

48. Ibid., 13.
49. See Stoler's similar attention to colonial archives whose "writerly practices . . . chronicle failed projects, delusional imaginings, [and] equivocal explanations," in "The Pulse of the Archive," 21.
50. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, 65–67.
51. Ibid., 152 (emphasis in original).
52. Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (1987), 14. See also Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015), 3, on the project of "unsettling" the "genealogy of modern liberalism."
53. Quotation from Nancy Partner, "Hayden White: The Form of the Content," *History and Theory* 37, no. 2 (1998): 166. See especially Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (1968); Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (1972); Idem, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology (Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984, Vol. 2, ed. James Faubion (1998): 369–91; Hayden White, Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe (1973); Idem, The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation (1987); and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History (1995).*
54. See especially Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000); and Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*.
55. Hartman, "Venus," 12.
56. Ibid., 11, 12–13, quoting Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, "Counterhistory and the Anecdote," in *Practicing New Historicism* (2000): 52.
57. Hartman, "Lose Your Mother," 13.
58. Ibid., 11, 12.
59. Ibid.
60. Fred Anderson and Andrew R. L. Cayton, "The Problem of Fragmentation and the Prospects for Synthesis in Early American Social History," *William and Mary Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (1993), 304.
61. Ibid., 305.
62. Lisa Lowe, "History Hesitant," *Social Text* 125 33, no. 4 (2015): 87.
63. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 256.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid., 257.
66. Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 374.
67. On violence as an analytical category, see the Histories of Violence Collective. <http://www.hovcollective.org/>.
68. Daina Ramey Berry and Jennifer L. Morgan, "#Blacklivesmatter Till They Don't: Slavery's Lasting Legacy," *History News Network*, December 8, 2014, <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/157816>.

Freedom's Surprise: Two Paths Through Slavery's Archives

David Kazanjian

Unfortunately I have not discovered a way of deranging the archive so that it might recall the content of a girl's life or reveal a truer picture, nor have I succeeded in prying open the dead book, which sealed her status as commodity. The random collection of details of which I have made use are the same descriptions, verbatim quotes, and trial transcripts that consigned her to death and made murder "not much noticed," at least, according to the surgeon. The promiscuity of the archive begets a wide array of reading, but none that are capable of resuscitating the girl.

—Saidiya Hartman

Sources are not the problem [. . .] multiple histories exist, but not all are valorized, inscribed, and sanctioned. Those that become dominant are thereby preserved. Past and present historians remain complicit in this political process of knowledge production.

—Herman L. Bennett

These two epigraphs bring forth an agonism. Is the archive of slavery so saturated by silence, death, and commodification that black life remains indiscernible even as discerning remains urgent, as Saidiya Hartman suggests?¹ Or are archives of slavery in the Americas overflowing with black lives that we are not particularly good at discerning, as Herman L. Bennett argues?² I want to linger with and reflect upon this agonism in the interest of widening the frame that often restricts the provocative questions raised by "Venus in Two Acts," the same ones this special issue addresses. I want to set out on transnational, multilingual, and textually difficult paths; to unsettle what we understand as "the archive of slavery"; to revise what we think of as "freedom."

Let me begin with the problematic presented to us in "Venus in Two Acts." Confronting the repeated appearance of "a *dead girl*" often called Venus in "the archive of Atlantic slavery," Hartman foregrounds the subalternity of the gendered slave who is only ever spoken of and for: "The archive is, in this case, a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory

of property, a medical treatise on gonorrhoea, a few lines about a whore's life, an asterisk in the grand narrative of history."³ Not content with the mere reiteration of this historical tragedy, however—"But I want to say more than this"—she seeks, instead, a new narrative: "What are the kinds of stories to be told by those and about those who live in such an intimate relationship with death?"⁴ This seeking is not, however, solely an antiquarian practice:

For me, narrating counter-histories of slavery has always been inseparable from writing a history of present, by which I mean the incomplete project of freedom, and the precarious life of the ex-slave, a condition defined by the vulnerability to premature death and to gratuitous acts of violence. As I understand it, a history of the present strives to illuminate the intimacy of our experience with the lives of the dead, to write our now as it is interrupted by this past, and to imagine a free state, not as the time before captivity or slavery, but rather as the anticipated future of this writing.⁵

Hartman thus inspires a certain politico-narrative work, a practice she calls "critical fabulation":

The intention here isn't anything as miraculous as recovering the lives of the enslaved or redeeming the dead, but rather laboring to paint as full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible. This double gesture can be described as straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the same time, enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration [...] The intent of this practice is not to give voice to the slave, but rather to imagine what cannot be verified.⁶

Moving beyond archival empiricism toward the unverifiable, Hartman's history of the present seeks to understand a more complex future—one that is open to unpredictable change—rather than one that is enclosed within the repetition of the known.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has also argued in favor of humanities-based research as a way of learning "from the singular and the unverifiable," urging us to embrace "the exercise of the imagination" en route to "an uncoercive rearrangement of desire."⁷ For Spivak, such work in the humanities remains at a critical remove from the more empirical work of the social sciences, such that the two fields can "supplement each other, interrupt each other productively."⁸ That is, humanities-based research neither rejects nor completes social scientific empiricism; rather, it adds to and replaces the knowledge produced by the social sciences, allowing for a kind of thinking that is askew from the empirically verifiable, a thinking that draws on, moves elsewhere

from, but does not precisely refute empirical research.⁹ Unlike Spivak, however, Hartman seems to hope that critical fabulation's attention to the unverifiable will more fully accomplish a task left incomplete by empirical social history: depicting individual lives ("laboring to paint as full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible") from archival sources ("a cultural history of the captive"). In this way, Hartman's "critical fabulation" would not so much supplement or critically interrupt social history, as Spivak's "exercise of the imagination" might do; rather, critical fabulation would better realize—even if it still never *fully* realizes—the task social history sets out to accomplish, that of representing the lives of the captives.

What might a full or nearly full picture of captives' lives look like? Why is that our task as social historians or cultural critics? And how is cultural history our method of accomplishing it? These questions have long troubled my reading of "Venus in Two Acts." For even as Hartman's essay brings us to the verge of a concerted reckoning with the "archive of slavery's" unverifiabilities, it also holds that archive responsible for answering, or nearly answering, the more traditional, social-historical questions of who did what, where, when, and why. My concern here is that, despite the caution against naively giving "voice to the slave," the unverifiable and the empirical conflate. In the rest of this essay, I would like to dis-integrate the unverifiable and the empirical so that they can critically interrupt each other by following two distinct paths that Hartman leaves open but does not take in "Venus in Two Acts:" first, a more empirical path from "the archive of slavery" to multiple *archives* of slavery; and second, a more unverifiable path from "the lives of the captives" toward the speculative thought of captivity.

First Path

It seems to me that the responsibility "to paint as full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible" stems, in "Venus in Two Acts," from a passage early in the essay where Hartman sets a quite specific restriction on the archive through a set of questions on "the archive of slavery," a restriction that ends up circumscribing the work of critical fabulation in a surprisingly empirical frame:

How does one recuperate lives entangled with and impossible to differentiate from the terrible utterances that condemned them to death, the account books that identified them as units of value, the invoices that claimed them as property, and the banal chronicles that stripped them of human features? [...] And if so, what are the

lineaments of this new narrative? Put differently, how does one rewrite the chronicle of a death foretold and anticipated, as a collective biography of dead subjects, as a counter-history of the human, as the practice of freedom? [...] The scarcity of African narratives of captivity and enslavement exacerbate the pressure and gravity of such questions. There is not one extant autobiographical narrative of a female captive who survived the Middle Passage.¹⁰

Here the urgent, ontological and epistemological questions that begin this passage—questions addressed to what Hartman early on terms “the archive of slavery”—are oddly contained by the empirical claim, this time about an archive of slavery, with which the passage ends.

When we imagine enslaved lives as best recuperated or pictured by the “autobiographical narrative,” we make a politically, culturally, and historically specific Anglo-American literary genre our norm and ideal; we let an archive of slavery metonymically stand in for the archive of slavery. Yet the genre of autobiography does not epitomize the archives of slavery, and it did not come into being by some general ontological necessity. Rather, the genre of autobiography was made in and through the long nineteenth century’s trans-Atlantic abolitionist movement, itself a diverse and antagonistic political scene in which black authors, principally from the U.S., negotiated and improvised with whites who held the purse-strings and wielded the editorial pens. We know how black radicalisms emerged from that scene under and around the hegemonic efforts of white liberalisms—indeed, in *Scenes of Subjection* Hartman sharpened our ability to discern the presence of that very struggle. But the lack of “an extant autobiographical narrative” does not mean that there are no nearly full pictures to paint of “a female captive who survived the Middle Passage” or that there are no lives to recuperate from captivity. Nor are archives that fail to contain this politically, culturally, and historically specific narrative form condemned to reiterate death.

Instead, as Latin Americanists are increasingly teaching us, other types of narratives can come to us from outside the Anglo-American long nineteenth-century: from the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries; in the imperial languages of Spanish, Portuguese, or French; in indigenous languages such as Yucatec Maya, Chol, Quechua, or Aymara; in African languages from regions saturated by the slave trade like coastal Guinea-Bissau; and in improvised Creole and Crioulo languages. While it may be difficult to locate and read such archives, this hard work is important because it pluralizes monolithic conceptions of slavery and the archive,

and opens new histories of the present for our understanding and interpretation.

For instance, by broadening the discussion of slavery to include a focus on on sixteenth and seventeenth-century New Spain, Herman L. Bennett has shown us how “the terminology used to describe persons of African descent expanded over the course of the Middle Passage and beyond. By the time a slave ship landed in the Indies, the Africans on board already constituted slaves, royal subjects, and, in some cases, Christians. Through their prescribed juridical status, Africans and their descendants formulated New World identities that had valence during their encounters with absolutism. For this reason, identity was not a preordained essence for persons of African descent in the new world; it was carefully constructed.”¹¹ In particular, by examining ecclesiastical court records Bennett shows how the enslaved would frequently use canon or natural law’s respect for marriage against Castilian or positive law’s concern for property rights by marrying free people or people held by different masters and then demanding leave from their own master in order to consummate and sustain their marriage. Such juridical and discursive “dexterity,” as Bennett calls the slaves’ actions, required both the Spanish Empire’s dual court system and the Catholic Church’s recognition of the enslaved’s Christianity and accompanying privileges of faith, a context that did not similarly govern nineteenth-century Anglo-America.

But why must we privilege nineteenth-century Anglo-America and ignore colonial Spanish America when we reflect upon “the archive of slavery,” especially when research on colonial Spanish America has shown that so-called Enlightenment concepts such as free will, right, individuality, and public reason did not have to wait for North American revolutions to work their way into discursive practices of racialized freedom, and that such concepts in fact thrived in particular ways under early modern Spanish absolutism? Let us then take up challenges like Bennett’s: “Though disjointed, ambiguous [. . .], the anecdotes [contained in New Spain’s ecclesiastical court records] constitute the earliest and richest sources pertaining to the African and Afromestizo past.”¹² Since “by the mid-sixteenth century, people of African descent outnumbered Spaniards in New Spain and comprised the second-largest slave population in the Americas,” an exclusive focus on the narrative forms generated in the nineteenth-century Anglo-American Atlantic misrepresents the Afro-diaspora in the Americas and ignores much of “the archive of slavery.”¹³

Consider the 1674 case of Antonía de la Natividad, a black woman enslaved in Mexico City but married to Miguel de la Cruz, a black man residing outside the city with a different master, Jerónimo del Pozo. As Bennett explains, Antonía “petitioned the *provisor* [ecclesiastical judge] for an order that would enable her husband to leave his master ‘at least one time a week to have a married life with her.’ If this demand represented an onerous burden that would persuade Jerónimo del Pozo to sell Miguel, Antonía suggested that her husband’s master be required to sell him to a resident of Mexico.” The records tell us that the *provisor* agreed with Antonía and ordered Jerónimo to grant Miguel such freedom of movement, even though Jerónimo warned the court that Miguel “is a rebel and a fugitive which is why I bought him,” and that his “character is malevolent and accustomed to flight.” Indeed, as Bennett concludes, “Antonía’s petition represented an audacious demand. Here a slave woman insisted on determining how a master should regulate his property,” believing that “she had a right, as a wife, to define how her husband’s master could regiment Miguel de la Cruz’s time.” I would add, too, that Antonía here could be seen to assert sexuality and sexual pleasure over and against labor and property, thus offering an affective and embodied redefinition of freedom itself. While according to Bennett the archive does not contain the result of Jerónimo’s subsequent appeal, our concern should not so much be with the ultimate justice or injustice of canon law as with the bold effort by an enslaved black woman to define the very quotidian meanings of slavery and freedom, a practice that “gradually represented the norm instead of the exception” in New Spain, as Bennett goes to great length to show.¹⁴

Our efforts to pluralize the archive of slavery—and here I refer both to the pluralization of “archive” and the incorporation of more stories of enslaved bodies—need not even be confined to the ecclesiastical court records of New Spain. The work of Rachel Sarah O’Toole on court records and Kathryn Burns on notarial practices in colonial Peru has taught us how racial formations across Spanish America varied tremendously, and thus how there is also no singular archive of colonial Spanish American slavery.¹⁵ We can even expand our vision of the nineteenth century beyond the Anglo-Atlantic context. Examining inquisition and custom house archives as well as baptismal and naming records, Matthew Restall has documented the lives of enslaved and free Afro-Yucatecos—often called *ek box* or “black people” in Yucatec Maya—on the Yucatán peninsula. Though Afro-Yucatecos wrote

little and certainly did not leave behind a genre like the nineteenth-century Anglo-American American slave narrative, Restall argues that their active and transactional role between the Maya majority and the Creole power structure both in cities and in rural *pueblos* and *ranchos* made them into a “black middle.”¹⁶

Thus, when in 1847 the Maya majority in Yucatán rose up against Creole authority during one of the largest indigenous uprisings in the history of the Americas, starting a decades-long war that would be called *la Guerra de Castas* or the Caste War, they articulated their demands in ways that marked the black lives amongst them. Consider a letter written on April 7, 1850 by seven Maya rebels from a rancho called *Haas* in the south of the peninsula to a local Creole priest and commissioner with a proposal to settle the uprising. This letter was written in Yucatec Maya, translated immediately into Spanish by the Creole leaders to whom it was written, and here translated into English by me: “The agreement made with us is clearly understood, for this we are fighting. That no tax will be paid, by white, black or indian; 10 pesos for baptism for the white, for the black and for the indian; 10 pesos for weddings for the white, for the black and for the indian. As far as debts, that the old ones will not be paid by the white, nor the black, nor the indian; and that it will not be necessary to buy land, the white, the black or the indian can plant their *milpa* wherever he wants, and no one will prohibit it.”¹⁷ Repurposing *casta* distinctions in ways that ought to make us reimagine indigeneity and blackness in the nineteenth-century Americas, texts like these from archives outside the nineteenth-century Anglo-Atlantic abolitionist movement do not simply pluralize or add to our understandings of the Atlantic world; they reconfigure the very meaning of freedom.¹⁸

Before we theorize *the* archive of slavery as “a death sentence,” then, we ought to consider how *archives* of slavery also teem with black lives whose languages and narrative forms might not be as familiar as the classic nineteenth-century Anglo-American slave narrative, but whose stories nonetheless have much to teach us not only about past slaveries, but also about the future of our own continuing struggles for freedom.

Second Path

I just followed a path left open by but not followed in “Venus in Two Acts,” a path from the general *archive* of slavery, envisioned as a gendered tomb and modeled on the long nineteenth-century Anglo-American slave narrative,

toward plural *archives* of slavery overflowing with geographically and historically diverse black lives even as we encounter them in dispersed, fragmentary forms. But such a path, while rich in empirical detail, avoids Hartman's crucial call to attend to the unverifiable in our archives, a call that no empirical expansion of our sources can adequately address. For no matter how many sources we find, subalternity still structures the histories of the enslaved, and what we think we can know will always be less than what happened. As Hartman writes, "The necessity of recounting Venus's death is overshadowed by the inevitable failure of any attempt to represent her [. . .]. The necessity of trying to represent what we cannot, rather than leading to pessimism or despair must be embraced as the impossibility that conditions our knowledge of the past and animates our desire for a liberated future."¹⁹

I want to suggest that the structural impossibility Hartman describes can actually lead us to a productive possibility: to reading what archives we do have more speculatively, for their theoretical work rather than just for their empirical content. An odd legacy of what was once called the new social history, and its subsequent influence on literary studies, has been a failure to read documents of subalternity as offering philosophical reflection as well as data or description. In my work on the archives of Atlantic world slavery, I have found that even the most seemingly quotidian and fragmentary of documents can teach us as much or more about the very meanings of slavery and freedom than they can about who their author was and what that author did. But to learn in this way, we must read these documents for their speculative work. Which is to say, we must read seemingly quotidian texts not only for the empirical information they offer about the lives their authors lived and observed, but also for the theoretical work they do—for the ways they speculate upon ontological, epistemological, and political questions. Just as we ought not evaluate every archive of slavery against the putative ideal of the nineteenth-century Anglo-American slave narrative, so too ought we not expect all theoretical reflection to take the form of a nineteenth-century philosophical treatise like Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Perhaps, then, what Hartman calls "our desire for a liberated future" depends less on partially reconstructing individual lives, even in the mode of critical fabulation, and more on learning how seemingly quotidian and often fragmentary texts theorize ideas such as freedom itself.²⁰

Consider, for instance, a letter written from Monrovia, Liberia on July 1, 1848 by Julia Smith to her former master John McDonogh. Smith had been

enslaved by McDonogh in Louisiana until 1842, when she was freed on the condition that she agree to be deported to Liberia under the auspices of the American Colonization Society, a private philanthropical society of abolitionist and pro-slavery white nationalists that organized the colonization of Liberia during the nineteenth century. Though Smith is likely related to Nancy Ann Smith, another migrant to Liberia about whom I have written elsewhere, it is not clear from McDonogh's list of deportees whether she is "Julia, wife of Augustine Lombard, aged 17 years" or "Judy, an excellent woman, a first rate midwife, a Spinner of Cotton and wool, &c. &c. aged about 50 years."²¹ But perhaps this does not matter if we read her letter less to paint as full a picture of her life as possible and more for the letter's speculative reflections upon the unverifiable texture of freedom.²²

McDonogh himself wrote extensively about what freedom should mean to the enslaved. He argued that freedom was to be earned by the enslaved from the master through hard work, and once earned it should be entirely separate and distinct from slavery and from white Americans: a life lived in Africa on land colonized from native West Africans. In fact, McDonogh explains that he repeatedly communicated this understanding of freedom to those he enslaved by giving them lectures or tutorials on the Sabbath in which he would explain the complex system he had devised by which they could earn their emancipation and deportation to Liberia: specifically, he urged those he enslaved to work "overtime," or during their weekly Sabbath break, and he promised to "bank" these "earnings" until this "overtime" labor had earned enough for the enslaved to buy their own freedom, or even the freedom of their kin.²³ This individualist, teleological, benevolent, and meliorist conception of freedom was common in the nineteenth century; it animated many depictions of Liberian colonization by black and white advocates alike, and could even be said to enact a certain reading of Hegel's dialectic of lordship and bondage.

By contrast Smith's letter, in and through its apparently descriptive content, offers a critique of this conception of freedom. It begins by telling McDonogh that "no doubt you will be somewhat surprised when you see from whom it [the letter] is sent, I am at present in moderate health . . ." I do not know what reason Smith might have had for presuming such surprise. Perhaps she refers to the fact that, as she says in the letter's first sentence, this is her first letter to McDonogh since she arrived in Liberia six years earlier. Reading this passage more speculatively, however, we could say that

by casting the relationship between former master and former slave as one of surprise without then explicitly explaining the nature of that surprise, this text depicts freedom (in contrast to McDonogh's conception) as an utterance, argument, or claim that a master does not see coming, cannot quite comprehend, and would have to learn from the formerly enslaved, if and when the formerly enslaved decides to bother with such a teaching. Smith herself waited six years.

After describing the health and religious faith of other black settlers known to McDonogh, Smith then offers what seems like the description of another surprising fact: "Galloway Smith has gone to the U. States, he left here in the U.S. Store Ship 'Southampton', shipped onboard, & has never returned since. I have heard from him three times, the last time I heard that he was in Philadelphia acting as porter in some Merchant's Store or Warehouse." Letters from black settlers in Liberia occasionally mention such surprising returns from Liberia, a place designed to embody freedom for black Americans, to the U.S., where slavery of course still thrived. However, in and through its descriptive content this letter could also be said to further theorize the surprise of freedom. Consider how its account of Galloway's movements displaces McDonogh's presumptively definitive teleologies of freedom—from slavery to emancipation, from the U.S. to Liberia—with a certain recursivity: from slavery in the U.S. to emancipation in Liberia to a life proximate to servitude back in the U.S. Consider also how that account supplants the didactic lectures on the meaning of and means to freedom McDonogh claims he regularly delivered to his slaves with both the exchange of letters amongst the formerly enslaved—Smith writes "I have heard from him three times"—and the circulation of information and rumor among the Atlantic world subaltern: she writes "last time I heard." What if this letter challenges the idea of freedom as something to be calculated and codified, as something that constitutes a definitive break from slavery, as something that must be earned from a master through hard work? And what if it also offers a kind of treatise on freedom as always intimately and recursively bound to servitude. Even further, what if it argues that freedom is something structured by surprise: something one comes upon unexpectedly, something that astonishes one, something for which one is unprepared, that even attacks one without warning?²⁴

Is this an "overreading" of Julia Smith's letter? Perhaps. But why must we expect Julia Smith's letter to narrate an autobiography or to describe a

life instead of to theorize freedom? That is, why must we be wary of interpreting the speculative content of a letter such as this while we are encouraged continually to interpret a contemporaneous philosophical treatise like Hegel's *Phenomenology*, which after all has sparked and will continue to spark countless readings and debates, typically without regard for any account of the details of Hegel's own life? What if we refused to allow the threatening charge of "overreading" to circumscribe texts that are supposed to narrate an autobiography or to describe a life? What if we refused to let cautions against "overreading" disallow such texts from theoretical speculation? What if we repurposed the term "overreading" and used it—in a manner Derrida would call paleonymy—as a name for the activity of reading for the singular and unverifiable in the putatively empirical?²⁵ By embracing the practice of overreading such texts, perhaps we could offer an unverifiable but textually coherent account of this archive of slavery's speculative reflections, just as we would read any nineteenth-century philosophical treatise on freedom. Perhaps, then, we could defer the injuncture "to paint as full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible" and instead read "texturally" for a "singular and unverifiable" account not of who did what, where, when and why, but rather of how freedom means. As such, Julia Smith's letter would be much more than an ever-partial depiction of a captive's life from the archive of slavery whose ever-partiality we learn to lament. Rather, like so many of the hundreds of letters from black settlers in Liberia, and the thousands of other traces of black lives in the archives of slavery throughout the Atlantic world, this letter would offer unverifiable scenes of speculation upon the meaning of freedom.

Critical Interruption

As I mentioned above, when Spivak calls on us to "learn to read texturally" for "the singular and the unverifiable," she does so not in the interest of, borrowing Hartman's words one last time, "laboring to paint as full a picture [. . .] as possible" of those whose lives flicker in and out of our archives. Rather, she proffers a practice of critical interruption in which the literary and philosophical work of reading and the social scientific work of empirical research "supplement each other, interrupt each other productively."²⁶ I would thus like to think of the relationship between the two paths I have briefly traced throughout this essay in Spivak's terms, such that we might allow accounts of ever more plural archives of slavery to at once add to and be replaced by

ongoing overreadings of the scenes of speculation that fill such archives, scenes that may yet teach us how freedom can surprise.

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Notes

1. Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 13.
2. Herman L. Bennett, "Writing into a Void: Representing Slavery and Freedom in the Narrative of Colonial Spanish America," *Social Text* 93, 25.4 (Winter 2007): 82.
3. Hartman, "Venus," 2.
4. *Ibid.*, 2, 4.
5. *Ibid.*, 4.
6. *Ibid.*, 11–12.
7. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Our Asias—2011: How to Be a Continentalist," in *Other Asias* (2008), 226–227.
8. *Ibid.*, 236.
9. Spivak draws on Jacques Derrida's notion of the supplement. See Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1997), 144–145. Spivak's argument, and my reading of it here, is different from the often reductively summarized argument of her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" for two reasons. First, the subjects at stake in my essay have left written traces of themselves and thus are not, strictly speaking, subalterns in the sense that Spivak used that term in "Can the Subaltern Speak?". Second, the kind of "speaking" Spivak casts into doubt in "Can the Subaltern Speak?"—speaking as direct communication from the head or the heart of the subaltern as an individual to the first world intellectual—is not the same kind of textural representation at stake in this essay or of concern to Spivak in "Our Asias" or, indeed, ultimately in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" itself. Which is to say, the felicitous reading of a text's critical or theoretical work is different from a specious claim about the intention of the individual author or historical subject. See Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Carey Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (1988), 271–313; revised in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (1999), 198–311.
10. Hartman, "Venus," 3.
11. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570–1640* (2003), 7.
12. *Ibid.*, 155.
13. *Ibid.*, 18.
14. *Ibid.*, 148–49, 238. According to Bennett, the original record comes from the Archivo General de la Nación, Matrimonios (without reference), "Antonía de la Na-

tividad, negra, sobre que el amo su marido le permita a este hacer vida maridable con ella," 1674.

15. Kathryn Burns, *Into the Archive: Writing and Power in Colonial Peru* (2010); Burns, "Unfixing Race," *Histories of Race and Racism: The Andes and Mesoamerica from Colonial Times to the Present*, ed. Laura Gotkowitz (2011), 57–71; Rachel Sarah O'Toole, *Bound Lives: Africans, Indians, and the Making of Race in Colonial Peru* (2012); O'Toole, "From the Rivers of Guinea to the Valleys of Peru: Becoming a Bran Diaspora within Spanish Slavery," *Social Text* 92, 25.3 (Fall 2007): 19–36. See also Sherwin K. Bryant, Rachel Sarah O'Toole, and Ben Vinson III, eds. *Africans to Spanish America: Expanding the Diaspora* (2012).

16. Matthew Restall, *The Black Middle: Africans, Mayas, and Spaniards in Colonial Yucatan* (2009).

17. The translation is my own, from Fidelio Quintal Martín, ed., *Correspondencia de la Guerra de Castas* (Mérida: Ediciones de la Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, 1992), 78.

18. For more on this reconfiguration, and the richly important role of the *milpa* in this passage, see David Kazanjian, *The Brink of Freedom: Improvising Life in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World* (2016), Chapter 4.

19. Hartman, "Venus," 13.

20. On this call to read speculatively, see David Kazanjian, "Scenes of Speculation," *Social Text* 125, 33.4 (December): 77–83; and Kazanjian, *The Brink of Freedom*.

21. On Nancy Ann Smith, see David Kazanjian, "The Speculative Freedom of Colonial Liberia," *American Quarterly* 63.4 (2011): 863–93; Kazanjian, *The Brink of Freedom*, Chapter 2.

22. Julia Smith to John McDonogh, July 1, 1848; Box 12, Folder 26, John McDonogh Papers, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University Library, New Orleans. Thanks to Sean Benjamin, Public Services Librarian at the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, for locating this letter, which has recently been digitalized, along with many other letters, in the collection "Free People of Color in Louisiana," accessible here: <http://cdm16313.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p16313coll51/id/4203>. The Smith letter has also been published in Bell I. Wiley, ed. *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia, 1833–1869* (1980), 149–50. All subsequent references to Julia Smith's letter are to the manuscript source.

23. John McDonogh, "A Letter of John McDonogh, on African Colonization: Addressed to the Editors of the New Orleans Bulletin," *American Repository and Colonial Journal* 19.2 (1843): 48–60.

24. "Surprise." OED online.

25. Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (1982), 71.

26. Spivak, "Our Asias," 236.