



# Vulnerability, Affectivity, and the Politics of Shared Struggle

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# Austerity and Inequality: Baltimore



# What Can Philosophy Offer?

- In times of socio-political struggle, what can philosophical thought actually offer?
- How can we *think* the concepts of resistance and shared struggle?
- Through a consideration of **affect** and **vulnerability**, philosophy can help us think about the conditions which inspire and sustain political engagement against oppression, state violence, and economic violence.

# AFFECT

- “Generally speaking, an affect is a modification. Being affected means to be modified – that is, altered, changed – by the impact of an encounter, be it with another subject or an object [...] We may call affect every kind of modification produced by the feeling of a difference.”

-Catherine Malabou, ‘Go Wonder: Subjectivity and Affects in Neurobiological Times’, p. 5

# Affect, continued

- As political subjects, we are affected by a host of material and immaterial conditions (ex: police violence, racial inequality, economic austerity)
- Various affects contribute to the shaping of our identities.
- Affects can be both joyful and sorrowful.
- Affect often involves risk, as certain forms of affect involve facing our own **vulnerability** (and encountering the vulnerability of others).

# VULNERABILITY



# VULNERABILITY AND AFFECTIVITY

- In this context, vulnerability can be viewed as both a positive and negative openness to being affected.
- In a classical philosophical sense, we can say that this sort of affectivity is what can lead to a sense of **wonder**, as that which makes me re-think my previous understanding of both myself and the world around me.
- Following Malabou, we can think of vulnerability as that which leaves us open to affect and wonder, we could think of this as the *philosophical moment*.

# From Affect to Shared Struggle





# Frantz Fanon, or, After Wonder

- “Why I am writing this book? Nobody asked me to. Especially not those for whom it is Intended. So? So in all serenity my answer is that there are too many idiots on this earth. And now that I’ve said that, I have to prove it. **Striving for a New Humanism.** Understanding mankind. Our Black Brothers. I believe in you, man. Racial prejudice. **Understanding and Loving.**”

-Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*,

# Fanon, continued.

- Fanon wants to introduce notions of love and understanding into a philosophical discourse often over-dependent on a purely rational understanding of situations. He refers to this a *new humanism*.
- For Fanon, love and understanding exceed the rigidity of certain logical categories.
- This notion of love/understanding can lead past wonder (thought) to a notion of shared struggle (act).

# Malabou *with* Fanon

- 1) AFFECTIVITY
- 2) WONDER
- 3) LOVE & UNDERSTANDING
- 4) SHARED-STRUGGLE
  
- “Generosity is wonder combined with love”

-Catherine Malabou, *ibid.*, p. 18

# Why this matters



# Austerity

- Easy to remain unaffected by the struggles (and vulnerability) of others, especially those ‘not like us’.
- Affect, wonder, love, and understanding introduce a notion of shared struggle, and a second level of vulnerability. This vulnerability is marked by the risk of struggling with those truly affected by racist, statist, and economic forms of violence.
- Any opposition to these forms of violence must involve a universal form of struggle in which love and understanding overcome structural differences, and in which we are vulnerable to being affected and responding to these affects.

the end

