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Post-Linguistic Acts and the Worshiped Invisible

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Abstract

For communities on the margins of hostile or indifferent power structures, the political order can be experienced as a force whose acts are not motivated by reasons in accord with recognizable norms. Power, then, as a social phenomenon, is naturalized in the sense that it is dehumanized. Derrida explored some of this territory in his final seminar, *the Beast and the Sovereign*. Power becomes a latent animality, structuring social life as it removes itself from mechanisms of accountability. At the same time, the Black church ritual, in the United States and elsewhere, provides an experience of a self-sustaining power, whose invisibility is taken as coextensive with its omnipresence. The act of worship becomes a project of counter-habituation whereby power can be constituted as just and life-affirming. Simone Weil's spiritual writings on the necessity of God's love can be of some assistance here, but her concern with "decreation" is on its face a self-erasing theological enterprise, the sociopolitical implications of which would seem to put it at odds with a movement, among marginalized people, toward increased recognition. A look at the relation between Weil's writing method—which I analyze as a kind of endophrasis—and Edmund Husserl's transcendental understanding of the self provides a way to reorganize our understanding of the sociocultural project supported by the ritual. To grasp the counter-habituating project of the ritual, we must see it as founded in non-linguistic thinking and post-linguistic acts. These acts are, in part, improvisational, which is a key to habituating the recognition of higher-order necessity through free activity. They bring the worshiper "through" culturally determined linguistic acts to another kind of experience, in which the freedom to worship an invisible God is manifest.

Keywords: ritual; Husserl; phenomenology; black church; writing; water crisis; sovereignty; improvisation; necessity; contingency

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1. Introduction: A Nest of Invisibilities

The following text continues my research on the social experience of marginalized populations broadly and the people of Flint, Michigan, in particular. It explores the relation between an unaccountable "sovereign" and the population it governs, understanding that relation through the institutions and practices the people rely on to give meaning to their lives. The intellectual leap required will be to take the work of philosophers and mystics like Simone Weil and Edmund Husserl as relevant to the spiritual experience of Flint residents. Complexity is introduced in this undertaking because of the many equivocations of the term "invisible" at play: We have the social invisibility of residents of Flint. We have the invisible links within structures of power and domination. We have the invisibility of the object of worship, the deity. We have the invisibility of the structural features of our

experience of the world: necessity, love, subjectivity, etc.,[1] These equivocations are not to be sorted out so much as to be worked through. The aim in these pages is to see more, at the philosophico-eidetic level, of what it means for marginalized populations to practice faith in times of crisis.

2. Poison

The city where I was born was famously poisoned in the year 2014 when the state government changed the water supply for the local population from the Great Lakes to the river that runs through the city.[2] The river and the city are named Flint. The poison, as is now widely known, was lead, a toxic heavy metal. Lead leached from the pipes and into the drinking water of just less than one hundred thousand people. In my book Alterity and the Flint Water Crisis, I attempted to understand how, socially and on a human level, such an event could take place, and how the voices of those affected by the crisis could be so effectively stifled and so comprehensively ignored. Lead is, however, only one poison, only one of the powers corrosive of body, mind and community, that affected the city of Flint. There are others: social and spiritual poisons like apathy, nihilism, crime, murder, invisibility, mistrust, etc. The current text is not meant merely as a sociological examination of the problems or poisons afflicting a single city. It is rather a set or network of sociophenomenological reflections related to a specific social context. There is a well-known lack of trust in institutions of most kinds in the city, and among majority Black populations in America more broadly. The exception to that distrust that I found in Flint was the Black church. The people I spoke to in Flint cited the church as the major institutional structure that was interested in helping them. In some ways, this is unsurprising: The church is not a government organization or a private corporation with problematic ties to the city's water crisis or the economic exploitation and malaise that preceded it. But in another sense, the proffering of the church as not only a trusted but a helpful institution during the water crisis was puzzling. During the most intense periods of the crisis—it has not ended—people in Flint needed direct material assistance in the very short term. People needed safe water to drink and bathe in without delay. This is the kind of assistance that cash-strapped religious organizations were least prepared to provide. It is true, of course, that church groups gave material assistance, but my assessment was and continues to be that the function of the church in this time and in that context was multidimensional: habituating, social, and spiritual. To understand the position of the church for Flint residents, I needed to understand the constitution of an oppositional power structure in a time of crisis, in a time of great need, so that the experience of Flint residents could be seen as the persistence of an alterized population, an excluded people.[3]

3. The Caprice of the Sovereign

The motivation for that work comes from an analysis of the relation between marginalized and excluded populations like those in Flint and the structures of power and authority "over" them. Such populations relate to a sovereign power in much the same way that one might relate to a wild animal, or to an unpredictable force of nature, a tornado or flood or hurricane. Many people in Flint told me that their elected officials, in particular people like former governor Rick Snyder and the emergency managers he employed, should be put "under the jail." These remarks can be taken in the mode of a sought revenge or in the sense of an ongoing threat to public safety. *These are dangerous people*. Dangerous because they do not relate to us as persons in a community typically do. They do not seem bound by the commonly held norms that roughly characterize human rights, decency and fellow-feeling. This kind of an assessment follows from the ostensibly punitive and senseless application of policy, procedure, and law that residents in Flint face across many categories, including

water usage. For example, during the water crisis, Flint residents have paid some of the highest water bills in the country. They were forced to pay, even as the level of severity of the crisis was becoming undeniable.

In 2024, the local news outlets published stories about the mayor's office rescinding a portion of the liens placed on residents' homes for non-payment of water bills. The city claimed that over seven million dollars was owed from inactive accounts and over ten million dollars owed from active accounts.[4] In the very same press release that advertises assistance for some Flint residents, the mayor's office urges inactive account holders to make immediate payment arrangements to avoid liens, and by implication, possible foreclosure. This is only one example, among many, of the caprice of power: the decision to switch the water sources in the first place, hiding and de-emphasizing key public health hazards like the Legionnaires' disease outbreak and issuing boil advisories with limited guidance or contextualization, etc. If we examine this situation in the manner of empathy, thinking about the experience of Flint residents, we see a population that cannot predict the actions of their leaders, who are not afforded the privileges we reflexively associate with citizenship or social belonging, broadly speaking. The behavior of the powers is not experienced as conforming to standards of respect, care, or even logic. In the same paragraph of a city press release in which residents are informed that water is a human right, they are informed that old inactive water accounts can cause their homes to be foreclosed on. This has been going on for years through a complex constellation of personalities, politicians, government agencies, private corporations and other groups, all of which come together in an agent-synthesis, a variegated "they" that is characterized by its power, inscrutability, and capriciousness.

This "they" appears much as the sovereign does, for example, in Derrida's final seminar, published in two volumes, entitled The Beast and the Sovereign. In the text, Derrida's deconstructive method leads him to a series of representations in the literature, associations between sovereign status and beastliness. A pure phenomenological approach might help us to see the experience of such an authority as characterized by a capriciousness which is constitutive of a lived relation to natural phenomena under conditions of habitual—that is cultural, social, motivational, etc.—ignorance. The capriciousness of the power structure is so deep and baffling and ultimately pernicious that the power structure becomes like a beast whose behavior cannot be subsumed under the normative patterns that structure social life in a community. In Derrida's introductory lecture to the seminar, he gives us an image of the dual faces of the beast and the sovereign interpenetrating and haunting one another:

> "I believe that this troubling resemblance, this worrying superposition of these two beings-outside-the-law . . . explains and engenders a sort of hypnotic fascination or irresistible hallucination which makes us see, project, perceive . . . the face of the beast under the features of the sovereign . . . In the vertigo of this *unheimlich*, uncanny hallucination, one would be as though prey to a . . . haunting of the sovereign by the beast and the beast by the sovereign . . .". (Derrida 2011, p. 18)

Derrida's seminar is full of references to predators and prey, wolves, foxes, and carnivorous creatures of many varieties. When reading this passage, one is struck by the question of perspective. That is to say, for whom is this spectral relationship a haunting? For whom is this face on top of a face uncanny? Textually, the answer is clear: for "us." But who is that? The *we* of this passage cannot be the sovereign, and insofar as—at the sociological level—the sovereign is constituted as a community, it cannot be this community. The "we" here must be the communities positioned such that this dual nature of the sovereign is both perceptible and interpretable as a haunting. We imagine that the sovereign experiences his beastly obverse as a space of free action, perhaps as a delight. In any case, the sovereign, as

sovereign, does not suffer the experience of acting outside the law as an uncanny aberration. This mode of action is, on the contrary, constitutive of sovereignty in its purest form. For marginalized populations like residents of Flint, this obscene duality of the sovereign is all-too-readily perceived. Indeed, the characterization of figures in political power as criminals and grifters is commonplace among these communities. The haunting of these interpenetrating faces is a fact of daily life, a feature of the social environment.

The fourth lecture in the seminar—to skip over quite a *lot* of material—takes on the deconstruction of what might be called Lacan's speciesism.[5] This deconstruction is effected in typical virtuoso fashion for Derrida, but what interests me is a claim Derrida makes and reads in Lacan's analysis of "Law" and "Crime," the claim that the superego can be delinquent, can commit crimes, can transgress itself (Derrida 2011, p. 103). This observation is for us less a matter of psychoanalytic practice or philosophical speculation as it is a clue to seeing the social manifestation of power from the perspective of marginalized populations. The hypocritical dimension of the power structure, the sustaining-through-self-undermining character of law enforcement, is known to the people on the other side of the police officer's truncheon and the politician's press conference. The superego of a higher-order personality, like a community or social system, is its ruling class. And just like the superego of an individuated personality, it may transgress itself and be a source of transgression, by its own standards, in others. The specter of the criminal superego, the sovereign outside the law, can inspire subcultures of despair within the populace. We can read part of the reaction to the lynching tree in the United States of America in just this way. The lynching tree, at the level of the social unconscious, is a product of a criminal superego. We needn't be Lacanians or even Derridians to see the perspicacity of such a claim. One needs merely to note that the obscene celebration of the lynching is attended by members of the community who profess non-violent faiths and who adhere to non-violent principles (Cone 2013). As is well known, but should be more widely discussed, lynchings in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries often brought out hundreds or thousands of interested and celebratory onlookers. Parts of the corpse were taken as memorabilia. Photos of the hangings were used as postcards, etc.[6] The psychic contortions necessary to participate in and on some level approve of such barbarism while purportedly espousing Christian ethics and democratic principles have not been adequately understood.[7] The predatory abuse of an entire population is in keeping with almost no commonly held system of moral or ethical standards, and yet such abuse is a historical commonplace. This sociological paradox is not likely to be dissolved by the populations who suffer most of the violence of the crimes of the superego. In a context like the United States, that "criminal superego" can come to be associated with a capacity for institution-building as such. Where and when this happens, the basic structural elements necessary for social trust will be lacking. We should expect varying levels of despair, atomization, anomie, nihilism. Under such conditions, some countervailing means of social self-understanding is necessary.

All of these phenomena can be seen at another level as an imposed disruption of some of the most important habituation engendered by the sedimentation of empathy experience. The openness to familiarity, characteristic of empathy experience, can give rise to kinds of comfort, ease, and responsiveness that make spiritual understanding and communicative exchange possible. But the same phenomena that allow for the enrichment of communal life can deepen divisions between communities. Husserl outlines, in the fifth Cartesian meditation, some of the most general features of the problem. Using a language of monads and cultural worlds, Husserl observes that communities as types can be seen as "personalities" of a higher order. These personalities admit of infinitely many variations, some of which are quite different to one another, such that persons "belonging to one and the same world live in a loose cultural community—or even none at all . . ." Divisions

between cultural communities can take many forms. The division, a kind of empathetic rift, between Flint residents and the power structure, imposed by the power structure, is characterized by a capriciousness that precludes categories of expectations and which may be posited in a theoretical attitude as an experienced *contingency* associated with the contingency essential to nature itself.[8]

4. The Church Ritual and Taking Control

We can return, then, to the experience of the people of Flint, Michigan, in their moment under the capricious sovereign, and ask about their response to that power. They, for the most part, did not attempt to engage the power at the level of its internal rules of operation. People said that Rick Snyder should be under the jail, but they rarely said that the democratic process, given enough time, would bring justice to the people. I never heard anything like that in Flint. There was instead an emphasis on entirely different sorts of experience and modes of social organization than those associated with the power structure. These included especially the forms of religious and spiritual experience associated with the Black church.

In 2019, I attended a service of Joy Tabernacle in the Civic Park neighborhood of Flint that was instructive on a number of levels. The chief of police happened to be in attendance that morning, and he was invited to give a prayer. The chief asked all of the young men in the church to come forward. He said: "Father, we ask that you'd lead, you'd order their steps, father, in the way you would have them go, father. And only you can do that . . . Take control of their lives like they've never [known]. Don't even let them know what happened, Father." The chief of police ostensibly represents order and safety, even in Flint, where violent crime has become a constant and seemingly intractable problem. But here, the chief, in a purely linguistic fashion, places the authority and coercive power to sustain order in the divine sphere. The chief has given to God the project of ordering the lives caught up in the prayer. The chief was working in a linguistic fashion, but that does not mean he is working only with pure concepts. He is working with the posture of his body, tone of voice, etc. He is also delivering his speech to an audience with heads bowed and eyes closed. Every tiny element matters here and contributes to the habituation, as meaning that the prayer experience enacts. Later in the service, the congregation will sing a song, all together, whose refrain is "My life is in Your hands." The pastor's partially *improvised* performance will become more and more impassioned, telling the congregation that "It doesn't matter what it looks like. It doesn't matter what it feels like. If God has anything to do with it, then everything will work out for my good." The music will undergo a powerful change in which forms of organization, musical meaning, and their associated expectations are subverted or entirely left behind. Words are left behind. To the uninitiated listener, it might be a cacophony, a senselessness made sound. My interpretation of these features of the ritual is not that language and symbolic representation are simply abandoned, but rather that they are pushed through. *The ritual is structured in such a way that a new experience of necessity becomes possible, one not governed by pre-existing sedimentation of linguistic or conceptual meaning determined by the dominant culture*. The ritual becomes a way of showing the congregation how to break free of the tyranny of the word (of the law, of the social designation), to arrest its meaning-operation as determined by the necessity of coercive capriciousness of the sovereign and turn it towards a necessity of being under the divinity of God. One struggles to imagine such a shift happening through pure logico-linguistic argumentation. Similarly, one struggles to see such a shift happening without a previously sedimented socioculturally determined linguistic sphere. A genetic-phenomenological analysis should show that these acts occur, within the confines of the ritual, *after language*, are partially determined by non-linguistic forms of cognition, and have the potential to reorder the

social space as an element of communal resistance to a dominant cultural power. In this specific instance, the post-linguistic acts of the ritual aid in the intersubjective constitution of a necessity which includes an experience of justice as its essence and expectation of freedom as its essential present. In other work, I relate this analysis to what is called hope.

5. Weil and Writing from Within

Simone Weil's philosophical theology might seem a strange connection to make in an article on the Flint water crisis. Here, we can make no strong, set-in-stone-forever claims about the relation between Weil's discoveries of adumbrations of deity and the condition of marginalized people like Flint residents. We can only pull together strands, seek resonances, and hope that we've found something worth saying. The knowledge to be created here is sociological, philosophical, and, only in a very loosely associated way, theological. A presupposition of this work must be that an understanding of necessity that is not only metaphysically but theologically informed will bear sociological fruit. The character and the eidetic-theological foundations of the Black church ritual may indeed have something to tell us about the spiritual organization, the social animation, of the people of Flint and—given shared experiences of marginalization and injustice—other communities as well. Our hermeneutic task is great, as well as the risk, the same risk that menaces the properly phenomenological investigation when it attempts to incorporate and illuminate text of any kind. The text is a remainder, a petrification of the phenomenon of thought.[9] The relation between the text and the phenomenon can only be made vivid through effort, and even then, the questions of validity, of cogency, of authoritative or even coercive claims to truth might give us pause. Added to this difficulty is the undeniable observation that Weil was an unusually elliptical writer. What we have from her comes in large part from a stack of notebooks given to Gustave Thibon. Weil's writing technique spans detailed essayistic works, the polemic, and what comes across the page as burningly felt but piercingly observed spiritual reflections, unrelenting in character but constrained by the qualities of authentic revelation—thick with metaphors, haunted by superficial contradiction, deep, chasmic, even chiasmic. Before these challenges, philosophy must not shrink. For the purposes of the present text, a discussion of Weil's "decreation" is a pressing concern, but to address it, a discussion of what I will call her endophrastic method will be needed.

Weil does not give a direct definition of decreation in her works. Her intellectual and spiritual practice led her to explore decreation, as if from the inside, as opposed to dominating it with the delimitations of a concept. We could call such an approach an endophrasis, which spiritual writing on a certain level must be. The endophrastic writer produces descriptions from within a state of revelation or wonder and puts pen to paper as it were tremblingly, knowing that what is seen in revelation will fit poorly through language onto a page. Weil is aware of the inadequacy of the language she is using to capture and preserve something of her spiritual experience:

> "In the operation of writing, the hand which holds the pen and the body and soul which are attached to it with all their social environment are things of infinitesimal importance for those who love the truth. They are infinitely small in the order of nothingness." (Weil 1997, p. 11)

But she is aware of other inadequacies as well. The language used in writing is associated with a particular acculturation, a particular view of life and logic and the divine. The "order of nothingness" here is the order of that which transcends absolutely what might be said, that about which one still insists on writing. The endophrastic writing may be carried out with the aid of little but a fool's hope, but yet it is still carried out. One still does it. The contradictions—and, again, Weil's work is rife with contradictions—are in fact

indications that the endophrasis is being authentically achieved. The honest expression of what is seen and felt from within the wonder—endophrasis may be theological and motivated by revelation or secular-phenomenological, motivated by wonder—must fail on some level; its theme is that which is exceptional to the conceptual schemes that order our understanding of the world.[10] The exception is that which is beyond grasping, but not perhaps having, and phenomenologically not beyond what may be given.[11] This last category, that which may be given, is crucial to our understanding of Weil's method, crucial to our understanding of what I have been calling endophrasis. The category of linguistic expression, that which may be said, is subsumed by and dwarfed by the category of that which may be given. All fields of sensibility, the depths and heights of eidetic play, all glories of logico-mathematical reason, the poetries of pre-predicative life—all of this and more is there for us in the universe of givenness—all revelation! This is the key to understanding and feeling Weil as a writer motivated by a method. We may think, or be tempted to think, of endophrastic writing as in some sense naive. The endophrastic writer appears to be in the throes of a fit of the least communicable passion. We have this concern for naïveté when we read Weil and also when we reflect on her life story. Weil behaved as few do, she gave what almost no one gives. The error we risk making when writing about her is two-sided. She may be turned into a saint-like figure, beyond human needs and drives, connected to the divine in ways that we down below cannot hope to experience.[12] At the same time, she might be portrayed as ungainly, bumbling, and socially awkward.[13] How many biographies and introductions to Weil's work remind us that she was horribly injured after stepping in a vat of oil while attempting to aid the Spanish resistance? (Chenavier 2012, p. 10; Cha 2017, p. 11; Petrement 1976, p. 274) These biographical details are representations of her life, what she actually did, enjoyed and suffered in this world, but they are not her thought. What some say about Heidegger, one must certainly say for Weil: The thought, in itself, matters. If, through the thought, we arrive at or even glimpse something deeper, all the better. But here, when we consider Weil as an endophrastic writer, we have to acknowledge and affirm that writing from within the experiential predicament requires a commitment to meaning, sustained by a fidelity to truth. Endophrastic writing is an honest communicative act, and it is not possible to attempt to communicate honestly unless one accepts the conditions of possibility of honest communication. We need in this connection to take the endophrastic writer as aware of the continued partial failure that haunts deep communicative work and proceeding anyway. Yes, words fall short, but the value to be had is only revealed in the trying. Weil's thought speaks to this communicative understanding and this sustained attempt to say the unsayable. And yet we should not be tempted to reduce Weil into a paradox-monger or *forger* of Koans. There is a message and view of necessity we can learn from her work. We can learn it from outside, from the text, and maybe this "learning" can push us into a place from which to practice and endophrasis all our own.

6. Love and Necessity: Decreation

Miklos Vetö writes:

> "Weil was always convinced that all reality was completely determined by necessity, and it is basically to exonerate divinity from the cruel mechanism of this world that she found herself led to posit God as Power separated from Love." (Vetö 1994, p. 14)

This sweeping introductory encapsulation is interesting for—among other things—its use of the term "positing." Vetö has Weil *positing* a God—a type, in a kind of eidetic operation, a synthesis performed in a theoretical attitude, almost as if Weil were *thinking through* the problem of divinity in a cruel, fallen world and finding her writing on necessity

as an intellectualized solution to that problem. We may find such an interpretation doubtful, given not only Weil's biography but her claims and method. Weil's work does not give us the sense that she is *positing* God. She was rather discovering and exploring divinity, and only afterward positing ways of textualizing that experience. Part of that work required an analysis of necessity as related to divinity and power as a fact of the created world. Power is not only a feature of the deity, it is a way of disturbing Being, through the creation and expression of selfhood, such that the purity of Being represented by God's light is obscured. The self for Weil "is only a shadow" blocking God's light.[14] Weil's study of force in the Iliad also attests to this. The notion of force as that which turns a person into a stone, into a pure material object, seems to have arrested Weil's imagination (Weil and Holoka 2003, p. 46). The use of force in warfare, however, must be distinguished from the power of God. As Weil makes clear in the text, the effect of force is an acute form of dehumanization, a way of taking the will from a human being, or rather, subjecting all aspects of the will to the primal will to live. The moment at which Achilles, or any warrior, has Hector, or any warrior, at the end of his sword, helpless, on his knees, craving life but seeing only death ahead of him—this moment is possible only through the practice of a specifically human evil, the willed objectification of another.

How can we relate this understanding of force and objectification to Weil's decreation? Decreation is an act of will; it is a willed relinquishment of the self so that God's presence can again be the substance of the world. This idea is strange on its face because creation is or seems to be an act of the will of God. So then, why shouldn't we view creation as a field of being trembling at the tip of God's sword? Why should we not view being created as the ultimate act of submission to the will of God? This problem—it becomes a problem if we cannot answer the previous questions with an affirmative "we should"—is the beginning of a path to seeing God as love. But in order to see God as love, for Weil, one must see the self as a form of evil—as that which separates the creation from the pure will of God, the light of God, which is not force; it is necessity. Decreation, then, is a diachronic process whose end is the realization that the reality of the self is given through its separation from the Being of divinity. This feature of Weil's spiritual thought shows its difference to other mystical/religious/philosophical traditions, which take the self to be an *illusion*. For Weil, the self is there as a fact of creation. The self is the work of God, and yet the self is an imposition, there to take the beauty of creation and somehow nullify it, or rather pervert it into something that may not accept the love of God. The love of God is, for Weil, the primal fact of all Being. Creation is, however, distinct from the being of the love of God. Creation is that whose freedom separates itself from the necessity of God's love. To make this more plain, we can investigate the fantasy of God *choosing* to love his creations, the world and everything in it. For Weil, the notion of choosing to love is absurd, but it is also absurd to say that God must love. One does not think of God as being forced into anything. The necessity which binds the lover to the loving act is itself God. All of the necessitated acts of love are themselves God, for Weil. What then remains in the world of "free" will? Creation remains, which is to say all that rejects God's loving necessity, all that is bad, all that through pride throws down what is good. Creation institutes the possibility of evil, of absence, of the will to dominate, even destroy, the other.

From here, one must wonder whether decreation is not simply a doctrine of the annihilation of the self. Weil is adamant that it is not, but how are we to believe her, given the central idea of Weil's theology, which is that the created, individuated self exists but is bad?[15] If the created self has a positive real existence and is the sticking point separating God from created being, then the simple annihilation of the self ought to solve all ethical problems. God is unified with the annihilated being, leaving only divinity, only necessity. The problem, or one problem, with such a reading is the necessity that God is also love, and

loving is something *done.* The logic of the Being of God is precisely loving. It is therefore an active logic, an active being. The truth of God is love. The being of this truth requires a subject of knowledge and enunciation. The power of God is love. Such a power requires a domain over which it may be wielded. Elsewhere, Weil writes that belief in the existence of others is in itself love (Weil 2005, p. 291). This is on a first reading puzzling, until we allow ourselves, perhaps through reading Weil with Levinas, to focus on what is done for the other through the acknowledgment of their existence, through the willed apprehension of the other as *outside* of me, as a transcendent personal reality whom I can only know partially, who is always about to surprise me, to whom I am responsible, whose life I am bound to honor and to protect (R. C. Reed 2013).

Robert Reed looks to the Levinasian concept of "substitution" to draw this parallel out, taking time along the way to acknowledge that Levinas was an especially strident critic of Weil. Substitution, for Levinas, is a way of understanding our predicament as subjects in a world. Substitution reaches out to the other and says not only that I could be them but that because I could be the other, I am responsible for them; I am ethically related to the other, and I am implicated in their ethical relation to me. For Reed, Weil's decreation is what Levinas' substitution looks like "from the inside." (ibid., p. 30). It is a technique or rather a spiritual practice, which allows the practitioner to *be* that which the ethical conception demands. The decreation of the self is then a way of embodying the spiritual truth understood through ethico-spiritual reflection. It is *not* following a rule; it is rather *becoming that which demonstrates the truth the rule fails to describe*. Here, another dimension of endophrasis enters. Decreation, as such, is not a kind of endophrasis—decreation is not a writing practice—but the only writing that could properly describe decreation would be endophrastic. it would need to recognize that conformity to a rule could never account for the truth of decreative acts. Similarly, the kinds of philosophical concept-work associated with Levinasian substitution are separate from decreation as a lived experience. "Decreation" is a concept, but it is a concept which points to acts, acts which in themselves are not conceptual.

We can look to Weil's writings on suffering and necessity to find decreative experience, *but* we can also look to joy. Weil states that, "perfect joy excludes the very feeling of joy, for in the soul filled by the object no corner is available to say 'I'."[16] The moment of joy removes the created barrier between God and God, takes the self out of subjectivity, and enacts an experience of the object which transcends even the feeling of it. We might associate this experience beyond self, beyond feeling, beyond expression, with the Lacanian real or Buddhist no-mind. We might interpret Weil as making explicitly phenomenological claims about the deep structure of our experience, that hyletic materiality is not undergirded by an ur-Ich in the way that some Husserlian texts suggest. We might find any number of other ways to "read" Weil on joy and decreation. The most important thing for scholars and philosophers to do here is to observe the distinction between the experience described and the description of it. To attempt seriously to read Weil, we first decide to avoid the representationalist trap, and instead to see the words as a smudgy lens through which a non-linguistic experience might be glimpsed.

7. Weil and Husserl's Transcendentalism

Weil's decreation toward the necessity of God's love would seem to put her at odds with the Husserl of Husserliana 42, appendix 30, who analyzes the ego through the preservation of the self and who says, "The true life, the life under the idea of the true self would then be a life that constantly sets true goals for itself and progresses from true achievement to true achievement. That is, of course, the idea of a divine life."[17] In this text, we find the founder of phenomenology in a mode both focused on the practical realities

of human existence and the prospect of the divine. Husserl would appear to be, here, a staunch anti-decreationist. The path to the divine would be to build and strengthen the self through virtuous achievements, not to reduce or even annihilate the self. He arrives at this description through an understanding of the ego as having no fixed properties. The ego for Husserl is not a substantial entity but rather a movement toward the preservation of the self. This very movement constitutes the being of the ego.

Husserl invokes a language of "striving" in these passages, of the ego as a striving toward its continuation. This is the work of subjectivity, that before which and through which the world is constituted for consciousness, the active egoic component of the intentional relation. All of these concepts and concerns seem startlingly dissimilar to the general thrust of Weil's project, which takes revelation as a ground for intellectual work. This is why it is appropriate to describe Weil as a mystic. Weil is very much not a phenomenologist in the Husserlian vein, for whom the rational investigation of experience reveals a world amenable to the search for deeper meaning, a world that honors the deep truths of the transcendental method. The two approaches to philosophy and thought are, in a sense, opposites. Husserl's late ethics treats us to passages like this:

> "I cannot be satisfied with the world if it is not better. *The ideal is that the world is indeed a perfect one, this is the necessary ideal or the necessary practical demand that I must posit onto the world.* The world is as perfect as it can be thought of, fundamentally in the sense of the apprehension that human beings and the world are attuned to one another, that the world has a structure that makes an infinity of ethical culture possible for humanity . . . It would also have to be an essential necessity that contingencies that are incalculable for the agent and even that irrationality of the agent themselves are indispensable for the perfection of the world." (Husserl 2024, p. 25)

The picture of the rational is again a progressive, accumulative one in which human ethical culture is there for us to achieve. These achievements must be there for us despite the appearance of irrationality or contingency in the world. The dark horizon obscuring the essential rationality and goodness of the world must be necessary for the continual progressive perfection of the world. And yet phenomenology, as Eugen Fink understood, is a way of seeking the origin of the world. This search for origins is distinguished from the Kantian and Neo-Kantian critical philosophy, and from all naive metaphysics, in that phenomenology, at the level of method, eschews entrenched dogmatism and presuppositional a priori forms (Fink 2003, especially pp. 90–95). Phenomenology may only speak to the rationality of the world if, where, and how it finds it.

Rationality is not only the object of his analysis and the feature of the world he wishes to describe, it is the basis of his transcendental method. Phenomenology is structured so as to take seriously everything that is given—emotions, drives, sense-data, phantasy, etc.—but transcendental method is, for Husserl, a form of rational understanding. In a way that both precisifies methodologically and expands thematically, Husserl characterizes the transcendental tradition as an update and critique of Kantian philosophy:

> "I myself use the word 'transcendental' *in the broadest possible sense* . . . Working itself out radically, it is the motif of a universal philosophy which is grounded purely in this source and thus ultimately grounded. This source bears the title I-myself, with all of my actual and possible knowing life and, ultimately, my concrete life in general. The whole transcendental set of problems circles around the relation of this, my 'I'—the 'ego'—to what it is at first taken for granted to be—my soul—and, again, around the relation of this ego and my conscious life

> to the *world* of which I am conscious and whose true being I know through my own cognitive structures." (Husserl 1970, pp. 97–98)

How difficult it is to imagine Weil writing like this! Not only is the transcendental a way of understanding knowledge and purpose—and so rational in the most important sense—it specifically foregrounds the relation of the ego to the world as at least the inciting moment of transcendental reflection. The transcendentalist need not be prisoner to a correlationism of the kind that Meillassoux writes against—the "relation" between the ego and conscious life may be of any conceivable kind, an equivalence, a relation without relation, a purely epistemic, pedagogical, metaphorical relation, an eidetic relation of whatever kind, etc.—but the transcendentalist, according to Husserl here, must take the ego seriously. Transcendental work requires honoring, in a sense, the ego pole of experience, *whatever* we take "ego-ness" or polarity in this context to mean. Weil could not be counted among transcendentalists because the "I" for her is an obstruction, a thing to be overcome in the search for divinity. It is interesting that for Husserl, who places the ego in the center of his transcendental method, the I is insubstantial, ideal, whereas for Weil, who seeks a method to decreate the self, that "I" is a real created entity which "we have to give to God, in other worlds, to destroy." (Weil 1997, p. 71) Her method, her mysticism, her endophrastic writing all leap over the "I" to get to God or the other; work or prayer; necessity, love, Christ. We recall here that Weil felt Christ's indwelling presence first while reciting Herbert's poem 'Love.' (Weil 2005, p. 35) There are many esthetic, philosophical, and spiritual remarks to make here, but we will restrict ourselves to a few observations. The first is that the poem is clearly about a person struggling with moral shame and solitude. Love, as an expression of the deity, invites the sufferer to find solace in the consumption of the "meat" of the body of love itself. This act of consumption should lead to a *digestion* of the divine, an incorporation of the deity, and a nourishment of the sufferer, which is not merely a perpetuation of the pattern of suffering, but a replacement.[18] But no matter what one's spiritual or literary interpretation of this moment, it is hard to find a properly transcendental motivation in any of this. Perhaps these two thinkers simply have nothing to say to one another? A glimmer of a way forward might be found by returning to Husserliana 42 and Husserl's discussion of the self:

> "The human being's true self is that of a value idea that continues to be realized in the setting of tasks and the solution of tasks. And this idea is itself an ideal to which the striving life of human beings comes more or less close." (See Husserl 2024, p. 30)

The self is a form of valuable work. Although we should treat this claim from Husserl as a piece of phenomenology and so at odds with Weil's *method* as we have understood it here, it is illuminating to put this text up against Weil's reflections on the self and on work. This will lead us back in summation to Flint and the forms of worship important in that context. In *Prerequisite to Dignity of Labor*, Weil argues against changes in the conditions for workers, against the mechanization and "taylorization" of work. Taylorized work, work on an assembly line or before a conveyor belt, is loosely a kind of slavery, a kind of slavery which "persists whenever people find themselves in the same position on the first and the last day of a month, of a year, or of twenty years' effort." (Weil 2005, p. 265). This kind of slavery robs the worker of purpose, and, perhaps much more horribly, of attention. For Weil, "[a]ttention is the only faculty of the soul which gives access to God." (ibid., p. 273). The mechanized labor of factory workers required them to give over the potential value in the use of their attention to the exigencies of the conveyor belt. Such a dehumanizing form creates an illusion of necessity, an illusion which presents and asserts itself with a force that paralyzes the worker, turning them into a machine, which is an elaboration on

a stone. We are reminded here that Flint was a factory town. Many of my respondents spoke of the history of industrial production and corporate power in Flint, some relating it to the water crisis. The kinds of wage slavery that Weil rails against were, modified by time and technological change, part of the formation of the city of Flint, its segregation along not just racial lines but the distinction between bosses and workers, foremen and those on the line (Atkinson 2023, p. 217). One can reach back to the history of chattel slavery in this connection, acknowledging the ways in which the life of the slave is a form of bare activity, socially organized to enact a living death. The sociological study of the consequences—consequences for culture, commerce, familial relations, etc.—of founding a social system on the mechanization and cooptation of attention has not been adequately carried out. In the case of the Flint water crisis, such a study would need to account for the spiritual decay that follows the collapse of even such a socioeconomic system. The story of Flint in the twenty-first century is the report of what happens when even the "indignities" of the conveyor belt are taken from a people. The bleakness of such a state is (dimly) glimpsed through an inversion of the Husserlian language on the self referred to above. A non-self would be a value idea that *cannot* be realized in the setting and performance of tasks. To be without self is to be unable to have projects and carry them out. It perhaps need not be said that having a trustworthy water source is a condition of possibility for the accomplishment of most tasks. But even more than this, the very task of improving or cleaning the water supply is not within reach for many Flint residents: they lack the means to move away; they lack the social visibility to make change at home.[19] The question for people under these conditions—or one important question—is how to find an experience of freedom. That is to say, how to claim and realize a self.

8. Improvisation and Necessity

There are many, many aspects of the Black church ritual that deserve consideration here. What is at stake for us is the enactment of the ritual as a form of social life and a condition of subjective experience. The ritual is seen here as a way of doing the work which builds the self, and builds it intersubjectively. This work is assisted through multi-dimensional acts, among which are polysemic expressions like those achieved in music, through the forms of cooperation that engender song. At Joy Tabernacle, on Flint's north side, Pastor McCathern was a facilitator, a chief exhorter, of sorts, for the flock. What I did not observe, in the play of metaphysics, prayer, musical expression, and moral correction, was anything like the leader posing as a conduit or alternate representation of supernatural authority. Rather, the leadership of the church and the leadership of the ritual demonstrate a submission to social needs. Some of this demonstration is achieved through explicit use of language. The themes of the sermon may relate to one's submission to higher spiritual forces ("My life is Your hands"). The most interesting feature in this regard, however, may be entirely non-linguistic. The music is an invisible structuring element of the entire ritual. Even when it is not sounding, the music is there as an event which is expected; in potentia, the music to come hovers over every moment of the service. This musical presence is of a specific kind; it is not the prewritten and to-the-note preformed musical accompaniment of the mass. It is rather a flowing and improvised musical guide into spiritual experience. The Black church ritual is then an experience of ritualized improvisational work.[20]

At first glance, the description of improvisation as a spiritual necessity may seem strange. The improvisational act may be viewed as a kind of free activity, a pure expression of the will from one moment to the next. I do not claim, however, that this is how most jazz musicians view improvisational work. Indeed, I suspect that most serious jazz musicians see the improvisational work to involve, at least in part, a rigorous submission to the standard governing the improvisational work. Improvisation in music and in spiritual life

has a multidimensional structure. The improvisation is a communication; it is an individual expression; it is an achieved cultural statement; it is the extension and modification of a cultural tradition; it is a recognition of an eidetic demand which may or may not be a pre-established cultural standard; it is an embodied expression of inherent proclivities which may be unconditioned by previously existing cultural forms; it is an acquiescence to a flow of inspiration that becomes an outflowing of coordinated signitive activity; it is a way of managing determined ineffabilities and trading them in space and time; it is a form establishing the "space" of intersubjective time; it relies on the structures associated with motivation and expectation, yet through its work may modify or subvert those structures (Atkinson 2020). Improvisation is all of this and much more. Each of the descriptions above could be thought of as concept-poles in a movement which gives rise to something new, in this case a spiritual experience the character of which, at the deepest experiential levels, cannot be predicted, nor can it be controlled by any earthly power. If we take only the tension between the internal consciousness of time in the improvisational act and the emergence of intersubjective time in the same, we see that the modifications of protentions (moment-to-moment "expectations" in Husserl) by socially observed activity takes on a particular dynamism if the condition for the possibility of the activity is the undirected, unprepared and unpredictable character of the acts which collectively and in series constitute the ritual.

Although Anthony Reddie and I agree on the importance of improvisation in any account of Black spirituality, our methods and eidetics seem to differ. For Reddie, the question appears to be largely dialectical, while in my own work it is socio-phenomenological. In this text I hope to enact a method that draws on many different sources but also implicitly critiques Hegelian dialectics as a method which "knows too much," in danger of becoming abstract and using its abstractions to make predictions about the world which are not philosophically warranted. In Reddie, we find a description of the essence of improvisation as "one of dialectical tension and contradiction." (Reddie 2009, p. 163). On my own account, improvisation is not essentially determined by contradictions. What interests me is a necessity, a very special kind of necessity, which as a term is simply a way of indicating an expression understood as a solution to a problem with multiple dimensions: spiritual, metaphysical, social, communicative, habitual, etc. That problem is roughly how to be Black, free, and love God in a world like this one. The necessity in the improvisation helps us to feel that this is a solution to the problem; the improvisation in the necessity helps us to see that there are always more solutions to the problem.

One might protest here that improvisations are not unpredictable, that improvisers prepare the material they are going to present. Indeed, the jazz musician or fan learns to recognize passages, scoops, turnarounds, the little—or large—solutions to the problems of musical improvisation that performers tend to rely on. These are "planned" ahead of time. And even if one has a pure or "free" concept of improvisation, one is very unlikely to approach the instrument or the microphone as if for the first time.[21] The free improviser's ideal is not to act as if they cannot play or have never played before. Such a technique could only be a farce. The reality of improvisation as praxis is one in which forethought plays a role. But here we can ask what is essential to an act of collective improvisation. A negative determination of the improvisational act will not suffice. A pop band that memorizes music which was partially improvised in a studio setting and then takes that music on tour to perform it is not improvising during those later performances. What is the difference between the original improvised performance and the performance of the transcription? We have a sense of the meaning of the term "improvise" in that improvisations are "made up" on "the spot." The idea of being on the spot is a gesture toward temporal determination, but how can this be made precise? Does this mean that one has not thought or is not

thinking? No. Improvisation is an originary form of life in thought. The preparation for an act, musical or otherwise, is a projection, made in the imagination, controlling selected characteristics of future events. Preparation, which would include musical composition, is a way of using the intelligence associated with expectation to govern, to govern especially the contingencies associated with life in a temporal flux like the one in which we find ourselves. Preparation and planning are methods for achieving a necessity subject to the human will: *The future shall be bound to my demands*. Preparation, then, is at a certain level a revolt against nature and at another level a revolt against God. It is interesting that Jesus tells his followers to take no thought for the morrow. This admonition can be understood variously, but we can see it in this context as an encouragement to trust the world insofar as it is God's creation. Simone Weil makes a related claim:

> "Those who wish for their salvation do not truly believe in the reality of the joy within God." (Weil 1997, p. 84)

A joy requires the believer to give up the eschatological consciousness. To submit to the necessity represented by the will of the creator God, one submits one's capacity to prepare, in the sense of preparation as insistence that future events will have exactly one character or structure over another. In Joy Tabernacle, an insistence which contradicts the will of God was referred to by the Pastor as the "Devil's script":

> "Because the Devil will have you reading his script and living out his script. Somebody say, 'My life is in His hands.'"

The Devil's script is a form of rebellion against the will of God—an absolute necessity—and at the same time an imposition of a lower, ersatz necessity. To give up the Devil's script is to submit to the inspirations coming from the divine that superficially appear as contingencies but which, at a deeper level, a more spiritually "mature" level, are experienced as necessity.

From what's just been said, we can see more readily what, according to this analysis, is important about the improvisational enactments central to the ritual. The improvised sermon, with partially improvised musical accompaniment, is a ritualized submission of earthly human necessity to the higher necessity constituted by the creative will and love of God. In the Black church ritual, this submission to the higher necessity is sometimes evolved in music and song to such a degree that linguistic and musical patterned expression are abandoned entirely and the worship of the deity is unadorned by these insistences of the lower will.

This interpretation of the ritual puts its implicit theology at odds with Weil's decreation at one level of description and in harmony with it at another. For both the ritual and decreation, on my analysis, the submission to the will of God is an act which can be called holy, a renunciation of certain created aspects of the human person. Weil's contradictory method has already been discussed, and so it may not be needed here to point out that decreation for Weil seems to be a willed act which goes against the creative activity of the deity. What is much more important here is that Weil's decreation does not make positive pronouncements regarding what one must do. The tension, at the conceptual level, is strange. Decreation seems like a strongly willed spiritual experience, and yet it is difficult to see, from Weil's writings, how it is done, how it might become praxis. The power of the improvisational aspects of the church ritual is seen precisely here. The improvisational moment is one over which no human will has control. And increasing the number of participants makes the moment-to-moment character of the ritual less "predictable" for individual participants. The life of the ritual is placed in the hands of God. The movement of the ritual as improvised becomes a created human representation of intersubjectivity made subject to the will of God, which, in its "contingency," from the earthly perspective,

becomes a higher-order necessity. This necessity is felt in the moment but understood on reflection. It could not have been otherwise, *because we were improvising*. Notice that the necessity here must be distinguished from the contingencies associated with a constituted nature, contingencies which, as constituted for us, are not modified by meaning-making, by language, and by the play of interpenetrating experiences that constitute intersubjectivity. The asteroid, crashing down upon us, teaches us about contingency and necessity, both, but it does not crash down as it does because of its meaning for us. Its necessity/contingency is there *before* language. The intersubjective constitution of the ritual in improvisation is there to show the worshiper what it means to see necessity *after* language. This "seeing" takes the form of a habituating enactment. It is not conjuring. It does not produce a new state of the world; it merely habituates a recognition of the way the world already is: The necessities of the deity are all-encompassing; space, time, "earthly" necessity, "earthly" contingency, and all possible categories are nested immanently there.

9. Brief, Leaping Synthesis

It may be possible to read across Husserl, Weil, and the Black church ritual. In the Mysticism of Work, Weil tells us that "[n]o terrestrial finality separates the workers from God," suggesting that while the taylorization of work can dehumanize and enslave, there is another kind of work which brings us closer to divinity (Weil 2005, p. 180). Weil says that "[t]hrough work man turns himself into matter . . . Work is like a death." (ibid.). This likeness of death is a decreative likeness. It is the suspension of the self and its interests, a type of action which renounces "the fruits of action."

Although I would not claim that Weil had the Black church ritual in mind, I do see startling similarities between these descriptions, as I understand them, and the work of the ritual. The ritual, the forms of worship they entail, are renunciations of personal interests, of worldly acquisitions, of autonomy understood at a certain level. The ritual is a putting of one's life into the hands—the unseen hands—of the deity. Practicing the faith is to "pass from one instant to the next without laying hold of the past or the future." Weil calls this obedience. This form of living *through* a death is different to the social death of slavery and at a certain level of description—here, as elsewhere, I am much more phenomenological than mystical—this analysis of the ritual conforms to what Husserl says about the true self in Husserliana 42. The self is a form of valuable work, but the value expressed in the work may be of many different kinds. The decreative work, which at one level reduces a self whose created, "free" being separates it from God, enacts a value which, at a higher level, takes the form of a self of a completely different kind. The self here is realized by setting itself the tasks of worship, freely choosing to do the work—in the Black church ritual, an improvisational work—which necessitates attending to the invisible presence of the deity.

10. To Conclude

A text of this kind can only stand between the reader and the mysteries it attempts to describe. The moment in the Black church ritual which seeks, on my reading, to take the believer through and beyond the set of sociocultural conditions which have been imposed on them, past language, is a submission to Weilian necessity and a Husserlian sustenance of the self. It is difficult to maintain these tensions, even at the conceptual level. But attempting to do so may put us on a path to understanding the spiritual experience of invisibilized populations in a way that affirms life in the future we are working to create.

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Notes

1 I do not mean to claim that these concepts, as commonly understood, belong to the same level or type of description phenomenologically. I place them in the same list for simplicity and to emphasize distinctions with previously mentioned items.

2 The material question of how much lead was in the water of Flint residents, and how that might be empirically verified is not at issue here. The question of a possible "nocebo" effect is of secondary interest. I insist on the term "poison" here as a polysemous expression of what was done to the city and the majority of its residents.

3 Isaac Ariail Reed's approach in Power and Modernity and other texts was the point of departure for a conversation that would reveal to me how far I needed to go on my own philosophical journey into social thought (I. A. Reed 2020). This meant that I needed to talk about power structures and hierarchies. Working with Jagna Brudzińska gave me the insight that a phenomenology of relations to structures of power, domination, and exclusion was only a part of the work. Everything such a phenomenology might lead one to investigate, the whole range of human experience, was at issue, was pertinent to intellectual and philosophical practice.

4 Cf. Lorenz (2024). The press release ends with a bold heading: "Payment arrangements can be made at the following locations."

5 This is not Derrida's term, and it is a simplification. My interest here is in particular details of the lecture and not its overall aims. Those aims have to do with Lacan's "right to refuse the animal such and such a power" and even more directly with "whether what one calls man has the right . . . to attribute to himself, then, what he refuses to the animal" (p. 182). The discussion here turns on Lacan's dogmatic claim that to feign feigning is a higher-order communicative act that requires being the subject of the signifier.

6 Cf. Allen (2000), especially Leon Litwack's textual contribution (the photos in this collection are extremely disturbing, but they are records of what people experienced. The messages written on postcards are in a way even more disturbing.); Tracey (2025) (an internet-accessible, annotated copy of Ida B. Wells' *Lynch Law in America*); and Wells et al. (2025) for an empirical-sociological account of newspaper lynching coverage.

7 Here, I find a formulation from *A Black Theology of Liberation* especially illuminating: "Any message that is not related to the liberation of the poor in the society is not Christ's message. Any theology that is indifferent to the theme of liberation is not Christian theology." See Cone (1970, p. 11).

8 I do not examine here the ways in which associated experiences of marginalization can increase solidarity between communities. Cf. Mathieu (2023) on the relation between Black media and the Armenian genocide.

9 I say petrification and not fossilization as a nod to *what still lives* in the text. The name of the writer is a link—a rigid designator to use Kripke's term—to the material being, biological substance, eidetic truth, and spiritual reality of the writer. Our task today includes reimagining and overturning much that was said, by Derrida and others, about the author-function of the writer. The meaning which lives in the text is bound to the being of the writer; this binding is sustained by the facticity of the world and by the intransigent, universal character of truth. This can be ignored, of course, but it will never change. Were there no writers, no people, these eidetic relations would still hold.

10 We can see how aware of these relations she was from her own reflections on contradiction: "Contradiction is the test of necessity" (Weil 1997, p. 151). And more importantly: "The mystery of the cross of Christ lies in a contradiction . . ." (ibid., p. 156).

11 Observe the pattern of 'cept' words in English: inception, conception, deception, reception, etc. These terms are etymologically related to the proto-Indo-European **kap* through the Latin *cipere*, meaning to take or to *grasp*.

12 We recall here that Gustave Thibon wrote of Weil that "a limpid mysticism emanated from her; in no other human being [had he] come across such familiarity with religious mysteries; never [had he] felt the word supernatural to be more charged with reality than when in contact with her." It is not with irony but with a trembling humility that we describe Weil's work as coming from above. But the person and the work must remain, for us, human.

13 In Yoon Suk Cha's chapter on Weil's last years of correspondence, she writes that, "Weil often prefaces what she says to her interlocutors by simply saying that since she has thought them she must say them." Of course, the voluminous character of Weil's correspondence at the end of her life was due to her need to follow a dangerous vocation, to be a saboteur or Resistance fighter of some kind. Cha's scholarship helps us to see the profound need in Weil to follow a vocation which may mean the end of her, the fear that she has of missing "her death." In this constant petitioning, begging to be a part of the war effort, Weil puts her interlocutors at risk of putting her in harm's way, an act which, on its face, is in contravention of Weil's own ethical stance. This is yet another of Weil's many seeming contradictions. Cf. Cha (2017, chp. 6). Chenavier's short text on Weil's thought describes her power as a disruptive social force: "She, a teacher having the rank of agrégée was seen after school shaking the hands of the

jobless . . . This same teacher accompanied a delegation to present their demands, then went with them to the cafe, and, carrying a red flag, marched at the head of their demonstrations—all this did not go unnoticed." Cf. Chenavier (2012, p. 6).

14 Quoted in Anne Carson's excellent study of Weil, Marguerite Porete, and Sappho. See Carson (2002, p. 194).

15 Cf. Weil (1997, p. 89): "I do not in the least wish that this created world should fade from my view, but I do wish that it should no longer be shown to me in person."

16 See: Weil (1997, p. 77). Also: "Joy is the overflowing consciousness of reality" (ibid., p. 132).

17 Husserl (2024, p. 30). References to Husserliana 42 will be taken from the recently published volume Values of Love and Ethical Reflection. Translation is by Andrew D. Barrette.

18 This is a very preliminary beginning of an answer to a question animating Wole Soyinka's most recent play, Canticles for a Pyre Foretold: "Why do we eat our gods?"

19 This assertion is not meant to suggest that the people of Flint are powerless. Far from it. What is important here is to recognize the predicament that residents face, not only as a set of material conditions but as a social reality and its associated expectations.

20 I am, of course, aware that there are majority Black churches which do not follow an improvised structure like the one I discuss here. Blackness is various. Everywhere in this text where "the Black church ritual" is mentioned, the reader can interpret "*this* Black church ritual."

21 Griffin et al. (2015) reference a wonderful anecdote from Derrida in which he was invited by Ornette Coleman, the famous free improviser, to deliver a paper while Coleman improvised in response to what he heard. Although the particular passages Coleman played, in sequence, could not have been preplanned—if he was truly playing in response to the text Derrida read—the entire performance was subject to forethought of a kind.

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