

## Introduction

### VISUALIZING THE BODY OF THE BLACK ATLANTIC

What did they do to your memory  
That makes my quiet walk unknown to you.  
—Cristina Cabral

Audre Lorde's poem "Afterimages" takes the murder of Emmett Till and its famous photographic representation as a key moment of black memory and makes the poem take the place of the photograph, creating a lasting image of history and engaging the power of the eye in the word, in the body. "However the image enters," the poem begins, "its force remains within."<sup>1</sup> The speaker attempts to contain and release the tremendous burden of black subjectivity when that subjectivity is tethered to sight. To think of the afterimage in its plurality, in the collectivity of vision it renders, is to engender a discourse of the visual in the service of violated black bodies—both past and present. "My eyes are always hungry," the speaker continues, "and remembering."<sup>2</sup> Memory here measures the distance of "the length of gash across the dead boy's loins / his grieving mother's lamentation / the severed lips, how many burns / his gouged out eyes."<sup>3</sup> The import of collective visibility cannot be separated from the gendered nature of the speaker's witnessing. Her eye absorbs the imprint of the event, and it haunts her, filling her eyes with images both violent and lingering. Words drip from the poem, slowly paced but with precision, and imbued with the range of racial violations set against black people and over black flesh. Lorde's racialized and gendered subjectivity enters the frame and invests the image with a totality of vision. In this

way she orients the eye of the viewer so that there is no way for the viewer to remain outside the framework of vision when that vision is gendered—no way not to see if that field of vision includes black women.

Fred Moten hears in the visualization of the Till photograph an auditory impulse that propels the urgency of the image it hopes to frame. “The fear of another castration,” Moten writes, “is all bound up in this aversion of the eye.”<sup>4</sup> In the “dissonant, polyphonic affectivity of the ghost,” he declares, “there is the trace of what remains to be discovered.”<sup>5</sup> Lorde is invested in this trace as well. The afterimage as familiar distortion, as at once different and familiar—“dissonant” and “polyphonic”—is a space of imagery unfolding. The time-elapsing significance of this unfolding is also a part of its force. Taking the shape of the image before it, only altered, the afterimage requires the work of the viewer in order to be decipherable. To be known.

But “however the image enters” the black imaginary, “its force remains.”<sup>6</sup> For Lorde it is a moving carousel of violated black flesh that the poet encounters when she walks “through a northern summer,” her eyes “averted / from each corner’s photographies.” Her particular “aversion” has a sound that matches Moten’s. And for her it is “louder than life” and circular, leading from “pictures of black broken flesh / used, crumpled, and discarded / lying amid the sidewalk refuse / like a raped woman’s face,” to the “flickering afterimages of a nightmare rain.”<sup>7</sup> “I wade through summer ghosts,” she writes, “betrayed by vision / hers and my own.” This betrayal of vision is one of severe iteration, as “summer ghosts” populate the speaker’s ocular canvas, vying for her attention.

Mamie Till, Emmett Till’s mother, is the other “her” who forces a photographic engagement with the murder of her only child, and in Lorde’s poem Mamie Till is also the “her” who “wrings her hands / beneath the weight of agonies remembered,” and her son’s famous photographic imprint lingers over and through Lorde’s articulation.<sup>8</sup> In the doubling properties of her use of “refuse” (“lying amid the sidewalk refuse”), Lorde locates an urban iteration of a southern horror steeped in what Saidiya Hartman calls “the afterlife of slavery.”<sup>9</sup>

“The site of memory is also the sight of memory,” Katherine McKittrick contends, invoking the Toni Morrison essay that places blackness in the landscape of the racial formation of the United States.<sup>10</sup> For McKittrick, then, “imagination requires a return to and engagement with painful

places, worlds where black people were denied humanity, belonging, and formal citizenship.”<sup>11</sup> To enter this engagement and its “painful places” requires an examination of transatlantic slavery and black women’s necessary positioning within it. It requires a totality of vision—the image and the afterimage—in order to grapple with all of the ways in which black women fail to be seen with any clarity or insight.

What Mary Ann Doane refers to as the “persistence of vision,” the photographic afterimage, is embodied in the literature of the African diaspora with its insistence on visually rendering the potency and force of the transnational imaginary.<sup>12</sup> This afterimage is also present within the visual culture of the black Atlantic and forms a layering of contingent imagery therein. It is the place where black women’s endurances have been used against them, and their bare survival is reconfigured as a strength that cannot be altered, damaged, or destroyed. The force of representation enters a collective consciousness and remains within—seen, though distorted—and therefore remaining unknown.<sup>13</sup> Part of the purpose of this project is to follow the trace of slavery’s memory in black women’s literary and visual representations. I am specifically interested in the realm of the visual and the proliferation of imagery seeking to address the impossible duality between black women’s representations and slavery’s memory.

I turn to John Edgar Wideman’s novel *The Cattle Killing* (1996) to consider the import of the afterimage in this work of fiction. Early on in the novel, the unnamed narrator speaks briefly with Rowe, a former slave physically and emotionally scarred by the oppressive system he endured, “his whole dark body a map of torture.”<sup>14</sup> The narrator wonders how Rowe still manages to possess a smile that “positively glows” against the reality of his present existence.<sup>15</sup> When Rowe is asked to share “the vision that beams” in his gaze of subtle satisfaction, the former slave happily agrees. “Sometime I looks at the sky and close my eyes and I see the whole world startin over again,” Rowe begins.<sup>16</sup> In this space of internal visual creation, the ex-slave observes “a black man and a black woman and a white man and a white woman laid side by side fresh out of the oven and theys the only people God done made. Black man he wake up first this time. Remember everything. Quick. Grab ax. Chop white man head.”<sup>17</sup> Rowe continues his reimagining of the biblical story of creation by next figuring the black man and the white woman in a narrow lock where he sexu-

ally possesses her but ensures that she will bear no children—that, in the future, “ain’t gone be no more white peoples cept this one woman.”<sup>18</sup> Rowe spends the majority of this monologue concerned with “ramming” and “fixing” the white woman and ends by turning to the narrator, saying, “And that, scuse me Reverend, what I see sometimes when you see me smiling up at Heaven, Amen.”<sup>19</sup>

In this unsettling and violent liberation narrative, the phrase “remember everything” is key. It is at once a rhetorical statement (“I remember everything”) and a command, delivered in the imperative (“remember everything!”). Embedded within an imagined momentary yielding, Rowe fantasizes about trading places with his white patriarchal counterpart and severing his competition in one fell swoop. Remember everything. Within the phrase, buried silently beneath the dichotomous repulsion/desire left lingering and barren inside the body of the white woman, is the assumed acceptance and collusion of the black woman, who, we are to imagine, shares her memory with Rowe and understands his inclination toward violence. Is the former slave truly working within the process of memory? He moves seamlessly between an act of physical liberation to “chop white man head” and shifts immediately onto his next concern, the white woman, lying prostrate, eager to receive him. She is envisioned as a version of evil he must destroy by giving “a good ramming.” For a man musing over his ability to “remember everything,” the passage is conveniently forgetful of the black woman who is integral to the narrative but ignored within it. She is a visual necessity, but a logistical inconvenience. The black woman in this example is an afterimage of all she has witnessed and experienced—a ghost of representation. She is both “betrayed by vision,” in Lorde’s imagination, and “lying amid the sidewalk refuse,” awaiting her articulation. The passage situates her within Rowe’s narrative and tangential to her body: a visual vessel for Rowe’s imagination and an apt illustration of his need to return to the origin of man’s creation and begin again.

If, as Doane asserts, the afterimage proves that “vision was subject to delay,” and that “the theory of the afterimage presupposes a temporal aberration, an incessant invasion of the present moment by the past,” what is to be made of the black Atlantic body forgotten?<sup>20</sup> Doane’s useful articulation, “the idea that temporality invades vision,” is one that lends itself to the machinations of the afterimage of slavery, and the

interactions that locate themselves between the hyperpresence of black women within the slave system and the particular experiences that continue to present them as “marked women,” to borrow from Hortense Spillers, that “render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh” and “whose disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color.”<sup>21</sup> In order to “remember everything,” Rowe would have to acknowledge the black woman who emerged with him “fresh out of the oven” as an entity imbued with a history of infliction and capable of considering herself deserving of a recognized history—a “remember everything” of her very own. In this recognition, her story would be told from her specific vantage point; her concerns, her desires, and her observations would rise to the forefront.

The negotiated trajectory of tortured flesh is explored most fully in Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* (1987), which depicts three generations of women related through blood, slavery, and death. For Sethe, a woman with bodily scars ever present but not easily seen, her obsessive attempt to control memory frames her engagement with the world. Negotiating multiple traumatic violations against her body (physical, sexual, psychological, generational, scopic, maternal), she retreats into a world of word, sound, and image, vacillating between the material and the ethereal as her long-dead daughter returns to her in the flesh.

The generational lineage of black pain, literally “written on the back” of black female subjectivity, is a repetition of imagistic concern in the novel. In Sethe’s world, there is the scarred back that she cannot see and the killed daughter made flesh again (and this she *can* see). Slavery’s violent proximities, its aggressive intimacy is mapped out in Morrison’s novel with a particular attention to the world of the visual. This is an intimacy and proximity that provides breast milk to other people’s offspring, features a negotiation of sex *within* violence, and conflates and elongates temporality, and therefore pain.<sup>22</sup> *To remember everything in fragments and pieces.* The marking of Sethe’s flesh happens against her will, and the physical scars, the keloids she possesses on her back, rise out of the physical and sexual violence she has sustained and thicken instead of disappearing. The residue of this slave experience is a part of Sethe’s “remember,” a reframing of the particular and the general that she utilizes in order to hold firm to her subjectivity and to get other people to see it as she does.

Sethe's witnessing is thus communal and interactive, and though her pain is her own, she articulates it outward as a less evolved part of her subconscious that she must nevertheless appease. Sethe attempts to curtail illegible torture at the point of the narrative visual. *Beloved* offers us a "rememory" for Rowe's "remember everything" and, in doing so, a unique way of seeing the *force that remains within*. Sethe reorganizes temporal order as she remembers events and emphasizes the intimate contingencies others may miss when, for instance, they focus on one aspect of her physical presentation (the tree on her back) as opposed to others that are less visible (her stolen milk, her missing husband, her dead child). In *Beloved* there are unique and expected corporeal repetitions: two Denvers (Sethe's daughter and Amy Denver, the white woman who helps Sethe give birth to her last child); three Beloveds (the baby, "crawling already," the ghost in the home, and the woman who returns to 124 Bluestone Road to take the baby's fleshed-out and grown adult female form); and several Pauls (the brothers: Paul D, Paul A, Paul F). Bodies repeat in the narrative in an attempt to grasp the enormous weight of slavery on black Atlantic subjects. The repeated bodies, narratives, and names make clear that it takes many generations to grasp the horrendous event of slavery. And in order to "remember everything," black women, alive, dead, and in-between, linger and loiter, waiting to have their stories told. My interest in this project is to trace out these repetitions as they move across particular genres of representation and to think through these renderings that have so encapsulated the black imaginary within a narrow containment of black women's visibility.

In his introduction to *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, Antonio Benítez-Rojo graphically utilizes the symbolic power of imperial violation through the rhetoric of birth-through-conquest. "The Atlantic is the Atlantic," he writes, "because it was the painfully delivered child of the Caribbean, whose vagina was stretched between continental clamps." During this process of violation, Benítez-Rojo asserts, "after the blood and salt water spurts, quickly sew up torn flesh and apply the antiseptic tinctures, the gauze and surgical plaster; then the febrile wait through the forming of a scar."<sup>23</sup> Here gendered hyperpresence, indeed, the gendered hyperavailability of particular bodies, is treated to both a violent birth and a kind of postmortem examination, with all of the clinical investigation the event necessitates. In this space

of birth without female subjectivity, the gendered body is one of total and complete physical (and violent) utility. To think of the “painfully delivered child” as having a birth mother would necessitate a consideration that was both observant and inclusive. “The integrity of the race is thus made interchangeable with the integrity of black masculinity,” Paul Gilroy writes, “which must be regenerated at all costs.”<sup>24</sup> Again we see what it looks like when women are a visual and corporeal necessity but a logistical inconvenience. Like Rowe’s silent black woman, they are mostly objects of articulation for men to write through.<sup>25</sup> While I share with Benítez-Rojo an interest in what happens when the ruptures of empire and slavery form the threading material of culture and identity, my purpose here is to stay with the symbolic figure of this impact when she is no longer just symbol, but subject. Mine, then, is an emphasis that employs the photographic trace to retrieve women from the margins of slavery’s framing mechanisms.<sup>26</sup>

As James Elkins argues in *The Object Stares Back*, “We prefer to have bodies in front of us or in our hands, and if we cannot have them, we continue to see them, as afterimages or ghosts.”<sup>27</sup> Therein lies the difficulty in attempting to wrest black women from the trace of the corporeal. Where could they go without bringing the past along with them? Where would we let them go without our perception of their bodies’ utility in an ocular world? Part of the work of this book is to make legible the multiple enactments of hypervisibility black women cannot escape, and to highlight artistic attempts at using opacity, framing, fragmentation, and repetitions of the visual to illustrate a desire for black subjectivity that includes black women within it.

This project gathers at the intersection of literature and visual culture studies, building on the work of Saidiya Hartman in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, Avery Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, and Christina Sharpe’s *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects*. Sharpe’s intervention in particular brings into focus many of the contemporary traces remaining after slavery’s demise that I also interrogate. Hartman and Gordon measure the meaning of embodiment: how, in the words of Hartman, its very “fungibility” is the key to envisioning black subjectivity through its requisite deployments and representational iconographies.

*The Repeating Body* is a book informed by black feminist theory, visual

culture studies, literary criticism, and critical race theory. It is with this determinedly interdisciplinary lens that I endeavor to investigate the phenomenon of black women's representational late contemporary restructuring. I am interested in Jennifer DeVere Brody's attendant portrayals of grammatical structure and the traces of violence located in fictional narratives; Katherine McKittrick's engagement with black women, bodies, and the geographic resonance of space; Jenny Sharpe's diasporic interrogation of narratives of resistance; and Jennifer L. Morgan's analysis of slavery's reproductive and reproducing mechanisms. Within this well-established rubric of black feminism, I want to privilege the centrality of the visual as a prevailing feature of black Atlantic literature, using contemporary visual culture as another way to engage this discourse.<sup>28</sup>

When Sethe allows others to see the scars on her back, she conceals and reveals all at once. As she exposes her previous physical pain and makes herself vulnerable and open to reading, she also obscures a visual reading of her face. The corporeal refusal she enacts here engages in the vernacular discourse of black Atlantic metaphoric communicating ("I got a tree on my back . . . I've never seen it and never will").<sup>29</sup> It is a call-and-response interaction that reads (or allows others to read) the body and its narrative.<sup>30</sup> To refuse (by turning your back to someone) is to move outside the realm of racial and corporeal familiarity and "knowing." It is to turn your back (refusing a full entrance into the frame) on those who would propose to know *you*, to put mystery in the place of that *knowing*.

An emphasis of black feminist articulation gives us a totality of vision, attuned to the visual properties of slavery's memory. The resonant echoes of slavery's memory have a genealogy that is repetitive, and rituals and gestures that are cadent and fluid. They allow us to see how black women must occupy the center of the frame of a system that literally gave birth to modernity. "Slavery has ended," Avery Gordon writes, "but something of it continues to live on in the social geography of where people reside . . . in the veins of the contradictory formation we call New World modernity."<sup>31</sup> This "contradictory formation" masks the import of the very centrality (of black women and their bodies) organizing transatlantic slavery and its resonant imprint.

To give birth to modernity is no small order, particularly if that very act is considered a masculine feat, devoid of women. In one of Carrie Mae Weems's more provocative examinations of creation, subjugation, and



the continuing conundrum of DNA, she engages in a genealogical trace that is historical, imagistic, and national. The fifth panel of the six-panel series called *The Jefferson Suite* is the only one that includes a representation of both Thomas Jefferson and his slave Sally Hemings as the foci of the frame (figure 1.1). Jefferson's quill pen draws the viewer's eye to the center of the frame, as it appears that he creates Hemings out of the recesses of some previous declaration—over certain bodies, out of others. While both subjects have their backs to the viewer, Jefferson is visualized as someone who is free and open, intimated by the position of his arm and the quill, the apparatus of his legibility. Weems-as-Hemings represents self-portraiture's resurrecting possibilities within a black Atlantic self-reflective imperative. She is a figure of both mystery and mastery. Arms crossed in front and with her head facing the direction of a window the viewer cannot see, the faint appearance of light the only indication of a reprieve from total enclosure, Weems offers the slight inference of a failure of communication between the two. Not just quill against gesture, Jefferson is illustrated as fully clothed while Hemings's shoulders and arms are bare, an errant shoulder strap either absentmindedly or purposely drawn down, illustrating the framing mechanism's perspective of choice. If, as Saidiya Hartman claims, "the discourse of seduction obfuscates the primacy and extremity of violence in master-slave relations," Weems-as-Hemings delineates this concept as a failure of the archive, or an available archive that others refused to see.<sup>32</sup>

*The Jefferson Suite* illustrates racial ambiguity, merging it to the slave system Thomas Jefferson symbolized through rhetorical inconsistency, lust, and lineage. Here, "suite" connotes an interior, private space where lovers come together (hotel suite), a connected set of musical notes or chords, or, as in its auditory configuration, a pleasing smell or taste (sweet). If we think of *The Jefferson Suite* and the bodies presented as "types" collected and cataloged like the human and animal possessions marked in Jefferson's famous *Farm Book*, the suite becomes an ironic play on words, the sweetness dissipates. What remains, though, is the question of *affect* and *effect*, the sentimental attachments of the visual and the familial and their lingering imaginaries. Severing the viewer's ocular comportment while making malleable the corporeal dimensions of slavery's legacy, *The Jefferson Suite* contains the delineations of the evidentiary photograph, linking it to past presidents and plantations, science, possession, and lineage.



I.1. *Re-enactment of the Jefferson-Hemings Affair*, Carrie Mae Weems, 2003.  
Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery.

That Hemings's body is the text upon which democracy stands and modernity forms allows Weems the ability to perform a postemancipation declaration of slave visibility. With her back turned to the viewer, Jefferson's articulation, and the mismanagement of history, Weems-as-Hemings seeks to interrogate the place of the known historical narrative and its always-embattled counterconstruction. Using Hemings and her famous master as symbolic precursors to photography's duplicating prerogatives, Weems's self-portrait underscores the contemporary obsession with DNA as biological proof along with its concomitant imagery, prephotographic temporally, but inferred with a force of visuality all its own. To envision, then, slave subjectivity within the structure of slave agency and limited mobility is to splice the narrative and reorganize it. For this, a negotiation of word and image brings the body into focus, brings history into the frame, and whether the work is literary or visual, the pattern of repetition remains the same.

A repetition of corporeal refusal within the photographic frame sets the visual trajectory in opposite motion—controlled and taut, slowly releasing the narrative deployments of the visual and corporeal that are often neglected. Weems fashions an archive out of the visibility of her skin. She brings to the center of the frame a woman who would have been relegated to the footnote of history had it not been for the insistence of her archival embodiment. Her descendants ultimately provided the archive that now registers her legibility. Before that she was a ghost like the fictional *Beloved*—a haunting that marred the good name of the third president of the United States.

In the sheer repetition of imagery associated with this one figure (from William Wells Brown to Natasha Trethewey, Carrie Mae Weems, and Robbie McCauley), there has been a refusal to forget, a refusal to bend to the will of nearly two hundred years of fierce rhetorical denial.<sup>33</sup> *Sethe* describes events like this to her daughter Denver as “a thought picture” that both is and is not. Instead, it is more like a collective event, like “when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else.”<sup>34</sup> If we think of the afterimage as a violation of the gaze, the “force that remains within,” the repetition of this force creates a visual circle that can seem unyielding. The afterimage as temporal motif, then, is the organizing mechanism suturing black women to the cultural narratives that have been used to placate black Atlantic subjectivities in flux.

Symbolic of the corporeal register of subjectivities in flux, María Magdalena Campos-Pons's *When I Am Not Here/Estoy Alla* (plate 1) envisions a diaspora that is bilingual, black, female, and the end product of the transatlantic slave trade. It is a representation of the riverain goddess Yemayá, the traveling deity of reproduction, resurrection, and reckoning. In the anonymity of the fragment there is also the imprint of a diasporic return. This return is a frontal assault of corporeality and visibility, engaging the viewer in a layered construction of all that the image cannot contain, and that which flows out from the body.

Sea waves envelop a woman's body, fragmenting her form. From the neckline through her waist she embodies the Atlantic Ocean, its organic properties, and the mechanized reproduction (via the bottles of milk draped around her neck) facilitated by and through slavery's birth and rebirth. She occupies the bifocality of the black diaspora, the left and right hemispheric alignment that locates itself on black women's bodies. In the self-portrait other bodies enter the frame with Campos-Pons. They slip in under the rubric of black Atlantic haunting. Since the image also invokes the Middle Passage deity Yemayá, there is an otherworldly element here that conflates the temporal demarcation of slavery's transmission. In the circular logic surrounding slavery's "eternal return," oceans meet bodies in flux and alter the trajectory, the sway, and the movement of the transatlantic slave trade.

I am interested in the rhythm and the extension of this movement, in the many disparate locations that allow it to glide through cartographies of violence that "though they were unspeakable . . . were not inexpressible."<sup>35</sup> In the multiple temporal possibilities engendered by the production of slavery in the New World, I focus on those that hover as they drift, a skulking metaphor for the past that is, according to Christina Sharpe, "not yet past."<sup>36</sup> In doing so, I offer not a definitive and linear trajectory of cultural production in the Americas but instead a gathering of archival intent, that which places all of the confluences and displacements of the visual at the center of contemporary engagements.<sup>37</sup> I do this because studies of the black Atlantic and its subjectivities have always been studies of visual culture(s), whether or not they have been received as such.<sup>38</sup>

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What can encompass this haunted house of empires and nations, this transnational narrative of silence and strength hovering over representations of slavery in the United States, the Caribbean, and Brazil? Repetition. I have structured as a thematic production the repetitive qualities of the black Atlantic that hover somewhere between the past and the present.<sup>39</sup> Each chapter of *The Repeating Body* is informed by an aspect of repetition that provides insight into the visual, material, and gendered iterations of slavery's indelible memory.<sup>40</sup> Whether it functions as afterimage, double exposure, hyperembodiment, or the ocular and auditory meditation of a diasporic riff, repetition brings the figuration of slavery into being with the force of modernity. This is a phenomenon of the contemporary and is particularly suited to explore and expand on slavery's gendered modulations. For this reason I have incorporated multiple geographic locations, multiple genres of representation, and multiple repetitions of the ocular. I have also employed some textual repetitions and duplicating extensions so that it is possible in this text that a novel like Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, with its uncanny mutating abilities, will occupy space in multiple chapters. In *The Repeating Body*, Morrison's novel becomes the threading text, a novel that painfully lays bare the reiterative qualities of slavery's burdens.

The first chapter of the book positions repetition as afterimage—as the figurative register of what gets left over when the eye no longer has the image before it. I begin by considering articulations of slave women's sexual agency, particularly when these women are the mothers of both slavery and freedom, giving birth to the children of slave masters. Specifically, I examine the place of whiteness moving through slave women's bodies and the postmodern inversion of this phenomenon. In chapter 1, "Black Rapture: Corporeal Afterimage and Transnational Desire," I use Mary Ann Doane's theory of the photographic afterimage and Saidiya Hartman's critical engagement with the performative space of the plantation as a way to situate slave women's bodies as corporeal "sites of memory" wherein white men visit their patriarchal predecessors' handiwork in the bodies of their own slaves and yearn to make a mark of their own.

The afterimage is an ocular residue, a visual duplication as well as an alteration. One could call it a burning image that eventually fades. And

that image is based on another, the one before the *after* of the image. The myth of black women's sexual supremacy furthers this cause, as it is precisely the marking of their flesh that serves as the racial coding to the planter class, while making the intense violence of the system difficult to discern. As visual phenomena, afterimages represent slavery's profound ability to linger throughout the diaspora. They linger in the architectural structures built for the system to self-proliferate: landscapes of myriad mechanical testaments to enslavement, the racial fetish of a bygone era, and family portraits illustrating the height and depth of property relations—inanimate and human—that perpetuate the visuality of hegemony.

Visual imagery becomes particularly useful here, solidifying representation and directing the trajectory of the discourse. This chapter juxtaposes contemporary artistic representations of Sally Hemings, Margaret Garner, and Brazil's Chica da Silva and concerns the visual positionality these women enter. The imagistic lens of slavery confronts the space whiteness occupies within repetitive sexualized violence. I examine narratives of nonbiological, familial connectivity crafted by artists who see little space between the violations of the past and their present diasporic bodies. Robbie McCauley's play *Sally's Rape* links the corporeal legacy of her great-great-grandmother Sally with that of herself as well as the "Sally" of Jefferson folklore. Faith Ringgold, in her *thangka* print *Slave Rape Series*, challenges the anonymity of sexually exploited slave women by marking the canvas with her own image as a pregnant slave woman fleeing a lascivious overseer.

In the *after* of these images, there is the temporal instability that weaves the past onto the present, visually representing a conflation of imagery writ across time. In this book I attend to the contemporary negotiation of slavery that tethers itself to the world of the visual.<sup>41</sup> It is within the realm of repetition, its looping and determined return, that black Atlantic subjectivities are able, in all of their profound and disparate in-*vectives*, to be seen.

To be seen. Double vision and sight conspire here, in this space of insistent recognition, the ocular comportment of engagement. Rendered as simultaneously hypervisible and invisible, black women function within the register of externally imposed enclosures. What is it that brings the event of slavery out of the archive and into the plain sight of the late con-

temporary? What tethers its import, its tendency to reverberate into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? In slavery's heightened visible register, gender delineates the force and future repetition of the usable corpus, a double marking that has reverberations throughout and beyond the Americas. They tell us how to see the beneath and beyond of the system of slavery, the "visions and revisions" fueling poetry, fiction, and visual art practices. The afterimage here occupies the space of stubborn insistence and transcultural haunting, the pathos of diaspora.

Chapter 2, "Fragmented Figurations of the Maternal," presents repetition as the double exposure of the black diaspora, as the suture between production, reproduction, and counterproduction. The concept of double exposure (as I am articulating it here) structures violent and discordant interactions within the contemporary as continually fraught with the tonal frequencies of slavery's remains. Repetition functions as and through this bifocality, a layering of contingent imagery embodying both sight and sound.

In this chapter I argue that processes of black maternal longing limit the ability of black women to self-possess; this is a disjuncture that artists highlight through fragmentation, sectioning off parts of black women's bodies (and often their own) imaginistically to mark the collective "parsing" out of black maternal capacities. This is always negotiated through a cultural reinforcement of surrogate mothering or, to use Patricia Hill Collins's term, "othermothering." Along with the collective request that black women participate in repetitions of maternal sacrifice, there are representations that challenge the siphoning of black women's power through the maternal, literally marking the place of maternal dependence and visual impossibility.

In the synesthetic quality of this productive deployment, visual and auditory impulses converge, performing through the matter and the mode of the black Atlantic. "The question of racial terror," writes Paul Gilroy, "always remains in view when these modernisms are discussed because imaginative proximity to terror is their inaugural experience."<sup>42</sup> Within this "inaugural experience" are the pace and proximity of the black maternal, the mode and manner of its diasporic iteration. Bound to this iteration of the diaspora, repetition as reproduction offers us improvisation and agitation, movement within the visuality of maternal retrieval and within a constant state of loss. Utilizing a flood of imagery

associated with black women's conflicted maternity, I emphasize the role of fragmentation in illuminating the ruptured nature of postslavery maternal processes.

Chapter 3, "The Boundaries of Excess," deploys the visual register of hyperembodiment and disembodiment in order to investigate the ever-expansive corporeal tether that binds black women to the framework of slavery's making. Here I use visual shielding and the gender transference of slave women's bodies as a way to read the corporeal trajectory of diasporic movement and loss as a narrative of excess. This chapter looks at artistic representations of physical prowess in American abolitionist Harriet Tubman and Brazilian slave deity Blessed Anastácia. I argue that certain historical figures of the black Atlantic are symbolic body armor and are portrayed as such; their representations are created to serve as virtual/visual protection to black masses. For Tubman, this is done through rhetoric and rifle, as literary and visual images reinforce a hypermasculine performance of collective protection. Fred D'Aguiar's novel *Feeding the Ghosts* imagines the male historical survivor of the throwing overboard from the slave ship *Zong* as a woman who climbs back onto the ship after being tossed off and subsequently plans an insurrection. Hyperembodiment and disembodiment extend the visibility of the boundary between utility and excessive use, delineating the marker of black women's corporeal availability as continually shifting beyond and beneath the horizon of the grand spectacle that is slavery's contemporary representation.

The final chapter, "The Return: Conjuring the Figure, Following the Form," concerns the materiality of the event of slavery that seeps through cultural productions of the black diaspora with force. In the tumultuous rendering of both subject and object, slavery creates/anticipates the Du Boisian structure of double-consciousness that, had it a visual register, would always be photographic. The stereograph, a photographic image popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, intimates this doubling with slant repetition. It is the mechanism that mimics both the eye and the ear, pairs of visual and auditory encompassing that function as a methodology for survival. This survival engenders a future fraught with slavery's duplication: formerly enslaved people who are not yet free, and whose "freedom" bears the violence, marginality, and hyper-visibility of slavery's tether. To step out of the shadow of slavery in the contemporary means gazing back onto the haunting of its varied past.



It is an event that is always invoking, always evoking. And like any other haunting, it has the desire to be seen.

In this final chapter I prioritize the matter of diaspora, the dependent methodology of the black Atlantic that taps into the bare survival of others in order to highlight the liminal status of both the enslaved and the marginally free. This bare survival deepens the discourse of the ocular that slavery manipulated; it is a large part of the reason black women still exist under a rubric of repeated and excessive use. Here, I focus on iterations of ethereal haunting in literature, imbued with a hyperdependence on black women's "resurrecting" qualities. Mystics, preachers, and god figures maintain the black diasporic space between the living and the dead and drift in out of the black Atlantic imaginary as purposeful martyrs negotiating their place within a structured narrative of what Avery Gordon calls "ghostly matters."

Standing between Western productions of stasis and movement, slavery ruptures a linear trajectory in favor of flux: the flux of subjectivity, of permeability, and the flux of protection and possession. Literal movement places the body in a position of external whim, coercion, force, and self-theft. If, as many critical race and slavery studies scholars assert, black Atlantic subjectivities force an engagement with death that is repetitive and unrelenting, these engagements survive off of the riff and the motif of New World slavery.<sup>43</sup> In the contemporary there can be no accounting for the total enclosure of slavery and its aftermath without being attuned to the aural and imagistic mandates that locate themselves at the site of the event. There can be no telling of this story without making black women central, no way to see the indexical force of the horrendous event of transnational slavery unless the way of seeing, the sight and the sound of it, is rearticulated and black women are at the center of the frame.

Sethe's created recollecting, her "rememory," mirrors Rowe's internal mandate (from *The Cattle Killing*) to "remember everything," placing the event that is slavery and its afterlife at the center of a visual and corporeal retrieval. For this retrieval to reach its fullest invocation we must pay close attention to what black female artists are showing us, how, in the words of Anne Cheng, "we do not master by seeing; we are ourselves altered when we look."<sup>44</sup> I hope *The Repeating Body* works within the vein of the camera lucida, allowing multiple vantage points through which to layer slavery's recurring and repeating visions.