Introduction

INTRODUCING THE ELSEWHERE

> It is a narrative written from nowhere, from the nowhere of the ghetto and the nowhere of utopia.
>
> — HARTMAN, *WAYWARD LIVES, BEAUTIFUL EXPERIMENTS*

> We are the guerrilla poems written on walls, purveyors of a billion dangerous meanings of life.
>
> — GUMBS, "KEYWORD: MOTHERING"

In my family, we tell a story about me; I tell it too. And in many ways, it is where *The Elsewhere Is Black* begins. When I was young, I used to eat books, my mother's in particular. She collected them everywhere. She would buy trashy novels from the grocery store and pick through every abandoned box of books she encountered on the sidewalk, sometimes taking the whole box home. She would swipe books from the doctor's office and adopt abandoned novels from street corners. She happily accepted books from friends, no matter what they were about, and when we would venture to the Salvation Army, she would make a beeline to the ten-cent book bins and buy as many as she could afford. Even if they were torn, even if I had gnawed at the edges, she would still make her way through them—sometimes crafting imagined line endings at the eroded margins, sometimes reading them as if that was the way they were supposed to be.

No matter how trashy, books have always been the material with which my mother set herself aflight from the narrowed possibilities of racial and sexual condemnation. At fifteen, she didn't know that women in rural Tobago were being inundated by pesticides, so she couldn't have imagined that those pesticides, themselves bound up in long histories of colonial violence, would be part of the ecological conditions of my birth.[1] She was also too young to notice that the passing of Trinidad and Tobago's 1986 Sexual

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Offences Act shaped her struggle to name her queer desires, particularly because she was a pregnant fifteen-year-old "dougla."[2] What she *did* know was that reading was like breathing, and it was a practice she carried with her when she was reunited with my grandmother, who had been working tirelessly as a domestic worker in Brooklyn, trying to make it in America and bring her children over too. But my story, and my mother's and grandmother's, is like most Black immigrant stories. America might have proved different from the racial-sexual economies that constrained Black women on the twenty-six-mile-long island of Tobago where I was born, but the geographies of racial capitalism in the United States did not exactly offer more room for a Black teenaged mother (or her daughter) to *be*.

It was the late 1980s when my mother and I came to the United States, a time when the privatization of city services was on the rise and the scope of the anti-Black carceral state was changing. The legacy of redlining, of blockbusting, of white flight, and of disinvestment were well-entrenched in cities with large Black populations. Hartford, Connecticut, where we ended up, was no different. By the 1990s, the conflation of broken windows and trash on the streets with Black criminality was being consumed in the form of shows like *Cops*, while hip-hop was understood to be a hotbed of deviant Black working-class aesthetics pejoratively labeled "street." Black women's aesthetics in particular symbolized the trash coming from the hood. The "welfare queen" and her many names gave national grammars to the gendered equation of Black degeneration, and her progeny were being thrown in jail at younger and younger ages.[3] The school-to-prison pipeline was hardening as the welfare state was disappearing. And under the guise of protecting (white) women from the "superpredators" coming from the hood, the ghetto had crystallized in the white supremacist imagination as a tangle of pathological relationships to space, an "over there" problem of Black genders and their impropriety, a ghetto that is simultaneously elsewhere and somehow not of this world at all.

The ghetto, as the late Steven Gregory theorized, is a term that conceals more than it reveals, a term that obscures the material relations of depletion, neglect, or what Katherine McKittrick might name as the way geography becomes a form of racial-sexual condemnation.[4] Constitutively, the processes of material and ideological condemnation that produce the cartographic struggles of Black life hinge on the contradictory premise that Blackness in the United States is essentially *unecological*. The term *ghetto*, then, also conceals the eco-logics of property, whereby the protection of property and white life purports to revere (while simultaneously destroying)

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a "pristine" nature that "seems innocent of black history."[5] The condemnation of poor people of color's relationships to their (gendered) bodies, to objects, to place, and to environments casts Black, especially poor, urban life outside nature-social relations. Yet, seemingly paradoxically, the condemnation of "the Negro" through their relationship to (or *as*) wild is used to construct Blackness as animality in order to *naturalize* exploitation and criminalization.[6]

Whether it be the inner city, the suburbs, or a rural area, Black people are presumed to be both agents of disorder and degeneration (unecological) and a people overdetermined by "broken windows," "hot climates," and "savage jungles." Most clearly operative in policing tactics, the long-debunked-but-still-practiced criminological theory of broken windows specifically targets "signs of decay" as a tactic to deter "criminals" from antisocial behavior violating order and lawfulness.[7] Yet as many critics have pointed out, what cops (who are often property owners themselves) actually reinforce, if not produce, are racist perceptions of Black people as inherent hazards to property.[8] My point here is not to survey criminological theory so much as it is to point out the lay environmental theory that lies at its heart: Blackness is a pathological, if not criminal, excess that disorders environments, and the environments of Blackness are a pathological hazard of criminal excessiveness. Black people are contaminated—a state that has already come to pass—and contaminating—a threat to sanitized white life.

Take my eating habits. Along with my mother's books, I also ate paint. And when I was three or maybe four years old, I was required to take an IQ test (not a blood-lead-level test) to prove I was "delinquent." After all, as one of my teachers remarked, I was eating books. Eating paint was just more evidence of an inability to engage respectably with objects, evincing my young propensity for disrespecting the property of others. The lead levels in the two-bedroom house where we lived with eight other family members were never tested, but we didn't need a test to tell us the levels were high. We knew we lived in the ghetto, and that was enough to know some things just weren't right. Sometimes we speculate about the potential link between lead and the diagnosis of leukemia that came when I was five, but we do so cautiously. The elision of my body and our environment would be a trap for Black women, a story well-worn in the annals of history. It is the story of the pathological Black mother who fails to rear Black children in acceptable or healthful environments. Under her many names—welfare queen, hood rat, ghetto trash—she produces children (no matter their genders) who inherit her propensity to degrade the environment.

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In this equation, the ecologies of Blackened places are not only punishing for Black women; the landscapes of their environments also become interchangeable with Blackness itself. The particulate matter caused by a "green" waste-to-energy plant; lead in the patch of grass behind the projects, which were built over a lead-soaked field; unused lots that are actually Superfund sites, with unknown measurements of arsenic and unnamed chemicals, become the often-invisible backdrop of places condemned by the anti-Black state to the condition of blight. The irony is that if Blackness is interchangeable with a broken window, a pothole, or any other sign of state neglect, then Blackness is ecologically useful for racial capitalism. Blackness marks an elsewhere to which risk can always be consigned, and it marks such material conclusions because Blackness is not *ecological* at all.

TOXIC CAPTURE, UNECOLOGIC, AND PROPERTY AS A GENRE OF LIFE

The "unecologic"—riffing off McKittrick's use of the Black "ungeographic"—points us to how the priority of property casts Blackness as excessive to and outside of the environment.[9] Forged in the architecture of the settler-master's plantation, colonial expropriation of Indigenous homelands wielded enslaved bodies as an environmental weapon. And it was through this environmental process that the settler made himself into what Tiffany King calls the "conquistador-settler."[10] Through (il)legal documents, he created his own property in land and people. He became his own cartographer, mapping *over* Indigenous territories, claiming theft as the law.[11] And with new maps, he installed a plantocracy, making himself the author of antagonistically organized difference that sought to obliterate native claims of kinship with land, naturalize the destruction of delicate ecologies, criminalize Black life off the plantation, and ensure his own genre of habitation (property).[12] In the entwined genocide and ecocide of his own propertied becoming, the conquistador became the steward of death. As Haunani-Kay Trask succinctly said of the United States, "Colonization was the historical process, and genocide the official policy."[13]

The environmental devastation of Black and Indigenous dispossession is fundamental to what underpins settler self and ecological becoming. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue, a violent racial triad (settler-native-slave) supports the settler colonial formation: a native to be disappeared and a slave whose labor was central to value production but whose presence and

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personhood were considered an excess to (stolen) land and/or environment.[14] Materialized as "excess" by the geographic institutions and environmental policies that uphold (settler) whiteness as property, the ongoing production of the settler-native-slave triad makes Blackness maimable, displaceable, and killable, ever held captive by the need for land and/as a "sink for pollution."[15] The violences of (white) property emanate from the epistemic, ontological, and material force of the social relations of ownership. Yet the risks of this propertied habitation accumulate elsewhere, subjecting Black life to toxic capture.

Throughout this book, I emphasize that anti-Blackness is, among many things, an environmental strategy. If the unecologic (or, rather, the racist eco-logics of property) casts Black (especially wageless) life outside of nature, one of settler racial capitalism's uses for the Black body is Blackening place to make way for waste disposal and toxic accumulation. Unceded lands "have been forcibly made part of the US [waste] infrastructure," and stolen Black bodies are inexhaustibly used to absorb, and plan for, the places of environmental risk.[16] I call this ever-accumulating and compounding condition of risk "toxic capture," to expand our thinking about environmental racism to include the way that property is a genre of living (by killing). Though some of this book takes place near sites of waste disposal (landfills, transfer stations), I argue that property itself is inherently environmentally destructive, including through its production of waste management's mundane yet disavowed toxic conditions.[17] Despite the reverence the conquistador human has for how he constructs and bounds nature, property is not ecologically sound. The management of waste relies on its placement. And planning the places of waste requires the calculation of risk to bodies, to water (tables), to marine life, to soil, to air—a colonial science that, even if not always immediately obvious, racializes land "use" to determine "the threshold of harm."[18] While environmental regulations attempt to manage the risk of pollution to human and more-than-human life, they do so by disavowing a (settler) colonial capitalist system that uses the Black body to expropriate unceded native land and constructs "Blackness" as a "human and environmental hazard."[19]

Blackness is environmentally useful for capital, by which I mean productive through its condemnation of Black people as an environmental problem. Toxicity follows capture wherever Black life is made quintessentially disposable, and it is the accrued but disavowed consequences elsewhere to property as a genre of habitation. Materially, this means that our collective and more-than-human environments are enrolled in

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the project of domination, including the project to cast out (or punish). But casting out does not actually make material (or ecological) relations disappear; instead, it changes them and often with dramatic consequences that threaten if not reveal the instability of property and its attendant ways of living. As a consequence of the unecologic, waste/risk/toxicity is what property produces, and capture is an ever-available method to protect a propertied way of life. Thus, toxic capture describes a racialized material condition; it is an ever-accumulating reality and a condition produced by (settler) colonial racial capitalism's most destructive fantasy: that property and its genre of living (or killing) are (or ever were) sustainable.

Toxic capture appears in different ways across the places and times of this text, sometimes next to the acute sites of waste management, sometimes as the seizure of Black life by eminent domain. My hope is that naming toxic capture as a condition makes it imperative to see those discarded and made discardable by it as environmental theorists. Their ways of talking, telling, improvising with, speculating about, and storying matter are instructive ecological ethics for living with/in and against a material world, to reprise Carolyn Finney, that is seemingly innocent of Black material histories. It is precisely the conditions of toxic capture that make the Black ecological struggle also a struggle with the terms of ecology (as pristine, clean, and white).

Surrounded by toxic capture, I, too, struggle to make sense of my childhood with the dominant terms of ecology, terms that do not address the contradictory roles Blackness is forced to bear vis-à-vis nature and environment. What if those contradictions did alter my hunger? What if bearing down on my stomach was the need for nourishment to be more than food? What if my hunger (for books, for paint) charted alternative forms of stewardship through Blackened depravation? If reading offered my mother a way to move, then perhaps eating books was a way for me to be with her in ecological struggle, a way to improvise with matter's "contingency and possibility" instead of property's "necessity and determinacy?"[20] What if, in the midst of being hungry, consuming indigestible paper, PCBs in ink, bacterium, dust, and glue, I was experimenting with the terms and relations of my environment? The Blackening of place is part of what M. Murphy calls the conditions of altered life, in which "life already altered . . . is also life open to alteration."[21] Living the acute "contradictions of existing in worlds that demand chemical exposures as the condition for eating, drinking, breathing," what if eating books and paint was a way for me to improvise within the violences of being discarded?[22] What if it was a practice that

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exposed and indexed how my hunger was the product of many things (poverty, loss, racial and sexual condemnation)? And the things I was hungry for (my mother, flight, what reading represented, nourishment, pleasure) were as multiple as the world's violences? Perhaps in a world that wastes life, I was rendering the world differently with waste.

A professor who used to eat books is not an ecological story that fits neatly within the history of environmentalism, conversations about climate crisis, or more recent moves toward zero-waste futures. It is not a story of renewable energy (though it is perhaps a story of how Blackness is ever renewed as energy for capital), and it is not a story that coheres under the rubric of green techno-optimism that we might note in climate accords. In fact, it's a story that challenges the optimism of zero-waste futures, and tasks us with including trash in our understanding of the Black present, a vision that insists on prioritizing (the poor, the houseless, the wageless) Black presence. That my family continues to tell the story of how I ate books, and that I tell it here, too, is a way to *not* elide the conditions of our life by rendering them only abject, or as the failure of Black family formation. Instead, we tell a story that neither pathologizes nor cleans up; we tell stories about the other ways that we *are*, and in so doing, we tell stories of other ways of being.[23]

Along with the toxicity I undoubtedly ingested, I consumed other ways of knowing the vexed political object upon which this book hinges: waste. The unsanctioned practices of reuse deployed by poor and working-class people are often criminalized precisely because they have the potential to rearrange the order of value, or because they capture something that exceeds capitalism's clutches. For example, in 2016, when the New York Department of Sanitation (DSNY) realized that the city's curbside waste diversion rates were nearly half that of the national average (16 percent and 34.4 percent, respectively), the "theft" of recyclables became an environmental issue. With Mayor Bill de Blasio's zero waste by 2030 campaign, the DSNY was under the direction of the mayor's office to increase rates to 25 percent. Although urban scavengers already do the labor of diversion, Vito Turso, spokesperson for the DSNY, told the *New York Times*, "The city's got goals, and the only way we know how to meet those goals is if we have control over the commodity"—that is, recyclables.[24] Despite the bottle bills (passed in New York City in 2008), which allow for the scavenging of certain recyclables (with some restrictions, such as prohibiting the use of vehicles), the criminalization of scavenging points to both the value of waste to capitalism's racist order and the fugitive politics of discarded living.

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Making life among discards is elsewhere to an environmentalism that hinges on capitalism's attempts to save the future for itself by "controlling the commodity." Zero-waste campaigns, diversion rates, and recycling "theft" are among the many iterations of capitalism's desire to clean up places and people for its own accumulation. However, to name the possibility of a different genre of earthly knowledge, a different orientation to the matter of living under intersecting forms of domination, I join L. Horton-Stalling's stated desire to embrace "the dirty," which I extend to the *trashy*. "The dirty," Horton-Stallings argues, "in its finest and filthiest iterations . . . exists as the simultaneous place and practice of intersectional politics, critiques of moral authority, and the development of regional aesthetic philosophies whose purpose is dismantling and reinventing southern public spheres largely erected out of the sexual economy of slavery and sustained by settler colonialism."[25] The way that *dirty* signals both a condition (relative to cleanliness) and an aesthetic racialized sexual politics is critical to understanding the intervention that dirty makes. I seek to wrench open *trash*, too. *Trashy* is as much a state of capitalism as it is an aesthetic practice, or in Jillian Hernandez's term, an aesthetic of excess.[26] My hope is that straining to see the relationship between trash and *trashy* offers a different way to think about waste, trash, and the discarded as material sutured to dispossessed life. In addition, I hope that this prompts a rethinking of the meanings of *waste* and its accrued (social/moral) imperatives.

KNOWING WASTE

Marco Armiero argues that "waste is not a thing to be placed somewhere"; rather, he urges us to shift our attention to "a set of wasting relationships."[27] This shift to waste-producing relations reveals waste-facility siting to be far "more than a matter of miles and ZIP codes." While violent spatialities are key to a waste management system that prioritizes the health of white property over all other things in the United States, waste is also a *relation* that "*produces* the targeted community" rather than merely an unfortunate consequence of the science of land use and its spatialization of discriminate *zones*.[28] Thus, in agreement with Armiero's critique, this book does not approach waste as a metaphor for dispossession but as dispossession's material reality.

The discarded pile up, onto, and perhaps *into* one another, producing a toxic tethering, wherein waste becomes a condition of dispossession.

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Waste matter and racialized bodies stick to one another within racial capitalism's geographies; however, the spatial violence that subtends this mode of discarding can't always predictably "incorporate" its own excesses. Against narratives that presume that the dispossessed either are a waste or waste their lives, "subaltern people have gotten organized, sometimes openly clashing with the forces of wasting . . . often struggling to substitute wasting relationships with commoning."[29]

Recent work on commoning proves important to the way I theorize the materiality of dispossession. For example, Miriam Ticktin's work points us to the ways that poor, racialized, and gender nonconforming peoples have generated creative ways to survive by producing new forms of commons, despite racial capitalism's enclosures.[30] "Commoning practices," Armiero argues, are a form of sabotage that interrupt the social relations that waste.[31] The feminist injunction here, counter to romanticized and patriarchal visions of "the commons," is to see practices of commoning as part of the mutual-aid work required to produce alternative futures. In a similar vein, J. T. Roane historicizes the Black commons as a practice and a place of freedom forged on the plots of the plantation.[32] Roane's work is particularly instructive here, as he traces the seemingly unruly material practices of slaves (in the stolen seed and the stolen time of plotting) as insurgent knowledge production that allowed the enslaved to use their familiarity with the environments of the plantation to craft methods of resistance.[33] Sometimes this resistance was in the form of escape, in which "the swamp and the wilderness" served as shelter.[34] Sometimes it manifested in resistance to the settler-planter economy in which the slave was a tool burnished within the economies of genocide and the disposing of land.[35] Regardless of how the knowledge was acquired, it was used deceptively, thoughtfully, agentively, to forge freedom with unruly matter.

It is in this spirit that I approach the materiality of dispossession, or waste as dispossession's attendant condition. Ethnographically speaking, this means I prioritize the knowledge of the dispossessed, whose object practices and material relations—including drug use, cigarette smoking, and aesthetic cultures—are often pathologized, if not criminalized, by a carceral imagination that approaches discarded life as itself an environmental hazard. Instead of solely theorizing the disposability of "redundant populations," this book takes knowing waste through dispossession seriously as a potential site of insurgent ecological knowledge.[36]

Drawing on ethnographic research in the Hampton Roads (or Tidewater, depending on who you ask) region of Southeastern Virginia—currently

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experiencing transformation across the cities of Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Suffolk—and the gentrifying neighborhood of Bed-Stuy, in Brooklyn, New York, this book approaches the material practices of Black dispossessed persons as ecological knowledge. Though this project began with scavenging on the streets of Bed-Stuy with houseless Black men, I also found my way South, attempting to trace the circuitous logics that make *Black* and *trash* redundant.[37] In Virginia, where landfills rearticulate the plantation's resilient relations, I found myself learning the most about trash, trashiness, and Blackness from sex workers, who proudly referred to themselves as "trashy hookers."[38] Through the stories that scavengers and sex workers tell, to the paths of critique that their movements through space chart, this book argues that we need to pay closer attention to the materiality of Black life as the experimental ground for new forms of ecological ethics.

In order to launch dispossessed Black living as fecund with abundant ecological politics, we first need an important corrective. Kathleen Millar points out that waste is a metaphor that reinscribes capital and the state. She argues that "those whose labor is *not needed* by capital" are those described as "waste," "surplus," or "superfluous" to the state.[39] However, as waste historian Susan Strasser's work makes clear, until the twentieth century in the United States, laboring waste *was* needed by capital, though it was primarily unwaged labor, bracketed off from the "productive" economic sphere altogether.[40] From street gleaners to rag pickers to the fat rendering, soap making, and mattress stuffing practices of the domestic arts, laboring waste was socially *re*productive.

As I interpret Millar's argument, the reinscription of waged labor as the only way to understand value and political economy is a classist—not to mention sexist, which is always racial—epistemic problem in the scholarship on waste and an ideological undercurrent in the response to it. To put it differently: We presume to know why people dig through the trash, and thus we presume that we already know the story. Not only does this make classism a problem for how scholars and ethnographers "know," but it also turns dispossessed people's relationship to waste into something that is *only* a response to economic scarcity. This assumption is a form of epistemic violence, in which the only thing that dispossessed people can do (on the page) is survive. While employment and making a living "is . . . a central dimension of *a form of living*, it is not synonymous with . . . the pursuit of a specific mode of inhabiting the world."[41]

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Making a living, particularly when you are barely apprehended as human, isn't the only way to live in an anti-Black world. And in the lives of the wageless sex workers and scavengers I learned from who live on the street, the value(s) of humanism and its definitions of work do not guide living. This resonates with one of the central arguments in Neferti Tadiar's *Remaindered Life*, which centers the violence of humanization as a "value-constitutive activity" that presumes to know the labor of "a life worth living."[42] Building off Tadiar's and Millar's critiques of how stories of waste can become austere, this book, too, seeks to "break open this reduction, allowing for diversity of productive actions that do not fit easily into capitalist categories of labor and notions of work."[43] In fact, in this book, the people who tell stories with and about waste, as well as labor on it, revel in other ways to *be* amid a dispossessing world, including through the proliferation of genres—of aesthetics, of gender, of the human—that build socioecological relations from the colonial detritus of our present, deeply haunted by its pasts.[44]

Self-proclaimed garbologists William Rathje and Cullen Murphy ask, "If our garbage, in the eyes of the future, is destined to hold a key to the past, then surely it already holds a key to the present."[45] This provocation to think of garbage as a socio-ecological record presents an important companion to Myra J. Hird's argument that knowing waste is an "ironic testimonial to our desire to forget."[46] Hird argues that waste infrastructure doesn't just determine where waste *goes* but also shapes our ability to attend to waste in the everyday and in theory. But what if waste didn't "go" away, if it weren't picked up off your streets, or if the street was where you lived? What if your home was described by scholars as "the gutted infrastructures of segregated cityscapes," in which the effects of imperialism reside in the "microecologies of [your] matter[ing] and [your] mind"?[47] What if waste was always becoming other things, including the logics that justify your removal, turning you into matter to be cleared and disappeared? Is waste, then, an empirical object or a condition of history? A description of matter or evidence of violent relations? The facts of production or a fiction of capital? "Away" is a violent spatiality that naturalizes, if not *reveres*, property above all else. It is a fantasy of environments stabilized—dare I say naturalized—by the inheritance of white ownership and the infrastructures that serve it (including the biocentric genders of capitalism). If we desire to forget waste, so too do we desire to forget the histories of enslavement and colonization's eco-social relations that have long buried

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their environmental risks "elsewhere," an elsewhere with which the material present is entwined.

ELSEWHERE IS EVERYWHERE (TO A PROPERTIED WAY OF LIFE)

Throughout this book, I use the term *elsewhere* to articulate three interrelated themes: (1) how waste infrastructures displace and concentrate toxicity to an underthought elsewhere that is not only material but, mundanely, Black; (2) what waste tells us about property and, specifically, what I call a propertied way of life; and (3) the intersections of the emergent fields of Black geographies and Black ecologies that point us to the everywhere nature of "elsewhere." I see these three themes as necessary for thinking about the relationship between Black life and waste, if not the environment more broadly. The genealogy of scholars upon which I draw across these themes has taught me how to hold together things that are often in disciplinary tension with one another. So while the connections I elucidate in the following pages are central to how this book moves from one chapter to the next and to how I situate myself ethnographically, there are also things (namely, waste) that become more and more opaque as the book progresses. I see these moments of opacity as a critical intervention into ethnographic modes of attention and a way to insist that *seeing* is a struggle. I hope these moments remind all of us that opacity is also a political relation, a way of knowing violence, and a critique of Western knowledge production.[48] A critique of Western knowledge production that comes from somewhere else.

Infrastructures discriminate in the things they circulate, where they concentrate their social "goods," and, crucially, for *whom* they act. Against the anthropological framing of infrastructure as something that becomes thinkable or visible only upon breakdown, Robert Bullard's watershed *Dumping in Dixie* exposes how infrastructure's racist politics are not invisible. Breakdown is the condition of a racist capitalist state that affirms white lives while Black and Brown bodies are made to die.[49] By bringing scholarship on racial capitalism to bear on infrastructure, I start from the position that infrastructures stratify, distributing space, people, and services unevenly. They do not function equally in all places at once, nor are they meant to.[50] Urban spatial order is enacted through sanitation infrastructures (toilets, water treatment plants, sewers, and pipes), and ideologies of cleanliness and vitality are circulated and inscribed though practice.[51]

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However, infrastructures do not just produce aesthetic and social orders; they also rationalize them into space.[52] Infrastructures materialize state power to coordinate and govern the spatial politics of everyday life.[53]

Joshua Reno's ethnographic work on waste labor in the landfills of Michigan argues that waste infrastructures "do not eliminate environmental health risks entirely, but *concentrate them elsewhere*."[54] While infrastructures that "work well" recede into the background of white middle-class life, this is always contingent on the way they condition—that is to say, where and how far away they condemn the distant or unthinkable "other" to slow death.[55] Thus, while the research for this project began with questions about infrastructure, the book became an ethnographic and theoretical rumination on environmental risk as a mundane part of Black living. In this sense, the elsewhere is about marking that place and time to which risk is consigned, a way to insist that somewhere *over there* is in fact infrastructurally coterminous with living and theorizing *here*.

This brings me to the second thematic the elsewhere marks. If current paradigms for managing waste concentrate risk *elsewhere*, then what are the corollary spatial arrangements protecting the here and now from waste's accumulations? I argue that the here and now is categorically *property*, specifically white property and whiteness *as* property. Putting distance between waste and property is a critical part of settler-colonial, anti-Black land politics.[56] Moreover, to invoke Bullard's *Dumping in Dixie* once more, the structure of policies, practices, and directives "that differentially affects or disadvantages . . . individuals, groups, or communities based on race" is constitutive of racial capitalism's geographies and the material realties of colonialism.[57] In other words, it is *the possibility of ownership* that creates the conditions of dispossession, what Malcom Ferdinand has called "a colonial habitation."[58] Otherwise illegible to colonial forms of inhabiting, the environmentalisms of the colonized, dispossessed, and poor "other" are recast as "criminal," a problem of backward stewardship "over there." This colonial habitation, or what I refer to as a propertied way of life, disavows "the material, economic, and political connection to the 'here,'" and *here* is the time, place, and racial relations of property.[59]

The inherited "material privileges attendant to being white" define what Cheryl Harris describes as the secured expectations and status that make whiteness a form of property.[60] The recursive logic of property rights retroactively secures an ontological status to whiteness that secures the settler as a specific *genre of being* and defines his humanness by his right to first possession.[61] This ontological dominion is material, actively produced

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through the violence of conquest. I emphasize "material" here to center the way that social domination is always an environmental project and its violences an imposition on our complex ecological relations. As Frank Wilderson reminds us, *clearing* (to which I would add *cleaning*)—in terms of clearing the way for a propertied way of life—is a violent verb, laboring across Indigenous lands, bodies, and more-than-human beings in order to justify colonial improvements to "wasted" lands.[62] Critical Indigenous studies scholars teach us that declarations of "wastelands" are part of a colonial architecture that requires the genocidal removal of the native.[63] By marking Indigenous stewardship as "unproductive" and a waste, colonial regimes lay moral claim to ownership over land, non-human beings, matter, and all manner of peoples. As Indigenous stewardship, cosmologies, and ways of being with the earth were actively obliterated (at least according to the maps that ontologized settler sovereignty), the colonial appropriation of land became so thoroughly embedded in the settler-planter common sense that whiteness appeared to be a natural system that cleans, orders, and produces value(s).[64] However, property (as/and whiteness) is a force that requires waste to propel itself into being.[65]

While whiteness inherits the capacity to possess, whiteness as property becomes a *way of being*, marked by the "romantic marks of sentience [and a] feeling of intentionality."[66] Blackness, on the other hand, as Katherine McKittrick has argued, inherits dispossession and, along with it, the discourses of "dirt" and the unruly agency of unthinking matter.[67] Caught within the colonial gaze, contaminating nonwhite "others" are positioned as like objects or animals, justifiably slated for exploitation, manipulation, or early extinction.[68] Other genres of being within a racialized world become subdivisions of humanity—sub, less than, not human—presumed closer to inert matter, which must be enrolled in a recursive white regime of property rights to be made productive.[69] Property's conditions of avowal and disavowal are critical to understanding how waste *conditions*. Thus, waste management is not simply the infrastructural project to manage surplus matter; managing waste is an epistemological and ontological concern with the violent conditions of ownership.[70] Waste accumulations *become* toxic because managing waste, or rather our "wasting relationships," is part of the violent requirements for transformation that sustain the political, economic, and ontological conditions of white supremacy's propertied regimes of being. In other words, moving waste out of sight and out of mind sustains a settler-colonial fantasy: that whiteness and property are ecologically sound.

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Thinking from somewhere else requires analytic tools that see facts, particularly the obviousness of space, property, and waste, as suspect categories of analysis produced by the circulation and exploitation of risk. However, under settler colonialism, as Tuck and Yang note in their theorization of the settler-native-slave triad, the racial formation of the native and the slave are distinct in their forms of dis/possession. The ways that anti-Blackness and the disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty require one another to transform land are strategically different, ensuring that their political incommensurability is a usable impasse for capitalism. Building off what Patrick Wolfe calls "the logic of elimination,"[71] I understand the terraforming of Indigenous lands with enslaved labor to be an ongoing process whereby anti-Blackness remains a useful way to declare land "wasted." The way that slavery codified anti-Blackness as, in part, a racial regime of expropriated labor enabled the expropriation of Indigenous land. Settler colonialism did not merely designate Indigenous stewardship as *wasting land*; rather, it enrolled slave labor in its *subsequent material expropriation by the planter class*. The political economy of plantation slavery under settler colonialism continues to shape how Blackness and waste are made proximate. Shifting our orientation to waste as a condition that links property to the elsewhere pulls into focus colonial and Black geographies, ongoing forms of genocide and slow death, and the necropolitical regimes of mapping and exploiting risk that make race and waste material bedfellows.

The third evocation of the elsewhere is the *everywhere* of Black ecological and geographic thought. Black ecologies names, in my estimation, the abundance of practice, theory, ways of being, and forms of critique in Black nature-social relations (or, my preference, material-social relations). Naming this abundance is itself an injunction to how the transatlantic kidnapping of African peoples then "planted" around the Americas and Caribbean cast Blackness *outside* nature-social relations—and outside Africa. By this I mean that the slave was used as a tool of ecological destruction to carve out colonial property regimes through which colonists could extract and then commodify land. But as long as enslaved people were used as a tool, enslaved people also resisted. Maroons sought to make life on their own terms.[72] And while some histories of marronage in the Caribbean are romanticized, it is important to keep in mind that life *outside* one "that is value constitutive" for the colony often requires experiment and improvisation, failure and revision.[73] Through the experiments that failed and succeeded (to mount revolution, to stay hidden, to live independent of colonial racial capitalism's monoculture), marronage is an exemplar of alternative

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nature-social relations, other ways of being, and the alternative land relations that racial capitalism's ongoing colonial relations try to narrate as a threat by calling them unruly. And they *are* unruly, as long as the rule of law is private property.

The Elsewhere Is Black adds to the repertoire of Black geographic and ecologic knowledge that takes seriously how risk adheres in the matter(s) and *mattering* of Black life. It takes seriously how the metaphorization of waste requires a reckoning: both as an accurate metaphor for capital's behavior and as an elision that sometimes distances Black scholarship from how discards have long been part of the matter with which Black life is made. To that end, I deploy Black feminist thought to guide our way through unruly relations elsewhere, tracing objects as well as forms of objectification. By this I mean that within the domain of Black feminist thought, objectification is simultaneously anti-Black violence's racial objectification and the sexual objectification and commoditization of racialized bodies subject to patriarchy's dominion.[74] Within the intersecting violences of objectification, Black women are subject to a number of incongruent contradictions that make them hyper-available and invisible, outside the category "woman" and hypersexual, the "unthinkable" spatial subject, and contagious in their procreation, to name just a few.[75] The architectures of power that play out on Black women's bodies are deeply revealing of how "wasting relationships" are also shaped by hetero(cis)sexist relations.[76] Black feminist thought reveals how power wastes and how Black women's inability (and refusal) to conform to white gendered expectations make Black genders a site for material punishment.

Our feminist forebears have long theorized that colonization's gender regimes deem people of color gender nonconforming and sexually deviant.[77] In the United States, "the master-slave relation constructed a masculine power hierarchy" in which masters were "*the* representative of hegemonic masculinity."[78] While post-emancipation racial violence, such as lynching and castration, deliberately targeted Black men to reinforce white superiority, white masculinity's monopoly on violence shapes the production of Black genders.[79] The settler-planter patriarchal order turned Black genders—insofar as gender is part of what marks one's *full* humanity—into an ontological impossibility. That is, enslavement required the evacuation of the slave's humanity in order to produce manipulatable Black(ened) "flesh" as a fungible object of exchange.[80] This "ungendering," as scholars citing Hortense Spillers have explored, not only subtended the possibility of property in the form of humans but also turned Black people

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into objects of exchange—objects upon which whiteness accrues inherited *material privileges* and disavows its waste.[81]

The punishing reality of "flesh 'ungendered'" is both critical to what C. Riley Snorton has called the fugitive "transcapability" housed within Black fungibility and the material anchor that whiteness and/as property requires to stabilize one of its central material fictions: that there are two and only two genders.[82] "A secret of cisgender," Marquis Bey writes, "is that it is not only about gender."[83] By this, I take Bey to affirm what Snorton argues: "Gender is a racial arrangement of the transubstantiation of things."[84] But these *things* that transubstantiate are the racialized matters of Black life and the material with which Black life is lived—whether that be on the run or in the hold. Important to my materialist approach is an understanding that cisgender, then, is not only a racial alignment but a racial and material arrangement of a colonial habitation—that is, a propertied way of life.

Thus, Black feminism—which in my curation requires Black trans theory and a queer of color critique—better traces the knowledge produced within confinement as well as the joy, aesthetics, pleasures, and genres of gender produced therein. This requires a queer embrace, as Cathy Cohen argues, of the non-normative Black lives that queer theory's critique of heterosexuality often ignores. For Cohen, "queer" should include "all those who stand on the outside of the dominant construction of norm[alized] state-sanctioned white middle- and upper-class heterosexuality."[85] In Cohen's analysis, this includes the deviance of single-Black motherhood and the fugitive sex workers and scavengers around whom this book's offerings pivot.

Elsewhere charts a Black feminist path through the "liberatory aspects of deviance" to espouse a non-respectable and queer-material ecological ethics of improvisation.[86] This ecological ethics sometimes evinces itself through the fugitive plans of the scavenger's hustle and sometimes through the carefully coordinated flight of sex workers through violent spatialities and white masculinity's monopoly on violence that continuously discards them.[87] I see these improvisations in critical conversation with practices of sabotage. For example, Sarah Haley rewrites Black women's sabotage in the postbellum south as a critical refutation of punishment's racial meanings. Black women's movements, joys, and right to rebellion violated the sanctity of whiteness: "Fugitivity was immanent, freedom ingrained in their interior lives even as the external world indicated they were trapped."[88] Discussing the planned, though thwarted, prison break of three Black girls incarcerated for destroying flowers along the paths to white houses, Haley writes, "The quotidian, deviant and gendered fugitive practice of floral

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theft and redistribution, the inspired collective imaginary" that inhered in rebellious friendship, fostered the "capacity [for] sabotage."[89] Haley's writing on sabotage, not as "success or triumph against systemic violence and dispossession" but as living by disordering, inspires how I see the ecological ethics that inhere in dispossessed Black life.[90]

Unruly places are abundant with unruly object relations challenging a propertied way of life. The abundance to which I speak is twofold. It is the capacity to generate life-giving critique and the capacity to use the (mis)names of matter to write new stories. In the case of waste, those lives discarded by racial capitalism make new forms of living that do not just replicate life as a value-constitutive activity for racial capitalism or the colony; rather, they alter *theory*. Centering altered lives produces alternative readings, including the alternative ways of reading sand, sexuality, and coloniality in the Caribbean in the work of Vanessa Agard-Jones; of reading US Southern environments through work songs in J. T. Roane's meditations; and of reading sorrow songs in the work of Willie Jamaal Wright.[91] This abundance is part of what Nik Heynen and Megan Ybarra call abolition ecologies.[92] The surplus matter of racial capitalism (waste in its many forms) and the surplusification of life are not things that can ever be made pristine.

Centering low-income, poor, and houseless material practices as *material knowledge* requires thinking with the unruly abundance of matter produced by the "wasting relationships" that discard. After all, it is crucially *with* and *into* unruly environments that enslaved peoples forged their escape.[93] The alternative material-social relations that enslaved people built with their own human flesh and the flesh of the earth challenged the plantation's disposal of Indigenous homelands. The "unruly," "deviant," "dangerous," "waste-filled," "bad" environments where white men (and women) dare not go just might be the ecological conditions facilitating forms of resistance that provide shelter from the hazards of a heteronormative, gender-austere, racially violent, propertied way of life.

STORY IS THE PRACTICE OF BLACK LIFE

Inspired by the people whose words move us from page to page (from theorists like Fanon and McKittrick to my interlocutors Betty and Sal), I, too, try to experiment with living Blackly on the page. I improvise where theory fails, I reach for other objects where waste overdetermines, and I weave speculative histories where "proof" does not exist. Deeply informed

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by Black feminist thought, I revise—which does not mean stably assert—to perform the kind of still-movingness of scenes of Black life.[94] I take to heart McKittrick's assertion that alongside the archive of slavery, the way scholars often bring Black life to the fore is to render the violence anew. As such, "The documents and ledgers and logs that narrate the brutalities of this history give birth to new world blackness as they evacuate life from blackness."[95] It happens in ethnography, too. Thus, I want to be clear from the outset: Ruth Wilson Gilmore's definition of racism as a condition of vulnerability to premature death remains true, and waste, in this book, is part of that condition.[96] But this book is also concerned with how people *live*, how people manage both the matter and the *meaning* of being discarded.

The anti-Black logic of capital's dispossessing migrations means that ethnographically, I had to learn to write about people I met amid the constant loss of them. Learning through constant loss is a fundamental challenge to the project of ethnography. The viability of the ethnographic project hinges on a racial-spatial imaginary: presumptive access to "the native," to which the ethnographer can continuously return. But dispossessed Black people living precariously on and off the street are always subject to violent removal. In other words, my interlocutors were always moving. This posed a methodological challenge to feminist ethnographic practices that demand reciprocity and ongoing intimacy beyond the "end" of research or writing. Instead, my feminist training pulled me to think about the relations of power that inform knowledge production and the epistemic violence we as scholars commit in our role as landlords of knowledge. As landlords, Joy James argues, we authorize the ideas that circulate for and alongside capital.[97] This indictment is a challenge not only to academia writ large but also to our writing, our commitments, and to what and who "research" is for.

So many of the people who inhabit these pages disappear (and are disappeared), so much so that when I began to write this book, I thought it was fundamentally a book about loss. But in writing, imagining what it might be like to return to conversations, to ask people to read what I'd written, or to learn where our voices are more dissonant than they seem on the page, I've realized that this book is an homage to the lessons I've learned from Black studies as the practice of Black life, a celebration of experimentation, improvisation, and speculation as tools for surviving anti-Blackness. To square my feminist training with the realities of Black life, I had to find a way to honor how dispossession constantly produces people and theory on the move, including to prison.[98]

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Johannes Fabian famously wrote, "Coevalness is anthropology's problem with Time."[99] But ethnography is also guilty of a kind of presentism that assumes that "informants" never change, have no history, and worse, do not have changing conceptions of their own histories and selves. Changing self-knowledge is, I believe, fundamentally inaccessible to the project of ethnography but is also necessary to confront in ethnographic writing. My approach here is not a whole answer but a strategy (one that I hope continues to change) for thinking while writing about dispossession. Drawing on the political meditations of Terrion Williamson and reflexive theorizing of Saidiya Hartman, I actively write myself in.[100] In lieu of returning to people during research, I return over and over again to them on the page. Across the book, I restage scenes, returning to wonder what other ways and what other things were known—*wandering*, as Sarah Cervenak might say, toward "an undisclosed terrain" of ecological ethics and desires.[101] Without access to those changing reflections, I instead return to a multitude of conversations. I revisit interactions over the course of the book that have stuck with me, and my thinking about them evolves (and will continue to evolve, I'm sure, long past the publication of this book).

LIVING BY DISORDERING

The interlocutors in this book are criminals. They break the law, and they do so with pleasure.[102] They steal things and swipe pills; they destroy property. Some announce affinity with trash and pestilence, some speculate about toxicities that can't be proven and the histories we can no longer see. They make fugitive plans, reclaim trash as matter that matters. They fabulate and experiment, improvising with objects and claims to them. They disappear, and they are disappeared. They are disreputable, and to some, unrepresentable, self-proclaimed trashy women. They are pedagogues of an anti-respectable environmental politics where unruliness is a different horizon of relation and ecologies are always marked by the violence of capital. Never pure or clean, they teach us other things about the environment, other ways to be *against purity* and to challenge the assumption that property is ecologically sound.[103]

As I previously noted, this book disorders. It follows fugitive histories, and waste becomes fugitive matter. Because this book foregrounds the knowledge produced by living while Black and on the move, sometimes

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scholarly approaches to waste sit incongruously with how people describe their life and relationships to discards. For this reason, between each chapter you will find short meditations on terms that often characterize (disciplinary) approaches to waste. These meditations deploy different tactics for speculating about how each term is connected to Black life. In other words, these interstitials put Black and discard studies in conversation with one another. "Flow" looks to the importance of a waste contract signed in the 1990s that forever yoked New York City to Virginia infrastructurally. "Infrastructure" thinks about how the plantation haunts the scale at which we manage waste. "Surplus" shifts our attention from the politicization of specific objects to the way waste is a different kind of surplus critical to racial capitalism, and "Disposal" thinks about how Blackness becomes necessary to dispose of things in the first place. In each vignette, the 1990s plays an important role, making these meditations a place to wonder what actors and mandates are involved in turning plantations into dumping grounds. But in the final vignette, "Junk," waste becomes a place to wonder what else happened in the 1990s, not to make an argument for better environmental policy but to notice what existing environmental regulations occlude and what Black people make with waste's constraints. These meditations can be read together and continuously with one another or as interstices, points of connection, and moments of disjuncture that emerge when the environment is storied from here, there, and elsewhere.

Chapter 1, "Toxic Capture," thinks through how waste becomes a form of ecological punishment, and it does so in part by reframing the common assertion that "Black people don't talk about the environment." Instead, this chapter argues that anti-Blackness is an environmental strategy, showing how stories about surviving racism, criminalization, and dispossession are in fact stories about the economies of waste shaping the environment. The criminalization of poverty, which positions the poor as at fault for their own ill health, obfuscates how toxic conditions are produced by waste-management's protection of white propertied life. Black people are presumed to be inherently hazardous (socially and materially), providing justification for the toxification of the places where Black people live. Thus, living proximate to the municipal, regional, and private facilities that infrastructurally coordinate waste's movements, means being criminalized as a hazard to property value. If white supremacy's values determine how land is "used," it does so by turning Black people's bodies into a material threshold for environmental risk. By centering those people who are

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(unknowingly) inundated by the long-distance management of New York City's waste in the Virginia Tidewater, waste, in the present, is revealed as a geography of toxic capture.

"Becoming Fill" (chapter 2) locates toxic capture as an outcome of the racial and ecological injury of the plantation. Tracing how wageless sex workers in Virginia tell stories about their own surplusification, this chapter uses their descriptions of land and matter to excavate chattel slavery's and settler colonialism's ongoing destruction of Black flesh and the flesh of the biosphere. By emphasizing that "wagelessness" is a relationship to (native) land, this chapter shows how Black people's bodies (not just their labor) are rendered "unecologic" and excess matter central to capitalist development—the recurring terraforming projects that fuel settler colonialism.

Chapter 3, "Revisions from Elsewhere," flips the script. If waste is used to Blacken environments, chapter 3 asks us to see the landscapes of waste as a possible condition for radical Black becoming. This chapter takes us around town and around time, not only to those places where waste marks fugitive movement but to those times where trash and identifying with it become ecological protest. Raising questions about what lessons we might take from trash, waste becomes part of the fugitive, unruly matter of Black politics and Black life. "Revisions from Elsewhere" presents a challenge for thinking about Black futurity and the respectability of environmental politics. Here I trace a dirty Black feminism to open up a place of intersectional politics, where those discarded by racial capitalism's wasting relations have something to teach us about living with trash.[104] They offer a radical imperative to a future already shaped by our past and present waste.

Chapter 4, "Black Refractions," transports us to New York City and the houseless Black men scavenging Bed-Stuy in the midst of gentrification. Amid the legacies of spatial violence that continuously avow and disavow Black history, discarded objects take on new importance. Both as ephemera of the impossibility of the Black "domestic" and objects of potential value, reading among the litter of Black life asks us to tend to the relationship between Black genders and place.

The conclusion, "Fictions of Fabulous/Fabulative Ethnography," is a playful meditation on the tensions the preceding chapters raise about story, time, Blackness, and ecology. These final experiments don't summarize where we've been but point toward a place our ecological politics could go. In other words, what do people do with the elsewhere? How does story become Black life and Black life become study? What is a Black ecogrammar but a grammar of living (improvising) *against property*?

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Neither progressive—at least, not a progress narrative that moves from savagery to civilization—nor pure, in the sense that categories of matter are not always what they seem, the story I tell of myself eating books is not a clean one. And neither is this book. *The Elsewhere Is Black* is not a story that promotes cleanup or a story that denies that poverty is dirty. It is a discordant story, in which progressive environmental paradigms refract the long duration of anti-Black settler-colonial property regimes and the genders they seek to impose, while also considering how identification with waste and dispossessed people's experiments with its meaning and matter are sometimes a declaration of anti-liberal personhood, sometimes a way to notice living history as well as underthought sites of political becoming. Like the story I tell of myself through family here, this book is a story about *dirtiness* and *trashiness* as knowledge, Blackness as an alternative site from which to see the "environment," and Black being as ecologically complex. It revels in the complexity of the toxic, tacking back and forth between the violence of untraceable sources and the ways people story it. *The Elsewhere Is Black* also tracks the femme aesthetics of "unnatural," trashy women to forms of ecological punishment. Trashy women's environmental politics refract a different relationship between property and gender, one that hinges on a "criminal" irreverence for property. Throughout these Blackened places, time and again people theorize how environmental racism *shapes* but does not *determine* Black living. Refusing to reconcile the toxicity endemic to racial capitalism, this book is an ethnographic exploration of ecological modes (real and speculative) forged elsewhere. And that elsewhere is Black.

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