

AT THE PORES OF THE PLANTATION

This black urban presence—black life—uncovers a mode of being human that, while often cast out from other official history, is not victimized and dispossessed and wholly alien to the land; rather it redefines the terms of who and what we are vis-à-vis a cosmogony that, while painful, does not seek to inhabit a location closer to that of “the fittest” but instead honors our mutually constitutive and relational versions of humanness.

—KATHERINE MCKITTRICK, “Plantation Futures”

Around 2011, the hue “indigo black,” or indigo-stained Black skin, pierced my cornea and grafted itself onto my eye. While I had viewed the film *Daughters of the Dust* countless times before 2011, it was in the context of reflecting on conquest and the relationship between Black enslavement and Indigenous genocide that I found the stained hands of Nana Peazant and her kin who worked the indigo plantation arresting. From 2011 until now, the very idea that the cultivation of violet plants and the crude chemistry involved in their conversion into indigo dye could have an afterlife on the skin, and perhaps across generations, has inhabited a small corner of my mind.¹ In *Daughters of the Dust*, which was released in 1991, Julie Dash tells the story of the Peazant family, descendants of the Gullah people who live on the Sea Islands off the coast of Georgia. The film depicts the twenty-four-hour period before several members of the Peazant family leave the Sea Islands to become modern Black subjects on the shores of Savannah, Georgia; Harlem; and Nova Scotia. Throughout the film, the family tensions, secrets, histories, and dramas climb and reach their own crests as departure from the Sea Islands draws near. As the viewer observes the narrative arcs, the screen captures images of Black people whose hands are stained blue. In an interview with Houston Baker that I elaborate on later,

Dash calls the indigo-stained hands the scars of slavery. Since 2011, I have been haunted by these scars.

While we were in Charleston, South Carolina, in the spring of 2011, my mother and I took a Gullah tour with Alphonso Brown, the local historian who curates the tour, acts as docent, and facilitates commercial exchanges between tourists and Gullah artisans.² After traveling to a number of different sites on the tour, I asked Brown about indigo plantations. I wanted to know whether there were any extant sites where indigo-processing vats and materials were preserved. Brown shared that, for the most part, indigo processing had been suspended in the region in the early 1800s because it caused premature death in the enslaved populations who worked it. According to Brown, slaves who processed indigo were susceptible to diseases and illnesses that contemporary medicine would refer to as cancer.³ Indigo processing was a noxious and potentially fatal endeavor on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century plantations in South Carolina and the Low Country.

Historians have described the region of the plantation cordoned off for indigo processing as “insalubrious.”⁴ In Dash’s filmic depiction of the nether regions of the indigo plantation—a place located both deep within and at the edge of—a dense and haptic scene encloses the lens of the camera with thick, murky clouds of smoke and fog that obscure the people and objects just beyond. So thick and liminal is the gaseous visual scape created on-screen that it might allow a viewer to imagine a rank and putrid stench of rotting plants and weeds potent enough to choke a person.⁵ For almost two full minutes about an hour and three minutes into the film, the sights and sounds of indigo-making saturate the visual field. The murky and noxious ecozone has a surreal visual- and soundscape. Microphones pick up the sloshing sounds of liquid being stirred. Soft, faint drums and human chanting create a background layer of sound for the sloshing. An unborn child, a future member of the Peazant family, is depicted as a ghostly figure in a white dress and narrates the scene, which explains that these workers are “the ones who chose to survive.”⁶ The low, haunting music that plays in the key of A (for Elegba) at the end of the scene is the theme that often plays when the members of the Peazant family are on the beach.⁷

Contrasting the smoky and dark landscape are bright blue fabrics. Three women in the foreground are stirring liquid in large vats with a tall stick. The indigo that has spilled over the lip of the vats stains the sides of the deep wells. The unborn child appears at the vat in the foreground and sticks her hand into one of the poisonous vats and mimics the women’s stirring.

One old man is also stirring a vat of liquid, and a woman is hanging the cloth on a line. The camera later frames the unborn child while she holds a square mold for the indigo paste. The camera moves away from the unborn child and frames a young boy watching an elder count the indigo molds. The elder chants as he stacks the molds, and the camera moves back into the dark smoke that billows around the young boy's face. The foggy smoke hides portions of the young boy's body.

As described in historical literature, the area of the plantation marked off for indigo processing was a fly- and insect-infested contact zone, rife with the potential for the transmission of disease. The smoky, hot, rank, and infested zone was often deemed uninhabitable, even for animals.⁸ Yet like the hold of the ship, it also contained life that fostered alternative modes of survival, existence, and perhaps even pleasure. The nether region of the indigo plantation is a liminal place that represents a space that is at once both inside and at the very edge of the plantation. It is also a place teetering on the edges of death and life. As a transitional space, the indigo plantation could be called an ecotone—a region of transition between distinct ecological, social, and ontological systems. This chapter tracks the production of ecotonal and liminal spaces at the site and space of the pore. The indigo plantation and the body represent different scales of porosity and illumine the ways that Black embodiment and place disrupt and reorganize humanist representations of bodies and inhabitable space. The indigo plantation represents the edge of one kind of plantation sociality and the beginning of another. Similarly, the pores of the hands of enslaved Black people working indigo function as the edge of the body and as a portal into other kinds of human and nonhuman relations.

In this chapter, I use the metaphor of the pore to make space for alternative readings of representations of Black life in plantation landscapes as open spaces of transit, flux, and exchange through which a number of symbolic economies move and collide. By overlaying or creating a bricolage of the speculative work of Julie Dash and William Gerard de Brahm at each of the images' pores—or openings—I reread the cartouche featuring Black figures processing indigo on the shore in de Brahm's map through Dash's filmic depictions of porous, "indigo-stained" Black hands.⁹ I want to pause here to "notice" and again write about the haunting work done by the ghostly doubling of the cartouche on the copy of the map at Davidson College, in which the palimpsestic nature and, more specifically, porosity of the materiality of papyrus/paper maps has enabled the cartouche's Black figures to have a kind of play and errancy that de Brahm did not intend. The

paranormal doubling here harkens to Katherine McKittrick's "something else" of Black life as a surplus of anti-Black violence. This bricolage or shoal functions as an alternative geography that represents Black embodiment as states of flux, openings, and portals that include and exceed the rubric of labor. Because the analytic of labor often crowds out other analytics, such as porosity and fungibility, and tends to dictate how Black bodies on plantation landscapes are viewed and perceived, it is particularly challenging to reorient practices of looking in ways that can also facilitate viewing Blackness as something other than labor. The two speculative texts—de Brahm's, which attempts conquest, and Dash's, which depicts "otherwise" ways of being human—work as overlays on each other to create a new ecotonal site of possibility for Black embodiment and place-making. At the pores of Black embodiment, a new scale of the plantation and its various socialities can be perceived. Throughout the chapter, I rely on theorizations of fungibility by Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Jennifer Morgan, and, more recently, C. Riley Snorton to situate my analytic of porosity as a frame that exceeds labor. Finally, drawing on McKittrick's work on plantation futurity, I read for Black life in the depths of indigo plantation degradation. Far from reducing on-screen Black figures and porous flesh as abject objects, this chapter reveals the ways that all bodies are always already embedded in and run conterminously with nonhuman life. The kinds of epistemic and ontological openings that appear in Dash's aesthetics and in Black interdisciplinary scholarship align with notions of "all my relations" in conceptualizations of the body's relationship to land and nonhuman life in Native studies. The Anishinaabe poet and scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson argues, "Our bodies are embedded in the ecologies and in our intimate relationships with the land."¹⁰ Indigenous insight into the land-body connection, or the land possessing the body, offers a different way to think about and regard the Black hands that are entangled with or stained by indigo. Far from being rendered objectified bodies, they are visual reminders of the ways that the human body is always embedded in the ecologies that surround us. In fact, all bodies are a part of the ecology.

THE SHOALS OF THE PLANTATION

In this chapter, I frame the shoal in four distinct yet related ways. First, the visual analysis of Dash's images of Black-blue hands is read against and with de Brahm's map to methodologically produce a tension and friction. Shoaling as a form of encounter and friction is made more explicit in

the counterreading that Dash makes possible in her images of alternative forms of Black embodiment and relations on the indigo plantation. Dash's images disrupt singular narratives of death. Second, fungibility as an analytical frame shoals the impulse to rely on the Marxian regime of labor and other inadequate forms of political economic analysis. A shared Black and Indigenous critique of labor functions as another shoal, or gathering space, that unsettles normative Lockean and Marxist notions of who can be human and on what terms. When the onto-epistemic terms of labor and its modernizing, humanizing, and disciplinary power on Indigenous and Black subjects are rejected, frames such as fungibility, fugitivity, and porosity provide other ways to discuss human relations to the land and nonhuman life-forms. Third, porosity is explicitly engaged as a way to theorize entanglement and interconnection as a part of all human relations. While the focus is on the Black bodies' pores as a space of connection — or shoal — to other nonhuman forms of life, ultimately I theorize this “reality” of human porosity and connection as an attribute of all forms of life. Various forms of life are ecotonal, or hybrid spaces like the shoal; however, our current Cartesian epistemes do not enable an exploration of this reality of entanglement. Fourth, and finally, the indigo-processing zone is theorized as the outer limit, or pore, of the plantation. As a pore, it is both a limit space and a buffer from the abject zone, yet it also keeps the body and social connected to that which is abject. I connect the metaphor of the shoal to the pore as it also functions as an ecotonal and in-between space like the pore.

Porosity and fungibility are elusive and difficult to visualize because they cannot be captured through traditional modes of seeing. Dash, for instance, had to use creative license and stain her actors' hands blue (a stain that would not appear to the human eye offscreen) to depict the “scars” left on Black bodies from indigo processing. I interpret these stained blue hands as other kinds of human bodies that are open and porous sites of transit that index alchemy, radical alterity, and transformation. Labor alone does not sufficiently relay or explain the Black body's significance to the altering of the landscape and its transformation into a process under eighteenth-century relations of conquest and settlement. Further, labor alone does not capture all of the relationships that Blackness has to slavery, genocide, settlement, and capitalism. If we think through Snorton's idea that fungibility and fugitivity are two sides of a “Janus-faced coin,” fungibility — particularly, for Snorton, gender openness and capacity for re-arrangement — can become a resource and a site of possibility. To over-

come this conceptual and visual gap, I argue that new kinds of speculative tableaux, visual practices, and archives need to be created.

Through creating this bricolage (and shoal), the speculative work of both Dash and de Brahm—especially the ghostly, paranormal image of the cartouche that duplicates its image over time—remap and reimagine new kinds of geographies that defamiliarize traditional plantation scenes while creating new landscapes that can depict both bodies and plantations as sets of relations and processes in the making rather than as fixed and already knowable plantation spaces that always already contain laboring Black forms. These new landscapes stretch beyond the humanist narratives of labor and development that privilege settlement, productivity, and human domination of the land. Linking Dash and de Brahm's cartouche at the porous space of the indigo plantation creates an original interdisciplinary and multimedia map that explicitly focuses on the speculative and imaginative nature of colonial mapmaking. Rendering these sites—the film and the map—as porous lends to a reading of the open-ended nature of both speculative mediums. For example, the porosity of the de Brahm map enables a palimpsestic reproduction of the image of the Black figures in the cartouche; because of the map's porous nature, the image of the Black figures could, in the sense that Christina Sharpe introduces in *In the Wake*, annotate it.¹¹ The Black figures exhibit this paranormal annotation by duplicating their image over and over—a swelling of the crowd—which leaves cartography as a modern form of writing (Man) open to revision. When one reads the map this way, an archive of conquest becomes a site of Hartman's critical fabulation and a way to connect texts to make, as McKittrick argues, human geographies of domination “alterable.”¹² Specifically, by mapping de Brahm's eighteenth-century renderings and Dash's twentieth-century images simultaneously, they can be read relationally as speculative and imaginative works that tell multiple stories. In this way, de Brahm's map becomes another spatial imaginary rather than an inscrutable scientific document that holds irrefutable truth. Likewise, Dash's rendering of the porous fungible body helps us destabilize the governing frame of labor for understanding Black embodiment on plantation landscapes. Read together as a practice of critical fabulation, this new map (or these new maps) renders a depiction of the Atlantic and Low Country coast as a volatile and unstable landscape in which Blackness functions as a symbol of transition, flux, and uncapturability in a period in which the British colonies needed to put the landscape in motion to transform and conquer it.

As speculative texts, Dash's 1991 filmic images of the porous, penetrable, and stained hands of former slaves who worked indigo on noxious landscapes and de Brahm's 1757 map depict open-ended representations of Black bodies as states of instability, change, and transition.¹³ De Brahm's motives were to control and dehumanize while Dash manages to point to other ways of living in, through, and beyond abjection. But both of their works enable a glimpse of Black bodies (and ideas of Blackness) as suspended states of boundarylessness, gender ambiguity, and intercessory spaces necessary for the completion of chemical processes such as indigo fermentation. De Brahm's and Dash's boundarylessness moves in very different ways: while de Brahm's moves toward a form of dehumanization and Black sensuousness, Dash's moves in a direction of a Black uncontainability that is impossible for de Brahm to contain. Both de Brahm's understanding of the landscape as a dynamic and unstable process and Dash's depiction of pores on Black bodies that function as openings and entryways of connections to larger nonhuman ecosystems resist reducing Black bodies to merely laboring bodies.

While labor is surely depicted, de Brahm's and Dash's visual fields refuse conventional analyses that would collapse multiple and intricate processes into the governing logic of labor. By allowing the eye to maintain chemical processes and pores of the body in a holding pattern, these images can depict Blackness as coterminous with a series of chemical reactions and as porous bodies that exceed the humanist ontological boundaries that would separate plant, objects, and human flesh from one another. Reading de Brahm's and Dash's images of Black embodiment as potentially porous through and against one another works to disrupt conventional interpretations of Black bodies as merely labor while also creating space for other kinds of spatial readings. Further, it opens up possibilities that allow for more agile and generous readings that can bring notions of Black fungibility and fugitivity into closer proximity while also looking at Black people's bodies more ethically and scrupulously.

Combining, merging, and creating new images of Black embodiment—particularly, errant Black bodily forms—also pushes at the limits of what is conventionally construed as the human body. De Brahm's and Dash's depictions of the outer edge of the indigo plantation and the skin affect liminality at different scales. However, at the scale of the pore—whether it is the pore of the plantation or the pore of the skin—the images overlap. As pores, the indigo plantation and the skin function as entrances and exits, openings and closings. The space of the pore represents a multiscale geog-

raphy that connects the cartouche's depiction of the indigo plantation and Dash's outer region of the plantation to the Black pores of Dash's actors' indigo stains. The tiny pore gives way to an opening onto the edges and depths of the plantation as a process and shifting set of relations. As spaces of passage, pores face both inward and outward, on the inside and on the outside, at the edge and at the beginning of the human, or as something outside of and more than the human. The pore of the body is the shallowest place on the skin/epidermis, acting as the first surface that interacts with other, ostensibly nonhuman matter.

BEYOND THE ICONICITY OF BLACK LABOR

While labor is important, when it is used as the exclusive governing analytic in the scholarship on U.S. slavery and U.S. settler colonialism, it hides more than it reveals.¹⁴ Specifically, labor as a governing frame obscures other processes, relations, locations, and symbolic economies that Black bodies and representations of Black embodiment produce and sustain within New World spatial expansion and geography's attendant project of human-making. Labor, though one particular and useful frame of analysis for analyzing colonial and subsequent capitalist contexts, imposes its own, totalizing regimes of reason and visibility. While this chapter, and book, by no means jettison the historical fact that Black people have served as various forms of labor, I argue here that when we look at and contend with the fact or experience of slavery, the enslaved Black body presents a remainder and something in excess of labor.¹⁵ The Black enslaved body is always something more—a fungible, expanding, and becoming-fugitive state. Further, a focus just on the Black laboring body may preclude thinking about the ways that Black bodies are imagined within other symbolic economies, such as conquest, Native genocide, the Cartesian notion of nature, colonial taxonomies, and ecological destruction.

As a flexible analytic, Black fungibility also functions as a mode of critique and an alternative reading practice that reroutes lines of inquiry around humanist assumptions and aspirations that can pull critique toward incorporation into categories such as labor(er). While fraught, considering Black fungibility as an analytical frame forecloses celebratory discussions of Black labor as evidence of Black contributions to Western “settlement” and investments in humanist forms of modernity. Shona Jackson argues in *Creole Indigeneity*, for example, that the analytic of labor as an ontological system inherited from Enlightenment thought is widely circu-

lated within Caribbean and “postcolonial” thought. Jackson draws attention to the trappings of what she describes as the “metaphysics of labor,” which rely on the logic that labor is a disciplining and civilizing process through which Blacks can travel to become human. To become civilized through labor, Indigenous relations to land and Black resistance to labor exploitation must be disavowed.¹⁶

Considering Black fungibility instead of labor as an analytical frame creates an opportunity to reflect on other kinds of cosmologies—more specifically, Indigenous and Black ones—that radically reimagine the body’s relationship to life forms that have been taxonomized as plants or non-human. Further, critiques of labor (and Marxist forms of humanism) that emerge from Black studies, such as Hartman’s notion of fungibility, align with critiques of labor within Indigenous studies, such as Glen Coulthard’s. Thinking with and privileging Marx’s notion of primitive accumulation instead of labor exploitation, Hartman is able to focus on the ever expanding use of Blackness beyond labor, and Coulthard is able to center the murder and colonization of Native people and land.¹⁷ I find this shift of attention and emphasis in both Black studies and Native studies important. It does not assume or center a laboring figure that works itself into humanity through alienation—that is, by separating itself from other life-forms that it must denigrate, such as land, water, and animals. These challenges to the worker as a privileged genre of the human—or what Sylvia Wynter would call Man2—can open space to consider what LaMonda Stallings calls an “anti-work politics and postwork imagination.”¹⁸ In *Funk the Erotic*, Stallings challenges the very notion of work and the attendant idea that it makes one worthy of life, protection, and dignity.

Moreover, theorizing Black bodies as forms of flux or space in process rather than as human producers, stewards, and occupiers of space enables at least a momentary reflection on the other kinds of (and often forgotten) relationships that Black bodies have to plants, objects, and nonhuman life-forms. A focus on the fungible flux of Blackness can temporarily arrest the tendency to assume that Black life always already orients itself around the human as the center of space and life. As an open and porous state, Blackness possesses various openings, entry points, and ways of orienting itself to social and organic constellations. To break with a totalizing regime of labor, Black porosity is considered as an analytical shoal and alternative reading practice to disrupt the visual regime and iconicity of Black labor.¹⁹

In part, Black fungibility in this chapter reimagines Black bodies’ relationship to the spatial processes that make seventeenth- and eighteenth-

century plantation landscapes—both actual and imagined—possible. As Morgan argues in *Laboring Women*, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Blackness (Black bodies and symbols of Blackness) as a form of expansion and spatial possibility became a constituting feature of the spatial imagination of the conquistador-settler rather than a mere technology or tool of expansion. Specifically, Morgan argues that Black women's bodies on plantations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries functioned as more than productive and reproductive laboring bodies. Morgan's archival excavations and analyses reveal that Black women's bodies also functioned as symbols and, indeed, the conceptual fodder that made spatial expansion and settlement possible for British settlers. As an analytical framework, Black fungibility illuminates the ways that British colonial conceptions of Blackness mediated the ways in which the natural world could be imagined as malleable and an open landscape of flux.²⁰ I argue that Black bodies, in their fluttering, stretching, and changing states, became a symbol of unstable borders, processes, and the shifting power relations that inspired key renderings of eighteenth-century British plantation landscapes.

Morgan's Black feminist historical analysis of the enslaved Black female body as an open and pliable form that could also represent spatial expansion resonates with both Spillers's notion of "flesh" as a territory of culture and political maneuver and Hartman's theorization of how accumulation and fungibility define Black captivity as a state of perpetual exchangeability. I anchor the theoretics of fungibility in the scholarship of Spillers, Hartman, Morgan, and Snorton to attend to its origins in Black feminist theorizing, as well as to acknowledge more open-ended readings of Black fungibility that do not necessarily run along the "always already" death-bound inflections of its Afro-pessimist connotations. Spillers and Snorton specifically enable a theorizing of the "rearrangement and reorganization" of Black flesh toward or for a practice of freedom, even as it exists within unlikely noxious and dark zones of the plantation and captivity.

While Spillers's and Snorton's notions of the flesh and fungibility depart from Afro-pessimism in their pursuit of freedom and Black life, the productive set of refusals and lack of faith in liberal humanist forms of social redress found in Afro-pessimist scholarship is retained and expanded beyond its current capacities. However, the generative nihilism and disavowals are harnessed in these rereadings of colonial archives and used to produce a new, speculative tableau in which Black fungible forms can also operate as sites of deferral or as escape from the current entrapments of the human. These Black fungible, porous, and fugitive forms create new

experiences, feelings, and possibilities. Relevant and material to the study of geography, Black fungibility even becomes a symbol for space.

As the self-actualization of Man₁ and Man₂ is linked to the production of space through conquest, I identify Black fungibility as a form of raw material and an expression of spatial expansion used for hu(Man) ascendancy under conquest.²¹ This particular spatial treatment of fungibility (for the service of White self-actualization) explores Blackness as an abstract, always moving process that enables human geographical projects. In this way, Black spatiality is imagined as both outside of (ejected from living within) human space and necessary (in its negation) for the production of human places. This is a tension yet to be resolved in our current discussions of human geography. Admittedly, this application of Black fungibility as a spatial methodology tracking the production of humanist space positions Black space as outside liberal geographies of humanity. With this in mind, the making of Black place necessarily occurs on different terms—terms that McKittrick would call “painful” but also that honor “our mutually constitutive and relational versions of humanness.”

Following McKittrick, who follows Wynter into the rarely explored corners of the plantation plot to anticipate Black life, my approach to Black fungibility recognizes the violence of the plantation and its afterlife while simultaneously acknowledging the ongoing capacity for the making and remaking of Black life in the midst of plantation violence.²² In “Plantation Futures,” arguably the space that the phantom figures of the cartouche inhabit, McKittrick insists that a necessary double reading of the plantation is urgent. Thinking with Wynter’s “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation” (1995), McKittrick argues that the approaches and methods for reading for resistance require a creative and less conventional search for and understanding of other modes of resistance:

Analytically, the simultaneous rather than dichotomized workings of the plot and plantation, understood alongside the creative work of the fiction plot, recast the politics of resistance. Wynter’s essay suggests that plantation futures can go two ways at once: first, where the basic system is left untouched and we are left to defend and justify it and, second, where the awareness of the workings of the system are engendered in a (creative and geographic) plot-life and, at the same time, challenge this long-standing logic. The latter future offered, I suggest, cannot withstand inevitable black-death because it asks that we imagine black-life as anticipatory.²³

Like McKittrick, Snorton follows Harriet Jacobs's flight to a garret — a loophole of retreat — in a house on the plantation in which she is enslaved in order to think about the ways that the enslaved could alter and manipulate the plantation plot. Snorton follows and accompanies Jacobs off the plantation and into the snaky swamps of North Carolina. While in this uninhabitable, snake-infested swamp, Jacobs was able to transform captivity and its terrain of Black exclusion into conditions “that would allow fungibility to become fertile ground for flight.”²⁴ Very much like the swamp that offered Harriet Jacobs a fugitive and unthinkable geography for a “performance for” escape, the nether regions of the indigo plantation and the chemical process of changing the plant into a dye in the film *Daughters of the Dust* provided Black people with an unexpected loophole of retreat and a geography of life on other terms.

Using the speculative work in *Daughters of the Dust*, I focus on Dash's representation of Black porous flesh stained indigo to visualize Blackness as an open state of possibility with the capacity to transform conditions of subjection. The blue, porous hands of the characters in the film function as shoals and sites of transit that reconfigure Black flesh at the threshold of Man and index possibilities for other kinds of humanity. In the film, Black people refashion abject conditions and noxious spaces into Black places of life that exist outside normative conscriptions of what it means to be human and where that humanity can take place.

BLACK EMBODIMENT IN SPACE

Existing outside the borders of liberal humanism's stable individual, the porous and fungible form is an always unfolding space of possibility. Blackness, as a symbol of fugitivity and fungibility, rather than simply of labor, disorients a number of theoretical approaches.²⁵ Slavery and its afterlife are animated around the severing of Blackness from human contemporaries and human relations. In *Red, White and Black*, Frank Wilderson attends to how Afro-pessimists “have gone considerable lengths to show that, point of fact, slavery is and connotes an ontological status for blackness; and that the constituent elements of slavery are not exploitation and alienation but accumulation and fungibility.”²⁶ Under slavery and conquest, the Black body becomes the ultimate symbol of accumulation, malleability, and flux existing outside human coordinates of space and time. Instead, Blackness is the raw dimensionality (symbol, matter, kinetic energy) used to make space. As space, Black bodies cannot also occupy space on human terms.

According to Wilderson, Blacks do not share the “spatial and temporal capacity” of the human.²⁷ While they are used for the production of human geographies of possession, inhabitation, and self-actualization, Black bodies do not exist as human cartographers, inhabitants, or stewards of space and property in eighteenth-century mappings of empire and within human geography writ large. Black bodies are the spatial and temporal coordinates that make human orientation to space possible. Black bodies are, in fact, the spatial coordinates that the human can manipulate and inhabit. Early geographical imaginaries posited “space as outside of human existence.”²⁸ Black bodies, one with nature, take on the coordinates of space within Western thought. Black bodies mark the outsides of humanness.

Conversely, and more in line with McKittrick’s Black geographical subjects, I argue that Black bodies negotiate time-space configurations on different terms. Running conterminously with McKittrick’s “protean” plantation, the unanchored Black body in flux is at the center of modernity.²⁹ In fact, the Black body thrown into a state of flux becomes a symbol of process, transformation, expansion, and space under relations of conquest. While under relations of conquest, Black people must imagine and inhabit place in ways outside humanist configurations of geography. I attempt to reread the paranormal “liveness” of the rendering of Black figures processing indigo in a Dashean and McKittrickian tradition that presumes Black endurance and the pursuit of life, pleasure, and other ways to exist in the meantime. Like the volatile landscape depicted in de Brahm’s map, Black bodies are porous sites of instability and transition between states. The three bodies in the cartouche represent states of change and fugitive potential. The tremors of muscles in action are at once motions under captivity and debasement, as well as maneuvers and contortions escaping totalizing violence. Akin to the way Darieck Scott rereads Frantz Fanon’s “tensely quivering muscles at the junction of the split,” I read the Black muscles in de Brahm’s map through Dash, Fanon, and Scott as both restrained and resistant in ways that cannot always be predicted and therefore contained.³⁰

Reading this map at its pores (overlying Dash and de Brahm at the indigo plantation and the body) and alongside scholarly interpretations of environmental historians who incorporate how the White surveyor de Brahm was attuned to the volatility of the landscape, enables a rereading of Black bodies on plantation landscapes as shifting, moving, and unstable figures that elude full knowability. While de Brahm’s cartouche may appear to capture the Black body in a precarious and unstable state, the same

Black bodies can be viewed as ever changing and unruly forms that are impossible to contain. The decolonial optics of Julie Dash are an example of a more liberatory image of fugitive fungibility.³¹ When one focuses on images of Dash's characters whose hands are stained indigo, what becomes evident is how the porosity of Blackness can direct our sight and attention toward the ways that Black modes of living require rethinking human gender and sexual categories, Cartesian separations of human from non-human life-forms, and traditional notions of habitable zones of life. When Black fungibility can be perceived — or translated within — the realm of the scopic, it radically transforms the terms of dominant visibility.

Speculative work depicting what is possible enables an examination of both the limits of the White conquistador imagination and the possibilities created by Black imaginaries.³² Speculative readings also offer a mapping of the limits of the imagination and the epistemological systems that the conquistador-settler relied on to create spatial representations of empire. This visual analysis catalogues and considers the speculative labor and imaginative work required of conquest. Specifically, this analysis tracks the ways that the Cartesian landscape in de Brahm's map and the Black figures on it had to be thrown into a state flux or made fungible (movement, process, and boundarylessness) before they could be imaged as inert and capturable forms that could be fixed in space.

Paradoxically, de Brahm's need to visually and conceptually render human and nonhuman life-forms as discrete, knowable, containable, and fixed also required them to be represented as unstable and changing. The fixed boundaries of Cartesianism are a colonial ruse that obscures how boundaries continually needed to be made malleable and thrown into flux to be reorganized and reconstituted with new humanist boundary markers.³³ Moreover, focusing on process and states of change (things that cannot be pinned down) introduces a way of exposing the colonial ruse of empiricism by illuminating the "Black" phantasmic — or uncapturable nature of Black fugitivity — within hegemonic visual regimes. This analysis's scrutiny of the imaginative and speculative nature of eighteenth-century cartography reveals the fiction of empiricism and its production of the idea of truth through an accounting of the "real." The imaginative landscapes of this eighteenth-century map expose that there was not necessarily a discrete, inert, and visible catalogue of "real" bodies, nature, and land that could be truly captured and "known." Therefore, Black bodies, nonhuman life-forms, and the ways that they were categorized through humanist forms of Cartesianism can be continually called into question.

The categories of human and nonhuman “laborer,” plant, land, animal, and other forms of life and the boundaries between them all become suspect “political projects.”³⁴ What is important about this denaturalization of humanist boundaries is that if the Black figure on the plantation landscape is something that is obscure and not yet known, it can elude certain forms of representation that attempt to fix it in space and time. Black forms on the landscape are something yet to be understood rather than always already known.

INDIGO-BLACK

In de Brahm’s cartouche, Black bodies functioned to connect and cohere small, and even micro-level, chemical changes such as those that occurred during indigo processing. A closer examination of the schematic rendering of the indigo-processing phases in the cartouche reveal how Black fungible bodies merged with and became coterminous with or symbols for colonial chemical processes. Contextualizing de Brahm’s cartouche within what Nicholas Mirzoeff periodizes as the modern mode of plantation visuality (1660–1860), I argue that de Brahm’s map is a part of the tradition of rendering the landscape as a schematic, or a process in motion.³⁵ The schematic as a vantage point or perspective enabled the cartographer, surveyor, and artist to reveal the process, such as nature, as a system that is generally assumed to be static.

For example, Mirzoeff uses the plate illustrations of the missionary Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre, who rendered the complex process of indigo cultivation in the Antilles in 1667 in a plate titled “Indigoterie,” in *L’histoire général des Antilles habitées par les Français* (The general history of the Antilles inhabited by the French). “Indigoterie” features eleven stages of the indigo production process. The overseer—the eyes of the French Empire—is placed in the center of the drawing in a way that gives him a view of all of the slaves in every phase of the process. Mirzoeff draws our attention to what the rendering attempts to achieve: “This incongruous scene is not a literal depiction of indigo production[,], although it depicts each stage of the necessary work and its resultant division of labor, *but its schematic representation, which makes visible both the process and the power that sustained it.*”³⁶ The schematic view, which focuses on “the process and the power,” makes it possible to view the Black body as more than a slave or laboring body. While it is certainly not self-evident or automatically apparent to any viewer of “Indigoterie,” or de Brahm’s map, I argue, the sche-

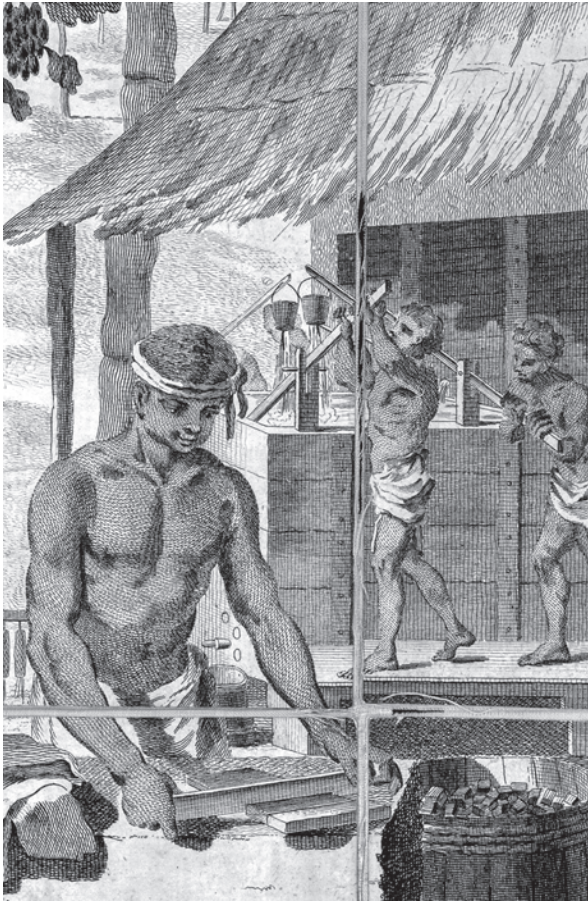


FIGURE 3.1. Cartouche from William Gerard de Brahm's "1757 Map of the Coast of South Carolina and Parts of Georgia." Credit: William Gerard de Brahm, 1757.

Map of South Carolina and a Part of Georgia, Containing the Whole Sea-Coast. Courtesy of Archives and Special Collections Division of the E. H. Little Library, Davidson College.

matic in the era of plantation visuality (1660–1860) creates a momentary scopic opening in which one can get a glimpse of when and how the Black figure exceeds that of a laborer and can become a body embedded in or part of a process.

The actual processing of indigo, which carried great aesthetic and symbolic importance for the British empire, is featured prominently in the cartouche. Mart Stewart muses, “In this context, the cartouche might also be read a little more speculatively as emphasizing not just the production of an imperial commodity but as an exaltation of one of the chemical processes—in this case, the fermentation process that turned a plant into a dye and a glorious color.”³⁷ Attending carefully to the chemical process of indigo dye production reveals the Black figures depicted in the cartouche as dynamic and active states of the phases of indigo processing.

When one looks closely at their movements and progressive placement in the cartouche, the three ostensibly Black male bodies appear to mimic modern scientific movement through the stages of a chemical process. In the right background, the slaves’ movements depict the rudimentary and elemental processes of stirring. The fermentation of the indican plant is presented as the beginning stage of indigo processing in the cartouche. The figures are also drawn at angles that almost mimic ethnographic and scientific renderings of objects that are shown as vertical sections or as profiles to illustrate their position in a prior and primitive stage. Their bodies and activities represent the moments in which the plants, water, lime—and, perhaps, even muscles due to strain and fatigue—break down to their most basic chemical elements. Indican plants, water, and lime lose their unique elemental properties and are reassembled into an oxidizing solution. Moreover, the Black bodies paddling in the background are rendered repetitive, standardized, and symmetrical replications of one another, depicting a process under way.

As the eye moves to the foreground and toward the little bit of negative space near the left margin, it traces the path of the progression of linear time represented in the drawing. As linear time moves from the background and to the left, the eye travels along and through the more advanced phases of the chemical process. In the final stages of indigo production, the solution of chemical elements is transformed into a deep blue solid. The mass of indigo needs to be subjected to a more sophisticated process, requiring sharp attention to detail, an eye for discerning uniform measurement, and good timing.³⁸ At this stage, the body is drawn with more precision. The figure in the foreground is shown in a frontal view and at a scale

that renders facial features visible. To be a marketable and sellable commodity, the dye blocks need to be measured, weighed, and packed by a skilled eye. A process of chemical breakdown, fluidity, and boundary loss must be converted into discrete economic units and a linearly progressive “scientific” process to be replicated. In this context, Black bodies represent elaborate processes of chemical breakdown, reassemblage, and states of transition on the colonial landscape. When one reads de Brahm’s map this way, Black bodily movements can exceed the logics of labor and render the Black body an opaque space that confounds already available frames of legibility. To cause an additional unfurling that engenders rethinking and revaluizing the humanist categories of labor and “male” bodies, I move a few scales down to the skin and then further to the pores.

BLACK POROSITY (AND FUNGIBILITY) AS RESOURCES

Daughters of the Dust depicts the drama that unfolds on the occasion of the Peazant family’s migration from the Sea Islands to the mainland territories on the Georgia coast. In the film, formerly enslaved people who process indigo appear on-screen with hands dyed blue. The images in Dash’s movie are certainly gendered. Yet germane to my argument is that, at the location of the stained pore, gender distinctions collapse. As Spillers has explained, “Men of the black diaspora . . . had the opportunity to understand something about the female that no other community had the opportunity to understand and vice versa.”³⁹ At the scale of the pore, Black bodies are sensual, non-gender-specific, penetrable, sexual, fecund, and boundless.

In the moments in which the camera’s lens focuses tightly in on the fingers, skin, and pores, the hand becomes a space where boundaries among nature, plant, culture, gender, and flesh break down. The hand becomes more than a hand; it becomes something else. Dash’s image of a hand stained indigo serves as my *Ur*-text for crafting a visual vocabulary, and now a language, to reorient the Black fungible enslaved body in space. The indigo-stained hands of Nana Peazant create an image of bodily subjection that exceeds a number of conceptual frames used for thinking about Black bodies and slavery. In an interview, Houston Baker asked Dash why she chose to stain the skin of her actors blue, to which she responded, “It was important for me to show these indigo-handed people as a reminder, that these were the scars of slavery, this blueness. I needed to physically show the scars in a different way, because film is like poetry. You want to say something that has been said before, but in a different way.”⁴⁰ Dash’s



FIGURE 3.2. Screen grab from Julie Dash's film *Daughters of the Dust* showing an indigo-stained hand holding a piece of red fruit.

poetics are important, as they are able to exceed the limits imposed by realism and puncture the frame of labor that the limits of realism may leave undisturbed. The actors' indigo-stained hands are also what Nicole Fleetwood calls "counter-iconic" images of slavery.⁴¹ These images do not trap the Black body within the sign of labor. As porous and stained bodies, they break the iconicity of the "Black laboring body" and open up other possibilities for viewing, interpreting, and imagining Black bodies on plantation landscapes.

More than metaphors, these indigo "scars" index forms and orders of violence that exceed both the capacity of the human eye and traditional ideations of slavery as labor.⁴² Dash's image of the scarred hands pushes our sight into the realm of fungibility. The boundaries of the slave body are broken or, better yet, do not exist within cognitive orders of Enlightenment humanism. The Enlightenment posits bodies that are stable, autonomous, bounded, and separate from nature. The indigo-stained hands of Nana Peazant transgress Cartesian dualisms and notions of who can be human.

Given Cartesian, dualistic, Enlightenment conceptualizations of space, Dash's hybrid body exists outside the realm of the bounded liberal human. That which is outside of humanness may be considered a part of nature and space. Gillian Rose describes Enlightenment notions of humanity upholding strict boundaries between outsides and insides, noting that "the civilized body was one with limited and carefully controlled passages between

its inside and outside.”⁴³ As fungible bodies, Black bodies are porous and can merge with indigo—or nature—and make new kinds of flesh. Black porous flesh and its connections with plants and nonhuman forms of life confound Enlightenment orderings of the world. Indigo-stained pores, or blue-Black flesh, represent an alternative orientation and relation to objects, plants, and human and nonhuman elements in the world. As a speculative artist and filmmaker, Dash *pushes against* liberal notions of the human as separate from nature. Thus, in the film Black bodies and plant molecules are intimately and inexorably interdependent. Dash’s image of the hand stained over time by its ongoing subjection to a molecular process of a body becoming both flesh and indigo represents the space where the flesh becomes more than a human hand. The pores of the hand become part of an ecological constellation that includes both flesh and plants.

According to Clyde Woods, who writes about the kind of African American representational structure that emerges in opposition to the “totalizing practices of plantation institutions,” the world that the enslaved people inhabited on the indigo plantation could have been organized by a “blues epistemology.”⁴⁴ Reading Woods’s notion of the “blues epistemology” alongside Dash’s blue-handed people and their more intimate relationship with and knowledge of the porosity of the human and nonhuman world gestures toward a form of Black, or African American, realism that should be noted. Woods argues that the blues culture was, in part, made up of “cosmologies derived from African and Native American traditions, which were populated by known and unknown human, animal and plant spirits, and by the forces of nature.”⁴⁵ I situate Dash’s film and its representation of a radical Black embeddedness and connection to multiple worlds as a part of what Woods names a blues tradition. This blues epistemology tells a different story about what it means to be human. What emerges is a hybrid story of mutual coexistence and relationality with nonhuman, animal, and plant life that radically respatializes the body and notions of the self.

Dash’s intervention in the visual realm to depict human skin and indigo dye as one also represents an example of the kind of African American realism—a worldview that takes into consideration everyday life—that must rely on speculation and creative invention to reveal the truth of Black life.

The indigo stain is knowable only at the molecular level (slaves are poisoned and die) and perceptible to the human eye only through decolonial art such as Dash’s. The regime of colonial visibility also hides aspects of conquest such as genocide. Specifically, the colonial regime of visibility obscures and makes invisible the genocide of the Yamasee and Indigenous

people of the Sea Islands through the rubric of labor. More to the point, once Native bodies are eliminated, they are removed from and no longer visible on the landscape of the plantation where slaves labor. Dash, however, makes it possible to bring into the frame the genocide of the Indigenous people through her depiction of the Cherokee people and the transformation of land/plant life to property vis-à-vis the fungible body (not only the laboring body) of Nana Peazant.

To “see” the genocide of the Native on Nana Peazant’s body, her pores need to be spatialized within the context of fungibility. If Nana Peazant’s hand represents a scale of the violence that makes the plantation and settlement, which also produces her as a fungible body, then her palm renders visible multiple kinds of violence. The plantation and the clearing were made through the making and unmaking of bodies such as Nana Peazant, the Cherokee Nation, and Indigenous people. Nana Peazant’s hand functions as a scale of a new geographical unit: the clearing-plantation-settlement. The clearing, plantation, and the settlement emerge simultaneously through mutually constituting forms of violence. McKittrick argues that the plantation is reintroduced (again and again) as a “protean” and mutable spatial formation that “fostered complex black and non-black geographies in the Americas and provided the blueprint for future sites of racial entanglement.”⁴⁶ McKittrick’s theorization of plantation space as a place in which differently racialized people and different racial projects encounter each another aligns with Dash’s geography of the indigo-stained pore as a scale of Black subjugation, Indigenous genocide, and conquistador-settler becoming. Attending to what occurs in the pores of Nana Peazant’s hands offer us a new kind of sight. Her pores, as an analytical unit of space embedded in the visual landscape that also features the “lone” surviving Cherokee person on the islands, narrate a story of conquest where the multiple violence of enslavement and genocide merge.

For Nana Peazant’s hands to become scarred blue, indigo had to bleed into her cuticles and pores. Before that, the indigo plant had to be broken down and reduced to separable chemical components in the form of indican. Before that, indigo plants had to be domesticated and harvested on the plantation-settlement plot. The plantation plot had to be fenced off. And preceding these acts, the land had to be cleared. Before the land could be cleared, the settler had to kill and remove the remaining Yama-see/Cherokee Nation residing there. The presence of Dash’s character, St. Julien Lastchild, the lone surviving member of the Cherokee Nation in the film, evokes and makes visible the absences produced by genocide. Nana

Peasant's palms tell a story of multiple kinds of racial violence as well as the new kinds of subjectivities that produced new modes of life on the plantation. Nana Peasant's palms, as well as St. Julien Lastchild's presence, work to bring into the field of vision forms of violence that are excised from the plantation landscape when labor becomes our sole lens for sight. While Nana Peasant's palms represent a scale of the violence of conquest, they also represent ecotones or transitional spaces on the landscape.

BLACK FLUX

In the nether regions of the indigo plantation, Black bodies may merge/mate with plants and create the commodity dye. Black bodies as hybrid plant bodies assume another level of nonnormative and nonhuman sexual excess when situated within the context of the emergence of modern sexuality. Black open, porous bodies both traffic within discourses of sexuality as slippery, wet, and always open and transgress the purview of the sexual. The Black enslaved body embedded within ecotonal processes that tropicalize the landscape of the plantation present new racial and sexual coordinates of human alterity. Black bodies (at the place of the pore) are genderless, sensual, penetrable, sexual, fecund, and boundless in ways that queer theory cannot give an account.

Attending to flesh/pores at their encounter with the pores of indican moves into proximity with the ways that Spillers "breaks" the gender specificity of Black flesh under enslavement. The ostensibly male slaves who participated in indigo processing were susceptible to the same kind of staining, abjection, and sometimes death (likened to cancer) related to toxic exposure as "female flesh unprotected." At the level of pores, the Black bodies in Dash's movie and those working the indigo on the map are ungendered by their capacity for porosity and functioning as sites of transit for chemicals. In fact, gender ambiguity and genderlessness (or the ungendering of the captive) is part of the reason that Blackness gets scripted out of coherent human genres.⁴⁷ These indigo Black bodies are also sites of open and unbounded exchange and entry at their pores. These kinds of fluid and open bodies become signs of sensuality, movement, and exchange and often metaphors for the sexual.

While the stained Black pore as a sign of sensuality, movement, and transit runs alongside the sexual, its penetrability is not solely linked to the genital-anus complex. Nor do Black bodies achieve nonnormative status primarily through sex and the sexual metaphors proffered by queer



FIGURE 3.3. Screen grab from *Daughters of the Dust* showing an indigo-stained hand playing a game.

theory. Homosexual/queer subjects (contemporary LGBT individuals) and theory begin in and with the new genres of the human that emerged in late nineteenth-century sexology. During this era of White sexual differentiation and particularity, Dash's characters contend with the generational poisoning and staining of their pores as sensual and, therefore, deselected beings.

I stress this point for a few reasons. One reason is that mainstream queer theory does not do an adequate job of conceptualizing how Blackness reconfigures Western gender and sexuality. Furthermore, queer theory arrogantly assumes that Western gender and sexuality — and their modalities of nonnormativity — can be mapped onto the corporeality of Blackness. For example, Kathryn Bond Stockton's assertion in the introduction to *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame* that the work of antiracist Black literature has led to a congealing of Blackness is an example of this kind of arrogant misreading. Moreover, Stockton argues that Blackness truly becomes a contagious and spreadable matter only on the back of queerness. When considering the speculative and imaginative work of Dash and of other Black diaspora scholars (particularly those focusing on the Atlantic, oceanic, fungible, and the fugitive), I question Stockton's reading of Black literary and cultural production. If anything, Blackness enters Western modernity from a place of spreadability and boundarylessness made possible by the Middle Passage and various processes that render it outside of coherent and con-

tained human coordinates. It is also from within this place of spreadability, diffuseness, abjection, and nonhumanness from which Black people seek an alternative mode of being human.⁴⁸ As Spillers suggested in 1987, as captives turned into malleable “territories of political and cultural maneuver,” the community of ex-slaves had “nothing to prove.”⁴⁹

Stockton attempts to establish the foundations for an argument that the Black literary and cultural imagination needs to be queered and made a spreadable contaminant. Before Stockton can have White queer theory make this intervention or augment the Black antiracist literary tradition, she must read Blackness as congealed. Stockton confidently reads Black antiracist and queer literature as rigid or solid(ly) afraid of its own spreadability as a contagion.⁵⁰ In contrast, queer (read White) activists and theorists (e.g., Lauren Berlant, Judith Butler, Carolyn Dinshaw, Lee Edelman, Joseph Litvak, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Michael Warner) “have worked to restate ‘queer’ as ‘strange,’ to break against any scripted identities for ‘gays’ or ‘homosexuals’ — to break with congealment, as it were. And yet, in a sense, they would willingly, gladly, spread contamination. They would make supposedly ‘normal’ sexualities confess their strangeness and, therefore, their queerness, lending ‘normal’ sex a whiff of their slang.”⁵¹

Celebrating the queer and contaminating nature of White queer strangeness and its embrace of the nonnormative, Stockton juxtaposes Blackness as conservative, normative, and fearful of leaking out of bounds. Stockton observes, “As for ‘black’ there’s a different dynamic. A dynamic nearly opposite. . . . The range of contaminating significations sticking to ‘black,’ even so, has led, in rather remarkable fashion, to politically sensitive forms of congealment on the part of some anti-racists advocates.”⁵² Rather than rehearse the “antiracist” traditions that have refused the politics of respectability and used Black otherness and nonhumanness as a resource, I challenge Stockton to make this claim stick. Stockton is clearly reading outside the interdisciplinary tradition of Black studies that has already embraced Black deviance and nonnormativity as a mode of life outside liberal humanity.⁵³

Before Black queer theory emerges, Black literary criticism already construes Black diasporic movement, migration, cultural production, and self-making as boundaryless. Black cultural studies in particular traces Black diasporic lifeways among Paul Gilroy’s rhizomorphic oceanic flows of the Black Atlantic that exceed and spread beyond normative units such as the nation-state. Gilroy traces this history of Black oceanic and spreadable cultural flows even before the nineteenth century. Black spreadability was an

essential, if not constitutive, part of Black diasporic and Atlantic epistemologies before the advent of White queer theory. Black studies has not had to reach for or enact spreadability and contamination in the way that nonintersectional queer theory has had to exert itself to take up the contamination of nonnormativity.

In fact, Black studies, as a social field both within and beyond Black queer theory, has argued that both LGBT identity claims and queer theory work from a space of normative identity. Greg Thomas traces how the “beyond” in Wynter’s work takes us beyond humanist aspirations and the internal epistemic revolutions of the West and how Wynter attributes the “specific articulations of both heterosexuality and homosexuality to the Darwinian reinvention of Man (2) in 19th century Europe.”⁵⁴ As Wynter tracks the emergence and reproduction of Man, she scrutinizes how the reconfiguration of the nineteenth-century human reshapes itself through the inclusion of queer or homosexual diversity. Marx’s worker as subject in the nineteenth century can also be a rational wage-earning homosexual (or female) proletarian. The laborer as woman or homosexual knows itself as a free wage laborer (with the choice of sexual expression and identity) through the captivity of the fungible slave who also labors. The European White proletarian who has achieved sexual liberation and identity (hetero- and homosexual) through the individuating power of the wage becomes an intensified Foucauldian individual and subject in relation to the enslaved, nonwage work of Blacks, who are expelled from the boundaries of the rational human wage worker and sexual subject.

In addition to moving beyond the categories of rational human sexuality, Wynter attempted to move beyond the explanatory frame of labor. In “Beyond the Categories of the Master Conception: The Counterdoctrine of the Jamesian Poiesis,” she uses C. L. R. James’s fiction and autobiographical writing to provide historical, material, cultural, and more pluriconceptual frameworks to explain the European bourgeois mode of domination and accumulation that includes and exceeds labor exploitation as a way to explain global oppression. Wynter defines James’s theoretical framework through the figure or unit of the *pieza*, stating that the *pieza* served as a general equivalent of value for the variety of groups whose labor could be exploited with the capitalist world system.⁵⁵ “*Pieza*” was the name the Portuguese gave to the African who functioned as the standard measure of exchange during the slave trade in the sixteenth century. “He” was a man approximately twenty-five years old, in good health, and calculated to give a certain amount of physical labor. He served as the general equiva-

lent of physical labor value against which all the others could be measured. For example, three teenagers and older men and women thrown into a job lot as refuse could equate to one pieza. In the Jamesian system, the pieza becomes an ever more general category of value, establishing equivalences among a wider variety of oppressed labor power. Wynter focuses on the pieza as a way to introduce and focus on the “trade in African slaves” as having seminal importance for James and his anticolonial, Pan-African, and anticapitalist politics. James’s pluri-conceptual and pieza framework explained the bourgeois mode of accumulation and domination as a system of aesthetics, language, and culture. The pluri-conceptual framework approached the bourgeois mode of reason, property, and accumulation as a larger system that absorbed the mode of production.⁵⁶ This system and mode of domination cannot be reduced to labor. In “Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean to Be Human?,” Walter Mignolo calls this mode of domination and accumulation a cultural, aesthetic, and linguistic statement about man in the sixteenth century. The mode of production and labor exploitation were but forms of oppression that could occur under the larger global system of domination and accumulation. Labor exploitation and the mode of production do not lead or determine global patterns and systems of domination. For Wynter, in her rereading of James, labor exploitation and the mode of production are just one of the many ways that global oppression is organized.

For Wynter, this global model of accumulation, which was established during the sixteenth century through the slave trade, is a more expansive explanatory model that can “encompass both the proletariat and the multiple groups and groupings whose mode of coercion and oppression are outside of the explanatory power of labor.”⁵⁷ Wynter’s postulation represents a shift in focus from labor to accumulation. For Wynter, James enables this displacement and reordering of liberal and Marxist hegemonic explanations of the social order. Hartman enacts this same kind of reordering in *Scenes of Subjection* through her focus on Marx’s notion of primitive accumulation. Hartman privileges the analytics of accumulation and fungibility over labor in her configuration of the making of enslaved and free Black subjects. The pieza forged through the transatlantic slave trade of the sixteenth century, according to Mignolo, set in motion what we call capitalism.⁵⁸ He explains the pieza as a “sensibility,” a system of measure and mode of representation and exchange. As a sensibility, it enabled merchants, traders, and Europeans to make “certain human lives dispensable vis-à-vis different categories of value.”⁵⁹ I turn now to the image of

the “male” in the foreground of the cartouche. More than and exceeding the sign for labor, this “young ostensibly adult male” figure is also a stand-in for other enslaved bodies not represented. Because a lot of slaves who were perhaps too young, too old, or too disabled to labor could be assessed, grouped, and exchanged against or in relation to the pieza, the pieza marked much more than productive labor. The pieza could also stand in for the lot of slaves who represented what Wynter called the “lower categories of human lives,” who could not be accounted for within labor’s explanatory frame but could still be accumulated.⁶⁰ The pieza, whether blue-handed, infirm, or mute, could stand in for the “non-norm,” or what Wynter names the “symbolic inversion of norm value” under the global mandate of accumulation.⁶¹

Conversely, the rational wage worker also has access to human sexuality and sexual identity as a heterosexual or homosexual subject. In “Beyond Miranda’s Meanings,” Wynter argues that human sexuality, “True Heterosexuality (like True Homosexuality) are human forms of sexuality only reserved for ‘the colonizer.’”⁶² The nineteenth-century homosexual (twentieth-century LGBT/QUEER) worker can claim rights to humanity through the wage, a unit of economic rationalization and competition that makes the laborer as human different from the Black fungible and sensuous and irrational slave. There is no wage, or unit of economic rationalization, through which to humanize the slave as a human yet exploited worker. The slave’s sensuous and nonrational, fungible body is of an order of sensuality and abjection so contaminating that its excess oozes outside of the boundaries human sexual coordinates. Wynter argues that the “birth” of “homosexuality” and “heterosexuality” proper is concurrent with the “re-birth” of Man, also known as Man2, in the economic and Darwinian code of evolution in the nineteenth century. The sexual subject of the nineteenth century who will emerge as the subject of queer theory in the twentieth century does so through the normative process of dehumanizing enslaved Black and nonwaged bodies as forms of sensuous and nonrational flesh.

The maneuvers of fungible and fugitive Black bodies from within the space of debasement do not mimic the itineraries of feminist and queer subjects and theory. Black porous pursuits of freedom take routes less traveled. They are bodies with ever developing entry points subject to infinite lust and endless possibility. Bodies stained blue invoke this boundarylessness, which fungibility requires. Dash’s image of indigo blue hands serves as the nineteenth-century punctum point (created in the twentieth century) that further throws into flux de Brahm’s eighteenth-century stadium



FIGURE 3.4. Screen grab from *Daughters of the Dust* showing the region of the plantation where indigo is processed.

of Black transition and movement fluctuating conterminously with the landscape. Far from evoking tranquility, the idyllic eighteenth-century scene in the cartouche, the site where indigo was fermented in vats, was a space of literal and social Black death. It was a place on the plantation where it was hard to breathe and a zone many avoided.

Because indigo processing produced a noxious ecozone and abject space on the plantation, the enslaved toiling there were not always within the master's immediate field of vision. Given this relative seclusion, is it possible that this area of the plantation could also function as a space of Black solitude, if not pleasure and freedom? Clyde Woods has argued that the plantation bloc inadvertently produced a subversive blues bloc with counter-epistemologies and modes of resistance. He explains, "To ensure the autonomy of thought and action in the midst of constant surveillance and violence, African Americans constructed a highly developed tradition of social interpretation."⁶³ The figures in the cartouche evoke the secret societies that momentarily emerged during the intermittent moments when the master blinked their eyes and when they decided to avoid the stank place of indigo processing.

Like the volatile landscape depicted in de Brahm's map, Black bodies are sites of instability. The tremors and movements of muscles in action are at once motions of laboring bodies, captivity, and debasement, as well as possible maneuvers and contortions that escape totalizing violence.⁶⁴ Muscles in their suspended state between recoiling and responding hold a potential for action in ways that cannot be predicted and, therefore, always

contained.⁶⁵ Darieck Scott's focus on the tensed muscle of Black male bodies under duress and abjection enables an understanding of abjection as a means of producing a "break" in "gender and sexuality" in ways that provide an "opportunity for different configurations of gender and sexuality."⁶⁶ Following the Black quivering itineraries of Scott, who reads for the ways that the specificity of Black vulnerability and penetrability create opportunities for transgressing the Western gender order, I read de Brahm's indigo-processing scene on new terms.

Perhaps the scene in the cartouche could be reimagined as an erotic scene in which the enslaved enjoyed one another's "indigo" and porous flesh outside the sightline of the master. Imagine that in even more secluded locations, such as under the cover of or behind the shed, a therapeutic massage or amorous touch on a forearm might open up possibilities for sexual or healing encounters. In this context of other Black possibilities, I also reinterpret the countenance of the figure in the foreground. The visage is in a state of continual movement. For example, the mouth is in motion. The mouth's muscles seem to be moving from a neutral expression almost to a smile, which typically signals docility; however, I read the not-quite smile as holding other kinds of affective meanings.

Could the mouth in motion be affecting an expression of contentment due to the lack of immediate White surveillance, the simple pleasure of Black solitude, the anticipation or replaying of non-work-related interactions, or perhaps satisfaction with the making of preliminary plans for rebellion? These dynamic, unstable, and therefore opaque Black figures are beyond full knowability and containability. Yet as it exists in the thick, humid, and noxious indigo ecozones of the nonhuman, Blackness refashions life where human life is not supposed to thrive, or within what Alex Weheliye, drawing on Wynter's notion of the demonic, calls the "liminal precincts" of the current configurations of the human as Man.⁶⁷

POROUSLY FUNGIBLE FUTURES

As a way to conclude this section, I focus on the kinetic energy that is not explicitly depicted but is certainly alluded to in the rendering of the cartouche's foregrounded figure. The kinetic energy can be discerned in the item that seeks to contain it: the figure is wearing a light-colored head wrap. The wrap certainly could have functioned to keep the sweat out of the person's eyes. In addition, given what Stewart has indicated about how the quality of the dye could be compromised by "other elements"

that could be introduced into the mixture, such as insects, dirt, and even sweat, one could surmise that the head wrap also worked to protect the dye blocks from the dye cutter's sweat during these final and crucial stages of the process.⁶⁸ Here it is possible to read Black errant bodies' continual kinetic energy as a threat to the ongoing practices and regimes of property-making that constituted slavery. Black fungibility as a state of continual movement, change, and exchange, enacted to make Black bodies accummable and fungible, can also work against the colonial regime's aims. If it is necessary for eighteenth-century visual and plantation regimes to throw Black bodies into a state of continual movement, that very movement becomes a threat to attempts to stabilize and fix Black bodies as inert, docile, and marketable commodity forms.

On a micro level, Black moving, leaky, and sweaty bodies pose a threat to successful indigo processing. The dye cutter's kinetic energy produces sweat that could ruin the dye. Black bodies in motion and Black errant kinetics (sweat) pose various kinds of threats. Rendered as fungible and perpetual states of change, Black bodies also have the capacity for unexpected and unanticipated movements that upend proprietors' or slave owners' claims to them as property. Black bodies on the move—or, as LaMonda Stallings describes them, “transitional bodies”—not only sweat but also flee like the Black fugitives during the Stono Rebellion.⁶⁹

As Black fungible and fugitive figures, Black bodies in flux are dynamic, kinetic sites that the slave owners and proprietors listed on the map truly had only tenuous claims to when considering how porous and fungible Blackness easily morphs into errant fugitivity. As a somewhat tragic yet equalizing and humanizing footnote, in 1793, while seeking medical treatment, Eliza Lucas Pinckney, the famed South Carolinian “conquistador-settler-master” and indigo cultivator, succumbed to breast cancer. While human in all of her capacities as proprietor, socialite, woman of leisure, and reader of philosophy, she could not escape her own affectable, porous body. All bodies—Black, Indigenous, White—that produce the plantation as a living and porous social organism are subject to exposure to non-human elements. All bodies, though not equally, are hybrid assemblages and cumulative effects of multispecies entanglements. The affectability that Pinckney and other eighteenth-century cartographic subjects sought to disavow and displace onto the pores of the Black body eventually met up with them at the very horizon of an indigo-induced death that they sought to evade.