

General Editors' Introduction

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Grand theory travels. It circulates, colonizes, and globalizes. By contrast, minority discourses, subaltern voices, and historical formations outside the metropole are routinely “conscripted to the realm of the particular” because, Alexander Weheliye reminds us, “minority discourses seemingly cannot inhabit the space of proper theoretical reflection” (2014: 19, 6). Instead, these particularities are consumed and discharged in the production of “Theory” with a capital *T* that purports to abstract, despecify, and ultimately to deracinate. Of course, the universal forms such theoretical knowledges create turn out to be screens for a particular conception of the human—that is, (masculinist, Eurocentric, white, heteropatriarchal, able-ist, bourgeois) “Man”—which, as Sylvia Wynter writes, “over-represents itself as if it were the human itself” (2003: 260).

To what extent does transgender theorizing in the academy circulate as grand theory, subtended and overseen by the Man and all his baggage, and to what extent does it participate in critical minoritarian discourse and contribute to the livability of lives ranked less worthy of living according to Man’s mis-measures? This is the tension that frames this issue of *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, “The Issue of Blackness,” guest edited by Treva Ellison, Kai M. Green, C. Riley Snorton, and Matt Richardson.

These editors offer blunt provocations to the field of transgender studies and its practitioners: why, in its processes of institutionalization and canon formation, has transgender studies, another “theory in the flesh,” been so remiss in acknowledging women-of-color feminisms—black feminisms in particular—as a necessary foundation for the field’s own critical explorations of embodied difference? Why has it been so complicit in provincializing that body of work, replicating privileged notions of the human as Man, or celebrating in- or post-human figurations of embodied being that can prematurely foreclose humanness to the very beings routinely denied access to it? In what ways does transgender as a mode of analysis, point of theoretical departure, or object of study, in their words,

“always already depend on an abstraction of the racialization of space as foundational to the production of gender and sexuality?” And most pointedly, in a historical moment when images of black trans women saturate mass media as never before, yet the precarity of black transfeminine lives has rarely been greater, how might the field of transgender studies be building its relevance and accruing its cultural capital on such black women’s backs and using their lives “as a springboard to move toward other things, presumably white things,” while doing precious little to interrupt the power that renders black lives “killable and cageable”? As the editors note, they’ve “got issues” with “the issue of blackness” in trans* studies. Their voices, and the work of the scholars they have selected for inclusion in this issue of *TSQ*, do the vital work of centering all these issues for any further elaborations of the field.

Somewhat unexpectedly, this issue of *TSQ* also dramatizes the kinships and estrangements of trans* studies and queer studies through the lens of blackness. While it is certainly true that trans* studies has worked to hold queer studies accountable for its unstated cis-centrism and its privileging of sexuality over the forms of gendered embodiment that allow sexuality to “take shape and find its aim” (Stryker 2004: 212), it is nonetheless also true that a field of black queer studies has taken shape that provides an intellectual home for black scholars of trans* phenomena that such scholars have yet to fully seek or claim (or perhaps desire) within trans* studies. When queer theory was first becoming institutionalized in the academy a quarter century ago, it was widely perceived as a white affair, presided over by literary scholars of the Anglo-American canon working at elite private universities. And yet, within a few years, queer-of-color scholars were offering countergenealogies of the field that displayed its other roots, decentered its presumptive whiteness, and grounded its work in different problematics. Transgender studies is at just such a crossroads today. Work such as that collected in this issue can perhaps begin to demonstrate that blackness, rather than being a “new direction” of concern for the field, has in fact always already been a constitutive if rarely acknowledged element in the field’s formation and articulation.

As the activist Lourdes Ashley Hunter, the national director of the Trans Women of Color Collective, notes, “Every breath a black trans person takes is an act of revolution” (2015). Each such breath is a radical instance of the persistence of black being, of black mattering and continuing to matter as black, and of the need for and the possibility of deep structural changes that are conducive to black life. How can transgender studies as a field be more inspired by such sentiments so that it conspires with them: literally breathing in, in order to breathe with, a revolutionary black politics? Scholarly attention to the transversal relationality of

blackness to transness within the dominant system of social organization we all live within, which ranks us all according to cultural fantasies about the meaning of our flesh, must surely be part of any such transformative political project.

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