

PART 1

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Black, Trans, Feminism 1

Blackness is an approach, a way of taking in the world.

AUDRE LORDE, "Above the Wind: An Interview with Audre Lorde"

... trying to mangle the "truth" of gender and identity
without giving people too many easy answers.

GEO WYETH, "Representation and Its Limits"

In the vein of Cathy Cohen's recalibration of queerness in her landmark essay "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens," the kind of nonnormativity expressive of black trans feminism urges for rethought modes of inhabitation. Cohen argues that queerness, instead of being a possessed sexual identity ascribed to lesbian, gay, or bisexual people, should be understood as an existential orientation, as a relation to power, which broadens the ambit through which queerness is interacted. Put another way, this shift toward the primacy of politicality indexes Angela Davis's feminist posture, wherein such feminist formations reside "in the possibility of politicizing this identity—basing the identity on politics rather than the politics on identity."¹ The desire to radically reconfigure what "identity" means is motivated by "identity" being understood, here, as a normative ideal. The typical conception of blackness or transness or womanness as an identity, as something that is possessed on the body, is to be rigorously interrogated. Identity rests upon an assumptive coherence, knowability, and nonporousness, all of which are regulated, normative regimes of legibility and stability.

But what's wrong with the normative? Do we not want and need a normative, some standard toward which to strive or by which we evaluate our process? Is it not a good thing to instantiate a normative ideal so that we can point to it and say, Look, this is what you need to reach in order for us to become freer? And is not this very meditation an attempt to create a normative apparatus for black trans feminism by which others who wish to do this work can measure their own and others' political commitments?

I respond to the question of the normative with an understanding of it as necessarily violent. Normativity is not merely an innocuous criterion, nor is it simply what is typical or numerically, statistically "normal." Within normative ascriptions—as it is indeed always an ascription, always prescriptive, always an imposition and a coerced rubric to measure against, punitive consequences betiding those who do not measure up—is a demand to meet the evaluative metrics of normativity. It is a *mundane, quotidian* kind of violence. Normativity is defined as that which pertains to norms that govern a given realm of ontology. It is an ontological requisite for one's very ontology; it is a coercive mechanism for livability by only certain means, falling outside of those means relegating one to a nonlivable life. Whiteness and cis genders, for instance, are normative endeavors not because they are purely descriptive of most people in a given environment but because they determine who and what counts as valid, ideal, normal, and representable; bestow consequences on those who do not live up to, adhere to, or who deviate from their rubrics; and cast as imperfect, unfinished, nonideal, or deserving of fewer life chances those who are not proximal to, or who do not appear through, or who stray from, whiteness and cis genders. But the normative also "pertains to ethical justification, how it is established, and what concrete consequences proceed therefrom."² Where and how we locate racialized gender is always and already woven into normative operations that dictate such intelligibilities, and what is considered subversive is always and already subject to the ways that the imposition is occurring, when and where it is occurring, to whom it is occurring.

To clarify this meditation's understanding of the normative as it relates to the subversive, I reference Judith Butler: "I am not interested in delivering judgments on what distinguishes the subversive from the unsubversive. Not only do I believe that such judgments cannot be made out of context, but that they cannot be made in ways that endure through time ('contexts' are themselves posited unities that undergo temporal change and expose their essential disunity)."³ They (that is, Butler)⁴ go on to say, "Subversive performances always run the risk of becoming deadening

cliches through their repetition and, most importantly, through their repetition within commodity culture where ‘subversion’ carries market value. The effort to name the criterion for subversiveness will always fail, and ought to. So what is at stake in using the term at all?”⁵ It is not a matter of a violence that is somehow spectacularly normative but the very violence of norms (and these norms shift over time and space), a violence that supervenes less along the ways that, say, normative gender expectations do violence to those who do not measure up; it is for me, instead, both about how the normative is necessarily coercive and nonconsensual—the normative only permits you to “be” on its terms, negating your ability to determine your inhabitation of sociality before you even show up precisely because you can only show up if you adhere to its systematicity—as well as how the normative forecloses other realms of intelligibility, making impossible alternative modes of life. The question for me is not what kind of violent things the normative is doing to us; rather, the violence inheres most substantively in the question, What is the normative literally making impossible for us to do, to be, to aspire toward? We cannot begin to parse what is merely descriptive or statistically extant from what is imposed and deemed acceptable because the field of power, normativity, has already dictated what appears as racialized gender and how it exists as intelligible to be considered in the first place. The assessment is rigged from the start.

My commitment to the nonnormative is thus a commitment to what has not been permitted to appear on the scene. The nonnormative must be carefully distinguished from the “counter” or the “oppositional” inasmuch as these, to me, express a reaction to what has been established. To counter or oppose, which is not without meaning and efficacy, is simply insufficient in the final instance as an abolitionist gesture because it maintains the logics imputed by that which is countered or opposed, logics that have orchestrated the very framework sought to be done away with. The nonnormative, thus, does not accept or *decline*—it doesn’t “cline” at all; the nonnormative is an operation on other grounds and by other means not predicated on legitimizing identities, knowledges, or sense-making apparatuses already in place. It is also, crucially, about a way of relating and unrelating, or nonrelating, giving it the tenor of politics massively uninterested in the presumptions that inhere in certain configurations of somatics. Nonnormativity is here distinguished as a multifaceted and polyvocal interruption of ontological tenets, doing the work of interruption on various registers that may even be more substantive than the somatic; nonnormativity is here distinguished as the way that politicality engenders what we subse-

quently might mean and how we might literally matter or show up in the world, a *potentia* that morphs into, or that is always already, a *kinesthesia* that is not an identity nor possession—it is a modality, a disposition, a deployment, a subjective plenum we move through and amidst as an indexation of what else might be possible for us to become un beholden to the violences that have purportedly forged all we can be.

All of this also might go under the heading of a commitment to what has been deemed the otherwise, or Denise Ferreira da Silva's articulation of an interrogative inclination to ask "other"-wise, as the otherwise elaborates an alternative that by necessity critiques the given and the normative, critiques the normative in service of something, anything, other than what has been mentioned and given and touted as that which is all we have.⁶ Irrespective of the efficacy of what is already deemed legible, it stands that what is already here has coexisted with the violences of the world. Black trans feminism commits to the nonnormative because nonnormativity references the world of abolition. It is not a reference necessarily to gender nonconformity or what are deemed nonnormative sexual practices; the nonnormativity of black trans feminism may well inflect and have these things as its partial archive, but when I use the term in these pages I am talking about the stuff that has been expunged from the field of power, the stuff that might be the sinewy anarchitecture of the world in the midst of abolition's onset, for nonnormativity is meant to reference nonviolated existence and indeed existence that gains its definitional heft by virtue of its expulsion of ontological violation. Gender nonnormativity, then, for example, will be what gender might be and become were it not for Gender, what we emerge into when we are not nonconsensually given an ontology of gender—that is, not simply binary gender but the very structure of or imposition necessary for legible subjectivity that we have come to call Gender—and that is the nonnormativity about which I speak here.

So, how one subjectivates oneself nonnormatively references more a *political* identity, three of which go by the irreducible names of black, trans, and feminist, which name sites of coalitional conspiracy and furnish fluid mechanisms by which to cultivate what it means, politically, to live among others on more ethical grounds, across and within differentiations.⁷ I maintain that insofar as corporeality situates one in literal and symbolic space, the simple fact of one's occupying such a space with others says little about the affective and political substance, or even the fact of membership, of the space's inhabitants. To belong with and in this space with others is not simply, or primarily, to end at the corporeal surface; to belong with and in this

space with others is more specifically a way of relating to spatiality, politicality, history, and subjectivity in a way that cannot be physically assumed. Of importance is affiliation and commitment to insurgent forms of life, rather than an exclusionary limning of boundary, because it concerns itself with how we interact with one another via an open critical posture. I wish to emphasize a sociality-in-differentiation, one that is not possessed natally and ad infinitum; a “sociality without exclusion,” as J. Kameron Carter and Sarah Jane Cervenak would have it.⁸ This is the fashioning of subjectivities formed through a desire, as noted in the introduction, to be held, but such a holding is an encompassing openness that eases but does not contain. I want to express some kind of subjectivity that allows for us to be loved and embraced without, and as a rejection of, fixing us, limiting or knowing us in totality, without stalling movement as a means to manufacture commonality and legibility. The holding, which is always a facilitator of rather than impediment to our movement, in fact lets us *come* together instead of being *brought* together.

The forthcoming breakdowns are necessarily misguided, but it is in the service of illumination that I am misguiding myself and readers. To say, as I do subsequently, “black and trans,” “black and feminist,” and “trans and feminist” is incomplete and half-truthful because they cannot be so easily parsed, as any intersectionalist could explain, though I myself care much less for that terminology than others. But extending intersectionalist critiques, the impossibility of parsing “black” and “trans” and “feminist” from one another is because of their inflections of one another, their intrareverberations. “Black” and “trans” will, or at least ought to, inflect feminism; “black” and “feminist” will, or at least ought to, inflect transness; “trans” and “feminist” will, or at least ought to, inflect blackness.

BLACK AND TRANS

Emphasizing the conversation, the rap session, that blackness and transness have long been having is to emphasize their capacity for deploying mutability in service of exceeding modes of regulatory captivity. So, first, let’s think blackness. Blackness might be glimpsed in the flesh, which I will discuss more at length in the following chapter. Flesh is “ante- and antimatter,” which uncouples it from the materiality and purported objectivity of the visual surface.⁹ And matter, we know, does things, is not merely lying in wait to be acted upon; matter is a performative metaphysics that is not a

latent thing but an agential doing, a performativity that rebels underneath and to the side of, not against, preexistence and moves with the force of desedimentation. Blackness's adherence to flesh rather than bodies delinks it from taxonomic racial classifications, which are the province of bodies, and opens it up to the fleshy subjectivity of all who dare to claim it. If we are to live in and through the flesh, if flesh is the different modality of existence engendered when fully inhabited, if the flesh is the onset of the abolition of (overrepresented) "Man" (making it not only a "racial" critique of Western civilization but, too, a "gendered" critique, which too many fail to make explicit even if blackness is, as so many often use as absolution, "ungendered"), blackness must be unhinged from the terrain of encroachable racialized bodies and dis/located elsewhere, in the uncapturable. Such work becomes unusual politics, an unrecognizable "transgender politics" that Aren Aizura maintains "invests not in an identity category but in disrupting the litany of injustices that comprise twenty-first-century capitalism. . . . If race, gender, and sexuality determine the norms of intimate and public social relations, those of democracy, nation, prison, property, labor, and (settler) colonialism, a trans politics aimed at disrupting those institutions may not read as politics at all"—it may read as radicality or abolitionist work, which, for my purposes, is to say black trans feminist work.¹⁰ When we divest from the categories created by the state, we might then be able to inhabit the flesh. Mere reversal of the valuative hierarchy between the hegemonic and the subordinated reifies its logic, fails to interrogate the texture of hegemonic identities, and keeps in place the identities modernity has created. In short, such a move, as J. Kameron Carter has argued, is "not radical enough," and we must instead commit to "nonracial flesh," unracial and ungendered flesh, trans/gendered flesh.¹¹ But I'm getting ahead of myself; more on this explicitly in the following chapter.

This is the bind in which I want to dwell: the fact of a visual field coded through racial optics that fixes bodies deemed black into static racial templates deserving of fatal policing, and the more substantive *doing* of blackness, the iconoclastic doing of one's subjectivity in refusal and subversion of governmentality. Though a solidarity on the basis of historically epidermalized pathology is significant to the extent that a common oppression allows for a unique insight into how one traverses the world, it is a troublesome thought to fix solidarity in blackness to a primordial moment of violence, terror, and pathology. Blackness is not to be reduced to its epidermally formative moment of violence, as it constitutes blackness solely in and through violence and horror. Understanding blackness only

or primarily through violence constructs blackness only insofar as it has the intensified capacity to be terrorized. Blackness becomes, simply, that thing that can get you killed, which, to me, greatly flattens what blackness has been and can and will be. I am black, this argument goes, because—and mostly only because—they are coming to get me.

No.

Blackness on my account of black trans feminism is linked to opening and unfixing, which promotes its capacity for life, though lived in ways that may not look like life to current evaluative tools. If there is to be any relation between black and trans it comes from the mobilizing torque that makes the static, imposed, and assumed lose these essential properties. I am not interested in adjudicating the final definition of blackness as an identifiable entity but in allowing blackness to, simply, do work that initiates nonnormative, insurgent effects that trouble and ultimately dissolve what we have been given. The work comes from rendering the status quo, hegemony, normativity—pick your terminology for that which engenders violence and circumscription—unrecognizable and thus able to be gotten away from. The given terms diminish subjective possibility, so blackness might describe the process by which, illegible as it may be, different modes of being and becoming are glimpses of life lived unfettered by normative violence moving through us by way of white and cis male supremacy (etc.). These different modes of being, designated as black modes of being, inasmuch as blackness engenders the possibility of mutability, require a loosening of the things that purport to allow us to exist. It is maintained that these things that call themselves identities do not actually allow us to exist as we wish; they limit our capacity to be otherwise, which is, I want to argue, what subjectivity, what a self-determined self, is par excellence: the ability to be other than what we are. It is in that that self-determination rests, and it is in that that blackness gains its peak transness (to rework jayy dodd, about whom I speak later in part 2 of this book). Blackness, because of its inherent feminism (on which I elaborate momentarily), is fundamentally “an anticaptivity project,” so in opposing captivity we must oppose the various ways in which we are not only captured (enslavement, racially coded optics, etc.) but capture ourselves in logics and frameworks that could never encompass our breadth.¹² This is a tapping into blackness’s queerness, drawing from it the queer counternarrative, or perhaps even nega-narrative (how closely this prefix rubs against the epithetic), of relational identificatory engendering; this is blackness’s otherwise identification, located in the interstices, frictional relations, and rebellious communing with those we are not

supposed to commune with, befriending the misfits and being/becoming in excess of what has been permitted. In other words, blackness, reconceptualized in this way, is a queer relationality, a “blackqueer aesthesis,” that “otherwise mode of relationality not predicated upon blood quantum nor juridical declarations of law and land.”¹³ Blackness names one of the many ways we affectively recompose subjectivities in the name of liberation, flight from the nonbecoming hegemon of Man. It is a trans blackness that is an ante-anti-category, a preceding and subverting predilection for opposing cohesive categorization.

Okay, now let’s think transness. The transness integral to an understanding of blackness bears an intimate link to it by way of transness’s disruption of bodily coherence. If transness is distinguished from being transgender, and if transness marks primarily a *movement* away from an imposed starting point to an undisclosed (non)destination, then this emblemizes abolitionist gender radicality: the fixedness and presumed immutability of bodily bestowal is dissolved through a departure toward something else through the vector of gender—or, more precisely, through a generative warping of gender toward something else. Since a paraontological blackness expresses the inadequacy of a “given ontology,” transness, too, bears a referential relationship with blackness because of both’s refusal of enclosed coherence, rejection of imposed racialized gendered ontologies, and movement away from captivity. The colonial record does not have the last word on who we can be. Transness’s propinquity to blackness, their kinship, develops different kinships for us all, a kind of “trans*kinship” that acts “across, through, between, among, those with whom we identify, to whom we are attached, that is not simply a question of blood, or even of archive, but rather, and more suggestively, of proximity and affinity, touch, breath, dream.” This kinship demands that we ask, “What if we breathe together as queerly connected, as trans*historical kin,” or, how might we “imagine otherly” ways, per LaVelle Ridley, to aspirate not beholden to epistemic, ontological, or necropolitical constraints?¹⁴ And we know, at least since July 17, 2014, in Staten Island, but also so much longer before that, that breathing is of vital importance. How can we breathe together, find ways to inhale oxygen as well as, say, water, smoke, blood, any readily available material to sustain ourselves? How can those with an abundance of breath give that breath to those whose reserves are nearly depleted? Breathing gifts us with an attention to wonder, which then alerts us to mutability and alteration, culminating in a realization—a critical interrogative (black) trans feminist realization—that “challenges assumptions about ‘proper’ scientific or political objects.” This wondrous

breathing, Magdalena Górska has written, connects us to others across imposed differentiations.¹⁵ We come to a breathing oddly together, looking for different breath, impossible breath, airless air to saturate our lungs, as the pursuit that puts us in sync with one another.

The black and trans, if there is to be a fundamental and convergent link between them—as I vehemently argue there is—must be thought not through strict identificatory means, which nearly always manifest in exclusionary, border-delimiting criteria, but through a radically insurrectionary mode. Such a conception allows for jettisoning stilted discourses surrounding authenticity and “realness” that only work to limit the number of accomplices we might otherwise have to combat violent regimes. Too, a blackness and transness given over to us conceptually via abolition makes for a clearer and more capacious assemblage of politicized subjects capable of inhabiting a sociality after abolition *lived now*, which acts in subversion of the normative frame that so broadly structures the current necropolitical, circumscriptive one. The insurrection at the heart of these two analytics, which do not simply analyze but operate from a subjective and material reality that provides epistemic access to a radically inclusive analytic trove, refutes the misguided and (often unintentionally) violent presupposition of the dominance of the purportedly biological. If there is a description of blackness that follows thusly—

concern over the supposedly stultifying force of authenticity exerted by supposedly restrictive and narrow conceptions of blackness, worry over the supposed intranational dominance of blackness broadly and unrigorously conceived (in ways that presuppose its strict biological limitation within an unlimited minoritarian field), or anxiety over the putatively intradiasporic hegemony of a certain mode of blackness (which presumes national as well as biological determinations that are continually over- and underdetermined) indexes some other trouble that we would do well to investigate¹⁶

—then it becomes clear that in this refutation of a biological determinism in which there is no validity given to the imposition of an ontology onto putatively biologically immutable “facts,” blackness is a trans matter inasmuch as transness can be understood through an insurrection of the axiologically dominant valorization of “sex” (the location[s] of which is/are often never settled or defined in any systematic way) as determinative of “gender.” To continually root blackness in a somatic endowment that gains its substantiveness by way of a belief in its immutability, its presumed ethical need to

delimit it, its nationalistic and biological definitiveness, and its territorial need to secure and defend is a disservice and, I might wager, a misreading of how we ought to understand blackness in order to create a way of relating to others on more just, coalitional, abolitionist, radical, loving, and hopeful grounds. Getting to this requires a relinquishing of the predominance of the biological, so often deployed in violent and exclusionary ways, which elaborates blackness through an investigative disposition skeptical of the biological, the territorial, and the immutable. Blackness, in other words, is a trans matter; transness is a fundamentally black praxis. This black and trans matter is the “other trouble” that we are correctly urged to investigate. What is in your hands now is that very investigation.

The cohabitation of blackness and transness creates space for the unknowable to emerge. Kai M. Green sees the nexus of these two forces, in part, as asking us “to develop new optics, a new way of seeing that is less reliant upon categorical delineation” and more reliant on escape from categorization, escape from normative conceptions of who we are permitted to be.¹⁷ Blackness and transness trouble narratives like being “trapped in the wrong body” and urge for existence in transition. The wrong body narrative sees transition as a frustrating means to an end, buttressing two distinct poles of a binary, the end of which is untroubled situatedness in an identifiable norm. But a blackened transness, so to speak, unproduces this narrative and thinks about the multifaceted ways we can be, as Green concludes, “unpredetermined movement.”¹⁸

The black and trans attune us to how radically comporting to the world via nonracial and nongendered, or unracial and ungendered, subjectivity emergent through black trans radicalism begets a politicized subjectivity fueled by an abolitionist posture. The underground politics and furtive insurgency are what matter here, not to the exclusion but in *excess* of other things that might (have been said to) matter. My hesitance to affix the politicality and fugitivity of the black and trans to the physiognomic stems from the fact that their corporeality implies little about how one does their work. There is, in Sylvia Wynter’s words, “no guarantee that even if you experience yourself in self-alienating terms,” which might be to say you occupy the racialized or gendered position of blackness/womanness/transness, “you will not push that out of the mind; it shows that there is no guarantee that you cannot be assimilated into seeing yourself in normative terms.”¹⁹ Put crassly, you can be racialized black, identified and identify as a woman or transgender (or both [or all three]) and still do some fucked-up shit, still hold steadfast to violent norms. Thus, the weightiness of the things

formerly known as identities must shift to the ways one deploys oneself in subversion of power, and in alternative relationality. I want to lovingly, painstakingly move toward black and trans, in this instance, naming those alternative relationalities. Inextricable are blackness and transness under racial capitalistic regimes, black and trans life generatively folding into one another referentially and speaking a transient, transductive, and transformative “werqing” of social categories. Black and trans people, then, put in werq—and it is my contention that “black” and “trans” are names for that werqing—the deformation and denaturation of racial, gender, and sexual categories that grip our ontologies. Werqing, indexical of the paraontological force of blackness and transness, is the destabilization of the purported homes of race, gender, and sexuality, the excessive fissures of the project of Man.²⁰

BLACK AND FEMINIST

It is 1983. Alice Walker, in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, gives her now-famous and off-the-cuff quotable definitions of “womanist.” Her second entry of the definition, emphasizing love for women, concludes with a telling conversation between a child and mother. “Mama,” the child asks, “why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige and black?” The mother answers, “Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented.” In the wake of the Black Power era’s more prominent strains of monolithized blackness, Walker presents a radical disruption of such thinking, and the thinking of what constitutes “the colored race,” read “black.” What does it say that the “colored race” can be, in a word, any color? What does it say that one’s colored—black—family can be not only brown, black, or “high yella” but also pink and white? Walker seems to be unfixing blackness and familial affiliation with it from set epidermal measurements and locating blackness, coloredness, somewhere else. Walker, in this anecdote that one can hear in the voice of their own mama, advances a blackness that pervades various shades, a blackness echoing an artistic axiom presented by conceptual and performance artist Lina Iris Viktor: “Every color in the spectrum is contained in black”; and echoing, in a scholarly vein, Tavia Nyong’o, who writes in *Afro-Fabulations* of a “uchromatic” blackness (following François Laruelle), “a blackness which is not the absence or opposite of color, but the possibility of any color whatsoever. Blackness not as the end, but as the one: the anorigin of minoritarian anarchaeology.”²¹ It is a commitment to

the polychromaticity of blackness that allows one to enter into blackness from a variety of positions, giving blackness a radical openness unanticipated by logics of hegemony; it is Denise Ferreira da Silva's "unmoored" black feminist blackness, which moves "in excess of the objects and subjects it creates," resisting definitive racialized bodies said to be black; it is CeCe McDonald's—Honee Bea's—request for us to use every color imaginable to fashion who we are, self-determinedly, as every color can and does constitute the texture of our blackness and transness when we, rejecting ontologies that masquerade as unmediated and natural, "go beyond our natural selves."²² Blackness's openness, its ability to claim various unanticipated subjects, makes it a cunning beast.

Walker's deployment of blackness as capacious and multivalent is also affixed to an ethics. Blackness denotes "paying the cost," claiming deviance and dwelling with normativity's subversion. That is to say, a deployable, paraontological blackness marks "a kind of *ethical* gesture to claim this dispossession . . . this radical poverty-in-spirit."²³ Surely it is understood here that a history of the way particular characteristics, and thus particular positionings, have been made to attach to skin color makes it sensible to see kinship in those who, too, have been subjected to similar racialized plights as oneself. My critique is that a substantive solidarity rests not in how one has been treated—which almost exclusively gets tied to historical terror and trauma as opposed to, for example, racialized instances of joy—but with how one approaches world-changing, politicality, and thus radical politics to beget a more habitable world. "We are the African and the trader," Walker notes. "We are the Indian and the settler. We are oppressor and oppressed. . . . We are the mestizos of North America. We are black, yes, but we are 'white,' too, and we are red."²⁴ We are fugitives to purported immutable and imposed identities. Or we are trans to racial categorization. Unification, or coalitional subjectivity in blackness and feminism, is assemblage; "we" can live in this undercommon space because it is open, but only if you dare.

Also, Walker's remixed and extensive blackness is saturated with and in her black feminist, her womanist, vernacular theorizations, and this is where I wish to dwell for the moment. In short, this remixed blackness is necessarily womanist. (I am aware, of course, of the analogical relationship between womanism and [black] feminism. I am timidly conflating them here because Walker notes one of the definitions of womanist as "a black feminist," and I am ultimately utilizing womanism's close proximity to black feminism in order to reveal how we might extend a paraontologi-

cal distinction and emphasis on politicality to black feminism.) Indeed, her definitions of womanism concern less mere natal corporeal or cultural happenstance and more with proclivity, with preference, with politics. Womanism is to *act* grown, to act audacious, outrageous, to exert “*willful* behavior”; to *commit* to survival; to love in the struggle. Tying a pervasive, almost rhizomatic blackness to a deeply black feminist politic inflects it in a way that refuses being hemmed by hegemonic seductions from white or cis male supremacy. It refuses as well your run-of-the-Negro-mill shallowly deployed blackness by, largely, black (cis[?]) men who take on a narrow nationalistic blackness that “merely call[s] on Black people to love Black, live Black and buy Black,” which Alicia Garza and numerous other black queer feminists have critiqued time and again.²⁵ Black feminism is and must be, for Walker, integral to a capacious, multivalent understanding of blackness. A blackness that is constituted by black feminism forces one to lose stable ground to the end of self-threatening—rendering one’s own hegemonic destruction—and opening sociality until we can become-black together differently, excessively. Black feminism is in fact constitutive of such an understanding of blackness, and thus it is sensible to argue that blackness as capacious willful subversion *is* what we mean by black feminism.

It bears making explicit that feminism, that darling of white women who clutch dearly their claim to being oppressed and never oppressor, does not belong to whiteness. If feminism is that which perpetually must trouble its own ground and assumptions, that must work to a constant posture of destabilizing violent normativities (or, as the Combahee River Collective notes, “we are committed to a continual examination of our politics as they develop through criticism and self-criticism as an essential aspect of our practice”); if feminism is the commitment to vitiating gendered hierarchies, (cis) male supremacy, and heteropatriarchy, which necessitates that *gender* itself must be the aim of that committed vitiation; and if feminism might be said to actualize its radicality by those who subtend its most vocal aspects—if it is fueled most by “the forgotten women who ‘fell down the well’ (as Carolyn Heilbrun puts it) in subsequent rewritings of Women’s Liberation as exclusively white”—then feminism *can only be* black trans feminism.²⁶ Black feminist study is everywhere, beholden to no strictly delimited demographic, bearing no strict criteria for entrance, always expressive of a “radical inclusivity” because, in “mak[ing] possible new worlds for Black life forms,” it becomes the most capacious analytic for making possible *new life*.²⁷ Black trans feminism is the feminism black feminism has been talking about, the feminism trans feminism has been talking about. What

I assert, then, is that the inextricability of the terms in black trans feminism stem from their convergence and concatenation with one another as analytics for differently inflected modes of subversion and transformation. Blackness converges with feminism inasmuch as there is a history of black women and femmes pointing out the inseparability of race and gender as well as a history of blackness radicalizing feminist social justice aims. Additionally, “Black feminist theory [i]s essential to Black trans theory and to transgender studies [because] Black feminist thought, labor, and commitment have been essential to the de/construction of gender and sexuality,” as the guest editors of the “Issue of Blackness” volume of *Transgender Studies Quarterly* note.²⁸ Transness forces feminism to heed its radical commitment to inclusivity, which, as it were, is propelled by the radically inclusive blackness of black feminism.

Black feminism, or the feminism of blackness and the blackness of feminism—and this way of breaking down the common term denotes how feminism, to be feminist, must always be generated by blackness’s insurrectionary relation to gender and blackness must always, in order to do what blackness does, vitiate the gender binary with the paradoxical aim of gender expansiveness and abolition—is misunderstood if it is understood as parochial and about establishing epistemological property. So very often black feminism is misattributed as a minority form of knowledge that pertains strictly to an identitarian demographic and relevant only to the denizens of that demographic when it is, in fact, like Audre Lorde’s understanding of blackness articulated in the epigraph above, an approach, and a radical abolitionist one at that.²⁹ We do not comfortably inhabit this black feminism but operate via an exhabitation; we enact political aims by way of deploying ourselves from black feminism since it is something that commands us to do rather than deems that we are. We are all of us entangled and intra-acting, and diffusive in that entanglement—infectiously spreading while coming together in unforeseen ways—which displaces being for becoming. So, the perhaps expected distinction underlying my claims is that between black feminism and black women. Black feminism is not the sole province of black women; black feminism is a commitment to inhabiting, disseminating, becoming, and choosing a disruptive and excessive posture of critique, one that has (to be frank, arbitrarily) been historically, but contingently, rooted in those subjects deemed black women. (I will take this question up further in chapter 2’s discussion of “becoming-black-woman” as well as in chapter 4’s meditation on Alexis Pauline Gumbs’s work.) To reinsert in a more expanded version a quote by Hortense Spillers noted in the introduction,

Black feminism also seeks a degree of critical independence in relationship to the social order so that *its posture is the critical posture*. But I need to make a distinction between black women, black women as the subject of feminism, and black feminism as a critical disposition; all three of these distinctions might well overlap and show relationship to each other, but they also define distinct positionalities that we tend to occlude; for example, *not all black women are feminists, or the subjects of feminism, not even black feminism*, and insisting on the difference allows us to capture nuance, and enough nuance spells the difference between night and day, hot and cold, etc. . . . I should like to think that *black feminisms, as a repertoire of concepts, practices, and alignments*, is progressive in outlook and dedicated to the view that sustainable life systems must be available to everyone.³⁰

Though black women think and act in ways that reveal their “distinct angle of vision” of the social world, black feminism is not reducible to an amalgamation of the ideologies, thoughts, political leanings, proclivities, etc. of black women, a line of reasoning that concludes that only black women can do and create black feminism. Rather, black feminism is an epistemology, “knowledging” the world-as-world and becoming imbricated, habituated corporeally and discursively, in the production of renegade knowledge, that historically indexes black women but is not reducible to them. Because I also bring the trans to bear on all subjectivities, it is necessary to trouble where, how, and when we “know” a black woman appears, as often the assumption that black feminism is about, simply, black women leads to troubling implications of only talking about “cis” black women, with the oft-mentioned discourse of the “black maternal” (which sometimes instantiates black women as, definitionally, maternal figures), the elision of incarcerated black trans women and the specific violences they face, or the shallow gesture toward trans inclusion in literal parentheticals yet continuing to make implicit and explicit arguments predicated on the gender binary and anatomical essentialism. The trans, in other words, significantly throws loving but necessary shade on the monolith of The Black Woman, querying, in a fashion that has been offered by 1970s black women throwing shade on white feminists: What do you mean “we,” black (cis) woman? And, indeed, too, black feminism stages an entrée into onto-epistemic sociality, exculpating black women as bearers of the onus of representation and responsibility. A trans/feminist understanding of this might be to reconfigure black feminism as an approach, or as a mangling

of the “truth” of race and gender, as Geo Wyeth says in the second chapter epigraph, which follows Lorde.

It is precisely the goal of black feminism to decouple anatomical medicalized markers of gender (e.g., genitalia) from sociogenically gendered subjects (or black feminism as a refutation of mainstream, white “market-place feminism,” which implies that simply being female [transantagonistically reduced to having a vagina] is effusively celebratory and the extent of the work of feminism), *and*, I would argue, from epidermalized markers of blackness.³¹ It does not abide implicit assumptions about its biological grounding in either race or gender; instead it operates on the understanding that it, black feminism, is a theorizing first and foremost, one that suspends assumptions of race, gender, and sex because they must be approached with the posture of interrogation and destabilization. C. Riley Snorton makes a similarly cogent argument in his critique of black male feminism’s uncritical self-reflexivity, noting that it, and by extension black feminism, must include “studies of masculinity along a range of bodies—never diminishing its critique of patriarchy—but refocusing its critique on processes of socialization that do not rely on particular (mis)readings of anatomy.” Black feminism is thus “a radical destabilization of” racialized and gendered subjects—their transfiguration, as Snorton would say—and about which I will say more in chapter 3.³² If somatic readings are inadequate to racial and gender designations, it is perhaps an illegible anteoriginal force motivating the consolidation of bodies into categories that index such forces. Hence, my interest lies in the excavation of the texture of that force, a force that black feminism cites in its racial and gendered inflections of abolition. Therefore, black feminism is not merely a history of black women critiquing white men, white women, and black men, but a citation of the fissuring besidedness of that primordial mutiny that renders the troubling of the historical indexations of the attempt to mitigate that mutinous force (e.g., whiteness and cis masculinity).

What if black feminism remixed, then, is less a matter (or nonmatter, ante- and antimatter) of who is black and woman and more a kind of subaltern nonlocation that “necessarily resides outside the grasps of hegemony”? Thus, black feminism becomes, here, what Eric A. Stanley calls the dream of an “insurgent trans study that refuses its own complicity in the brutality of exclusion,” its radical inclusivity motivated by the unfixing of immutable “identities” from what we are said to be able to do and become.³³ Black feminism is open to anyone who takes up the work of black feminism, its black and trans insurrectionary work. Black feminism is a praxis, a performative

process of engagement and subversion that “rests” nowhere but is instead incited to continue living, hard and always with intention, in the moments when it is committed to. It has always been such, and, as being such, it bends biomythographically, offering “vast possibilities for rethinking ‘questions of identity’ in its ability to formally dissemble identities’ ‘static limitations.’”³⁴ And in this sense, too, it becomes clear that what people like Che Gossett, Tourmaline, AJ Lewis, and Nat Raha have argued is decidedly true: “Black feminism has always been trans.”³⁵

TRANS AND FEMINIST

In a very real sense, feminism and transness need one another. To the extent that transness—or transgender identity, or transgender studies—is persistently routed through a liberal individualism that assumes a singular, internally autonomous subject, feminism contributes to this a coalitional politics and recognition of power’s productivity (i.e., how power produces the very options, or nonoptions, at our disposal; how power acts on and through us in ways that orchestrate, to some effect, what we understand as our and others’ gender). And, insofar as feminism has a deeply embedded history of trans-exclusion and discursive, political, and personal violence toward gender-binarristic deviation—indeed, feminism’s history of, with white and cis male supremacy, instantiating and buttressing the purported inviolability of the gender binary—feminism needs transness/trans studies in order to deliver on its claim of radical inclusivity.

What has come to be called trans feminism was initially understood as something like looking at feminism through a transgender lens, or bringing transgender women into the folds of feminism. Instead of a focus on patriarchy understood through a rigid male oppression of women, trans feminists took aim at the gender binary as a more fundamental and robust bedrock for the gendered ills that plague us. Instead of addressing symptoms like that of the power and value imbued into those who identified or were identified as men to the inverse siphoning of power and value from those who identified and were identified as women, trans feminism aims, historically and contemporarily, to address the *genre* of this phenomenon—namely, the hierarchized binary itself. Trans feminism is an assault on the genre of the binary, that ontological caste that universalizes itself and structures how we are made possible.

Many accounts describe trans feminism as an iteration of intersectional feminism detailing how sexism and transphobia intersect and mutually reinforce one another. On this account, trans feminism was first articulated in Spain (as *transfeminismo*) in the late 1980s in order to call for the inclusion of trans women in feminist politics. Thankfully, subsequent to this origin trans feminism became part of a broader feminist politic that aimed to resist capitalism, bring antiracist and postcolonial critiques to state policies, and act in anti-institutional and radically democratic ways. So while trans feminism has sometimes meant merely the inclusion of trans women in feminist politics, it now describes “an epistemology—a theory of knowledge and power—that guides a diverse array of transfeminist activist political practices” with four pillars of influence that Sayak Valencia, a Mexican trans feminist scholar, delineates as U.S. women of color feminists, postporn and anticapitalist subcultures, movements to disarticulate trans identity from medical governance and the clinic, and acts to aid the life chances of migrants.³⁶

The transness of feminism is indebted to those of transgender experiences—the violences that betide those who are transgender, violences that can prove fatal upon being “found out” during or after sex acts and then retroactively blamed by way of “trans panic” laws; embodied experiences across, beyond, and between gendered categories; distinct angles of insight into the gender binaristic interstices in professional, medical, and carceral realms. The transness of feminism, too, seeks to inflect the disorienting work of those whose bodies are positioned in antagonistic ways with respect to the gender binary and understand transness through this disorientation, this rebellious and abolitionist spirit, rather than placing the onus of gender disruption onto the bodies of those who position themselves and are positioned as transgender. In excess of the set criteria for gender (non)comportment (criteria still open for debate), I am articulating transness in a way that two trans lesbians and their allies in Le Zoo (a French queer group, founded in 1996) articulate it: “We identify as trans because we are doing politics, not because of our transsexualism.”³⁷ Transness becomes a way of doing oneself as nonnormatively related to a coercive gender binary that saturates the world, a deployment of oneself as ill-fitting with the tenets of this world, escaping the circumscriptive reach of hegemony. Transness, as what Cameron Awkward-Rich describes as “a project of undoing (gender, disciplines, selves), a project that . . . never tries to build a house,” finds generative circulation within feminism as its radical circuitry, inasmuch as feminism and its attending blackness—radical feminism as a necessary

black feminism—is a persistent vigilance as to how it must undo and unincorporate its own foundation.³⁸ Ungrounded and opposed to any notion of a “proper” object of study, the conjoining of trans and feminism inducts all who wish to bring about world transformation. Transness and feminism place a demand on all of us who wish to bring about an abolished world, forcing us to put our proclivities and ourselves in service of gendered disruption irrespective of corporeal positionality. We as feminists are not off the hook.

“Transfeminism” has been most sustainedly theorized by Emi Koyama in her “Transfeminist Manifesto.” Koyama notes that trans feminism, like numerous other iterations of feminism, was first thought to be a “distraction” that fractured a movement that sought to maintain a cohesion and undifferentiation. (I can sympathize here, as my articulation of black trans feminism has been deemed an unnecessary extension of black feminism by none other than Patricia Hill Collins herself, implying that “black trans feminism” is an unneeded term and thus a distraction from the work of black feminist thought.³⁹) Trans feminism, though, forced a response from feminism, since it made “other feminists . . . rethink their idea of whom they represent and what they stand for,” and subsequently it critiques the capaciousness of their efforts. Trans women, for Koyama, “further [expand] the scope of the movement.” Trans feminism has at its core trans women but—in a nonidentitarian fashion, which Koyama finds to be more liberatory as well as consilient with trans feminism’s ultimate aim—escapes definitional constriction by remaining open to anyone who claims a coalitional solidarity with trans women because they believe “their alliance with trans women to be essential for their own liberation.”⁴⁰ Fundamental to trans feminism is self-determination, the choosing of one’s own subjectivity and the expectation that this chosen subjectivity will be the means by which they and those who encounter them engage sociality. This is in primary service of the eradication of violence, of which normative impositions are prime culprits. Too, there is a recognition of subjective complexity and nonteleological subjectivity—that one is not required to be “born” something in order to become something else, nor does one’s differing natal identity with one’s current identity disqualify or negate either identification. Any external or coerced impositions of sex or gender undermine the aims of trans feminism, which advocates for “a social arrangement where one is free to assign her or his own sex (or non-sex, for that matter).” Important as well is a resistance to the temptation of “wrong body” narratives that operate on the assumption of essentialist, biologized origins of gender identity and expression. The implications of such narratives, for

Koyama and her theorization of trans feminism, skew troublesomely into the realm of female and male souls or minds, bifurcating dualistic genders in axiomatic ways, which then ultimately harms women and transgender people, essentializes gender identity, and disallows self-determination. The argument made by trans feminism is that we want to “dismantl[e] the essentialist assumption of the normativity of the sex/gender congruence.”⁴¹ And with this comes a necessary penchant toward abolition, not as a seizure of the means by which we have come into subjectivity, expanding the criteria for sex and sanctioning the validity of “misaligned” criteria or adding valid genders to the options for our social media profiles. Not revolution, but abolition: we are not playing the game anymore, not altering the rules—we are leaving the field, throwing away our equipment, depriving funding from restoration efforts, and joyfully watching the stadium crumble not because we smashed it to bits but simply because we left and refused to come back.

Bringing trans and feminist together, making them hold hands, as it were, is a quest to radicalize them both. If transness has a strain of history that rejects feminism (Virginia Prince, Caitlyn Jenner), and if feminism has a strain of its history that is transantagonistic (Janice Raymond, Michele Wallace, Sheila Jeffreys), how might bringing them together refuse those histories and make them each find an identity not solely in a common history but in their advancement of a political posture of radicality? Transness’s and feminism’s existence within one another must find life outside of a strict sharing of genealogical trajectories as the basis for relationality and identification and in a rallying around a sociality that can accommodate divergent pathways. These pathways cannot be anticipated, which is precisely what must commence when we dare to actualize the radical world of which we speak. It will be unexpected; it will look different; it will be what we yearned for. And we may be terrified. But we have known terror, have been bred in part by it. And we know how to live amid it, in spite of it. But if we trade in the terror that has long gripped us for the terror of what a life without being suffocated might be like, we then fear only the wild possibilities of life as it can be for us: life un/gendered.

Transness’s and feminism’s coalition make plain that sex/gender are “absolutely political categor[ies]” since they maintain “an eminently political binary articulation, *the product of oppression, just like racial difference*.”⁴² These categories are oppressive bestowals and impositions, at base. Transness and feminism, then, interrogate Western thought and set out to dismantle the foundational tenets on which Man rests. What culminates is a refusal of the categorization of sex and gender, inscribing into (black) trans feminism

gender and sex abolition as gender radicality. A feminism that is immersed in a transitivity is tasked with refusing to be exhausted by exhaustion. Indeed, this open-ended critique and undoing of themselves allows transness and feminism to name as their aim the excess that spills over as the point of departure (and never “arrival”) for trans and feminist work. It is what we must constantly, vigilantly, not only commit ourselves to but understand, that the thing to which we commit ourselves—black trans feminism—is operable *through* its own interrogation. “We must always be willing to interrupt ourselves,” Kai Lumumba Barrow suggests, “even when we think we’ve got it ‘right.’”⁴³ I might say, further, that what I am trying to describe is precisely that interruption of ourselves, a politics comprised of those moments where we interrupt our coherence as a self and the normative logics upon which we base our political valences. Necessary is the risk of deviant multiplicity, vitiation of borders—our borders are that of the unbordered, and we politicize and find politicality in this refusal to be bordered. Unbordered politicality makes us fracture ourselves, uncongeal ourselves, unbecome ourselves and deviate our identities from nation-state and hegemonically imposed modes of subjectivity.

Transness and feminism, when sutured, or when focusing on their constitutive suturing, assert Outrans’s declaration that “transfeminism is a major opportunity to build a politics of resistance and alliance,” which is to say that those who do trans feminism become trans feminists on the grounds that they work to build this politics of resistance and, by virtue of this, become allied together in trans feminism and as trans feminists. The politics stemming from transness is and must be “a feminist one,” Outrans continues, that sees itself as already a part of black feminism, “third-wave feminism, queer feminism, and postidentity feminism.”⁴⁴ Transness and feminism encourage us to think anew because they sit uncomfortably in the current order of things, so much so that they require a new world *disorder*. They make untenable old forms of relation and organizing, old forms of identity and understanding. Indeed, the “birth of transfeminism” has shown that

we cannot count on old forms of political organization based on identities alone. Maybe the best alliances are those of and for people of different backgrounds who are eventually compelled to understand and fight for one another. These new arrangements are an effort to *do* intersectionality, to put into practice new forms of political organization that do not premise themselves solely on the politics of identity marginalization

or on the belief that an identity category is sufficient for describing the kinds of oppression experienced by all members of that category.⁴⁵

Intersectionality here means that alliances and political cohabitation can and must occur with those of varied backgrounds, side-stepping expected political formations, to create subjectivities in excess of backgrounds. *Doing* intersectionality is read as the doing of black feminism, which is not a conflation but a nod to black feminism's birthing—or perhaps midwifing (or both)—of the concepts that comprise intersectional thinking but ultimately exceed intersectional feminism. It is no coincidence that so many iterations of trans feminism make note of intersectionality or black feminism. In addition to the above, Susan Stryker and Talia Bettcher note the “tremendous worldwide effect” intersectionality has had on trans feminism and go on to cite the Combahee River Collective's refutation of biological determinism as an adequate basis on which to fashion a politics. Also, Jack Halberstam remarks that changes to support trans women or advance trans justice will ultimately benefit everyone, echoing again the Combahee River Collective's dictum that “if Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free.” In short, because of its questioning of sexual and gender difference in a way that did not take the sexual and gender binary as a given, critiquing the utility of “woman,” and having an analysis of race always foregrounded, Stryker and Bettcher assert that “this intersectional version of feminism laid the foundation for transfeminist theories and practices in the 1990s and subsequently.”⁴⁶

Yet there is a noted elision in the accounts of trans feminism's indebtedness to intersectionality—namely, the couching of the radical edges of blackness into “intersectional.” But, first, simply by dint of how its definition has been carried out, I part with intersectionality on some of its grounds for their insufficiency and what appears as a disingenuousness. That is, before even speaking to the obfuscation of blackness in the term, on its own terms, to me and others like Jasbir Puar, Mark Rifkin, and most notably Jennifer Nash, it often conflates black women with the wholly oppressed and thus evacuates them of the possibility of privilege and the ability to do harm (generating, as Nash terms it, “the monolithism of ‘black womanhood’”); it proves at times unable, with its overwhelming focus on the multiply (and assumedly entirely) marginalized, to think the efficacy of attending to the confluence of identities of, say, a white trans disabled man; and it uncritically invests in identities that become consistently reified and presumed natural, in need of no critique, dissolution, or, indeed, abolishing.⁴⁷

But, even more, intersectional feminism, while surely capacious, nevertheless dilutes the blackness of the black feminism that propelled and that haunts it. If it is accurate to say that intersectionality is the product of black feminist theorizing, then to make intersectionality the quintessence of radical feminism fails to truly grapple with the blackness inherent to intersectionality. Blackness on my account is not one descriptor among others, nor is it a description only of the people who do the feminism to which it is attached. It, in fact, has a capacity that intersectionality may not have, and the linking of trans feminism to “intersectional feminism” rather than, explicitly, black feminism does a disservice. Thus, my goal is to highlight this and bring to the fore trans feminism’s decided blackness. First, in having the Combahee River Collective speak as the key text that clarifies trans feminism’s intersectionality, there is an unstated but forceful black feminism. The collective’s text is not “An Intersectional Feminist Statement”; it is a *black* feminist statement, and their commitment is to blackness and its specificity, or opacity, which is precisely that which enables the freedom for all. In other words, the specificity of black women as a synecdoche for black feminism, or even the specificity of trans women as a synecdoche for trans feminism, is the very thing that will allow us to bring about freedom for all. It is because black feminism and trans feminism are coalitional epistemologies, are coalitionally inclusive and interrogative of normative grounds, that they can and should be spoken of in the same breath. Intersectional feminism has the potential to always reify the limits of the still-discrete identities that converge; intersectional feminism maintains that only the crash that happened is the accident, the building and mapping of the streets and curbs and road lines needing no interrogation, assuming them to be innocuous mainstays in the landscape. Trans feminism and black feminism critique the very streets that form the intersection, work to both look elsewhere and in excess of the streets and roads for the totality of one’s subjectivity as well as refuse to let the city planner have the last word on the definition of streets. They do not permit gender to remain what it is, remapping it outside of determination, a commitment that requires a quotidian intention—because some of y’all, a lot of y’all, say y’all want the undetermined, the non-biologically determined, the ungendered, yet do not take that to its end of abolition and gender radicality. Trans feminism and black feminism give affirmative consent for gender abolition. And they mean it: *gender abolition*. Trans feminism and black feminism want different streets, or want dirt roads, or want waterways and sewers, or want open meadows, just something other than the congealed, solidified rigidity of concrete and tar.

Both transness and feminism challenge the givenness of gendered ontologies. Transness and feminism are always in the interest of becoming, and an already given ontology that nonconsensually and coercively claims one's subjectivity cannot hold the openness of an ontological becoming. Abolition and gender radicality, unlike the appropriative grasp of ontology, serve as forms of self-expropriation. There is a deep urgency in this mode of living because gender and sexual normativity are destabilized, creating a crisis that becomes an opportunity to enact new forms of assemblages, coalitions, collectivities, affinities, and life. We are told that we must be the men, the women, the white people we have been forced to be. But we do not have to be them; we can become something different, in excess of ourselves, in service of something else. We want, we need, something else. And "transfeminism is that 'something else.'"48

BLACK AND TRANS AND FEMINIST

... other ways to be trans ... with which blacks in the
New World had much practice.

C. RILEY SNORTON, *Black on Both Sides*

Imagine other ways of being and feeling black feminist.

JENNIFER NASH, *Black Feminism Reimagined*

Dora Silva Santana, in "Mais Viva! Reassembling Transness, Blackness, and Feminism," dwells at length on trans feminism as imbricated with blackness. She begins by querying how the experiential knowledges of black Brazilian trans women could introduce a radical epistemic shift in the terrain. How could centering black trans women alter what qualifies as knowledge, or what is deemed "the world"? This is a query into the political stakes of knowledge production, and a movement toward the radical possibility of black trans women naming, unname, or leaving beautifully unknown the contours of the world. Santana goes on to inquire as to how black trans *life* might be thought about and focused on as black trans women resist death. So often the subjectivities of black trans women are mentioned only when they no longer live—when they've been murdered, met with antiblack and transantagonistic violence, often deadnamed and misgendered in headlines (if given headlines at all)—so Santana yearns for care of black trans women while they still live and, indeed, care that

allows for the continuation of that life. Methodologically, Santana employs *papo-de-mana*, or “sista talk,” a foregrounding of the conversations black women have with one another as the primary site of black (trans) feminist knowledge production. In conjunction with the Trans Revolução (Trans Revolution) support group comprised of trans women, trans men, transsexual people, and nonbinary people, Santana alludes to her own gendered and racialized transition and asserts that transition is “a nonlinear, undirected, dislocated, and localized movement.”⁴⁹ Black trans women, and black trans feminism more broadly, fashion subjectivities around the pursuit of “unsubordinated living,” undirected and unsubjected life begotten by the subjective embodiment of the primordial, insurrectionary force of black trans feminism.

Her focus is on black trans women *in movement*. She distinguishes between black women, be they understood as “trans” or “cis,” in feminist movements and black women in motion, doing actions, organizing in coalitions, a distinction that to me articulates black (trans) feminism through the ways subjects mobilize different kinds of subversive work that breaches the very confines that structure the marginalization of the people for whom black trans feminism is in service. It is less about joining groups based on who one is; it is about coming together by way of how work is put in. Santana’s black trans feminism constitutes a politics for liberation from racialized gendered oppression and a transing of fugitive spaces (what she identifies in the text as *quilombo*). Resistance against racialized gendered violence that assaults nonnormative subjectivities “is where trans feminism and black feminism meet,” she writes, and this nexus is a fugitive one, where “fugitivity is a refusal of systems that keep us captive to situations that oppress us.”⁵⁰ The sista talk of the black trans women Santana spoke with generates black trans feminism. It is talk and knowledge, collectivity and politics, that assert the continued life of black trans women. And in this is a politics for the alteration and even destruction of the world as it is known. For Santana, “to do black trans feminist work is to bring in the fugitivity of blackness, that unspecified movement of transness and the gendered and ungendering racialization of bodies pointed out by black feminism.”⁵¹ It is an apparatus electrified in its circuitry by fugitive blackness, or blackness as a mutiny of racializing categorizations; by transness as undetermined and wayward, a deregulated movement through and beyond gender toward its recalibration and destruction; and by black feminism, an epistemological stratagem that fractures hegemonic fetters of racialized gender in ways that limit ontological breadth.

Following Santana, black trans feminism is no provincial project. Inasmuch as one radical stance one could take in the social milieu is one in which black women, trans women, and black trans women are kept alive, are indeed those whose lives foundation our calls that social justice is predicated on the mattering of the lives of the most marginalized, black trans feminism becomes *a name* for radical politics. It would then be a misnomer to say that one is radically politically oriented if blackness, transness, and feminism do not hold notable interest in one's political purview. And these are references not to quintessential bodies that look a certain way, but to modalities of subjectivation hinting at alternative socialities. That is, black trans feminism has a certain archive from which it draws, yes—and that archive, too, is one of many, a multiplicity of nonhierarchized archives that do black trans feminist work even if the archive is not “about” or “composed of” those who ostensibly “are” black or trans or women. I have named this treatise and political penchant “black trans feminism” for indexical reasons, by which I mean they name things other than what they’ve come to mean in this particular sociohistorical concoction, and those things—which are characterized by unnamable forces of mutiny, desedimentation, paraontology, categorical displacement, and many others—are always entangled with the various ways they might be named by other means. Black trans feminism might be said to erupt from the convergence of the “other ways” to be and do nonnormative, trans genders with which blackness is well practiced, as Snorton notes in this section’s first epigraph, with the contention in the Nash epigraph that we must imagine “other ways” to do and be and feel and enact black feminism. Black trans feminism names the “other way” suturing the trans, the black, and the black feminist. This expansively specific project might be complemented by another project under a different heading—say, that of decolonial radical socialisms, or indigenous anarchist insurgencies, or what have you. Black trans feminism neither supersedes nor rejects these; they are all in coalition, working angles and avenues in service of another way to be that does not stand for the ills that plague us. That other way has come under the banner, here, of abolition and gender radicality. Because I am not talking about identificatory possessions but, rather, politics and forces, modalities and relations, it is able to be maintained that such a project called black trans feminism does not work over and against other radical projects in a supersessionist sense. What I’ve collected black trans feminism as under the banner of unfixation permits a generative promiscuity that is flexible and nonterritorial—that is uninterested in

territorial gestures and allows for other projects of radicality to serve not as competitors but goons and accomplices in the struggle together.

Put simply, and clearly, I want to affix blackness, transness, and (black) feminism to an abolitionist and radical posturing. This is not to reduce these historically and phenomenologically specific modalities to a homogenous understanding of one another. In other words, no, blackness, transness, and (black) feminism are not all the same under this helm; they are names that index escape and theft of life in and through the nonnormative, the subversion of hegemony, unbecoming, breach. They are names for unmeaning, particularly nonparticular unmeanings that take these names because of how history has consolidated the anoriginal fugitive force into various corporeal and behavioral postures deemed deviant or unsettling. I am making a similar claim as I make elsewhere about blackness and transness:

This is not to collapse blackness and trans*-ness, diluting their uniqueness and utility as analytics for different, though related, disciplinary fields. They are, rather, nodes of one another, inflections that, though originary and names for the nothingness upon which distinction rests, flash in different hues because of subjects' interpretive historical entrenchment. That is to say, they are differently inflected names for an anoriginal lawlessness that marks an escape from confinement and a besideness to ontology. Manifesting in the modern world differently as race and gender fugitivity, black and trans*, though pointed at by bodies that identify as black and/or trans*, precede and provide the foundational condition for those fugitive identificatory demarcations.⁵²

Because I am interested in how fugitivity has arisen from black studies and is thus tied to the name “blackness,” and because blackness, for me, is not tied to any specific racialized body, the gendered kin of and in this blackness usefully bear the names “transness” and “feminism” because these, too, are fugitive flights that inflect strongly the contemporary world. This book is adamant about blackness, transness, and feminism because they are, to my mind, metonymic instances and poetic flashes of a critical disposition. The radical criticality herein names itself as always prepared for a necessary self-critique. It is open to its own undoing because critique signals more than mere externalized criticism; it seeks to negate—to make nonexistent—the hegemon as well as build otherworlds, or create in this world the conditions of possibility for otherworlds to proliferate in unanticipated ways. Black trans feminism might be called a general theory (always in hieroglyphic

form) that, *in what it theorizes*, instantiates the impossibility of a general theory insofar as a general theory rests on universalism—antithetical to the subversive sociality yearned for by the blackness of black trans feminism, the transness of black trans feminism, the feminism of black trans feminism.

The claim made here, and that a black trans feminism attempts to make clear, is that the external and supposedly obvious is at best an ostensibility, at worst a phantasm (with no set criteria to discern which). That which appears simply there and an unadulterated mainstay of, say, the body is not in fact such. These external things subject to the senses are, as Denise Ferreira da Silva puts it in the context of problematic Enlightenment reason and rationality, “already an effect of regulating reason”—that is, already mediated and tainted, as it were, by the white and cis and masculine genre of being a valid subject. We are already touched by violence and supremacist discourses even when we wish to claim that which has been pathologized on and in us, making even the gesture to say “I am black/I am a woman, and that’s okay” understandable but not the final resting place of our political endeavors. It is because one’s categorical race and gender, despite its feeling of deep inherency and self-fashioning, is an “exterior thing”; racial and gender *identity*, da Silva would conclude, “constitute but effects of the interior tools of ‘pure reason.’” It is pure reason, which is mired in white supremacist, cisnormative, masculine conceptions of the subject, that has authored the very idea of identity, racial, gender, or otherwise, and thus the abolitionist and radical forces indexed in black trans feminism act as a negation, a “radical gesture” toward not merely their reclothing; no, black trans feminism, to take da Silva’s call seriously, insofar as racial and gender identity are “exterior things,” serves as “the declaration of the ontoepistemological *inexistence* of exterior things.”⁵³ This is a radically abolitionist project, a project that, in the grand scheme of things, is a black and trans and feminist project.

Black trans feminism is an analytic praxis inflected in various ways due to historical contingencies but is nevertheless excessive of historical instantiations and identitarian subjectivities. This is not to elide materiality—abstractions do not abandon, and in fact often have as their primary aim of redress, social, material, and cultural meanings. Black trans feminism is the devastation of violences, whatever form they may take. Perhaps the blackness, the transness, and the feminism of it all, their promiscuous coalitional affiliations and insurgent politicality, are indexed in the defiant togetherness of an unlawful assemblage, an unregulated and prohibited way of getting together and going together. Ideally, sought after would be a raucous

liveliness in the exquisite shadows that illuminate those things that promise something beyond our catastrophic situation, things that exceed what their context dictates of them and nevertheless desire something not this. We don't know what will arise if we realize this thoroughgoing dream I've been spouting, nor should we. To claim to know in advance would belie the aim, as we would only entrench what might be into the current logics we have at our disposal. We don't know, and that is okay. We just want something else, a something we do not know yet.