

The logo for the Anthropology Book Forum, featuring a stylized blue and white circular design on the left. The text "Anthropology Book Forum" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font across the top of a dark blue rectangular background.

# Anthropology Book Forum

Open Access Book Reviews

**KATHERINE MCKITTRICK.** 2021. *Dear Science and Other Stories*. Durham: Duke University Press. 221 pp. ISBN 978-1-4780-1104-0

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Katherine McKittrick's *Dear Science and Other Stories* is pulse, commitment, invitation, groove, gallery, curiosity, and so much more. It beautifully, carefully, and humbly charts black life as always more than the abstractions produced through scientific knowledge. McKittrick has long insisted that black geographies cannot analytically sustain the reductive and repetitious story of antiblack violence, and that there is always something outside the dominant disciplinary frame that runs parallel to- and which produces- black space and place. This book is organized into nineteen stories, seven of which are images and their sources. The abundance of these stories speaks to McKittrick's generosity; she shares her thinking process by frequently building onto sentences as a mode of seeking out more apt articulations, playing with partial formulations, and continuously posing questions. Importantly, McKittrick begins, "from the premise that liberation is an already existing and unfinished and unmet possibility," (13). This triangulation of here-ongoing-latent liberation provides a foothold of theorizing black livingness, where futures and histories come together to exceed scientific- including social scientific- determinism.

In response to the unconventional book format, this book review focuses on various themes of the text rather than chapter breakdowns. One of the primary issues McKittrick takes up is the descriptive practices of scientific racism and its discursive resolutions. She acknowledges the social constructions of race but resists the epistemological drive across academic disciplines to reiterate a "teleological narrative" of blackness in terms of death and dying (135). This narrative of scientific racism begs an analytical question that only ever falls back on itself. Instead, she wants to "live with violence and...not ask for more and more and more evidence or proof of that violence" (138). The book's aim is to point to black livingness that surpasses the "plantocratic-colonial registers" of academic sciences (145).

Stories practice ways to share across disciplines, standpoints, mediums, techniques, and spaces. To do this, McKittrick advocates for a black citational practice that is "thick and wide ranging," (35). She is against the limiting project of some feminist scholars who refuse to cite canonized white cismen, as she argues this obfuscates and further entrenches the chasms that split academic disciplines. Rather than drawing citational lines, she advocates for the importance of sharing as it is capacious and crosses boundaries. And she emphasizes that storytelling has been formative in her relationship with Sylvia Wynter. In their exchanges, she has found that the collaboration and surprise which emerges from "sharing stories *is* creative rigorous radical theory," (73).

Another important theme of the book pivots on meanings of measure. On the one hand, measure comes to the fore in algorithms that assess geographical determinations under the auspices of white supremacy. She draws on the example of predictive policing technologies that codify who lives, who is criminalized, and who counts in the projected futures of racial capitalism. On the other hand, she emphasizes that “black livingness is unmeasurable,” (186). Her elongated scholarly project of underlining a ‘black sense of place’ engages the praxis of moving to the differential beat of black life that cannot be wholly defined by the calculable. Perhaps this can be discerned in her incorporation of musical measures- one story is a list of songs- as evidencing a black sense of place; a turn away from spatialized white supremacist algorithms to black ‘algorithms’ that improvise and move to a different geographical drum.

Staying with the theme of music, McKittrick plays with uses of looping. She is concerned about the closed loop of scientific racism that feeds back into itself and can only ever compute “biocentric” outcomes that reify “racial-sexual differentiation,” (134) Subverting the loop of scientific racism, McKittrick talks about her practice of looping slides in public talks as a way to signal the various sources that inform her theorizing. She acknowledges the incompleteness of these visual loops yet emphasizes that they serve as a reminder of where her thinking rests in order to gesture where it can go. Looping as work-in-progress, arrival, and departure is duplicated in her repetitious syntax which brings the reader along on the journey of articulation. Looping is literalized in the section “(Zong) Bad Made Measure,” where the reader turns the pages and then reverses the page turn to read down and across columns. A stylistic ode to M. NourbeSe Philip’s longform poem *Zong!*, which newly-cycles text from *Gregson v. Gilbert (1781)* to interrogate the “diachronic loop” of racist violence in order to push against it. *Zong!*, and McKittrick’s columned writing on *Zong!*, write “in a nonlinear fashion” in order to “produce a knowledge system that momentarily moves outside of itself” (146). McKittrick acknowledges how looping remakes and breaks in complex ways but is a pivotal part of storytelling that seeks liberation.

In the spirit of creative looping, I will wrap up this review by returning to the beginning of the book. McKittrick first story, titled “Curiosities (My Heart Makes My Head Swim),” asks the reader to stay with the precision of black methodology where “Wonder is study. Curiosity is attentive,” (5) Curiosity can be dizzying; it looks to the implications of scientific knowledge and unfurls opacity, immeasurability, possibility. Wonder skirts predetermined outcomes. This means eliding disciplinary and scientific attachments. But wonder opens a pathway to awe. Sustained, detailed curiosity seeks out the “already existing and unfinished and unmet possibility” of black livingness. This epistemological project challenges sciences that loop back to antiblack violence, and argues black people have always engaged in praxis across genres and mediums to “story the world” (4).

While I am not an anthropologist, I am situated in the adjacent field of critical geography which uses similar tools to write about land, people, and palimpsests. McKittrick’s *Dear Science and Other Stories* implores social scientists to not return to the tired racialized story of socio-scientific ‘facts.’ There is something radical to black knowledge systems that retain black livingness. This book should be read, not to know more, but to do better. Here, neither racism nor science can- nor should- be ignored, and at the same time, there are always registers of sharing ideas, dreams, curiosities even if the lexicon is incomplete. *Dear Science and Other*

*Stories* phenomenally traverses disciplines, spaces, queries, black feminist praxis, media, and more to differently account for black humanity. Put whatever you are doing down, and pick up this book.

P.S.: McKittrick released a six and a half hour Spotify playlist under the same title as an unofficial accompaniment to the book. This allows readers hear the storytellers she engages, to bop to its rhythms, to think beyond boundaries of genre, form, and field. *Dear Science and Other Stories*- book and playlist- saddles up to the edge and extends a hand. To riff on Ruth Wilson Gilmore: as every geographer knows, edges are also sensory experiences. A black sense of place where head and heart swim *and* sway.

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