InVisible Culture • Issue 31: Black Studies Now and the Counter-Currents of Hazel Carby

Studying With Hazel Carby

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Dear Hazel,

I've decided to write you a letter. When I think about being your student, I think first of our conversations—in office hours, over coffee, via email—so this makes sense to me as a form.¹ You are not one for nostalgia, let alone adulation.

When I read the proposed title of this special issue, my reaction was *I wonder what Hazel will think about it*. Specifically, I imagined you taking issue with “currency.”

To my mind, that word most immediately evokes financial transactions and, in the context of academia, the commodification, marketing, and compelled speeding-up of intellectual labor. It conjures a sense of urgency, or a potentially-profitable crisis, something upon which institutions might capitalize. I thought of Barbara Christian's “The Race for Theory.”²

(An obsolete definition of “currency” is: “Fluency; readiness of utterance; easiness of pronunciation.”³)

It struck me that your work has never been current, if “current” means popular and of-the-moment—symptomatic of the times, as opposed to diagnostic, prescient, and seeking alternative futures. If I had to characterize your scholarship—which is also to say, your teaching—it is just the opposite. It is profoundly, dazzlingly skeptical of the present, of the current and currency—both in the sense of the direction in which things seem to be flowing (what perhaps-undetected forces are in operation and to what ends) and the more specific manifestations of that flow.⁴ I do not imagine that your critique of the sudden popularity of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* went over particularly well in some circles—perhaps least of all in African American Studies.⁵ Or there was the time you repurposed Harvard's W.E.B. Du Bois Lectures as an occasion to interrogate “three-piece suit” black masculinity, identifying Du Bois as its progenitor and a cadre of contemporary black male intellectuals as its inheritors.⁶

“Currency” should be an object of study, which is to say, it should be repositioned as a construction or process and an object of critique. (Something the editors no doubt have in mind). For example, you have long questioned the formations and projects, explicit and implicit, of African American Studies, from within its fought-for and commemorated walls. The currency of (certain) African Diasporic cultural production and the departmentalization or other sorts of institutional recognition of African

American or African Diasporic or Black Studies remains always-also-already cause for at least a little concern.⁷ To invoke Stuart Hall, whose work you taught me, departmentalization (and the disciplining of a discipline and its students; at worst, their petrification) is “conjunctural.”⁸ Thus, when you frame your essays as “occasional,” I think this should not be interpreted as their having currency. Unless “currency” denotes that which is immanent and imminent in the lives of those targeted by the market in its current manifestations, in which even ostensibly anti-racist, anti-sexist pockets of academia may be complicit.⁹ Or unless “currency” is a demand to ask who and what is currently excluded from trends-with-dividends in academic scholarship—which has been, for you, often the more interesting and imperative question.¹⁰

I registered for “Caribbean Diasporic Intellectuals” in my first semester of graduate school because I wanted to study with you. It didn’t exactly, or immediately, make sense for my fake-it-’til-you-make-it dissertation project on (as I recall, and rehearsed) *queer desire in the U.S. American South in the first half of the twentieth century in the context of racialized violence and freedom struggles*. I spent the first month or so worrying about my research paper topic. I remember searching Caribbean newspapers in an online database for references to racialized violence and African American cultural production. In other words, “African American Studies,” as I was approaching it, meant trying to conscript “the Caribbean” into a U.S.-centric narrative. But, midway through the semester, one dissertation became an either/or—that one, or a study centered on enslaved women in eighteenth-century Jamaica. The latter would attempt to grapple with a massive archive that the Beinecke had recently acquired, to which the newest African American Studies graduate students were introduced upon arrival. The grammar of *Acquisitions* registers differently before the pages of an overseer’s diary, its fragile binding, and brutal contents, cradled by a pair of olive-green wedges.¹¹

At some point, I asked if you planned to use that collection in your research. You responded that you were keeping as far away from it as possible.

I remember sitting in your office later that term, trying to express how and why the only way I felt that I could write about enslaved persons in Thistlewood’s archive was if I paired passages from his diaries with creative work that came to mind as I read his words. I needed something to disrupt his accounting. (“Accounting” is another word I’ve picked up from you).

“Of course.”

You said it in an almost startled manner; your response felt anything but current. It felt conspiratorial, treasonous. Challenging archival boundaries—geographic, material, and temporal—was necessary to historiographic work. Indeed, when I brought my project to a History seminar the following semester, I was told that I “could do that in a Literature Department”—but certainly not there.

In that moment, it was as though you grasped everything I was trying to say, and, beyond that, things for which I didn’t (yet) have words. Perhaps it was then that you suggested I read Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. I checked out a copy from the library. There were pencil marks all over its pages. I like to think they were your students’. I added to them. When I purchased a copy, I filled it with post-it notes and stars and underlines. They accumulate with every reading.

Silencing the Past was the first text I thought of when planning the syllabus for “History and Memory in the Early Modern Atlantic World” at NYU’s Gallatin School of Individualized Study.¹² I purchased the twentieth-anniversary edition, both to have a copy to put on hold and to assign your Foreword. Someone at Bobst Library wrapped the book in brown paper, affixed “RESERVE” and a barcode for checking it out, and wrote, “Silencing the Past,” on the cover, in black permanent marker. Consulting it three years later, I am reminded that the meaning of books on my shelf also takes shape through how, when, where, and why I teach them. In the course evaluations, one student complained that there had been too little “history” and too much “identity politics.” Just one, though. A History major, if I’m not mistaken.

It’s not surprising, but remains refreshing, that your foreword to the twentieth-anniversary edition introduces readers to Trouillot’s book by describing how it functions in your teaching and what his thinking teaches you. Preempting approaches to the text that might understand its relevance solely within the confines of particular disciplines, timelines, and geographies, you situate *Silencing the Past* alongside contemporary cultural production—in this case, Ellen Gallagher’s *DeLuxe*, which I first studied with you.¹³ Interweaving Trouillot’s project in *Silencing the Past* with the aims of your foreword, you remind readers, “What history *is* matters less to Trouillot than how history *works*.”¹⁴

It was surprising to learn that you never met him in person. You were writing this after he passed away, yet you are not sentimental. After all, you, like Trouillot, study the power of “retrospective significance,” the fourth “moment” in which “[s]ilences enter

the process of historical production.”¹⁵ You write, “But I have his words, his provocative questions, his insights, and they prick my conscience if I ever feel satisfied with just ‘imagin[ing] the lives under the mortar,’ remembering that Trouillot also asks how we ‘recognize the end of a bottomless silence.’” He is meaningful to you because of what he asks, what he unsettles, how his thought works, what *Silencing the Past* works on, against, and toward: “What is at stake in pastness for Trouillot is the future, the process of becoming.”¹⁶

When I introduce my white queer self to students at the start of term, I often tell them that the first essay I read by the scholar who would become my advisor and mentor was “White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood,” in Jafari Allen’s seminar “Black Feminist Theory and Praxis.” I explain that, because the course was my introduction to feminist and queer theory, I operate from a position that foregrounds the imbrications of gender, sexuality, race, and class.

“White Woman Listen!” was among the first texts I assigned this fall in “Litanies for Survival, Plots for Revolution,” together with “Race and the Academy: Feminism and the Politics of Difference” and your introduction to *Cultures in Babylon*, for the way you self-reflexively (re)frame your work, some of which took shape here at Wesleyan. Following your lead, I tell my students that, whenever they make “we” statements, I will ask them what they mean, and that they should watch for the ways in which “we” functions in other texts. I’ve begun to point out that the classroom space coerces a kind of “we”—which is messy at best, devastating at worst.

I can’t figure out how to explain what holding the classroom space feels like, besides visceral. On the one hand, I am acutely aware that one student’s liberal arts experience can be another’s trauma. I want them to know this, and to know that I recognize this. On the other hand, but relatedly, it feels irresponsible to teach courses that make anyone, myself included, feel at ease or confident that they already “own” the material or might “master” it shortly. The nomenclature of the course title and departmental classification sets particular expectations that increasingly seem at odds with “Studies,” as I’ve been trained to approach such work. Perhaps paradoxically, the only way to proceed that makes sense to me at present is to make things messier, to make a “we” of the mess, to make “we” a verb always on the verge of a perhaps-undesirable or never-desirable pronominalization.

As I told the students, I would not be doing “Black Studies” or “Gender & Sexuality Studies” (as I understand them) if I were not also engaging fields such as Indigenous

Studies, Latinx Studies, and Disability Studies. I insisted, “I will fail you. And ‘we’ will fail one another.” And I expressed my hope that we, in different and perhaps shared or overlapping ways, would have a number of “oh, shit” moments. We talked about emotional labor, about how it isn’t any one student’s job to “educate” their peers or their professors.

When you conclude “White Woman Listen!” by asking white feminists: “what exactly do you mean when you say ‘WE’??” it suggests, of course, that “we” does work and that it’s a process that not infrequently masks its formation under the guise of a stable, agreed-upon pronoun. I don’t think this is a rhetorical question. And I’d argue that it remains as unfashionable currently as it did at the time of your writing. It’s a question you continue to pose regarding definitions of “black” as well—both how white feminists view black women academics and how Black Studies scholars understand the “we” of their field. Ending with a question brings in the other half of your argument—that listening alone is insufficient. To study is to listen and to say—in whatever forms and through whatever senses. My class, which is fairly diverse for Wesleyan, did not object to your arguments about racism and classism among white feminists, and the need for white feminists to register and address their/our position within racist structures of power. In class and through their weekly reflections, students have noted their increased consciousness regarding the words they use and their implications. But they did require clarification regarding what you meant by “black” in the sentence “Black women have come from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean.”¹⁷ None of them were familiar with that usage. One student’s question encapsulated the altered state of things: “Does she mean *black* women who have *come* from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean?”

A couple of weeks ago, we were discussing *Wild Seed*.¹⁸ (Part of your next book project, I think?) One student, Nia, brought up Anyanwu’s characterization of particular practices as “abominations,” and asked, “But what work does that do?”¹⁹ At the start of term, I’d told the class that I learned to ask what “work” something does from being your student and that they could expect me to ask them that question at least once per meeting. I couldn’t help but smile when a student posed the question herself. When I wrote Nia to double-check the particular aspect of the novel she’d referenced, I explained that I was (still) working on my contribution to this special issue and remarked upon how fitting it was that she had asked what work something does, since I inherited that practice from you. Nia’s reply both answered my question and engaged how I framed it. She wrote, “Also, it’s interesting to think of ‘inheriting’

questions or ‘inheriting’ ways of thinking because since taking a course with you previously I ask myself the same question in trying to determine the purpose of thinkers putting different concepts/ideas in conversation with one another.”²⁰

You are not one for genealogies, I know, but I inherited that question from you and, apparently, I’ve passed it on. It seems all the more appropriate that the “What work?” question came up when we were reading a novel very suspicious of “generations,” of (conscripted) “people”—especially when tied to constructions of “race” or “kind”—while wondering after what an alternative collectivity might look like.²¹ I wanted students to think about how Butler manipulates readers’ various expectations—their fears and desires, ingrained narratives of which they might not be aware, but which structure their lives—and teaches readers to read again.²² To begin the conversation, I asked the students to characterize in a word or phrase their impressions of or responses to what we’d read of the novel thus far (the first five chapters). Their responses varied widely—from not liking it much to not being able to put it down; several were excited to read fiction for a change. Next, we returned to the opening paragraphs (the introduction to Doro) and the students who had enjoyed the novel went, “Oh.” What hadn’t (for some) registered as ominous, threatening, cause for concern, took on an entirely different cast. They were surprised at the seductiveness of the text, how the bereft father-figure confronted with the gruesome remains of “one of his seed villages,” including the skeleton of a child, became a possessive, prideful manipulator who “protected his own” in exchange for “their loyalty, their obedience.” They refocused on Butler’s description of Doro as someone willing to sacrifice “individuals” if it meant that “groups” (his groups) survived.²³ They noted how quickly “the woman” he “discovered” in the novel’s opening line became “his quarry.”²⁴

I looked up *abomination* and *abominable* in the *OED* the other day. I learned that the words are of Anglo-Norman and Middle French origin. Intriguingly, a “folk etymology” is responsible for now-obsolete early spellings that inserted an “h” after the “b,” such that the word appeared to come from the Latin “*ab homine*,” or, “away from man, inhuman.” According to the *OED*, this occurrence “has also influenced the semantic development of the word in English and French.”²⁵ By way of a “transmission error,” *abominable* and *abomination* were (re)imagined or assumed to have origins in defining that which is “inhuman,” understood as that which deviates from “man.” Thinking Trouillot’s interventions together with those of Sylvia Wynter and Mel Chen suggests that the word *abomination* performs the work of reanimating the in/human as not/Man.²⁶ I wonder if Butler was aware of this etymology.

For our next class, students met with author Karla Cornejo Villavicencio. One topic that arose was the difficulty of disagreeing with the canonical figures in one's field, in her case, Latinx Studies. Later that day, another student asked me if it was strange to critique my professors. I admitted that I was still writing this letter. I told her that you'd taught me to ask questions, to question everything, and to practice constant self-consciousness in my teaching and research.²⁷ Perhaps it's difficult to "critique" your work because, if it forecloses or seeks to foreclose anything at all, it's structures of oppression. Your scholarship and syllabi are always about what's next, gesturing toward and making space for what has not (yet) been perceived, argued, fought against and fought for. You've studied what some have deemed "abominations," such as black women's sexual politics.²⁸ And you have committed what others (or perhaps the same individuals) might consider "abominations": you've challenged current, or currently-unchallenged, definitions of "woman," "black," and "African American literary criticism."

Studying with you taught me to ask, "What is this 'black' in Black Studies?" I learned to wonder after the processes that go into defining "black" or "blackness" and what such projects might silence, exclude, or render abominable. I pose to my students and myself the other question I've heard you raise countless times: "But what's at *stake*?"

Perhaps Black Studies describes a field that doesn't yet exist, or one that hasn't, doesn't, shouldn't, or perhaps won't ever have "currency." Studying with you shaped my thinking and teaching; you make "Studies" a verb and a conversation, a studying-with.

I think that love and care suffuse and enable this work, whether one operates from a position that views such feelings and frameworks as suspicious, or endeavors to redefine love and care as praxes integral to survival, upheaval, flourishing.²⁹ The version of Black Studies that makes sense to me now must be in conversation with that which some definitions of Black Studies, past and present, might exclude. The classificatory impulse concerns me, except insofar as it marks an admission of one's starting point (one's disciplinary "training") and thereby gestures toward that which one does not or might not (ever) know.

A study, like a story, has to start somewhere. It interests me to ask what makes something a "Black Studies," "African American Studies," or "Africana Studies" project, or a "Disability Studies" project, or a "Gender Studies" project, or an "Indigenous Studies" project, or an "Environmental Studies" project.³⁰

Is *Wild Seed* a story (or a study) of indigeneity and settler colonialism? Slavery? Religion? Disability? Neurodiversity? Biology? Psychology? Gender? Sexuality? Race? Class? Capitalism? Democracy? Socialism? Fascism? Biopolitics? Power? The human? History? Linguistics? Sociology? Anthropology? Empire? Geography? Ethics? Philosophy? Diaspora? Narrative?

“It’s the weirdest novel I’ve ever read,” was one student’s summation.

Syllabi tell and retell stories; they commence somewhere and not elsewhere (whether their authors acknowledge this or not). For me, writing a syllabus is an exercise in failure, approached with a kind of “wild hope.”³¹ What the “final” version contains, the one I let go of in the eleventh hour (not unlike this letter), is already only a sliver of what I wish it could be. But collecting everything isn’t possible and would be a suspicious project in its own right.

I suppose this is where the “Black” in “Black Studies” comes in for me. It names the shifting set of coordinates from which I fail. “I am trained in Black Studies” is a statement that I have decided to fail and that a certain kind of failure is desirable—a failure that comes from feeling for edges, for cracks, for tectonic plates. Black Studies is the field I try to “know,” which undoes its coherency the minute I get to work, or should. It’s an invitation to, or a demand for, specificity—and a marker of its limitations. Black Studies can be a weapon wielded against historically white and white-supremacist institutions. And it can be coopted by them. That cooptation can look like commitment, like care.

Black Studies (inevitably?) produces criteria—criteria which some fail to meet. Here, I am thinking of the student who is told, in so many ways, that they aren’t “black enough.” And the student of multiple diasporas. And the student for whom decolonization or the decriminalization of refugees is as imperative as abolition. And the student whose disability enters the conversation only as metaphor. And the student whose “work-study” schedule conflicts with the scheduled protest.

My courses seem to attract Black Studies’ “misfits.”³²

Thank you.

—Heather

P.S. I’m reading *Imperial Intimacies* this weekend. I’ve held off until I submit this writing, because I want to talk about it with you first. On Monday, I’ll ask the students

what work they think it does. I'll ask them: what's at stake?

Footnotes

1. Roderick Ferguson's visit to Wesleyan's Center for the Humanities a couple of weeks ago (October 14-15, 2019) reminded me that David Scott adopts (and apologizes for) an "epistolary" structure in *Stuart Hall's Voice: Intimations of an Ethics of Receptive Generosity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017). I look forward to questioning further the conjuncture that has produced this special issue—and shaped the form and content of my contribution to it—the minute I cringe and hit "send." I hope I'm leaving this letter open-ended enough, for now. If so, then that, too, is something you've taught me. [↵](#)

2. In her essay "The Race for Theory," Barbara Christian, wrote, "Interestingly in the first part of this century {the twentieth}, at least in England and America, the critic was usually also a writer of poetry, plays, or novels. But today, as a new generation of professionals develops, he or she is increasingly an academic. Activities such as teaching or writing one's response to specific works of literature have, among this group, become subordinated to one primary thrust, that moment when one creates a theory, thus fixing a constellation of ideas for a time at least, a fixing which no doubt will be replaced in another month or so by somebody else's competing theory as the race accelerates. Perhaps because those who have effected the takeover have the power (although they deny it) first of all to be published, and thereby to determine the ideas which are deemed valuable, some of our most daring and potentially radical critics (and by *our* I mean black, women, third world) have been influenced, even coopted, into speaking a language and defining their discussion in terms alien to and opposed to our needs and orientation. At least so far, the creative writers I study have resisted this language." Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," *Cultural Critique* 6, "The Nature of Minority Discourse" (Spring 1987): 52, italics in original. In the pages that follow, Christian troubles her own invocation of "black, women, third world"—lest a reader believe that she, too, substitutes one fixity for another: "I and many of my sisters do not see the world as being so simple. And perhaps that is why we have not rushed to create abstract theories. For we know there are countless women of color, both in America and in the rest of the world to whom our singular ideas would be applied." Christian, "The Race for Theory," 60. [↵](#)

3. "Currency, n.," definition 1b, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed May 30, 2019, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/46095>. [↵](#)

4. See Hazel V. Carby, "The Blackness of Theory," in *Cultures in Babylon: Black Britain and African America* (London: Verso, 1999), 233-4. [↵](#)
5. See Hazel V. Carby, "The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston," in *Cultures in Babylon: Black Britain and African America* (London: Verso, 1999), 168-185. [↵](#)
6. See Hazel V. Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), "Introduction" (1-6) and chapter one, "The Souls of Black Men" (9-41). [↵](#)
7. See Carby, "The Blackness of Theory," esp. 234-236. [↵](#)
8. Stuart Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" in *Black Popular Culture*, project by Michele Wallace, ed. Gina Dent, Dia Center for the Arts, *Discussions in Contemporary Culture* 8 (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), 21. [↵](#)
9. In the introduction to *Cultures in Babylon*, Carby writes, "The essays in 'Black Feminist Interventions' are occasional. They articulate my concerns about the terms and conditions under which black women exist in the academy, from their representation on a syllabus to the conditions of their employment, whether as dining hall workers or as graduate students." Carby, *Cultures in Babylon*, 2-3. [↵](#)
10. See Carby, "The Blackness of Theory," 234-235. [↵](#)
11. I refer here to the papers of Thomas Thistlewood, housed at Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library; see <https://beinecke.library.yale.edu/collections/highlights/thomas-thistlewood-papers>. [↵](#)
12. Thank you, again, for recommending me. [↵](#)
13. It is also telling, I think, that you select an example of collaborative teaching—in this case, with Laura Wexler. See Hazel V. Carby, "Foreword," in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), xi-xii. *Silencing the Past* was first published by Beacon Press in 1995. [↵](#)
14. Carby, "Foreword," xii, emphases in original. [↵](#)
15. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 26. [↵](#)
16. Carby, "Foreword," xiii. [↵](#)
17. Carby, *Cultures in Babylon*, 67. [↵](#)

18. Octavia E. Butler, *Wild Seed*, in *Seed to Harvest*, Octavia E. Butler (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2007). First published by Doubleday in 1980. [↵](#)

19. When Doro suggests that, if Anyanwu's "sons and daughters married each other," her children might not die, she responds, "Abomination! {...} We are not animals here, Doro!" When Anyanwu disapproves of Doro killing the son of an enslaved man, he responds, "Your own people kill children." Attempting to defend such practices (a suspect move), Anyanwu states, "Only the ones who must be killed—the abominations. And even with them... sometimes when the thing wrong with the child was small, I was able to stop the killing. I spoke with the voice of the god, and as long as I did not violate tradition too much, the people listened." Butler, *Wild Seed*, 15, 35; cf. 55, 94-95. [↵](#)

20. Nia Eddy-Pina, "Re: odd question for you about class discussion Monday," message to Heather V. Vermeulen, Oct. 8, 2019, E-mail. I realize now that I've used "text" a fair bit in this letter, but I mean it more in the sense of "work," as defined and differentiated by Barbara Christian when she lamented that "works (a word which evokes labor) have become texts." Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," 52. Perhaps the word "text" is my own unrealized and now mistranslated inheritance from the training I received as an English major in the 2000s. [↵](#)

21. Doro promises to "give" Anyanwu "children of {her} own kind." When she wants to return to "{her} people," he commands, in biblically-resonant language, "My people will be your people. You will obey me as they obey." Butler, *Wild Seed*, 23, 54; cf. 59. [↵](#)

22. These lines from Christian's "The Race for Theory" come to mind: "I, for one, am tired of being asked to produce a black feminist literary theory as if I were a mechanical man. For I believe such theory is prescriptive—it ought to have some relationship to practice. Since I can count on one hand the number of people attempting to be black feminist literary critics in the world today, I consider it presumptuous of me to invent a theory of how we *ought* to read. Instead, I think we need to read the works of our writers in our various ways and remain open to the intricacies of the intersection of language, class, race, and gender in the literature. And it would help if we share our process, that is, our practice, as much as possible since, finally, our work *is* a collective endeavor." Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," 53, italics in original. [↵](#)

23. Butler, *Wild Seed*, 5. [↵](#)

24. Butler, *Wild Seed*, 5, 6. [↵](#)
25. “Abominable, Adj., n., and Adv.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed Oct. 22, 2019, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/466#eid7623546>. [↵](#)
26. You introduced me to Sylvia Wynter’s work as well. Here, I am thinking of Wynter’s “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257-337; and Mel Chen’s *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012). [↵](#)
27. See Carby, *Cultures in Babylon*, 3. [↵](#)
28. Here, I refer to the essays in section one of Carby, *Cultures in Babylon*, titled “Women, Migration and the Formation of a Blues Culture.” [↵](#)
29. With “upheaval,” I reference Saidiya V. Hartman’s *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), which she dedicated to Carby, her teacher when an undergraduate at Wesleyan. [↵](#)
30. I’m excited to hear your thoughts on C. Riley Snorton’s *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017) and Tiffany Lethabo King’s *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), as well as Lou Cornum’s “Burial Ground Acknowledgements,” *The New Inquiry*, October 14, 2019, accessed Oct. 14, 2019, <https://thenewinquiry.com/burial-ground-acknowledgements/>. [↵](#)
31. Here, I reference Saidiya V. Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 26 (June 2008): 14. [↵](#)
32. Anyanwu tries not to “turn {...} out” anyone who lives with her, which would result in that individual “becoming a misfit again in the world outside.” At the same time, I think readers are supposed to be a bit suspicious of Anyanwu’s project and “power,” not only Doro’s, especially since Anyanwu’s property is still referred to as a “plantation,” and the repetition of negations—“she did not threaten them, did not slaughter among them as Doro did among his people”—perhaps echoes the ways in which Doro’s ship is ostensibly differentiated from a slave ship. Mere pages earlier, Anyanwu reflects that, because she “had been white for too long,” she “was not seeing the slaves in front of {her}”—those being bought and sold in Louisiana, all

around her property. She admits to Doro, “I would not have thought I could be oblivious to such a thing.” Butler, *Wild Seed*, 200, 64-5, 191. [↩](#)