



PROJECT MUSE®

---

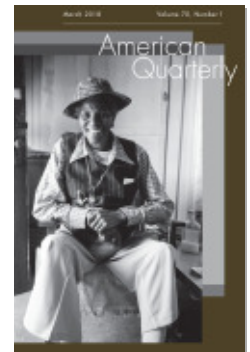
The Shape of Poetics to Come: On Taking Up the Task of  
Criticism

Tiana Reid

American Quarterly, Volume 70, Number 1, March 2018, pp. 139-150 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2018.0008>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/689161>

# The Shape of Poetics to Come: On Taking Up the Task of Criticism

*Tiana Reid*

***And: Phenomenology of the End.* By Franco “Bifo” Berardi. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2015. 352 pages. \$17.95 (paper).**

***The Argonauts.* By Maggie Nelson. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2015. 160 pages. \$23.00 (hardcover).**

***Difficult Diasporas: The Transnational Feminist Aesthetic of the Black Atlantic.* By Samantha Pinto. New York: New York University Press, 2013. 281 pages. \$89.00 (cloth). \$27.00 (paper).**

***Freedom Time: The Poetics and Politics of Black Experimental Writing.* By Anthony Reed. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2014. 262 pages. \$44.95 (hardcover). \$24.95 (paper).**

***In the Wake: On Blackness and Being.* By Christina Sharpe. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016. 192 pages. \$79.95 (cloth). \$22.95 (paper).**

***She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks.* By M. NourbeSe Philip. Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2015. 110 pages. \$15.95 (paper).**

“I would die for Poetry”

—Bob Kaufman

It is revealing—of past social traces and present political desires—that when we think of Karl Marx, we do not also think of poetics. His well-known *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* was a study of abstractions (an analysis of capital on its way to capitalism) in which he was invested in the literary importance of the unverifiable.<sup>1</sup> To set the stage for his working-class reader, Marx employed

the usual suspects of literature: storytelling, metaphors, imagery, personifications, and allusions. And when writing about the vicious repetitions of world-historical events in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), Marx engaged a range of theater metaphors to drive home his point about the instrumentality of the lumpenproletariat in the making of a so-called bourgeois revolution in nineteenth-century France. Among other tropes, he relied on the performative work of tragedy, stages, roles, and costumes. The first of seven sections of his noted historical study also brings us to another aesthetic category at the heart of not only revolution but also criticism: poetry. Marx writes in an oft-quoted passage in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* that “the social [*soziale*] revolution of the nineteenth century can only draw its poetry from the future, not from the past.”<sup>2</sup>

Where will the social revolution of the twenty-first century, if it comes, if it is not already here, draw its poetry? Marx urged that poetry itself is embedded in the language and history of future revolutions. In mapping out contemporary social, political, and economic urgencies, will the difference between past, present, and future revolutions come down to the work of poetics, that delicate mix of chance, relation, and criticism? To riff on Ornette Coleman’s vision of sonically configured futures in his 1959 jazz album, what is the shape of poetics to come?<sup>3</sup>

While considering the kind of criticism that might be up to the task of identifying and responding to contemporary contradictions, Fredric Jameson recently described current criticism as being a very “free form,” consisting of a range of methodologies, approaches, and differences.<sup>4</sup> Not settling for the bipartition implied in a term like *hybrid form*, *free form* has been a way to describe aesthetic categories absented of fixed structures—such as jazz and free verse poetry. There is yet another way to think about this free form, however, in terms of one of the most important developments in American literary studies in the late twentieth century, which has been arguing for the importance of the relation between what occurs on the so-called outside of the text (human experience, atrocities of war, local politics, etc.) to questions of rhythm, diction, imagery, metaphor, parataxis, tropes, symbols, and other formal literary techniques. In this light, criticism can reinvigorate itself through a kind of free form, by organizing different ways that questions and answers are formulated. And yet this insistence on a political and social critique, not only *of* but *through* literature, and one without guarantees, has plausibly been waning in English departments in the United States, where many have settled for descriptive, surface, or distant reading—in a word, neutrality over a sketch of the stakes of socio-historical-political specificities.<sup>5</sup>

Recent works of criticism in and around American studies are taking up the question of free form through poetics expanded beyond the terrain of poetry itself, criticism as poetics wherein both modes conjoin as a method of political, social, cultural, theoretical, and economic inquiry. What I call criticism as poetics attempts to make use of the literary as an invitation for what Marx called the “poetry of the future.” The expectation that criticism’s critical edge and poetry’s definitively creative perspective are two opposing modes of relation is a divide undermined by what Fred Moten has called a “dual mode” of poetry and criticism, which has a long history in American avant-garde poetry (arising from the sensibilities of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson onward to writers including Ezra Pound, Charles Olson, and Amiri Baraka who wrote poetry but also theorized about poetics—often in their poems themselves—as a way to articulate philosophical questions).<sup>6</sup>

While the discipline-blurring books selected for this review essay have a diverse scope, each analyzes the contemporary historical conjuncture by prodding open poetry and refashioning the task of criticism. They include Anthony Reed’s black politics of form in *Freedom Time: The Poetics and Politics of Black Experimental Writing* (2014); Christina Sharpe’s critique of antiblack violence and formations of contemporary ontological constructions in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016); the embodied autotheory of Maggie Nelson’s memoir *The Argonauts* (2015); Samantha Pinto’s intimate feminist reading in *Difficult Diasporas: The Transnational Feminist Aesthetic of the Black Atlantic* (2013); M. NourbeSe Philip’s sonic-literary testings in *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* (2015); and Franco “Bifo” Berardi’s semiotics of capitalism in *And: Phenomenology of the End* (2015). In this review essay, I situate three overlapping problematics through a dyadic comparative frame: Pinto’s and Reed’s investigation of black writing and/as poetics; poetics without poetry in the autotheoretical work of Nelson and Sharpe; and paratext and poetry as excess in Philip and Berardi within the violent forces of contemporary global capitalism that thrive on appropriating surplus value. Collectively, these authors map directions to consider poetics as constituting one task of an ongoing project of social, political, and literary criticism, marked by an America that works to both annihilate unruly modes of living and stifle the imaginative forces that constitute them. These recent publications suggest that to give an account of poetics is to render criticism as a manner of reckoning with a multigeneric, generative, and generous impulse to go off track. Attending to poetics illuminates how the terms of language circumscribe our imaginaries about the past, present, and future, and make a difference for how to encounter heavy strictures that bind and make the everyday.

Pinto's *Difficult Diasporas* and Reed's *Freedom Time* are two publications in transnational American literary studies that make a call to and for poetics, a poetics that carries a trace of poetry but does not refer only to poems, that is, a literary work with recognizable formal qualities such as rhythm, meter, rhyme, stanzaic structures, and enjambment. Indeed, Pinto and Reed tend to think of poetics as capacious and contingent, lingering around Lawrence Upton's question, "What if writing were a subset of poetry rather than the other way around?"<sup>7</sup> Both books, which won the Modern Language Association's William Sanders Scarborough Prize for black American literature or culture in their respective publication years, examine literatures of the African diaspora in the aftermath of the civil rights movement. Reed examines the work of African American and Caribbean writers—Suzan-Lori Parks, Philip, Kamau Brathwaite, Claudia Rankine, Douglas Kearney, Harryette Mullen, and Nathaniel Mackey—within debates of experimentation, race, representation, and social transformation. In an attempt to destabilize the relation between gender, race, and location, Pinto focuses exclusively on women writers in Africa and its diaspora, including Elizabeth Alexander, Adrienne Kennedy, Ama Ata Aidoo, Zora Neale Hurston, Erna Brodber, Bessie Head, Zoë Wicomb, and Philip. Assessing the genre diversity of the spotlighted writers, both Pinto and Reed have "poetry" as an explicit object of study in their literary analysis alongside other forms of writing: Reed combines poetry, music, plays, and the visual, while Pinto illuminates the interstices "beyond the novel" through profile, song, drama, poetry, and short fiction (5). Despite the heterogeneity of their objects of analysis, what makes their conceptual apparatus similar is their reach toward the expansiveness of the category of poetics, resulting in what Pinto calls a "shift not away from form and structure but toward it" (9). Poetics here operates as a kind of placeholder for a multigeneric and multinational exorbitance that the poet and scholar of American poetics Maria Damon might call "micropoetries," that is, everyday "poetries that fly beneath the radar of accepted poetic practice [. . . which] are processes rather than object/products."<sup>8</sup>

By exploring the way experimentation destabilizes categories and divisions, *Difficult Diasporas* and *Freedom Time* pay attention to the aesthetic configurations of poetics as a jumping-off point for thinking about what literature can do to imagine something other than the established order. In her introduction to *Difficult Diasporas*, Pinto writes that the eponymous "difficult" refers to what she calls hard-to-digest "innovative" texts written by "difficult subjects," that is, "black women as authors/agents/disciplinary formations of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries" (3). Although Pinto is not as invested as Reed in tracing a tradition of the black avant-garde, Pinto's main claims are similar in

that she conceives of her objects of study as breaking the mold. In her introduction she writes:

Too often black women as subjects and artists are hemmed in by their established, legible frames. Black women writers who deviate from formal and generic convention are particularly hard to place for creative communities because of the limited foremothers they are allowed to claim on the innovation front and a difficult reception history in African American studies post-Black arts. (Pinto 2–3)

*Difficult Diasporas* is in part especially generative because it performs the very tasks it identifies through its playful orientation to the archive of twentieth-century black women cultural producers in theorizing what Pinto calls “a diaspora feminist aesthetics” (175). Pinto argues that by compiling an innovative archive that analyzes texts from a variety of genres and time periods, we can move from a teleological politics of representation and identity to something that acknowledges “failures of coherence” (11). Pinto knowingly draws her book’s own “paratactic, recombinant strategy of critical framing” from the textual strategies she examines—memoir, ethnography, fragmented novels, poetry, and experimental profiles (12). *Difficult Diasporas* questions—and by questioning expands—the bounds of critical engagement, insisting that poetry is not “the only scene for looking at poetics” (12). Poetics is one way to hold the “tentative, experimental economies of form and a set of aesthetic practices that flow unevenly across national and geographic borders in the Anglophone diaspora” (4).

Reed uses the Greek etymology of *poiesis*—“to make”—in order to appeal to the processual and relational aspects of what he calls “black experimental writing,” an emphasis that focuses on “literary effects rather than efficacy within an already defined discursive and political situation” (5). The origin of *poiesis* thus has verbal resonances, emphasizing making and creating. By stressing poetry’s etymology of the Greek *poiesis*, Reed’s focus is more so *writing* while Pinto’s is on *writers* as subjects with origins, biographies, and personal politics that leave social, cultural, and political marks on their text. In this vein, Pinto tends to prefer “aesthetics” over “poetics” as the umbrella term for the stray texts she archives because aesthetics gets after sensorial embodiment, those modes of experience that congeal around ways of making and living in the world. Both Pinto and Reed reevaluate the social valence of literary forms, meddling with the consignment of form to some apolitical space.

With no formal divide between living and making, Nelson and Sharpe practice criticism as a poetic engagement. Together they teach us something of what the poet Will Alexander vivaciously imagines: “Being benched by

consciousness, the poet finds that the magnetic inscription of words on the page is only part of a continuum.”<sup>9</sup> That is to say, the words on the page are not only in the world but *of* it. *The Argonauts* and *In the Wake* constitute what Pinto might call “prose assemblages”; they play with received forms of narrative textuality (15). Both *The Argonauts* and *In the Wake*, situated somewhere on the edge of a long essay or academic book, respectively, refuse literary categorization, a refusal that itself prods toward and against form, and produces a blurry configuration of the writings’ own design. This is writing that imperils the boundaries of textual engagement where yielding a critical project is also essentially a curatorial process, an enactment of picking and choosing, pairing and questioning, and mixing and melding that constitutes poetics without poetry. A bit of a misnomer, the “without” in “poetics without poetry” does not signal a lack but indexes a trace of something of poetry’s affective core—not merely its formal or stylistic properties. Nelson’s and Sharpe’s genre-blurring assemblages particularly explore the use of the self and exploit the feminized sphere of the “personal” beyond the codified literary-critical “memoir” genre. In the weavings of Nelson and Sharpe, what are stitched together are items as disparate as, say, a quote from psychoanalytic theory, film stills, a love letter, last year’s family death, yesterday’s lunch, a partner’s gaze, a favorite book. This assembly posits criticism as a poetics that offers an occasion for thinking associatively and an occasion for attending to relations.

*In the Wake*, published by a university press, does not produce what one might expect as a typical encounter with an academic publication. Similar to Ashon Crawley’s 2016 *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*, a publication with a quadruple conceptual-metaphorical map of “Breath,” “Shouting,” “Noise,” and “Tongues,” Sharpe’s book contains four brief yet jarring chapter titles—“The Wake,” “The Ship,” “The Hold,” and “The Weather.” These terms constitute the nodes of inquiry that attempt to “find the language” for the analytic Sharpe calls “wake work” (19). The first chapter (there is no introduction) sets up the metaphor of “the wake” as a polysemous apparatus that denotes “the keeping watch with the dead, the path of a ship, a consequence of something, in the line of flight and/or sight, awakening, and consciousness” (17–18).

The first word of *In the Wake* is “I”; “I wasn’t there when my sister died,” Sharpe writes, situating the first person in the ongoing terrain of the wake as a “past that is not past,” a wound that begins the book, a “there” that is also here (1, 9). Embarking on a project of heterogeneous time and location, Sharpe wants to “position this work, and [her]self, in and of the wake” and in so doing draws on what Saidiya Hartman has called the force of the “auto-

biographical example” as a critical and theoretical practice in order to situate her intellectual intervention, the way black death runs through the pulse of not only the world but *her* world as a black intellectual writing in the United States (8).<sup>10</sup> Hartman writes that “the autobiographical example is not a personal story that folds onto itself; it’s not about navel gazing, it’s really about trying to look at historical and social process and one’s own formation as a window onto social and historical processes, as an example of them” (7). To be sure, the first page of *The Argonauts* particularly unfolds the tension between sociohistorical processes and personal narratives. Here is a partial list of the various elements of Nelson’s multitude of literary techniques: the first sentences inscribe a date, “October, 2007,” offering a diaristic impulse; a reference to the weather, making the presence of the rough “Santa Ana winds” sensed by the reader; a second-person address to the first-time “you” (Harry, her partner, not *you*) “fuck me in the ass”; and an allusion to Ludwig Wittgenstein’s theory of inexpressibility (3). Nelson’s writing of the self is not contained to a specimen-level of example—autobiographical or not—rather, it operates as the thread of the book’s content itself: the tenuous links between exploring maternity, queer sexuality, desire, and radical politics; shifting family forms; and the legal-judicial. While the publisher, Gray Wolf, categorizes *The Argonauts* as memoir/criticism, the dust jacket calls the book a “genre-bending” work of “autotheory.” Borrowed from Paul Preciado’s *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, autotheory names the intersection of autobiography and theory. It is this insistence on autotheory that creates a poetics, a commitment to something new through this chapterless book that operates on a level of both the fragment and the essay.

Why does *The Argonauts* work this way, exposing the bones of the author’s self, in an effort to rework the problem of criticism as it relates to modes of intellectual living? Wrestling with the politics of choice, Nelson’s generous self-criticism comes out of a skepticism of “revolutionary language as a sort of fetish” (27). Because criticism has no guarantees, there is no other way but swiftly moving through different objects, tones, writers, and rhythms, putting so-called high theory next to the fleeing desire to sit outside during a cold day or the problem of having Harry, “a very private person,” read your writing about him next to the collective anxiety of what makes a subject “radical” (46). The enclosures of language—words like *queer*, *heteronormative*, and *radical*—force Nelson to find an escape.

While Nelson is elsewhere a published poet, *The Argonauts* is not a work of poetry. When she cites poets such as CAConrad and Eileen Myles, she *uses* them. But, similar to Sharpe, there is an excess to her prose that conjures a



poetics without poetry, a critical mode that requires poetics to imagine the multiple registers of the quotidian, the autobiographical, social theory, and politics. At a 2017 panel on *In the Wake* at Barnard College, the notion that *In the Wake* comprised a work that was very much “poetic” was a repeated motif. It is less that *In the Wake* is a poetic book than that interweaving of lines of poetry, dictionary definitions, theories of historiography, photojournalism from Getty Images, and stills from Alan Sekula’s 2010 film-essay *The Forgotten Space* suggests a criticism that requires the textures of poetics to conjure the ethical problematics of what it means to live in the aftermath of the historically specific trauma of the transatlantic slavery. Sharpe’s own interest in “poets and poet-novelists” such as Philip, Dionne Brand, and Brathwaite stems from a commitment to works that “do not seek to explain or resolve the question of this [black] exclusion in terms of assimilation, inclusion, or civil or human rights, but rather depict the impossibility of such resolutions by representing the paradoxes of blackness within and after the legacies of slavery’s denial of Black humanity” (14).

Sharpe uses a term called the “orthography of the wake” to describe the contemporary moment of disaster and the language that makes the visibility of disaster possible. In a similar vein, in *And: Phenomenology of the End*, Berardi thinks about the phenomenon of the America-centered regime of semiocapitalism, a portmanteau that combines the words capitalism and semiotics by drawing attention to notions of cognition and sensibility (58). For Berardi, a figure of the Italian Marxist autonomist movement, the present is intimately tied with America as a deterritorialized ideation (68). He writes: “By America, here, we are not referring to the North American territory subject to the jurisdiction of the United States of America, but to a pervasive anthropological principle that defines the way of life and self-perception of the global class connected through the circuit of the global economy” (70). This expansion of America to signal not place or even a transnational American studies but a psychic imaginary, a feeling, a “way of life,” a twinned freedom and terror, speaks to the subtitle of the 2014 American Studies Association conference that referred to the twenty-first century as “post-American.”<sup>11</sup> Rather than the aftereffects inferred by the temporality in “post-American,” Berardi sees this “becoming American” as an ongoing process tied to the disastrous consequences of contemporary globalized capitalism that has pummeled the “entire population of the planet” since World War II through “the mythology propagated by Hollywood, the global advertising industry, and the political machinery of human rights” (70). But we know that the “entire population” feels things in differentiated and unequal ways.

Extending Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's metaphor of the rhizome, Berardi sees the rhizomatic as an infinite and "open concatenation of ands," a "model to conceptualize cultural processes and transformations" (9, 10). As a metaphor, the rhizome both names the "neoliberal process of globalization, and the precarization of labor that it entails," and "also refers to the interminability of the philosophical task" (10). Might another name for philosophy be criticism? Berardi's use of the rhizome—as a sprawling, multiple, subterranean, and creeping botanical figure—is another way to name the role of poetics in the task of criticism. While writing on the movement of signs and symbols, that is, the "global circulation of goods and images," Berardi romanticizes poetry (among other things) (58). For Berardi, poetics intervenes in a set of critical questions about imperialism and capitalist accumulation, and signals a kind of excess—exceeding language, meaning, and exchange. At the same time, by not attempting to make it himself, Berardi lets the spirit of poetics slip. In other words, his work does not mine the seams of nuance; he stays firmly planted in a desire for direct meaning, not necessarily practicing the intimacy needed in verb of *poiesis* but pointing to an object, separate from him, that he studies. Berardi only identifies and diagnoses poetics as a mode of criticism; he does not enact it himself.

Philip seems to live her poetics and/as criticism through silence, experimentation, and visual blanks. Even as Fred Moten, by way of the jazz musician Charles Lloyd, spouts the refrain, "words don't go there," "she" indeed "tries her tongue."<sup>12</sup> Philip's multigeneric collection of poetry, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, which won the Casa de las Americas prize in 1988, was recently republished with a new foreword by Evie Shockley, who describes *She Tries* as "part autobiography, part Caribbean cultural criticism, part literary theory, and part critical race studies" (x). Philip's archival practice of working through entangled discursive regimes is a regard for a past, a care for others, a swelling of history, and a sometimes anachronistic and geographically dislocated history that brings together, in *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, reggae shops in Toronto, ancient Roman myths, dreamspaces, and hills that recall islands in the Caribbean that formed maronage refuges.

Bursting at the seams, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* insists on refusing certain stable cognitive frames, staging what Berardi calls "poetry as excess." In *And: Phenomenology of the End*, Berardi writes that "poetry is the language that exceeds exchange. It is the infinite return of hermeneutics, and the reactivation of the sensuous body of language" (155). It is the simile of "poetry as excess" that situates why Berardi is interested in poetry as a tool that opens up the possibility of ambivalence. This is easy to say, but more

complicated to put into practice. In this vein of praxis, I focus on a crucial text that operates within yet outside the frame of *She Tries Her Tongue*: the afterword, an essay called “The Absence of Writing or How I Almost Became a Spy,” which explores themes of colonial language and the production of images. The afterword is not poetry yet it contains its trace; it is the excess, surplus, or remnant of Philip’s poetic process.

Rather than offer a reading of how this prose piece, “The Absence of Writing,” can be read alongside her poetry or as evidence of her aesthetic practice (and it might), I am more interested in what and how the essay itself fleshes out poetics as ongoing, provisional, and intermeshed with the social worlds it seeks to imagine. While paratextual elements like prefaces, afterwards, subtitles, footnotes, and cover art are often considered framing devices, and they certainly are, Philip’s prose as a frame discloses more than encloses. The afterword, for Philip, is a genre committed to a subtle disclosure or opening up that is also a “profound eruption of the body into the text,” as she writes in “The Absence of Writing” (90). She references a previous version of the essay, which had been published in 1983 in the journal *Fireweed* under the title “Postscript,” in which she writes that it was “not a conclusion because the issues raised here are still very much undecided” (88). She reframes this nonconclusion by saying in the same paragraph that “there can be no conclusion to the issues raised in this essay since language is always and continually changing—a fluid phenomenon” (88). “This is not a conclusion,” Philip says, again, and I believe her especially when realizing that in the Ragweed Press edition, “The Absence of Writing” is actually the introduction rather than the afterword, as it is named and positioned in the new edition (87). Even this editorial divergence runs alongside what Pinto describes in *Difficult Diasporas* as “a refusal of completion and coherence” (177). By bringing the afterword forward, Philip’s movement of reversal reorganizes assumed narratival progress and temporality, and makes the reading of the book’s formal organization—a book of poems attuned to sections, parts, and wholes rather than any individual poem—contingent on edition, making it a personal reading, an intimate and moveable reference. Philip narrates her poetic work through the paratext and in so doing discloses or opens up the “quiet quiet filling up all kinds of notebooks,” the silent or silenced writing practice that is part of the inseparability of her life and work (76).

In a way, then, Philip sidelines having to consider critics because, through her paratext, she is her own critic. She frames, interprets, analyzes, and diarizes her poetry. She does the work of the critic. And yet the essay “The Absence of Writing” cannot only be seen as supplement to the pure poetic practice.

Instead, Philip's end-of-book essay is closer to its French etymology, "essai," that is to say, to try or to test. The poetic-meets-diaristic coda is another try at wrenching out the words, a miming of the tongue on the page; it is the final opening toward writing even if writing for Philip is a kind of failure in the sense that certain forms of gendered labor are never quite recognized as labor. And yet the making and production process for Philip is unending; it is a practice of editing and revising that relates to silence as a "reciprocity of reading" and a structuring principle of this black woman's work (Pinto 179). Philip's paratextual practice bears witness, then, not only to her poetry writing but also to her investment in a black aesthetic production or a black study that is of the world.

Recall that Philip writes that "there can be no conclusion to the issues raised in this essay since language is always and continually changing—a fluid phenomenon" (88). Inasmuch as poetics aspires toward the unconclusiveness of the end, here are a few more questions about the project of criticism to open us up further. All the authors discussed are attuned to a criticism that indexes what can never be said but must be said. Nelson reminds herself and us of the positioning that always make up a writer's task: "I am interested in offering up my experience and performing my particular manner of thinking, for whatever they are worth" (97). How to perform that obsessive impossibility? A turn toward poetics asks how to render sensible a criticism of the impossible, a creative modality. Sharpe engages the theoretical labor of wake work as a form of care and "a mode of inhabiting and rupturing this epitome with our known lived and un/imaginable lives" and inscribes the role of the (critical) self in reading the living and dying at the core of antiblackness as a globally rippling phenomenon (18). But what is the "work" in "wake work?" Is it a critical practice? A way of reading? A subject who is always working? If indeed "wake work" as a poetics of criticism is simultaneously embedded in everyday life, there will be no rest.

## Notes

- Thank you to the Summer 2017 participants, faculty, and organizers of the NM Poetics program in New Mexico for your insights and energy.
1. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has frequently written about literary criticism as a way to learn from the unverifiable. See, e.g., Spivak, "Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching," *Diacritics* 32.3–7 (2002): 17–31; and Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular," *Postcolonial Studies* 8.4 (2005): 475–86.

2. Karl Marx, *Surveys from Exile* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 149. Translation modified by the author.
3. Ornette Coleman, *The Shape of Jazz to Come* (New York: Atlantic, 1959).
4. Nico Baumbach, Damon R. Young, and Genevieve Yue, "Revisiting Postmodernism: An Interview with Fredric Jameson," *Social Text*, no. 127 (2016): 150.
5. Nico Baumbach, Damon R. Young, and Genevieve Yue, "For a Political Critique of Culture," introduction to "The Cultural Logic of Contemporary Capitalism," special issue, *Social Text*, no. 127 (2016): 1–20.
6. Charles Henry Rowell, "'Words Don't Go There': An Interview with Fred Moten," *Callaloo* 27.4 (2004): 955.
7. This is the epigraph to Maria Damon's "Pleasures of Mourning: A Essay on Poetries in Out-of-the-Way Places," in *Poetry after Cultural Studies*, ed. Heidi R. Bean and Mike Chasar (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 2011). I thank Maria for pointing me to Upton's reversal.
8. See Maria Damon, "Pleasures of Mourning: A Essay on Poetries in Out-of-the-Way Places," in Bean and Chasar, *Poetry after Cultural Studies*, 63–64.
9. Will Alexander, *Singing in the Magnetic Hoofbeat: Essays, Prose Texts, Interviews, and a Lecture (1991–2007)* (Ithaca, NY: Essay, 2012), 141.
10. Sharpe quotes the following from Hartman's *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008): "The autobiographical example is not a personal story that folds onto itself; it's not about navel gazing, it's really about trying to look at historical and social process and one's own formation as a window onto social and historical processes, as an example of them" (7).
11. The full title is "The Fun and the Fury: New Dialectics of Pleasure and Pain in the Post-American Century."
12. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 41–42.