

Editors' Notes

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Issue 6, no. 1, “aesthetics,” is the third issue of *liquid blackness: journal of aesthetics and black studies* published by Duke University Press and the conclusion to a trilogy—following vol. 5, no. 1, “liquidity,” and vol. 5, no. 2, “blackness”—that identifies this journal’s foundational concerns, originally outlined in Alessandra’s 2014 essay “Blackness, Aesthetics, Liquidity” (*liquid blackness* 1, no. 2). Eight years ago the terms were in a different order, and strangely enough, we can pinpoint the moment this rearrangement took place: while grocery shopping for a “make-your-own pizza party” for the Editorial Board meeting the following day, Alessandra was in a car accident. The Editorial Board was relieved that, despite the resulting whiplash, she was able to join the meeting, but we insisted the Founding Editor in Chief (the person with the clearest vision of the journal) should leave and seek medical treatment. Left temporarily alone, we improvised.

At the time we knew these three issues would clarify the central theoretical questions that inspire the art and research we publish, but this (admittedly unintentional) sequencing has in fact clarified how many of our concerns *depart from, lead to, and methodologically face* aesthetics. This rearrangement has helped us rethink conclusions we made years ago. And in the issues that follow these first three, we know these are the questions that will allow us to begin again. This is the “canted temporality” that emerges once one attends to blackness’s invaginative relation to the philosophical project of aesthetics. In “completing”

the work we planned years ago, we move closer to “incompleteness.” We will continue to improvise.

Indeed, the experience we’ve gained while doing this meticulous work has made our editorial process more nonsensical and/or undercommonsensical. It is not surprising that the challenging topics contributors have explored so far (capital, materiality, chromatic theory, polyrhythmia, abstraction, philology, ecocriticism, etc.) remain open and unresolved, but we might not have anticipated that the experience we’ve gained while doing this meticulous work would make our editorial process more nonsensical and/or undercommonsensical. As previous introductions have explained, the *liquid blackness* research group was founded on relationships between advisers, advisees, colleagues, and friends—in fact, we joke about the fact that once a person joins the group, we never let them go. For instance, this issue features a conversation with an artist, Elissa Blount Moorhead, that is particularly dear to us because it was conducted by Michele Prettyman, the earliest adviser of the *liquid blackness* research group and builds on a collaborative project undertaken with Jenny Gunn, Daren Fowler, and Derrick Jones (artistically known as djones), in collaboration with Susan Sojourna Collier, Aggie Ebrahimi Bazaz, and Jade Petermon, who, together with Alessandra founded *AMPLIFY: media arts for collective strength*, in the wake of George Floyd’s murder, to offer a dedicated showcase and safe space for our grieving and traumatized students. That project also benefited from the additional support of Alper Gobel, Gail McFarland, Jarred Biederstaedt,

Josh Cleveland, Matt Rowels, and Karin Smoot. These relationships have and will always be important, but they are not necessarily getting clearer: we practice disputes by swapping sides (defense and offense) in the hope of coming to a tie, and we often rely the most on people and labor that go unseen. We can attest to the fact that the relationship between former advisers/advisees that are now colleagues and friends is more intimate, but certainly not simpler. In the Blount Moorhead interview, the filmmaker describes the care of a collaborator who asks, “Are you okay? Are you okay?” “Are you sleeping?” “Are the ideas right? Is it what we need? Is it making sense in terms of what’s already in the world and what we want in the world?” These are the same questions we asked Alessandra after her accident, and the answers seemed simple enough. Now, as we get more accustomed to working with each other, we know exactly how difficult these questions are not just to answer, but also to ask.

In this work we are discovering an iterative process in which we must urgently return to the things “we know.” For example, precisely because we know all too well about the inequities in academic attribution, we must work away from the impulse to conceptual “ownership” that is ultimately never to the benefit of the communities in the most precarious professional positions. As a result, we acknowledge that the practice of citation, the most fundamental lesson we learn as scholars, has never been more complicated. Similarly, in the seemingly straightforward task of drafting journal bylaws, our intention was to outline the

job descriptions for the journal's various roles. We removed ambiguity, quantified tasks, and even used bullet points. Yet, this document was submitted woefully late to our publishers because we're beginning to understand that participation in our project, in the way we conceptualize it and in terms of the values we hope to put forward, is an invitation and not a demand. Although a practice of generous collaboration is intended to encourage patience and grace, we sometimes find our respect for each other pushing us to work harder and faster. Thus, beyond *doing* "black study," we find ourselves in the uncharted territory of trying to care for it; without always knowing exactly where to direct these questions, we ask "black study": "Are you okay? Are you okay?" "Are you sleeping?" "Are the ideas right? Is it what we need? Is it making sense in terms of what's already in the world and what we want in the world?"

Moving toward "incompleteness" does not mean we do not have goals for *liquid blackness*; we want the journal to organically create its own intellectual community where scholars, artists, and their work are in conversation with one another and one day we hope that community can find its points of connection in ways that are not already the tools institutions use to surveil, quantify, and isolate us. We also want to publish work that makes it apparent that we play better together, whether we're thinking, writing, making, or reading. Even as we identify these aspirations, we know we'll be back at the beginning soon. Until then, as we continue to acquire experience as editors, we'll improvise.

As stated again in the introduction, we work from a position of incompleteness but perhaps what needs saying (again) is that this is also a matter of friendship—the relationships we already cultivate and also those we hope can flourish as a result of our editorial processes. Hopefully, the pages of the journal raise a series of generative questions that are often the result of our own experimental, improvisational, ensemblic, even nonsensical and/or undercommonsensical, practice. Black study—we learn everyday—is what gets done when nobody is watching. As such, we express an unpayable debt of gratitude toward each other, and our extended ensemble, one that might not always be visible in the "front matter" of this very journal. ■