



MARQUIS BEY

BLACK TRANS FEMINISM

BLACK
TRANS
FEMINISM

BLACK OUTDOORS
INNOVATIONS IN THE
POETICS OF STUDY

A series edited by

J. Kameron Carter and

Sarah Jane Cervenak

BLACK
TRANS
FEMIN—
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For those we don't know yet

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Contents

ix *Acknowledgments*

1 Introduction: Abolition, Gender Radicality

PART 1

37 Black, Trans, Feminism 1
66 Fugitivity, Un/gendered 2
88 Trans/figurative, Blackness 3

PART 2

115 Feminist, Fugitivity 4
145 Questioned, Gendered 5
175 Trigger, Rebel 6
199 Conclusion: Hope, Fugitive

229 *Notes*
263 *Bibliography*
283 *Index*

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Acknowledgments

If I were being honest, I wouldn't call this section the "Acknowledgments." The word seems to imply a kind of nod from the person who did most of the heavy lifting; it implies, on one reading, that *I* did the bulk of the work, whereas all these other folks were peripheral and "minor characters." But this isn't entirely true, as some of the people I will mention did an inordinate amount of work for this book, for my thinking, for my very ability to write it. So, instead I might call this section an account of my collaborators, my coproducers, my coconspirators, my accomplices.

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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 afantasmatic 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.¹ That is, feminism marks here the vitiating 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.”² 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.³ 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."⁴ Desire makes things, it makes something else, it *invents*. There is

thus a different image of the world after the world I wish to posit because I wish to take the scariness seriously. So, abolition urges for the eradication of every and all violent holdovers. It is possible, though, that, even on groundlessness, even in a wholly other world, we can be held insofar as we are embraced by that which does not know us and, in this unknowing, truly loves and caresses us. Think: we might become anything at all, something wildly other than what we are, and in order to give in to that we need to be encountered by a world that really, actually, truly holds and loves us by never, ever presuming to know what shape we will take, what we will want, before we show up. We need to feel held, and we will be held when we are not known from the start—the world we inhabit after and amid abolition and gender radicality doesn't know a damn thing about us, and it smiles at such a fact, because when it finds out, it will know that we emerged from no coercion and no violence, no impositions. And then we can begin another kind of living.

There is, thus, a fundamental commitment to life and livability, and to modes of life that will not look like “Life” precisely because of their dazzlingly abolitionist dwelling in the generative rubble after the oft-mentioned end of the world. As such, black trans feminism is given over as a loving but appositional shimmying away from the constantly repeated rhetorical move “Violence against women, *especially trans women*; violence against trans women, *especially trans women of color* or *especially black trans women*.” The move is understandable, and, please, keep making that gesture when it is appropriate as a way to highlight the populations onto which violation is disproportionately imposed—because we know transantagonism is very much about the targeting of poor black trans women and trans women of color. I proffer a caution, though, in service of an attempted refutation of the assumption embedded in the italicized subclauses, an assumption that the subclause *is* black trans feminism, that one's black trans feminism is encapsulated by a pointing to the violated lives (and deaths) of black trans women. This to me troublingly only allows (black) trans femme subjectivity to emerge through violence. Black trans feminism as articulated in this book is a love letter, a box of chocolates, a warm hug, a place to sleep after a hot meal, a “They got problems with you, you come get me” for those who live in excess of that purportedly unlivable nexus and those hailed by those analytic nominatives—and, further, for those whose subjectivities are such that the world cannot yet accommodate them.

Black Trans Feminism's overall intent is to intervene in two primary discourses: first, a general identitarian discourse—which, to be sure, is not to

be haphazardly denigrated as an unthinking “mob” mentality—that considers blackness, transness, and feminism to be possessed identities from which politics emerge (i.e., “*I am black*,” “*I am trans*,” “*I am a feminist*”). My aim is to think about how we might rally around subversive politics, which then serve as one’s identity as such—Cathy Cohen’s political identities, or what Judith Butler calls thinking in alliance. I wish to deem the corporeal surface as only one node of blackness, transness, and womanness, and the taking of such theorizations seriously will necessitate radically undoing what we have come to hold very dear. A subjectless critique, the broader argument of this book refuses to posit *a* or *the* subject of black trans feminism, rejecting a “proper” object of both study and knowledge production in service of an “eccentricity,” to take language from Teresa de Lauretis. It is a black trans feminism that does not coincide with the amalgam of black and/or trans and/or women subjects, assuming that the being of these historicized demographics intends a certain relation to power and normativity and worldly inhabitation, but, instead, a black trans feminism that “arises as a force of displacement, as a practice for the transformation of subjectivity,” a methodology in conversational politicality with Nahum Chandler’s desedimentary, originary displacement and paraontological Negro problematic that is also, I would argue (and have argued), a gender problematic.⁵

The second discourse in which I am intervening is that which surrounds intersectionalist feminisms, or social justice work done through an intersectionalist frame. Oftentimes this discourse takes the identities that make up the various titular intersections to be givens, needing no critique or, even more treacherously, abandonment. While it is certainly a valiant and useful type of political work to reckon with how one’s race *and* gender, for example, bear on their situatedness in relation to institutions, history, and discourses, there is much to be wanted that black trans feminism seeks to examine. I maintain, in alignment with another loving critic of aspects of how intersectionality is deployed, that “intersectional identities are the byproducts of attempts to still and quell the perpetual motion of assemblages, to capture and reduce them, to harness their threatening mobility,” a mobility to which I wish to give primacy as the constituent force of black trans feminism.⁶ In other words, what could be missing in intersectional feminisms is an attention to what is happening on the sidewalks along the road, the sewers underground, the skyscrapers up above; or what it sounds like out there, how hot it is outside, what snoozed alarm made the person late for work and in need of going fifteen miles per hour over the speed limit in the first place. Black trans feminism desires an attention to these things

as well, and ultimately the possibilities for reconfiguring what streets can look like, what kind of vehicles we use, and how the traffic patterns move in tandem with the pulse of the city.

Inevitably, in all of this, one wonders about the role and status of the body. While blackness, transness, and feminism are not entirely extricated from the body—it remains that the processes of materialization known as race and gender shape how we experience (what we come to understand as) our bodies—there is still an insistence here, first, on their fundamental distinction from being confined to corporeality. On this score, *Black Trans Feminism* makes a twofold argument: first, that matter and materiality are not to be equated with mere being, a transparent and unmediated facticity of “the body.” I am critical of an understanding of the material body as an unmitigated bearer and disseminator of truth, as if matter cannot be and has not been touched, as it were. The matter that makes up black and transgender and women’s subjectivities is in fact a regulatory ideal that has been made to congeal into a certain look, a look that inevitably excludes other looks for what might validly be considered black or transgender or woman. We come to know what a “proper” one of these subjects looks like by way, unbeknownst (or willfully ignored, when it gets down to it) to many, of highly regulated parameters that I am in the business of deconstructing. It is precisely those regimes of regulation that, while they give us the shape and feel of marginalized identities held dear, are the culprits of various normativities inherent to which are violent hegemonies. Regulatory norms create the obviousness of the “fact” of such and such a body as black or transgender or woman through a forcible, which is to say coerced, reiteration of tenets of what is said to be possible for one to be. Because black trans feminism seeks to destroy such coercion, violences, normativities, and hubristic assumptions, it is necessary to express a critical eye toward a simplistic formulation of materiality that fails to consider its highly regulated grounding. It is thus my contention that if such grounding were dutifully critiqued it would yield the necessity for an abandonment of how “matter” and materiality are commonly understood in favor of a joyous disposition toward the tinkering and playing with how materialization has and can occur differently. There is an ongoing agency to materiality, thus processes of materialization, what we come to understand as matter, are glimpsed in the transness and transing of matter.

The second component of the twofold argument is that “race” and “gender” are necessarily different from this book’s constitutive terms, which cannot be located on or in, strictly speaking, the body. That is, the constituent

terms of this book's title cannot be said to be "simply" names for race and gender (or a disposition gotten to by a specific gender identification [e.g., "woman"]), nor can they be "found" on or in the body in some legible and transparent way. So, while we indeed feel various oppressions in a visceral way, I want to make the claim that it is not because of our immediate access to a material body that is acted upon by external forces, subsequently translating those feelings to a "self" that has perfect communication with that body. The body, too, or what we have come to understand as our body, is subject to epistemic scrutiny; it is not privy to unmediated knowledge or our unproblematic possession. We feel oppressions by virtue of those oppressions giving to us a subjective shape that houses that oppression, is formed in the image of that oppression. The various ways we come to be confined and disciplined, which is to say the form and texture of our bodies, does not preexist ontologizing forces—whether benign or malevolent—but is coeval with them.

In short, the construction that is "the body," which is never as simple as the definite article implies, since other identificatory vectors always complicate its definitiveness, *becomes* largely through hegemonic structures that trek along on axes of epistemology, ontology, ocularcentrism, and neuro-normativity, all of which is to shorthand what we might recognize as the project of Western civilization. These are territorializing projects—colonial and imperialist projects, if you will—that must be subverted even if they are the visceral bases of our comfort. Indeed, black women and femmes along the jagged orbit that meanders around cis and trans have long taken their imposed corporealized ontologies as indicative of a system with instabilities and fractures that they were made to bear the weight of and thus are poised to deploy those fracturative forces against the system itself.⁷

I want to commit to the argument that neither blackness nor transness, nor the implicit "woman" as the subject of feminism, is tied to a specific kind of body or identity. They are, to me, inflections of mutinous subjectivities that have been captured and consolidated into bodily legibilities. With this, however, it is ethically necessary for me to say something about the lives of those who live life as black and/or trans and/or women and to dwell on something perhaps idiosyncratic about these identities *as* identities (ethically necessary because of my own identificatory positionality, which reads a certain way but is, I wholeheartedly submit, inaccurate [curious minds will want to read this endnote]).⁸ Thus, I choose not to recapitulate the worn discourse of "lived experience" that I speak to a bit more in chapter 2 but to advance the much more complex and rich notion

of “opacity.” Given its most fleshed-out articulation by Édouard Glissant, opacity denotes a departure from the Western imperative of transparency, inherent to which is a reduction. In other words, to be transparent and thus legible to the predominating schema of intelligibility one must always have the breadth of their subjectivity reduced, distilled. One’s differences that may fall outside of scripts of possibility (e.g., gender nonbinariness) must be captured by the norm, linked to it in some way, which deprives the difference of something “essential” to it. Glissant offers opacity to combat this “enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy.”⁹ Opacity refuses reduction and perfunctory transparency and preserves the singularity of those who are so often coerced into making themselves digestible. Opacity also allows for a kind of quiet (or loud) claim to something unable and unwilling to be given to others. Such a privacy is ethically important because of its potential for something like solace amid regimes of violence. I am conceding the fact of opacity for those who live through the identificatory markers of blackness, transness, and womanness because it may very well be one of the few things keeping them alive. And I am committed to nothing if I am not committed to life.

But there is more to be said of opacity as it relates to my concerns. Opacity is more robustly a tactical evasion that eludes medicalized, biometric, and regulatory frameworks of “knowing” a subject. Marginalized and oppressed subjects like those indexed by the titular terms of this book can retain the specificities of their positions as differentially subject to the aforementioned regulatory regimes. And this is what I must hold on to, though the “unfixation” I delineate in a later section of this introduction must still be foregrounded. To do this, I urge readers to understand opacity as a vehicle precisely for the eradication of those differentiations that are, at base, violences structured and created by forces of hegemony. To be understood as categorically black or trans or woman is, fundamentally, an identity imposed—a “given ontology”—that, ultimately, in the world after the end of the world, must be discarded because of its link to being forged in the cauldron of an originary violence.¹⁰ Opacity in my usage argues that one’s situatedness is important in that it provides access to the mechanisms of power that have created the conditions for ontologized accidents (e.g., epidermal blackness, nonnormative gendered physicality) to be denigrated and expunged from the province of social validity. There is a way that being forced to hold this denigration on what gets consolidated as a kind of body that approximates but does not measure up to the human ideal in some way

is crucial to note, as bearing the viscera is a different kind of knowledge that some do not have access to. *But opacity does not end here*, and certainly not in the way that proponents of an unceasing and uncritical valorization of lived experience as the pinnacle of epistemic argumentation put forward. Opacity concedes this experiential specificity as radically inclusive, which is to say that it is specific to certain kinds of bodies but it provides knowledge and world-making onto-epistemic forces that can be mobilized by any and every body and nonbody. Immediately following Glissant's mention of the impenetrable autarchy, he goes on to say that "opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics." This is to say, one's experiential blackness or transgender identity is and can be opaque to nonblack and nontrans people, indeed; it says, simultaneously, however, that the knowledge and itch for otherwise ways of living gleaned from being positioned as such is not parochial and is in fact weavable, convergent, coexistent with everyone else.

Furthermore, this is to say that opacity is not static. One is not simply to be black or trans or woman, being opaque to those who are not black/trans/women, which is then the end of the story. Opacities shift and move depending on how various identities get positioned in a given context and also, perhaps more importantly, how identities get deployed in order to create opaque pockets that become impenetrable to power (or, if penetrated, how that probe may enter but not come out, to creatively remix Zora Neale Hurston).¹¹ We come to understand that opacities are *created*, not simply given or possessed ontologically, so the shifting of opacity is predicated ultimately on how we create zones of opacities. And that is what I mean by political identities.

UNFIXATION

I maintain as axiomatic that, as Nat Raha has clearly argued, a radical feminism must center the needs, experiences, and material concerns of trans women, trans femmes, and nonbinary femmes. Any black/trans/feminist worldview is undeserving of the name if it is not grounded by the various epistemic forms proffered by the aforementioned demographics. Too, though, I want to maintain this while simultaneously maintaining the unfixation of transness—and blackness and feminism, and their factorial proliferations—from the sole terrain and ownership, and thus burden of

responsibility for liberation, of those who are said to (and/or say of themselves) embody the numerous imbrications of these identities. The black trans feminism I want to begin to theorize, nonexhaustively so, is one that, again, as Raha notes, “is not simply about the inclusion of trans bodies or transfeminine people into feminism,” and also one that is not simply about assuming that one’s embodied marginalized identity is sufficient for proffering a radical politics.¹² To do black and/or trans and/or feminist work is not done solely or monolithically by those whom historico-sociality has deemed black or trans or women, or all three. Indeed, if the project of radical trans feminism, and most certainly black radicalism, is characterized as a “heterogeneous, decolonising anti-capitalist feminist project,” then black trans feminism here wishes to think itself and its adherents as those who commit to engendering themselves through these performative enactments.¹³

To inhabit the world as unfixed requires one to let go profoundly. But this profound letting go is with respect to a profound gaining of something else that might allow us to do things differently. The present conditions must undergo an immense detachment; we must detach, unfix, from such conditions if we are to engender something other than this. It is untenable to stick with what we have now, what exists now, if we heed that a radical end of the world requires a radical *end of this* world and its signatories. The other world that is here and now, an other world that harbors otherwise states of becoming and a “you beyond you,” to borrow from Alexis Pauline Gumbs (whose work will be discussed in chapter 4), necessitates the serious rethinking of who we are and what we know. It is a fundamentally radicalized onto-epistemic vitiation in service of finding another way to live with one another.

Black trans feminism is nothing other than radicalism and is a departure from typical definitions of “radical”—the etymological going back to the roots—toward, well, a more radical definition: radical as an imaginative will to engage life unbounded. The radicality discussed in these pages is an adjectival mobilization toward what has not (yet) been realized or conceptualized, an imaginative speculation about how we might be, where we might end up, what might exist, and what might be possible. “Radical” and “radicality” denote a way of being un beholden to normative constraints for legibility, politics, subjectivity, knowledge, and relationality. Blackness’s radicality functions in a transitive manner because it is inflected with respect to but not confined by sedimented notions of racial quanta.

It staves off certainty, invites troubled orientations, ill-abides taxonomy, keeps at a distance existence ahead of itself; it is an unfolding of the fold that demands a different subjectivity. Transness's radicality functions differently than, but not to the exclusion of, "transgender." Specifically, it "functions as a way to think about how things come together and how they work with, on, and in one another." About movement and change, transness asks us to meditate on the manifold ways a thing can present itself differently and, as Kai M. Green states, "allows us to let go of the stability."¹⁴ Black feminism's radicality, that perpetual refusal of institutionalization, manifests as an attunement to the regimes of ontological genders and works those regulative traps by unsuturing them and fracturing gender's impositions. Black feminism and its underpinning trans feminism mutate the state's attempt and function to render things immobile, a function Michel Foucault has noted, and names that which cannot be kept in place or moored to the normative ledgers of history. Taken together, these understandings of blackness, transness, and feminism undergird the start of the hieroglyphic theorization that will come to be understood as black trans feminism, an abolitionist gender radicality.

An ontological blackness and ontological gender are anathema to those abetting the proliferation of black trans feminism, as these ontologies tend toward a reification by which race and gender in particular become treated as if they exist objectively and independent of historical contingency or subjective intentions. Resultant is a categorically essential racial and gender consciousness unable to hold difference and hostile when met with critique, leading to a nebulously and inconsistently exhaustive principle of Racial and Gender Identity, their "thoroughgoing index" entrapping more than liberating.¹⁵ Indeed, "the terms homosexual/heterosexual and transsexual as well as other markers like man/woman, masculine/feminine, whiteness/blackness/brownness," Jack Halberstam writes, "are all historically variable terms, untethered in fixed or for that matter natural or inevitable ways to bodies and populations."¹⁶ The contingency, though merely a speculation of what might have been, is precisely the space in which I dwell here, as what might have been is what we are after, since it is in contradistinction to the violence of what has been and is. Rather than seeing contingency as a bygone thought, it is read here as the seeds of the possible ways we might unfix ourselves from the violence of what has been and is. If what might have been, that historical contingency, is fundamentally not what has been and is—which is the battleground on which

we do all this radical work—then it serves as a potent and rich dossier of rethinking ourselves differently, of unfixing ourselves, and unfixation is an extricative transitive relationship to power's grasp and its ability to coerce meaning onto us. What might have been can be what will soon be.

Readers may have begun to notice something that could be seen as troubling—namely, the seeming overlooking of structural barriers. A structural, and indeed terrestrially, sociohistorically ontological *anti-blackness, sexism, and transantagonism* is an onus not elided in an anti- and antecategorical blackness/transness/feminism. No, no, do not mistake me. What I offer is a celebratory and radically liberatory analysis of these modalities instead of a rehashing-type account of how their identificatory corporeal signifiers are hemmed and maligned by hegemonic forces. And this, I assure you, is in service of the absolute eradication of the forces compelling the hegemon. Antiblackness, transantagonism, sexism, and the (hierarchized) gender binary are all structures that disallow such freedom of choice and movement that I have implied thus far, one might think. And, to be sure, one thinks this on justifiable grounds, as one cannot merely opt out of the plight of antiblackness, say, by willing oneself in excess of those structural fetters. But the radicality of self-determination, for example—to claim and fashion one's own subjectivity even in the "objective" face of historical, material, and social structures—is a bedrock of any subversion of the very ills that foundation oppressive structures. An outside to the structures must be imagined if there is any chance in negating their sovereignty. Their utter undermining in the form of gender self-determination might be one of those outsides. And there are others. Inasmuch as perinatally designated sex and gender, or white supremacist epidermalization of value, or cis male supremacist subordination and invalidation of those who are not cis men are structural regimes, their cessation requires an irreverence toward their organizing logics and all of their claims about the world. The politicality of blackness, transness, and feminism allows this to occur, as they are not tied to the structures that attempt to "know" subjects on grounds that precede them. Blackness, thus, will outlast "race"; transness will outlast "gender"; feminism will outlast "women." They outlast the identities often sutured to them because, as engendering fugitive forces, they precede and exceed their capture in these identities, and further, they referentially index one another as different literal and proverbial hues of one another—blackness, transness, and feminism are radical and fugitive rhymes for one another.

The moment “Ain’t I a woman?” had to be addressed by Sojourner Truth, the moment she had to bare her breasts to prove that she was the woman, was already a queer, a trans moment. So that rather than seeing ourselves as outside blackness, as outside the dialogue of queerness and trans, I think that we need to place ourselves as black females at the core of the dialogue.

BELL HOOKS, “Are You Still a Slave? Liberating the Black Female Body”

Black trans feminism indexes a thing that has been simmering for a while now, bubbling up in the most and least incendiary of places. It is instructive to excavate the historical archive for the way it has tried to manifest blackness through the vector of fugitivity, though imperfectly, as all manifestations of fugitivity are happy to be. And it is fugitivity that I want to use here, for now, as an indexation of the paraontological distinction between blackness and people deemed black, which will then open up transness and black feminism to similar distinctions. So, into the archive.

Approved and signed into law by George Washington on February 12, 1793, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 articulates a preoccupation with stateliness and territory. In the burgeoning formation of a nation, boundedness in more ways than one—national, corporeal, intellectual—became prioritized. Fugitive slaves, then, were broadly conceived of as those who transgressed imposed boundaries: breached the geographic confines of the plantations that they did not and could not call home; undermined the perceptual boundaries of the limits of slave, or Negro, capacity; escaped the grasp of whips, horses, dogs, laws, and desires demanding their confinement; and demonstrated the capacity to autonomously steal that which was deemed property—themselves. Fleeing the “State or Territory” was effectively an escape to life-in-freedom, as the fugitive’s status as slave, being bounded by the state or specific location from which they fled, dissolved on the run. Of note, too, in Section 6 of the amended Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 is that “in no trial or hearing under this act shall the testimony of such alleged fugitive be admitted in evidence,” an extension of imposed incapacity onto the very ontology of the slave, in this era (and, arguably, into the contemporary moment) synonymous with blackness. But in all of this, the law cannot hold. The two laws were inadequate, as they could not ensure the fugitive’s capture. On some accounts, in fact, it became even more

difficult to recapture fugitives as they became more adept at eluding power's grasp. Mr. Mason of Virginia, he who introduced the 1850 law because the previous one lacked sufficient severity, tellingly notes that under the 1793 Fugitive Slave Law "you may as well go down into the sea and endeavor to recover from his [*sic*] native element a fish which has escaped from you, as expect to recover such a fugitive."¹⁷ The runaway, the subject engendering another iteration of themselves, transing themselves, quintessentializes the tenor of fugitivity: a perpetual, fishy, escapeful slitheriness that power's hands cannot contain. The law attempts to enact sovereignty on an insovereign nonentity.

In both laws fugitivity extends to those who do the work of aiding and abetting a fugitive and, more notably, impeding the capture of fugitives. Fugitive slave law enlisted everyone, claimed everyone, to make a dire choice: choose the proliferation of captivity or the proliferation of escape. With the historical mobilization of fugitivity through blackness, I want to gesture toward their interrelatedness. I want to gesture toward, because of this historical proximity, blackness being given the capacity I intend for it through fugitive slave law. As the 1793 law states in its second section, "If any person or persons shall, by force, set at liberty, or rescue the fugitive from such agent while transporting . . . the person or persons so offending shall, on conviction, be fined . . . and be imprisoned"; and as the 1850 law says in its seventh section, those assisting runaways "after notice or knowledge of the fact that such person was a fugitive from service or labor as aforesaid, shall, for either of said offences, be subject to a fine . . . and imprisonment."¹⁸ I am thoroughly aware that, say, white abolitionists helping usher fugitive slaves to the North do not occupy the same historical and ontologically abjected position as the runaways themselves, and I do not wish to conflate the two. My assertion, in part, is that these white abolitionists engendered themselves and their world through and in proximity to a paraontological blackness; they, as I expound upon later in this book in a slightly different context, "became-black" and subjectivated themselves politically via a deployment of fugitive blackness. Blackness becomes nonproprietary in a radical and serious, a seriously radical, sense. On this front there is this to say:

This [paraontological] movement . . . refuses to give definition or essence to purportedly extant historical figures precisely because, via the desedimentary, deconstructive, *différential* workings of thinking these subjects, there is to be found no definition or last essential analysis.