"Here Lies the Possibility of Bodies Turning Elemental": Oceanic Remembrance, Serpent Rain (2016), and Scandinavian Racial Climates

By Jenny Andrine Madsen Evang

PhD Candidate, Modern Thought And Literature, Stanford University, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6837-213X

Abstract

This paper explores the (non)representational aesthetics and politics of *Serpent Rain,* a 2016 Black feminist film inspired by the recovery of a Danish-Norwegian slave ship. Despite ample historical evidence, Scandinavia's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade remains an underdiscussed topic; when the history is broached at all, it tends to be relegated to a distant 'dark chapter' already overcome. I argue that *Serpent Rain* rejects this binary of erasure vs. contained representation in its treatment of slavery, enacting instead another type of (non)representation that moves beyond "the limits of most available narratives to explain the position of the enslaved" (Hartman and Wilderson 2003, p.184). Taking its meandering and associative form from *Serpent Rain*'s experimental aesthetics, this article draws on Black feminist theory—particularly Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake*—to argue that the film unsettles visual and ontological certainty to dramatize the repetitive structure of racial capitalism and its ongoing reiterative violence, from the sunken slave ship to the ongoing extraction of oil on indigenous land. Ultimately, the film makes us question not only the hegemonic mediation of the enslaved, but also the orthography of the (white) human and the seeming serenity of Norwegian oceanic landscapes.

KEYWORDS: Black feminism, Nordic Exceptionalism, the Sonic, Temporality, Slow Cinema, (Anti) Humanism.

Introduction

> *We are never as steeped in history as when we pretend not to be, but if we stop pretending, we may gain in understanding what we lose in false innocence.*
>
> – Trouillot 1995, p.xxiii

> *How do we memorialize an event that is still ongoing?*
>
> – Sharpe 2016, p.20

> *Ocean waters [are] themselves an archive, an ever-present, ever-reformulating record of the unimaginable.*
>
> – Tinsley 2008, pp.193-194

On December 1, 1768, the slave ship *Fredensborg* ("Freedom Castle") sank outside a small coastal city in Norway called Arendal. The shipwreck lay at the bottom of the ocean for more than 200 years, until it was recovered by a historian and a crew of divers in 1974-1977. In addition to ivory, cotton, and tobacco, the ship had also carried 265 captured Africans from Ghana to be sold in the Danish colony of St. Croix as part of the transatlantic slave trade.[1] Many of the enslaved people onboard *Fredensborg* died during the transatlantic journey, their bodies thrown overboard to be buried in the ocean. The discovery of *Fredensborg* challenged Scandinavia's self-image as a racially innocent, peaceful region—an image built on the myth of Nordic exceptionalism, which frames the region's welfare states as "icons of tolerance, humanism, and equality" (Lykke, p.112). How could Norway and Denmark, often celebrated for their progressivism, be responsible for one of the world's 'best-preserved' slave ships? (Lauvland 2019).[2]

While the discovery of the ship might have at first shaken some of the foundational assumptions of the region's self-image, by asking Scandinavians to grapple with their (our) historical entanglement with slavery and anti-Blackness, this moment was quickly relegated to a footnote in the grand narrative of Danish-Norwegian history, either to be completely erased or framed as an already-mitigated 'dark chapter' to be locked squarely in a distant past irrelevant to the present. This marginalization reflects a broader structure of colonial amnesia in Scandinavia. As Blaagaard and Andreassen note:

> *Denmark was the seventh largest slave-trading nation during colonial times, [yet this history remains] invisible to most Danes (…) The Danish relationship to the former colonies and to the history of slavery and the slave trade is today characterised by both non-memory and a national romantic reproduction of the past (2012, pp.84-85).*

In recent years, artists, activists, and some scholars have worked to confront this colonial amnesia. Initiatives include the 2017 "Unfinished Histories" symposium, the "Blind Spots: Images of the Danish West Indies" exhibition, the 2017 exhibit "What Lies Unspoken" at the National Gallery of Denmark, and the *I am Queen Mary* monument at the Copenhagen waterfront—Denmark's first monument dedicated to a Black woman, honoring Queen Mary, who led an anticolonial revolt in St. Croix. These important efforts, however, tend to be relegated to the realm of "special interest" rather than being allowed to shake up the general structures of Scandinavian exceptionalism.

In relation to the specific history of *Fredensborg,* there have been several efforts to circulate the history of the ship and its excavation, including a permanent exhibition at the KUBEN Museum (established in 2018), two books (1978, 1996), a documentary (2020), a comic series (1997), and numerous media articles from the time of the excavation. These representations, however, tend to "anaesthetize" the slave ship's history and the (absent) stories of its 'human cargo', ensuring that "the dead [are] formally prohibited from stirring up disorder in the present" (Mbembe 2002, p.22). The most extensive portrayal is at the KUBEN Museum in Arendal, where the ship was recovered. Part of UNESCO's *Routes of Enslaved Peoples* project (1994), the exhibition includes the original excavated objects, the captain's logbook, and footage of the excavation.

Image 1: *Two stills from the entrance of the permanent exhibition "Slavegjort" ("Enslaved"/ "Slave made") at the KUBEN museum in Arendal. To enter the exhibit, you walk through a tunnel made from a shipping container. The walls of the container are covered with screens showing the faces of mostly white children. These examples have two excerpts from the UN declaration of universal human rights written on them; article 15: "everyone has the right to a nationality" (left), article 3: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person" (right). Photographs courtesy of the author.*

At KUBEN, the visitors enter the permanent exhibition through a tunnel made out of a shipping container covered in screens displaying images of mostly white children, accompanied by excerpts from the UN Declaration of human rights. The entrance to the KUBEN exhibition reflects the ideological conduits through which the history of Scandinavia's colonial past is often conveyed. Key elements of this mediation include: 1) Denmark and Norway's embrace of "post-racial" egalitarianism and the universality of human rights, 2) the reparative distance between the liberated present and the brief past of a momentary entanglement with the larger history of colonialism and slavery, and 3) the framing of Denmark-Norway as having been the kindest and gentlest colonial power in Europe—described by Andersen as an exceptionally "benevolent type of colonizer" (2024, p.99). Together, these three pillars produce a sense of "innocent colonialism"—surely, as long as Denmark and Norway clings to the idea of "[their own] humane…colonialism, there is no recognition of any debt, and thus no reason to feel guilty, to apologize, or to 'repair'" (Körber 2018, p.26).[3]

The affective invocation of racial innocence at the exhibition's entrance is evident. The young white faces serve as a more recognizable conduit for sympathy than the 265 enslaved Africans who

were forcefully carried on the ship some 250 years ago. These white faces embody the heightened sensitivity and impressibility of the white body, displacing yet again those that the exhibition's empathetic architecture allegedly should make us "feel for." Coupled with human rights language, the exhibition frames slavery as an attack on the universal human, rather than a racialized crime against Black people, in which Denmark-Norway remains complicit. Thus, the exhibition uses slavery's history to emphasize the progress of the (white) human figure, whose universality can only be realized through deracialization (Hartman and Wilderson 2003, p.184). The exhibition rehearses what Wekker calls "white innocence," where whiteness is understood as the unmarked, the universal, the easiest conduit for empathy (2016, p.59). As Mendes argues, "Black pain […] does not illicit the compassion, horror, or intervention of a dominant Nordic public (which quickly relieves itself of all accountability) but instead becomes utilitarian" (2024, p.1). The exhibition repurposes Black pain as a spectacle of absence, repurposed—through the language of the universal human—as a utilitarian vessel for Nordic progress narratives. Indeed, the representations of the slave ship in the mainstream sphere enact "the desire to look at the ravages and the brutality of the last few centuries, but to still find a way to feel good about ourselves" (Hartman and Wilderson 2023, p.184). The ghosts of the past—those enslaved people who were 'produced' through the chain and the whip as what Hortense Spillers calls "Black flesh" in the course of the Middle Passage—remain unnamed, unknowable, and ungrievable in the exhibit, replaced by the winsome faces of white children more adept to produce the designated identificatory emotional responses (of empathy but not guilt, pity but not rage) in the visitors (1987).[4] Afro-Nordic thinkers, activists, and artists have recently criticized this racialized emotional architecture that recenters the plasticity and universality of the white body. For example, Camara Lundestad Joof's play "De må føde oss eller pule oss for å elske oss [They must give birth to us or fuck us to love us]" addresses the indifference and disidentification that uphold white innocence and post-racial inclusion in Norwegian society. Similarly, Black feminist writer Sumaya Jirde Ali articulates the way that white, seemingly "empathetic" bodies are recentered even in moments where their racism is called out: "speaking about racism out loud places me in a process of negotiation that demands me to do care work. This means that my job is in the first place to reassure and safeguard everyone else's feelings" (2023, pp.14-15, author's translation).

This article examines *Serpent Rain*, a 2016 Black feminist experimental film that intervenes in Denmark-Norway's dominant post-racial affective architecture by refusing to recenter the white human—or any human form—as the point of identification. Inspired by the 1970s discovery of the Fredensborg shipwreck, the film was commissioned for an exhibition on "Shipping and the Shipped." I argue that Serpent Rain disrupts the erasure vs. anaesthetized representation dichotomy that characterizes dominant portrayals of slavery and its afterlife in Scandinavia. Instead, the film embraces an experimental audiovisual form to question the affective registers of nature, history, and humanity themselves. Part of the ongoing collaboration between Denise Ferreira da Silva and Arjuna Neuman, *Serpent Rain* features long shots of forests, waters, and glaciers around Bergen, Norway, interspersed with computer-generated images of oil refineries, underwater life, and repurposed footage of anti-Black violence from London, Ferguson, and Baltimore. Towards the end, we see brief images of two drawings of *Fredensborg* and J.M.W. Turner's *the Slave Ship* (1840). The film also uses blackouts and intertitles extensively, accompanied by voiceovers where da Silva weaves together a Black feminist critique of linear temporality with an affective and poetic performance that decentralizes the 'human perspective'.

While the excavation of Fredensborg serves as the catalyst for *Serpent Rain*, the film cannot be said to be simply 'about' the slave ship or the captured Africans onboard in any straightforward way. As I trace in this article, the film contains neither plot nor human characters nor direct narration about the ship, instead reimagining Scandinavian oceanic nature as materially, symbolically, and economically tied to a(n ongoing) history so

often negated or used to reinforce Scandinavian exceptionalism. I understand the film as a cinematic experiment that produces a sense of haunting in the spectators to open up a space not only for grappling differently with the assumed racial innocence of Denmark-Norway's past, present, and future, but also the very categories of past, present and future themselves. Drawing on Sharpe's concept of "the wake" of slavery, I argue that the film's temporal blurrings resist closure and linearity, rendering spectators themselves ghostlike. Rather than merely highlighting an overlooked part of Scandinavian history, *Serpent Rain* questions the very representability of slavery and its afterlife. Through black cuts, enigmatic oceanic landscapes, and sound, the film pushes viewers to confront the issues at the heart of the hegemonic historical record. This approach critiques the liberal tendency to 'fill the gaps' in history, which often depoliticizes the very history it seeks to restore by imposing closure where none exists. The film asks us, in the words of Black feminist thinker Christina Sharpe, riffing on Dionne Brand, to "sit in the room with history" (2016, p.12) and confront the disorder that "the dead" might stir if we refuse to lay them neatly to rest by pretending that there is no debt to be paid (Mbembe 2002, p.22). Aesthetically and politically, *Serpent Rain* participates in a broader effort to recognize the "afterlife of slavery" as an ongoing crisis that unsettles our categories of place, being, and time (Hartman 1997).

This article is structured in four sections, each exploring how *Serpent Rain enacts a refusal of representation vs. erasure:* "Shipping and the Shipped," "That's the Smell of Money," "Looking Too Closely for Hydra, Everything Fell Overboard, Into the Cut," and "The Cut, Like a Womb, Sings Together Life." The first section examines the role of the oceanic in Scandinavian landscapes while introducing the theoretical framework of "the wake" of slavery to complicate those landscapes' seeming serenity. The second section explores how the film links past and present, local and global, by reflecting on the circuits of capital. The third section addresses the film's critique of the gaze as a dominant epistemological structure, while the fourth examines its use of soundscapes to evoke the ocean's womb-like resonances—simultaneously tied to a history of violence and offering possibilities for new ontological modes beyond the current conceptualization of the human.

"Shipping and the Shipped": Norway's Oceanic Mediations

> *Inspired by Norway's grip on the sea, "Shipping and the Shipped" is for all those who long to be transported and all those who have long been transported.*
>
> – Harney 2016

In 2016, the Freethought Collective[5] was invited to be one of the three conveners for the second edition of the Bergen Triennale. The Collective structured its commissioned exhibit around infrastructure and divided it into six subthemes: "Shipping and the Shipped," "End of Oil," "Spirit Labour," "Infrastructure of Feeling," "Archives of Substance," and "The Museum of Burning Questions." One key member, philosopher Stefano Harney, known for his work with Fred Moten in Black studies and critical university studies, commissioned a piece by filmmaker Arjuna Neuman and theorist/artist Denise Ferreira da Silva[6] for "Shipping and the Shipped." This collaboration resulted in *Serpent Rain*, which also led to a longer partnership between Neuman and da Silva, producing films like *4 Waters: Deep Implicancy* (2018), *Soot Breath / Corpus Infinitum* (2020), and *Ancestral Clouds, Ancestral Claims* (2024). These works continue their exploration of racialized (dis)embodiment and nonhuman intimacies across global landscapes of violence.

Serpent Rain uses the theme of "shipping and the shipped" to present an alternate history of infrastructure, embedding Norwegian waters within the histories of the transatlantic slave trade and oil extraction. The focus on "the shipped" shifts attention from the smooth logistics of the shipping industry to the commodities moved through it, including the historical and ongoing forced movement of people reduced to living,

fleshy commodities. The film thus denaturalizes the serenity of shipping landscapes—ports, fjords, and oceans—highlighting the submerged histories of "the shipped." I argue that the film thus links these global systems of racialized violence, where bodies and commodities move across waters, to specific representational tropes in Norwegian national imaginaries.

Scandinavia is deeply tied to what Mrozewicz calls "eco-exceptionalism," where the region's pristine nature, clean energy, and dramatic landscapes are cornerstones in the region's self-image (2020). Norwegian eco-exceptionalism has roots in the 1800s, when the nation-building project (following independence from Denmark) romanticized Norwegian coasts and waters. The iconic painting *Brudeferd I Hardanger* [Bridal Procession in Hardanger] epitomizes this serene vision, depicting a peaceful boat trip across a fjord, set against timeless, stoic mountains and tranquil waters, symbolizing the idealized vision of the Norwegian "folk" and their way of life (Image 2).

More recently, nostalgia for the serenity of Norway's oceans helped explain why 2.6 million Norwegians tuned into *Hurtigruten: Minute by Minute*, billed as the world's longest consecutive reality show. The series captured a ferry's 134-hour journey along Northern Norway's coastline. Promoted by NRK as "the world's most beautiful journey by sea," the series represented the tranquil waters in real time, disturbed only by the ferry's wake. In this slow-moving imagery, the waters are not sites of shipping or extraction, but pristine backdrops for the enduring spirit of the Norwegian people.

The persistence of the Scandinavian image of pristine waters is striking, especially considering that Norway is one of Europe's largest oil exporters. The offshore oil industry and extraction

Image 2: *"Brudeferd i Hardanger" [Bridal Procession in Hardanger] by Hans Gude and Adolph Tidemand (1848). The painting—which is the most canonical national romantic painting of its time—showcases the oceanic imaginary of Norwegian landscapes as the backdrop for authentic folk culture and tradition.*

on Indigenous Sámi land are a central backbone in Norway's economy and culture, yet they are either erased from the imagery of Norwegian oceans in a "nothing-to-see-here mode of visuality" (Leyda 2023, p.50), or reframed as leading the way toward green innovation. Many Norwegian politicians argue that phasing out the oil industry would be morally perilous, claiming that Norwegian oil is the "cleanest" in the world, unlike the "dirty oil" from elsewhere. As Vangen ironically puts it, "our oil is better, more beautiful, more sympathetic. More Norwegian" (2023).

Dominant representations of Norwegian nature are racialized precisely because the country's "white ecology" seems not to be so (Mrozewicz 2020, p.94). The calmness and whiteness of the landscape are infused with the absent-presence of Norwegian racial innocence (Wekker 2016). In these hegemonic depictions, the troubling histories of oil extraction on Indigenous land, slave ships in Norwegian waters, and racialized immigrants left at sea are washed away by the tranquil waves. The landscape is portrayed as timeless, without history, and unchanging. The material and symbolic wakes of the ships seem to vanish into the still waters, leaving no lasting marks on the environment or the national attachment to its tranquility.

It is this oceanic imaginary of innocence that *Serpent Rain*'s Black feminist affective and ontological interrogation intervenes in, refusing to ignore the wakes of slavery, colonialism, and environmental destruction. It makes the ghosts of the "shipped" palpable within the landscape, challenging the seeming innocence at the heart of Scandinavia's "white ecology" by examining the residues of extraction and exploitation. In her landmark book *In the Wake*, Christina Sharpe traces the marks that slavery has left on the political, symbolic, and environmental climate, rejecting the post-racial erasure of reiterative anti-Black violence. She writes:

> *Living in the wake means living the history and present of terror, from slavery to the present, as the ground of our everyday Black existence; living the historically and geographically dis/continuous but always present and endlessly reinvigorated brutality in, and on, our bodies while even as that terror is visited on our bodies the realities of that terror are erased (2016, p.15).*

Contrary to dominant representations of the slave ship's history—such as those at the KUBEN museum or in media archives that frame the ship's excavation as a moment of closure—*Serpent Rain* refuses to erase the interconnected terrors that ripple through bodies, places, and structures. *Serpent Rain's* cinematic enactment of "the wake" crosses several of the wake's metonymic registers. A wake can refer to "the track left on the water's surface by a ship; the disturbance caused by a body swimming or moved in water; the air currents behind a body in flight," or the vigil held after someone has died (Sharpe 2016, p.3). The wake is thus oceanic in both a literal and metaphorical valence: while it names the materially continued disturbances of movement in water, the rippling effects of a ship—perhaps *Fredensborg*—crossing the oceans, it also functions as a metaphor for existing in the ongoing afterlife of slavery, an event which ripples through the present to infuse it with ongoing (social) death. As Christina Sharpe writes, "In the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present" (2016, p.9). In *Serpent Rain*, the past reappears in/as the present both materially, aesthetically, and politically to point us towards the anti-Black *climate* of the world—from premature death to the disproportionate effects of climate change on racialized communities. In mediating the wake, *Serpent Rain* manages to cross between the natural and historical; the film pushes us to recognize the violent material and cultural history of Scandinavian waters by throwing us into an affective experiment where the ghosts of "the shipped" disrupt the serene surface of our often-cherished fjords and oceans just as much as they disturb the blank surface of our racially innocent self-image.

The first shot of the film—much like the celebrated slow TV show "Hurtigruten: minute by minute"—presents us with a ship moving at snail like speed (Image 3). The opening long shot is also

a long take—it lingers on screen for much longer than expected, drawing the spectator's attention to details of a shot which at first glance seems to be a still image.

The shot depicts a hybrid landscape at sunset: a sky in shades of pink and blue fills the top two-thirds of the frame, while the middle is dominated by a snow-covered Norwegian mountain chain. While these elements could be lifted from a Norwegian national romantic painting, the foreground disrupts this serene image with the presence of an oil refinery at Mongstad, revealing the absent presence of oil in imaginaries of Norwegian coastal nature. At the center of the shot, two tall towers emit flames, marking the refinery's role in climate gas emissions. At first, the only movement is the burning flames; after looking at the shot for a while, however, the spectators begin to sense something in the background of the shot moving; a long red shipping vessel, initially inseparable from the large red oil containers on shore, creeps slowly across the screen. The vessel's sluggish pace mirrors that of the shot itself, lingering uncomfortably longer than expected. Unlike *Hurtigruten*'s seamless blending into the tranquil Norwegian fjords, this ship's slowness disrupts the landscape both visually as well as literally through the ongoing destruction of marine life and fossil fuel emission. The ship creates a "wake" that cracks open the innocence of Norwegian waters, allowing the ripples of oil extraction and industrial capital to resonate in the viewer as their eyes search for meaning on the alarmingly, rather than soothingly, still screen. As the spectator watches, they may wonder: why does a film "about" slavery begin with a slow-moving oil ship? As they search for meaning in the slow-moving shot, viewers might imagine this vessel as haunted by another ship that crossed these same waters—one that didn't carry oil, but human cargo.

"That's the Smell of Money": Capital and the Absent-Presence of "The Shipped"

After what feels like an uncomfortable, yet undecidable, stretch of time spent on the opening shot of mountains, the oil refinery, and the shipping vessel,

Image 3: *A still from the opening shot of* Serpent Rain. *The frame shows a long shot of the Mongstad oil refinery in Norway, cradled by mountains and a sunset sky in the background. Image courtesy of Bergen Kunsthall.*

Image 4: *the first of many intertitles in the movie, which reads "an acrid smell bites at the back of your throat." Image courtesy of Bergen Kunsthall.*

the film cuts to a black screen with the words: *"An acrid smell bites at the back of your throat"* (Image 4). The abrupt shift from the lingering shot to the minimalist screen makes the words land like a cut. Perhaps one starts imagining the harsh smell of oil being refined, perhaps the sentence brings back other embodied memories of acrid tastes.

After the intertitle, the film cuts to pixelated footage of human figures moving chaotically between burning buildings, seemingly captured by an infrared camera. Though perhaps not immediately recognizable as such, the shots are appropriated footage from riots in London, Baltimore, and Ferguson following the anti-Black police murders of Mark Duggan, Michael Brown, and Freddie Gray. The grainy images, reminiscent of low-quality surveillance footage, show lagging movements and indistinct faces. Following this, another intertitle reads: "The refinery's press officer jokes in a thick Norwegian accent… That's the smell of money." The film then cuts to a shot that is so quick that its significance only hits us after the fact; it is of a white police officer beating a Black man lying down the street. The rapidity of the shot emphasizes the gratuitousness of the violence without indulging in the fetishization of Black suffering seen in many media representations. These moments—some of the only when the film shifts from non-representational to representational aesthetics—explicitly comment on the contemporary global circuits of consumption of this type of footage, whereby the selective (non)recognition Black humanity is tied to voyeuristic modes of witnessing that doubly occlude the person. The grainy, panoptic quality of the images also foregrounds the violence of the camera itself. The rapidity of this footage undercuts the dominant modes of representation that haunt Black suffering—even in their representation, their politics of visibility are troubled through drawing attention to everything that remains unspoken and unseen. This incorporation of riot footage also explicitly ties the Scandinavian landscape to global structures of anti-Blackness, refusing to treat racism as an issue confined to other regions. Four years after the film, the global resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, sparked by the murder of George Floyd, ignited large protests in Scandinavia as well. [7]

It is against this larger affective backdrop that we are to understand the thoroughly

disorienting first moments of the film—the intertitle, the appropriated footage, and the slow-moving video of an oil refinery. In the complete absence of didactic representation and narration, the spectator must actively piece together meaning from these fragmented elements. Seemingly disparate phenomena are juxtaposed: the often-erased infrastructure of oil extraction against tranquil Norwegian mountains, riots in the UK and US against racialized police brutality, the acrid taste of oil, and a PR officer's comment about the "smell of money." As these images linger, the film introduces another intertitle: "What he actually meant was… that's the smell of the forced decomposition of organic matter." This shifts the focus to the relationship between money—as a seemingly abstract medium of exchange—and the smell of decaying organic matter. The decomposition of organic matter refers simultaneously to the breaking down of oil—the most immediate referent for the officer's comments—but also the forced decomposition of Black people that attempts to turn them into disposable and commodified flesh, symbolically and literally. The shot of a police officer beating a Black man becomes the most concrete and visceral reference to this forced decomposition, but the intertitle also evokes the decomposition of the bodies of enslaved people at the bottom of the ocean and the decomposition of the *Fredensborg* wreck. The invocation of the forced decomposition of organic matter becomes the first concrete hinge within the film that brings the two ships—the oil vessel and the slave ship *Fredensborg*—and their wakes together, ever so opaquely.

Towards the end of *Serpent Rain*, an intertitle deepens our understanding of the connections being hinted at in these first moments of the film. The intertitle reads "as money, slave-labor lives in/as capital." The smell of money is directly linked to slave-labor; the intertitle invokes the "smell" of slavery for the spectator, and with it, the smell of the exploitation and forced fungibility of the "Black flesh" of enslaved people, robbed of the self-possession of their bodies (Spillers 1987). *Serpent Rain* articulates slavery as the negated ground of capital, marking its absence-presence through its aesthetic, natural, and sonic landscape. The wake of colonialism and slavery remains an abyss that cannot be fully captured in the image or contained as a singular event to be represented.

The film understands slavery and racial capitalism as embedded in the complex climate of the world, and of Scandinavia, in several ways: it lives in resource extraction, in the infrastructure and finance of shipping and profits, and in the political climate that devalues certain lives as ungrievable. The climate is, as the environmental humanities emphasizes, profoundly hard to fully visualize without falling back on apolitical imagery of tranquil nature; the *climate* in all the senses of the word marks the constitutive background of being and meaning, but is rarely centered in itself. *Serpent Rain* shines a "blacklight" on the climate itself to highlight "what is there as a filler, a detail, as means, or a raw material" (da Silva quoted in Mendes 2018). This method of blacklight highlights the way that "Black being is perpetually yet unnoticeably situated" as the constitutive outside of Nordic landscapes of belonging (Konaté 2020a).

"Looking Too Closely for Hydra, Everything Fell Overboard, Into the Cut"

> *When Hercules lopped off one of the hydra's heads, two new ones grew in its place.*
> – Linebaugh and Rediker 2002, pp.3-4

> *Visuality is not simply looking. It is a regime of seeing and being, and any so-called neutral position is a position of power that refuses to recognize itself as such.*
> – Sharpe 2023, p.123

Slavery, that which the spectators are expecting to 'see' on screen, enters the picture precisely through the *absence* of a picture—it haunts the blackout intertitles, the smells and tastes being invoked, and the hints at the accumulation of wealth through Norwegian waters. In fact, even though

Fredensborg was the inspiration for the film, the ship is not explicitly introduced until the very end of the film in a quick glimpse of a drawing at the moment of wreckage (Image 5). Through its (non) visual aesthetic language, *Serpent Rain* marks that "something has become too strong in the image," as the reiterative violence of racist climates across time will always escape the frame of the shot (Deleuze 2013, p.18).[8]

Contrary to mainstream representations of the ship, *Serpent Rain* does not rely on transmitting facts or truths to emphasize the violence that the enslaved Africans onboard endured or the 'resistance' they might have shown[9]; nowhere in the film is it mentioned, for example, that several of the captured Africans of the Akwamu tribe were planning a revolt and takeover of the ship (Svalesen 2000, p.144). An elucidation of these important facts seems not to be within the purview of *Serpent Rain's* aesthetic language, which instead chooses to enact a refusal of the term 'historical fact' itself.[10]

Throughout the film, the spectator's gaze is continually unmoored, shifting between long takes of landscapes, fleeting glimpses of appropriated footage, sound and water waves, and lingering black cuts. The rejection of documentary style re-presentation of the past also entails an almost complete rejection of sustained images of recognizably human figures. The only human forms are seen in the appropriated footage of anti-Black police violence, riots, and a recurring motif of hands shuffling tarot cards. As such, the film resists the urge to produce a humanizing counter-archive of any iteration of "the shipped" to counteract their continuous erasure, precisely because the orthography of the human relied on Black people as its constitutive outside, only ever to be contingently and strategically assimilated through selective re-humanization (see Jackson 2020). The film enacts a fundamental refusal of representation as reparation, without then accepting erasure and absence as sufficient registers for dealing with the ghosts of those people so often left behind in the past. The film rejects the terms of the binary of erasure vs representation—terms that dominate so many attempts at doing justice to 'marginalized history'—all together, enacting another type of molecular and elemental (non)representation beyond and beneath the human.

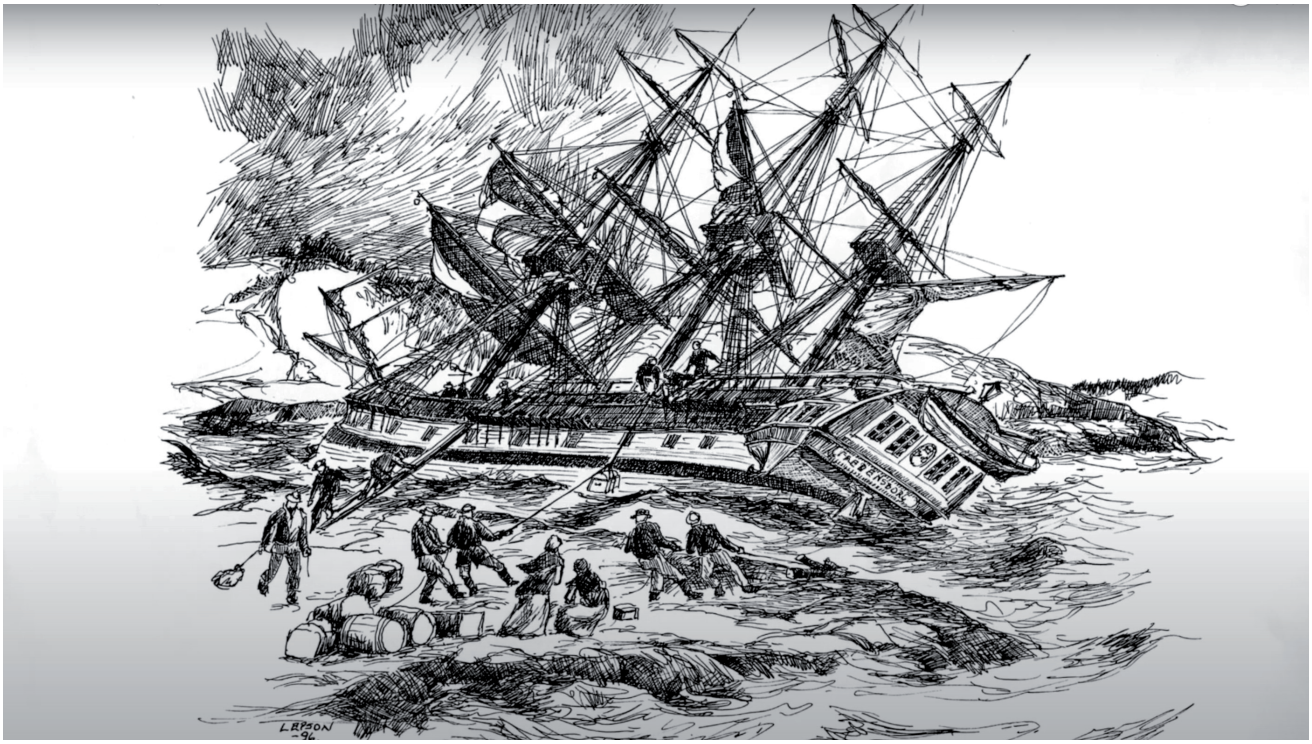

Image 5: *A brief shot of a drawing of* Fredensborg *at the moment of wreckage shown towards the end of* Serpent Rain. *Drawing created by Ants Lepson, and Image courtesy of Bergen Kunsthall.*

The film was, as the story goes, catalyzed by Neuman looking at the image of *Fredensborg* and asking da Silva an enigmatic question; "how do we get to the posthuman without technology?" The posthuman they want to invoke in the film is not the hybrid, futural cyborg—half human, half machine—which often dominates the so-called 'ontological turn.' The posthuman that *Serpent Rain* chases is neither utopian nor post-racial—instead, it can be sensed in turning to the fragmented ontology of those "shipped" who were never fully accepted into the dominant genre of the human. The line between the posthuman and the dehumanized blurs, as does the temporal divide between the 'post' in posthuman and the 'pre' of history. In asking how to reach the posthuman without technology, Neuman and da Silva seem to narrow technology's scope to machines, digital media, automation, and the like. Of course, the film's notion of getting to the posthuman *without* technology is an illusion, albeit a productive one; as media studies has been investigating for a while, technology represents an inescapable facet of the production of subjectivity. The film is itself full of technologies, from the camera and post-production editing, the use of CGI, to the ways race functions as an epistemological and ontological technology (see Chun 2009 and Benjamin 2019).

In *Serpent Rain*, the ocean is the dominant medium for exploring the ontologically complex posthuman, subverting the myth of Scandinavian waters as tranquil and innocent. The ocean has long been seen as "the place where history ends and the wild begins: the abyss, unrecorded, unknown, unmapped" (Peters 2015, p.53). In contrast, the film reimagines the ocean as a deeply historical space, even as it uses the oceanic to upset the vey category of 'the historical.' Rather than being unrecorded and unrecordable, the ocean bears the traces of racial capitalism's violences, disrupting positivist notions of recording, mapping, and knowing. As Tinsley writes, the ocean is an "ever-present, ever-reformulating record of the unimaginable" (2008, p.194). This turn to the opaque, oceanic archive is also material in a rather literal way—not only does it recenter the racialized infrastructure of oil extraction, but the film also invokes those captured "Africans [who were] thrown, jumped, dumped overboard in Middle Passage" as still existing "in hydrogen, in oxygen; in carbon, in phosphorous, and iron; in sodium and chlorine" in the ocean itself (Sharpe 2016, p.21). The turn to the ocean also invokes the crosscurrents between the history of colonialism and slavery and the contemporary oceanic imaginaries of the so-called refugee crisis. It might bring to mind the imagery of rescue boats 'saving' refugees crossing the waters to get to the European shore; imagery that often frames the rescue boats as heroic all the while covering up the fact that governments use them as alibis for limiting the safe ways to traverse the oceans, framing the refugee crisis as a "state of exception" rather than a produced zone of inhumanism where people are often left to die. The ocean is also, then, the "graveyard for [many] hapless immigrants" that remain every so opaquely and materially in the ocean (Peters 2015, p.53).

Serpent Rain interrogates the fragmented ontology of those for whom the ocean has been a tomb, focusing on the molecular traces left behind. Through underwater close-ups, the film submerges the viewer in the medium of water, revealing how molecules remain in the seemingly still ocean, stirring disorder. By imagining the material remnants of slavery and capital at the bottom of the ocean as a starting point for thinking about the posthuman and the entangled ontology of matter, *Serpent Rain* points us towards a mode of breaking down the human/nonhuman and natural/cultural binaries without letting our attention to such ontological entanglements become deracialized or ahistorical. The film does not entertain a Deleuzian turn away from the ontology of the molar towards the transgressive capacities of "becoming-molecular", as an easy line of flight away from capital's centrifugal force of coherence (as some (post-) Deleuzian theorizations in the academy might be accused of doing). Neither is the film turning to the elemental constitution of matter to make a grand gesture of universal (in)humanism—something like that we are all cut from the same cloth, that we are all in the same boat. Instead, the film seems to be saying that if we want to use the model of

the fragmented body as a way to orient ourselves towards the potentialities of the post-human, then we cannot forget that the violent production of Black flesh as raw material during chattel slavery took place precisely through the fragmentation of the idea and materiality of a self-possessed body. *Serpent Rain* critiques the colorblindness in many new materialist celebrations of ontological entanglement, reminding us that racialization is a key force in de-, post-, and re-humanization (see Jackson 2020; Weheliye 2014).

The unimaginable, material record of the waters is affectively enacted in the film, not only through the sustained long takes of watery imagery but also through the recurring black cuts. The intertitle that gave the name to this section of the article describes the cut as something one falls into when trying to look too closely: "looking too closely for hydra, everything fell overboard, into the cut." The attempt to master the gaze when searching for Hydra, the mythical serpentine water monster who grows more heads as they are cut off (a fitting metaphor for the unseen monstrosity and complexity of racial capitalism), plunges you into the black waters of the cut. The phrase "falling overboard" also evokes the cinematic cut *as* the opaque waters traversed by slave ships and shipping vessels.

The use of intertitles is reminiscent of films from the silent film era, but their writing tends to be confusing, rather than explanatory. The black cuts draw the viewer into discomfort by rejecting the stability of visual representation, instead of stitching the spectator into the diegesis as is customary in classical cinema. These cuts amplify the viewer's bewilderment: Where are these words coming from? How do they connect to the surrounding shots? What lies beyond or behind the blackness? The film's (non)representation of slavery emphasizes absence, confusion, and withholding, challenging the dominance of the gaze as a carrier of certainty. The cuts bring our attention to that which has been absented or relegated to the margins within history, casting a blacklight on the human's constitutive outside without reifying its return to presence and visibility. The film 'speaks' from inside the cut, without affording coherence to the speech and sounds that emerge.

The Cut, like a Womb, Sings Together Life": En-sounding the Oceanic Archive

> *Black (…) wombs are thus not only factories of abjection but (…) death machines: reproducing those oriented toward social death and a negligible physical death.*
>
> – Mendes 2020, p.62

> *These peri-acoustic express the feelings of an embodied singularity. Here, inside the cut, lies the possibility of bodies turning elemental.*
>
> —Serpent Rain, intertitle

In *Serpent Rain*, the cinematic cut is also directly associated with the imagery of the ocean as a womb; one set of intertitles reads "the cut, like a womb, sings together life." This womb functions on several metonymic registers; it can be understood as referencing the "womb" of the slave ship— "this boat is a womb, a womb abyss… This boat: pregnant with as many dead as living under sentence of death" (Glissant 1997, p.6). To me, it also references "the shipped" as the negated womb of the modern world and the figure of the human; as Wilderson and Hartman write, Black people give the world and the nation "its coherence because we're its *underbelly*" (2003, p.187, emphasis added). The cut as womb also contains within itself, however, the possibility of giving birth to an ontology that remakes the human from the traces of the dead that remain in the ocean, without forgetting the violence that produced those fragments by turning absence into coherent presence. Indeed, the film never quite resolves how we are to embrace that "inside the cut, lies the possibility of bodies turning elemental." But then again, resolution is not in its aesthetic purview, rather, the film aims to trace entangled violences and potentials while staying with the trouble. As I have

emphasized, the film centrally suggests that these ontological ripples in the ocean—the ripples of bodies turning elemental—have to be approached through senses beyond the visual. The filmmakers actively encourage synesthesia, the melding together of several senses in a complex conglomerate; the film urges us to taste acrid smells, for example, as the film's first intertitle states, or—as I expand in this section—to *listen* beyond or beneath the image. The ontological disorientation of synesthesia comes to us aesthetically through the film's use of the sonic and the haptic which envelop the spectator within a dark, womb-like space where ripples of history resonate above and below the threshold of hearing. As media theorist Peters writes, "underwater, light is scattered and absorbed but sound speeds at a quicksilver pace; optics are discouraged, and acoustics encouraged. …The ocean is a murky place, and light effectively vanishes once you reach a certain depth" (2015, p.61). Perhaps the aptitude for sound to travel further than light in water is one of the reasons that the intertitle reads "the cut, like a womb, *sings* together life." The 'sings' in this sentence points us directly towards the importance of the sonic for the reformulation of life beyond the current regimes of visual and ontological domination.

Neuman himself turns to the potentials of the sonic realm in his later writing. Against the dominance of the visual and its accompanying "fad of representation-based neoliberal reparations," he advocates for a turn towards the acoustic;

> *this move cannot only be a 'redistribution of the sensible,' something like substituting the ears for the eyes (…). No single sense exists uncontaminated by cultures of domination, yet shifting emphasis to hearing and even touch is certainly a start, especially since these senses are activated inside the womb—meaning they come to the fetus/mother when the fetus/mother is yet to be separated and sovereign…While colonial determinations have been encoded into all our senses, monstrous, prenatal, multiple existence and its potential synesthesia might help us begin to undo some of the collateral damage that noble predatory eyesight has unleashed on the world (2018, p. 98).*

In this excerpt, the womb reappears as a literalized metaphor for the ontological realm that precedes and exceeds the construction of the singular, coherent human—the one who recognizes itself in the mirror at the expense of those not deemed 'human enough' for self-possession. Hearing inside the womb unfolds within a liquid abyss, where, like the oceanic, acoustics travel where light cannot. *Serpent Rain* refers to this type of sound as "peri-acoustic": "In this more-than-individual state, we hear through multiplicity and mutuality, we hear through four points in space, we hear both internally and externally, and we hear our speech as both our own and not our own (alien)" (Neuman quoted in Mendes 2018). [11]

The use of peri-acoustics in *Serpent Rain* invites a new type of haptic listening from the spectators—perhaps "spectator" is even the wrong word to describe the sonic enveloping the film enacts. Listening here is "an attunement to sonic frequencies of affect and impact. It is an ensemble of seeing, feeling, being affected, contacted, and moved beyond the distance of sight and observer" (Campt 2017, p.42). The sonic regime of *Serpent Rain* pulls the audience into the oceanic depths of the opaque archive of racial capitalism, without reproducing the fantasy of 'giving voice' to the remnants of the shipped, rippling symbolically and materially through the wake. In contrast to some thinkers who see the sonic as untainted by colonial regimes of knowledge, *Serpent Rain* avoids representing the sonic multiplicity of the womb as a simple line of flight away from the violent (visual) regimes of the present-past, or as a leap towards a futural 'tabula rasa.' The peri-acoustics of the womb are intertwined with the abyss of the non- or sub-human; the womb is not a neutral space for an ahistorical fetus, but is embedded within a history of filiation and ontological production that is deeply racialized and gendered (see Hortense Spillers' "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" (1987) and Jan-Therese Mendes' "Black Death, Mourning and The Terror of Black Reproduction: Aborting the

Image 6: *A still from* Serpent Rain *showing a frozen waterfall in the vicinity of Bergen. The shot is taken from the ground, looking upwards onto the icicles. Image courtesy of Bergen Kunsthall.*

Black Muslim Self, Becoming the Assimilated Subject" (2020)).

While cinema is an audiovisual medium, audio has long been relegated to a secondary role compared to the visual—indeed, when reading a lot of classical film theory, one might get the impression that all cinema is silent cinema.[12] Against this visual dominance, the soundscape in *Serpent Rain* often takes center stage, resonating across the natural and cultural. It weaves together the sounds of the 'natural environment,' electronic music, Goldie's atmospheric "Timeless," and the rhythmic shuffle of cards. The soundscape becomes, in a sense, the "main image," alive with vibrations and flows that escape the frame. As Deleuze notes, the "sound image imposes a dissociation between it and the visual image, a disjunction which must not be surmounted: an irrational cut between the two" (2013, p.279).

In one key long take in *Serpent Rain*, the sonic realm takes precedence over the visuals. The shot shows a frozen, unmoving waterfall (Image 6). The stillness lingers for an unnerving duration, making us lose our sense of time and duration.

Accompanying this still image is a loud soundtrack of ice melting and droplets falling on a microphone. The soundscape seems too abrupt, too loud, in relation to the complete stillness of the image, imbuing it with an intense sensation of time passing too quickly. The sonic element evokes the direct experience of ice melting, even as the process itself remains largely invisible to the human eye. It is the soundscape that transforms this frozen image of Norway's white ecology—often depicted through tranquil imagery of snow and ice—into something that feels deeply significant, disorienting, and troubling. The sound of droplets falling pulls the spectator into the heart of time itself, on a scale we rarely have access to, emphasizing the uncontrollable effects of climate change rippling through the wakes of slavery and colonialism. Indeed, the film's focus on peri-acoustics and the sonic as its own realm of perception reorients us toward the disjunctive intensity of history's temporality—for while an image can remain as a still snapshot, sound always exists in/as time.

Coda: "How Do You Mourn Something that is Ongoing?"

> *Time's ethical force is perhaps the most important obstacle to a political program that deals with the challenges of the global present, in particular the pervasiveness of racial violence and of the colonial juridical mechanisms that facilitate extraction.*
>
> —Ferreira da Silva, quoted in Mendes 2018

How do you write a conclusion to accompany a film with an ontological project that refuses closure, that resists the gesture of laying to rest and "moving on"? How can one hold together the violence and potential of "bodies turning elemental" in the face of ever-expanding neoliberal regimes of visibility and containment? What can cinema do to leave history open, unresolved, in ways that dominant museal and archival remediations of the slave ship cannot? I hesitate to conclude an article on *Serpent Rain* with anything but more questions. And what better question to turn to than the one da Silva posed in response to Neuman's catalyzing query, "How do we get to the posthuman without technology?" She replied: "Perhaps we can make a film without time."

Serpent Rain's disruptions of ontological and political closures are multiple—from its sonic unsettling of gaze to the destabilizing of the subject-object relation and the assumed ahistoricism and innocence of the natural landscape of Denmark-Norway—but perhaps nowhere is the film's disorienting force more palpable than in its (dis)embodiment of time and linear history themselves. The film plays with time by throwing the spectator into a web of temporal scales. While it runs for just 30 minutes, its experience of time feels both to stretch far beyond that half hour and, paradoxically, to have no duration at all.

Let us return, then, in a non-linear fashion, to the opening shot of the film—the slow-moving shipping vessel, the still mountains, the burning flames of the fossil industry—to examine how the film "(un)does time" itself, resisting the teleology of endings and progressions. The tension between the temporalities in the film's opening shot ties together timescales that are often thought of as separate: the scale of the climate, of human history, and of industrial capital. As Chakrabarty argues:

> *anthropogenic global warming brings into view the collision…of three histories that, from the point of view of human history, are normally assumed to be working at such different and distinct paces that they are treated as processes separate from one another for all practical purposes: the history of the earth system, the history of life including that of human evolution on the planet, and the more recent history of industrial civilization (for many, capitalism) (2014, p.1).*

If the sky and snow-covered mountains in the opening shot of the film encapsulate the history of the earth system, the industrial landscape at the front simultaneously marks the longer history of human evolution *and* the specific subsection of the history of modernity and coloniality driven by capital accumulation and industrialization. The collision of these temporalities within this first shot is indicative of the continuous collision of temporalities which (un)marks the film as a whole. *Serpent Rain* suggests that the total climate of racial capitalism, and the ongoing afterlife of slavery, continues to crash against the shores of the present, operating on a temporal scale that defies the chrononormative regimes of measuring and structuring time. The film's temporal un-doings echo what Deleuze calls the "time-image," where distinct durations coexist, and "a single event can belong to several levels [as the] sheets of the past exist in non-chronological order" (Deleuze, 2013, p.xii).

Another shot particularly adept at capturing the undoing of singular temporality in *Serpent Rain* shows a forest slowly swaying in the wind (Image 7). The shot is taken from the perspective of the soil—unlike the disorienting bird's-eye view of the film's opening, this angle feels unnervingly close to the ground, too near to the camera to be comfortable. The separation between seer and

seen begins to falter, as the grasses almost seem to brush against the spectator's face.

The temporality of this perspective feels almost geological. Sensing from the ground shifts the spectator away from a linear sense of time and into the cluster of separate timescales Chakrabarty describes. In one of her voiceovers, da Silva asserts, "if we take fossilism as a model for our categories, a completely different notion of time could become available." An intertitle follows: "The fossil is a reminder that what has happened has not gone away... The product of slave labor remains in our lives." The temporality of the fossil is marked precisely by *remaining* beyond a singular historical event, beyond a singular frame. The fossil, often seen as the symbol of something hardened and unmalleable, becomes plastic and changing within the temporal purview of the film.

Taking its mark from the timescale of the fossil, the film turns toward the "long residence time" of Black life—"residence time tells us that traces of the flesh of the dead slaves remain here/now as part of the composition that is the ocean" (da Silva, quoted in Mendes, 2018). The invocation of residence time—a scientific term that names the average time that a substance or a particle *remains* in a given location or condition—brings us back to the temporality of the oceanic archive and its ripples in the present. The water and the oceanic remnants of the dead operate on an elemental, earth-scale temporality: "human blood is salty, and sodium has a residence time of 260 million years" (Sharpe, 2016, p.21). Recalling the film's earlier reference to the forced decomposition of organic matter, the focus on the deep tempos of trace molecules in the water offers a new ontological and temporal framework for considering the material re-compositions of those who were shipped and forcefully decomposed.

If *Serpent Rain* is "timeless," it may be because the dominant categories of time unravel under the climatic pressures of racialized violence. Its multifaceted temporalities do not suggest a return to a timeless ahistoricism—like the frozen Norwegian landscape's dominant innocence—nor a linear narration of a "dark chapter" in the nation's history, as in typical representations of the slave ship. Instead, it turns towards the scale

Image 7: *Still of a Norwegian forest that enters the film approximately halfway through* Serpent Rain. *The perspective of the camera is from the soil, invoking a telluric sensation for the spectators. The perspective makes the size of the straws compete with the height of the trees.*

of residence time, of remnants and ghosts that persist beyond historical or ontological containment—in museums, archives, or at the bottom of the ocean. Through shots, silences, and sound, the film enacts a temporality where, as Toni Morrison puts it, "everything is now. It is all now" (quoted in Sharpe 2016, p.21). If cinema is, as Jacques Derrida claims, the art of letting ghosts return, how can we remain with *Serpent Rain*'s invocation to listen for the ghosts of "the shipped" on and beyond the screen, without demanding they be easily recognizable, like the white faces at the entrance of the *Fredensborg* exhibition? A strength of *Serpent Rain*'s political approach is its rejection of didactics in favor of an affective, aesthetic experiment that troubles the spectator. But the question remains: how can we spread *Serpent Rain*'s lesson of unlearning beyond the confines of the museum and cinema? How do we extend its affective and ontological ripples beyond the dark movie theater? How might we make Scandinavia sit "in the room with [its] history," rather than turning the room into an anesthetized museum of an already overcome past (Sharpe, 2016, p.12)? If 'applying' *Serpent Rain*'s approach to something like the KUBEN exhibition on *Fredensborg* seems antithetical, how might we reimagine public memory spaces to foster broader engagement rather than closure? In line with the film's temporal wedge, I will let these questions remain open.

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Notes

[1] Denmark-Norway was directly involved in the forced displacement of around 110 000 enslaved Africans during the triangular trade of transatlantic chattel slavery.

[2] The prideful narration of this slave ship as one of the, if not *the,* 'best preserved' slave ships in the world warrants deeper interrogation. For whom and on whose premises is the slave ship preserved?

This is a particularly pressing question, given not only that Norway still owns all of the goods recovered from the slave ship, including ivory elephant fangs and mahogany, but also that the very fascination with the discovery and preservation of the ship continually recenters the white divers and historians while marginalizing the enslaved people who were captured and transported on the ship in the Middle passage.

3 Indeed, neither Denmark nor Norway have paid any reparations to the descendants of those shipped and colonized on whose backs so much of their economic wealth was built, despite a rather large public demand for apologies and reparations in 2017 (the 100 year anniversary of Denmark selling the virgin Islands to the U.S).

4 Hartman and Wilderson encapsulate the pervasiveness and violence of this; "It's as though in order to come to any recognition of common humanity, the other must be assimilated, meaning in this case, utterly displaced and effaced: Only if I can see myself in that position can I understand the crisis of that position" (2003, 189).

5 The Freethought Collective is comprised of Irit Rogoff, Stefano Harney, Adrian Heathfield, Massimiliano Mollona, Louis Moreno and Nora Sternfeld. The collective "aims to blur the boundaries between thought, creativity, and critique and meld them into a trans-language practice, working with and as artists and knowledge producers in a new way. Making radical combinations of critical work and practice in the arts freethought strives to place these new models in unexpected contexts" (freethought collective).

6 Denise Ferreira da Silva is an artist-scholar, philosopher, and professor who works at the University of British Columbia. Her work explores post-enlightenment thought from anticolonial and Black feminist perspectives, with a specific focus on the racialized construction of the human, and her books include *Unpayable Debt* (2022) and *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (2007).

7 As Konaté writes, there is a new wave of activists and artists explicitly grappling with the complex relations between police brutality and anti-Blackness in the US and the racial politics of innocence that have dominated Scandinavia; "This is one of the first times in Nordic history that so many Black people have come together collectively. Not just to extend solidarity abroad; but also us coming together on a larger scale to challenge anti-Blackness within our own region of Europe" (2020b, p.1).

8 In describing the "time-image," Gilles Deleuze writes that "something has become too strong in the image" (18). Contrary to Deleuze's historical mapping, however, which relies heavily on world war two as the breaking point for the image, *Serpent Rain* forces the spectators to relate this "too strongness" back to slavery and the birth of racial capitalism and forward to its present and future afterlife. As such, the film performs Black studies critiques of the exceptionalization of the camp as "the first" moment of utter dehumanization (see Weheliye 2014; Fanon 2008 [1952]; Mbembe 2002).

9 I enclose 'resistance' in quotation marks to allude to the complex and ongoing discussion regarding the term in Black feminist theory.

10 The sustained structure of the white gaze relies on enacting a sense of bodily and sensory mastery through asserting a distance between the subject of the gaze and the object of the look. Frantz Fanon describes the position of Blackness as frozen in the position of "looked-at-ness" by the white child. "Not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. (…) The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man" (p.110). Several Black feminist thinkers argue that this structure is so deeply entrenched in visibility itself that even attempts at "doing justice" to Black people often rely on the very same parameters of representation.

11 *Serpent Rain*'s use of peri-acoustics has inspired an artwork by the artist Anna Frei titled "Consent not to be a Single Being- a Set for Peri-Acoustic Attunement."

12 Against this backdrop, there have been sustained efforts towards solidifying "sound studies" as a field within film studies by scholars such as Kaja Silverman, Britta Sjögren, and Jean Ma.