

# Off Littorality (Shoal 1.0): Black Study Off the Shores of “the Black Body”

*Tiffany Lethabo King*

On July 15<sup>th</sup> 1914, the Silver Spray ferry was travelling across Lake Michigan from Chicago to Milwaukee carrying 200 University of Chicago students when it ran aground on a 32-acre limestone formation. In 1914 and today, about 300 yards off of the shoreline, a 425-million-year-old limestone formation rises up from the lake’s floor and kisses the surface of the water. The shoal, hard to detect particularly if the tide and water levels are above average, wrecked the Silver Spray. Even after shoals are mapped, they can often remain elusive due to the tide as well as their own capacity to shift and morph over time. By attending to what a shoal can do to a vessel moving toward it, I foreground the shoal as a conceptual and methodological disturbance.

As a geological formation and nautical disturbance off shore it represents an elusive and at times a dangerous space of encounter. In addition to being part of the lake’s rising and falling floor, the shoal is also a nautical process. As a verb, to shoal means to move into shallow water.<sup>1</sup> When a ship moves into shallow water it must change speeds or adjust its velocity. The shoal forces a vessel approaching the shore to change its momentum and often its course. My discussion of the shoal imagines it as a metaphor and methodology within Black Studies. I argue that encounters with the various shoals of Black Studies throw normative theories, methods, reading practices, aesthetics, and associations off course. The shoal forces a vessel to remain off shore—off the littoral—impeding it from reaching its intended destination. In what follows, I consider two practices within Black Studies that slow, and force thought to reorient itself in relationship to Black embodiment.

As a formation that reroutes thought, I situate the shoal as a practice and praxis of black study that has the potential to impede the normative movement and momentum of the practice of gazing upon, reading, and theorizing “black bodies.” As I proceed, I intend to discuss methods and approaches within Black Studies that shoal or slow normative, reflexive, and pornotropic movement toward the black body.<sup>2</sup> The first shoaling or method that I focus on is Katherine McKittrick’s practice of “noticing” Black livingness that requires “shifting our analytic frame away from the lone site of the suffering [Black] body” and “toward co-relational texts, practices, and narratives that emphasize black life.”<sup>3</sup> While McKittrick (and Ruthie Gilmore) has critiqued the dehumanizing deployment of the suffering black body—

and “the black Body” more generally as an object of analysis across scholarly traditions and disciplines; McKittrick’s more recent work, “Mathematics Black Life” (2014) and “Diachronic Loops/deadweight tonnage/bad made measure” (2016) grounds my attention and thinking for the moment. More specifically, I think with McKittrick’s method of and devotion to noticing the “what else”—or surplus of Black livingness—that exceeds black death, black suffering, and the black body.<sup>4</sup>

For instance, in the case of the notorious Zong incident, McKittrick’s “noticing” opens up the possibility that through a rereading of the Zong’s histories and ledgers (and their unreliable numbers of the dead) against M. NourbeSe Philip’s poetics that a possibility of something else—or as McKittrick terms it, a “what else”—emerges alongside the killings. The way that McKittrick holds out—or holds space for—black livingness among stories of the dead resonates with the way Christina Sharpe poetically cares for the enslaved on the Zong in her book *In the Wake*. At the bottom of page thirty-seven, in what I remember as the last two devastatingly beautiful lines of the page, Sharpe writes of a captive on the Zong. She writes of a ‘male’ [the ledger’s gendering of insurable goods] “who thrown overboard, managed to climb back onto the ship.”<sup>5</sup> When I read this passage, the last two lines of that page appear to me as if they are straining and clinging for dear life to the lines of text directly above to avoid falling into the void of the page’s bottom margin. The dangling sentences on the edge of page thirty-seven haunt me and bring me back to McKittrick’s desire and effort to notice the possibility of something in excess of Black death and the suffering black body. Prodded by McKittrick, this dangling and suspended figure climbing back onto the ship opens up a place to imagine the unimaginable metaphysics of Black livingness in the wake of anti-blackness.

What kind of otherwise desire mixed with an unfathomable desperation, hope, and anticipation of an unknowable future—filled with its own terrifying horizon of unpredictable events—supplied this person’s muscles with energy for this (perhaps futile) embodied act? This embodied act presents an occasion to consider the radically different kinds of futures and temporalities conjured by the community in the hold. Did the person with their immediate and unknowable understanding of the future climb back on the ship to: say goodbye, to kill a crew member, to take someone with them into the ocean, or to negotiate for their spot on the ship headed toward unknown terrors and its tiny opportunities to create black slivers of joy? *Did this climbing-dangling person shoal the vessel?* What kind of implausible notions of black futurity urged and animated this embodied act? Have interdisciplinary and Black Studies methods cultivated the kind of imagination and practices of study necessary to approach or come close to understanding this desire/desperation/hope? Does this desire, desperation, hope and its sensations and kinetic energy create the body as an effect? With the help of the something else or that which is in excess of black death and the body, is it possible for current interdisciplinary methods to begin to conceptualize the body as an effect (Butler) of the current, pull, and pulse of Black livingness (McKittrick) and the “what else” that produces

it?<sup>6</sup> Have critical theories and their methodologies chosen to only see the effect—the body—of black desire, world making, and radical futures? I think about the difficulty to register or foreground black pulse and breath (Crawley) as a force that is more than (or before the) body as partly an epistemological problem presented by the limits of visibility and perception.<sup>7</sup>

For example, Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí in *The Invention of Women* writes of the ways that pre-colonial Yoruba cultures navigated and experienced each other and the social realm through a world-sense as opposed to a worldview. Unlike a western world-view that privileges sight, a Yoruba world-sense apprehends reality through a multiplicity of senses anchored by hearing.<sup>8</sup> A Yoruba world-sense is also attuned to the multiple worlds that constitute the realities that people exist within including the physical (body) and metaphysical (exceeding the body and materiality).<sup>9</sup> Without visibility as a perceptual anchor, the body—as mere appearance or a surface for projection—does not become the primary field of orientation for the social world and an order based on somatic or body reasoning. Did the person climbing aboard come from a community in West Africa that had the capacities to attune themselves to these extra-somatic—not outside of the body but exceeding it, like flesh—ways of existing? The one who survived—crawled back onto the ship—could have felt that their life force did not belong to the ocean. They could feel and hear their pulse beating, and therefore desire their life force back on the deck of the ship. Their particular desire, will, and vitality animated an embodied movement—a body crawling—back into the ship. The will of the flesh that precedes the body. The willing of the flesh and the climbing back into a black future—bleak as it may be—produces the body as an effect. An understanding of the body as the effect or will of black vitality and life pulse is a way or method of noticing that needs to be homed among others.

I think with McKittrick's insistence on noticing and the "what else" it might lead to as a method/approach for redirecting a singular attention on the black body toward other important objects of scholarly, ethical, and sensational concern.<sup>10</sup> For white and non-black scholars who attempt to engage in the practice of Black study, I introduce another practice or method of noticing or giving one's attention that follows more erotic lines. I offer that instead of looking to the Black body—whether suffering or in ecstasy—as an object of study, that one attends to or notices their own (white and non-black) desire(s) for the Black body. Noticing requires one to pause, take a beat, and maybe a breath before proceeding. It requires a slowing of one's momentum maybe even one's pulse and a moment to regroup and reorient. Similar to the space of the shoal, where a vessel must pay attention in a new way and possibly set a new course, McKittrick's noticing requires one to seek out something else, maybe a detour around the black body to perceive the "what else" that is the relentless desire to pursue the black body. What are the sensations, feelings, and desires of the white and non-black body that produce the black body as an object of inquiry?

Alongside McKittrick's noticing that seeks out "what else," I think with the work of Black scholars who attend to black erotics, black kink, and perversion. I turn to Ariane Cruz, Amber Musser, Jennifer Nash, and LaMonda Stallings because they insist upon a different practice of "noticing" at the level of sensation and affect. In their 2015 roundtable discussion "Race, Pornography and Desire," published in *The Black Scholar*, they insist that one notices their own body and its desires particularly as one approaches the black body, be it in ecstasy, pain, or both. In discussing the quotidian, ordinary, and mundane ways that sexual pleasure and anti-black violence become tethered to one another, these scholars argue that kink and perversion run through and organize capitalism's quotidian anti-black violence.<sup>11</sup> I argue that like shoals, Cruz, Musser, Nash, and Stallings force the reader—of the black body—to run up, into, and against their own desire for the black body. For Cruz, Musser, Nash, and Stallings confronting one's own body and its response to—and desire for—an experience with the sexualized, and at times suffering black form, is what the erotic labor of Black kink and perversion demands.

McKittrick's noticing of Black life, not found at the site of the suffering black body, and Black feminists' kinky and perverted methods that demand noticing your (white and non-black) own bodily sensations in the face of the black body's pain (and pleasure) perform a shoaling. They offer new sites and objects of scholarly analysis that are often ignored when thinking about and theorizing Blackness. For example, some forgotten and (I argue willfully) ignored sites might include how white and non-black bodies feel when focusing on black bodies. How might the practice of Black study make white and non-black scholars that do Black Studies make their own bodies and sensations sites of analysis?

This question became more than an abstract or hypothetical exercise for me when I began to advise graduate thesis projects. While I am outraged about gratuitous uses of Black bodies (often penises, anuses, and vaginas), rather than issue an immediate moratorium on white and non-black scholars using black people's bodies in their research, I needed to think about what it would mean instead to respond to this desire to gaze upon and load black bodies with the burden of performing the *sensual labor* (while white and non-black bodies disappear) of theoretical race work.<sup>12</sup> As a teacher who is able to build a relationship with white and non-black scholars (who I believe to be earnest and full of good intent), the one-on-one exchange enables me to enter this conversation from a place of compassion instead of rage. From this relational space, I am able to develop a more adaptive repertoire of responses as a teacher and thesis advisor, particularly when it comes to my white students' interest in Black studies and more often than not black bodies. As a teacher and advisor, I can frame my students' desires as possible sites of theoretical and methodological intervention. For example, I can ask them, "What could a focus on your desire to home in on the Black body bring to the surface or make visible and available for interrogation?"

As a way of moving forward, I share a scenario that emerged with a former white graduate student who took one of my sections of Black Feminist Thought in 2016. More and more white students are approaching me with an interest in thinking about anti-Blackness and doing anti-racist and decolonial work. When they map out their initial project they often start with thinking about and through Blackness. More often than not, when these white students think about Blackness, it is the black body that is on their mind. I have a lot of thoughts about why this might be the case which is another discussion. But what I do want to think about is a response to these students' desires. How could I slow them down and direct them to do some critical "noticing?" More specifically, how could I have them think about their own embodiment? Might I ask the student, "What does your body feel, desire, want when it thinks about blackness?" "What does your body—or desire—want from the Black body or the idea of Blackness that you are describing to me right now?" This line of questioning brings me back to the email request from a former student now living in Europe. They wrote me a year later in 2017 with a request. At the time, I did not know what to do with the request and all of the feelings that I had about it, and decided not to respond to the message. In the body of the email the former student wrote the following:

I got back to you because I am writing my dissertation on the Body Politics of Black Lives Matter. Particularly, I am referring to the process of rearticulation of Blackness in this social, cultural, and political space, paying attention to the way in which the narrative of the movement *has shifted the focus of attention on the body*. The work is still pretty much in the making, but I thought of you because your class has been fundamental for me and your opinion would be really precious.<sup>13</sup>

I have many questions about this email and its underlying assumptions about who I am, why I would respond and why I would take up this labor. But more importantly, I want to ask if this perceived movement or shift to the body is of their own making? Even if sources point to the body, why are you interested in Black bodies? Are you excited by this shift to the body? What excites you about Black bodies?

I invite white and non-black scholars studying, theorizing, aestheticizing black bodies and Blackness to think with McKittrick's noticing and turn to the "what else" of black kinky and erotic methods to become better attuned to (Adreanna Nattiel) their own bodies.<sup>14</sup> I extend this invitation because I contend (however controversial it may be) that white scholarly projects that gesture toward or state their critical and anti-racist intent engage in acts of pornotroping black embodiment. I draw on Hortense Spillers' elaboration of pornotroping in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" as a way of analyzing white scholarly efforts to aestheticize (look, gaze, capture, know) and deconstruct (close reads of black authored texts as bodies) in visual and literary studies. Thinking with Spillers, I argue that white and non-black scholars transform black figures and

forms into “captive bodies” under their scholarly gazes and modes of deconstruction in their work related to visual culture and literary criticism regardless of their intentions. In the white and non-black scholars’ visual and or semiotic field of study, I argue that the black form becomes a captive body and site of “captured sexuality.”<sup>15</sup>

Sensuality and captive sexuality map onto one another within Spillers’ configuration of the pornotroping that happens under captivity. Under the eyes of and within the semiotic and interpretive field of the white and non-white visual scholar and literary critic, black embodiment transformed into a body—or *being for* the captors.<sup>16</sup> Treated as a captured (*hold still and now move*) body for the close, detailed and surgical reads/examinations, the black body becomes a source of “irresistible, destructive sensuality.”<sup>17</sup> While I do not intend to conflate the sensual with the sexual, the act of tracing the contours of black bodies, black literature, expression, sound and prose (as black experience and embodiment) can be a physically, intellectually, and emotionally gratifying experience.<sup>18</sup> (*I can do sooo many things with/to Blackness/Black bodies. They are sooo capacious/liquid/unbound...*) Spillers’ notion of how the “irresistible, destructive sensuality” of the captive body comes into contact with the sexual is crucial. Spillers notices the way that the captive body becomes an othered kind of object (not the self) and therefore a form of captured sexuality. The many ways that white and non-black scholars produce themselves through capturing and producing the black—sensual and sexual captive—object of study remains a space of unthought in contemporary critical theories.

Cruz, Musser, Nash, and Stallings, who draw upon Sharon Holland’s book *The Erotic Life of Racism*, are correct in acknowledging that racial difference is a sexually charged place.<sup>19</sup> Amber Musser speaks of the difficulty of separating out the “hold that race has on our sexual imagination.”<sup>20</sup> Had I been thinking with McKittrick, Musser, Nash, Cruz, and Stallings when this former student emailed me, I would have urged this eager white scholar to consider the ways that her process of thinking about the Black body concerns her own body, its sensations, and how she understands herself as someone who should not be subject to sensual scrutiny. I would want her to consider the ways that the pulls of racialized erotics and its sensual and gratifying elements shape her intellectual project. Beyond reading and citing—#CiteBlackWomen—I encourage non-black scholars to take up the transformative labor that black erotic, kinky (and sometimes feminist) methodologies demand.<sup>21</sup> Reading Black women’s texts, particularly the work of Spillers, Hartman, and Wynter, has become a sexy practice of citation at the moment. While non-black scholars now eagerly cite these scholars and their texts, non-black scholars ignore the embodied-intellectual and ethical work that they demand.<sup>22</sup> In addition to all of the generative theoretical work that black gender and sexuality studies, and black feminist/queer/trans studies performs, they also call forth a practice of noticing and carefully attending to how the white and non-black self emerges in relation to the black texts, art, and people they are reading/consuming. At this

particular juncture when another surge in interest around projects on Black and Indigenous peoples' movements and bodies is cresting, I'm not sure that there is a way around doing this erotic and ethical work of noticing. I do not believe that there is a way for non-Black scholars to separate the erotic from the intellectual project of thinking about Blackness. Working on Blackness is always already an erotic project. However, this reality does not present an occasion for shame or judgment.

The work of Black feminist scholars on the erotic, kink, and pornographic illumines the ways that the desires, affects, and sensations embedded in work on race and raceplay become important sites of knowledge production. Musser encourages the pursuit of an erotic line of inquiry (as opposed to a pornotropic one) that opens up possibilities rather than judgment. Musser suggests that, "rather than ask whether or not something is oppressive, I am interested in thinking about the fantasies that people are attaching to difference and whether there is a way to think around them or through them to reframe these questions of desire."<sup>23</sup> Musser helps me make an important affective shift here.

When I am confronted with yet another white project on Black people's bodies—specifically Black people's genitals, entrails, and rotting carcasses—I am now compelled to ask more questions of (as opposed to shut down) the scholar. Following Musser, who develops an empathetic reading practice in *Sensational Flesh*, I argue that there is generative potential and value to mining the white and non-black scholar's desires, motivations, and affective states in the midst of thinking about Blackness.<sup>24</sup> Some of these black erotic and kinky methods and practices even run alongside queer methods of feeling, thinking, and writing. For example, Ann Cvetkovich models critical memoir as a mode of writing and knowledge production in *Depression: A Public Feeling* that encourages a contemplative and affective practice. Cvetkovich's critical mode of feeling, attending to, and writing about how depression feels as "everyday sensations that do not immediately connect to any larger diagnosis or explanatory framework" is one of many models and templates for noticing.<sup>25</sup> In a way, Cvetkovich directs her own attention to feeling and describing the "minutiae and boring effects" of depression in a way that defamiliarizes how she and her readers think and talk about depression.<sup>26</sup> What is important about this practice is that Cvetkovich's attention to the minutiae, mundane, boring, and ordinary feelings of depression can break with the scripted, polite, respectable and accepted way of talking about depression. This mode of writing and thinking allows Cvetkovich to pick at or puncture the layer of film of academic discourse that covers and floats on top of the pulsing and ugly ways that depression lies under the surface and expresses itself under ordinary (and often uninterrogated) circumstances. As a research method, Cvetkovich's "Depression Journals," that accompany the scholarly essays in the second half of the book, help reveal "the emotional investments that guided" and shaped her more scholarly and conventional essays.<sup>27</sup> Queer methods like Cvetkovich's provide evidence of the existence of reflexive and contemplative

tools that white and non-white scholars have already developed and can access if they choose. These tools can be sharpened and adapted to respond to the challenge that black kinky and erotic methods present.

Further, the most generative white queer theory contains a playful, kinky, and open-spirit of public sexual experimentation and exhibitionism (a large part gifted from black queer theorist Samuel Delany<sup>28</sup>) that allows it to offer its own white body up for use. I hold out hope that the critical and ethical white and non-black scholars who acknowledge queer theory's deviance, kink, funk, bare-backed, rawness are able to follow, or rather accept, the invitation of the black kinky call to show your goods. Give black erotic and kinky studies something to play and think with. What is your body doing in response to blackness? That is the unexplored and yet to be answered kinky question. Queer and necessarily anti-racist theoretical labor that seeks to abolish anti-black violence must attend to and study the white and non-black body's becoming and unbecoming at the site of blackness. The queerest and most radical scholarship must, and will, abandon its own practice of dissemblance in the face of its own desire (whatever it may be at the moment) for blackness. The anti-racist project that seeks the eradication of anti-black violence must relinquish its posture of "respectable" and duty-bound interest. The black kinky and erotic method is a demanding lover/fuck. Stop being so prudish and so selfish with all of the "let me see yours" without bending it over and spreading it—wide and white or non-black—for Black kinky methods to gaze upon. Far from staid and serious, white, and non-black practices of scholarly withholding while gazing and examining with the best intent are actually anthropological (I see/notice you). Far from altruistic or an expression of allyship, white and non-black scholars are interested, invested, and erotically motivated (understood broadly) by their studies of black people, black expressive culture, theory, and life.<sup>29</sup>

With a recognition and deep awareness of the erotic currents that animate white and non-Black interests in blackness and sometimes (often) black bodies, white and non-Black scholars could be receptive to asking themselves the following questions. How could my desire—to the extent that it can be made known—be made useful as an object of study? Since the body is always implicated in the production of knowledge, how will I acknowledge my own body as a white/non-black scholar while studying Black bodies? How does studying black bodies make me feel? How do/es my skin, eyes, genitals, mind, tongue feel when I think about the black body? (For those who have done meditation or yoga this is a practice of noticing that might feel familiar.) What are the methodological implications of attending to my own body and its sensations as an object of knowledge as I attend to Black bodies? Am I willing to make myself an object as I make blackness an object?

I consider these questions because the exercise of situating oneself in the vein of, "I acknowledge that I am a white-cis-queer-male-setter-scholar working on yada..." has become an inane exercise. I want to know how it feels to acknowledge arousal—and or other sensations—at the sight of Black bodies in pain, rebellion,

movement, ecstasy, and make that feeling—your feeling—an object for study. This kind of empathetic disclosure interrupts the violence of politesse and its performance of “pure” and anti-racist intent on the part of the white/non-black researcher. This empathetic practice of accountability does not naively assume that the white/non-black scholars’ interest in blackness/black bodies is an expression of allyship. *The corporate university does not produce scholars whose primary interest is in producing knowledge for political action and more specifically the eradication of anti-black racism.* The corporate university trains us to work against our best selves. The humanist or social scientist in the corporate university is trained to intervene upon and improve fields of study. The scholar who will be successful is trained to develop an impulse to improve, develop, elevate, abstract, queer, trans or post-humanize existing fields, especially Black Studies. The successful scholar will be able to track their accomplishment and growth by documenting a record of the impression or legacy they have left on the field. The question that white and non-black scholars in the academy must ultimately answer is how did I advance, intervene upon, or “save” Black Studies. Rarely are white and non-black scholars asked to reflect upon and come to terms with how Black Studies “saved” them. To be clear, I am not cynical or invested in an indictment and understanding of white and non-black anti-blackness as hopelessly intractable, unrelenting, or unchangeable. The empathetic practice of disclosure and engagement I invite assumes and holds space for the possibility that people can be (and want to be) accountable and ethical. Further, this kind of empathetic practice requires more than accountability.

Unlike the empathy of the abolitionist or the misguided white liberal subject that Hartman treats as an object of inquiry in *Scenes of Subjection*, this empathetic practice is an erotic process of unbecoming.<sup>30</sup> This erotic call toward an unbecoming submits to the mandate of Lorde’s erotic movement toward chaos.<sup>31</sup> Is it possible to invite the Lordean chaos that can ensue when one approaches blackness (in its embodied form in this case) and submits to its invitation to abolish a self that makes and remakes itself through the sensuous objectification and destruction of black people? If approached ethically, the power of black presence and embodiment can undo and reorganize the white and non-black body and self on different terms. White and non-black scholars could choose to open themselves to a Black erotic method and practice of unravelling their investments in possessing themselves and the black captive body. If white and non-black scholars can bare or expose the ways that their white/non-black self depends on rendering the black body a captive “being for” whiteness/others, it is possible to render themselves available for being radically rearranged by Blackness. This work leaves room for the formation of a new kind of body—a Deleuzian Body Without Organs—that can be undone and remade in relation to blackness.<sup>32</sup> This kind of ethic and reorientation can interrupt the current impulse to objectify black embodiment and black life while transforming the white and non-black scholars who hope to abolish anti-black violence in their own work.

## Endnotes

1. H. Willoughby in R. Hakluyet. *Princ. Navigation* (1589) 11.269, "Shoal," Dictionary, Oxford English. "Oxford English dictionary online." (2016).
2. In "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," Hortense Spillers introduces the captive body as a surface or matter that has the "potential for pornotroping," as a thing that becomes a "being for" the captor. On page 67 in a long passage Spillers writes the following: "But this body, at least from the view of the captive community, focuses on a private and particular space, at which point of convergence biological, sexual, social, cultural, linguistic, ritualistic and psychological fortunes join. This profound intimacy of interlocking detail is disrupted, however by externally imposed meanings and uses: 1) the captive body becomes the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality; at the same time—in stunning contradiction—the captive body reduces to a thing, becoming *being for* the captor; 3) in this absence *from* a subject position, the captured sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of "otherness"; 4) as a category of "otherness," the captive body translates into a potential for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general "powerlessness," resonating through various centers of human and social meaning." Hortense J. Spillers "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *diacritics* vol. 17, no. 2 (1987): 65-81.
3. See: Katherine McKittrick, "Mathematics Black Life," *The Black Scholar* vol. 44, no. 2 (2014): 16-28; Katherine McKittrick, "Diachronic loops/deadweight tonnage/bad made measure," *cultural geographies* vol. 23, no. 1 (2016): 10.
4. McKittrick, "Diachronic loops."
5. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham:Duke University Press, 2016, 37. There are also other documented accounts of attending to this figure climbing back onto the Zong. See: Erin M. Fehskens, "ACCOUNTS UNPAID, ACCOUNTS UNTOLD: M. NourbeSe Philip's Zong! and the Catalogue," *Callaloo* vol. 35, no. 2 (2012): 407-24.
6. See: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 1990; see also McKittrick's counter arguments to scholarship that reflexively focuses on black death as if it is axiomatic to black studies. McKittrick chooses a method of attending to black life as something that is always lurking among black death and that can expose anti-black violence in ways that a sole focus on black death cannot "Black Livingness," "Black Atlantic Livingness," in McKittrick, "Diachronic loops."
7. See: Ashon Crawley, *Blackpentecostal breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2016.
- 8., Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, 14.
9. Ibid.
10. In "Diachronic loops," McKittrick introduces and describes this practice of noticing Black Livingness that I extend upon as an ethical and erotic method in this essay.
11. See: Louis Chude-Sokei, Ariane Cruz, Amber Jamilla Musser, Jennifer C. Nash, L. H. Stallings, and Kirin Wachter-Grene, "Race, Pornography, and Desire: A TBS Roundtable," *The Black Scholar* vol. 46, no. 4 (2016): 49-64.
12. See Kathryn Bond Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where "Black" Meets "Queer."* Durham: Duke University Press, 2006; Timothy S. Lyle, "Tryin'to Scrub that" Death Pussy" Clean Again: The Pleasures of Domesticating HIV/AIDS in Pearl Cleage's Fiction," *African American Review* vol. 50, no. 2 (2017): 153-168.
13. Email communication from Fall 2017.
14. See Adreanna Nattiel's notion of attunement to a black lesbian sensorium in "Bringing Sex to Theory: Sensational Affinity, Pleasure, and Sexual Pedagogy" Georgia State University (2018) Unpublished Master of Arts Thesis. Nattiel uses it in the context of thinking about how one might attune—direct their attentions and senses to--themselves to a black lesbian sensorium that attends to the specificity of black lesbian affects and sensations without reifying the uniqueness sensations of lesbian sensuality to a rigid identity category.
15. Spillers, "Mama's Baby," 67
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.

18. The sensual feeling that is gratifying for the white and non-black bodies that can be a number of things that include and exceed the sexual ranging from a sense of elevating black experience, moving black experience to a level of white and non black aesthetics and theoretical abstraction. The ecstasy of mastering, dominating and therefore organizing black thought and bodies into white and non black coherence. This elation and pleasure can also be likened to the feel of a potter manipulating wet squishy clay into form/order and cooking the raw form in a kiln.
19. See: Sharon Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.
20. Chude-Sokei, Cruz, Musser, et al., "Race, Pornography, and Desire: A TBS Roundtable."
21. #CiteBlackWomen is a hashtag started by Black women scholars....in order to their twitter handle's page reads @citeblackwomen: It's simple: Cite Black Women. We have been producing knowledge since we blessed this earth, We theorize, we innovate, we revolutionize the world. Honor us. <https://twitter.com/citeblackwomen>
22. Further, the citation and apparent white consumption of black women's texts is rewarded while black women's and black scholars' citation of themselves and other black women is undervalued and in fact penalized in the academy.
23. See: Amber Musser, *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism*. New York: NYU Press, 2014. When I refer to "desires, motivations and affective states," I do not intend to imply that these things are are stable, unchanging and essential qualities that can be "confessed" or dislodged from the core of one's beings. The things and elements that need to be "mined" are the conditions under which Black bodies are made objects and the reward systems that stimulate certain kinds of sensations and affects.
24. In *Sensational Flesh*, Musser defines her "empathetic reading practice" as a method that allows her to bring multiple texts/notions of masochism together that might be seen as non-commensurable (19) and more directly related to this discussion enables Musser to forge a relationship with the text and the writer of the text as well as the writer's subject position (24). My own use of Musser's notion of empathetic reading is a call for the non-black subject to announce self-interest, motivation and desires, sensations to allow for a reading of the person's becoming in relationship to blackness. To state differently, a reflexive feeling out or description of the self that enables black studies to subject the motivation, desire, sensation to object status as it comes into the space of the subject through blackness.
25. See: Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Durham: Duke University Press, 79.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. See: Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. New York: NYU Press, 1999.
29. White bourgeoisie protocols of civility impose the expectation that Black people will perform codes of politesse and refrain from asking white people about their feelings, sensations—possibly arousal—in response to black content (bodies, text, ideas). This politesse and its codes of civility act as forms of control which protect whiteness.
30. See: Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 21-22. Hartman explains why empathy—specifically white empathy is a failed project as it too often relies on a displacement of black pain in favor of white suffering and the white capacity to perform humanness. Black life and pain becomes unthinkable and unsayable under the liberal formation of empathy.
31. Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. New York, Crossing Press, 1984, 53-59.
32. See Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a Body Without Organs—BWO—as a body that has potential rather than already a predetermined gendered, raced, agentive, autonomous thing. The BWO poses the question "what can a body?" do rather than "what is a body?" See: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980.