

## Afterword

Dr. Sharon P. Johnson, Director of Women's and Gender Studies

Trichia Cadette writes: "I have always been fascinated by the Black woman's body. Its shape and movement, the way it finesses and eclipses its surroundings. I was aching to bring this magical woman who consumed my thoughts to life." Immediately I was struck, asking myself: *Why do tears form in my eyes? Why does my heart open and clench at a such a powerful, beautiful utterance? Is it desire and deep love of the human body I identify with, and in particular, Cadette's stated love of the BLACK woman's body that makes emotion well? ... sowing seeds of love ... expressing one's own love of such desire that renders me mute and overcome with beauty? Cadette's own self-identification and self-love is perhaps what was so powerfully voiced, which in turn gives voice and substance to the beauty of the Black body--with all its hues and rich tones--without eroticization, violation or the hurtful voyeuristic (white) gaze.* Seeking inspiration from the novelist Ntozake Shange, Cadette was drawn to that writer's images of self-love and self-actualization. They capture what Cadette envisions as the magical essence of feminine Black love and the Black body. Black paint fills in luscious curves and iridescent color dazzles the eye when taking in her figures' eye-catching hair. One *sees* their beauty in all their boldness. This is inspired self-representation and self-love. Language and drawn contours capture fully the beauty that is Black womanhood, Black powerfulness and Black acceptance. Potent language. Potent concretization. Potent *visualities*. Potent futures...for little Black girls and Black grown women.

In Cadette's paintings and reflection, we find the praxis of giving voice to the silenced, the repressed, the "misseen" (Spillers qtd. by Murrell) and the invisible that Pratt-Clarke so aptly identified as one new, important Virginia Tech goal. With the university's commitment to diversity and inclusion, as an institution, Virginia Tech has made an effort to foreground marginalized

perspectives, voices and experiences. Dr. Andrea Baldwin's spring 2019 WGS 6004 seminar inspired and guided love, care, rigorous thought, agency and activism. In each chapter, these contributing scholars have impressively analyzed, interpreted or studied dimensions of the Black experience through the lens of Black Feminist thinkers and writers--boldly, unapologetically and incisively. They offer us reflections and new directions that provide us hope for going beyond hurtful narratives, painful histories, reductive, limiting stereotypes and the realities of Black enslavement. Celebration, knowledge, love and care lead the way to enlighten and create this volume's productive, mind-opening analyses. Murrell argues that it is happening now with Afro-Caribbean woman who are reclaiming sex work, public dance hall performances, and Caribbean popular culture as positive acts and spaces where sexual liberation occurs because "women are in charge of *their* bodies".

The praxis of reimagining the Black self through digital self-representation was one call to arms that Islam proposed to infuse American culture with new Black self-representations in order to eclipse the five stubborn stereotypes of Black women since slavery. Such an approach helps to undo three hurtful characterizations of Black women, that they are "unfeminine" "nonhuman" and by extension "unloveable", which Williams and Baldwin identified in their Introduction. It helps to undo Black women's "proximity to hardship, death and dehumanization". Black feminist love and Black Feminisms provide an opening-up to emotions, self-acceptance, self-love and knowledges that resist the repercussions of prejudices and suffering that engender "grief", "loss", "trauma", "displacement" "misrepresentation" and "loving small". Williams and Baldwin write that "Black love looks like magic, an alchemy that is capable of creative and revolutionary possibilities in everyday acts." We are taken back to Cadette's magical Black woman. Black Feminist Love and Black Feminisms help to remove the mechanisms

that Black women internalize to protect themselves “to survive within the viciousness of a system that views them as mere flesh (Spillers 1987)”. Mightily, Williams and Baldwin assert: “Black love existing in the Wake and in the Afterlife of Slavery is radical, and to love our Black selves is a radical act that defies the spatiotemporal logics of euro-american racist academy and that celebrates Black life”. For Black women, such bold words spark audacity, rebelliousness, life, vitality and the desire to love hugely. One essential credo, rooted in radical Black Feminisms, is to “lov[e] Blackness and Blackwomen”! Simply stated, joyously welcomed and sublimely practiced. All of the authors of this edited edition engaged in this type of praxis, powerfully. Black peoples’ humanity is affirmed, and Williams and Baldwin see the work they do as “libations to [their] ancestors”.

Islam also called for all who publish in various venues to center “Black womanhood as an epistemological site in their work and [to create] knowledge about Black women’s lived experiences”. Moreover, she suggested for scholars and activists to “address the intersectional and historical roots of problems that cause Black female oppression. More specifically, by centering Black womanhood as an epistemological site, we can all challenge the mainstream assumptions of Black women by educating the public about the long-term and very real effects of controlling images on the Black community”. Such practices emerged and gained exquisite validity with Black Feminist pedagogy’s foci and inspiration. Both Judith Lorber in her *Paradoxes of Gender* (1999) and Kimberl e Crenshaw (2016) spoke of the necessity for scholars first to make the discriminatory or limiting nature of issues related to gender, race, and identity visible in order to then challenge, subvert or eradicate unjust laws, representations or cultural practices. As Baldwin, Reichelmann and Harris argue in their introduction, Black Feminist pedagogy, which co-committedly is grounded in an ethics of self-care and love, “helps us

develop and engage in strategies that move beyond mere survival toward bettering the present and to futurity. It allows the oppressed to ‘move beyond victimhood [and survival] to embrace the notion of ... educators, scholars, and activists as active agents... transforming the academy and/or society itself’ (Perlow et al. 2018, 3)”. This is a pedagogy that does not divorce scholarly work from affect, attachment or one’s own emotional responses to what we write and for whom. All of these essays are written with the greatest commitment to scholarly excellence, inspired by the theoreticians, texts, and professorial guidance received spring 2019. These research projects contribute to moving beyond predominately white, Anglo-American or Western European theoretical models by foregrounding Black Feminists’ theoretical frames of reference and the histories of the African/Black diaspora. Black lives, Black oppressions, Black thought and Black culture represent core intellectual processes that hold a central place within knowledge making. This approach needs to continue to thrive and proliferate throughout the academy—nationally and internationally—and throughout societies where discrimination, oppression and injustice still prevail. Knowledge allows us to see past practices to try to rewrite the future, and many futures need reversals to occur.

Scaptura showed how historically and during the 2016 election that “white women continuously ch[o]se to vote against what [was] seemingly in their best interests [...]. By choosing their race over their gender, white women throughout history have subjugated Black women for their own self-interests, or more accurately, for white men’s self-interests.” Therefore, liberal and conservative white women need to enlighten themselves and fight to reverse this social, political pattern of voting republican so that a figure such as Trump is not (re)elected. More inclusionary practices need to be implemented in WGS courses and Ph.D reading lists to include Black feminist

thought. Great vigilance by all is necessary to ward against Black bodies being used in malevolent ways such as medical guinea pigs in scientific studies, such as those mentioned in Scaptura's work.

Fallon's chapter explored how Black Feminist thought could "help us to turn moments into movements" regarding the socio-political struggles over the construction of the Mountain Valley Pipeline in Southwest Virginia and the #Black Lives Matter movement. For the first, Fallon lays out two ways that pipeline resistance could be expanded into "an emancipatory movement for political transformation"—how resisters of the MVP should be sensitive to their own (white) rhetorical arguments. This is a challenge for all. Moving from Wynter's framework, Fallon "recasts the issue of pipelines in a manner which emphasizes a sense of both the intersectionality of power relations and the interdependence of social politics". In Wynter's words: "the correlated hypothesis here is that all our present struggles with respect to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, struggles over the environment, global warming, severe climate change, the sharply unequal distribution of the earth's resources... these are all differing facets of the central ethnoclass Man vs. Human struggle" (Wynter 2003, 261). In articulating the abuses of current MVP and state violences, it is incumbent on MVP resisters to broaden their critique to include all past transgressions regarding the colonization of lands: those of the Native Americans which were seized and developed and those of the cotton fields, cultivated and labored by Black slaves under the system of slavery. White US citizenry appropriated and expanded their profits through such wrongs. For Fallon, it allows resisters to provide a more complete historiography of struggle and injustice when dissenting the current plan to takeover lands through eminent domain by the MVP and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Hence, protesters and Wynter's project "can be seen as doing intersectional work in that [they] recognize[e] the layered, differentiated, and always white supremacist, patriarchal, and classist orientation which dominant formulations of genre take on."

For the second, a similar historiography as we saw related to the colonization practices needs to situate police and KKK violence against Blacks in order to understand the depth of the issues being contested and to dismantle the structural injustices. He draws on Taylor's work because she provides a "lucid account of the constellation of political and historical events which inform the Ferguson uprising into a generative account of how movements can come to be catalyzed by flashpoints, or moments [...]".

If scholars wish to analyze and envision new social patterns and practices related to African mores, Nombouwotsamo guides us to use two important theoretician's work. In order to first make African marriages and the concomitant institutions of polygamy, in-lawism, and levirate understandable, she draws from Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to underscore how gendered roles are "unconsciously" assimilated and later passed on culturally and socially through social modeling in boys' and girls' upbringing. Convincingly, Ogunyemi's theorizations of African "womanism" lend themselves more aptly to that continent's historical and contemporary context rather than (white) American Feminisms. For Ogunyemi, the scholar "will recognize that along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations into her philosophy", an approach that resembles in some of its components, Crenshaw's intersectional analyses. Nombouwotsamo also calls for broadening the sphere of motherhood so that women's work will have value in an African context. Lastly, to try to work against the oppressive and limiting components of marriage for African women, change has to happen regarding how Africa raises its young boys and girls in order to shape new values communicated through mothers, fathers, in-laws and community.

Ray offers a different kind of methodology, reflexive autoethnography, "toward a goal of supporting Black voices by elucidating how to engage with Black activism and explore ways

white men may provide this support without appropriating the message and strategies of Black collective action.” He dialogs with Haraway and Collins while exploring his own experiences with Afrofuturism—as a movement, genre and aesthetic—because those theoreticians discuss “situated knowledges”, “or a form of feminist praxis that considers knowledges as located within the lived experiences of cultures, groups, and peoples”. He suggests another way to engage with Afrofuturism: the deconstruction of the “use of history as a means through which futures can be imagined, and resistance can be achieved”. His analysis of how hierarchy contributes to racism is another major argument of his approach. As a professor of literature, culture and language, I appreciate Ray’s determination not only to acknowledge his subject position when approaching this culture-bound aesthetic, but also his sensitivity in seeking to understand Afrofuturist texts on their own terms. These approaches can be tools with which all “white male activists” and I would add, all non-African scholars could engage with works of Afrofuturist and Africanfuturist writers. For him and for many science-fiction readers and scholars, it might be “one step toward establishing solidarity with marginalized and oppressed voices, so that we can be allies and support those activist voices without appropriating them.” What Ray discovered in writing his book chapter is what some Literary Cultural Studies scholars do who contextualize their texts by doing archival research in order to situate historically the reception and original social context in which literary works are embedded and read. Afro/Africanfuturist literature is one rich way to understand African problematics, social realities and possible futures if those works are placed within the contexts of time and place culturally of a country or a continent. Grasping actual social strife, systemic oppression and social resistances to such ills allows one to understand fictitious representations of characters, their point of view and positionality and narrative space more richly, accurately and respectfully. Many chapters in this edited edition have done just that.

Woodward brings great sophistication to his analyses of hierarchies in a range of social contexts that delineate “superior” “dominant” and “powerful” modalities that contrast with their dichotomous other--the “inferior” the “marginalized” and the “dispossessed”. He begins his chapter with an exergue by Charles Blow who drives home the necessity of empathy and understanding in society for it to be a place where harm and menace do not reign. With both empathy and understanding, all subjects could identify with and have compassion for the “other”. Subjects would recognize prejudices, discriminatory practices and structural oppression that besiege Black and Brown individuals in the US, South Africa or any other disadvantaged minority in a global locale. Moreover, the concept of palimpsest figuratively highlights how the layers of history of an urban center need to be envisaged when building new, non-discriminatory urban environments. Such excavation was not done for High Modernism in South Africa; Woodward submits that interpreting that urbanist project through the lens of Wynter’s archipelago of Man and Other, “it is evident that its application was solely for the betterment of (White) Man, not the Other.” Therefore, unearthing the historiography of time and place along with empathy and understanding help all to apprehend harmful socio-cultural injustices and to visualize a society where all human beings equally enjoy the same rights, rewards and civic responsibilities. These imply that all laws are fairly applied and opportunities equally prevail for all, economically, politically and socially. In this manner, they can help deflect “additional positions of Otherness” and not racialize or pathologize the citizens of poor urban areas that Woodward discusses. They can rid society of “syndemic segregation”, social marginalization and what Hegel calls “misrecognition”—a democracy in which “subordinated groups, through stigmatizing shame, are primarily harmed by ‘a ubiquitous and deep-seated form of injustice’”.



These three concepts are powerful indeed, when we set out to reimagine new built environments or a road towards greater social equity.

All of these book chapters engage with their subjects or aesthetics politically, in how Rancière and Tanke on Rancière define both: “Rancière takes on an interventionist form: ‘Politics consists of reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible that defines the common of a community, by introducing into it subjects and new objects, in rendering visible those who were not, and of making understood as speakers those who were only understood as noisy animals.’ Art is political and politics artistic because both are practices of contesting the historical transcendental factors that delimit the social and ascribe to individuals a particular mode of subjectivity.” The works in *Standpoints* alter readers’ subjectivity and their way of perceiving the problematics analyzed.

All of us are a part of the larger world that is humanity. As these scholarly chapters have elucidated, the future directions delineated are a call to action for all of us. Individually and collectively, we are encouraged and shown concrete ways to read, educate and to agitate so that change can happen to lessen racism, oppression and injustice. These striking encouragements also underscore how Baldwin’s WGS 6004 course brought knowledge, Black Feminism and activism boldly together for her students. Their scholarship has opened up new pathways for thought and analysis. *Standpoints* has also created new lines of action to be undertaken by all. This is breathtaking pedagogy and inspirational scholarship!