

# Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge

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## What Exceeds the Hold?: An Interview with Christina Sharpe

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[1] Selamawit Terrefe: Thank you Christina, for making the time to speak with me. I want you to know how influential your work has been for me throughout my tenure as a scholar in training.

[2] Christina Sharpe: I'm happy to be doing this interview with you. It's a pleasure.

[3] ST: I'd like to begin with a question that invokes, for me, your first book—*Monstrous Intimacies*<sup>[1]</sup>—in particular your formulation of the "sodomasochism of everyday Black life"<sup>[2]</sup> and the representation of Black suffering. I recalled your investigations of the spectacle, imagination, and identification when I watched President Obama's performance at Reverend Pinckney's funeral in Charleston, South Carolina and I could not help but think of the compulsion to remember and repeat, this compulsion with regards to the funeral as a televised event, replete with entertainment brought to you by the US' first Black President. You reference Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection*<sup>[3]</sup> in much of your work and you discuss the "staging of black suffering" in your essay "Blackness, Sexuality and Entertainment."<sup>[4]</sup> I wonder what your thoughts are regarding non-blacks' desires to consume the spectacle of Black death—funerals in particular—and the role of both memory *and* forgetting in Black people's response to, participation in, and consumption of these practices and images?

[4] CS: I have several responses to this. The first is that I'm not so interested in thinking about the non-Black desire to consume, produce and stage spectacular and quotidian Black death. I think it's enough for me to say that that is the case; that is the ground that we stand on, the space that we enter into. Your question, though, has me thinking about Amiri Baraka's funeral service, which I watched live streamed from Newark Symphony Hall. I was struck (but not surprised) by the number and range of people who came forward to speak. Poets like Jessica Care Moore and Sonia Sanchez, musicians such as Saul Williams, activists, and, of course, Ras Baraka. And I was struck as well by the musical performances and the testament to Baraka's profound influence in the world, in Newark, and Newark in the world. I remember very well the sound of people speaking (how they spoke as well as what they said), the activists who got up to speak, and in particular the sound of Savion Glover's dance for Baraka. I don't know if you saw it, but Savion Glover performs a tap dance and in that dance was the sound of mourning and joy and presence and it was *all* there. It was completely gorgeous and moving and life giving. As I watched the funeral for Rev. Pinckney, Baraka's funeral was somewhere in the back of my mind, disturbing my mind. Of course, Pinckney's service was religious and Baraka's was secular; I knew why

Barack Obama delivered the so-called eulogy for Rev. Pinckney's funeral and I say so-called eulogy because it wasn't a eulogy, it was a political speech.

[5] ST: Yes, exactly.

[6] CS: But I really wanted him not to deliver that speech. I wanted him, if he was going to be there, to stay in the audience to greet the family, to comfort the family, and to sit in the audience and listen, but of course he didn't. When he took the stage he gave the same one note performance that I think he always gives when it comes to Black people. It's the sort of note that sutures Black suffering to romance and redemption. The note of a more perfect union, the note of unhearable Black suffering. The note of romance of empire. There's a moment when I watched—and I didn't want to watch, but I was compelled to watch the funeral, to watch his eulogy—there was this moment as I watched his face that looked as if he was deciding what he was going to do next and then it became clearer to me that, oh my god, he's going to sing. And that line from *Invisible Man* kept going through my head, "the Brother *does not sing!*"

[5] I tweeted that because I could and couldn't believe he was actually going to do that. And then, of course, when he sings it's the opposite of Glover's tapping. For that reason, it seemed to me that he had to sing "Amazing Grace" because "Amazing Grace" is precisely that...unhearable Black suffering. It's precisely that song of romance and redemption because we know John Newton's history, that he keeps working on the slavers after his conversion and it's only later that he writes "Amazing Grace."

[7] I'm going to digress here and say that because I presented on a panel at the Black Portraiture Conference in Florence, Italy, I had the opportunity to attend the Venice Biennale. I wanted to go this year because it was curated by Okwui Enwezor and the title was All The World's Futures. It was my first time in Italy and given the crossings, sinkings, and drownings in the Mediterranean Sea and elsewhere, Venice, is a beautiful space and a deeply fraught space. On this day we decided not to go to either of the two main exhibition sites—the Arsenale or the Giardini—but to some of the other exhibition spaces. It's prohibitively expensive for countries to be in the main exhibition space so many pavilions are off-site. We saw a sign for the "Scottish and Venice Pavilion" and decided to go there. Once we're inside we realize that the theme of the Pavilion is "The Slave's Lament" and we are, to say the least, trepidatious. The artist is a white Scottish man named Graham Fagen and the exhibition spans four different rooms. In the fourth room was a four-screen installation featuring Ghetto Priest, the reggae artist, and three members of the Scottish Ensemble; so three instruments and then Ghetto Priest's voice singing the Robert Burns 1792 poem "The Slave's Lament." The program tells us that: "Fagen draws our attention to an episode in Burns' life." In 1786 he books a passage to Jamaica to escape economic and other pressures and accepts the position of slave overseer. At the last moment news that his recently published first work has been well-received changes his mind and the journey is seemingly forgotten, or perhaps not quite. He writes "The Slave's Lament," 1792, the poet's only work that empathizes with the appalling hurt of the displaced, the trafficked and the enslaved. A beautiful lyric written over 200 years ago with a narrative that remains entirely contemporary as we think of current tragedies unfolding on borders and hinterland locations. If this is not your specialty and you think about Robbie Burns it may be as somebody who at some point is involved with abolitionism. I was thinking about that and how it meets up with John

Newton; Robbie Burns meets John Newton: one man who makes his living on slave ships and one man who is about to become an overseer on a plantation until he gets news that his first book is well received and then he abandons the contract. Fagen says "The Slave's Lament" "isn't a song with a beginning, middle and end—the version is endless so he's been understanding it as a kind of formal sonic landscape." Slavery was the weather.

[8] In thinking about the sonic landscape of Savion Glover and the sonic landscape of Barack Obama delivering the eulogy at Rev. Pinckney's funeral, it seems to me that people must actively and continually allow that song to escape its genesis in order to offer it there in those circumstances: the murder of six Black women and three Black men in *that* church in South Carolina that was Denmark Vessey's church. To me, that speaks profoundly to the hold. As in the hold of the ship. It speaks profoundly to the hold and to the hold that the hold has on Obama's imagination. It seems to me that where Obama's imagination is involved where Black folk are concerned, he's always tied to the logics of the hold, of captivity, those sort of brutal arithmetics. Think of the difference between the speech Obama gives at the vigil after the Newtown, Connecticut murders at Sandy Hook Elementary School versus the speech that he gives in Chicago, Illinois at Hyde Park Academy in the wake of the murders and the lack of a trauma center for young people on the South Side of Chicago. In Newtown Obama's refrain is that we must do everything we can to save every child. When he gets to Chicago the refrain is that we might not be able to save every child. That is what I mean by the kinds of brutal arithmetics that are completely sutured to the hold. I write about this in the section of the book called "The Hold" and also in an essay called "Three Scenes" that was just published in *On Marronage: Ethical Confrontations with Antiblackness*. To sing Amazing Grace is to "mispronounce the song." The grace is not for us. It's to misunderstand the genesis and the subject of the song and the violence that the song never begins to deal with. It's about Newton's journey; it has nothing to do with slavery for the enslaved. And it's always trying to articulate some kind of romance of salvation. The grace is for Newton.

[9] ST: And would you categorize this idea of "mispronouncing the sound" as a form of forgetting or actually the memory of the hold?

[10] CS: Well I think it's both. It's a type of forgetting the origin of the song that then passes as a remembering: Newton's salvation, which is not the salvation of the enslaved, but Newton's own salvation—he's caught in a storm and he survives it. Maybe he participated in the throwing overboard of enslaved people, but he survived the storm. So it's both that memory and forgetting as they're sutured.

[11] ST: I know the focus of your work now isn't about non-Blacks' desire to participate in the spectacle of Black death, but isn't that what John Newton is doing in his role on the ship?

[12] CS: Well yes, of course it's everywhere, but I spent so much time in *Monstrous Intimacies* trying to think through Black and white encounters with this violence and that's just not what I'm interested in right now. Of course I'm always thinking about that in my teaching, but as far as thinking through this work, that's work someone else can do.

[13] ST: Can you say more about how your current project differs from *Monstrous Intimacies*?

[14] CS: The set of texts I'm thinking through and the way I'm thinking through them are different. I'm trying to be very clear about the "we" I'm summoning. In some senses it's a much more theoretical work; it is the performance of theorizing.

[15] ST: I think the type of violence that we are attempting to address and work through requires this type of theorization, prioritizing the performance of theorizing over attempting to enter or maintain a particular place in the academy. It's the ethical intervention, right?

[16] CS: Yes, that's what I think.

[17] ST: And I think it's tied to when Spillers talks about theory and praxis. Black women's flesh.

[18] CS: That's right. It is. We can also turn to Moraga, Anzaldéa, and Barbara Smith who are all talking about that in the 1980s at the same time as Spillers' intervention. They are all thinking about theory and praxis and enfleshment.

[19] ST: And flesh is the meditation required for theorizing. Black women's flesh is what people have been meditating upon and attempting to theorize for centuries.

[20] CS: Meditating upon, and marking—

[21] ST: Exactly!

[22] CS: Scoring—

[23] ST: And this is our way of reflecting back on that.

[24] CS: Yes.

[25] ST: I see strands of Spillers, Hartman, Wynter, Gordon, Sexton, Brand, and Wilderson throughout much of your work and all of these theorists, including yourself, continue to provide profound insights and generate penetrating questions for me, primarily how your work responds to Wilderson's question regarding Black people—"What does it mean to suffer"? How would you place your work in relation to this question Frank posits?

[26] CS: I would add a few others to that list: Rinaldo Walcott, Katherine McKittrick, and M. NourbeSe Philip. I think that once one accepts that violence precedes and exceeds the Black, that it's not situational violence or a conflict in civil society—that that violence is the grammar that articulates "the carceral continuum of black life"<sup>[6]</sup>—then one has to take up the question of what it means to suffer. I'm thinking this through two recent highly acclaimed works, Claudia Rankine's *Citizen*<sup>[7]</sup> and Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me*<sup>[8]</sup>. I don't think that they take this as the ground because if they did the address of the work would be quite different than it is. There's a point in the introduction to Frank's book [*Red, White & Black*] where he talks about Baldwin and Mailer: "In 'The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy,' James Baldwin writes about 'the terrible gap between [Norman Mailer's] life and my own.'" Wilderson writes it's "a painful essay in which Baldwin explains how he experienced, through beginning

and ending his 'friendship' with Mailer, those moments when Blackness inspires White emancipatory dreams and how it feels to suddenly realize the impossibility of the inverse." He goes on to write that "Baldwin's condemnation of discourses that utilize exploitation and alienation's grammar of suffering is unflinching: 'I am afraid that most of the white people I have ever known impressed me as being in the grip of a weird nostalgia, dreaming of a vanished state of security and order, against which dream, unflinching and unconsciously, they tested and very often lost their lives,'" etc. and he goes on to quote Baldwin saying, "There is a difference," he writes, 'between Norman and myself in that I think he still imagines that he has something to save, whereas I have never had anything to lose.'" [27] I was thinking about this in terms of the language of what it means to suffer and tying that language of what it means to suffer to a refusal to continually try to make Black suffering visible, hearable, and understandable to white people. But it seems to me that Rankine and Coates' books are invested in that translation. I'm interested in how these books are being received in the present and in the possible afterlives of the books; what do they or will they have made more or less possible in their wake? Because it's as if a whole other body of work has never happened. Coates' book in particular feels stuck in a particular mode of address that ejects me every time I try to read it. What I'm trying to say is that I'm thinking about the ways that the work of the people we started with, work I'm engaging and trying to extend and think with and through, does not circulate in the same ways in various publics as profound and transformative. Those bodies of work don't meet even for people who read them both. The address of both Coates and Rankine's books seems to me quite a young address. It presumes a certain kind of naiveté and refusal to acknowledge that there is a logic of the hold. It participates in the same logic as Obama's singing of "Amazing Grace" and his speech at Hyde Park Academy in Chicago.

[27] ST: It seems as if it's a way for them to alleviate non-Black folks' anxieties as well.

[28] CS: Yes, it's certainly a way to alleviate many non-black folks' anxieties, those non-Black folk who are so inclined to be made anxious. [Laughter.]

[29] ST: I have some critiques of my own of Coates' work—for instance that it's geared more toward white liberals and non-radical Black folk—but as much criticism that is warranted for Coates, he's shifted quite considerably from where he was a few years ago. He's almost there... almost in comparison to where he was before, don't you think?

[30] CS: Perhaps, but I don't think he's "almost there" and I think one might read his move to France as more evidence of that. This is not to say that there is not room for Coates and Rankine to do the work that they do; there is. My real problem is that the work is being considered sort of ground-shaking revolutionary work when it's not. It is work that is within a particular liberal and neo-liberal mode of address and if we see it as that and engage and use it from that place...that, is perhaps a quite different thing. I think about those moments in various Coates essays in *The Atlantic* when he writes about learning French as if somehow learning French would get him outside of something. That is not explicit but it is the implicit desire—the desire there to be read: as if there were not French colonies, as if the French had not participated in the slave trade, as if the French aren't still extracting indemnity from Haiti. As if, as if, as if. As if somehow this language that is not English will get him outside of a particular kind

of Black suffering, out of Black unhumaning. And I think that those moments in essays (in English) that he would punctuate with, "On y va," as a sort of punctuation of desire, a desire to be read as fully human. Which is to say capable of mastering another (colonial) tongue.

[31] ST: I read this desire for mastering another tongue as another extension of this compulsory desire for whiteness, or anything-but-Blackness specifically. Do you find Rankine's text demonstrates a similar naiveté to Coates' regarding the logic of the hold? I find a particular section of the text troubling, but I'd like to get your thoughts about the address in and of *Citizen*.

[32] CS: I think that there are moments in *Citizen* that are quite good and open up some kind of possibility; however, the beginning and the end are framed with this kind of naïve voice that is continually thrown off—not that we aren't thrown off by the racist encounter, but that in being thrown off by the racist encounter that voice in *Citizen* is plaintive; it is still looking for recognition. Looking in the face of the white person to try to see something, to be seen as something. But, as I said, there are other moments where I think that look gets deployed in different ways. For instance, the moment in "Script for Public Fiction at the Hammer Museum"<sup>[10]</sup> where the poet writes about a Black woman on a crowded train, with one empty seat, and a white woman standing up. We aren't told that the woman is white but we understand it's a white woman who won't sit in the one space that's open because it is next to the Black man. Rankine writes about the Black woman moving into that space and what happens then. "You put your body there in proximity to, adjacent to, alongside, within. You don't speak unless you are spoken to and your body speaks to the space you fill and you keep trying to fill it."<sup>[11]</sup> And I think that's a different mode, and a different "you" summoned onto the page and into the world, than the "you" in Section I, the poem with the therapist who orders the Black woman away from her door! Or in the same section, the poem in which the Black woman tells the Black male friend who is babysitting that he should accede to the antiblack demand that he not talk on the phone outside in the front of the house. (It seems to me that this is not about making him aware of the racist violence of and in the neighborhood. Not about protecting that Black man but of asking that he accede to the antiblack demand.) The address in "Script for Public Fiction" though is not naïve, it's alongside, adjacent, it is in the experience of Black non-being. But then you arrive again at the end of the text and those short poetic vignettes. "When the waitress hands your friend the card she took from you, you laugh and ask what else her privilege gets her? Oh, my preferred life, she answers. Then you both are laughing so hard, everyone in the restaurant smiles."<sup>[12]</sup> What is that shared laughter? How are we supposed to understand the quality of that laughter? It's similar to the moment in the first section, in one of the early poems, in which the narrator (of the poem) talks about standing in line behind a white man in a coffee shop when he directs an epithet at several young black people. The Black woman in the poem responds with, "oh do you need to do that?" And in responding she also smiles at the recognition that that tone of voice is one that she uses with her husband. I don't find those moments interesting. They don't reach out to me; they are constituting a particular Black subject. But you asked me about a particular section and I want to ask you to say a little bit about why that part troubled you.

[33] ST: It's the poem in which she states, "The patience is in the living. Time opens out to you. The

opening, between you and you, occupied, zoned for an encounter, given the histories of you and you —..."<sup>[13]</sup> It troubles me because I'm wondering about this idea of opening. How can she find or conceive of an opening? How can time open out to Black people given these "histories," given the evidence in the wake of this evidence? How are we saying that "patience is in the living" when the evidence we have is in the death and the dying—Marriott talks about a death that cannot die. Yet there are moments where I'm with Rankine, such as on the previous page wherein she writes about "the weight of non-existence," but then again the section begins "Some years there exists a wanting to escape...still the ache to coexist" and subsequently she calls that the "immanent you."<sup>[14]</sup> I think it just troubles me how she is reading immanence in non-being.

[34] CS: How she is reading an immanence in —

[35] ST: In non-being, non-existence. She continues, "Even as your own weight insists you are here, fighting off the weight of non-existence." So I'm questioning whether or not this is a disavowal because in disavowing there's a knowledge of 'reality,' unlike with fantasy. With fantasy—you're not aware when you're in fantasy; it's embedded deeply within the unconscious unlike disavowal.

[36] CS: Of course I have to go to etymology and think about the patience in the living. The capacity to accept or tolerate trouble or suffering without getting angry or upset. The bearing of provocation, misfortune, pain, etc. So if we think it in those lines as well, the bearing of misfortune and pain is in the living even if it is a living in preparation for death. So I don't know, I don't have a full reading of it. But who are the various "you(s)"?

[37] ST: Yes, yes.

[38] CS: I'm not sure who the "you and you" is in that encounter. Is "the patience is in the living, time opens out to you"— an address to a non-Black you? I'm not sure because in this work, at one point, the "you" is most clearly a white you, so I'm not sure what that "you," who those "you"s are in this instance.

[39] ST: This coalesces for me now, considering how you are reading both the production and reception of Rankine's and Coates' work together in terms of their address.

[40] CS: There need to be many different levels of disruption, of attempts to remake the world and yet I'm disturbed by the ways that, and here I am referring to Black people, can abandon a certain criticality because one can see oneself in the text. So I don't believe that Coates' address is to me. Maybe it's to some other Black people, but I also think that at least part of the address is to white people. And I'm disturbed by some of the ways that the work is being taken up and the ways in which it will become part of a curriculum; more than that, the way that the work will set the terms for a curriculum. I keep thinking about Dasani Coates, "The Invisible Child,"<sup>[15]</sup> and the way that narrative (that is supposed to be about her) becomes part of the *New York Times*' education curriculum that is assigned to sixth graders. Those sixth graders will read about this young Black girl who, in the end, is asked, 'who's going to save your life?' And told "You are." Now this may be true, but it's a narrative of profound failure. I keep wanting to

read these books in relation to a work like Alice Goffman's *On the Run*<sup>[16]</sup>, as they each become part of the curriculum. I'm not sure that they are such different animals. Now that might be a very ungenerous statement.

[41] ST: No, I think it's accurate, especially since I'm thinking about how Black death, which is to also say Black social life within social death, to reference Jared's work<sup>[17]</sup>, is mediated through the white gaze.

[42] CS: Yes.

[43] ST: Speaking of this mediation, have you seen *Let the Fire Burn*<sup>[18]</sup>? The recent documentary on the MOVE bombing?

[44] CS: I haven't, but you know I was in Philadelphia at U Penn when MOVE was bombed and they allowed Osage Avenue to burn. I haven't seen this documentary yet but I did see Toni Cade Bambara's documentary, *The Bombing of Osage Avenue*. For a long time I wanted to write about MOVE because it was so profoundly traumatic to witness.

[45] ST: I would be interested in your thoughts on the documentary because it has incredible footage that has yet to be compiled cinematically this way—it's very different than Bambara's documentary, which I discuss in one of my chapters because she is working from the perspective of the intramural. I am enraged at the new film—what the director does with the footage that he has.

[46] CS: Ok, I have to—I'll watch it.

[47] ST: Because it ends with a libidinal demand for catharsis through the suffering of a white police officer who has to leave the force. He's the officer into whose arms Birdie Africa runs when—

[48] CS: And doesn't he try to push Birdie back into the building?!

[49] ST: Of course, but if you watch this documentary, it ends with a lament, at the very abstract—symptomatically and at the level of libidinal economy—on the suffering of this white officer who was called "n\* lover" and had to leave his job because he was so traumatized by—

[50] CS: Being called n\* lover?

[51] ST: By the experience of being rejected by his peers, I presume? So you have two hours of footage of Black people being slaughtered, executed—

[52] CS: And that's the note that you end on. That's crazy. What I remember from the newspaper footage, from listening to it on the radio, from remembering the 1979 razing of the MOVE house—and I might be making this up because I was a young person and I've tried to find it since—that they killed a baby in 1979 and I swear I remember a picture of a police officer picking the baby up by the foot and throwing it down. That is a memory that is burned in my brain. And so you have all of this footage and that's the note one ends on—which of course would be a complete misunderstanding of what actually happened. (Another mispronouncing the note.) He was there to kill them. They forced some people back into that



burning house.

[53] ST: Yes, yes—of course! This is a matter of the ethics of reading and if one is attuned to Black suffering. Ramona Africa speaks at a lot of events that screen this documentary and, if I remember correctly, there isn't a single contemporary interview of Ramona in this film.

[54] CS: So why does she speak?

[55] ST: Because she needs to 'free' her family.

[56] CS: Yes, that's right. Well there's this moment, and I think about this a lot, this optic white, through Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return*,<sup>[19]</sup> where I ask what's on your retina? Is the slave ship on your retina? What's the door? Is the door on your retina? And I end the chapter on the hold with the picture that Oscar Grant has taken of Johan Mehserle that is found on his [Grant's] camera. Grant has captured the image of the person who is policing him in the hold. There was a story in the *New York Times* several years ago about a white supremacist named Jeff Hall who was in his 30s and was a leader of a neo-Nazi movement in Southern California. Hall's 10-year-old son shot him to death while he was lying on the sofa in their living room. That's one set of articles in the news section. Then there's a Lens Photography blog about Hall and his neo-Nazi group documented by Julie Platner, a young white woman around 28 years old years old, a photojournalist, who was with them for several months. After the son murdered his father (which is all about the father abusing the mother, the other child, and the son physically, as well as just growing up in this noxious atmosphere, this ecology of hate) the photojournalist was still talking about what a good father Hall was. The Lens lead is "Family tragedy in a Neo-Nazi home." Platner writes, "I'm trying to give human voice to people that most of society sees as monsters..." and "I'm interested in truth at the end of the day."<sup>[20]</sup> This seems to me to be a similar gesture, "human voice to the .... what?!?! No! They are already profoundly human. They *are* the human.

[57] ST: That's why Dylan Roof can get a bullet proof vest and—

[58] CS and ST: And Burger King!

[59] CS: And Tamir Rice is murdered within 2 seconds of police showing up. John Crawford is murdered in an Ohio Walmart and he does not even know what is happening. That Ramona Africa speaks after the film is really something. But as you said, to the extent that she can, she needs to help her family.

[60] ST: She needs to free her family. As free as they can get because they're still incarcerated, but even on the outside...

[61] CS: So the mediation is an ethical choice.

[62] ST: Of the profoundly human variety. [Laughter.] Also, I'm thinking about the split Black psyche here and as you were discussing optics and questioning what is on one's retina. Do you think it's a choice for Black folks to either look at the ship or to look where Coates is looking? A choice based on these unconscious, or conscious, desires?

[63] CS: It depends on what we understand choice to be. One example that I use in the book is Kara Walker's comments in *Dreams are Colder than Death*, which you've seen, right?

[64] ST: Yes. [Laughter.] I'll save my thoughts on that film for another conversation.

[65] CS: Well, then you know that moment when Kara Walker says, something along the lines of my most comfortable place of creating is that place where you lift up the skin and it's barely tethered and it's kind of visceral and gory. She thinks of that as a kind of retinal detachment. So I think about her in relation to Brand writing in *Map* that the door of no return is on her retina: it *is* her optic for seeing and being in the world. Which is to say that she knows where she is positioned and therefore she acts from there. So yes, I think it's a choice, and it's a refusal and a disavowal. It may be a choice for survival and so I don't pathologize that choice; nonetheless, given the ground, one has to actively look away.

[66] ST: Options versus choices, tactics versus—

[67] CS: Or strategy. I mean there are a number of things we could call it.

[68] ST: Well, I could understand this refusal in terms of desire. Frank always says you can't manage desire.

[69] CS: Well, that would be it too, right? That's why I marked the "on y va" in Coates. It's desire, it's a desire to be in another space, to have *that* marking mark his body and therefore allow him transit to someplace else.

[70] ST: But isn't part of wake work, not just in the idea of the funeral —the wake—but waking one's—

[71] CS: Consciousness, as in stay woke. Yes, it's all of those things. The funeral, the track behind the ship, the movement of a body or something through air or water, in the line of sight of a gun, the awakening of one's consciousness. It's what I think of a Blackened consciousness.

[72] ST: Yes!

[73] CS: To say I know where I stand, where I am placed, and therefore I can act from there, I can see from there. So yes, all of those things.

[74] ST: A consciousness that prevents us from mispronouncing the sound, as you mentioned earlier. This has me thinking of the Kendrick Lamar song, "Alright," in particular the refrain, "we gon' be alright," which was in many ways the anthem for the weekend convening of Movement for Black Lives.

[75] CS: Did you go?

[76] ST: Yes, and it was an amazing experience to be around over 1500 Black people with very radical if not revolutionary politics. And this song was playing after the first plenary where you had, for over half an hour, the family members of Emmett Till, Mike Brown, Rekia Boyd, Eric Garner, Jordan Davis, Kendrick Johnson, Oscar Grant, Ramarley Graham, Tamir Rice, Tanisha Anderson—whose daughter spoke about

watching her mother die from the two gunshots she saw police officers pummel into her body—VonDerrit Myers, and many many more. You had these family members go onstage and talk about their murdered loved ones, and they ended each memorial with "This is why we fight." The profundity of the gratuitousness of this violence had permeated the room. And after that we have Miss Major come onstage and she shifted everything. Because at this point we were all feeling the acuity of the violence that precedes and exceeds us, as you pointedly noted about Frank's work, and our proximity to and baptism in and by violence had permeated the auditorium. After the family members had spoken, organizers had asked people in the audience to stand up if they've had family members murdered by state or vigilante violence, which of course—what room filled with Black people doesn't have a majority of participants affected by this personally? And shortly thereafter Miss Major takes the podium and tells us "You don't have to take this shit anymore!!!" and we just erupt in tears, and rage, and laughter, and clapping, and shouting, and relief. Then the plenary ends with the blaring of Lamar's "Alright" and we all just jump out of our seats and start dancing and singing. In one sense it felt amazing, but to understand the reality of Black suffering would be to acknowledge that no, everything's *not* going to be alright. That is the ontology, our political ontology. And until there's a revolutionary shift, or destruction of what we know, it's not going to be alright. So yes, I'm questioning; I'm thinking if this is to quell one's own anxiety or the anxiety of others it doesn't necessarily matter because we're talking about the Black psyche, a Black psyche which is never formed or conditioned outside of how white people are viewing us. So when you were speaking of Coates' use of "On y va" as punctuating a desire to be read as fully human, that reminded me of this experience of wanting Lamar's address in "Alright"—"we gon' be alright"—to be true, also knowing the reality of where we are right now, which is a structural position always-already punctuated by the violence of/that is white desire, whether the Black psyche recognizes and/or is ready to wrestle with that positioning.

[77] Speaking of how others view us also coincides with how I interpret the response to Afropessimism that we're seeing in the academy, which sometimes seems much more violent from Black academics than from non-Black academics.

[78] CS: Can you say more about that connection? Because it makes me also think about the ways that a number of white academics have taken up Afropessimism. Particularly white male academics of a certain age group.

[79] ST: Yes, yes.

[80] CS: And how do we understand that?

[81] ST: I think the only people who can *be* Afropessimists are non-Black people. I don't think Black people can actually *be* Afropessimists; my colleague, Kara Hunt, reminded me of this. We can theorize, we can meditate on Black suffering, we can experience the violence, we're marked. But we cannot *be* Afropessimists since the idea and reality of being is foreclosed to us: we're non-being. The only people who can be and embrace it are particularly these white, male, young academics who are so excited. They're *excited* by it. And it's an invigorating theory because it's a purely intellectual enterprise for them.

This is something we have to experience and re-experience viscerally when we read Frank and Jared's work. It's a traumatic experience. But it's not a trauma that is being imposed by us— by the theory or by those of us who write and critically engage with the work. It's a trauma that we're reliving because we're never outside of this trauma. So I think Black people's responses, Black academics' responses in particular...it's not a foreclosure the way white or non-Black academics would respond. If it's a negative response it's foreclosing on their own...ethical relationship—

[82] CS: Relationship to thinking, to wanting to think outside of Black suffering.

[83] ST: Yes. I think of white progressives' violent responses to the Black women of Black Lives Matter, who are taking over these stages at Bernie Sanders events. It's similar with the responses to Afropessimism—don't hold a mirror up to *my* position in this world. But when Black people are responding so viscerally to Afropessimism, it's because the only capacity they have is that of consciousness. Consciousness of one's positioning in this world as non-human, or more precisely anti-human. Yet some desire to forget. And Afropessimist theory reminds them of their inability to forget, reminds them of their unexamined psyches and an unresolved antagonistic relationship to Blackness itself. Whether if it's this impossible desire to forget—and this foreclosure is always blamed on the theory and its proponents—or if it's too painful for them to examine Black suffering as structural, ontological rather than experiential, I have much more sympathy for them; nevertheless, their responses can be much more vehement.

[84] CS: I want to think about the sort of modulation and hearing of "we gon' be alright." Is there a way to hear "we gon' be alright" not as we're going to be *alright*? Not as we can be alright within the state of things as they are, but as a way of thinking laterally. And in this room, in this space, enacting a particular kind of ethics.

[85] ST: The intramural.

[86] CS: Yes. Is there a way to think it through the intramural because the whole day is about the gratuitous (violence), right? So one has to think that through the intramural. I'm trying to articulate something about care that is *not* the care of the state, that is, not the "care" of the state, which is care as prison cell, as grave, as mental institution, etc. It's something about intramural relations that might by necessity use some of the same language but is meant to sound a different note. The thing that I keep coming to and have written about now is, for example, Hi Man in *Beloved*<sup>[21]</sup>. Hi Man does not change the circumstances of their being imprisoned in what Dennis Childs has excavated for us as the prison slave ship: the slave ship that's on land, that is the moving prison. But what Hi Man seems to know is when to stop that particular violence of the white men demanding fellatio, those daily rapes, when to say Hiiiiii! before the moment that would be too much for the men on the chain gang. And that is some kind of intramural relation and it is something that Hi Man takes on himself and that Paul D cannot quite figure out. That's a kind of ethics of care, living as we do in the hold, in the wake, in this *longue durée* of Atlantic chattel slavery and as we work to rupture it, to make a new world.

[87] ST: So the sound is pronounced accurately but we're hindered by the semiotics.

[88] CS: Yes! And then by wanting to extend the sound and subject it to the sign.

[89] ST: Thank you! That helps.

[90] CS: So this convening was in Cleveland?

[91] ST: Yes. But there were also moments where Black folks were policing their own responses, their rage.

[92] CS: There was police violence.

[93] ST: Yes, on the last day. Many participants had left, but the LA contingent, the Chicago contingent, and many others were still there. There was a 14-year-old arrested, accused of not paying fare and/or for having alcohol. He was injured during the arrest, I think the transit police had body slammed him onto the police car, and participants circled the police cars and were demanding they let the child go.

[94] CS: That was amazing, that people interrupted. That's the kind of interruption, that's the kind of care that I'm thinking about. To insist.

[95] ST: And they insisted "call his mother, call his mother" because he had been injured, "call his mother." And the police would not. There were cops circling the group of Black activists who had encircled the two cop cars that were there to detain the child and the activists would not stand down. They refused to submit to the commands of the police officers inside or outside of the circle. But these were transit police officers initially who had arrested the child. And we see the difference between transit police versus city police. Which is why, I think, Cincinnati reacted so quickly to the University of Cincinnati campus police officer and his murder of Samuel DuBose. These are white intramural debates, right?

[96] CS: Yes.

[97] ST: *You* can't police as well as *we* can. If you are going to murder Black people, let *us* be the ones—

[98] CS: Let it be the city or the state—

[99] ST: The *real* cops.

[100] CS: Oh that's so interesting because in thinking back to the question of what does it mean to suffer and what does it mean for Black people to suffer when suffering is the ground? Who makes meaning of suffering? It's *who* makes meaning of it, for whom the suffering is performed and this comes back to the question that you asked before in relation to the non-Black desire, or we could say white desire to consume the spectacle of Black death. That my suffering is supposed to mean something, it's supposed to be educative somehow. But it's not educative for me. It simply is. And so how do we theorize, how do we contend with that is-ness. In those ways I found Afropessimism extremely useful and when I first found Jared and Frank's work I thought, here are two other people who take seriously the ontology of Black suffering. I'd been searching for this other than Saidiya and Spillers. And at the same time I'm not at all wedded to psychoanalytic thought, I use the tools that help me try to think through what I'm trying to

think through which is always centered on Black being or Black non-being. And so in *In the Wake: on Blackness and Being* I've been thinking about the hold and the wake and the ship and the weather as I try to think through what Rinaldo Walcott calls "black life forms," and questions of their continuing in the wake. And in thinking about the Zong I've also been trying to work some with the science of wakes. If something or someone is thrown or jumped overboard or if someone drowns and their body is not recovered that body won't last long in the water. And you will most likely not recover the bones. A colleague who teaches fluid dynamics told me about residence time, which is the amount of time that the nutrients exist in the water. So I've been thinking about residence time, those Africans thrown, jumped overboard who, as their bodies broke down into various components, like sodium from their blood, are with us still in residence time. I've been trying to think through those things in terms of how we understand the conditions and duration of Black suffering.

[101] ST: It's not only duration, though, it seems as though it's the sustenance—

[102] CS: Precisely!

[103] ST: Of the world as we know it. Not just on the ontological or psychic level, but at the—

[104] CS and ST: Material

[105] ST: Yes, which could also be the reason why there's such an unconscious resistance to dealing with the ethics of Black suffering.

[106] CS: Absolutely, because it is so much the stuff of non-Black existence and Black nonexistence.

[107] ST: Yes!

[108] CS: Materially, in very material ways. I'm thinking about that session that you organized at MLA and I've been thinking about anagrammatical Blackness. That's in the section on the hold in the book and I'm really struck by what you were saying about the Black activists saying "call his mother" and the police wouldn't call his mother, but also the activists wouldn't stand down, and thinking about the word mother. What does mother actually mean as far as Black people are concerned? That's one of the main words that I've been trying to think through in that section because of all of these examples—like, the most dangerous place for an African American is in the womb. Thinking about the Black woman who in the midst of the uprising in Baltimore slaps her son and she's called onto talk shows to talk about this disciplining of her son. The "bad mother" becomes the "good mother" in the context of white supremacy; but it is the noun that is really at issue here and not the modifier. In another instance she's the bad mother because she's "abusive," but she is called on to talk shows to talk about a particular kind of "care" which is violence. And *we understand* that violence, right, but it's not for our consumption.

[109] ST: Precisely, and I was so angry because it's a way of weaponizing the Black maternal in order to justify state violence. But I'm also working through the idea of what Black motherhood means, especially in light of Spiller's "Mama's Baby Papa's Maybe"<sup>[22]</sup> which continues to illuminate things for me.

[110] CS: Yes, what could Black motherhood possibly mean? I keep coming back to we need new words. How can we put these things together, how can we talk about them? Can we talk about a "Black woman" who gives birth to a "Black child" but individually and together those terms mean nothing? They mean nothing that the state has to recognize.

[111] ST: I would love for you to discuss anagrammatical Blackness for folks who haven't had the honor of seeing you present on this. And of course your theory of wake work too, please. The students here [UC Irvine] who attended your talk at ABC [Afrikan Black Coalition] are so profoundly moved by your discussion of wake work. They've been working through ideas of self-care alongside the intramural work they're doing here, and they call it wake work.

[112] CS: That couldn't make me happier. I am deeply gratified by that. Thank you.

[113] ST: I think they are profoundly receptive to this idea because of the strength of the African American Studies department here and the critical work that faculty like Frank and Jared, among others, are doing. Speaking of Black studies, I know your recent article in *The Black Scholar* engages this topic, but do you see the state of Black Studies today as encouraging or prohibiting this type of inquiry, especially considering the increasing attacks against formulations of Black experience as singular and without analogy?

[114] CS: I think it depends on what Black Studies we're talking about because there are various iterations of Black Studies. The Black Studies that I'm interested in has room for that type of inquiry and that's the kind of work that I think is completely necessary and important. Because people continue to mistake or willfully confuse or refuse an insistence on the particularity of Black suffering and a refusal of analogy with a love of suffering and not with a principled or ethical demand to refuse erasure.

[115] ST: Yes!

[116] CS: I think about Michel-Rolph Trouillot who says the Haitian Revolution has, and this is not an exact quote, the distinction of being unthinkable even as it happened. So one could say that even as it happens is it supposed to be unthinkable, the non-analogization, the inability to analogize Black suffering—is that supposed to be unthinkable even as everywhere we see that it is being made clear to us? Certainly there's a branch of Black Studies that sees the necessity of this ground for thinking, and are other branches, one of which wants to say something like suffering and trauma have been too thoroughly theorized and we need to be theorizing pleasure. I think Black Studies needs to contend with those claims of Afropessimism and also with other claims. An ethical Black Studies has to contend with the materiality of our circumstances globally. So not a U.S. Black Studies, but a global Black Studies that looks at the ways that everywhere we are we are shipped, held, contained, and also in excess of the shipping, the holding and containing, but nonetheless those are the forces that are arrayed against us everywhere that we are. I think that there is room for theorizing joy, but I think that's quite different than pleasure. And I think that there are moments of joy that we have to have access to, that we have to create, and again that that's different than pleasure. But I don't think you can theorize joy or even pleasure under certain kinds of extreme force unless you are marking them as simply the absence of

force.

[117] ST: This is why your theorizing of Black consciousness and the wake is so crucial. Forgive me for reducing it to the following brevity, but you describe wakes as, for instance, rituals and "processes [through which] we think about the dead and about our relations to them," "a watching practiced as a religious observance," the "track left on the water's surface by a ship," "the air currents behind a body in flight," and, "finally...being awake and, most importantly, consciousness." In thinking about Black people's structural positionality as subtended in slavery, would you describe your work on anagrammatical Blackness and the wake—wake work itself—as not only a product of but also producing the very Blackened consciousness called forth in your work?

[118] CS: Let me reprise what I say about wakes from the piece in *The Black Scholar*—wakes are processes. Through them we think about the dead and about our relations to them. They're rituals through which to enact grief and memory. They allow those among the living to mourn the passing of the dead through ritual. They include the watching of relatives and friends beside the body of someone who is dying and the deceased from the passage to death to burial and then afterwards whatever feasting drinking or other kinds of observances take place. They're often religious observances but they also can be secular ones. Also, wakes are the track left on the water surface by a ship, the disturbance caused by a body swimming or one that's moved in water or in air. They're the currents behind a body in flight, "a disturbed flow" it's what's in the line of sight of an observed object, it's also something that's in the line of recoil of a gun. And also wake means something like being awake and consciousness. So I've been thinking a lot about wakes, on a personal and larger Black global diaspora level. And that brought me to what I am trying to articulate as a theory and praxis of the wake and wake work. A praxis, a theorization, and a performance of the wake and wake-work, about how we think and live in the unlivable in the wake of slavery. We walk into these unlivable lives and we're faced with what are supposed to be, as far as the larger society is concerned, ungrievable deaths. And so thinking about grieving the ungrievable, living in—wresting something from the unlivable—is some kind of wake work. I'm thinking too of the ways that the call seems always to be about death. We're called into action by death and I'm thinking of the call—the call on the phone, that dreaded late night, or early morning, or mid-afternoon—it doesn't really matter what time—call that you know is somehow about death. And the ways we are both animated and also made inanimate by it. We are brought into some kind of action at the same time that it is another deadening blow. We continually respond to those grievous conditions of Black life that about Black death. Black life that isn't life, not life as and for those who determine life. Not the human with a capital H. I am thinking about how we recognize imminence and immanence (imminence with an I and immanence with an A) so that imminence with an I is something that's about to occur and immanence with an A is something's inherent, it remains within, so the imminence and immanence of Black death. I'm trying to think carefully about how to say this, but I also want to think about all those ways in which subjectification only confers violence—that violence precedes and exceeds the Black—that absolutely useful framing of Frank's. But I also want to think about what exceeds that hold, even as we recognize Blackness as ontology, as structural position, something is in excess of that that does not mean that that something exceeds deathliness, but that one might imagine otherwise even as one sees and recognizes captivity.



So how might we think about that? In some ways, that's the intramural.

[119] ST: Exactly.

[120] CS: I am theorizing the wake also as a problem for thought and care and trying to figure out how we might make operative care, wresting it away from surveillance and the state because the state also wants to imagine care but that care is the foot on your neck. All of these things are wrapped up together for me. Back to you asking me about the anagrammatical. In the summer 2014 article in *The Black Scholar*, I say that the birth canal of Black women is a space of the anagrammatical. The space of the anagrammatical has been all about the space of Black women. I've been thinking about the space of the womb of Black women and those who reproduce Blackness as another kind of domestic middle passage, the afterlife, the ongoing life of *partus sequitur ventrem* which translates as that which is brought forth follows the womb. I quote Hartman who says 19th century observers saw the domestic passage as well as this imposition of tremendous force as a domestic middle passage. So I was thinking with Hartman about how the belly of the ship produces Blackness as fungibility, the womb in the US was made to do the same thing through *partus sequitur ventrem*. Now, after the end of that form of chattel slavery, the birth canal of Black women and women who birth Blackness is also meant to do the same thing. As I stated in that article and I think in the panel that you organized on Spillers, it's womb to tomb all over again. So I really wanted to think about the anagrammatical and the ways that mother falls apart, child falls apart: can you claim mother, can you claim child? What new words do we need? What new ways must we think these relations that at any point, as Spillers says, "can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by ... property relations."<sup>[23]</sup> That is part of how I came to think anagrammatical Blackness. And one of the primary examples for me is Frederick Douglass' turning Hester into Esther, which is literally the anagrammatical (the same letters are rearranged) because the violence will not hold. Once you have Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*, all the work that Douglass has done to show the way that that violence comes down on Hester and himself is unsustainable once you have the grammar of the Human who can consent or not to law. All of this is tied in for me in thinking about the wake, so for me the theory of the wake is produced in relation to knowledges, both those that are gained from formal studies but also ones that run counter to that kind of formal study and it makes me think of Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* where she writes "from knowledge gained since."<sup>[24]</sup> So those kinds of knowledges that we gain from living within the Black everyday, from what Brand calls "sitting in the room with history,"<sup>[25]</sup> and the work that she does at the end of Map in her "Ruttier for the Marooned in the Diaspora." Think, for example, of the demands for publishing in HWCUs, the demands of conference presentation, the demands on the Black academic to produce a "legible work" that means that we're always expected to discount and measure, if not totally disregard, many of the ways of knowing that we come to. We are called on to enact epistemic violence against ourselves and others. So, in order to produce legible work within the academy, we are so often called upon to keep, to research and teach and *be* along methods that Sylvia Wynter says are "drafted into the service of the law or to a destructive force." And it seems like we're continually fighting against— if we do not disavow that this is the ground, are continually fighting against—

[121] ST: Yes, Yes!!!

[122] CS: Doing violence against our own capacities to read, think and imagine otherwise. That we're continually fighting that antiblack disciplining. And again, if we are lucky enough to not disavow that that disciplining is already happening and to be poised to see it and then disrupt it. I'm thinking of all of this by way of explanation of the theory of the wake, about living in and as the wake of slavery. Living that—and I'm going to coin a term, that Hartmanian—afterlife of property. It's knowing that Black life, Black non-being is that push toward death. Knowing that we are and inhabit bodies, flesh to which anything and everything can be done. Knowing that is the ground, I've tried to arrive at a theory of the wake and a theory of wake work. And I want to keep thinking and theorizing the tension between being and instrumentality that is Black non-being in the wake. So for me wake theory, what I've been calling wake work, the theory and performance of the wake, is a mode of attending to Black suffering and Black life that exceeds that suffering. I think all kinds of wake work are happening. And I was really struck and very gratified that you told me that after I gave that talk at Irvine that students have been working with wake work and so I've been hoping that the theories that are wake work, and within that is anagrammatical Blackness, within *that* is the Trans\* Atlantic—

[123] ST: Transasterisks?

[124] CS: Yes, I've been thinking about the Trans\* Atlantic both in terms of Omise'ke Tinsley saying the Black Atlantic has always been the queer Atlantic, I'm also saying it's also been something in excess of that: the Black Atlantic has always been the Trans\* Atlantic, the unmaking of Black bodies, Black flesh, and then the eruption into that of all those transes—transmogrification, transubstantiation, transmigration, transmediteranean, etc. as a way to think about a non-coherence in relation to gender, to space, to home, to time. So I'm hoping, and you've given me more hope, that the things I'm trying to work with are capacious enough and also specific enough for people to think with as we try to wrest something out of these worlds that consign us to death. I keep thinking too of the wake work that someone like Mariame Kaba, does in Chicago with Project Nia and her many other projects.

[125] ST: Indeed, and her advocacy work has been instrumental in bringing Marissa Alexander's case into public consciousness.

[126] CS: Absolutely, absolutely with Marissa Alexander. I'm thinking about the work that she does to dismantle police and prisons and her political education work. Thinking too about those young people who put their lives on the lines fighting for a trauma center on the south side of Chicago knowing already that their lives are on the line because, were they to be grievously wounded, there is no trauma center for those under the age of 16 on the south side of Chicago. So in that transportation time, in that sort of trans\* time to a trauma center, the likelihood is that you will die. Thinking about the Movement for Black Lives in Cleveland that you went to, the work that Black people are doing to make a new world, not just to fight for access to the present one that demands your subjection, but really to make a new world. I think of all of this as wake work because wake work takes as ground, as knowledge, the position of the Black and then says, from this position and from all of these things that wake means, how then do we

struggle for a new world, the end of the world as it is and for something new? How can we imagine otherwise? And so that's what I've been trying to think through with wake work. I think I told you the book has four parts, the first part being the Wake in which I talk about all of that. But I also begin from the point of the deaths in my own family over the course of the past year and a half, two years now, and I take up what Hartman calls in an interview with Patricia Saunders that "courage and recklessness are required to be a host of history."<sup>[26]</sup> She's talking about the inclusion of the autobiographical in *Lose Your Mother*,<sup>[27]</sup> and she says that she never set out to write what some people would call a memoir. She writes that the "autobiographical example, which is not a personal story that folds onto itself, it's not about navel gazing, it's really about trying to look at historical and social process and one's own formation as a window onto social and historical processes, as an example of them. I wanted to tell a story capable of engaging and countering the violence of abstraction."<sup>[28]</sup> I begin with the personal because it seemed to me unethical to be thinking through and with and in the midst of the ongoingness of Black death and not also position myself in it in those ways. I was reeling from the losses in my own immediate family and in the Black diaspora world outside of that immediate family, and really trying to theorize what it means to be in the wake. So I, too, begin from within my experience because I also wanted to tell a story capable of countering the violence of abstraction with the very specifics of my particular experience in the wake. The second section of the book is the Ship. The third is the Hold and the fourth is the Weather. Each section works through my theorization of the wake and wake work. I don't want to say too much because I want people to read the book.

[127] ST: We've been waiting for it, believe me! I'm compelled by how you're thinking through the intramural, theorizing Black consciousness in light of competing and compulsory gestures that make demands of the Black psyche—

[128] CS: Yes.

[129] ST: —taking this passage to burial which, in the Hartmanian sense, would be to take it out of the violence of abstraction. But this is the materiality that we're dealing with.

[130] CS: Yes, Yes.

[131] ST: And this idea of unmaking and how Black people through Black consciousness, through theorizing performance are finding ways in which... to—I don't want to say *live* with the unmaking—

[132] CS: But live *in* and *as* the unmaking. Because it's not with, it's not alongside.

[133] ST: Exactly. Yes.

[134] CS: It's *in* and *as*. So I have this Black *being* in the wake as *being/in* because it's not alongside, it's at the same time. It's you are living *in* and *as* this unmaking.

[135] ST: So would you agree with Frank's assertion regarding the impossibility of our relationality in terms of how *Humans* have relationality? What you're elaborating could be an articulation of the way in which Black people—

[136] CS: Have relationality.

[137] ST: This is the intramural. It's working within that impossibility.

[138] CS: Yes. Well, I'm also trying to think with Glissant and relation. How does Glissant's poetics of relation as including the totality of existence, on one hand, work with Afropessimism's ideas of non-relationality? I'm thinking of the ways in which they speak and don't speak to each other. But certainly I think it determines the relationality of the Black to the non-Black.

[139] ST: I see Frank's theory as discussing the limitations of Lacanian psychoanalysis to account for the way violence forms our psyches, and by extension relations to one another, demonstrating how we don't have access to incorporation and recognition in the same ways— how they are the ground for thinking through the Human psyche.

[140] CS: Yes, Yes.

[141] ST: So I can see how it would be interesting to work with these two theorists.

[142] CS: I can give you one line from each of the sections of the book if that would be useful.

[143] ST: Please!

[144] CS: Very simply, in the section on the Ship I'm trying to show how the slave ship lives on in the present. How it marks and haunts the present through its recurrence and through the trans\* formations enacted on Black being in the wake of those ships. I move through a variety of examples from film to text to image and to contemporary quotidian horrific events that are not seen to be horrific except by those of us in the wake, in the ways that Black people are in the wake. We can all be said to be in the wake but we are not all in the wake in the same way. Since some are conferred humanity and for others there is the absolute denial of humanity. Then in the Hold I'm really thinking about containment, regulation, punishment, captivity, capture but also the ways in which the Hold cannot and does not hold even as it remains. That there is something in excess of it.

[145] ST: Like when Jared discusses the truth rather than the totality of Black existence within regimes of antiblack violence.

[146] CS: Yes. It's in the Hold that I've most wrestled with the tension between being and instrumentality that is Black being in the wake. I'll say it was very hard to get out of the hold, to leave behind the writing of the hold. And not get out of the hold in the way that Frank says in terms of fantasies of flight, but the Hold, that section kept growing and growing and growing and finally I had to say, well, *it simply is* that the hold repeats and repeats and repeats. For the Weather, I'll say quite simply, that at stake in the Weather is antiblackness as total climate. I'm trying to think antiblackness as total climate and ways in which we might hear, might sound—there might appear Black visual and sonic resistance to that imposition of non-being, but again, not the totality. It doesn't rupture the totality. But that doesn't mean that we don't have to attend to it. So that's what I'm trying to work with and through as ways of attending to Black suffering.

[147] ST: It's interesting the way you describe the Weather, it reminds me of the question I had about being an Afropessimist—

[148] CS: And who can be —

[149] ST: Exactly.

[150] CS: And who can use.

[151] ST: So the fact that antiblackness —as it is and its total climate—it's why Black people cannot actually be Afropessimists. It would be too overwhelming for the psyche to bear.

[152] CS: And it is simply... everything we do is riven through with it. My first thought for the weather really came from the end of *BeLoved* when Morrison writes it's "[J]ust weather": "[C]ertainly no clamor for a kiss." That it's "[J]ust weather." "By and by all trace is gone and what is forgotten is not only the footprints but the water too and what is down there. The rest is weather...Just weather." But that also made me realize the ways in which weather was so fundamental and always marked in the plantation management —

[153] ST: Yes! During the middle passage—

[154] CS: Yes, and on the plantation. The weather is central to every aspect of it—the wake, the ship, the hold, —

[155] ST: The funereal...

[156] Thank you so much for speaking with me about your work. I can't wait for the book to be released. It's going to be fiya.

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