

# BLACK TRANS FEMIN- ISM

MARQUIS  
BEY

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS *Durham and London* 2022

Introduction

## Abolition, Gender Radicality

### GUIDE QUOTES (AFTER SYLVIA WYNTER)

While, as Fanon asserts, there is an imposition onto the figure of the black that would signify the confluence of racial identity and racial inferiority, there is also, in a way that is prior to the regulative force of that imposition and calls it into question, a resource working through the epidermalization of fantasmatic inferiority as the anti-epidermalization of the radical alternative, to which the peoples who are called black have a kind of (under)privileged relation in and as the very history of that imposition. One might speak, then, of the blackening of the common, which would imply neither that any and every person who is called black claims or defends the sociopoetic force of that fantasy nor that persons who are not called black are disqualified from making such claims and enacting such defense.

FRED MOTEN, *The Universal Machine*

If feminism is, at its core, about combating the dangerously unfair ways that power and oppression, recognition and repudiation, are distributed to individuals based on how their bodies are categorized, trans concerns lie at the heart of feminism.

LAURA HORAK, "Trans Studies"

The black feminist position as trouble. . . . It refuses to disappear into the general categories of otherness or objecthood, that is,

blackness and womanhood, and refuses to comply with the formulations of racial and gender-sexual emancipatory projects these categories guide.

DENISE FERREIRA DA SILVA, "Hacking the Subject: Black Feminism and Refusal Beyond the Limits of Critique"

Feminism will be trans-feminist or not at all.

THE WHOREDYKEBLACKTRANSFEMINIST NETWORK, "Manifesto for the Trans-Feminist Insurrection"

The future(s) of blackness move(s) us to name the ways in which refusal to sequester, to quarantine black from black, is inherent to blackness itself.

AMEY VICTORIA ADKINS-JONES, "Black/Feminist Futures: Reading Beauvoir in *Black Skin, White Masks*"

But I need to make a distinction between black women, black women as the subject of feminism, and black feminism as a critical disposition. . . . I should like to think that black feminism, 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.

HORTENSE SPILLERS, "The Scholarly Journey of Hortense Spillers"

From the Combahee River Collective (a collective of Black feminists meeting since 1974) and its critique of biological essentialism as a "dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic" to trans genealogies of Black feminism—*Black feminism [i]s always already trans.*

CHE GOSSETT, "Žižek's Trans/gender Trouble"

Transgender is the gender trouble that feminism has been talking about all along.

JACK HALBERSTAM, "Why We Need Transfeminism"

Black. Trans. Feminism. Or black (trans feminism), (black) trans (feminism), and (black trans) feminism. Where blackness is concerned, there is the refusal of sequestration, which is to say both a refusal to be set

aside and isolated, as it is itself a sociality that demands relations of myriad natures; and, too, a refusal to limit this work to epidermalized demographics, dispersing its penchant for politicized subversion to all of those taking up the task. As mutinous relation to imposed ontology, blackness enables and conditions the inhabited spirit of subjective abolition. Transness, always shadowed by its echolalic blackness, as this book will demonstrate, unfixes gender from essentialist moorings and posits itself precisely as that unfixation, as a departure-from without the presumption of a stable destination, or indeed a departure that itself destabilizes destinational desires. This transness is endemic to a genealogy that has at its foundation the fundamental critique of the capaciousness of "man" (or "Man") and "woman," and as such the critique of the regulative regime of normative gender and categorization. Feminism, which is to say trans feminism—which is, more, to say black feminism—is an agential and intentional undoing of regulative gender norms and, further, the creative deconstructing of ontological racial and gender assault; a kind of gendered deconstruction, an unraveling that unstitches governant means of subjectivation; feminism as the reiterative un/gendered quotidian process of how not to be governed and given from without.<sup>1</sup> That is, feminism marks here the vitiation of imposed racial and gender ontologies that then demands an abolitionist modality of encountering the racialized gendered world.

What you hold in your hands is not another treatise on how we might righteously rail against harms done to an already-known "us"; it is not a meditation on the violences done to black or trans or femme "bodies," nor is it one concerned, in the main, with flipping the valuation of maligned identities (e.g., the practice of lambasting white folks as the pinnacle of loving and doing black radical work, or the extent to which one points out the oversights of white [feminist] cis women as the extent to which one is a hardcore black feminist). I am quite uninterested in talking solely about bodies and about what we already (think we) know. Indeed, our bodies cannot and must not be coveted in the final instance. For sure, it has come to be the site that suffers oppressive forces because that is precisely how oppressive forces wish to construct our subjectivities—to form to them and understand themselves as formed, in toto, by them. What we have come to name our bodies, though, is not the only way we can or should think ourselves possible in the world. Our subjectivity—my preferred, though still imperfect, term—indexes the amalgam of the various ways that we engage sociality, an engagement that is not determined wholly by or confined to the surface of corporeality. And if aspects of the body have come to be that

which are formed by violent forces, it is necessary to find liberation in the aspects that are not confined to the body; it is necessary to find liberation in the aspects of subjectivity that exceed and ooze out of the body. And this ooze, this uncaught-ness, is variously inflected and named, at least in part, by the black, the trans, and the feminist.

Additionally, this facilitates the dissolution of the things we may have come to regard as quite dear—namely, our given, and even reclaimed, identities. It has come to a point, it seems to me, where many of us have crafted as virtuous the mere fact of holding steadfast to the historically maligned identities we hold. Many of us have come to doubling down on racial identification, or gender identification and expression, on the grounds that such identities have historically (and contemporarily) been expunged from the province of positive valuation. There is little efficacy in clutching the purported fact (which is not a fact, unmediated and transparent) that one is right or righteous or unceasingly wise because they do not hold in contempt their racialized blackness or their cis womanhood, for instance, categories that have been and are marginalized. That is not what this all is about. These identities are at base hegemonic bestowals and will thus have diminished liberatory import in the final analysis; indeed, we cannot get to the final analysis—which I offer as an abolitionist analysis—with these identities if such an abolitionist terrain is given definition by way of the instantiation of the impossibility of violence and captivity. Black trans feminism cannot abide such classificatory violences, so it urges us also to abolish the categories we may love, even if they have not always been received well. If the aim of the radical project of black trans feminism is abolition and gender radicality, which is the case I will be making, it is imperative to grapple with what that actually means. We cannot half-ass abolition, holding on to some of the things we didn't think we would be called to task for giving up. If we want freedom, we need to free ourselves, too, of the things with which we capture ourselves. The project at hand is interested in a thoroughgoing conception of freeness, and it seems like black trans feminism, to call on Saidiya Hartman, “makes everyone freer than they actually want to be.”<sup>2</sup> When the white woman or the black trans person or the queer-identified person comes at such a project with their indignation about me, us, black trans feminism, trying to take away the very things that they've worked so hard to achieve, we are surely to meet them with a certain level of kindness as an ethical attentiveness to how such trauma has been felt and the joys of mitigating, in whatever way, those traumas. But, and I mean this, we are not to capitulate to a sort-of abolished world because some people who may

look like us or the people who have been forged in oppression are pleading to us. We still, even when Grandma doesn't (think she) want(s) it, work to abolish the world. That is what black trans feminism, as an orientation toward radical freedom, commits to. And that will not be easy, nor will it feel good in the ways we expect.

All of this converges into what will concern this text: black trans feminism. Black trans feminism names this convergence and grapples with the tense and conflicting legacies that inhere in its nominative permutations of black trans, black feminism, and trans feminism. The aim, then, is to mine each of these for how they contribute to the culmination of black trans feminism as a modality of worldly inhabitation, an agential and performative posture in and after this world. In this way, black trans feminism theorizes power, and, more important, the subversion of it, in excess of wholesale notions of immediately discernible “identities.” Maintained, then, is how commitment to nonnormativity—where normativity is understood necessarily as “the *terror* of the normative,” of which black (trans) feminism is disruptive and interrogative—is also concerned with an impossible desire for being held.<sup>3</sup> While captivity connotes violent grips confining our flourishing, perhaps in thinking of a movement away from captivity that is not toward but facilitated in its movement by an embrace—perhaps an impossible embrace without arms, an embrace without being bounded, a bear hug by arms that never close—we gain a different understanding of that toward which we aspire. The work of black trans feminism is always an aim for the *creative* dimension of abolition and the worlds that arise because of the undermined hegemonic categories. Indeed, we are various shades of brokenness and lack, and I wish not to venerate this plight. We need to be healed and do not wish to remain writhing in our broken pieces. We need, in other words, to be held. But what I wish for, what black trans feminism might wish for, is the reconfiguration of how we hold each other without stopping, without *withholding*, all while we are on the run.

I want to wager that this holding and being held without withholding is how one might be able to find footing on what is ultimately no ground. We cannot import some of the violent things into the world we are trying to create and cultivate in the rubble of the old, in the same form, for we would belie the world we are creating. The urge to do that comes from wanting desperately to have a place; it comes from a desire promoted by a fear of loss. But, as Claudia Tate has put it, “while desire is constitutive of a loss, desire also generates by-products even as it makes that deficiency conspicuous.”<sup>4</sup> Desire makes things, it makes something else, it *invents*. There is

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 natively and ad infinitum; a "sociality without exclusion," as J. Kameron Carter and Sarah Jane Cervenak would have it.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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

## 2 Fugitivity, Un/gendered

*Get it?* Gender is a country, a field of signifying roses you can walk through, or wear tucked behind your ear.

Eventually the flower wilts & you can pick another, or burn the field, or turn & run back across the tracks.

CAMERON AWKWARD-RICH, "Essay on the Theory of Motion"

### TRANIFLESH

The work blackness's proximity to trans/gender does is to foreground how blackness and transness are, in the first instance, "political move[s], strategic or tactical move[s] . . . *movement itself*, a displacement between established plateaus."<sup>1</sup> Blackness and transness reference movement and cultivate space to live, to become-as-being, in this movement. It becomes necessary that we retool the language of approaching gender and its abolition, an abolition that is concerned much more with the creation and cultivation of a new way to exist than with incessantly referencing the purportedly bad iterations of gender (e.g., "toxic" masculinity). Abolition means just that, and black trans feminism stands here for gender abolition even in the face of those who would, as they say, feel some type of way about gender abolition after they've worked so tirelessly to gain recognition or validity in their own (often historically marginalized) gender. Black trans feminism must respond to the expected question "Even *my* gender? Even *progressive* masculinities and *innocent* femininities?" with an understanding

but assured "Yup." And it is in service of gender radicality because (gender) abolition gratuitously expands the ambit through which subjects might become subjects in ways that do not carry with them the normativities of worlds and histories past, which then means we will have the possibility to become something or somethings that have never been permitted to arise. And we could not have gotten to those things if we did not unequivocally, searingly refuse the coerced regime of gender we had no choice but to exist as. When we refuse this, we make possible the very things the regime sought to preemptively, and post hoc, quell. This might be a fugitive un/gendering.

"Ungendering" is of course indebted to Hortense Spillers and is a theorization emergent from an inveterate blackness and feminism. Gender is that which is made to attach to bodies of a domesticized space, predicated on the integrity of an ontology constituted by a white symbolic order. The subjects contained in the "lab" of the ship's hold, as malleable flesh, ungender subjectivity by way of refusing and being refused by the necessary symbolic ontology of gender. In the context of Spillers's other remarks, particularly regarding blackness's unfixation from physiognomy—that blackness is a philosophical skepticism and disobedience available to anyone and any posture; that blackness is a serial critical posture of transformational possibilities that can and must be, and has been, dispersed *across predicates*, across different kinds of bodies and hues to which it is said to be attached—ungendering might be understood usefully as a refusal of an "identity," and furthermore of an ontological grounding.<sup>2</sup> Ungendering's undercurrent of blackness, an abolitionist feminist blackness, is to mobilize the flesh. These two terms—ungendered and flesh—bear much cache in black studies and black feminism, so I wish to make clear that I understand them here as, in Samantha Pinto's words, "a radical differentiation in America's static but quite specifically formed notion of gendering that denotes Whiteness as the base of a normative process" (ungender) and "an opening, a break, an interstice that doesn't so much resist as remake what we think we know about the range and pitch of 'Black women' and Black feminist political possibility" (flesh).<sup>3</sup> I find this description of Spillers's terms quite apt and similar to how I wish to articulate the fundamental project of black trans feminism through abolition and gender radicality. Similar, but not necessarily the same; I may depart from many others' understanding of these concepts—they are, after all, with their pervasiveness, deeply overdetermined and thus subject to many people's steadfast feelings about a "correct" utilization of them—so my intent is to think alongside these conceptualizations, using them as provocations for radical thought rather

than with a strict fidelity. Fidelity to a perceived original intended meaning is not my aim, nor what I understand as "careful" reading or theoretical deployment.<sup>4</sup> I seek to amplify the differentiation and the opening interstitial break that does the work of remaking black women and black feminist possibility, for the former inflects the anoriginality I ascribe to blackness's unfixation and propulsion of mutability, while the latter ungrounds racialized gender and posits a trans effort endemic to black feminism toward precisely the undoing of and deviation from naturalized categorization. Thus, I am advancing and caressing Spillers's concepts on these grounds, maneuvering them into a space in fact after the abolition of this world's configuration. It is the *entrée* into fugitive un/gendering.

A fugitive *un/gendering*, as what I understand a black trans feminism to be given over from, can be consolidated into what I want to call, bringing together Spillers, Kai M. Green, and Treva Ellison, "traniflesh." Because gender via hegemonic logics is predicated on being visible to the mind, being material, being biological, being an immutable substance, traniflesh, in getting outside of those walled enclosures that ultimately signify fallacies and arbitrariness, becomes the un/gendered. It is not gendered, nor strictly speaking ungendered, as the slash in un/gendering marks a necessary slight departure from Spillers by drawing readers' attention to the liberatory, uncapturable otherwise of flesh, of traniflesh. Un/gendering's fleshiness is an overflow that spills over violent categorization and, instead of being generated by whips and frisks, is the unwhippable and unfriskable displacement of normative violence, the levied critique of normativity we hope to move toward as subjective livability. Traniflesh, too, is not specifically tied to gender proper or bodies understood, (im)properly, as nonnormatively gendered or transgender. It is an unspecific generality, that which sparks the onset of a different modality of existence. In this, it is open, insurgent ground on which to tread toward this other modality that is indebted to the racial and gendered opacity that spews an excessive muck we can all get inside and go forth with. Now.

Where Spillers understands flesh as distinct from the body, the body as embedded in captivity and flesh as an antecedent "liberated subject-position," Green and Ellison, in turn, describe "tranifesting"—transformative manifesting—as modalities that "operat[e] across normativizing and violative configurations of race, gender, class, sex, and sexuality," mobilizing across apparatuses of capture designed by the state.<sup>5</sup> The spirit of these two theorizations is what I want to put forth in traniflesh. Quintessential to traniflesh—this unlawful assemblage of illegal black-market parts, where the quintes-

sence is an ecstatic centrifugal and centripetal motility—is an immaterial materiality. In other words, traniflesh mobilizes a kind of subjectivity that does not abide the violative configurations of race and gender, that does not house itself as a body, and that comes to engender us through something like abolished subjectivity. There is an urgent need to conceptualize a mode of living, an alternative and otherwise mode of living, grounded in a radically nonexclusionary sociality that escapes captive and captivating logics of subjectivity. In this sense, what is offered is a way to live oneself differently by way of coalition: to jettison the strictly biological as a criterion on which one relates to oneself or others (what Gayatri Gopinath would call a model of non-blood-based affiliation); to urge the gritty togetherness necessary for nonviolent relationality; and to gather subjectivity coalitionally, leaving open the question of anyone's identity, who they are and who they might become, as an abolitionist gesture. A fugitive un/gendering is this opening, this suspension: it attempts to vitiate gender *through* itself, undoing itself by way of an unyielding, radically opening ungendering. This traniflesh is underbeing, being that refuses being in favor of becoming away from being *as* being. It does not index matter or form but a general sentient sensorium that exceeds corporeal capture and is the inaugurative muck that produces byzantine, rhizomatic relational affinities. Traniflesh is between the haptic and the tactile; traniflesh is hac(k)tile, in all its connotative touch and subversive infiltration, and challenges grammar through debiscence and suture, always coming apart in service of coming together differently.

What I am suggesting finds collaborative expression in L. H. Stallings's "illusive flesh," drawing from Robert Hayden's poetic phrase.<sup>6</sup> Illusive flesh is Stallings's counterphilosophy to philosophies of embodiment, a mode of subjectivity that escapes the normative hold of the body. She writes that illusive flesh serves as an alternative "to embodiment about what the transaesthetic experience and representation of Otherly human bodies means to forms of life and being that exceed the biological," a stylized transaesthetics that Stallings says "disturb[s] forms, biological and otherwise," a transness that deforms the biological and the sexual, as well as disturbs the "otherwise," the racial, gendered, and physical. Illusive flesh, in conversation with Spillers's flesh—that "ethereal social (after) life of bare existence," inhabitation of which would "lead to a different modality of existence"—is a transed subjectivity, a nonnormative way of living in, or even beside, oneself.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, illusive flesh for Stallings allows black political traditions to opt out of Western interpretations of sex and gender as material: "These discursive practices [of illusive flesh] join Yoruba-influenced spirituality in

the United States as black traditions willing to theorize illusive flesh as a form of metaphysical gender, less attached to the notion of a unified body," she writes.<sup>8</sup>

How might we understand illusive flesh as generative for traniflesh, an un/gendered fugitivity? Illusive flesh, Stallings argues, "suggests how we can see black funk's move away from the skin as a styling of self beyond Man that depends upon the haptic aesthetics and sensations felt somewhere other than the skin"; it "provides a different theory of embodiment."<sup>9</sup> And this "different theory of embodiment" may be what engenders the conditions of possibility for new, unknown emergences. This is flesh that precedes the systematicity of bodies, that renders subjects subjugable to the violence of the Law. Illusive flesh is perhaps the tentative name of the unnamed. The flesh, transoriented, denotes a decidedly un/gendered antiterrain—it is, after all, "female flesh," Spillers notes. It marks the gendered-site-that-is-not-a-gendered-site that welcomes not only those who were exscribed from traditional symbolics of gender, but also, to advance Spillers a bit, those who move toward the ethical and political transgressive posture of fleshiness that engenders a different way of becoming as *that which might have come but for Gender*. The un/gendered blackness occurring here is the black female flesh on the run from gender, on the run from legibility, by way of a kind of stepping out of a lineage, worrying the line, as it were, and tearing being. It is perhaps creating life in becoming-unbecoming. So if "*patriarchalized female gender*," at least "from one point of view, is the *only female gender there is*," perhaps that means that if we eradicate patriarchy—one of the many-headed and -footed limbs of the hegemon—then, extending this line of reasoning, there will not be a liberated female gender, as such a term would lose meaning, but, indeed, something different entirely, a different and otherwise gender that emerges from the abolition of patriarchalized (female) gender: (female) gender as *such*.<sup>10</sup> What emerges in this is not a collapsing universality—that "everyone is female and everyone hates it," per Andrea Long Chu—and not a conception of femaleness, devoid of political efficacy and a stand-in simply for letting another do one's desiring.<sup>11</sup> Rather, what is being posited here is a recognition of "female" being a vehicle for whiteness, patriarchy, and the gender binary, which are violent apparatuses, and thus the abolition of femaleness as such, suggesting something else we might emerge into in its place. Un/gender; traniflesh.

Traniflesh emerges as an impossibly possible space where we know not what will arise because, illegible to us on variegated levels, it does not rely

on legalizing relations to Man and the categorizing hegemon. It is envisioned here as what one's "body" is made of when living in a milieu constituted by abolition and gender radicality. As an emergent force and, like black and trans oppositional flesh, "a capacitating structure for alternative modes of being," traniflesh works and becomes in the terrain that skirts captivity where different formations and matterings, different and differing subjectivities, of life can materialize.<sup>12</sup> Traniflesh is an otherwise way of being that exceeds the categorizing logics of race and gender, that exceeds "identities" and (dis)organizes around subversive world-building. It is fluid, excessive, a kind of primordial transitivity that indexes blackness, black feminism, and transness—citing Kimberly Benston's "beginning-as-blackness" and "primordial blackness"; Claire Colebrook's "transitivity"; Kai M. Green's blackness in excess of the category of black; and Spillers's telling femininity that evades definition because of its shadowy ubiquity.<sup>13</sup> I designate traniflesh as the process by which gender is unmoored and unmade *that serves as* an otherwise way to become a subject in excess of gender, or what I've termed "gender radicality." In this radical divergence that one, anyone, moves toward—one disperses themselves outside the constraints of normative (gendered) subjectivity—is the processual space in which gender-that-is-not-gender manifests.

Note, too, the possibility of the resoundingly epithetic if pronouncing the /i/ of traniflesh as a long /ē/. My intent is not for it to be pronounced in the way of the epithet ("tranny-flesh"), but such a pronunciation is latent, simmering beneath the surface of its intended pronunciation (the "trani-" as rhyming with the "mani-" of "manifest"). This presents the ever-present "insurgent ground" of choosing to claim the Spillersian "monstrosity." Traniflesh and the fitting, flickering inhabitation of it—a Steinbockian "shimmer"—is a rigorous commitment to Green and Ellison's "flexible new collectivities" that, on my reading, do not conform to the mechanistic templates we understand as legible identities: race, gender, sex, sexuality. It renames and reconfigures how we become, and continue becoming, subjects that breach hegemonic logics. Traniflesh names that breach, names it as a place to dwell and, more important, to fashion another way of living. Indeed, it fashions a way that too many of us who are not permitted to live simply *can*.<sup>14</sup>

This chapter takes up black trans feminism's underlying abolition and gender radicality via a commitment to something other than representational logics. Thus, identifiable bodies as stand-ins for particular kinds of politics or indexations of liberation are suspect precisely because the aim

of black trans feminism is to cultivate ways of living that do not entail reliance on the very taxonomies that promulgated the violence that constitutes our identities. This chapter also wonders cheerfully and boisterously about how transness, when allowed to snuggle up against black feminism, can lead us into some enrapturingly thorny territory like feeling “at home” in homelessness—or, more precisely, the rejection of the stasis of the home on the grounds that it, too, can be a site of violence, immobilization, discipline, and adherence to architectural normativities. The chapter ends on a note of irreverence toward genre: What’s the worst that will happen if, when, we forsake the genres we’ve come to know intimately and form who we are via something else?

#### BECOMING-BLACK-WOMAN

(Forgive me if this lengthy parenthetical strikes you, reader, as a detraction, but it is imperative that something be made critically clear at the outset before I even begin to say what I cannot help but saying here—that is, the status of “black women.” I have on multiple occasions been taken to task on the danger of black women’s [which I suspect as being conflated with black female bodies, with its attending perinatal “female” assignation and assumption of a habitable womb and normative anatomy] erasure and the necessity of instantiating the materiality, foregrounding the experiential flesh-and-bloodness, of the figure demographically limned as black and woman. The task-taking is very rightly a warning not to leave black women by the wayside and to heed the very specific contributions of certain kinds of people and, importantly, too, to note the people onto whom the effects of what I am theorizing will be felt acutely. So as not to reiterate what has already been hammered home, I will simply say this before moving on to the ways I want to wiggle within and out of this sentiment: it is not that I do not think black women matter. Black women, historically and contemporarily, academically and nonacademically, politically and socially, have been foundational not only for my thought but, indeed, for thought qua thought. It seems to me, though, that, following Jennifer Nash, my conception of black feminism is a capacious one that strikes some as too capacious. But I cannot not think black feminism in Nash’s terms, following Deleuze’s terms, as “deterritorialized,” as a “move[ment] with figures beyond ‘black woman,’” as not an *act* as Nash describes it but a quotidian

theoretical practice “of radical anti-territoriality, a refusal of the proprietary relationships that mark” certain bodies as stand-ins for politics or certain given ontologies—which are, however one slices it, violent and hegemonic bestowals—as inherently liberatory or omnipotent. Because I am understanding black feminism in this capacious sense that eschews a posture of proprietizing in favor of “a radical embrace of the political potential of intimacy,” as Nash goes on to say, I must take that toward a certain conception of radical intimacy that permits the possibility of an intimacy so close that we, whoever we are, become through and in and with and maybe as one another.<sup>15</sup>

(This, then, leads me to where I want this treatise on black trans feminism to go. So, allow this thought: in commenting on a conversation between Hortense Spillers and Gail Lewis, Saidiya Hartman elaborates what is termed a “fugitive feminism” through a clarification of ungendering. Ungendering, she says, was not intended to efface the “lived experience of black women,” and that black women in particular are not to be erased by ungendering. Rather, Hartman says, it is an interrogative analytic that challenges us to think differentiations across social fields. She goes on to say that with this in mind, the ultimate aim is to “flee [the] category of womanhood and also the other categories across the social grid so we can imagine a liberated future.”<sup>16</sup> I submit that discourses like “lived experience,” at some point in their offering, run up against a limit unable to be surpassed without significantly diminishing returns, and soon after that in ways that in fact prove ultimately harmful. Related to the discussion in the introduction about the stalwart holding on to historically epithetic identities, to double and triple down on lived experience as an ethically incontestable refutation of what I offer here regarding becoming-black-woman misguidedly takes for granted a presumed transparency and naturalness of the being named black and woman. To do so ultimately reproduces these categories as natural and, indeed, needing no critique or supplanting, in the last instance validating the historical violence that instantiated the difference itself “rather than . . . exploring how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world,” as Joan Scott notes (in addition to so much more than I could gloss here).<sup>17</sup> If our aim is to not only “contest” given ontological and ideological systems, as Scott claims, but to *abolish* them, as black trans feminism calls us to do, we cannot simply reify all things as ever more and more marginalized identities [e.g., black women, poor black women, poor black trans women]. We



must think indexical forces, modalities of in- and exhabitation, processes of undoing, and the Spillersian “something wider” [see below] that will not possess *any* of the trappings we know ourselves to be forged by, race and gender—*being* a black woman—among them.

(We must come to know, as Spillers knows, that gender is not to be doubled down on, yet it cannot be flippantly dispensed with; she acknowledges the double bind, and thus the double gesture that must be made. Hence why she remarks in a conversation about her famed 1987 essay, “The refusal of certain gender privileges to black women historically was a part of the problem. At the same time, that you have to sort of see that and get beyond it and get to something else, because you are trying to go through gender to get to something wider.”<sup>18</sup> The phenomenological gendered experiences of black “cis” women, or of people of trans experience, is not to be discarded, and other multiply marginalized identities are not to be forgotten. It is not to be forgotten not because I wish to capitulate to those who so badly want to hold on to these remnants—I do not, though I sympathize tremendously—but because there are resources working through the epidermalization and anatomized gendering that will ultimately be in service of the antiepidermalization and antigendering that is the radical alternative: what I would deem abolition and gender radicality. And this is the ultimate goal. So as not to reify the gendered ontology that orchestrates cisnormative and gender binaristic templates routed through whiteness via making other modes of subjectivity impossible, it can be said that blackness and transness and black feminism, with their attending concatenations of and through one another, are prefixal indexations of racial and gender desedimentation. And this is precisely the move of going through nonnormative gendered corporeality’s fractures of the binary to get to something wider. Black trans feminism is that “something wider.”

(I know: some of us, many of us, still want some kind of familiar footing. We still have that desire to be held, somehow. It’ll be discarded once we realize that where we’re at is luscious and grand, freer than we could have ever imagined, but maybe we need something just to get us past the threshold. Maybe we just need someone there holding our hand, reminding us that we are not going into the angelic belly of the illustriously salvific abolitionary beast alone. I am, truly, tearing up right now, because I know many of us need this holding. But know that you are held by the beckoning into the world after this world, a world that is not far from where you stand. The openness of that world is holding you, in every moment you question the ethics of how you’ve been treated, in every moment you’ve wanted to

stretch just a bit further, maybe so much that you became afraid but knew that stretching more could present you with something grand. You are held in these pages, I promise, because even the things that might cut deep are there to help us all glimpse what could be if we did not have to defend the violences that have come to be so familiar and thus thought unable to be discarded. You can discard them, you can “let go,” as Nash says, as La Marr Jurelle Bruce says, as Alexis Pauline Gumbs says. These categories are very good at frontin’, even though they are not treating you the way they should. So, if you wish to know what it is like to truly be held, lovingly, then let them go.

(Okay, now we can begin.)<sup>19</sup>

What if a feeling through another elsewhere is a feeling, which is knowledge, indexical of traniflesh? Even as one might be enclosed by the prohibitions of other grammars, traniflesh acts as the unpunctuated and anagrammatical subjectivity in which we can escape toward another texture of escape. Clarifying the presence of un/gendering in traniflesh is an assessment of black women’s subjectivities. That is, black trans feminism heeds the epistemic position of black women for an acute insight into disruption of racialized gender because of an opaque excess, and black women are prime speaking agents on traniflesh because “not properly women, Black women inhabit a trans space.”<sup>20</sup> So black women incite the rethinking of un/gendering through a thoroughgoing interrogation—imposed and engendered—of the processual becoming (un)human through the subject placed at the nexus of black and woman. If “the black woman” is, contentiously speaking, an impossible figure, there is a curious kind of becoming-*black-woman* that is not only “read as a twin refusal (of both purity and subjection),” but more pointedly an *evil* twin refusal, a refusal of purification and subjectification.<sup>21</sup> In the first order, “becoming-woman” is an assertion not of a literal reading, which would be a misreading, but an assault on phallogocentric ordering. It is a feminist syntax of sorts—though a few theorists of feminisms past would take great umbrage with such a claim<sup>22</sup>—a feminist syntax that understands radical feminism as a means of escaping power insofar as “what we call ‘woman’ has always already been the sum of trajectories away from the centres of power.”<sup>23</sup> Becoming-woman is the most fundamental becoming, at least for Deleuze and Guattari, the quintessential minoritarian subject (because only the minoritarian, never majoritarian, can *become*; and further, women, regardless of their population size, are always minoritarian, a description of womanness as a relation to normative power

rather than a descriptor of an ontological subject [which also suspends the very meaning of that subject]). To become-woman is not the ownership of designated women and also is not something all women already, by virtue of their womanness, do or are. Becoming-woman is open, a *subjectivation* needing to be entered into by all, “women” included, as becoming-woman “affect[s] all of humankind.”<sup>24</sup>

There is a “special introductory power” in becoming-woman because of its fundamentality. It is a kind of “sorcery” Deleuze and Guattari say is not reducible to the image of the woman; it may not even result in a being that “looks” like a woman, as it is not about representation but the puncturing of gender’s metaphysics. Here we can note an implicit transness to becoming-woman, a radical suspension of attaching to any gender a certain corporeal limit and shape, radical gender self-determination and, ultimately, abolition of the concept of gender adhering to the parameters of a certain kind of body. Becoming-woman can lead to one who “looks” like a “man,” a radical trans inclusivity and interrogation of gender.

Importantly, becoming-woman is not mere imitation, though one must take heed not to overlook the import that “behaving as a woman” has on, say, people of trans experience who seek medicalized intervention in the form of gender confirmation surgery and how, because of the medical industrial complex’s fixation on normative gender behaviors even as they assist in trans affirmative surgeries, imitation can offer an avenue toward self-determination. “All we are saying,” the dynamic philosophical duo write, “is that these indissociable aspects of becoming-woman must first be understood as a function of something else: not imitating or assuming the female form, but emitting particles that enter the relation of movement and rest, or the zone of proximity, of a microfemininity, in other words, that produce in us a molecular woman, create the molecular woman.”<sup>25</sup> There is a critique to be made here of how some women are not “feminine” and have in fact been disallowed femininity, as we’ll see shortly, but nevertheless what is being offered (and what has been deeply misunderstood in feminist critiques of the notion of becoming-woman) is a way to think about the paraontological primordially of “woman.” “Woman” is indexical of, and thus not reducible to or the sole owner of, the beings historically hailed by the term, indexical of some other thing that serves as what I’ve deemed abolition and gender radicality, an unbounded torsion that acts in oppositional ways on centralized power. Becoming-woman is the molten flow that cannot abide declarative, uncritiquable statements like “As a woman . . .”—those authoritarian sympathies, as Adorno would have it,

with whom I tentatively and temporarily express an affinity—though necessary at times for the reclamation of a history and maybe even integrity. This declaration not only dangerously jettisons internal variation and heterogeneity but also confines the subject of “woman” to a manner of static being rather than a micropolitical subjective and extrasubjective working necessary for all to take up.<sup>26</sup> What follows subsequently is a rummaging through the storage locker of Deleuze and Guattari’s old intellectual memorabilia, stealing their valuables because, I feel, they want me to take them, make use of them, because they, too, want me to be “in search of tools and techniques for thinking against representation.”<sup>27</sup>

Becoming-*black-woman* would be more than notation of a racial elision in becoming-woman. There is much to glean from becoming-woman, and becoming-*black-woman* is not meant to reject it. Rather, becoming-*black-woman* is an intensification. It marks an insurrectionary opacity, a tarrying between abandonment and inclusion, that demands generatively warping the very ontologizing process of gender *through* the irruptive figuration of blackness and womanness or femininity: in short, the going through gender to get to something wider, a width expansively encapsulated by black trans feminism. The argument here circulates, generatively, I think, and in mutual imbrication, with black trans theorizing, with Matt Richardson’s claim that “black womanhood” is in fact not something that emerges from being perinatally designated female at birth, *or*, to further Richardson, black at birth. It is something that is forged, something that accumulates. It is in service of desedimenting biologics, or logics of assessing valid subjectivity on biologically essentialist (or, simply, biological) grounds. While Richardson’s specific argument concerns that of black trans women and their useful belying of social understandings that equate proper womanhood with a series of bio-teleo-logical signifiers of maturation like breast growth, menstruation, and the like, I wish to extend his inquiry about the fact that one “becomes” a black woman to querying not only the expected (trans)gender site but, too, into thinking about how one “becomes”—which is to say, understands as open and volatile—a *black woman* as well.<sup>28</sup>

Because becoming-woman is not really about “women,” becoming-*black-woman* is likewise not really about “black women.” Remember, please, the parenthetical above, and remember, too, that “women” have not always existed. There is indeed a “history” of the notion of “woman,” as Denise Riley makes plain; women had to be “invented,” in the terms of Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, as was made apparent to Oyèwùmí by dint of a “realiz[ation]

that the fundamental category 'woman' . . . simply did not exist in Yorubáland prior to its sustained contact with the West.<sup>29</sup> The intensification it is meant to highlight is how the "black" that (un)rests in between becoming and woman precipitates a breakage outward toward not a racially implicitly white woman, much less any kind of "man"; it is a breakage outward toward an enveloping nothingness that exceeds its opacity and results in annihilating the genders that can only be Gender. For becoming-woman to truly move, as Deleuze and Guattari wish, beyond all human normality, it is necessary that we understand the human as normatively white as well, to be sure. It is the nexus of black woman that actualizes Claire Colebrook's assertion that becoming-woman "would abandon the idea of stepping outside man once and for all—but it would also be a refusal of active submission, or the idea that we always already think within a system that we repeat parodically or ironically." This is, in short, *black feminism* because it "refuses to disappear into the general categories of otherness or objecthood"—what Colebrook describes as the "redemptive otherness of woman," and what Denise Ferreira da Silva understands as the intersection of "blackness and womanhood"—"and refuses to comply with the formulations of racial and gender-sexual emancipatory projects these categories guide."<sup>30</sup> Hence, what might be most useful in the formulation of becoming-black-woman is its refusal of a passive reproduction of subaltern or marginalized status, a doubling down on *being* black and woman that maintains the validity of the normative systems that produced such a subject in the first place; it is a figuration that asserts the potential for radical reimaginings and political potencies of alternative, otherwise modalities that configure life and livability in ways not hitherto conceptualized.

This bears being put differently so as to make vanishingly unlikely a misreading. Of interest here, for clarity's sake and likely to the frustration of some, is, once again, not a purported ontological, embodied, entirely known and transparent black (cis?) woman. *That is not the point here*. The project of black trans feminism cares less about people who are black and/or trans and/or women *as the definition of* black trans feminism or black trans feminism's sole progenitors/focus; rather, the project is one that, as Deleuze writes to the "harsh critic" alleged to be his student Michel Cressole, has "nothing to do with the character of this or that exclusive group, it's to do with the transversal relations that ensure that any effects produced in some particular way . . . *can always be produced by other means*"; it is, on Paul Preciado's radical trans countersexual reading of Deleuze, "not so much who can think or talk about what as it is about creating a set of conditions

to produce new utterances."<sup>31</sup> I am speaking here of conditions otherwise, ways of being and becoming that are so unenamored of the conceit of this world's supposed correctness that they find solace in how we unbecome, how we un/gender ourselves and others in order to relate to power in illegible and subversive ways. We cannot continue to recap *this* if we purport to want abolition and radicality. If we want radical, if we want the gifts of blackness and transness and black feminism, it is not merely that something's gotta give—no, *everything's* gotta give.

The import of becoming-black-woman is made clearer when noting that becoming-woman is predicated on a "microfemininity" that gets mobilized as the thousand tiny sexes that make up the being that is woman, a femininity beyond the rigidity of gendered being. The question that must immediately follow, though, is, What happens when there is a spectrally absent femininity for those beings who "should" be permitted femininity, but aren't? Black women's femininity has historically been stripped; thus the usage of femininity is fraught with femininity's disavowed. What results, then, is a subtraction from the equation "figure of the feminine beyond rigid being" that becomes simply "figure beyond rigid being," so bringing the nexus of black and woman to bear here marks a gendered language without gender. Becoming-black-woman allows for thinking of gender without thinking of, or reifying, gender—gender that might have been but for Gender.

The fundamentality of becoming-woman gets even more fundamental in becoming-black-woman. It is because blackness, too, functions as a radicalization of the minoritarian molecular insurrection of the nonbecoming hegemon of Man. That Man is undoubtedly a genre of a White Man, thinking beyond this particular subjective tendency (to use Deleuze and Guattari's phrase) forces the salvific concession that there are other pulsations of life that escape the definitive logics culminating from and as White Man. Becoming-black-woman is a posture taking on the tendencies, or deploying the onto-epistemic unruliness, of black feminism. The black woman of becoming-black-woman is the being that emerges from the anoriginary, mutinous insurrection that is black feminism, an unyieldingly trans force that delinks radical insurrection from historicized physical characteristics and understands these terms as a differential power or subversiveness. The resulting effect that beings called black women have—that is, unsettling racialized gender and critiquing racial and gender solipsism while also precipitating, because of their exclusion from the racialized category of gender and thus valid human subjectivity, another modality of ontological life—is

the force of black feminism, and becoming-black-woman is the repetition of *that*.

Deleuze and Guattari ask, "If becoming-woman is the first quantum, or molecular segment . . . what [is it] all rushing toward?" to which they respond "Without a doubt, toward becoming-imperceptible."<sup>32</sup> With its "an-originary," blackness necessitates the refusal of a "first." The anoriginary precedes origins and firsts; thus becoming-black-woman is not the first quantum and hence does not rush toward becoming-imperceptible. It is before the first; it is a zero quantum, a null quantum, which is what, exactly? If the quantum level is characterized by being "difficult to categorize" and "peripatetic movement," as "a multidimensional blackness that defies any attempt to make it follow a 'straight line,'" argued by Michelle M. Wright, its zeroness breaks it outside of quantifiability such that it is movement before movement, blackness before blackness.<sup>33</sup> Becoming-black-woman is this very thing, so it rushes toward not an imperceptibility but a fracturing of perception itself. It is slowly becoming popularly known that observation of quantum phenomena, that perceiving quantum phenomena, is insufficient to understanding what happens at that level and speed. One cannot really observe quantum movement. So the anoriginary quantum of becoming-black-woman requires a perception that is not perception; it requires another mode of observation.

Because the gender binary is an "arborescent" sociopolitical orchestration predicated on cisness, whiteness, and categorically disciplinary "rigid segmentarities," becoming-black-woman works to highlight how the subjective intramural always makes tremulous the stultified overdetermination of racialized gender identity. In the hegemonic attempt to instantiate "womanness" or "manness," or even racial whiteness or racial blackness as one's fundamental personhood, down to their very core, becoming-black-woman is the politicized rejoinder that asserts, inasmuch as black womanhood is supposedly fixed, "becoming undoes these suppositions. The notion of acting *like* a woman"—or acting like, listening to,<sup>34</sup> perpetually citing black (cis? trans? non-cis/non-trans? cis *and* trans?) women—"has no purchase with reference to becoming—one does, one acts, affects, is affected by, and in these processes one continually produces 'something other than [one]self; something that destabilizes the holisms that fix and determine that self in hegemonic logics that can only deal with minority identities, not processes of becoming minoritarian."<sup>35</sup> In short, I want to posit the subjective tendency of becoming-black-woman as the production of a certain kind of something-other-than-oneself, as the very production of

that something other than the self one is required to be in order to inhabit being. Becoming-black-woman as, in other words, the kind of life possible in abolition *through* a gender radicality.

All the things I am suggesting—traniflesh, the gender radicality of becoming-woman, figuration—are to be found in the nexus that is called "black" and "woman." That nexus, given name by the becoming-black-woman, is a sort of radical performativity that does funky stuff to racialized gender. And this is fundamental to the black radical tradition. According to H. L. T. Quan, the tradition argues that "the rematerialization of the 'ontological totality' of Blackness requires the blending and bending of gender/sex/race structures and meanings."<sup>36</sup> In other words, inextricable from the black radical tradition is crisisizing gender, transgressive and transgressing gender on the run from a body—that is, in un/gendered traniflesh. Becoming-black-woman operates on a trans plane, bringing black feminism into intimate propinquity with trans feminism—becoming-black-woman is in fact a testament to the transness of black feminism and the blackness of trans feminism—by way of its radical detachment from the biologized, racialized genre of what Rachel Anne Williams calls "the cis-normative standard for what a Woman™ is."<sup>37</sup>

To thus inhabit the fugitive spirit of this un/gendering is to incite a radically different way of living. It is a secretive and shadowy force that presents the conditions of possibility for possibility. As possibility for subjectivity, traniflesh holds out for impossible possibilities, shadow possibilities, and thus unanticipated possibilities that do not necessarily rely on normative frameworks for their somethingness. With this, I want to dwell for a period on a well-known philosopher of phenomenology. Allow me, if you will, to quote at length:

This anonymity innate to *Myself* . . . we have previously called flesh, and one knows there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate it. The flesh is not matter, in the sense of corpuscles of being which would add up or continue on one another to form beings. Nor is the visible (the things as well as my own body) some "psychic" material that would be—God knows how—brought into being by the things factually existing and acting on my factual body. In general, it is not a fact or a sum of facts "material" or "spiritual." Nor is it a representation for a mind: a mind could not be captured by its own representations; it would rebel against this insertion into the visible which is essential to the seer. The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need

the old term “element,” in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatiotemporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an “element” of Being. Not a fact or a sum of facts, and yet adherent to location and to the now.<sup>38</sup>

What is called flesh is a sort of anonymity, an opacity to optics and logics external to oneself (though “self” is not the proper term for this thing). The anonymity is foundational and crucial, as its impossibility to be known implies an existence outside. It has no proper name, nor a proper location, and cannot have its identity known, only pointed at indirectly, looked at askance, smelled in the faintest of scents, felt in brushes and stipples. The anonymity is innate to the self that is not quite self but harbors the flesh, that is the improper, inaccurate name for this thing we cannot and must not be able to know quite yet. Traditional philosophy cannot name it, which is to say Western metaphysics cannot name it, for it escapes the knowledge frame that dominates Western civilization. Flesh’s anonymity is that black radical critique of Western civilization.

It is not matter, this flesh—and traniflesh, with its indexation of the flesh spoken of here, is not matter either; un/gendered subjectivity cannot (be) matter—but is something else. There is no real “look” of one who inhabits the flesh, as if there is a specific costume or adornment that alerts others to when one is fleshy. This flesh that bears a trans relationship to gender eludes elaborations of what visible existence can be. It looks, in other words, like nothing. This flesh does not simply become matter as we know it, forming beings with muscles and sinew and organs that comprise a “body.” It is the fundamental dissolution of these things, as they are fabrications that ultimately have been given, imposed, and coerced into being understood as the only thing we can be, “natural.” Neither a fact nor the sum of various facts, flesh knows not what the “biological” is and throws shade on determination from without. What, then, does this mean for gender? To say that flesh, which is *almost* to say traniflesh, exudes a non- or nega-biological penchant and refusal of externalized determination is to say that traniflesh is a kind of opaque excess. The anonymity of the flesh dissembles when trying to be apprehended by the senses generating legibility. Its opacity and unknownness gives an excess that spills over. This spillage can be glimpsed in blackness and the ways its laughter is too much or its politics cannot be contained in the epidermis, in transness when its genitalia does not “align”

or its expression cannot fit into binaries or its body cannot be said to be a proper body, in black feminism when its collectivities cannot abide strict criteria of race or gender or its way of knowing the world cannot be found in what we have currently. These are mobilizations of traniflesh because the anonymous and illegible shadows which they generate, and which thus prevent its interiority from being seen by many, are the very things that generate something that all can take up to get at precisely what it can only allude to. The excess comes by way of the anonymous opacity, surging from a specificity into a “claimable” mutiny of all kinds of enclosures.

#### ON THE RUN FROM GENDER

Che Gossett, in a June 10, 2017, Facebook status update, wrote, “Trans as being on the run from gender . . . trans as gender’s undercommons.” And my mind set sail. Yes, transness is on the run from gender—gender understood particularly as that material and (white) symbolic regime of binaristic categorization. Insofar as gender is at least one substantive node of legibilizing oneself as a subject, transness as a way of subjectivating oneself “wrongly” articulates a self-effacement inasmuch as one’s “self” operates upon a fundamental cohesiveness of which an intact/integral gender is constitutive. Moseying along in the undercommons, transness refuses to be known ahead of itself, slurring subjective embodiment and figuring, in the words of Nathaniel Mackey, “a fugitive tendency towards self-effacement . . . a sigh the elegiac witness to an emergent abscondity not otherwise to be known.”<sup>39</sup> The abscondity, the escape, emerges in the open secret of the undercommons, that playground wherein transness emerges *through* its otherwise to be knownness, its escapeful abscondity, its runnin’ of its mouf with an unattainable wild tongue. Effacing the subject from which it is believed to stem is a move away from subjectivity toward *subjectivity*, a beneath, an underground, a subversive simmering subterrain where we ain’t got no business doin’ none of yo’ business. I feel you, Nate: I, too, “confess to a weakness for these amphibious, in-between, both/and advances into a realm which defies categorization, this way of trespassing, so to speak, the line which otherwise divides.”<sup>40</sup> The intersexual amphibiousness—the goings-on and ontological workings of “crime’s offspring,” as Foucault has called the hermaphroditic in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*—a deep historical tie to transness, interstitial and chromosomally/genitally nonclassifiable, defiant of categorization. Where it goes, it trespasses; where it leaves, it tears ever so slightly.

And such a rending disturbance is not an explosive, historically masculine notion of revolution as the toppling of all regimes in one fell swoop, but the transitionality of those “thousands of little gestures of protest and presence” Julian Carter says reach toward “finally achiev[ing] escape velocity from the category you were stuck in all those years ago.”<sup>41</sup> Transitioning, which sounds to my ears like the positioning of transness, a trans-positioning that is always askance and askew, is the “escape velocity” from categorization; it’s a quotidian act of becoming through openings and refusals. To breach confines of capturability is to position oneself transly, escaping and fleeing gendered captivity: transition, the definition of which those who take on trans’s heft in an embodied sense often meet with an “open-ended refusal,” because what transness does in one sense is imagine an excessive being; transness invents, and seeks to performatively uptake, what C. Riley Snorton calls “the conditions of emergence of things and beings that may not yet exist,” about which I will say more in chapter 3.

Perhaps it might be necessary, with this theorization, to distinguish ever so nimbly traniflesh from Spillers’s “hieroglyphic” theorization of flesh. Whereas Spillers gives a spatiotemporal foundation to flesh in that flesh comes before the body, and it might thus be necessary to reclaim a connection to this flesh, I want to understand flesh, traniflesh, as having no accessible preceding point of connection. We cannot go back, if that is the aim. There is no access to an originary connection; what we make is sociality in the cut. The cutting sociality producing unanticipated relations and rhizomatic assemblages to the undermining of normativity is how we must understand traniflesh.

There is, then, too, no home to which we can retreat. With such a long history of “home” as an important site for marginalized subjects, to jettison the notion of home might trouble some of this lineage. Specifically, in black and trans discourses the analytic of home proves vital, connoting comfort and reprieve, per, say, transition narratives that allow one to finally live in and as a gender that confirms their interiority. However, Nael Bhanji, in his essay “Trans/scriptions: Homing Desires, (Trans)sexual Citizenship and Racialized Bodies,” takes up the question of “home” as it has been deployed in trans theory and casts it in a more critical diasporic light, colored by his own identity as, on his account, an East Indian/Arab immigrant trans man in Canada who has spent most of his life in Kenya. Finding problematic the production and uncritiqued normalization of whiteness and Anglophone bias in trans theories of home, Bhanji interrogates the very utility, shape, and location of home for trans subjects. To what “home,”

Bhanji asks, does the trajectory of transition lead, particularly for the trans subject who is already diasporic, already in liminality, already (and always) in transgressive motion?

Bhanji’s diasporic framework “helps to problematize those unacknowledged ‘homing desires’ within trans theory.” In other words, he argues, “we must pay attention to the different ways in which people (re)imagine and (re)create the edifice of homely belonging; where one’s ‘real’ home can only exist as a romanticized cathedral of constancy.”<sup>42</sup> There is a pressure to pass and “arrive” at a destination in trans communities, Bhanji asserts. Often emphasized is not the transition but the destination, the getting to a kind of bodily, gendered “home.” In his own words, the pressure to get to one’s destination as quickly and seamlessly as possible, to zoom “from transgressive to transfixed results in the transsexual forever rushing onwards to find the space beyond, ‘the promise of home on the other side.’”<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, Bhanji writes, simmering just beneath this politics of home for trans subjects is the urge for normality and to belong, without complication or trouble, to a normative framework. This urge for normativity is a move away from blackness, from gender radicality, and seeks to subvert transness via its quest for the normative. Trans homecoming, then, is marked for Bhanji as a fantasy; it is the white suburban utopia that Venus Xtravaganza from *Paris Is Burning* so wished for, an embodied “rightness” in which, as Jack Halberstam notes, “‘rightness’ may [as] easily depend on whiteness or class privilege as it does on being regendered.”<sup>44</sup> For Bhanji, “trans” necessarily functions not merely as movement across a particular schism; it also evokes the transgression, transmogrification, and transmutation of norms. Transness by necessity must trouble and destabilize fixed location—or, in other words, it must disarticulate the operative assumptions of fixity in conversations surrounding space and place.

Home is, in fact, a stifled space and maybe even antithetical to how “trans” has been understood throughout this book. Additionally, home can no longer be equated with a sense of unfettered comfort, for there are far too many of us for whom “home” was not only a place where we were fed and loved but, simultaneously, and sometimes primarily, the place where we encountered familial rage and abuse, assault, disappointment, confinement, belittlement, terror. Freeness and solace must not be tethered to feelings of being at home; freeness and solace, liberation and kin, demand another iteration of spatiality not predicated on an architectural site of enclosure. Where we wish to live must be an open and unbounded space. If traniflesh might be a place to live it cannot be our home—indeed, we cannot, perhaps,

want a home insofar as home connotes a place where one stays or gets away from it all. Traniflesh, if we are lucky enough to engender ourselves in and through it, cannot be a home in which we are (re)born; it has to be our unhome, our outdoors, because “when home is not where you are born, nothing is predetermined. Anything can be.”<sup>45</sup> It is in the spirit of radical openness and coalition that we spurn home. Surely home has been a place of refuge, warmth, and acceptance by many, and it is not this legacy—or any legacy providing a salve for the plights of the marginalized—I wish to disparage. My intent is only to think about the constitutive strictures in our balms, the violences and missteps of our loves in favor of something that, while treacherously terrifying and unknown, might prove to be the last balm we’ll ever need.

Out-of-homes is where we might build edifices without walls and roofs. Roofless ceilings are outdoors where we might live in traniflesh. We can begin from the wreckage of the roof, indeed we must. Traniflesh comes in at the crisis point of unsuturing the body and falling outside of subjectivity. Its fugitive, blackened, un/gendered and un/gendering force is indexed in its folds characterized by the “non-sovereign and metapolitical” gender-troubling blackness articulated by Che Gossett, a subjectivity that gains its identificatory heft through its subversive politicality, refusal of dominative calls for sovereign control, and otherwise-politics (politics *unusual*).<sup>46</sup>

All this flesh wants is a chance to live outside of this life in a life that lives. It wants to become on the sly and on the low. Think Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*: “Edging into life from the back door. Becoming,” this from a novel that Ann duCille says is “unbound, blackened, feminized, repopulated, and unpunctuated.”<sup>47</sup> Unstopped by punctuation, unbounded by limits, populated by denizens unfamiliar so you know things are going to have to change. Traniflesh allows us to *edge* into life, making a verb out of the outskirted, paraontological place of fugitivity, working and werqing that space so it can exude life and livability. It is an unanticipated life because they won’t expect us coming in from the back door, the one that they thought was always bolted, not realizing we jimmed the lock. They thought they were the only ones who lived there but didn’t know that we, not “were coming,” but *be coming*, becoming, vernacular syntactical ontological otherwisely that live differently. That’s why they couldn’t clock us, their grammars too strict and rigid to hold the excess. We, on the other hand, were and always must be unshaken (because always shaking), unbroken (because always breaking).

## GROWL

I want to claim fugitive un/gendering as a means by which we refuse formalized stability and find the shape of subjectivity in the shake of subjectivity. We come into ourselves when we come outside and beyond given ontologies, configuring what “I” means in our dancing, of course, but also in our seeing with things other than eyes, in our feeling through others, in how we cast our voices, an aural torquing into an aural vibration whose sound, as Geo Wyeth says of his beautifully jarring music, emerges from “unknown origins and also places of alienation” as a *kind of irreverence for genre*, which extends to an irreverence for genre’s etymological offspring, *gender*.<sup>48</sup>

Even we who commit to fugitive un/gendering still, and will always, have work to do. It is the black and gender radicality at work, placing the incessant demand of black trans feminist liberatory politics. That work necessitates that we move

to discover the re-routing encoded in the work of art: in the anachrographic reset of a shoulder, in the quiet extremities that animate a range of social chromaticisms and, especially, in the mutations that drive mute, labored, musicked speech as it moves between an incapacity for reasoned or meaningful self-generated utterance that is, on the one hand, supposed and, on the other hand, imposed, and a critical predisposition to steal (away). In those mutations that are always also a regendering or transgendering (as in Al Green’s errant falsetto or Big Maybelle’s bass—which is not but nothing other than basic—growl).<sup>49</sup>

Where might we find the rerouted route, or the groove that can’t track the rerouting? If traniflesh’s un/gendered fugitivity is an uncharted map to somewhere else, a kind of reproduction of cartography so we can make our way there, but a reproduction made by way of a negation or uncovering, all the while being animative, then it becomes an interstitial bop that shakes off the weight of our bodies, themselves fundamentally gendered, making this interstitial bop “a regendering or transgendering.” Remix Moten here: it is not neither/nor, nor both/and; traniflesh, its un/gendered and un/gendering fugitivity, is *either/and* this regendering or transgendering. It is mixing up in and with a bad crowd of regendered, transgendered, retransgendered, and transregendered folks, a rageful spitfire of a subjective expression per Susan Stryker’s choice words to Vic Frank. I know: traniflesh is the shape of subjectivity that is not made of flesh and bone but of a *growl*.



alizations (i.e. the spectre of the multiply-marginalized black woman that haunts intersectionality) and multiple privileges (i.e. the spectre of the [heterosexual] white man that haunts intersectionality), it neglects to describe the ways in which privilege and oppression intersect, informing each subject's experiences.

In painting black women, for example, as wholly oppressed and marginalized, intersectional theory can not attend to variations within black women's experiences that afford some black women greater privilege, autonomy, and freedom. In troubling the monolithism of "black womanhood," intersectionality could be strategically disloyal to dominant conceptions of black women as "the mules of the world," exploding the tendency of radical projects to elide critical differences *within* ostensibly marginalized subject positions. (11–12)

In *Black Feminism Reimagined*, Nash brings intersectionality specifically to bear on its relationship to black feminism, noting how black feminism has become hemmed in by defining itself through the policing of intersectionality's uses (and, I would add, policing overwhelmingly its uses by white women). After articulating the "single affect" governing black feminist politics as defensiveness—which, I will admit, we must critique, as if that is the only black feminist affect out there; a falsity, to my mind—she writes, "I treat black feminist defensiveness as manifested most explicitly through black feminism's proprietary attachments to intersectionality. These attachments conscript black feminism into a largely protective posture, leaving black feminists mired in policing intersectionality's usages, demanding that intersectionality remain located within black feminism, and reasserting intersectionality's 'true' origins in black feminist texts. This book traces how defensiveness is largely articulated by rendering intersectionality black feminist property, as terrain that has been gentrified, colonized, and appropriated" (3).

48. Espineira and Bourcier, "Transfeminism," 90.

49. Santana, "Mais Viva!," 211.

50. Santana, "Mais Viva!," 217.

51. Santana, "Mais Viva!," 217–19.

52. Bey, "Trans\*-Ness of Blackness," 278.

53. da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea*, 60–61. Emphasis added.

## CHAPTER 2. FUGITIVITY, UN/GENDERED

A shorter version of chapter 2 appears in the *Black Scholar* 49, no. 1 (2019), under the title "Black Fugitivity Un/Gendered."

1. Fournier, "Lines of Flight," 121. Emphasis added.

2. In "Peter's Pans: Eating in the Diaspora," the introductory chapter of Hortense Spillers's *Black, White, and In Color*, Spillers, in doing a reading of Ralph Ellison,

writes, "By revising and correcting 'blackness' into a critical posture, into a pre-eminent site of the 'multicultural,' long before the latter defined a new politics and polemic, and by distinguishing it from a sign called the 'American Negro' (and we can make any substitution here that might be appropriate, i.e., 'black,' 'Afro-American,' 'African-American,' as more or less the same lady and gentleman), [Ralph] Ellison harnessed 'blackness' to a symbolic program of philosophical 'disobedience' (a systematic skepticism and refusal) that would make the former available to *anyone*, or more pointedly, *any* posture, that was willing to take on the formidable task of *thinking* as a willful act of imagination and invention" (5; emphasis in original). I might mention, too, that only pages later Spillers writes that "'blackness' [i]s a series of critical postulates and the figure of 'Rineheart,'" from Ellison's *Invisible Man*, "had staged it as a caricature of *transformational* possibilities, [so] radical change would consist in the time of 'blackness' dispersed across predicates" (15; emphasis in original). This also, of course, bears a similarity to Walter Mignolo's epistemic disobedience, defined by Mignolo as a delinking. What is so beautifully pertinent to my overall discussion, too, is how Mignolo writes that those engaging in epistemic disobedience undergo "two kinds or directions advanced by the former *anthropos* who are no longer claiming recognition by or inclusion in the *humanitas*"—and the italics here are in the original, as if he is emphasizing the very things that concern the intellectual life of my project—which is a testament to the requisite for a decided break from the very comfort of our familiarity with our humanity. That is, Mignolo and Spillers are urging for a break, a Mignolo-esque delinking, from the precise category we think is so fundamental for our existence (being human, or *Anthropos*) and seeking recognition, that which constitutes our existence in the social sphere, elsewhere, by different means. To no longer seek inclusion into the *humanitas* is to find inclusion on other grounds wherein one is not encountered on the viscerally ideological grounds of the human, that of race and gender, among other embarrassingly "etc." things (per Judith Butler). Those other grounds are grounds, or maybe nongrounds, maybe McKittrick-like demonic grounds, of an abolished world, a world after our freedom. See Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience," 161. Emphasis in original.

3. Pinto, "Black Feminist Literacies," 27–28.

4. This aligns with Jennifer Nash's interrogation of the ways black feminists have policed the uses of intersectionality, conflating a fidelity to a presumed original intent with care and correctness. If Nash argues that care for a term and its uses means to "exercise a deep fidelity to the analytic's foundational texts," like her I seek to "interrogate *both* the claim that careful reading and textual fidelity are synonymous and the notion that certain kinds of reading practices manifest an affection for"—not only intersectionality, as is her aim, but for these superused Spillersian terms. These terms are tools, used respectfully, of course, but ultimately to engender radical subjectivities and relationalities and the like, not a mere regurgitation of the academic black feminist queen. Her ideas can move in different, unintended ways. See Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 59. Emphasis in original.



5. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 212.

6. The phrase "illusive flesh" that Stallings makes use of comes from Hayden's poem "Monet's Water Lilies." Stallings cites this in her discussion: "Here space and time exist in light / the eye like the eye of faith believes. / The seen, the known / dissolve in iridescence, become / illusive flesh of light / that was not, was, forever is" (213).

7. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 72, 112.

8. Horton-Stallings, *Funk the Erotic*, 206.

9. Horton-Stallings, *Funk the Erotic*, 213.

10. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 73.

11. Chu, *Females*, 1; see also Gabriel, "Limits of the Bit."

12. Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*, 53.

13. Benston, *Performing Blackness*, 9; Colebrook, "What Is It Like to Be a Human?"; Green, "Race and Gender Are Not the Same!"; Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe." For Benston, primordial blackness references a kind of denaturalization of history as teleological, and the beginning-as-blackness is a displacement of "white mythology," which can be read in conjunction with a Chandlerian blackness (or African American subject; or Negro) that is a paraontological originary displacement or desedimentation of ontology.

Colebrook's transitivity marks a trans iteration, as it were, of an original lawlessness (indexical, via someone like Moten or Nahum Chandler, of blackness). It is, in effect, a conditioning generativity that has not yet congealed into discrete identities.

Green, in brief, in thinking about the turmoil surrounding Rachel Dolezal, argues that "black has always been a porous entity. . . . Not all black people relate to the category or are marked by the category in the same way. Your blackness might not be legible in certain places perhaps because of your complexion, or language, or accent, or hair texture. . . . Black is a category that we all have the ability to move in and out of to a certain extent" (n.p.).

And, lastly, Spillers notes that black women's claim or relationship to femininity, via captive African American women, is largely "the tale writ between the lines and in the not-quite spaces of an American domesticity" (77).

14. Some readers might also understand this as conversant with Maurice Merleau-Ponty, specifically when he writes, "I become flesh only at the very edge of my perception, and can do so only under the press of the invisible and imperceptible outside that, it would seem, forms the border of that flesh. My body is visible and able to be apprehended like any object, but my flesh is not; it is bounded by my perception and extends proprioceptively into the world." While this proves fruitful and generative in the sense that flesh is distinguished from the body as something much more illegible and unapprehensible to normative rubrics, I part from this inasmuch as this account is fixated on an ocularcentric perception. Too, it seems

to presume that flesh is a matter primarily if not solely of one's own perception, by which it is bounded. This proves somewhat troubling for my account on the grounds that I want to think about a fleshiness that is more coalitional as well as not beholden to one's own perception, delimiting flesh to a knowable boundary within one's own grasp. I want to hold out for something more unknown and unanticipated, more assemblic and coalitional. See Salamon, "Place Where Life Hides Away," 103.

15. Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 104.

16. "Saidiya Hartman on Fugitive Feminism." Emphasis added.

17. Scott, "Experience," 25. Because of Scott's cogency and unflinching, though measured, critique, I wish to quote her at length:

When the evidence offered is the evidence of "experience," the claim for referentiality is further buttressed—what could be truer, after all, than a subject's own account of what he or she has lived through? It is precisely this kind of appeal to experience as uncontested evidence and as an originary point of explanation—as a foundation upon which analysis is based that weakens the critical thrust of histories of difference. By remaining within the epistemological frame of orthodox history, these studies lose the possibility of examining those assumptions and practices that excluded considerations of difference in the first place. They take as self-evident the identities of those whose experience is being documented and thus naturalize their difference. They locate resistance outside its discursive construction, and reify agency as an inherent attribute of individuals, thus decontextualizing it. When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one's vision is structured—about language (or discourse) and history—are left aside. . . .

To put it another way, the evidence of experience, whether conceived through a metaphor of visibility or in any other way that takes meaning as transparent, reproduces rather than contests given ideological systems—those that assume that the facts of history speak for themselves and, in the case of histories of gender, those that rest on notions of a natural or established opposition between sexual practices and social conventions, and between homosexuality and heterosexuality. (24–25)

18. Spillers et al., "Whatcha Gonna Do?," 304.

19. It is possible and necessary to proceed without the presumption of a coherent subject of representation for our political endeavors. We needn't continually foreground that we know, in "her" totality, the black (cis? trans? non-cis/non-trans? cis and trans?) woman and, from this knowledge, proceed with our black trans feminist

politics on "her" behalf. No shade to Toni Cade Bambara, but "the black woman" is ultimately a phantasm that obscures the indeterminacy and complexity that rests at that nominative site, an indeterminacy and a complexity that proves much more utile for abolitionist and radical aims. The black woman "we" is a perpetually unstable category whose named forces cannot in fact be contained by the category, is indeed categorical dissolution. This instability, however, promulgates an opening up of the previous restrictions placed onto the radicalized gendered nexus toward other configurations, toward transfigurations, of not only race, not only gender, but politicized livability.

20. Escalante, "Gynecology and the Ungendering."

21. Colebrook, "Modernism without Women," 434; see also, of course, Stryker, "Transgender Studies."

22. This has been critiqued on multiple occasions by people like Christine Battersby, who has written, "Even the 'becoming-woman' of women is not something that women themselves perform. Instead, the 'becoming-woman' of women results from changes in the organisation of social structures of males, produced by social transitions within capitalism." Alice Jardine, in turn, argues that becoming is pertinent only for those who already sit comfortably within positions of power and wish to simply abdicate that power, those who are, in effect, bored with their power and need a change of pace. As Hannah Stark and Timothy Laurie write in their summative description of the matter, the risk, ultimately, is that "'becoming' contains a trap that attends any philosophical concept imported into a political situation: a desire for romantic abstraction at the expense of engagement with lived realities and the practical demands of living trans lives" or living femme/cis woman lives. See Battersby, *Phenomenal Woman*, 188; Jardine, *Gynesis*; and Stark and Laurie, "Deleuze and Transfeminism," 128.

23. Dolphijn and van der Tuin, "Thousand Tiny Intersections," 132.

24. Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 106.

25. Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 275.

26. See Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 276. They write also that becoming-woman needs to be taken up by men as well. It "should produce a becoming-woman as atoms of womanhood capable of crossing and impregnating an entire social field, and of contaminating men, of sweeping them up in that becoming," which dovetails with my assertion that black trans feminism is to be taken up by anyone, that blackness can and should be taken up by those who are nonblack, that transness can and should be taken up by those who are nontrans, and that feminism can and should be taken up by those who are not its implicit white woman. On the subject of blackness, Jeffrey T. Nealon makes this very claim in "Refraining, Becoming-Black: Repetition and Difference in Amiri Baraka's *Blues People*." Drawing on Nathaniel Mackey, who remarks on the tendency of black people to enact "countering, contes-

tatory tendencies" and engage in the "movement from noun to verb," Nealon writes in a Deleuzian and Guattarian flourish: "So perhaps we could say that if this movement from noun to verb 'is' anything at all, it 'is' what we might call a *becoming-black* (rather than a hypostasized *being-black*). As Baraka writes in "The Legacy of Malcolm X," even 'the Black Man must aspire to Blackness'" (86).

27. Nyong'o, *Afro-Fabulations*, 199.

28. Richardson, "Ajita Wilson," 193. Richardson also notes that what constitutes one's girlhood and womanhood, as it were, is variegated and creative, as various as there are people, and that our emphasis must be on how "these are categories of self-definition and creativity and are not fixed in any one kind of body, whether or not socially recognized as 'woman'" (206n1).

29. The Nigerian scholar Oyèwùmí is critiquing the "age-old somatocentricity in Western thought," arguing ultimately that "the cultural logic of Western social categories is based on an ideology of biological determinism: the conception that biology provides the rationale for the organization of the social world. Thus, this cultural logic is actually a 'bio-logic.' Social categories like 'woman' are based on body-type and are elaborated in relation to and in opposition to another category: man; the presence or absence of certain organs determine social position." See Oyèwùmí, *Invention of Women*, x; see also Oyèwùmí, "De-Confounding Gender"; and Riley, *Am I That Name?*

30. Colebrook, "Modernism without Women," 432, 434; da Silva, "Hacking the Subject," 20.

31. Deleuze, "Letter to a Harsh Critic," 11. Emphasis in original. See also Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 147.

32. Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 279.

33. Wright, *Physics of Blackness*, 109.

34. I have in mind here a Tweet by jade bentil (@divanificent). On March 4, 2020, bentil tweeted for a grand total of over 2800 likes: "'Listen to Black women' is such an empty, essentialist take and seeing it leveraged to legitimise imperialist and fundamentally self-serving political positions is altogether very very underwhelming" (<https://twitter.com/divanificent/status/1235315503645839368>).

35. Malatino, *Queer Embodiment*, 197. Emphasis in original. See also Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 195. It may be useful to state clearly here, just in case, that becoming-black-woman is quite a "real" and material, or socially substantive, matter, not a philosophical abstraction untethered to "actual" black women. To quote Deleuze and Guattari: "A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification. . . . To become is not to progress or regress along a series. Above all, becoming does not occur in the imagination. . . . [It] is perfectly real. But which reality is at issue

here? For if becoming animal [or becoming-(black)-woman] does not consist in playing animal or imitating an animal [or (black) woman], it is clear that the human being does not 'really' become an animal any more than the animal 'really' becomes something else. Becoming produces something other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes" (237–38).

I am intrigued by this inasmuch as I am intrigued, and place an emphasis on, what the "something other than itself" is that becoming produces. If becoming-black-woman means neither that you binaristically imitate black women nor simply are a black woman, what is this something else that the becoming produces here? I am interested in that, and I think it might be described in my analytics of abolition and gender radicality.

36. See Quan's chapter "It's Hard to Stop Rebels That Time Travel," 189.

37. Williams, *Transgressive*, 44.

38. Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible*, 139–40.

39. Mackey, *Bedouin Hornbook*, 105.

40. Mackey, *Bedouin Hornbook*, 158.

41. J. Carter, "Transition," 235–36; Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*, xiv.

42. Bhanji, "Trans/Scriptions," 515.

43. Bhanji, "Trans/Scriptions," 515. Emphasis in original.

44. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 172.

45. Gessen, "To Be, or Not to Be."

46. Gossett, "Žižek's Trans/Gender Trouble."

47. Morrison, *Bluest Eye*, 138; duCille, "Of Race, Gender, and the Novel."

48. Bowen, "Discovery."

49. Harney and Moten, *Undercommons*, 50.

### CHAPTER 3. TRANS/FIGURATIVE, BLACKNESS

1. Crawley, *Lonely Letters*, 234.

2. Spillers, "Idea of Black Culture," 26. Spillers writes, "In a sense, if there is no black culture, or no longer black culture (because it has 'succeeded'), then we need it now; and if that is true, then perhaps black culture—as the reclamation of the critical edge, as one of those vantages from which it might be spied, and no longer predicated on 'race'—has yet to come."

3. Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*, 59.

4. Konitshek, "Calling Forth," 17. Emphasis in original.

5. da Silva, "1 (Life)." Emphasis added. The distinction I am here highlighting is that between da Silva's categorical blackness, which for her is "always already a referent of [a] commodity, an object, and the other, as fact beyond evidence" and "serves the ordered universe of determinacy and the violence and violations it authorizes," and blackness as a formless, vital substance of matter, which, according to the black trans theorizing of Jessica Marion Modi, "nullifies ways of knowing that depend on determinacy (as well as, argues Ferreira da Silva, separability and sequentiality). As matter, it 'invites the possibility of knowing without modern categories' under which difference among humans and matter registers as separability." See Aiken, Modi, and Polk, "Issued," 434–35.

6. Cervenak and Carter, "Untitled and Outdoors," 6; see also Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 108.

7. McKittrick, "Worn Out," 99.

8. See Snorton, "Transfiguring Masculinities."

9. Howie, "On Transfiguration," 159–60.

10. Howie, "On Transfiguration," 158–59.

11. Moten, *In the Break*, 154.

12. Nyong'o, *Afro-Fabulations*, 206–7.

13. Hedva, "In Defence of De-Persons."

14. Hedva, "In Defence of De-Persons." The comment on privilege as radical incapacity for sociality is Hedva's quotation of an exchange with Fred Moten who makes that keen observation. Additionally, Hedva writes in their "About" section, regarding the body, "There is always the body, but the task is how to eclipse it, how to nebulize it, and how to cope when this inevitably fails. There is no divine purpose other than the purpose of telic nothingness and the warzone of sociality, but both make beautiful garbage, a khoratic plenum" (<https://johannahedva.com/about.html>, accessed March 23, 2021).

15. Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*, 2.

16. See McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*. McKittrick, drawing on Sylvia Wynter's work, writes that demonic grounds are the "very different geography" that might be characterized as a "nondeterministic impossibility" (xxv). It's a kind of abolitionist geography about "not . . . only reifying and politicizing marginality in itself (black women's identities = margin/position = difference in/and feminism; or, our present form of life)" (135).

17. Quoted in White, "Black Metamorphosis," 129.

18. Thomas, "Sex/Sexuality," 100. Emphasis in original.