No Tea, NO SHADE

New Writings in Black Queer Studies

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FOR ALL THE QUEER
FOREMOTHERS AND FOREFATHERS

2

The Whiter the Bread, the Quicker You're Dead

Spectacular Absence and Post-Racialized Blackness in (White) Queer Theory

ALISON REED

To be sensual, I think, is to respect and rejoice in the force of life, of life itself, and to be present *in all that one does, from the effort of loving to the breaking of bread. It will be a great day for America, incidentally, when we begin to eat bread again, instead of the blasphemous and tasteless foam rubber that we have substituted for it.* —JAMES BALDWIN, *The Fire Next Time*

WHILE MANY CRITICS HAVE INTERPRETED James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* as liberal-integrationist or ultimately transcendent of racial politics altogether, part of the force of his argument lies in its incisive critique of whiteness as spiritually void, which he captures in the figure of white bread.[1] This "blasphemous and tasteless foam rubber" metonymically represents not only white supremacy as a sickness plaguing the nation but also Baldwin's theoretical meditation on how whiteness constructs itself against a fiction of blackness—without which its world shatters into abysmal meaninglessness. As he writes to his nephew: "Try to imagine how you would feel if you woke up one morning to find the sun shining and all the stars aflame. . . . Well, the black man has functioned in the white man's world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations." Since whiteness defines itself by contrast, white Americans actively disinvesting in white supremacy would equal nothing short of reenvisioning their basis for identity. As an empty vessel of white fears, anxieties, and desires, overdetermined fantasies of blackness reflect the devastating effects of a society that cannot understand itself without symbolic figurations of so-called otherness. This violent project of identity formation, as Baldwin describes, must crumble before a new society can take shape—one based on freedom "close to love" and deeply politicized sensuality that dissolves hierarchy. Aware that sensuality may evoke "quivering dusky maidens or priapic black studs" in the U.S. popular imagination, Baldwin eschews stereotypes of thoroughly racialized embodiment, and the violence they authorize, for something "less fanciful." Shared histories of struggle testify to the pain and pleasure of living, an emotional complexity captured in the blues and jazz pulse of "ironic tenacity" from which white Americans recoil in its embedded sensuality.[2] Baldwin's concept of humble sensuality, the collective breaking of bread, provides nothing short of a vehicle for social transformation.

Taking seriously James Baldwin's aside on sensuality in *The Fire Next Time*, which critiques how whiteness depends on fetishizations of black sexuality to define itself through the metaphor of bland white bread, in this chapter I interrogate the uncritical use of racialized bodies as spectacular markers of queerness.[3] I am interested in how (white) queer theory as a discipline relies on spectacularized blackness to understand itself and, in so doing, racializes the term "injury" by collapsing the distinction between race and racism. Here I mean "injury" in the sense of both a physical wound and psychic harm. The popular conflation of race and racism produces what I call "spectacular absence," which locates an eerie evacuation of discussions of systemic racism in the everywhere-thereness of race in mainstream queer theory. By filtering the aesthetics of trauma through the racialized body, spectacular absence demonstrates the contradictory logics of representing people of color as both the victims of oppressive power structures and the heroes of their perceived overturning, which serves the political purpose of denying the persistence of racial injustices. Race as theoretical fetish satisfies an institutional need for multicultural representation and theoretical diversity, while perpetuating colorblind logics that foreclose possibilities for justice by denying the existence of white supremacy. Ultimately, I want to gesture toward

alternative frames for sustained queer engagements with race, gender, and sexuality that address how racialized embodiment shapes and is shaped by interpersonal and institutional racism, refusing myths of a post-racial state.

Postwhite Injury: Shame on Me? Shame on You

Despite mounting evidence of homonormative complicity with and assimilation into the state, existent oppression along the lines of gender and sexuality fallaciously bolsters a victim narrative to displace white queer identity from the social and economic wages of whiteness. This disavowal of privilege produces white queers who performatively align themselves with a racialized "otherness." Recent successes of mainstream gay and lesbian organizing, marked by campaigns for so-called marriage equality, make all the more pressing the need for recuperating a sense of injured identity. As Chandan Reddy, Kenyon Farrow, and others have theorized, white queer politics hides white privilege behind legalistic analogies between race and sexuality, not to mention the violence of "Gay Is the New Black" mottos, predicated on the uncited co-opting of organizing strategies and language of the black freedom movement.[4] These insidious discursive strategies of disavowing privilege evade collective responsibility for addressing the ongoing unearned benefits of whiteness irrespective of class, gender, and sexuality. Neoliberal progress narratives easily let race slide into sexuality, as current demands for legal rights presume that the civil rights movement marked an end to racial injustice, making way for "colorblind" rhetorics that focus centrally on gender and sexuality. White gay and lesbian feelings of entitlement via their call for "gay and lesbian" to be added as an affirmative action category dangerously override a long history of racial injustices in the United States through a claim to marginalization along the lines of sexuality that erases the specific experiences of queer and trans people of color.[5] This disturbing move has a long history in white supremacy, and it points to the danger of single-issue identity politics, particularly in a historical moment that wields the language of antiracism to perpetuate global racial injustices. These uneven parallels between oppressions elide uneven relationships to privilege in order to idealize a fabricated and cohesive queer community. Scholars premise romantic notions of togetherness on the spectacular fetishization of the racialized body. I therefore argue that the entrenched whiteness of queer

theory coincides with its positioning of people of color as markers of queer sexuality across this antidisciplinary, ever disciplining, discipline—providing another example of whiteness depending on subordination and exploitation to gain meaning, as it racializes sexuality to claim injury.

According to colorblind liberals, the "race problem" was put to rest after civil rights legislation; they erect monuments for figures like John F. Kennedy as benevolent saviors, while ignoring the fact that civil rights movements were led by people of color, many of whom were murdered as a result of their activism. Yet civil rights rhetoric lives on, as white people cast themselves as the past's heroes of civil rights and today's "victims" of affirmative action. Through discourses of "cultural pathology," "victim blaming," and spectacular white dissociation from individualized acts of racism divorced from their institutional context, colorblindness ideology charges conversations about race with irrelevance if not full-blown racism. In a society that disavows the existence of systemic forms of racism and celebrates "post-identity" politics in which all identity is constructed and thus supposedly equal, multiculturalism's safe containment of certain kinds of societally sanctioned difference allows it to coexist alongside colorblindness without being perceived as contradictory; when the nation pushes an agenda of diverse representation, equal opportunity, and cultural (rather than racial) "pathology," then race no longer *matters*.

Colorblindness operates in some queer theory through a dangerous swapping of terms, namely, a substitution of sustained conversations about systemic racism with race as such, particularly spectacular racialized embodiment. This disavowal turns on three related points:

1. From "Gay Is the New Black" to the original Netflix television series *Orange Is the New Black*, white queer sexuality gains mainstream traction through spectacular representations of blackness, cashing in on the Hollywoodization of trauma and vulnerability born out of white supremacy by locating those traumas in the past rather than as ongoing and systematic.
2. In the academy, sites of injury are spectacularly racialized and mobilized for theoretical study. I call the sterilization of trauma through processes of displacement and metaphorization "utopian trauma," a kind of colorblind melodrama that characterizes white liberalism's politics of spectacularized suffering. I use the term "utopian" because colorblind discourse imagines racism as

no longer existent in institutionalized form; if we already live in a utopian world without racism, then folks disavow their implication in its mechanisms and refuse to work toward its eradication. When queer theory deploys race but absents discussions of racism, it consolidates a racialized queerness as identity through the fetish of post-racialized blackness, sutured to trauma.

3. Contemporary scholars tend to conflate identity with oppression and thus see the former as something that must be overcome, ultimately reproducing colorblind logics while making way for the triumphant progress narratives of (neo)liberalism.

In *On Making Sense: Queer Race Narratives of Intelligibility*, Ernesto Martínez critiques what he calls "antirealist" stances that understand racialized personhood as only and necessarily a form of subjection.[6] The equation of identity with oppression fallaciously collapses the distinction between race and racism, neglecting that shared histories of struggle generate vital embodied forms of meaning-making. The colorblind formulation of race *as racism* fails to consider that historical traumas do not delimit the social meanings of race. However, if scholars take race on its own terms as completely distinct from racism, which is to say, mobilize race *as metaphor*, discussions of race can opt not to address institutional racism and thus risk reasserting liberal-individualist understandings of race at best or white supremacist fantasies at worst. In other words, if race and racism remain entirely separate from each other, race may be mobilized in colorblind ways to divorce discussions of structural racism from racialized embodiment. Using race as an analytic without sustained considerations of the way racial regimes operate makes metaphor of daily lived reality, ultimately reproducing hegemonic racial discourse while claiming participation in antiracist practice merely by evoking race. Claims to antiracism without seriously engaging the operation of power satisfy an institutional need, mirroring larger patterns of the incorporation of antiracist language into racially inequitable systems.

The instrumentalizing of race to illuminate queerness enables white mobility through fantasy projections of raced immobility—pointing to the seemingly paradoxical logic whereby discourses of colorblindness and racialized trauma meet in the sphere of the post-racialized body. We can here expand Robyn Wiegman's notion of *prewhite* injury, which explains the tendency of white people to disown their privilege by fabricating roots in a nonwhite identity, to what I call "postwhite injury" in a queer

studies context. Wiegman discusses the white liberal tendency toward a kind of victimized whiteness born out of a class-based solidarity or historical patterns of immigration and racialization. This leads to fallacious claims to prewhite injury, in part motivated by affirmative action backlash, and set into motion by "the guise of an originary discursive blackness that simultaneously particularizes and dis-identifies with the political power of white skin." This "discursive blackness" is guilty of "participating in—indeed, actively forging—a counterwhiteness whose primary characteristic is its disaffiliation from white supremacist practices."[7] This strategic alignment of discursive blackness and deracinated whiteness reproduces white supremacy under the banner of progressivism.

Wiegman's articulation of claims to prewhite injury through discursive blackness operates powerfully in queer studies with a slightly altered timeline. Rather than returning to a past in which immigrants discriminated against on the basis of class or religion literally performed blackness in order to enter into the privileges of whiteness (recalling Al Jolson's infamous blackface performance in *The Jazz Singer*), white queer subjects perform "discursive blackness" in and through their entrance into queer sexual orientation or gender expression. This disavowal of privilege produces white queers who discursively align themselves with a racialized otherness fetishized as a counterhegemonic way of being in the world. Whiteness is deemed an apolitical, historically untethered anti-identity, while sites of injury, shame, debasement, and abjection appear through symbolic figurations of post-racialized blackness.

A U.S. culture of de facto segregation, which does not recognize itself as such, provides the conditions in which an illusory figuration of "otherness" can perpetuate itself even in supposedly radical fields of inquiry. Hiram Perez's critique of the 2003 Gay Shame Conference at the University of Michigan pinpoints this disturbing trend in queer studies. While Vaginal Davis and Mario Montez were present as performers, out of over forty invited participants, Perez was the only queer of color speaker in attendance. Thus, a "distressing racialized division of labor resulted at Gay Shame. White folks performed the intellectual labor while black and brown folks just plain performed, evidently constituting the spectacle of gay shame."[8] As Perez explains, the popular imagination links race and shame without explicitly addressing racism, silencing conversations about race with the pejorative charge of identity politics while simultaneously rethroning the white male subject as the implied "universal" term.

A Beautiful, Shameless Shame

The structural problem of turning toward race while evacuating conversations about racism encourages risky readings of recent scholarly production in queer theory. I examine Kathryn Bond Stockton's *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where "Black" Meets "Queer"* not to individualize an institutional problem but to analyze how such pernicious readings get consolidated through discursive technologies. In so doing, I gesture toward other modes of scholarship that play to the possibilities of work like Stockton's without reproducing its pitfalls. All writing, most certainly including my own, risks rehearsing what it seeks to critique, for situated experiences and power imbalances make our research a minefield of cultural implications—producing assemblages and excesses of meaning often unintended. To open doors rather than close them, I read Stockton against a black queer studies text that generatively engages race, abjection, and trauma, offering other theoretical modalities. Despite the dangers of trauma as spectacle, much recent work in critical race and sexuality studies generatively examines the systematic traumas of racism through the lens of shame and abjection. Darieck Scott's *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination* takes up black queerness through this lens while also looking to power and agency within these contested sites, refusing simple identification or correlation between blackness, queerness, and abjection. Against the racialized figure of absolute victimhood at the heart of spectacular absence, Scott's work offers a powerful antidote to the aestheticization of trauma—acknowledging the complex politics of interpellation, recognition, and loss.

Kathryn Bond Stockton's *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame* engages what she calls the "switchpoints" between blackness and queerness but, in so doing, reduces race to a literal wound on the skin, or to a sartorial layer. Thus Stockton's text exposes a number of larger theoretical trends: white queer theorists often divorce the material from the symbolic in such a way that white Continental philosophers theorize while critical race theorists produce other kinds of knowledges, further consigning black cultural production to the realm of representation *as replication* of existing social realities. Stockton's book, for example, unpacks a rich archive of African American novels, such as James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, with predominantly white theorists. While Baldwin's and Morrison's canonical theorizations of race might have produced a

more generative analysis, this theoretical lens reproduces whiteness as an unmarked and universally applicable framework for interpretation. To make work "new," white queer scholars must often willfully ignore and thus fail to cite the critical race theorists with whom their work would be most productively engaged, defaulting to white Continental philosophers as a critical toolbox. Stockton curiously omits the interlocutors with which her text might be best positioned. She briefly cites and then dismisses bell hooks and Frantz Fanon, in addition to largely overlooking the thriving existence of black queer studies as a field, to move into an apparently innovative exchange of black and queer (distinct from black queer) abjections. While Darieck Scott's *Extravagant Abjection* also explores these intersections, he does so with foundations in African American literary and critical theory. He foregrounds social justice movements and histories as well as traumatic encounters with white supremacy. Stockton's book is absent of such context and even gestures toward the word *oppression* in quotation marks—an unexplained evocation and dismissal of institutionalized power in favor of "the melodramatic nature of the prejudice against blacks and queers."[9] Perhaps it is this ironic gesture toward racism that enables shame to shine in all its debasements.

Discursive and visual assaults abound in *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame*, forging newness through jarring juxtapositions—for example, the widely circulated photograph of Emmett Till's open-casket funeral wedged between whole pages devoted to Eldridge Cleaver and Norman Mailer, writers not by any stretch of the imagination sympathetic to black queer struggles. *Pulp Fiction*, *Fight Club*, and Robert Mapplethorpe sidle up to Stockton's take on black queerness. The cover of Stockton's book replicates this discursive violence by featuring J B Higgins's photograph *André*, which recalls Mapplethorpe's highly debated series, as a fetishized black man's body is poised in a fetal position with his face hidden from the camera. Scott's text features a more complex engagement with scopic regimes. His cover, Glenn Ligon's silkscreen portrait series *Figure*, brings together a nuanced imagistic repetition and layering of black abjection that engages the political act of looking as the site not just of interpellation but also of opposition and disidentification. I highlight these images not to speculate on the degree of decision and agency afforded the authors by each press in cover design (although it interests me that the identity investments of the artist chosen for each cover seem to closely align with those of the author) but to visually register the effects each text produces within its pages. The pitfalls of Stockton's work reflect a

larger trend within queer theory of dangerously absenting racism from conversations about race.

In *Extravagant Abjection*, Scott also reads the figure of the black male bottom; however, his interest lies in the kinds of "counterintuitive power" found in seemingly powerless spaces of abjection.[10] It is not, as Stockton writes, the "wound of black skin" but the wounds inflicted by white supremacy that partially animate his claims.[11] In challenging work that proclaims the past as obstacle, Scott thinks through what generative potential might be found in "racialization-through-abjection as historical legacy, as ancestral experience."[12] Scott rereads Fanon against criticisms that suggest his work radically, even messianically, dismisses the past, arguing that for Fanon, history can be a vital resource. Stockton, in contrast, pathologizes memory by describing its "AIDS-like transmission."[13] In fact, the text drapes material realities in uneasy metaphors of AIDS, rape, mass incarceration, and slavery: for example, in her description of the "white man's slave narrative," the generic conventions of which she finds in Baldwin's novel *Giovanni's Room* and David Fincher's film *Fight Club*. Just in case this genre seems unclear or off-putting, she defines the white man's slave narrative as one "in which the labor-against-one's-will (one's slave labor) is mental labor and one is captive to something (or someone) in the prison of one's mind."[14] This definition risks reducing historical realities of slavery and mass incarceration to white spectacles of suffering.

Stockton's discussion of Quentin Tarantino's film *Pulp Fiction* casts as "strangely funny" the rape of Marsellus Wallace (Ving Rhames) by two white men before Butch (Bruce Willis) saves him.[15] Stockton admits this response to the scene of interracial rape and its subsequent lynching scene without weighing the historical script that animates such a ritual: the myth of the black male rapist/pure white woman, with its attendant castration rite. Tarantino's jumbled sensationalistic identity politics play and historical revisionism of white supremacist sexual violence condones a critical blind spot—an absenting of history—that enables Stockton's freedom to see the scene with fresh eyes and thus symbolically mobilize traumatic lived experiences of other people's social realities. Slavery's reduction to metaphor reappears later in the text as "slavery to the Ikea nest." What's more, race as clothing, or the "switchpoint between cloth and skin," rehearses multicultural paradigms of difference as additive.[16] Since race can be worn like a garment, the entire text cloaks material realities in postmodern play: depoliticizing the switchpoints between apparently white queerness and black bottomness. Institutional structures of

racial capitalism slide into individualized sexual acts, as in the link drawn between the "stigma of people who live at the bottom of an economic scale" and "queer anality" (68).[17] Stockton's campy reading of race, then, which she terms "Dark Camp," adheres to Susan Sontag's controversial definition of camp as about surface and shame, with blackness illuminating the particular shames of white queerness.

Scott's work begins elsewhere. In tracing the psychosexual dimensions of racism via Fanon, he notes a taken-for-granted assumption of the field of black queer studies—race as sexualized, and sexuality as racialized. While Stockton claims to chart new territory by examining these switchpoints, Scott understands them as "relentless [and] repetitive." This "vertiginous doubly queer" positionality that Scott argues obsessively links queerness to the spectacular "imago of the black body" rests on the hypervisible, hyperbolic link between blackness and abjection in Eurocentric fantasy structures. Scott does not stop at how the white gaze fixes meaning on the epidermis, a colonialist projection of history and being that Fanon famously describes in "The Fact of Blackness." Instead, he theorizes the "interarticulated temporality" of death-in-life that refuses defeat.[18] Against a ubiquitous politics of hopelessness in a moment guided by a theoretical obsession with death, Scott looks to possibilities for decolonizing dominant knowledge formations. Rather than bolstering the imagination of a post-racial present, Scott finds Fanon's oft-cited and co-opted words—"I am not a prisoner of history"—to manifest new visions of collectivity born out of struggle.[19]

The Cult of Negation

In this essay I have argued that while the elision of considerations of black studies from (white) queer theory has been well documented, queer theory at the same time spectacularly represents racialized embodiment as a way into its stylized origin narrative of trauma. This fetishization of blackness produces its own logics of disavowal, reinforcing hegemonic understandings of race by articulating embodiment in post-racial terms. Whiteness, then, goes unacknowledged and unexamined, while uncritically reproducing multiculturalist logics that mainstream visibility can smooth over ongoing injustices, precisely by exploiting the hypervisibility of black bodies for a white queer politics of injury. As another example of the racialization of white queerness, I would like to compare how the HIV/AIDS epidemic is taken up by Stockton in *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful*

Shame and by Lee Edelman in *No Future*, an exemplary text of what I shorthand as the cult of negation in queer theory, which takes as its motto "fuck the future" and embraces a politics of negativity that sees any vision of collectivity as sentimental fantasy.[20] Edelman's rejection of what he calls "reproductive futurism" locates queerness "as the place of the social order's death drive." Edelman's portmanteau, the *sinthomosexual*, replaces action and activism with the "act of repudiating the social."[21] While Stockton immediately sutures the black body to HIV/AIDS, stating that the AIDS crisis "bound black and gay communities, largely at the level of public language," discursively collapsing the distinct signifiers black and gay, Edelman's text, for all its focus on antirelationality and death, remains curiously silent on this historical juncture (mentioning AIDS only twice)—as silent as whiteness is absent from the way he positions his argument.[22]

In the space of a footnote, Edelman predicts and preempts the critiques scholars will lodge against him for his "apolitical formalism" as well as "bourgeois privilege," on which he has since rightly been called out.[23] Rather than recapitulate those important critiques of the unnamed white privilege shaping his arguments, what interests me here is that Edelman's rant against the promise of the future depends on whiteness as an unmarked, apolitical category. Whiteness hides as invisible and depoliticized, and so too does the historical context out of which his argument gains traction. Two traumas appear in their disappearance from the text, then: the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and whiteness as an identity defined through subjection and negation. The erasure of failed whiteness and loss at the heart of the project is individualized, instead of motivating collective responsibility for the broader networks in which Edelman articulates his distrust of the future: namely, the historical outbreak of the HIV/AIDS crisis and the medical industrial complex. Ultimately, Edelman's *No Future* enacts a politics of disavowal that erases the historical stage on which it was thought. This queer embrace of antirelationality over and against alternative epistemologies of collective social life mirrors larger theoretical moves across disciplinary boundaries. While Edelman wants us to "refuse the insistence of hope itself as affirmation," his conception of queerness as the undoing of identity negates both hope and history, ending in a bleak place where only the most privileged of queers would thrive: a place of absolute refusal of the social and the vital forms of collective knowledge found there. Edelman thus reads "access to a livable social form" as unquestioningly liberal, and all progress at its behest.[24]

As much as Edelman would like to see his project as not investing in the political stakes he finds futile, his disinvestment in the political is itself, of course, deeply political. These embraces of radical negativity foreclose taking seriously the fact that aggrieved communities strategically negotiate oppressive power structures without becoming trapped inside them; in the wake of daily traumas, possibilities exist not for self-annihilation but for imagining other ways to be. *No Future* cannot articulate trauma because that trauma has been spectacularly sutured to the blackness of which textual absence marks a disavowal of politics.

We need something more, not something that smells like teen angst but that smacks of utopia, something to rub against the grain of the cult of negation, which turns away from the social and embraces death as a supposedly radical form of rejection. Collective forms of annihilation morph into rhetorics of individual choice, as queers negate a politics of community through the decision to opt out of reproductive futurism. This move discards historical legacies and current manifestations of grassroots mobilizations for social change. However, the "utopian political aspirations and desires" of the black radical tradition put pressure on a privileged politics of negativity that disavows the historical traumas that enabled its articulation, reinforced by the institutionalized "post" that evokes competing narratives of moving beyond historical injustices and of feeling hopeless in the face of abstract accounts of power as totalizing—accounts critiqued by black feminist and black radical thinkers such as Patricia Hill Collins, Patricia Williams, and Cedric Robinson.[25] When queer theory sterilizes sites of injury by displacing material realities of trauma from their representation, lived experiences morph into post-racialized metaphors that preempt possibilities for justice.

Cosubject Seductions

To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger.
—JAMES BALDWIN, *The Fire Next Time*

The parenthetical whiteness that haunts mainstream queer theory must find other ways of punctuating its own traumatic disavowals, returning us to that "fixed star" of fabricated blackness illuminating the violence of white identity production. Baldwin suggests that the ongoing process of actively disinvesting in the privileges of whiteness in a white supremacist society requires looking to other models of subjectivity that do not require

symbolic and material subjugations. If we listen closely rather than presuming to know, our research investments can tell us much about alternative ways of being in the world. Yet, as semioticians and cultural studies scholars, queer theorists often read the body as text and, in so doing, turn subject into object—making the "object" of analysis a product of ideology rather than a complex subject not wholly determined by but also determining the social order. At the same time, as Roderick Ferguson reminds us, the specific histories of queers of color produce a privileged optic on power, but we should be careful not to fetishize that positionality.[26] The spectacular absences of queer theory take that argument to its extreme, where fetishized blackness stands in for claims to white injury. We must move from object to subject lessons, refusing simplistic accounts of structural oppression that render identities wholly victimized and/or heroic; we must turn to archives that articulate more complex engagements with power.

Transformative potential for the politicized love Baldwin describes in *The Fire Next Time* has to be born out of grappling with legacies the past leaves on the present; these legacies are traumatic but also provide the raw material for active hope, a hope informed not by sleek political campaigns but by community-based practices of survival and resilience in the face of dire social conditions. No mere pipe dreams, the practice of self-introspection and love, the development of a critical social consciousness, and the eradication of heteropatriarchal white supremacy remain vital forms of collective mobilization and struggle. However, in the so-called post–civil rights era scholars often talk about utopian aspirations and social justice in the same way—as redundancies or as sentimental fantasies informed by naïve investments in change. Rather than perceiving the persistence of institutionalized inequity, denial of rights, mass incarceration, police murder, and other forms of state violence as signs of defeat, cultural workers continue to posit concrete visions of transformation. While activist-oriented scholarship risks performatively enacting rather than actively investing in justice,[27] queer theorists would do better not to abandon the work altogether but to ask: who are my interlocutors?

Supposed "objects" of research have always rejected their objectification. While Della Pollock warns that reformulating "the *subject and object of research as cosubjects* could mean that the pleasure of the fetishistic gaze is just doubled," I follow Pollock in advocating for an immersive performance ethnography in which the researcher's subjectivity becomes open to the transformative possibilities embedded in the creative process.[28] Let us shift from object lessons to what we might call *cosubject seductions*—seduction intentionally evoking both the dangers and pleasures of how our research can transform us and make necessary that we tell different stories about ourselves and each other in the process. Against the neoliberal rhetoric of newness, which licenses appropriation and disavowal, scholars, organizers, and radical pedagogues must be open to the porous and messy echoes of intellectual exchange. From community-based research to literary studies, the subjects who speak to us from the page, the stage, or the spaces in which we move do not need our ears as much as we need to practice the art of hearing. Let us take our cue from E. Patrick Johnson in restoring agency to the scene of performance, developing "queer epistemologies . . . from a writerly place called home."[29] Performance scholarship that theorizes the "reflective and reflexive nature of performance" as well as embodied writing as theory generates alternative ways of assembling our existence through language without purporting to transcend our own social location when we enter the wor(l)ds of our research.[30] As D. Soyini Madison writes in "That Was My Occupation: Oral Narrative, Performance, and Black Feminist Thought," listening closely to the way research subjects tell their own stories, theorize their own lives, and construct their own versions of reality challenges "the great imbalance of scholarly work that ignores black indigenous and intellectual traditions as critical and theoretical constructs that can guide and determine the analysis of texts and performances."[31] This is not to say a cosubject exchange will not involve mediated affect, performance, opacity, projection, and lost chains of signification, but it does suggest that if we really want to hear, we must listen to theorist/practitioners operating in contestation of master narratives of being and nation that evade histories and realities of racial injustice—constructing alternative archives that refuse to separate theory and literature, understanding literature *as theory*. Moving away from representational models of literature, texts actively make meaning and in so doing do not simply represent but transform social realities.

In refusing to separate oral history, performance, and literature from theory, scholars also need to reject the false binary between critical race theory and critical theory, which further reinforces the material/symbolic divide.[32] Challenging dominant forms of legibility, cosubject seductions draw from embodied identities and histories as vital forces for making meaning and forming coalition. Against the post-racialized suturing of queerness to shame, abjection, and death, we must extend the language for refusing to sever our greatest pains from our deepest pleasures. The

pains of life forge new pathways for transformation by the kind of political love James Baldwin described half a century ago. As Toni Morrison cautions in *Playing in the Dark*: "The subject of the dream is the dreamer."[33] Not too queer to hope, I go in search of (spectacular absence's) shadows.

NOTES

James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time *(New York: Vintage, [1963] 1993).*

1. For (not unproblematic in their own right) complications of this misreading, see Henry Louis Gates Jr., "The Fire Last Time," *New Republic* 206, no. 22 (1992): 37–43; and Bill Lyne, "God's Black Revolutionary Mouth: James Baldwin's Black Radicalism," *Science and Society* 74, no. 1 (2010): 12–36. While Lyne reads one of Baldwin's most famous passages ("Do I really *want* to be integrated into a burning house?") as challenging the entrenched mainstream liberalism of his time with a black radical understanding of U.S. racial capitalism, he also argues that Baldwin "chooses colorblind love over racial solidarity with 'I love a few people and they love me and some of them are white, and isn't love more important than color?'" (26). Yet, since Baldwin's conception of love seeks to redistribute power through structural change predicated on social transformation, I would question the shaky foundations on which this claim of colorblind liberal humanism rests.

2. Baldwin, *Fire Next Time*, 9, 41, 43, 42.

3. For some examples of people of color being used to figure queerness, see the cases of Willie Horton, as Marlon Ross describes in "Beyond the Closet as Raceless Paradigm," in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, eds. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Vaginal Davis, Mario Montez, and Kiko, as Hiram Perez describes in "You Can Have My Brown Body and Eat It, Too!" in *What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?*, eds. David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz, special issue, *Social Text* 84–85 (2005): 171–92; and of Ed in Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*, as Siobhan Somerville describes in *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

4. See Chandan Reddy, *Freedom with Violence* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); and Kenyon Farrow, "Is Gay Marriage Anti-Black?" *KenyonFarrow.com*, March 5, 2004, accessed June 26, 2014, http://kenyonfarrow.com/2005/06/14/is-gay-marriage-anti-black/. See also Cathy Cohen's foundational essay, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3 (1997): 437–65.

5. For a summary of white claims to affirmative action along the lines of sexuality, see Ian Barnard's *Queer Race: Cultural Interventions in the Racial Politics of Queer Theory* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

6. Ernesto Javier Martínez, *On Making Sense: Queer Race Narratives of Intelligibility* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 8.

7. Robyn Wiegman, "Whiteness Studies and the Paradox of Particularity," *boundary 2* 26, no. 3 (1999): 123, 119.

8. Perez, "You Can Have My Brown Body," 172.

9. Kathryn Bond Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where "Black" Meets "Queer"* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 216.

10. Darieck Scott, *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 9.

11. Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame*, 214.

12. Scott, *Extravagant Abjection*, 6.

13. Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame*, 5.

14. Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame*, 153.

15. Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame*, 114.

16. Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame*, 220, 68. For more on the concept of "additive race," see Amanda Phillips and Alison Reed, "Additive Race: Colorblind Discourses of Realism in Performance Capture Technologies" in *Performance Art and Digital Media*, ed. Michael Nitsche, special issue, *Digital Creativity* 24, no. 1 (2013): 1–15.

17. Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame*, 68.

18. Scott, *Extravagant Abjection*, 7, 8, 26.

19. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove, [1952] 1967), 229.

20. See Lee Edelman in the 2006 *PMLA* forum on the antirelational turn in queer theory: "Antagonism, Negativity, and the Subject of Queer Theory," *PMLA* 121, no. 3 (2006): 821–22.

21. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 3, 101.

22. Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame*, 73; Edelman mentions AIDS in *No Future* on pages 19 and 75.

23. Edelman, *No Future*, 157.

24. Edelman, *No Future*, 4, 104.

25. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

26. As Roderick Ferguson explains, a "postnationalist American studies informed by women of color and queer of color social formations does not at all mean the idealization of the woman of color and queer of color subject" (*Aberrations in Black*, 143).

27. See Robyn Wiegman's *Object Lessons* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), which critiques the way a politics of desiring justice animates disciplines such that scholarship becomes an end in and of itself. See also Sara Ahmed, "Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism," *borderlands* (e-journal) 3, no. 2 (2004): 1–59, on the "non-performativity" of white claims to antiracism.

28. Della Pollock, "Marking New Directions in Performance Ethnography," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (October 2006): 326.

29. E. Patrick Johnson, "Queer Epistemologies: Theorizing the Self from a Writerly Place Called Home," *Biography* 34, no. 3 (2011): 429.

30. Johnson, "Queer Epistemologies," 429. See also Della Pollock, "Performing Writing," in *The Ends of Performance*, eds. Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane, 73–103 (New York: New York University Press, 1998); and D. Soyini Madison, "Performing Theory/Embodied Writing," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (April 1999): 107–24.

31. D. Soyini Madison, "That Was My Occupation: Oral Narrative, Performance, and Black Feminist Thought," in *Exceptional Spaces: Essays in Performance and History*, ed. Della Pollock, 319–42 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 322.

32. Deborah McDowell critiques the racialized divide between practice/theory—such that white women theorize, and black women practice, recapitulating the historical overembodiment of people of color and again "making theory a province shared between men"; see *"The Changing Same": Black Women's Literature, Criticism, and Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 165. Ultimately, McDowell asserts that rather than claiming access to the realm of theory, an even better task "is to resist the theory/practice dichotomy, which is too broad, abbreviated, and compromised by hedging definitions to capture the range and diversity of contemporary critical projects, including the range and diversity of the contributions of black women to that discourse" (167).

33. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 17.

3

Troubling the Waters

Mobilizing a Trans Analytic*

KAI M. GREEN

IN 2012, I DECIDED TO TRANSITION from female to male with the aid of hormones. This occurred after a year of field research for my dissertation in South Central Los Angeles. Prior to my transition I was well known as a black lesbian activist; thus, all of my relationships were affected. Where did I belong now? As a black transgender man, I knew that my gender troubled many black lesbian and gay community spaces. I became less legible as a body fit for residence in black lesbian spaces. And while I was never formally asked not to partake in black lesbian events, I felt that my black transgender male presence disturbed certain members of the community. For example, an organizer of an annual black lesbian retreat that I had previously attended said that I could continue to attend the retreat after having top surgery, as long as I did not take off my shirt. Not having breasts was more of my *man* side, and that space was for *women* who loved other *women*. I decided not to attend the retreat, believing that the organizer's policing of my body in that space was a missed opportunity for this community to grow and be challenged. I was asked to conform to a narrow notion of "lesbian" rather than have a community respond to the varied ways a person might exceed the category altogether.

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