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Black Time

Slavery, Metaphysics, and the Logic of Wellness

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Exhaustion is the contemporary crisis of black studies. Though affectively unified, it takes various forms: the obsession with everything "post" (such as postblackness and postracial), the fetishization of progress narratives (such as the resurgence of liberal humanism in the academy), and the stigmatization of those who argue that emancipation was a political ruse—that slavery remains with us. Our critical climate is one of impatience, as if we've somehow exceeded a statute of limitations for discussing slavery. This exhaustion produces a set of "disavowed desires," in Aida Levy-Hussen's words, that recodify *exhausted temporal imaginings* as scientific or objective (see chapter 10). In other words, the desire of the exhausted to enter a temporality beyond slavery—to inhabit the present—has structured our discourse about slavery. The phrase "getting over" is yet another index of this intensifying exhaustion—one that figuratively subordinates the subject of the slave past, holding out the dubious promise that if we can somehow get over this incorrigible subject, this conceptual-historical surplus, then we might achieve something like wellness, success, possessive individualism, power, agency, and so on. But what exactly are we getting over? What is the slavery that we are so eager to move beyond?

At the heart of this compulsion to get over is a crisis of time and objectivity: to get over anything, one must first objectify something and then place this object within a schema of time. In a sense, this compulsion expresses a metaphysical will to power, a desire to dominate time in the twenty-first century. Thus, it is not surprising that many proponents of getting over describe slavery using a restricted temporal grammar—slavery was "back then," "this is now," "we're moving forward." Within this rhetoric, slavery becomes a conquerable object that we can temporize and leave aside; in turn, the act of leaving aside becomes the sign of wellness.

In my view, the critical compulsion to get over slavery is inextricable from the constitutive violence of the metaphysical enterprise. The aim of metaphysics is domination. Its function is to capture an event-horizon—something that exceeds metaphysical time—and then transform it into a historical object and dominate it. In contrast, I argue that slavery is not reducible to an object-event of metaphysics; moreover, it comprises an event-horizon that structures western thought itself. Slavery, in my analysis, is an antiblack episteme that enables the distinctions between human and nonhuman, citizen and property, self-possession and dispossession to have meaning. Thus, slavery exceeds the frame of the historical event that we are so eager to get over and indeed provides the condition of possibility for the liberal grammar of humanism that undergirds the compulsion to get over in the first place.

In essence, there is no meaning or world without slavery, which is why it is a horizon and not an object. Yet because slavery has become the metaphysical object of historiography, subjected to narratives of linearity, movement, and change, the event-horizon is distorted as merely one tragic event among others that we can somehow move beyond. I propose an alternative temporality of slavery—one that I call *black time*. Black time is time without duration; it is a horizon of time that eludes objectification, foreclosing idioms such as "getting over," "getting through," or "getting beneath." I use the idea of black time to critique the metaphysical hegemony and the complicit logic of black wellness predicated on a relinquishment of historical complaint.

Object-Events, Event-Horizons, and Metaphysical Violence

I understand metaphysics as constituting a particularly violent episteme, one that reduces the grandeur of being into a scientific plaything—an *object* of rationality, calculation, instrumentalization, and schematization.[1] Metaphysics' insatiable will to power attempts to crush spontaneity and projectionality (that is, the ability to engage in a unique life project) and to turn the individual into a docile, mechanical instrument. Philosopher Gianni Vattimo asserts, "Pain is the very essence of metaphysics[;] . . . there is no metaphysics except the metaphysics of pain."[2] By this, he means that metaphysics produces the source of its own nourishment: it produces the pain that sustains it. Indeed, if we reflect on the destruction, trauma, and devastation that structure existence, we will find at its root metaphysical thinking and organization of life. This enterprise of pain depends on certain strategies of domination to exercise control, and the strategy of objectification is, perhaps, the most destructive and pernicious of them.

Metaphysics works through object-events to establish its episteme: its violent organization of knowledge and claims to truth. In fact, there can be no metaphysics without them. An object-event is a scientific invention—a metaphysical entity—that colonizes the world through its imposition of the laws of

metaphysics. Converting time into event in the name of knowledge, object-events are ironically *fraudulent*, for they present an impossible and orderly world that is fully knowable, transparent, and calculable within metaphysical logic. (This is what we call an object.)

Metaphysics seeks to dominate and to transform the event-horizon into an object-event. The event-horizon is that which exceeds metaphysical epistemes and incorrigibly escapes the clutches of metaphysics, even as metaphysics attempts to capture it through objectification. Slavoj Žižek, in *Event: Philosophy in Transit,* explains that "an event is the effect that seems to exceed its cause—and the space of an event is that which opens up by the gap that separates an effect from its causes." It is the "emergence of something new that undermines every stable scheme."[3] In this sense, events cause problems for the ontic approach—that is, metaphysical reasoning—because they defy established laws used to explain and govern our existence. (We might think of miracles as such an event.) Thus, metaphysics seeks to confine an event-horizon into a scientific box and invade it thoroughly to extract as much information as possible. In a sense, it attempts a forced translation of the ineffable into apodictic law, the opaque into the lucid. But event-horizons also defy the laws of temporality, or the vulgarization of time, as Martin Heidegger might describe it.[4] In dominating an event-horizon, metaphysics attempts to dominate time itself, transforming time into a mere object of scientific inquiry and calculation. Because our temporal sensibilities determine the orientation of our object-knowledge systems, time is always an issue in the translation from an event-horizon into an object-event. If metaphysical time relies on the stability of cause (beginning), effect (end), teleology (the calculation of cause and effect), past, present, and future, then part of the enterprise of pain is to stuff an event-horizon into the temporal categories of metaphysical reason. Thus, something that exceeds and defies metaphysical time is subjected to its logic; without this violent subjection we cannot know the event. In fact, we might suggest that disciplinary formations of knowledge emerge from vicious metaphysical domination.

What we call slavery can be seen as the result of metaphysical domination, both epistemologically and ontologically. In fact, *slavery is the triumph of metaphysics.* Through slavery, being becomes thoroughly objectified and instrumentalized; the African is transformed into "a being for the other," as Hortense Spillers has written—an instrumental-object infused with use value and traded within a perverse economy of cupidity, accumulation, and terror.[5] The ontological aspects of metaphysical domination are understood as they concern slavery, but the epistemological dimensions are often overlooked. This neglect, however, is far from benign. Epistemology anchors our ontological investigation of slavery. In other words, we know about this vicious ontological violence because slavery is *first* subjected to epistemological violence. In essence, slavery as an event-horizon is reduced to an object-event for our epistemological

desires and interests. Our knowledge about slavery is inextricable from the metaphysical violence that preconditions it.

Slavery has become an object of historiography, and we can understand historiography as the violent metaphysical enterprise that objectifies time and space and reduces event-horizons into object-events.[6] Historiography reproduces metaphysical notions of linearity, cause-effect, progress, and schematization; we often refer to it as a science. It is one of the premiere metaphysical enterprises with the sole purpose of colonizing and objectifying time itself. Because historiography, probably more than any other disciplinary formation, claims slavery as an object, slavery is subjected to metaphysical time. Thus, when we are talking about slavery, we are always talking about time, either directly or indirectly. The temporal grammar that we use to discuss it distorts the event so that we can calculate it (for example, "When did it begin?" "When was or is it over?"). Perhaps describing slavery as an event-horizon seems awkward because we are conditioned to thinking about it as an object of science that can be traced and understood. If we follow Heidegger—who more than any other philosopher understood the violence of metaphysics—we can describe an event-horizon as that which discloses being itself or as Alain Badiou's meditation of the event as that which structures truth.[7] Event-horizons disclose and structure the condition of thought and existence. When we think about slavery as more than that thing, that object, that happened back then and that we are studying in our present, it discloses itself as an event that defies reason, rationality, and calculability. Indeed, it structures western thought itself. Psychoanalytically, we can suggest that slavery is a master signifier of antiblackness; it is the *phallus* of western philosophy and metaphysical knowledge formations. It is impossible to trace the non-sense of this phallus, to locate precisely its origin, because it is situated outside space and time. Thus, it preconditions both space and time. Because the phallus operates through substitution (meaning that it reproduces itself through a series of replaceable signifiers), slavery expresses itself in "endless disguise," as Spillers explains.[8]

In an interview with Mark Sinker, Greg Tate adumbrates this logic when he suggests that "the bar between the signifier and the signified could be understood as standing for the Middle Passage that separated signification from sign."[9] The structure of meaning in the modern world—signifier, signified, signification, and sign—depends on antiblack violence (slavery as master signifier) for its constitution. Not only does the trauma of the Middle Passage rupture the signifying process, but it also instantiates a meaningless sign as the foundation of language, meaning, and social existence itself. Following the work of Nicolas Abraham and Mária Török we could suggest that the meaninglessness of antiblack violence is the crypt-signifier that organizes the modern world and its institutions.[10] Any meaning that is articulated possesses a kernel of absurdity that blacks embody as fleshy signs. What I am suggesting is that slavery

structures western thought; it is a violent metaphysical enterprise that reduces the grandeur of black being to an object of exchange and provides the condition of possibility for western institutions—trade, economy, philosophy, medical science, theology, and so on. (Can we envision modern civil society *without* slavery?) Slavery exceeds ontological violence—the reduction of black being to object. It structures the world itself; in Frank Wilderson's words, "no slave, no world."[11] When we limit our scope of slavery to the physical and the legal, we neglect other forms of violence that constitute slavery, such as epistemological and metaphysical violence. These other aspects are not easily quantifiable using historiographical instruments and positivists methods. We are just beginning to mine the depths of slavery as an epistemological, metaphysical (and ontological), and spiritual force. To suggest that slavery is a thing of the past is to deny the unsettling lifespan of violence; for certain forms of violence never die but are continually regenerated, reborn, and reincarnated. Slavery is such a violence.

Our conceptions of American slavery have overwhelmingly been historiographical, and historiography traffics in the metaphysical violence of temporality that engenders it. The event-horizon that structures modern thought and meaning is reduced to a mere scientific object with a beginning (supposedly 1619) and an end (supposedly 1865). This violence determines the way in which we talk about slavery; it turns slavery into something we can get over, control, calculate, and dominate. Perhaps our imagined need for control is at the root of our anxieties about slavery. If we can no longer objectify and monitor it, what might happen to our episteme of progress, movement, and change? Can we indeed be agents without the metaphysical instruments that ensure the exercise of such agency? Slavery is precisely a surplus that resists scientific capture, despite the indefatigable effort of metaphysics to dominate it.

The time of slavery, then, is a temporality outside of metaphysical time; it is time that fractures into an infinite array of absurdities, paradoxes, and contradictions. It is a time, much like time in the unconscious, in which the horizon of violence fractures the vectors of temporality. Present, past, and future all lose concrete meaning, and we are left with an accretion of undecipherable flashes. In other words, we distort the force of slavery by attempting to temporize it. Such violence cannot be said to ever end, even if we can attempt to trace its birth. It is precisely this time outside of duration that we must confront when we discuss slavery.[12] The problem is that our metaphysical grammar for discussing the event-horizon of slavery limits our understanding of the devastation of slavery. How do you discuss an event-horizon that provides the condition of thought? How do you determine the beginning or end of such a seismic force? The temporal vectors of past, present, and future are inadequate to capture the event, and the event fractures these vectors as we attempt to squeeze the event into them. We lack an appropriate grammar for discussing the time of slavery, and we carry this problem of grammar into our analysis.

Black Time

Slavery is the *extremity* of antiblackness through time. Imposing metaphysical temporality on the African body to accomplish the work of objectification is part of the internecine enterprise of slavery. What type of temporality sustains the black body in the hold of the dungeon or slave ship? How do you orient yourself in time and space without any reference, especially when the journey could take months? Temporal domination is essential to slavery; its purpose is to disorient, objectify, and terrify. Not knowing where you are, how long you've been there, how long this torment will continue, or if there is an end in sight is part of the domination that separates the white ship captain from the black cargo in the dark hold. Put differently, slavery works through temporal domination. Blackness is the product of such temporal domination, and metaphysical time is recoded as a feature of racial privilege. The time of slavery is multidimensional and cyclical, and antiblackness is a particular colonization of time through black bodies.

In "Possible Pasts: Some Speculations on Time, Temporality, and the History of Atlantic Slavery," Walter Johnson describes certain aspects of temporal domination. According to him, time is a site of contestation, imagination, and terror for beings captured during war, confined to dungeons, boarded on ships, and suspended in the ocean. Time, in a sense, is incalculable for the captive under such conditions. The "metaphysical horror of a 'middle' passage that some must have thought would never end and others might only have recognized as a trip across the '*kalunga*,' a body of water which separated the world of the living from that of the dead—a flight from time measured in the gradual physical deterioration of the worldly body"—compounds the ontological dimensions of domination.[13] Time is instrumentalized to pulverize and dominate the captive on the plantation. Perhaps this is why Frederick Douglass's master admonished him not to think about a future, for his time belonged to his master. The captive lives outside of metaphysical time, without a future, without an accessible past (natal alienation), and in a present overwhelmed with the immediacy of bodily pain, psychic torment, and routine humiliation. *Time is terror.* As Johnson writes:

> One of the many things slaveholders thought they owned was their slaves' time. Indeed, to outline the temporal claims that slaveholders made upon their slaves is to draw a multi-dimensional portrait of slavery itself. Slaveholders, of course, defined the shape of the day. Whether it ran from sunup to sundown, whether it was defined by the tasks that had to be done by its close, or was measured out into job scaled clock time, slavery's daily time was delineated by the master and often enforced by violence. Those who turned up late, quit early, worked too slowly, came up short, or failed to wait deferentially while the master attended to

> other things were cajoled, beaten, or starved into matching the daily rhythms through which their owners measured progress. As well as quotidian time, slaveholders claimed calendar time as their own. They decided which days would be workdays, and which days would be holidays (or holy days); they enforced a cycle of yearly hires and calendar-termed financial obligations. And slaveholders thought they owned the slaves' biographical time: they recorded their slaves' birthdays in account books that only they could see; they determined at what age their slaves would start into the fields or set to a trade; when their slaves would be cajoled into reproduction; how many years they would be allowed to nurse their children they had, and how old they would have to be before retiring. . . . They infused their slaves with their own time—through the daily process of slave discipline, the foreign, the young, and the resistant were forcibly inculcated with the nested temporal rhythms of their enslavement.[14]

Not only did slave masters seize the captive's body as property, but they also seized his or her time, reifying it into a commodity of exchange and an instrument of torment. The "peculiar institution" of slavery could not exist without the violent metaphysical process of objectifying time; this process situated the black being outside the horizon of time that defines the human and into the indistinct zone of temporality—time without duration. We can call this black time. If we think about the way in which time orients the human existentially—birthdays, astrological signs, age, maturation, and so on—we see that time provides *meaning* for the human. So to seize time is, in essence, to seize the existential condition itself—to control the production and semiotics of meaning. Black beings are disoriented within metaphysical time; *they are temporally homeless.* This disorientation provides the necessary existential ground to discipline, punish, and destroy black bodies. Temporal domination is a vicious metaphysical enterprise; its aim is to break down the active will diurnally. Thus, we must consider a fourth temporal dimension in Johnson's distinctions (quotidian time, calendar time, and biographical time): existential time. Existential time is "the Time of Man," as Homi Bhabha writes: the "temporality of modernity within which the figure of the 'human' comes to be authorized."[15] *Ipseity*—that is, making the human proper to itself, the suturing of the self—is only accomplished through the time of man because it provides the necessary conceptual material to orient the self and concretize the boundaries between this self and the external world. To make a slave requires the foreclosure of *ipseity*, requires leaving the self in fragments. (Perhaps this was the existential riddle that W.E.B. Du Bois attempted to solve with his notion of "double consciousness.")[16] Black time is this foreclosure of the self, and we refer to this foreclosure as dispossession. The slave is dispossessed from the self only to the

extent that the slave master can seize his or her time and *epidermalize* temporality (that is, black time and the time of man). *Slavery is the vicious enterprise of situating a being outside the time of man and in the abyss of black time.*

The inability or unwillingness of critical scholars to contend with black time diminishes the ontological and existential violence of slavery. In a sense, thinking in black time forces a reconsideration of the critical categories of analysis—history, linearity, progress, movement, and ethics. For this reason, scholars tend to reduce the event-horizon of slavery into the metaphysical object to conquer it and get over it. Perhaps our incessant desire to gain distance from the object animates this refusal of black time. How do you theorize an event that throws the past, present, and future into virtual crisis? Can we analyze slavery without these metaphysical distinctions? What is our investment in metaphysical time? Will thinking and writing in metaphysical time finally transform blacks into humans? In other words, does the performance of metaphysics resolve the ontological violence of dispossession and objectification?

In his essay "On Failing to Make the Past Present," Stephen Best argues for the "nonrelationality between the past and the present" to imagine a black politics unmoored from collective condition and racial solidarity. In his view, scholars infuse the slave past with both an affective and an ethical dimension, which results in the compulsion to analyze the present through the prism of this past; affect becomes axiom. This compulsion translates into a "melancholic historicism" in which the critic remains "faithful to the lost object and [refuses] to renounce the [critic's] attachment to it."[17] Best seems to aspire toward a certain traversal narrative, in the psychoanalytic sense—to traverse the fundamental fantasy of slavery as repetitive structure and accept the real of historical disjuncture. This idea represents, perhaps, another fantasy—and contemporary theories such as postblackness share it—about living independently from history that hurts and to invest the now with an ethical-political potency capable of restoring ontological coherence. Best advances this thesis through the rhetorical device of *erotema*.[18]

> In fact, why has the slave past had such enormous weight for an entire generation of thinkers? Why must we predicate having an ethical relation to the past on an assumed continuity between that past and our present and on the implicit consequence that to study that past is somehow to intervene in it? Through what process has it become possible to claim the lives and efforts of history's defeated as ours either to redeem or to redress? And if we take slavery's dispossessions to live on into the twenty-first century, divesting history of movement and change, then what form can effective political agency take? Why must our relation to the past be ethical in the first place—and is it possible to have a relation to the past that is not predicated on ethics?[19]

What structures Best's critique is a strong metaphysics of time: the "slave past," "our present," "assumed continuity," "relation to the past," and so on. He reduces the event-horizon of slavery into an object-event that can be easily catalogued using past, present, and future. But this reduction rebounds upon itself in certain ways; the ontological dimensions of slavery, which escape this categorization, create aporias in the analysis.[20] In other words, his questions circumvent the aporia of time and ontology that would render the critique ineffective. When he asks, "And if we take slavery's dispossessions to live on into the twenty-first century, divesting history of movement and change, then what form can effective political agency take?" he assumes metaphysical linearity, that history does move and change, and that blacks are situated within this time as agents. But divesting history of movement and change can only be a problem for the political agent, who can exercise agency because temporal linearity exists for him or her. Why do we assume that blacks are agents if the ontological problem of blackness is not resolved? Does Best assume that emancipation resolved the existential and ontological violence of foreclosed *ipseity* and dispossession? If so, how did the law resolve an ontological crisis? His question presumes a humanism that does not quite apply to blacks. Thus, the danger of losing political agency becomes something of a false alarm or non sequitur. Because his question theorizes blackness in the wrong time, Best creates a crisis that undermines itself.

The answer to this question, then, would be that blackness doesn't assume any effective political agency within an antiblack context because the ontological crisis of blackness is not resolved. An immediate reaction to this answer is that the ontological crisis *is* resolved; blacks are free. Yet what instruments ensured the end of this crisis? What is the evidence of such freedom? Does the exception clause in the Thirteenth Amendment force a rethinking of legal optimism and the law's ability, or willingness, to resolve the ontological crisis of blackness? To my mind, one must at least prove the ontological discontinuity of slavery before we can talk about political agency. Historical movement and change do not translate into eradication and resolution. Change and movement are mere metaphysical fantasies, not synonyms for ontological coherence. Because "slavery unhinges certain givens about will, agency, individuality, and responsibility," as Soyica Diggs Colbert avers, applying the term *agency* under extreme conditions of antiblack violence distorts, or disavows, the problem of coherency that slavery foregrounds (see chapter 7). According to Alexander Weheliye, "resistance and agency assume full, self-present, and coherent subjects working against something or someone."[21] Applying the grammar of coherency (agency) to fractured beings reflects more slavery fatigue than it does any substantial ability to eradicate antiblackness. If we are to assume that political agency can restore ontological coherence, then proponents must present this evidence. Every attempt to diminish or eradicate antiblackness with agency, political or otherwise, reproduces the very antiblackness that one is trying to eradicate.

Best also asks, "Why must we predicate having an ethical relation to the past on an assumed continuity between that past and our present?" But what does "our present" entail? The critique is predicated upon a neat distinction between "slave past" and "our present" because presumably we are no longer slaves. According to philosopher Mladen Dolar, "the subject and the present it belongs to have no objective status, they have to be perpetually (re)constructed."[22] Best mobilizes the word *our* as a collective identity, even as he aims to "clear space for a black politics not animated by a sense of collective condition or solidarity."[23] What is the status of this "our" that he at once mobilizes and disavows? What conceptual work does this "our" accomplish in the present? It seems to force a homogenization of time and refuses the disjunctive reality of both this "our" and the present. Furthermore, what is the present? Jacques Derrida would describe it as a condition of non-adequation—that is, the present always carries the trace of another temporality, or trace structure. The present fractures into the past, future, future anterior, future perfect, and so on. The coherent present is a metaphysical fiction designed to facilitate what Dolar would call "reconstruction" and to conceal what Derrida would call "disjuncture." Homi Bhabha captures this fiction in "the enunciatory present."[24] The present is nothing more than a discursive maneuver, a perspective within modernity, a way of continually enunciating the self into existence. Best *must* enunciate this present throughout the text to conceal the ontological crisis that undergirds it: there can be no present without the disjuncture of black ontology and black time.

This brings us to the question of ethics. Best inquires, "Why must our relation to the past be ethical in the first place—and is it possible to have a relation to the past that is not predicated on ethics?" To this inquiry we must ask, is it possible to have an ethics at all within a context of antiblackness? In *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*, Frank B. Wilderson III limns the underside of ethics—what he calls "unspeakable Ethics." For him, "ontological incapacity is *the* constituent element of Ethics. Put another way, one cannot embody capacity and be, simultaneously, ethical."[25] Ethics is a relationality between coherent ontologies that is predicated on fractured blackness, or the nonrelational landscape between the human and blacks. In other words, ethics assumes a human subject at the heart of this relation, but the human subject can only remain human to the extent that it is able to demarcate the boundaries between the human self and the world of objects. Slavery became indispensable for the institution of ethics because it enabled the human to define its boundaries *against* a sentient object.

Furthermore, Emmanuel Levinas considers "time . . . [the] very relationship of the subject with the Other."[26] The ethical, then, is nothing other than the experience of time in which the subject and the other relate. This becomes somewhat problematic, however, if we read Frantz Fanon with Levinas. For Fanon, blacks lack symbolic placement as both subject and other because

antiblackness colonizes the sphere of the other, leaving blacks without a position within the temporal relation we call ethics.[27] Thus, ethics is a field that excludes blacks as a necessity, given that the subject cannot relate to something that lacks a symbolic position. It is an antiblack formation because its coherent subject is sustained only through black misery and suffering. The subject of ethics is the master, not the slave. It is interesting to return to the question of ethics within this context. Best assumes a symbolic position within *history* that secures the ethical relation. How can blacks have an ethical past if the field of ethics excises the instance of black-human relation? Perhaps "our" relation to the past is not predicated on ethics at all, and it never can be. We need a new grammar to describe black experience with the event-horizon as it fractures ethics and metaphysics. Best wants to capture the compulsion to engage this event-horizon, the necessity of it. The grammar of ethics, however, does not yield answers, only paradoxes and impasses.

If the ethical relation is really an experience of time between subject and other, as Levinas adumbrates, then the question of time becomes the circumvented aporia at the heart of Best's critique. Best resists the idea of historical repetition and reproduction—that the present is an assemblage of past repetitive grievances—but does not question the logic of presentism upon which the critique is grounded. What is the present? And how is it distinguished from the slave past? These questions challenge the critique of repetition and continuity because the critique assumes an objective distinction between temporalities. But does this demarcation of time between the slave past and our present fit the event-horizon of slavery? In "The Time of Slavery," Saidiya Hartman avers that "the distinction between the past and the present founders on the interminable grief engendered by slavery and its aftermath . . . the 'time of slavery' negates the common-sense intuition of time as continuity or progression, then and now coexist; we are coeval with the dead."[28] She shatters the logic of metaphysics with its commonsense narrative of linearity, progression, and change. For her, "interminable grief" escapes the confines of metaphysical enclosure and becomes a time without duration, a time outside of temporality—black time. The blackness of this time is what we might call grief; it is the black hole of time that resists linear narrativity. Best asserts that Hartman "solicits empathy with history's defeated through assertions that time has shown no movement" and questions the affective dimension of this solicitation. He, however, sidesteps her critique of metaphysical reasoning by focusing on the way in which feeling becomes axiom, not on the question of time itself. Does grief have a temporality? What temporal schema fully captures grief? Can we locate its precise beginning and end? This seems to be part of the complexity of Hartman's thinking about the time of slavery. If time shows movement, as Best seems to imply, does grief move with it in linear fashion? What would grief movement entail? Metaphysical time fails to account for the grief of slavery. The point is not so much that we need or have an

affective relation to the past so much as the notion that black grief itself is untemporizable. The event-horizon of slavery resides precisely within the no-time of black grief. To assume that black grief is over or in the past misunderstands grief itself because grief is not subject to the metaphysics of time that orients historical subjects. The violence of slavery constitutes an interminable grief that resists the vectors of present, past, and future. To argue that slavery is a falling away from our present rests on a limited understanding of slavery—one that reduces it to a certain legal, material, and historical incarnation and neglects the epistemological, spiritual, traumatic, and metaphysical dimensions of such violence.

In *Trauma and the Politics of Memory*, Jenny Edkins suggests that "trauma time is inherent in the destabilization and production of linearity. Trauma has to be excluded for linearity to be convincing . . . [and] similarly, trauma time cannot be described in the language we have without recourse to linearity."[29] Grief and trauma both express a temporality outside of and fracturing through metaphysics; we cannot express it within the grammar of metaphysics without creating catachresis. If, indeed, slavery is the horizon of unspeakable ontological and existential violations, then we cannot properly place slavery into the past, present, or future. Our desire to do so is an expression of a certain will to power, as Friedrich Nietzsche might describe it—to control, objectify, dominate, and get over the event-horizon of black grief.[30] Best's critique may represent a class of discourses with this metaphysical will to power. Charting slavery along a temporal scheme distorts the very thing we wish to understand. Epistemology destroys much more than it illuminates in this instance.

The Logic of Wellness

How do you get over an event-horizon? What cartography enables us to map the existential coordinates to get over it? Can you get over something that provides the condition of possibility for getting over itself, meaning the structure of thought? The compulsion to get over articulates a metaphysical impulse to objectify slavery, to turn it into a conquerable object. What is the status of this "over" that we are supposedly getting when we objectify slavery? "Over" becomes a synonym for wellness. When we think about wellness, we are always already spatializing, creating the boundaries between wellness and sickness, between presence and absence. But when we get over slavery, we are attempting to dominate black time through the metaphors of spatiality. *Wellness, then, is the compulsion to dominate time, to turn it into an object that can be thoroughly understood, analyzed, and eventually discarded when no longer needed. Sickness, by contrast, defines the inability to objectify black time—to live within it.*

Are we able to get over an event-horizon with the tools of metaphysics: psychology, psychiatry, and therapy? If getting over signals an impossible desire, a neurotic compulsion to control the uncontrollable, what does wellness really

mean? Doesn't it announce a certain sickness at its core—an antiblack pathology of dominating time through black bodies? And doesn't sickness embody the only hope for wellness—acceptance of the ineradicable nature of the event-horizon of slavery? Wellness is an aspect of what Lewis Gordon might call "bad faith."[31] It is an impossibility encoded as mandatory capacity.

The domination of black time, however, is a particularly violent process, and those who are unable or unwilling to engage in the impossible are stigmatized in various ways that perpetuate the sickness that advocates of getting over wish to achieve in the first place. Thus, we cannot separate the enterprise of wellness from the various forms of violence that sustain it in an antiblack order. In *Protest Psychosis*, Jonathan Metzl documents the way in which wellness, sickness, and psychiatric disorders (particularly schizophrenia) were used to justify incarcerating black civil rights activists.[32] Those who could not get over slavery were easily diagnosed as insane, sick, and unfit for society; wellness became an instrument of state-sponsored discipline, control, and terror. What would it mean, however, to get over slavery in this instance? Are lack of protest, silencing of discourse, and acclimation to antiblack violence signs of wellness? If you get over slavery, where do you land? Wellness is an expression of metaphysical logic, the logic of pain; it produces its own pathology and recodifies it as salubriousness. Perhaps it is time to get over "getting over" and to contend with slavery as a master signifier of antiblackness. Slavery is an event-horizon that expresses itself in endless disguise, through a time outside of duration—black time.

NOTES

1. My conception of metaphysics has been greatly influenced by Martin Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 2nd ed., trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).
2. Gianni Vattimo, *Nihilism and Emancipation*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 70.
3. Slavoj Žižek, *Event: Philosophy in Transit* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 12.
4. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 320–333.
5. Hortense Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
6. For a provocative discussion of historiography and metaphysics, see Hayden White, "The Metaphysics of Western Historiography," *Taiwan Journal of East Asian Studies* 1 (June 2004): 1–16.
7. Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2007).
8. Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color*, 208.
9. Gregory Tate, Interview with Mark Klinker, unpublished transcript, 1991.
10. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonomy*, trans. Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

11. Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), 11.
12. I borrow the phrase "time outside of duration" from Louis Althusser's description of "despotic time" in his *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Marx* (London: Verso, 2007), 78.
13. Walter Johnson, "Possible Pasts: Some Speculations on Time, Temporality, and the History of Atlantic Slavery," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 45, no. 4 (2000): 489.
14. Ibid., 492.
15. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 240.
16. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003).
17. Stephen Best, "On Failing to Make the Past Present," *Modern Language Quarterly* 73 (September 2012): 453–474, 460.
18. Erotema is a literary device in which one asks rhetorical questions to make an implicit argument. Best uses this device to make an implicit argument about the relation between time and slavery.
19. Best, "On Failing to Make the Past Present," 454.
20. An aporia is an irresolvable contradiction, paradox, or philosophical impasse. I have Jacques Derrida's concept of aporia in mind, and this indicates the moment in which the text undermines itself, creating conceptual chaos and instability. For an early demonstration of aporia, see his *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).
21. Alexander Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2014), 2.
22. Mladen Dolar, *The Legacy of the Enlightenment: Foucault and Lacan*, cited in Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 240.
23. Best, "On Failing to Make the Past Present," 454.
24. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha discusses Dolar's conception of reconstruction and Derrida's idea of disjunction as they relate to his idea of the "enunciatory present" (238–241).
25. Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black*, 49.
26. Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other and Other Essays*, trans. Richard A. Cohen. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 39.
27. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Markmann (New York: Grove, 1967). Also see Ronald Judy's brilliant analysis of symbolic placement and blackness in "Fanon's Body of Black Experience," in *Fanon: A Critical Reader*, ed. Lewis Gordon, T. Demean Sharpley-Whiting, and Renee T. White (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 1996), 53–73.
28. Saidiya Hartman, "The Time of Slavery," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 110, no. 4 (2002): 758.
29. Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Politics of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 16.
30. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufman and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968).
31. Lewis R. Gordon, *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1995).
32. Jonathan Metzl, *Protest Psychosis: How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease* (Boston: Beacon, 2010).