

Black Anaesthetics: African American Narrative Beyond Man

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Motivation

Black Anaesthetics tells the story of how a new strand of Black literary representation emerged in the late 1970s at the historical juncture of the movements for Black feminism, the Black Aesthetic, and racial integration. This book is part cultural history, part aesthetic theory, and part posthumanist critique.

Project Description

In the 1970s and '80s, the US cultural marketplace expected Black artists to create legibly black representations. Although Black women writers gained unprecedented success in this marketplace, some of them defiantly refused this expectation.

Black Anaesthetics tells the story of how Toni Morrison, Octavia Butler, and Andrea Lee transgressed racial rules of representation to reshape the mainstream publishing world they were integrating. Their literary experiments troubled the racial logic requiring that blackness always be known or seen. In the process, these writers cultivated a new mode of representation.



Explores how
Black women writers
integrated the mainstream
publishing world,
giving rise to a new mode
of literary representation.



Context

Rather than continuing to marginalize this aberrant strain of black representation, my project shows how the “awkward problem” of indeterminate blackness challenges presumptions that blackness is readily knowable.

Black women writers’ experimentation with inconspicuous blackness not only unsettles protocols of representation. It also disrupts the Western idea of the thinking subject—“Man”—whose very existence depends on evident blackness.

Project Deliverables

- Expand the archival basis of my book project by completing research at Columbia University’s Rare Book & Manuscript Library and the Huntington Library
- Complete the final two chapters of the book project and submit the manuscript to a university press

Potential Impact

- Centers Black women writers’ oft-overlooked experimentalism
- Maps a new Black literary history of the late twentieth century
- Offers a new theory of Black aesthetics
- First scholarly study of unpublished Toni Morrison manuscript

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