thus, even the contexts that sustain our writing of this article are imbued with contradictions and (perhaps irresolvable) tensions. As part of our continued unlearning process as white scholars, we understand solidarity as calling for the unveiling of often overlooked (historical) conditionalities embedded within assemblages of violence that sustain antiblackness (Varga et al., 2022). We believe this understanding traverses simplistic forms of analysis insofar that our efforts to put materiality and affect in direct conversation with antiblack violence—through storying—paves (educational) inroads that perhaps might lead to deeper understandings of historical and contemporary assemblages of violence and how/why affects experienced/registered by some groups of people are prioritized over others. Just as Mitchell Patterson (2022) emphatically noted, “to put it plainly, anti-Black racism has been here, is here, and ain’t going nowhere unless we truly reckon with it” (p. 33), we view our collective efforts with this work to be a form of reckoning that is guided by our commitments to justice, joy, love, care, community, and respect.

Traces of Affective In-Between-ness

More often than not, accounts of violence are undertheorized and oversimplified (Varga & van Kessel, 2021; Wozolek, 2021) with the story’s *ending* ending affective, material, and discursive opportunities to understand why/how (violent) outcomes—within the context of antiblackness—materialized. Moving beyond framing these encounters as distilled events, (re)imagining assemblages of violence as stories reveals a (re)new(ed) cast of more-than-human characters contributing to the materialization of each individual/collective violent outcome. According to McKittrick (2021), “thinking through the interdisciplinary interplay between narrative and material worlds is especially useful in black studies, because our analytical sites, and our selfhood, are often reduced to metaphor, analogy, trope, and symbol” (p. 10).

We understand affect as be(com)ing the connective tissue between (violent) story and materiality. Hence, the theoretical traces of this paper are concerned with cultivating an attunement to the way things are imbued with different intensities that become *used* to produce specific embodiments of affect. Taking a cue from Ahmed (2019), “use offers a way of telling stories about things. We can ask *about* objects by following them *about*” (p. 22). Weaving ourselves into the assemblage of violence that resulted in the murder of Tyre Nichols, we theorize how affect can be generative in historicizing more-than-human bodies (e.g., cotton plant, computer, and skateboard) that (re)produce unspeakable/uninterrupted territories of violence.

Gregg and Seigworth (2010) suggested that “affect arises in the midst of in-between-ness: in the capacities to act and to be acted upon” (p. 1). From this perspective, affect is not a register that can be defined, but rather a sensibility that seeks to account for how intensities of the world

are encountered, embodied, and responded to. Going further, affect lacks passivity and is agential (Barad, 2007), considering how affect resides *within* intensities that can shift, slip, and move across/between various human and more-than-human bodies (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010). These affective becomings can produce unique resonances that are by nature pluriversal and multiplicitous. Here, we acknowledge that the more-than-human bodies we are highlighting in this work (e.g., cotton plant, computer, and skateboard) do not produce the same affect(s) for everyone. Quite simply, affect is not monolithic, but rather unstable and unpredictable. Importantly, this facet of affect is significant to our work considering the *stickiness* of affect with the context of difference (Ahmed, 2010b); affects stick and, thus, get stuck in kaleidoscopic ways for/across variegated bodies. Whereas as some objects produce certain connections between ideas, cultures, sensories, perspectives, ethics, and values, they can (and do) produce something alternative for others. Following the work of Massumi (2002), affect can be understood as the “feeling of anticipation” or the “registering of potentials” (p. 92), which can be embodied viscerally and/or reside in territories beyond consciousness. In sum, engaging with affect adds texture to the assemblage of violence by accounting for the undulations, expansions, contractions, and rhythms that “mark the passages of intensities (whether dimming or accentuating) in body-to-body/world-body mutual imbrication” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 13).

Material and Affectual Tetherings

Next, we present three stories that tether more-than-human bodies to specific affects. These tetherings put affect theory to *use* by unveiling how more-than-human bodies are *used* (Ahmed, 2019) to (reproduce) particular embodied intensities that are implicated within contexts of antiblackness. In this way, we believe affect is “*becoming useful as becoming part*” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 11, emphasis in original), and it is our hope that historicization of each entity will work to resist human logics, patterns, and politics that disavow “most of the material conditions for the emergence of its objects (human societies, practices, cultures) and its own functioning” (Snaza, 2019, p. 3).

Tethering 1: Cotton Plant and Fear

Scientifically known as *gossypium*, the cotton plant has played a significant role in the cultivation of antiblackness in the United States. While the origin of the plant’s arrival to the Americas is often debated by scholars/historians, perhaps a suitable entry point for untangling its contentious relationship to Black life/death is the year 1850. Signed into law by Congress on September 18, 1850, the Fugitive Slave Act required that slaves be returned to their “owners” even if, spatially, they were existing in “free states.” Essentially, this law—which was part of the broader Compromise of 1850—bolstered the federal government’s role in (re)animating the movements of both white and Black people by underscoring the acceptability of white people owning Black people to work plantations that grew, in many cases, cotton. Going further, this law impacted plantation logics insofar that, “if escape was not an issue, then there would be no associated effect on [cotton] prices” (Lennon, 2016, p. 671). Despite this adverse economic framing, prices of cotton were in fact impacted by the reinforced plantation mentality and operation. Accordingly, “by 1850, 1.8 million of the nation’s 3.2 million enslaved people were

growing and picking cotton. By 1860, enslaved labor produced over 2 billion pounds of cotton each year” (National Park Service, 2023, para 1). To get an idea of the economic wealth that was generated for white bodies during this period, in 1860, cotton was worth 10 cents a pound but later skyrocketed to \$1.89 a pound between 1863-1864 (Dattel, 2008). Subsequently, the developing (and insidious) relationship between white and Black bodies, white economic growth, and cotton nested itself within the broader context of timespacebody(ing).⁶ As a result, the state of Mississippi—a leader in cotton production—experienced a surge in white and Black bodies from 1850 (606,526 total people) to 1860 (791,305 total people) (Bruchey, 1967).

However, what these increases do not reflect are the affective implications of all these upward statistical trends across populations, production, and price. Embedded within these relationships is an accumulation of feeling that directly intensifies both (white) becomings and (Black) un-becomings “becoming a palimpsest of force-encounters traversing the ebbs and swells of intensities that pass between ‘bodies’ [bodies defined not by an outer skin-envelope or other surface boundary but by their potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passages of affect]” (Siegworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 2). In this sense, perhaps thinking with/around/under/through affect can be generative in understanding the different bodily relationships both *at* and *in* play during this time and beyond. As Ahmed (2004) emphasized, “emotionality as a claim about a subject or a collective is clearly dependent on relations of power, which endow ‘others’ with meaning and value” (p. 4). Important to this thought is control and how those in power maintain the positionings necessary for dictating, manipulating, and stratifying certain affects for specific peoples (Jones, 2022).

To help us understand the relationship between cotton and *fear*, Jackson’s (2020) work on antiblackness, matter, and meaning is especially relevant. Jackson (2020) replaces notions of denied humanity and exclusion with bestialized humanization towards Black people. This argument abounds with opportunities for discourse on enslavement and animality—which is capacious in/for thinking about the roots of fear. Jackson’s (2020) framing implicates temporality and opens discursive perforations into how the cotton plant was used by white plantation owners to produce and reproduce sensibilities and embodiments of fear—which, we would argue, still lead to modes of extreme violence enacted upon Black people.

Returning to the aforementioned statistics with/around/under/through affect reveals that timespacebody(ing)s are undergirded by a particularly insidious form of racial capitalism and exploitation. As plantations and populations grew, so too did white wealth. White plantation owners not only wanted to protect their investment but also govern the way fear was embodied. Here, fear becomes a prismatic intensity that is both the afflicted and the encountered, or, put into Deleuzo-Guattarian (1987) terms, fear becomes “a capacity to affect or be affected” (p. xvi).

As documented in writing by the Slave Codes from 1667-1880, whites inflicted fear upon slaves with brutal beatings, bestialized working and living conditions, and persistent surveillance through Slave Patrols. These patrols—which are the basis of modern-day U.S. policing institutions—thrive off *mapping* fear onto Black bodies through terror and violence. In particular, and according to Potter (2013),

slave patrols had three primary functions: (1) to chase down, apprehend, and return to their owners, runaway slaves; (2) to provide a form of organized terror to deter slave revolts; and, (3) to maintain a form of discipline for slave-workers who were subject to summary justice, outside of the law, if they violated any plantation rules. (p. 3)

Put simply, these patrols and countless laws that supported their violent tendencies, such as the Negro Act of 1740 passed in South Carolina, were *composed to impose* subjection and obedience and preserve the racial ordering of society—a society built around the emotional, physical, and financial well-being of white bodies. Moreover, not only was this abhorrent governance legal, but the deployment of extreme violence to cultivate fear by enslavers was financially encouraged. As noted by Alexander and Alexander (2021), “in many colonies, like Virginia, the public treasury was even required to compensate enslavers if an enslaved person was killed while resisting or running away” (p. 103). Paradoxically, these productions occur because of an inverted register of white fear (Jones, 2022): fear of Black movement, fear of Black organization, Black worship, Black justice, Black resistance, Black hope, Black joy, and Black life. Bridging historical and contemporary contexts of the white monitoring of Blackness, Browne (2015) contends:

Dark sousveillance is also a reading praxis for examining surveillance that allows for a questions of how certain surveillance technologies installed during slavery to monitor and track blackness as property (for example, branding, the one-drop rule, quantitative plantation records that listened enslaved people alongside livestock and crops, slave passes, slave patrols, and runaway notices) anticipate the contemporary surveillance of racialized subjects, and it also provides a way to frame how the contemporary surveillance of the racial body might be contended with. (p. 24)

Amplifying Browne’s (2015) thought (and reality), this form of historical and surveilled fear has cast an indelible shadow on contemporary life. Who could forget Amy Cooper, a white woman who in 2022 called the police on Christian Cooper, a Black Man who was simply bird watching in Central Park or the story from 2020 of Lolade Siyonbola, a Black graduate student in African studies at Yale, who after falling asleep while working on a series of papers was accosted by authorities when Sarah Braasch, a white student, called the campus police to report a “serious incident” (Rogo, 2020). While these are just two examples, Dr. Paul Butler (as quoted in Victor, 2018), a Georgetown University law professor, reminds us that such instances happen “so frequently to people of color that we don’t often think of it as a big deal or as particularly newsworthy” (para 4). Furthermore, such situations can be even more invisible for Black girls in schools (Wun, 2014), where disciplinary practices become a “popular theater of cruelty” (Sexton, 2010, p. 197). Both instances were driven by fear and produced emotional trauma for the victims—sadly, there is also another outcome, death, which is the result of another complex intensity, *suspicion*.

Tethering 2: Computer and Suspicion

From the perspective that feelings and emotions are sticky and always-already in a state of becoming (Ahmed, 2004), they often get stuck onto other affects. That is, feeling begets *more* feeling. Thinking about affect in this way directs us to consider the pluriversality of feeling and how feeling becomes currency *and* is circulated to various bodies. Fear in this sense is not an affectual invariable and sticks itself to a range of other possible outcomes: ambivalence, avoidance, and suspicion.

Zeroing in on the last register, *suspicion*, we wish to overlay its tendrils onto another object, computer. As mentioned earlier, thinking through fear allows for a more entangled understanding

of how policing and surveillance is underwritten by white supremacist logics stemming from chattel slavery in the United States. Importantly, thinking materially about fear and racism also creates a line of flight that arcs towards and unveils acts and actions relating to the shape-shifting nature of white supremacy. Here, we follow Wozolek's (2021) orientation that "using assemblages of violence insists that any one iteration of violence is not singular; it is always necessarily dependent on sociocultural norms, histories, and other interactions of violence" (p. 66). Suspicion—as an affective category—can be, therefore, understood as being underpinned by traces of fear that have been programmed into racist machinations of technology (e.g., computers). Framing technology through what Benjamin (2019) refers to as "The New Jim Code" decodes the multifarious ways that computer *and* suspicion animated the actions resulting in Tyre Nichols' murder.

As Benjamin (2019) asked, "what do 'free will' and 'autonomy' mean in a world in which algorithms are tracking, predicting, and persuading us at every turn?" (p. 32), the officers responsible for Tyre's death were part of the SCORPION⁷ unit—a specialized police squad tasked with intimidating, harassing, and, in this case, deploying lethal violence against citizens of Memphis, Tennessee. The movements of the SCORPION unit are not happenstance, but rather highly intentional and informed by computer algorithms to spatially profile specific urban areas and make predictions of potential crimes. A closer look at the Memphis Police Department reveals the use of a (unspeakable/uninterrupted violent) computer algorithm, developed "in cooperation with the University of Memphis and two corporations [IBM and local company SkyCop]" (Tulumello & Lapaolo, 2022, p. 452). We know already from Wozolek (2021) that intra-actions do not require awareness, and so Benjamin's (2019) insights graft the layer of algorithmic unintentionally onto an irrevocable and entangled web of forces.

Racist algorithms dictating life/death in the United States are nothing new. As computer programs developed more complex ways to analyze/process data, bodies often have been stratified and racially coded. As one of countless examples, in 2009, it was revealed that computer giant Hewlett-Packard (HP) had developed face localization software that failed to recognize or track the faces of Black people, despite accurately tracing the movements of white faces (Sandvig et al., 2016; Simon, 2009). More broadly, computer algorithms curate communication and media, which enables the transfer and sharing of culture (Gillespie, 2012; Ziewitz, 2015) as well as what advertisements are sent to our devices (Bermejo, 2007). According to Coleman (2009), in many ways race can be read *as* technology:

A notion of race as technology, however, moves toward an aesthetic category of human being, where mutability of identity, reach of individual agency, and conditions of culture all influence each other. As a tool, race can be used for ill as well as for good; it may become a trap or a trapdoor. I base this turn from tool of terror to mechanism of agency not on magical thinking, but rather on the ethical choices that one may make every day. If race possesses no value without context, then we must choose to act courageously when faced with oppression—our own or somebody else's. (p. 181)

Whether trap or trapdoor, when entangled with technology, race becomes something much more than a static way of sorting/organizing bodies to fit into coded tiers imbued with (white) power(s) and privilege(s). Race *is* always-already violence and a technology in and of itself, while what we call "technology" in a more conventional sense becomes an apparatus for maintaining race's unspeakable-ness and uninterrupted-ness through an automation of antiblackness. Regarding

entanglements of racial logics and technological designs, Benjamin (2019) directs us to consider how “race itself operates as a tool of vision and division with often deadly results” (p. 36). Race as a technology sorts Black bodies in the classroom and beyond, including the statistics that shape school funding and opportunities, even when programs and initiatives are intended to thwart discrimination (see Beratan, 2006).

To summarize, the neighborhood in which Tyre Nichols was driving and eventually pulled over was under suspicion for “violent criminal activity” because of racist algorithms processed by a computer—developed by an academic institution and guided by policies and practices founded on fear, suspicion, and antiblackness. Despite many sources covering the murder dismissing the act as being non-racial, we would argue that the Black identities of the officers who beat Tyre Nichols to death are evidence of the complete permeance of both fear and suspicion within the architecture of police culture. Being Black does not make you immune to antiblackness—especially considering the underpinnings of organized policing and countless examples in the United States of Black life being deemed disposable. As James Baldwin (1998) prophetically stated, “the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do” (p. 723).

Tethering 3: Skateboard and Joy

Just as “the assemblage is an ever-knotted thing, always in motion” (Wozolek, 2021, p. 66), nested within assemblages of violence are threads of joy. Tyre Nichols was a father who loved skateboarding. And, although skateboarding culture has been shaped by predominantly white bodies, being a skater is inscribed with historical accounts of *refusal* of societal politeness and conformity—perhaps what Weheliye (2014) refers to as a racialized assemblage. According to *Mostly Skateboarding* podcast host Patrick Hunter:

Every skateboarder has experienced some sort of frightening or traumatizing experience dealing with either police officers or security guards. I remember the first time I got lined up with a bunch of my friends for skating at a loading dock behind a photo studio. There was something bizarre about it, in that we all knew what to do—you sit on your hands, you don’t say anything, nobody talks out of turn, and ideally, they let you go. I’ve had friends who have been slammed into police cars, friends who have been arrested and detained—I’ve certainly been handcuffed, I’ve been stopped and frisked. (Haidari, 2023, para. 5)

Despite this struggle, Tyre Nichols found immense joy in skateboarding. In a tribute to his legacy, community organizer Aaron Wiggs spoke about how a deck of wood with metal trucks and rubber wheels, covered in sticky tape holds the potential of leveraging personal joy into communal hope and action: “The beauty of skateboarding is you become allies with anyone who’s on a skateboard—you can go anywhere in the world and meet someone with a skateboard and you become friends. Your sense of community is stronger.” (Haidari, 2023, para. 11).

Drawing our attention to the generative capacity of refusal as an intensity, Halberstam (2011) suggests that acts of refusal “may lead to forms of speculation, modes of thinking that ally not with rigor and order, but with inspiration and unpredictability. If we begin anywhere, we begin with the right to refuse what has been refused to you” (p. 10). In the context of Tyre Nichols’s murder, we (the authors) refuse to linger within the assemblage of violence without underscoring

unwavering joyous lines with/around/under/through Tyre Nichol's life. Put differently, despite Tyre Nichols' life being tragically cut short by an assemblage of violence underwritten by cotton and fear, computer and suspicion, his life was not defined by the assemblage of violence. Here, we believe it is of the utmost importance to hazard the weight of antiblack grief/loss/murder by (re)positioning joy to be in close proximity with these (heavy) registers.

While we produce scholarship within the field of social studies that is concerned with refusing normalized mutings of death (Varga et al., 2021a, 2021b, 2023, we follow the lead of Duncan, Hall, and Dunn (2023) who declared that "if social studies is supposed to help students understand the full range of the human experience, the field's preoccupation with Black suffering must give way to curriculum and curricular materials that include a fuller picture of Black experiences" (p. 2). Duncan et al. (2023) continue:

Centering Black joy in social studies curriculum requires that teachers shift their mindsets about Black histories and communities, as well as what topics of study are worth dedicating classroom time toward. Most importantly, centering Black joy in the social studies curriculum allows Black students to see their own humanity as they learn that their ancestors consistently found joy alongside their struggle. (p. 7)

This shifted mindset has many personal and collective benefits. Tichavakunda (2022) asked the question: "Why discuss joy or agency, for example, in a country founded upon a totalizing system so violently racist as chattel slavery?" (p. 424). Drawing from Johnson (2003, p. 28), Tichavakunda (2022) responds that then "scholars might simultaneously understand enslaved people and their lives, as 'fiercely determined' yet 'insistently transcendent,' producing solidarity, culture, and a creative, vibrant life" (p. 424). In this way, there is a recognition of the many and reverberating effects and affects of enslavement while simultaneously honoring that no one's life can be reduced to their or their ancestors' enslavement or responses to enslavement.

We find joy and hope in the words of Kelley (2002), author of *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, who noted that the relationship between refusal and liberation demands "the mind's most creative capacities, catalyzed by participation in struggles for change" (p. 191). Importantly, and according to Spaulding et al., (2021) "this is the work that must be done to freedom dream" (p. 8).

And specifically, as educational researchers, we find joy and hope in Mitchell's (2022) articulation of Black Queer joy as a qualitative research lens. Such a lens can attend to formations of "Queer and Racial Battle fatigues," but with "the additional resonance to consider ... how institutional violence is based in a continuum of colonialist fear around the inability to ever fully control the spirit of Queer Black joy and overall desire" (p. 957). This joy, "realized through the realms of the arts, survivance, ridicule, and sustenance," benefits the Queer Black community and also "radiates beyond the community" (p. 944), particularly when not appropriated or encumbered by white supremacist, heteropatriarchal hatred and fear that results in what Love (2019) refers to as "spirit murdering."

We leave readers with one last joyful coordinate. Remember Christian Cooper, the birdwatcher from Central Park who was forced to endure Amy Cooper's fear and suspicion? Well, he will be starring in his own show on National Geographic TV, called *The Extraordinary Birder*, which will be released in the summer of 2023. Thinking again with Johnson (2003) and Tichavakunda (2022), Christian Cooper is entangled with hateful effects and affects of white supremacy while simultaneously being so much more than that experience.

Coda

So where does this leave us? How might a more particularized accounting of historical/contemporary materials and the affects they produce work to rupture educational assemblages of violence? How might educators talk to students about these unspeakable/uninterrupted territories of violence? And how might we dream otherwise? Perhaps when acts of violence do become visible, a nudge towards the material and affectual can be generative in helping students *refuse* historically censored, sustained, and whitewashed frames and forms of quotidian violence that drag our attention towards registers of inevitability and predictability. Here, we are thinking of what Springgay (2023) calls the *imponderable extraordinary curriculum* that refuses to accept a status quo approach to teaching, learning, pedagogy, and curriculum—and the ethico-onto-epistemological implications therein. Perhaps in this sense, our use of violence and the assemblage of bodies that become entangled within are indeed *queer*. Ahmed (2019) teaches us that “queer uses, when things are used for purposes other than the ones for which they were intended, still reference the qualities of things; queer uses may linger on those qualities, rendering them all the more lively” (p. 26). By this logic, when conceptualized as an assemblage, violence *and* education do indeed become lively and reveal myriad lines of flight for teachers and students to think about how human and more-than-human bodies and intensities contribute(d) to historical outcomes and contemporary be(com)ings.

In closing, our argument rests upon the position that thinking with things and affects can lead to potentially more complicated *and* relational understandings of violent contexts through an accounting of how things become controlled/leveraged to produce deliberate intensities that, more often than not, perpetuate and sustain ecologies of antiblackness. As we all continue to grapple with these thoughts in the context of a pastpresentfuture world (Varga, 2022) shaped, misshaped, and reshaped by injustice, it is our sincerest hope that this article serves as a reminder that we must come to understand how present and future violence is predicated upon the problematic past of American society and institutional culture and, perhaps most significantly, education’s role in allowing these configurations of violence to continue (Jones, 2022). Becoming attuned to affective saturations embedded within objects offers a slightly alternative angle for us to unknow ourselves;

the unhinging opens up a different conversation about why we do what we do, here, in this place, that despises us—not focusing on reparation of the self, alone, but instead sharing information and stories and resources to build the capacity for social change. (McKittrick, 2021, p. 16)

Material and affective change is (beyond) overdue.

Notes

1. According to Barad (2007), intra-action can be used to conceptualize the unique way(s) that various bodies can exist in states of be(com)ing that are contingent upon encounters, thus, registering bodies as co-constitutive.
2. We use the category more-than-human to describe bodies and matter that are *other* than human. Following the lead of Pugliese (2020), our orientation of *more* is meant to affirm that such entities transcend human characteristics, but also are entangled within the human experience (i.e., our use of -’s to connect the words).
3. Throughout this work, we conceptualize bodies as be(com)ing “forces that overlap and relate to each other” (Hultman & Lenz-Taguchi, 2010, p. 529).

4. In step with Vargas (2018), we write antiblackness as such to amplify the difference between the broader and nuanced condition of Blackness that extends beyond Black history/ies.
5. Our understanding of assemblage is underwritten by an arc of scholarship that suggests the concept itself is a multiplicity that articulates “bodies, actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 88). Moreover, we understand assemblages as being communal and agentic (DeLanda, 2006), dynamic and material (Grosz, 1993, 1994), affective and intersectional (Puar, 2007, 2012), and fleshy, physiological, and racialized (Weheliye, 2014).
6. Here we adjust Barad’s (2007) concept of timespacematter(ing) that collapses time, space, and matter(ing) into a singular concept to account for our framing of matter as being situated and embodied.
7. SCORPION unit stands for Street Crimes Operation to Restore Peace in Our Neighborhoods and was shut down after the murder of Tyre Nichols.

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