

Sampada Aranke

# Material Matters: Black Radical Aesthetics and the Limits of Visibility

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e-flux journal #79 — february 2017 Sampada Aranke  
Material Matters: Black Radical Aesthetics and the Limits of Visibility

Particularly in relation to African American historical images, we need to find ways of incorporating them into “social and political memory, instead of using [them] as a substitute which encourages the atrophy of such memory.”

– Angela Y. Davis (including a quotation by John Berger), “Afro Image: Politics, Fashion, Nostalgia” (1994)

If, in the words of the latest rallying cry, “black lives matter,” then we must recalibrate our modes of reading, thinking, and acting in order to pay heed to the political ontology of race and to the mattering of blackness itself.

– Huey Copeland, “Tending-toward-Blackness” (2016)

Contemporary black radical aesthetic practices that emphasize materials that surface, texture, and visualize blackness ineluctably trouble, if not unravel, the panoptic qualities of the visual itself. It is without a doubt that images play a hyperactive role in our understanding of black life, but what of the *material matters* of black resistance? In my use of the phrase, black radical aesthetic practices endeavor to recompose the relationship between the body and visibility, often by sidestepping representational mandates towards “accuracy.” Instead, these practices turn to the potentiality of abstract or conceptual approaches in materializing black corporeality.<sup>1</sup> Much attention has been paid to the vexed relationship between representation and black cultural forms in light of white supremacist practices that have produced and policed images of black people along the spectrum of spectacular and quotidian violence.<sup>2</sup> By emphasizing abstract and conceptual artistic practices, my definition of black radical aesthetics builds upon the notion of blackness as anoriginary abstraction – a category created in the service of devastating material, corporeal, and psychological violences that trafficked through the Middle Passage and whose afterlives are still active today.<sup>3</sup> Abstract and conceptual practices do not abandon the social, cultural, and material meanings that blackness invokes. As Adrienne Edwards has lucidly noted, these practices turn to what blackness “does in the world without conflating it – and those who understand blackness from within a system that deems them black, that is black people – with a singular historical narrative or monolithic subjectivity.”<sup>4</sup>

In this spirit, the black radical aesthetic practices detailed here fully activate many of the

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aims of the black freedom struggle through conceptual and material choices that disturb visibility as a measure of black presence. Instead, these approaches impede sight. They trouble its stability and open up modes of touch that reroute our expectations. This essay focuses on select works by David Hammons and Sadie Barnette that ask us to consider what constitutes the matter of black life, and in so doing reclaim the place of material and the body as archives of black radical history.

Hammons opens up the complex dynamics between what Frantz Fanon called the “racialized epidermal schema” that composes blackness, and the representational traps of the two-dimensional surface.<sup>5</sup> In Hammons’s case, skin becomes the cause and effect of his 1970s *Body Prints*. These works turn to the materiality of surface to comment upon quotidian exposures to violence in everyday black life. For Barnette, her father’s FBI file becomes the source material through which she materializes the complex politics of inheritance between black liberation struggles of the long 1960s and their impacts upon her own sense of self. Barnette mines the FBI file as a personal archive, and in so doing manipulates the documents therein towards a radical aesthetic materialization. While both

artists produce works in distinct historical contexts, to mobilize their practices together opens up the conditions of possibility for us to rethink, if not re-inhabit, black radical history’s present.

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### Caution in David Hammons's Surfaces

A pigment-saturated black fist is brought into stark clarity, centered within a sun-like round. Underneath, the fist’s forearm trails off, like an ellipsis, only to be boldly interrupted by obtuse bright yellow rectangles, aligned at the bottom of the page like a crosswalk. Titled *Caution* (1971–72), the greased and pigmented black fist, an iconic if not now overdetermined signifier for black liberation struggles, rises out of a pedestrian site – one that directs us to look both ways, take heed, remain vigilant.

*Caution* is one of many prints in Hammons’s *Body Prints* series, which were made in Los Angeles in the 1970s.<sup>6</sup> While Hammons did not formally belong to black radical organizations, during the time he lived and worked in Los Angeles – 1963 until the mid-1970s<sup>7</sup> – he and other abstract and conceptual black artists did “redefine black consciousness in art.”<sup>8</sup> The *Body Prints* series most notably takes on commitments crucial to the Black Power



David Hammons, *Caution*, c. 1971–1972. Body print, 37 x 28 in, Edition 4/10.

movement, as many of these prints mobilize issues central to black people in the US, including the production of racist stereotypes and more explicit images associated with the black freedom struggle, as in *Caution*. For these prints, Hammons coated grease onto various parts of his body – his arms, legs, torso, and face. He then laid and pressed these body parts onto paper and, subsequently, applied powdered colorant, which stuck directly onto the greased impressions. Hammons's use of grease is part and parcel of his interest in the ways that materials are racialized, and how those materials might be applied in such ways that potentially disturb racist logics or unravel their affects.<sup>9</sup> Hammons's use of grease to adhere pigment onto his skin takes on a particular charge – its stickiness coats black pigment onto the trace of Hammons's black skin, thus doubly signifying the social chromatism of the color black, while the grease's slipperiness when skin touches surface enlivens a particular understanding of the precarity of blackness. In this process, Hammons blends material – grease, skin, pigment – in such a way that confuses the relationship between primer, pigment, and surface.

*Body Prints* engages the curious work of the

epidermis, Hammons's passport to the relationship between surface and interior, skin and self, boundary and body. Hammons's 1970 works are in fact an activation of Frantz Fanon's insistence that the history of blackness is adhered to and mediated by the black subject's racial epidermal schema: the awareness that one's exposure to racial violence is sighted and sited at the level of skin, which becomes the surface of racist projections writ large.<sup>10</sup> By transforming his own skin from a surface upon which racist typologies are projected into a transfer point of material from self to surface, Hammons confuses the line between subject/object and body/print.<sup>11</sup> This material confusion opens up the dynamism between the process of rendering, the impression of Hammons's black skin as matrix,<sup>12</sup> and the subject of the work, as a nonrepresentational yet figurative engagement with what it means to be black. Print and skin are elided into a fleshly surface rendered to trouble the boundaries between both at the level of sight. In this series, Hammons deploys various citational practices that reference taxonomies of slaves as living commodities brought through the Middle Passage; binding legal contracts of slave purchases; lynching photographs; police and



David Hammons, *Defend Your Walk*, 1974. Body print, 31 Figure 2.5 x 42 in.



vigilante anti-black violence; post-Civil Rights black poverty; and, finally, the Black Power politics that shaped and shifted then-contemporary politics. *Caution* images the so-called pedestrian, everyday taxonomies that present and exceed these histories, while enlivening and inhabiting others.

### The Opacity of Defense

Emphasis on the pedestrian is followed up in Hammons's 1974 print *Defend Your Walk*. The grayish pigment bursts from the black plane to render an incredibly detailed, full image on the left, which blurs into fragmented parts, until the print fades to black. Moving from left to right makes it seem like the figure is walking backwards – defending his walk back, or defensively walking back, depending on who's looking. This printed body is composed of multiple parts of Hammons's body: his face, shoulder to elbow, forearm, and, in one iteration, his hand. While these elements are legible, Hammons overwhelmingly obscures most of the image, drawing on what Caribbean philosopher Édouard Glissant theorizes as "opacity" – a response to Western colonial impulses for a transparent world that perpetuates a "lukewarm humanism, both colorless and reassuring."<sup>13</sup> In my adoption of the term in relation to Hammons, opacity is a strategy that saturates the field of vision in the very matter of blackness as a means of obscuring desires to see and know entirely, to make transparent. Opacity denies complete incorporation, and directs us to ways of being and knowing that are vibrant, untamed, and free-floating. Opacity strives towards an "opportune obscurity" such that a type of aesthetic autonomy and resistant, black inhabitation can exist.<sup>14</sup> In Hammons's works, opacity invokes the brutality waged against black subjects at the level of representation, while also signaling an aesthetic presence that resists and refuses such violent categorizations. To put it baldly, these prints don't just picture, but materialize skin, corporeality, and blackness in order to alert us to possible subterranean ways of black being that refuse racist typologies often governed by sight.<sup>15</sup>

Taken together, *Caution* and *Defend Your Walk* both offer insight into what it means to be black in public – the need for caution or defense in everyday life, the routine acts of surveillance that often accompany quotidian activities, and the ever looming possibilities of violences unforeseen. Considering that both works were made when the impacts of the black liberation struggle were felt nationally and black radicals were met with more violent reactionary force than could be anticipated, these prints suggest that we attend to black corporeality and

materiality in the everyday. If the street is where both radical protest and white supremacist violence most visibly take place, then turning to the pedestrian qualities of black life is of urgent political need. Hammons asks: How might we defend our walks? How might we remain cautioned and vigilant against the transparent impulses of anti-black violence? How might we return to a political opacity that alludes to the depth of inhabitation and repurposes the surface for opaque possibilities of black being?

Hammons's 1970s prints ask us to reconsider the black body in public in light of the history of racist projections rehearsed through scopopic regimes of sight and white supremacist violences in the everyday. Skin becomes a surface that materializes black radical presence, and being in one's skin is but one of many modes of opaque inhabitation, in which the possibilities of political refusal might take shape.

### Redaction and Affection in Sadie Barnette's Aesthetic Materialism

On June 15, 1972, Rodney Barnette was observed embarking on American Airlines Flight 474 in the company of Angela Davis. This flight was en route from San Francisco to Chicago.

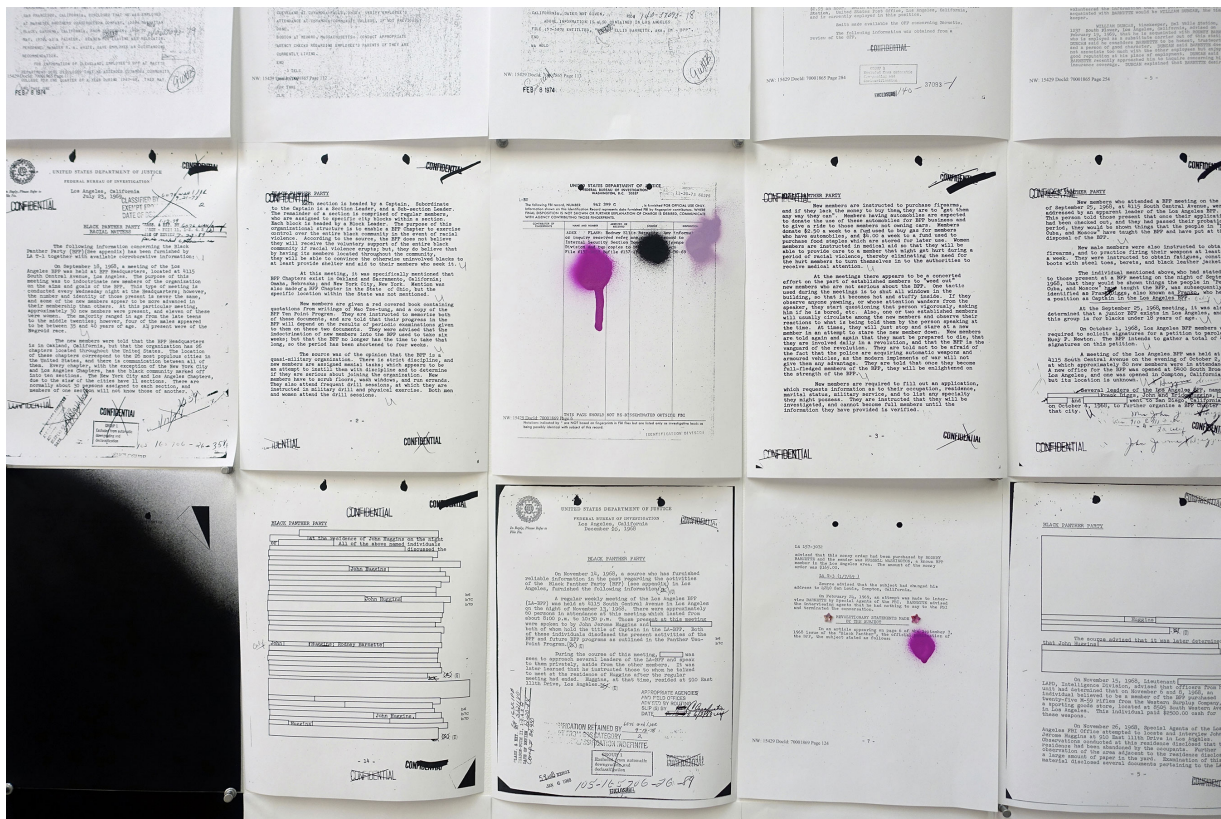
– Observation by FBI special agents (June 16, 1972)

By 1972, the FBI had amassed an unprecedented amount of surveillance documentation under their now infamous Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO). This program had successfully carried out a complex network of operations aimed to discredit, dismantle, and destroy black radical activists, organizations, and movements.<sup>16</sup> Collected among over five hundred pages of FBI documents on Rodney Ellis Barnette,<sup>17</sup> the two-sentence memo above is striking. Barnette was followed by FBI special agents (SAs) for years. His everyday movements and activities were under constant surveillance. This particular surveillance operation was conducted just eleven days after Angela Y. Davis was found not guilty on charges of murder, kidnapping, and criminal conspiracy. Barnette lived with Davis during the duration of her trial and was in charge of her personal security.<sup>18</sup> Here, even after Davis was rendered not guilty and without a single criminal charge leveled against Barnette, we're given a scene of relentless government surveillance and invasion of privacy – an all-seeing operation invested in policing Davis's and Barnette's lives.

The FBI's ongoing and invasive surveillance documentation reveals a deep investment in keeping track of Barnette's every move.



Sadie Barnette, *Untitled (Dad's Mug shot)*, 2016. (installation view) Graphite paper.



Sadie Barnette, *My Father's FBI Files, Project 1*, 2016. (installation detail) 180 laser prints, aerosol paint, family photographs Figure 3

Barnette's leadership in the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) was the primary justification for this level of government interest in his activities. Barnette opened the BPP's Compton office and emerged as a central figure in community organizing. The FBI's surveillance of his everyday activities was comprehensive to say the least. It included a steady team of SAs who conducted routine surveillance, harassed people close to Barnette, and attempted to frame him in conducting illegal activities by soliciting informants to infiltrate the BPP.<sup>19</sup> Apart from its many disturbing revelations, Barnette's FBI file marks the state's overall structural investment in maintaining sight of him – keeping him in view at all times as a standard measure of policing and criminalization.

These uses of sight are evidenced in the amassed pages of FBI files obtained by Barnette and his family after filing a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request some decades later. These documents reveal a decentralized strategy aimed not only to keep an eye on Barnette, but to archive and materially record activities as noteworthy. These typed memos were relentlessly photocopied, faxed, and filed away in FBI field offices and headquarters around the country. While we have no certain way of tracing how these documents circulated, we can speculate that this paperwork fell into the hands of hundreds of governmental employees, were read by several officers, and even probably occupied file cabinets across the nation. Barnette's surveillance therefore reflects a long-standing practice of policing black people at the level of sight. It also reveals how policing is recorded through documentation that necessitates a *particular kind* of material practices.

Rodney Barnette's files take on a radically different material character in his daughter Sadie's hands. When received by the Barnettes, these documents looked like all FOIA-requested FBI files – full of redactions, visibly represented by thick strikethrough rectangles, sometimes filled in black, but mostly left open in white. These redactions staccato the flow of information, as they leave crucial details hidden. What are the names of the secret agents that followed Barnette and Davis on June 16, 1972? Who was "at the residence of John Huggins on the night of"? Who were "all of the above named individuals" now obscured by empty white boxes, save for Huggins and Barnette, whose names repeatedly appear on page 14 of the released files? These spaces are evidence of the state's withholding, as the information left unseeable is most often the information most wanted – the details of operations, names of informants or agents, and goals and targets of key events. The

desire to know is impeded by these stubborn obstructions, which protect the state from relinquishing details that would further support claims by victims of COINTELPRO of governmental overreach, violation of constitutional rights, and the encouragement – if not incitement – of violence against black radicals.

Sadie Barnette troubles the central role of sight in a series of 2016 works that utilize her father's FBI file as raw source material. Barnette's installation of three works, *My Father's FBI File, Project 1* (2016), *Untitled (J. Edgar Hoover)* (2016), and *Untitled (Dad's Mug shot)* (2016), were show-stopping contributions to the Oakland Museum of California's "All Power to the People: Black Panthers at 50" (2016), an exhibition commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the BPP's founding. Nestled in the corner of the exhibition, taking up two adjoining walls, Barnette approaches these documents as archival materials which bring her into closer proximity to her father specifically, and to the Black Liberation Movement more broadly. In this way, she channels these documents' historical import into a contemporary discourse on their repercussions for post-1960s social movements and those who inherit their legacies.

For *My Father's FBI File, Project 1* (2016), on one wall, Barnette transformed 180 pages of her father's file into a wheat-pasted wallpaper that covers the entirety of the 9' x 13' museum wall, from the ceiling to the floor. Rather than display these documents as received in their fully redacted format, Barnette flourishes them with bright pink and purple hues or thick coats of black spray paint that selectively obscure legibility, and thus accentuate the paint's density in relation to the flatness of the glued documents. What comes into focus as one steps back from *My Father's FBI Files, Project 1*, is the spray paint applied to select pages by Barnette's own hands. Her pinks, purples, and blacks obscure portions of text and page into further illegibility, rendering opaque already impenetrable memos, descriptions, and data. She coats aerosol paint on decisively, allowing splatters of color to delicately sit on the page before laying it on so thick that its viscosity bubbles from the surface. Fully realizing the wallpaper motif, Barnette mounts ornamented frames that hold family photos. Next to these photos sits *Untitled (J. Edgar Hoover)* (2016), a 22" x 30" pencil drawing in a plain white frame. The drawing is Barnette's rendering of the most notable signature in all the files: "Very truly yours, John Edgar Hoover Director." Sandwiched between "yours" and "John" is the infamous COINTELPRO architect's signature, brilliantly forged and magnified by Sadie Barnette herself.



Barnette's riffs on the redactions of her father's file throw into even more crisis the conditions of visibility documented by the state's information-gathering protocols and subsequent practices of redaction.<sup>20</sup> The frustration of not knowing certain details transforms into a self-reflexive moment. The reality sets in: Even if all the words were there, made transparent, would that make the truth of this information somehow less disturbing? Isn't it enough to know that the government conducted sustained and invasive surveillance against political activists? Barnette moves us to ask these questions for what they mean *now*. If COINTELPRO pioneered state intelligence-gathering programs to date,<sup>21</sup> then Barnette's material methods take on ever contemporary meanings. Her application recalls a popular 1960s visual tactic: wheat-pasting, whereby political posters were glued in thick, repeated sequence on public walls. Here, spray paint, often associated with the 1980s urban aesthetic practice of graffiti, another method of visual intervention in public, is layered on top of this wheat-pasted wall. Barnette stages historical collision, where reproductions of 1960s and '70s photocopy ink is met with spray, a material associated with Sadie's generation. The conditions of visibility here are where history's present becomes activated – the relevance of COINTELPRO's legacy is functionally accented by an aesthetics generationally out of its reach. Sadie Barnette speaks here to the public function of seeing itself: radical visibility after COINTELPRO is always wrapped up in the nexus of policing, surveillance, criminalization, and vulnerability to state violence. Rodney Barnette's redacted FBI files make that reality certain, and Sadie Barnette's enhanced obfuscation make that reality felt.

This is best seen in Barnette's use of surface, as perfected in her shiny pink glitter wall, which stands adjacent to the document-laden wall. This wallpaper glows when the light catches it, making for a shine that radiates off the wall and mobilizes what art historian Krista Thompson has so brilliantly theorized as "shine": a black diasporic aesthetic strategy in which "the visual production of light reflecting off polished surfaces" emphasizes the "materiality and haptic quality of objects."<sup>22</sup> The shine invites the viewer to come close. Once close, we are met with Barnette's *Untitled (Dad's Mug shot)* (2016). Mounted in a frame far too large for what it carries sits another pencil drawing, this time a recreation of Rodney Barnette's mugshot as captured within his file. In an interview with her father, Sadie tells him:

I also did a drawing of your mug shot. It's the only image in the FBI file and had been

photocopied so many times that it had this poster-like quality to it. I wanted to draw it in pencil to really spend time and love laboring over it. Instead of the FBI investigating you, now I am creating a portrait of you using this material.<sup>23</sup>

The drawing's chiaroscuro is strikingly perfect as it embodies the effects of repeated photocopied reproduction, as well as the racialized politics of black and white. Barnette attends to the material effects of the copy as she herself reproduces the stark contrast of black and white, manifesting an image not of clarity but of obscurity, not of resemblance but of difference, not of distance but of intimacy.

This formal and material manifestation alerts us to the racial logics of the colors white and black, which have been adhered to subjects as signifiers of one's proximity to state violence and its attendant white supremacist logics. Barnette calls attention to the violences of anti-black racism through her recreation of her father's highly contrasted mugshot – there is no gray area, only the spaces between black and white. This image eerily reminds us of the manifest impacts of state violence at the affective ties that emerge from those who inherit these legacies. Hers is a labor of love aimed to rematerialize a mugshot into a portrait, a state-rendered image of criminalization into an intimate image of affection.<sup>24</sup>

Barnette's aesthetic materialism transforms an image meant to signal her father's (and by extension, the Movement's) criminalization into one of adornment, even celebration, thus making claims towards an intimacy that remains.<sup>25</sup> Barnette does this at the level of touch, as she spends time with the drawing, rendering her father's face with her own hand. Hers is a black radical aesthetic that demonstrates how these files tarry between public or private, wallpaper or wheat-paste, family album or FBI file, a cherished photograph or police mugshot. She works to trouble how knowledge is constituted through a rematerialization of intimate space, portraiture, and archives in black radical aesthetic practices. Barnette forces us to think about the intimate proximity between visibility, policing, and surveillance in the wake of COINTELPRO. In so doing, she traces her lineage, the evidence of her corporeality, through the lines and marks of ink on the page, through an image of her father flattened by protocol and the state's war on black radicals, until she arrives at an image of him that is only made possible by her touch, her aesthetic material. This is her life matter – her aesthetic materialization of black radical history's present.

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## Contact Matters

Hammons and Barnette aesthetically unpack how visibility is always impeded by conditions of surveillance and policing aimed to delimit or fix black representational capacity specifically, and black ways of being writ large. Both artists reposition the ways that materials alert us to the textures of black life that are often flattened by logics of visibility alone, and in so doing open up corporeality and materiality as crucial archives of black radical aesthetics. As examples of Huey Copeland's opening provocation to pay heed to the "mattering of blackness itself," these works suggest we apply a collective weight, defying demands for legibility and instead enlivening opacities of visibility that might allow for a mode of mattering critically through contact.<sup>26</sup> Hammons and Barnette carefully materialize contact through the activation of skin, slide of grease, viscosity of paint, and adornment of touch as black life matter.<sup>27</sup> This kind of black radical aesthetics contours the limits of visibility and in so doing enacts a sense of resistance thoroughly felt.

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**Sampada Aranke** (PhD, Performance Studies) is an Assistant Professor in the History and Theory of Contemporary Art at the San Francisco Art Institute. Prior to coming to SFAI, she was a Visiting Assistant Professor in Art History at the University of Illinois, Chicago. Her research interests include performance theories of embodiment, art history and visual culture, and black cultural and aesthetic theory. Her work has been published in *Art Journal*, *Artforum*, *Equid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, and *Trans-Scripts: An Interdisciplinary Online Journal in the Humanities and Social Sciences* at UC Irvine. Sampada and Nikolas Oscar Sparks (Duke University) have co-edited a special issue of *Women & Performance* entitled "Sentiment and Sentience: Black Performance Since *Scenes of Subjection*," which is slated for publication in March 2017. She's currently working on her book manuscript entitled *Death's Futurity: The Visual Culture of Death in Black Radical Politics*.

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1  
See Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2003); Huey Copeland, *Bound to Appear: Art, Slavery, and the Site of Blackness in Multicultural America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Kobena Mercer, *Discrepant Abstraction* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2006); Kellie Jones, "It's Not Enough to Say 'Black is Beautiful': Abstraction at the Whitney 1969–1974," in *EyeMinded: Living and Writing Contemporary Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011): 397–427; Adrienne Edwards, *Blackness in Abstraction* (New York: Pace Gallery, 2016)

2  
See Angela Y. Davis, "Afro Images: Politics, Fashion, Nostalgia," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 21, no. 1 (Autumn 1994): 37–45; David Marriott, *On Black Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Richard Powell, *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Krista Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Leigh Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

3  
See Sylvia Wynter, "Sambos and Minstrels," *Social Text* 1 (Winter 1979): 149–156; Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Autumn 1987): 64–81; Fred Moten, *In the Break*; Fred Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 112, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 779; Frank Wilderson, "Of Grammar and Ghosts: The Performative Limits of African Freedom," *Theatre Survey*, vol. 50, no. 1 (May 2009): 119–125; Hannah Black, "Fractal Freedoms," *Afterall* 41 (2016): 4–9.

4  
Adrienne Edwards, "Blackness in Abstraction," *Art in America*, vol. 103, no. 1 (January 2015): 62–69.

5  
Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 112.

6  
For a global visual history of the raised fist, please see art historian Lincoln Cushing's work-in-progress "A Brief History of the Clenched Fist Image" <http://www.docspopuli.org/articles/Fist.html>.

7  
As Danny Widener has noted,

during his time in Los Angeles, Hammons worked closely alongside Social Realist Charles White, which undoubtedly influenced Hammons's work in Southern California.

8  
Richard Powell, *Black Art and Culture in the 20th Century* (London: Thames and Hudson): 152–154.

9  
See Kellie Jones, "Interview with David Hammons," *Real Life Magazine* 16 (Autumn 1986): 249.

10  
Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 112.

11  
For more on the relationship between surface and print, see David Joselit, "Notes on Surface: Towards a Genealogy of Flatness," *Art History*, vol. 23, no. 1 (March 2000): 19–34.

12  
I am grateful for Nicole Archer's insights on Hammons's use of his own skin during the process of impression in his *Body Prints* series.

13  
Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 111.

14  
*Ibid.*, 120.

15  
There is much to be said about the relationship between Hammons's works and the historical European avant-garde. Indeed, Hammons himself was compelled by Yves Klein's *Anthropometries* works, and many of the prints created aesthetically recall and depart from avant-garde abstraction. For more on the relationship between black abstract or conceptual practices and the historical avant-garde, see the insightful works of Adrienne Edwards, Hannah Black, and Adam Pendleton: Adrienne Edwards, *Blackness in Abstraction* (New York: Pace Gallery, 2016); Hannah Black, "Fractal Freedoms"; Adam Pendleton, *Black Dada Manifesto*, 2008. For more on the subterranean, underground, and covert possibilities of black radical insurgency, see Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013).

16  
COINTELPRO effectively destroyed radical social movements in the US by engaging in infiltration, sabotage, arrest, false imprisonment, and, in some cases, murder. The impacts of this program are lasting, from radicals who are still imprisoned based on COINTELPRO operations, to the many

communities who were psychologically traumatized due to infiltration and police terror. In addition to these immediate and very material impacts, COINTELPRO advanced and expanded state intelligence programs, and indeed legitimated surveillance, policing, and the criminalization of political activists, thus justifying the suspension of legal protections and the expansion of governmental power. Part and parcel of this program was the production of a jaw-dropping amount of documentation of these operations, often organized around individual political activists in an attempt to discredit and criminalize their political work. For more, see Jim Vander Wall and Ward Churchill, *Agents of Repression* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002); Andres Alegria, Prentis Hemphill, Anita Johnson, and Claude Marks, 2012, "COINTELPRO 101," DVD, San Francisco: Freedom Archives.

17  
Maria L La Ganga, "Black Panthers 50 years on: art show reclaims movement by telling 'real story,'" *The Guardian*, October 8, 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/08/black-panthers-50th-anniversary-oakland-museum>.

18  
Angela Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1988), 360.

19  
Rodney and Sadie Barnette, "A Panther's Story Becomes Art: A conversation between artist Sadie Barnette and her father and former Black Panther Rodney Barnette," Oakland Museum of California blog, November 4, 2016 <http://museumca.org/blog/panthers-story-becomes-art>.

20  
There is a potentially dynamic relationship here to South Asian and Arab diasporic artists who also work through the politics of redaction in relationship to the prolonged War on Terror. As several scholars have noted, COINTELPRO piloted and advanced state intelligence programs and provided the groundwork for the post-9/11 PATRIOT ACT. Scholars like Anjali Nath, Ronak Kapadia, and Sara Mameni have noted how contemporary South Asian and Arab diasporic artists have all manipulated the redaction into an aesthetic form in their practices. For more, see Anjali Nath, "Beyond the Public Eye: On FOIA Documents and the Visual Politics of Redaction," *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2013): 21–28; Ronak Kapadia, "Kissing the Dead Body: US Military Imprisonment and the Evidence of Things Not Seen," in "Transnational Visual Cultures,"

ed. Kasturi Ray, special issue of *South Asian Diaspora*, vol. 7, no. 1 (March 2015); Sara Mameni, "Dermopolitics and the Erotics of the Muslim Body in Pain," in "Sentiment and Sentence: Black Performance Since Scenes of Subjection," eds. Sampada Aranke and Nikolas Oscar Sparks, special issue of *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, vol. 27, no. 1 (forthcoming March 2017).

21  
See Natsu Taylor Saito, "Whose liberty? Whose security?: The USA PATRIOT Act in the Context of COINTELPRO and the Unlawful Repression of Political Dissent," *Oregon Law Review*, vol. 81, no. 4 (2002): 1051–1131.

22  
Krista Thompson, *Shine: The Visual Economy of Light in African Diaspora Aesthetic Practice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 225.

23  
Rodney and Sadie Barnette, "A Panther's Story Becomes Art."

24  
For a brilliant study on the uses of photographic technology (vis-à-vis the mugshot) in the expansion of state power, see Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive: the use and classification of portrait photography by the police and social scientists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries," *October* 39 (Winter 1989): 3–64. For a lucid study on the relationship between the black freedom struggle's uses of photography, see Leigh Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

25  
Sadie Barnette's work is indeed an extension of Zora Neale Hurston's notion of "the will to adorn" as a "notable characteristic" of black American literary aesthetics. See Zora Neale Hurston, "Characteristics of Negro Expression," 1934. Reprinted in *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Bonnie Kime Scott (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 176, 178.

26  
For more on the relationship between blackness and current debates in new materialisms, see Huey Copeland, "Tending-toward-Blackness," *October* 156 (Spring 2016): 141–144.

27  
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