

# BLACK/QUEER/DIASPORA AT THE CURRENT CONJUNCTURE

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Given this queer space we find ourselves inhabiting currently—one in which the past and our futures seem to demand so much of our now: *What sort of moment is this* in which to pose the question of black/queer/diasporas? Following Stuart Hall, who argues that “moments are always conjunctural . . . have their historical specificity; and . . . always exhibit similarities and continuities with the other moments in which we pose a question like this,” this introductory essay proposes a genealogy of black/queer/diaspora work.<sup>1</sup> This work emerges from radical black and Third World lesbian feminist art, activism, and scholarship, and builds on the scholarly and programmatic practice of black queer studies and queer of color critique.

Black/queer/diaspora work emerges in a moment in which the terms *black*, *queer*, and *diaspora*—between the porous strokes I have added here—have already begun to be elaborated beyond the metaphors and concepts offered by any one of these constituencies, and beyond false dichotomies of essentialism and anti-essentialism. Such collections as E. Patrick Johnson and Mae Henderson’s *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, Jennifer DeVere Brody and Dwight McBride’s *Callaloo* special issue “Plum Nelly: New Essays in Black Queer Studies,” and a number of other works have already drawn on the lineages of black queer studies, which I turn to in subsequent sections. “Plum Nelly” and *Black Queer Studies* each emerge in different ways from the Black Queer Studies in the Millennium conference, organized by Johnson at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2000.<sup>2</sup> Roderick Ferguson’s *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color*

*Critique* is the first monograph to name and provide a thoroughgoing analysis and example of queer of color critique.<sup>3</sup> *Black Queer Studies* more or less followed the conference's parameters, focusing on the black United States, with Rinaldo Walcott's contribution pushing at these borders from "(a) queer place in diaspora" (Canada). However, Michelle Wright and Antje Schuhmann's collection *Blackness and Sexualities*—which emerges from the Europe-based Collegium of African-American Research and was published in Germany—broadens the geographic and thematic scopes of the black queer studies project to Europe (and Cuba), as well as to themes that are not strictly LGBTQ.<sup>4</sup> Each of these works, characterized by insurgent rereadings of classical or otherwise well-known texts, reclamation of intellectual traditions, and writing into the scholarly record, subjects otherwise relegated to the margins, at once cleared and claimed space.<sup>5</sup> We are fortunate to coinhabit this space today. Certainly, this is not to say that black queer theory and queer of color critique are closed discourses—quite the contrary. Nor do I want to give the impression that queer theory has unproblematically incorporated the contributions of this work or that black studies, diaspora studies, or any area or regional studies have welcomed queer thinking, themes, or persons into the center of their research agenda.<sup>6</sup>

Recently Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's *GLQ* article "Black Atlantic/Queer Atlantic" has offered a rethinking of metaphors of ships, oceans as bodies, and performative bodies (offered by Paul Gilroy, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, and Judith Butler, respectively), arguing that the black queer Atlantic "churns differently . . . diffracting meanings . . . (leaving Black queer diasporic subjects) 'whole and broken' . . . brutalized and feeling . . . divided from other diasporic migrants and linked to them."<sup>7</sup> Apropos of queer of color critique, José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* follows his earlier work's commitment to creating alternative visions of performance and performativity, read through a lens constituted in and through cultural theory that affirms futurity, *with a difference*.<sup>8</sup> Although queer of color critique and black queer studies are interdisciplinary projects, they both tend to lean heavily toward humanities and performance scholarship. History and the social sciences must not abdicate their responsibility, however. The literary critic Hortense Spillers has already convinced us of the consequences of negated kinship, and the importance of "first order naming" (which she asserts emerges from historical and social science research).<sup>9</sup> As more individuals trained in social science methodologies contribute to this work, we are beginning to see new possibilities.<sup>10</sup> *Say It Loud: I'm Black and I'm Proud: Black Pride Survey 2000*, Gloria Wekker's *Politics of Passion*, Critchlow's *Buller Men and Batty Bwoys*, Murray's *Opacity*, my own work, and Juan Battle's Social Justice Sexuality Project now

under way have begun to provide ethnographic dimensions and empirical data to black queer studies and queer of color critique.<sup>11</sup> This brings us closer to providing *verbs* to animate the continuation of the black radical intellectual tradition, as well as *a name*—or, more precisely, a number of names—*lesbian, transgender, bisexual, gay, batty bwoy, masisi, bulldagger, two-spirited, maricón, same gender loving, buller, zami, mati working, dress-up girls, bois, butches, femme* or *butch queen, gender insurgent, marimacha, branché, homosexual, sexual minority, men, women*, etcetera . . . of *Africa(n descent)* call ourselves. Of course, some eschew explicit naming, preferring to live their verbs, as for example, simply *am, is, are, been, being, be*—or *interrupt, invent, push, question, refuse, serve, or shade*, in some cases.

While commentators have astutely cited the Black Queer Studies in the Millennium conference as a watershed moment that provided both a platform for the staging of black queer studies and a foundation for various other related pursuits like collaboration and mentoring that support the work of black queer studies and black queer scholars and artists, an event that preceded it by five years is just as significant yet has garnered little critical attention.<sup>12</sup> The Black Nations/Queer Nations conference—documented by Shari Frilot in a film by the same name—was concerned not only with raising questions about the study of black LGBT two-spirit and same-gender-loving black people, across nationality, class, ability, gender, and sexual expression but also with expanding capacity toward critically engaging political organizing.<sup>13</sup> Black Nations/Queer Nations is thus also an important model for engaged projects, which, like black/queer/diaspora work, attempts to deepen and broaden the ineluctable connections between scholarship, activism, and artistry. Even a cursory look at the foundational works of black queer studies—anthologies, broadsides, chapbooks, poetry collections, and other nonacademic intellectual and political work—demonstrates this connection.<sup>14</sup> Nurturing these connections is a crucial part of ensuring that scholarship is grounded in, and in some ways accountable to, lived experience and nonacademic intellectual tradition.

Black queer studies and queer of color critique is practiced not only in scholarly publication but also in teaching on the graduate and undergraduate levels; in panels offered at local and international conferences and symposia, for example, by the Black Sexual Economies Reading Group and the Black Gay Research Group; in public education work, such as the Caribbean International Resources Network board; in leadership in professional academic organizations; in productive mentoring relationships formed with senior scholars; in crucial peer support; in collaborative teaching and research; and in activist scholarship by

independent cultural workers like Herukhuti (*Conjuring Black Funk: Notes on Culture, Sexuality, and Spirituality*).<sup>15</sup> In addition, several critical archival and cultural projects and political organizations, as well as personal connections between individuals whose networks and texts stretch across the globe, instantiate a more widespread and democratic circuit of *black queer here and there*.<sup>16</sup>

I have not undertaken the task of this special issue to rehearse the arguments of any of the fine works, events, or sites of collaboration or contestation I have just invoked. My aim here is to situate the sterling contributions to this volume vis-à-vis *conjunctural moments* in these interlocking discourses and practices and to welcome others into this dynamic conversation.<sup>17</sup> By conjunctural moments, I mean to index the temporal space in which the articulation (or accretion or collision) of sometimes related and other times opposing or unrelated discourses, practices, or trajectories reshape, reimagine, or alter our view of the present. At conjunctural moments, “new” ideas and practices emerge and take on added significance precisely because of this articulation (or perhaps novel rearticulation, or “mash-up”). The conjunctural moment I am meditating on here, for example, is constituted not only by the maturation of black and queer of color studies literatures and the current existential crisis of queer studies, but also by the recognition of the presence of the transnational in every moment, even “at home,” and the rapidity of popular forms of (uneven) global exchange.

Black/queer/diaspora is an organic project of multivalent and multiscalar reclamation, revisioning, and futurity (yes, all at once). Hall, quoting Antonio Gramsci, implores us to “turn violently” toward the unvarnished “contradictory ground of the current conjuncture.”<sup>18</sup> Still, in this current moment of stark, murderous contradiction, we are also compelled to envision and produce work that is deeply humane and capacious, as well as analyses that not only reflect “real life” on the ground but also speculate on liberatory models from the past and project our imaginations forward, to possible futures.

In this essay, I argue for the recognition of black/queer/diaspora as at once a caution, a theory, and (most centrally) *a work*. Rather than attempt to increase the territory of queer theory or black queer studies, the aspiration here is to push forward the work, in different sites and forms. The creation of another “studies” is not my aim here. My objective for this essay is to secure neither LGBT rights nor academic office space—although both are necessary and even honorable in many circumstances. This accent on work follows Audre Lorde’s “fixing” query “Are you doing your work?,” which is itself one way to recognize the black radical tradition of holding paid and unpaid intellectual, artistic, and activist labor as a serious,

necessary undertaking.<sup>19</sup> Here I hope to begin to sketch the parameters of black/queer/diaspora ethics, aesthetics, and methodologies by contextualizing the works in this special issue. These are “unsettled” questions in an ongoing conversation. To follow the routes of black/queer/diaspora is to interrogate dynamic, unsettled subjects whose bodies, desires, and texts *move*. Our methodologies must therefore be supple, our communication polyglot, our outlook wide and open, and our analysis nuanced. This multiple, luxuriant, and subtle approach is intellectually generative (if not also a bit unsettling for some). In any case, we find that this is more useful and more pleasurable than attempting to fit complex, contradictory, and perhaps fugitive experiences and imaginings into the staid desensitized and sterile boxes of “race,” “sexuality,” “nationality,” discipline, or genre. Of course, Wahneema Lubiano has already made it clear: “Black queer studies serves as a space in which one might experience freedom in the form of pedagogical and epistemological pleasure.”<sup>20</sup>

Rather than trace an intellectual lineage in which metaphors of trees, roots, or even complex intersecting strands of heterosexually reproduced DNA are organized in an orderly, temporally rigid trajectory, I offer here an organization of the genealogical matrix of the present moment that is necessarily and deliberately promiscuous. As Jasbir Puar has argued, “Queer times require even queerer modalities of thought, analysis, creativity, and expression.”<sup>21</sup> Here we take up the challenge of these queer times by claiming intellectual kin where we find them; speaking to, with, and through discourses appropriate to the conversation rather than those merely expected by convention, while reaching back to foundational works and projecting our imaginations forward.

And of course, yes. Despite popular and scholarly representations of black people as parochial, we live in the world—all of it. And wherever we are. Moreover, *diaspora* is not a place somewhere “out of Africa” seen only from the United States and England, and only by academics. Black folks participate in (uneven) global exchanges, whether with our entire body, or just a mouse-click, page turn, lifting of a fork, or remittance to a romantic fantasy abroad or family at home. The central theme of my own current research project on black queer sociality and movement is that currently, even *in place*, black queer subjects can hardly escape the flow of diasporic black desires. This is evident in neighborhoods where blackness is accented or differentiated by nation or language block to block, and in seatmates on a flight—one “going home” and the other “going down” or “over there” on vacation. It is evident in cyberspace between Twitterers, Orkutites, Facebookers, and Tumblrs, who trade in porn, gossip, sweet and/or nasty nothings, and urgent political news, and can be seen among individ-

uals who will never leave their own town but who nevertheless powerfully imagine their own black/queer “other.”

Black diaspora is at once about particular *locations* (actual and imagined); *roots/uprooting* (principally understood as *from* Africa, but just as much *to* and *within* Africa, in other cases); and *routes* that bodies, ideas, and texts travel. By diaspora, we refer to these conditions of movement and emplacement, and to processes of (dis)identification, but also to relationality, as Jacqueline Nassy Brown points out.<sup>22</sup> Commentators often miss this vital piece. The ways in which African (descended) groups (dis)identify as Black (or “black”), Afro-hyphenated, Kreyòl, Creole, mixed, or other designations do not occur in a vacuum but are conditioned by particularities of place, in relation to discourses and practices within other places. Witness, for example, the Dominican Republic’s official sublimation of the *negro* racial category, in response to its inevitable intimate, Haiti; or Atlantic Coast Nicaraguans’ black (and/or) Creole identity, marking not only mixed Afro-Caribbean heritage but also an English linguistic difference vis-à-vis the Pacific coast-oriented nation; or the British designation of black in the 1980s and 1990s. Though currently *disintegrated*, this category included South Asians, as well as Caribbean and African groups, in a conscious response to violent attempts to “keep Britain white.” Black diasporic relationality is also at work in the popular race talk of African (descended) immigrants to the United States who often hold several fascinating beliefs at once: that race is unimportant or not discussed (which are in fact not the same thing) in their homelands, or that social class and racialization are “more complex” in their countries than in the United States; or that they only “became black” once they reached the shores of the United States. Among other works, *Globalization and Race*, edited by Kamari Clarke and Deborah Thomas, illustrates the importance of including the historical specificity of racial formations as part of our analyses of complex global processes.<sup>23</sup>

Even with all of this rich contradiction and history, until recently blackness has most often been ignored in queer theory’s considerations of globalization, migration, and diaspora. This betrays a brand of scholarly refusal that poses blackness as transparently uninteresting, unchanging, and bound to the United States, while other groups are cosmopolitan—traveling, changing their minds and sex partners, and exchanging goods and ideas on the global market. To appropriate “diaspora” without considering blackness and antiblack racism is to ignore the work of critical scholars of the black Atlantic who provided foundational theorization of the conditions and performances of diaspora on which various scholars of queer globalization, migration, and diaspora depend.<sup>24</sup> The scholarly and ethical consequences of this ignorance are manifold and include capitulation to projects

of antiblack racism, which depend on the assignment of “race” to US blackness only, and “ethnicity” to nearly every other group.

Note the strokes (*/*) separating *black*, *queer*, and *diaspora*.<sup>25</sup> This can be seen to conjoin the terms on either side or to push them apart, toward sharper individual focus. Both *black* and *queer* exert pressure on *diaspora*, just as *black* leans to *queer*—perhaps toward *something else*, or the conjuncture to come. Black/queer/diaspora work explores the cumulative, synthetic force of each, along with various regional and area studies, performance theory, recent entreaties by “public feelings” scholars to be attentive to the political meanings and potential of affect and performative writing, and increasingly, ethnography.<sup>26</sup> Some of these literatures and politics closely articulate to form productive points of analysis, while the high-stakes disarticulation of others provides provocative entry points for much-needed new formulations. However, here the reader should not expect the standard academic spectacle of savaging work that has preceded the author’s pen to paper, putatively to “make room” or situate the author’s distinctive viewpoint.<sup>27</sup> This work constitutes a palimpsest, another litany (toward survival (and thriving):

looking inward and outward  
at once before and after  
seeking a now that can breed  
futures  
like bread in our children’s mouths  
so their dreams will not reflect  
the death of ours<sup>28</sup>

For black queers, survival has always been about finding ways to connect some of what is disconnected, to embody and re-member. This is the social erotics of love at work. The intersubjectivity evidenced by black queer love is “that conjure medicine that helps heal the psychic wounds of enslavement.”<sup>29</sup> Thus our work here is both a labor of love and evidence of it, perforce. Note once again the *strokes* shared between *black/queer/diaspora*: they are in fact also caresses, Omise’eke reminds me. Chela Sandoval has already elaborated a theory of “love as a hermeneutics of social change” in which “love can access and guide our theoretical and political *movidas*—revolutionary maneuvers toward decolonized being.”<sup>30</sup> This consciousness is of course mostly unheard of in academic discourse and left unsaid among academics. Here we have attempted here to remember the chief distinction of our queerness—whom and how we love (and have sex, certainly). The conventions of

our guild—steeped in cool reason—avoid love as a *movida*. It is nevertheless evident in the works featured here and in the passion-filled (not easy, uncomplicated, or necessarily romantic) relationships between many individuals who do this work. Practically, this means re-visioning standard academic disengagement and atomization.

The essays, art, and spirit of this special issue constitute a preliminary love offering of the Black/Queer/Diaspora Work(ing) Group and are drawn from our initial meeting, held in spring 2009 at Yale University.<sup>31</sup> Still in formation, this gathering of humanities scholars, social scientists, cultural critics, artists, and activists working in Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, North and South America, and various flows between these sites moves beyond lamenting the aporia of black diaspora scholarship in queer theory and the lack of engagement with queer theory in black diaspora studies. The working group endeavors to develop scholarly, artistic, and political projects that will provoke conversations and interventions in and across a number of sites, including collective research programs and construction of frames of analysis. This work must not only address the current chasms between bodies of literature but also do so in a way that highlights agency of the multiply subaltern, affirms positive human rights, and serves as a corrective to academic practices that “disappear” the work of black scholars and elide critical intersectional discourses and the experiences and imaginations of black subjects. For the working group, this includes scholarship but also must go beyond academe to form symbiotic collaborations with intellectuals, artists, and activists working on the ground: for example, on the stage, screen, page, sea, sand, and, literally, *on the ground*—at a party, lime or fiesta, demonstration or spiritual intervention—in and between a number of places around the globe. In short, the realms of creativity, performance, troubled/contingent belonging, spirituality, and affect are powerfully inscribed within our work. We recognize that *scholar*, *artist*, *practitioner*, *activist*, and *community member* are not mutually exclusive terms.

### **“All the Things You Could Be by Now, If Jacqui Alexander and Cathy Cohen Were Your . . .”**

During the opening discussion of our symposium, Michelle Wright offered that “dominant epistemologies are quite often illogical, in the way in which heteronormativity insists upon certain [fantastical ways of being and becoming], like the way in which Jehosephat begat Jeboth begat . . .” Queer studies and black studies also too often capitulate to lineages of “male autogenesis.”<sup>32</sup> As “outside children” of black studies and queer studies, we claim new ways to queerly trace our gene-



alogies beyond patronymic reconstruction. The title of this section both playfully recalls Spillers's foundational (dare I say "seminal"?) essay "All the Things You Could Be by Now, If Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother: Psychoanalysis and Race" and honors the radical black and feminist of color lesbian genesis of black/queer/diaspora work, here represented by Cohen and Alexander.<sup>33</sup> After the ellipsis in the section heading above, the reader may find a senior sister, wise lover, mentor, friend, or teacher, for example, or maybe a cousin who comes to visit (from the city, the country, or abroad) doing a new dance or wearing a scandalous outfit—precipitating a shift, structuring a conjuncture.

Since her *The Boundaries of Blackness*, Cohen has exposed how the US state and black institutions, academics, and families construct the dangerous vulnerabilities of the deeply and multiply subaltern—an analytic category she later formulated as "punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens."<sup>34</sup> In her essay "Deviance as Resistance: A New Research Agenda for the Study of Black Politics," Cohen critiques African American studies' politics of respectability and argues that the reputed deviance of lesbians, gays, transgender and bisexual persons, single mothers, and state aid recipients—in the eyes of not just US policy makers but also scholars and civil society leaders—marks us not only as unruly would-be subject-citizens but also as outside cultural boundaries of belonging and care.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Alexander has argued that *some* bodies, such as those of the lesbian and the "prostitute," cannot be included as citizens in former colonies of the Caribbean precisely because they embody sexual agency and eroticism radically out of step with the aspiration of the nation to advertise itself as independent, developed, disciplined, and poised to join in the number of putatively civilized states.<sup>36</sup> As she beautifully shows, this same "erotic autonomy" is the site out of which individuals and groups have staged various rebellions. Taken together, this work illustrates both a set of nettlesome political problems and a theoretical puzzle across black diaspora: Is there any place where [the benefits and recognition of] citizenship can accrue to the unruly—the "prostitute," the homosexual, "welfare queen," transgender person, or the black? And what calculus emerges when these gendered, raced, and sexed categories of nonnational, deviant, nonethnic/racial subject, nonconforming, or merely "other" are compounded? Alexander has vividly shown what this looks like moving across borders:

I am an outlaw in my country of birth: a national, but not a citizen. Born in Trinidad and Tobago . . . I was taught that once we pledged our lives to the new nation, "every creed and race (had) an equal place." I was taught to believe "Massa Day Done," that there would be an imminent end to

foreign domination. . . . In the United States of North America where I live now, I must constantly keep in my possession the immigrant (green) card given to me by the American state, marking me “legal” resident alien; non-national; non-citizen . . . [in] twenty two states, even with green card in hand, I may be convicted of crimes various defined as lewd unnatural; lascivious conduct; deviant sexual intercourse; gross indecency; buggery or crimes against nature.<sup>37</sup>

There are crucial historical and political-economic distinctions that condition and structure both how a state—any state—attempts to regulate particular bodies and how national belonging is reckoned. Still, it seems the state—seemingly every state, though of course in wildly varying scales and intensities—depends on racialized heteropatriarchy (which is always also *classed*) to constitute and maintain itself in the global hierarchy of states. While literatures on globalization and transnationalism have tended to highlight how the state is disappearing or being eclipsed by global capital and new information technologies, even neoliberal (leaning) states retain their power prerogative of surveillance, severe discipline, and in some cases expulsion or extermination of vulnerable persons, even as they continue to disinvest in public health, education, and welfare.<sup>38</sup> My own research in Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago, and Brazil and experiences at home in the United States impel taking seriously distinctions between socialist and liberal states, (post)colonial and imperial nations, North and South.<sup>39</sup> Certainly, “diaspora” does constitute a way out of the nation-state. Still, failing inclusion as a properly hygienic citizen or subject, where is the place for the black queer? Most pressing for me: if in fact black(s and) queers cannot be full citizens in the liberal sense, can they at least be *free*?

While the politics I highlight here continue to insist on the state’s responsibility to protect and care for those within its borders, and for families and communities to acknowledge and accept those within them, the stakes of belonging and unbelonging in black/queer/diaspora are high. The strokes I noted earlier can be, of course, (in the) back *slashes*—violently cutting out and cutting off. I query citizenship here not only because of the barriers black queers face when attempting to enjoy the full complement of citizenship—full “rights” within the nation’s political body—but more pointedly to ask whether the notion of citizenship, with its obvious rules of exclusion and exception, stands in for a wider range of assurances and freedoms. Complicating this, nonstate actors such as families, and religious and cultural organizations, often *think like a state*—making strange bedfellows in their support for projects of respectability.<sup>40</sup> Their shared project is to

discipline individuals into local legibility and particular forms of subjectification. Witness, for example, how disparate black fundamentalist, religious, and middle-class “race leader” rhetorics, in various sites across the Americas, in Africa, and in Europe, seem so perfectly in sync with one another and with the transnational homophobia and sexism of the largely white US Christian Right.<sup>41</sup> Still, observation of the everyday tactics and strategies of black queers, in a number of locations including those visited in this special issue, persuasively suggests that the “larger freedom” we seek may be more available outside the state’s purview and will certainly depend on a willingness to expose and articulate forms of deviance, and to be audacious in a variety of ways, at home in our various communities.<sup>42</sup> This certainly does not excuse the state’s disinvestment, or civil society’s self-righteousness, but rather holds that sites of resistance and self-making must necessarily find air in other spaces. They do, because they must. These spaces include audacious performativity, eroticism, the spectral, and futurity, as many of the contributions to this special issue richly illustrate. Scholarly work does not create everyday resistance within and survival by the most multiply vulnerable among us, but it can give light to it—helping expand recognition of those sites as legitimate political expression.

Thus in this issue—and in our larger individual and collective projects and those of a growing cadre of scholars, activist intellectuals, and artists—we take up the work that Cohen has challenged us to do, shifting research agendas to understand and meet the urgent demands of those who are multiply vulnerable. Furthermore, we follow Alexander’s recent proposal that the key epistemological intervention of our work remains to think/live/write contradictions of genre, discipline, materiality, spirituality, and affect, at once.<sup>43</sup> I turn now to consider the genealogical matrixes out of which this work emerges, before introducing each contribution to this special issue. I begin with queer studies, followed by black and women of color lesbian feminism, black queer studies, black diaspora studies, and queer of color critique. Of course, these are not mutually exclusive literatures or sites of work. Following my précis of the essays, I make some comments about the relative political positioning of black/queer/diaspora work, before a few words of conclusion.

### **Genealogical Matrixes**

Black and queer of color work that has already “thrown shade on the meanings of queer” highlights detail, color, and depth within the discourse that make it more incisive and useful.<sup>44</sup> E. Patrick Johnson’s rearticulation of race, place, and

affect in his brilliant reformulation of “quare” is one of a number of examples of this. Still, *queer* not only marks one of the constitutive academic discourses and historical moments here but is also a critical way of seeing and saying. That is, following Muñoz, for me “queerness is essentially about . . . an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.”<sup>45</sup> Moreover, notwithstanding the understandable protests of those who reject *queer* as a name for black subjects on the grounds that it extends a white patronym: *queer* does also uniquely capture the sense of the nonnormative status of men, women, and others who identify with or are identified as homosexual or bisexual, and those whose gender self-identification is not resonant with the sex assigned to them at birth. I am not claiming that large numbers of black or African (descended) people currently (or should) use this term to identify themselves. Still, as I have averred elsewhere, no term, even those that may seem self-evidently local, indigenous, or autochthonous, is perfectly stable or synchronous with dynamic self-identification on the ground.

Please allow me to address the big white elephant, resting just outside the margins of this special issue. The repetition of *black* queer theory, queer *people of color* critique, *black* feminist theory, and *black/queer/diaspora* seems to call the question; still here I must explicitly stipulate to the reader: read “queer theory” as “white queer theory produced in the US and Western Europe, and occasionally Australia and New Zealand.”<sup>46</sup> To riff on Hall again, “*What is this* whiteness in queer studies?” Nevertheless, this is a topic for another scholar, at another conjunctural moment. Black and queer of color scholars have already pointed out important contributions of the larger enterprise of queer theory, with respect to its ruthless critique of normativity, and have roundly criticized queer theory’s proposition of universal heterosexual privilege. Following scholars like J. Jack Halberstam, Muñoz, and Juana María Rodríguez, I have argued elsewhere that queer studies is due for another wave of reconsideration and reinvigoration. Part of the disappointment in/of some streams of queer theory is that having accepted the postmodern (PoMo) understanding of the collapse of categories of experience melting into nothingness, there is little room for anything—“no future,” indeed—beyond a yawning pessimism, which queers of color have, time after time, insisted our communities cannot afford.<sup>47</sup>

While queer theory has proliferated numerous studies in which everyday acts of gender or sexual nonconformity are celebrated, this has always been more complex for people of color. Not only are black subjects always already queer relative to normative ideals of the person, but black queers also often seem *a queer too far* for much of queer studies and gay and lesbian popular culture and politics. In addition, sexual minorities and gender-variant individuals from the global

South who negotiate but do not wholly capitulate to what Cymene Howe has called the “universal queer subject” discursively fall, in both time and space, outside narrowly Western and Northern middle-class gay constructions of “family,” “lesbian,” “gay,” “queer,” and “Gay Rights.”<sup>48</sup> Rather than pose this as a “problem” for queer studies, it is more productive to see it as an enriching, challenging, and ultimately salutary proposition to refine queer theory. Tellingly, here the reader will find that work in this special issue does not take up typical queer theory tropes of “shame” or “pride” or “the closet,” or argue false dichotomies of sexuality *or* gender, race *or* sexuality, nationality *or* class, for example. This work has a different focus. It orbits (and in fact, instantiates) black queer audacity. This is ironic because black and other people of color communities are constantly cast as archaic holdouts to progressive “sexual blindness” within emerging neoliberal multiculturalism: the work of black/queer/diaspora and people of color who seek to strategically or tactically use their putative deviance (*quareness?*) as resistance is therefore one of the most vigorous forces pushing left in queer studies.

Radical black feminists’ uninvited interventions in black politics, arts, and letters first demonstrated that submerged, discredited, or “alternative” knowledges produced at the interstices of violence, silence, invisibility, or forgetting exposed a wider horizon of possibilities.<sup>49</sup> Along with “revolution” or “liberation,” this work has been written off by some as a “closed discourse” and is commonly attacked as “identity politics,” as if the innovation of politicized identity formations as one strategy (or tactic) of resistance is the evil, rather than misogyny, racism, heterosexism, and classism.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, newer work in several realms of scholarly and artistic practice does not always acknowledge how, for example, black feminism can in fact be read as a queer project, one suffused with affect as a central methodology (and mode of exchange), and an Afro-futuristic one, as it imagines and attempts to call into being futures in which black folks exist and thrive (even if on the detritus of the past). The Black/Queer/Diaspora project takes up black feminism’s challenge to develop a synthetic vision and methodology of diasporic black queer futurity.

Continuing in the intellectual tradition of radical “Third World” and black lesbian feminisms, black transgender, lesbian, bisexual, and gay artists and activists in the United States—rooted in the civil rights, black feminist, and black liberation movements that raged between the 1950s and 1970s, and responding to important global political and social shifts of the 1980s and 1990s—revealed spaces within blackness that had been concealed and silenced. That is, they “yield[ed] unexpected ways of intervening and . . . [made] space for something else to be,” as Ferguson described the earlier black feminist movement.<sup>51</sup> The

concept of home, reflected in, for example, Barbara Smith's anthology *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* and other texts, including Cheryl Clarke's and Ron Simmons's polemical essays that challenge Black Arts movement icons and traditions of black heterosexual respectability, is the primary focus of this work.<sup>52</sup> Joseph Beam famously asserted in 1984:

When I speak of home, I mean not only the familial constellation from which I grew, but the entire Black community: the Black press, the Black church, Black academicians, the Black literati, and the Black left. Where is my reflection? I am most often rendered invisible, perceived as a threat to the family, or I am tolerated if I am silent and inconspicuous. I cannot go home as who I am and that hurts me deeply.<sup>53</sup>

Of course Lorde had already economically formulated the riddle of "home" in her poem "School Note":

For the embattled  
There is no place  
that cannot be home  
Nor is.<sup>54</sup>

By 1991, after the black gay movement failed to provide an alternative home in which Beam could have died surrounded by friends, colleagues, and community members, instead of alone and increasingly (self)alienated, the focus seems to shift for Essex Hemphill. It shifts away from an exposition of the vexed multiplicity of blackness and gayness toward a resolution to be at home, unapologetically. Hemphill writes in the original introduction to *Brother to Brother: New Writing by Black Gay Men*:

I ask you brother: Does your mama really know about you? Does she really know what I am? Does she know I want to love her son, care for him, nurture and celebrate him? Do you think she'll understand? I hope so, because *I am coming home. There is no place else to go that will be worth so much effort and love.*<sup>55</sup>

Love between family members is certainly no panacea. Nor is it uncomplicated or without conflict. It can also be unrequited, even as family or community support is necessary to battle against the extrinsic threat of racism. Black lesbian and gay artists and activist intellectuals developed a trenchant critique of heteronormativ-

ity and its intimate connection to racism, sexism, and classism, laying bare the ravages of internalized hatred as well as external threats. Moreover, they practiced their positions through popular education and community organizing. Their work provided the foundation and impetus for black queer studies, which, following the popular movement's insistence on claiming space, has "animate(d) the dialogic/dialectic 'kinship' [of black studies and queer studies] by mobilizing the tensions embedded in the *conjunction* of 'Black' and 'queer,'" as Johnson and Henderson aver in the introduction to their pathbreaking *Black Queer Studies*.<sup>56</sup> One of the most salient moves at the outset of black queer studies was to claim, and even celebrate, blackness and black self-identification in a historical moment in which "the identity politics pendulum had swung in the direction of a PoMo retreat in the name of anti-essentialism."<sup>57</sup> Sharon Holland, in her foreword to *Black Queer Studies*, reminisces about the challenges that faced those who, like her, had been working in and between black studies and queer theory in the early 1990s. Holland writes:

I moved toward a space that attempted to define a connection between "Black" and "queer" when "queer" had its own controversial orbit . . . would "queer" obfuscate the presence of lesbians in a movement that . . . had its own specific historical struggle over the "inclusion" of women in the story itself? The academic market, at least its emerging "queer" constituency, seemed to be interpreting "Identity politics" as the root of all evil—[suggesting that] simply getting rid of "race" (always too a fiction?) and the category "woman" (already a misnomer?) and we would have our rebirth on the other side of our problem(s).<sup>58</sup>

For Holland, question of identity politics, "woman" as a universal category, and the position of women in activist and nationalist contexts, for example, hardly seemed "new" for someone like herself who had followed such scholars as Hazel Carby, Spillers, Smith, and others. That is, in contrast to what at the time was the fashionable PoMo party line of queer theory, black and women of color feminism had developed an understanding of difference and resistance to normativity that was not only discursive and performative but also grounded in and responsive to everyday *fact(s)* of *blackness* (to invoke Fanon), that is, the materiality of black experiences.

In US black *quare* studies, the focus was indeed on "making an intervention at home," as Johnson and Henderson remind us.<sup>59</sup> Holland notes that black queer scholars and artists began to find "home . . . tucked away in the Harlem

Renaissance, embedded in second wave feminism, and nestled in the heart of the civil rights struggle . . . as backbone rather than anomaly.”<sup>60</sup> And of course, currently, as David Eng reminds us, we have come to understand that “*Home* is not private, as theorized under liberalism. Instead, it is a crucial public site of labor within the global restructuring of capitalism.”<sup>61</sup> Recently, examinations of African, Caribbean, Canadian, European, and Latin American literature and film have revealed that this theme is indeed global: *home* as a site of ambivalence and potential *conflama* (a US black gay vernacular conjunction connoting confusion and drama), yet at the same time somehow constituting Hemphill’s “place that will be worth so much effort and love.” It is just as central in black/queer/diaspora literature beyond US borders. Walcott has provided a significant example in his analysis of the reception of the Canadian short film *Welcome to Africville*.<sup>62</sup> In the watershed anthology *Our Caribbean: Gay and Lesbian Writing from the Antilles*, which is just as powerfully read as a diasporic text as it is an Antillian one, Thomas Glave has collected work from as far back as 1956 (but mostly from the 1990s and 2000s) that reveals, like much of Glave’s own beautifully evocative lyrical writing, that “home” in (and out of and returning back to) the Caribbean is also a vexed space.<sup>63</sup> Of course Canadian/Trinbagonian Dionne Brand’s critically acclaimed oeuvre also layers (im)migration, diaspora, displacement, and longing.<sup>64</sup> While there is a growing number of works on Africa that sympathetically engage sexuality, including that of Marc Epprecht, Neville Hoad, and the working group’s own Graeme Reid, the impressive and very recently published collection edited by Sylvia Tamale, *African Sexualities: A Reader* (which is more of a comprehensive reader on sexualities rather than specific to homosexualities and trans identities) has opened the way toward more work that highlights African sexual minorities and gender insurgents from the perspectives of black African activists.<sup>65</sup> As the work of the photographer and activist Ajamu X and the community arts organization Rukus! shows, Britain continues to be a hotbed of black/queer/diaspora work.<sup>66</sup> This work, of course, follows the work of such British artists as the filmmaker Isaac Julien, the Nigerian photographer Rotimi Fani-Kayode, and the critical cultural scholar Kobena Mercer—whose work in the late 1980s and 1990s spoke to black queer culture pointedly and engagingly across three continents, before focusing more particularly on visual art. This work provided brilliant provocations toward parsing the political and conceptual consequences of gender, racial, and sexual difference, nationality, ethnicity, and aesthetics within Britain and beyond.

Holland’s language of embeddedness—“tucked away”—is thus useful to think about the presence of black diaspora consciousness in black queer studies



of the 1980s and 1990s. For example, each member of the triumvirate of black queer letters (Lorde, Beam, and Hemphill) was a “diasporic subject.” Beam and Lorde, whose transnational work is well known, both have Caribbean heritage, and though his essays and poems illuminate Washington, D.C., and celebrate it as homespace, Hemphill also traveled internationally and began to have a transnational outlook, making important connections and collaborating significantly with black gay British artists. Of course among other important contributions, Robert Reid-Pharr provides delicious insight into the circulation of desire in German clubs he attended, through a black queer transnational lens, in his *Black Gay Man*, and newer work on choice, desire, and the black American intellectual whose work and life is also translocal.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, in popular culture of the black queer “classical era,” Grace Jones served Caribbean-cum-European cosmopolitanism better than any other.<sup>68</sup> Her androgyny, high-fashion styling, fabulously affected “continental” speech, and outrageous yet virtuosic avant-garde performance were legible to only a few as examples of a nice Jamaican girl/boy gone global naughty. Club and house music also has always included not only disco, R & B, and gospel but also West African, Latin, and European electronic musics. Moreover, popular forms of Africentricity — another iteration of earlier pan-African movements — are also well represented in black lesbian and gay culture in the United States. Consider, for example, the names, visual imagery, and stated politics of classical-era organizations including Salsa Soul Sisters, which later became African Ancestral Lesbians United for Social Change, and ADODI (a group of same-sex loving men of African descent, founded in Philadelphia in 1986). Of course groups like Wazobia (organized by and for African gays and lesbians in New York) and Caribbean Pride came along in the late 1990s.

The beginning of Phillip Bryan Harper’s *Black Queer Studies* essay thus seems an apt coda for that volume’s engagement with the world outside the United States and for black queer studies itself. He begins the essay: “I don’t travel much, but . . . lately I’ve been rethinking my position and pondering a little travel, which might be just the thing to ease my anxiety.”<sup>69</sup> Harper notes in his essay that African American studies often reacts to black queer studies “with a nearly deafening official silence.”<sup>70</sup> Today, with only a few examples of black queer “noise” reharmonizing storied black studies journals and graduate curricula that still echo with the same old voices, this is still too true. Thus metaphorical travel, that is, what Walcott has called “diaspora reading practices,” may be precisely what is needed to ease black queer studies’s angst.<sup>71</sup> When we engage black queers beyond our borders, we discover new vocabularies and find new conversation partners.

Gayatri Gopinath’s theorization of queer diaspora, in her *Impossible*

*Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, provides a provocative arrow to follow toward extending the formulation of black/queer/diaspora—that is, what we might garner from these queer diaspora reading practices. She writes: “The concept of a queer diaspora enables a simultaneous critique of heterosexuality and the national form while exploding the binary between nation and diaspora, heterosexuality and homosexuality, origin and copy.”<sup>72</sup> In his review of her *Impossible Desires* and Alexander’s *Pedagogies of Crossing*, Eng writes that Gopinath “shifts consideration from dominant analyses of gender in transnational feminism by considering what is at stake in focusing critical attention on the category of transnational sexuality developed by a queer diasporic (and queer of color) critique of family, kinship, and nation,” thus demonstrating the crucial need for a particularly queer critique.<sup>73</sup> The critical and methodological orientations of queer of color scholars extend the key theoretical contributions of black queer theory and have broadened black studies’ understanding of racial formation by exposing mechanisms through which other racialized subalterns are manufactured. The best of this work takes seriously Third World or women of color feminist politics of, for example, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Chrystos, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Norma Alarcón, Chela Sandoval, and others who consistently made connections in their local scholarship, artistry, and activism, with state practices and sites within and beyond their own ethnic or racial borders. Major works in queer of color critique, such as Gopinath’s as well as Muñoz’s *Disidentifications*, Rodríguez’s *Queer Latinidad*, Larry La Fountain—Stokes’s *Queer Ricans: Cultures and Sexualities in the Diaspora*, Fung’s “Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn,” Eng’s *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America*, as well as *Aberrations in Black* and *Impossible Desires*, which I have already cited, represent this tradition.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, apropos of the position of social science work in queer of color critique, Martin Manalansan’s award-winning *Global Divas* uniquely uses ethnography to demonstrate the everyday on-the-ground theorizing of his mostly mobile Filipino male subjects, thereby providing one of the central models for queer anthropology.<sup>75</sup> Recently, Carlos Decena’s *Tacit Subjects* has broken new ground in its deft rereading of queer and immigration studies, as well as its multilingual illustration of everyday theoretics.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, Urvashi Vaid’s historical policy work in *Virtually Equal* and Kenji Yoshino’s legal scholarship in *Covering*, while not often cited as theoretical or germane to queer of color critique, provide unique insights unavailable in other work.<sup>77</sup>

Still, I worry about both the absence of an analysis of race and racism, and the elision or recasting of antiblack racism as a closed question (the reasoning often goes something like: *way back in the bad old days, there was antiblack*

*racism; now this new thing has replaced it*) in some queer of color work.<sup>78</sup> Partly because of African, Caribbean, and Latin America studies' evident stubborn refusal to face race and antiblack racism, black identification has been posed as singularly African American. This not only effaces the transnational structures of antiblack racism but also elides the ways in which antiblack racism provides "new" vocabularies and models for already existing discrimination, xenophobia, and other racisms. The concept of ethnicity has a different historicity and does not do the same work as race. Where ethnicity is legible as dynamic, multiply constituted, and primed for cosmopolitan transformation—and therefore posed as *not race*—blackness is most often misapprehended as static and constructed only out of US political projects of racialization, which is erroneously posed as a polarity of black versus white and therefore less complex than other places around the globe.<sup>79</sup> While Ferguson's *Aberrations in Black* named the stream of work emerging from women of color feminisms "queer of color critique," his and Grace Kyungwon Hong's recent work incisively takes up this necessary work of "identify(ing) and invent(ing) analytics through which to compare racial formations . . . (rather than) . . . simply parallel instances of similarity."<sup>80</sup> Following the "usable tradition" of Third World and women of color feminism, their important intervention shows that "the stakes for identifying new comparative models are immensely high, for the changing configurations of power in the era after the decolonizing movements and new social movements of the mid-twentieth century demand that we understand how particular populations are rendered vulnerable to processes of death and devaluation over and against other populations, in ways that palimpsestically register older modalities of racialized death but also exceed them."<sup>81</sup>

We claim this current moment to move further toward *becoming fluent in each other's histories*, as Alexander has suggested, and becoming fluent in each other's (perhaps disparate or even contradictory) desires. We are certainly implicated politically in these histories and desires, and they are imprinted on us. After all, it is a queer kind of love that connects us across borders and waters and texts. Black/queer/diaspora constitutes a heterotopic love. By heterotopic love, I am certainly invoking Michel Foucault, and Sandoval, but also Ferguson and Hong's recent reformulation of queer of color relationality in women of color feminisms. Using the example of Moraga's preface to *This Bridge Called My Back*, they write:

Instead of Foucault's heterotopic nowhere, which he places in opposition to the empirically fixed and fixing table, [women of color feminism] gives us the heterotopic somewhere . . . in which the objects of comparison [e.g.,

an upper-middle-class cisgendered male black American college professor; an undocumented queer Haitian artist working in the United States; a Botswanan lesbian scholar; “queer theorists” and “black diaspora theorists”] have an unstable interrelation to each other, because they have changing meanings depending on context. These objects are not merely incongruous, as in Foucault’s analysis, and they are not merely uncategorizable under a uniform set of criteria. Their relationality is constantly shifting.<sup>82</sup>

Thus just as Ferguson and Hong find that “Moraga’s ‘unmolested’ passage through the city, her ‘protected’ status, is complexly determined by, and determining of . . . surveillance and disciplining . . . as well as . . . brutal state repression,” our love ethic here must insist that we be aware of and militate against the ways in which US black queer scholars may find ourselves perhaps similarly “unmolested”—or more realistically and to the point, molested in a different way—which allows for openings or impels coalitions.

This resonates with Walcott’s claim that a “diaspora reading practice . . . can disrupt the centrality of nationalist discourses within the Black studies project and thereby also allow for an elaboration of a Black queer diaspora project,” which lays crucial foundation for our work here apropos his contention that “the reconceptualizing of Black queer and Black diaspora produces both a Black queer diaspora and a new Black queer theory.”<sup>83</sup>

The contributors to this special issue and to the larger project of black/queer/diaspora work have certainly taken up this challenge with aplomb. Still, I cannot deny that my aspiration toward a diverse “international” special issue with scholars from at least three continents failed.<sup>84</sup> I hear Walcott’s reproof: “What is at stake here is the way in which some Black diaspora queers find African-American queers, yet the reverse always seems impossible,” calling “the sexual/textual economy” by which some US black scholars have seemed unaware of or uninterested in engaging across borders “(an) unequal exchange.”<sup>85</sup> However, this issue and the expanding project of black/queer/diaspora work is not a project of unrequited love. Black/queer/diaspora announces itself ready and willing to embrace and be embraced—to listen and to negotiate. The notion of ethics or even “good politics” is not strong enough to hold this. Perhaps love is. Still unfinished, our work consciously looks for and finds nonheteronormative people of Africa(n) descent, within and outside the United States, as we also lay claim to our position in black studies, queer studies, and feminist studies, as *backbone rather than anomaly*.<sup>86</sup>

### The Fabulous Essays

In this special issue we ask a “new” set of questions, conjuncturally related to perennial ones: Do African and African-descended sexual minorities and gender insurgents share common desires, or conditions, across borders and languages? What “erotic subjectivities” and insurgent black queer poetics obtain in sites scholars have previously ignored, or spaces that span across, through, and between? What political or affective strategies might be effective for one place or space but not for others? And, finally, what methodologies must we use to track all of this? By what means should we convey our analysis and reflection? Readers will find ample answers to these queries, and more provocative arrows toward spectral figures haunting these margins, in the essays that follow. In an effort to approximate more closely the conversations and diverse perspectives in which the working group and others are currently engaged, the editorial note “A Conversation ‘Overflowing with Memory’: On Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley’s ‘Water, Shoulders, Into the Black Pacific,’” follows this introduction. This not only prefaces Tinsley’s piece but also endeavors to inspire or provoke conversations apropos of innovative methods and affective strategies.

Other contributors continue black queer and queer of color theory’s dogged assertion of black queer agency and, especially, of an inner realm of individual consciousness and intersubjectivity, which some of us, inspired by Lorde (“uses of the erotic”) and Alexander (“erotic autonomy”), have come to call “erotic subjectivity.”<sup>87</sup> I am concerned with using the erotic as an embodied human resource, composed of our personal histories and (sexual, social) desires, toward deepening and enlivening individuals’ experiences. In one aspect, as I have averred in *Venceremos?*, this view of the erotic is hermeneutical. In Lorde’s words, it is “a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives.”<sup>88</sup> Although deeply personal, the erotic is also intersubjective — “self-connection shared” — and therefore political. I employ erotic subjectivity as a way to pose the relationship between individual everyday acts of refusal and the intention to build political communities or foment movement. An ongoing process, erotic subjectivity may therefore be used strategically, or tactically. Out of this we may create a counterpublic in which new forms of affective and erotic relations, and rules of public and private engagement, not only inform all our choices, as Lorde suggests, but in fact condition new choices and new politics.

In this issue, Lyndon Gill crafts a sterling example of this theorizing, pushing it significantly forward. While the current trend in queer studies seems

characterized by a turning away from sociality and politics, for black and other subjects of color, sociality in the form of love, friendship, and sexual relationships is an indispensable survival tool, which, as Gill's Trinbagonian respondents show, may also be the foundation for life-enhancing and life-saving interventions. The monstrous skeleton of putatively exceptional Caribbean homophobia haunts our perceptions of the region. These incomplete perceptions hide truths about the everyday effects of heterosexism and homophobia, and everyday resistance to it, both here and there. In his "Chatting Back an Epidemic: Caribbean Gay Men, HIV/AIDS, and the Uses of Erotic Subjectivity," Gill adds sinew, blood (indeed), and heart. Centering the islands of Trinidad and Tobago, he asserts that the organization Friends For Life—in its formation, the consciousness of its leadership, and in its most successful program, Community Chatroom—demonstrates the usefulness of erotic subjectivity for activism and community building.

Turning to the continent of Africa, Xavier Livermon contributes another example of erotic subjectivity—black queer action that forces recognition of the politics of culture. His essay "Queer(y)ing Freedom," clarifies what other scholars have claimed is a "paradox" of the representation of homosexuality in South Africa, as at once progressive, un-African, un-Christian, and dangerous. Livermon holds that this representation "rests on the racialization of the queer body as white and the sexualization of the black [citizen's] body as straight."<sup>89</sup> The essay then persuasively argues for an expanded understanding of "the political" that can hold the cultural and affectual. Its analysis of public and participatory gay and bisexual scandals moves us from the realm of the juridical, which dominates scholarly work and public imagination of sexuality in Africa, to the everyday public. Livermon argues that audacious acts in the public sphere garner a new visibility. This "cultural labor of black queerness," he offers, pushes toward freedom in ways the progressive constitution cannot. Here black queer persons deploy their complexly constructed identities for political ends that, without this theorization, observers might not readily recognize as politics.

If, as the Combahee River Collective statement argues, the conditions of our lives are "interlocking"—as well as dynamic, reiterative, related to global processes, and deeply felt, as many scholars have come to agree—standard academic practices simply will not do.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, this dynamism, recursivity, "globality," and affect must be reimaged and described with new vocabularies and fresh metaphors.

Generative and useful water metaphors have shaped black diaspora scholarship since Edward Wilmot Blyden and W. E. B. DuBois.<sup>91</sup> Of course Gilroy, Brand, and recently Tinsley have plumbed these depths. Yet in this special issue

Vanessa Agard-Jones shifts our metaphorical apparatus from water to sand “as a repository both of feeling and of experience, of affect and of history.” In “What the Sands Remember,” she offers an ecological narrative of *place and emplacement*. Looking up close — just behind a remote sand dune, or at a surfside fete in Martinique — we see local lesbians and gay men who may otherwise be obscured by the blur of distant, unengaged theorization, at the same time that her reading of a small moment in a nineteenth-century novel incisively speculates on black women’s agency. The analytic articulation of imagination and observable facts, drawn from ethnography and history, include and go beyond the poetics of relation elaborated by the eminent Martinican literary theorist and writer Édouard Glissant.

Drawing on what he calls “the queer ideas of Glissant,” Walcott expounded a related insight into speculation and literary analysis at our 2009 symposium: what he has theorized as a *homopoetics* “that allows him to read across various spaces and texts and to make some truth claims.”<sup>92</sup> Three contributions also serve as important examples of this, in very distinctive ways. First, there is Tinsley’s extract from her prodigiously researched historical novel in progress, “Water, Shoulders, Into the Black Pacific” — an intimate look at a probable past of desire and longing among women of color in 1940s Northern California, constructed through marking historical moments, places, contexts, and events recorded in archives, but also carefully crafted through imagination. In Tinsley’s gorgeous excerpt, we hear echoes of Saidiya Hartman’s project to compose a methodology for memory and a writing form to tell stories that must, somehow, be told (or that cannot be told).<sup>93</sup> Since the imagination — fiction — is too important a structuring genre of black/queer/diaspora work to present this piece bound by “explanation” (which would make it another form), an editorial note prefaces the work, describing its scholarly provenance and intention through a conversation with members of the working group.

Like the personal essay and the poem — black queer genres, par excellence — the meditation is an aesthetic and political end in itself, not merely a means by which to “write up” research findings, or prove or explicate a point (although here, Ana-Maurine Lara makes her case with tremendous skill and verve). In “Of Unexplained Presences, Flying Ife Heads, Vampires, Sweat, Zombis, and Legbas: A Meditation on Black Queer Aesthetics,” Lara is able to bring two events and a number of discourses into conversation, methodologically using “the metaphor of the *poto mitan* . . . to locate how my body connects two spaces.” Metaphorically, the *poto mitan* is both the pillar around which everything revolves, like the vodou peristyle, and the body of the woman (researcher). The term *vodou* in the formulation she offers is already as deeply African as it is a New World

invention, simultaneously incorporating European magic and indigenous American medicines, for example. “Vodoun aesthetics” therefore names not only the work of the *DASH* artists in Austin, Texas, and elsewhere, and the Grand Rue artists and participants in Haiti, but also the everyday arts and spiritual practices of black queer life.

Finally, as Matt Richardson asks, “What would it serve for Blacks to take the crisis imposed by colonialism and capture to (re)name and (re)invent the self?”<sup>94</sup> Through an analysis of the Scottish writer Jackie Kay’s *Trumpet*, Richardson’s “‘My Father Didn’t Have a Dick’: Social Death and Jackie Kay’s *Trumpet*” takes up Spillers’s challenge to not futilely follow “the master’s” definitions of gender down “the (hetero)patriarchal rabbit hole” toward queer versions of normativity but to gain “*insurgent* ground” by taking a stand outside the “traditional symbolics” of gender. Not only does Richardson’s analysis of Kay’s novel push us to consider how transgender experience centrally informs or talks back to cisgender black masculinity and Scottish identity, but his critical references also reflect a particularly black queer practice. Following Holland, he queers meanings of blackness as social death; argues with and alongside black nationalist critics; pushes Spillers’s notions of flesh and patronymic representation forward; and, perhaps scandalously to some, does not rest this work of black queer theory on “queer theorists.” Increasingly, as various interdisciplines and streams of work within and between them mature, scholars and artists refer to, claim, and build on genealogies that had been “submerged” (dismissed, or recast). In this issue, we insist on in-context conversation—that is, for example, the deployment of various black studies works or specific contexts lesser known in queer studies to discuss “LGBTQ topics” or to launch a queer argument. Mapping local and translocal genealogies, trajectories, and commitments of black [and] queer politics and expressive culture, these works therefore stand on the emerging edge where queer theory meets critical race theory, transnationalism, and black and Third World feminisms.

### **“What Is This Black?”: Where in the World?**

In these essays and in our work, black identity/identification is understood as hybrid, contingent, and relational. That is, *black* is a useful term for describing the historical, political, and affective ties of many individuals to one another, yet we do not attach mystical, transhistorical, or essential biological valence to this term. Witness how contributors to this special issue deploy blackness, depending on local histories and current exigencies as well as relationships to global racial



formations and individual choice. Blackness is explicitly named in both Livermon's and Richardson's work, in the cases of South Africa and Scotland, respectively, which obviously have vastly different proportions of blacks relative to the national population and vastly different histories: violent and protracted struggle against racist state violence and symbolic violent erasure, respectively. Writing about Trinidad and Tobago, Gill deploys the term *Afro-Trinidadian* to describe the subjects on which his ethnographic practice is focused — noting that while not self-consciously marked as a space for African-descended or black Trinbagonians (in fact, in keeping with Caribbean race rhetorics, it is open and multicultural), the day-to-day of Friends For Life (the organization the essay focuses on), finds it largely practiced as Afro-Trinidadian space. Of course, Haiti seems to occupy the space of unambiguous blackness, despite a deep history of “mixing” there as well. Perhaps this is why Lara's “larger framework of . . . vodoun aesthetics” can hold so many blacknesses so elegantly — US middle class, Dominican, European, Whitney Museum exhibitor, self-taught sculptor, Jewish, et cetera. Still, during our symposium, Fatima El-Tayeb averred that the diminishing usefulness of the concepts of blackness and nation for her work in Germany, and the inspiration of queer of color critique, prompted her to develop the concept of Europeans of color as a way to capture more precisely the local political realities she seeks to understand. In Agard-Jones's essay, “ordinary (mostly black) Martinicans” share the space of this overseas department of France with *békés*, *métisses*, and *mulâtres*. One of the startling moments in her narrative is when one locality on the island campaigns to replace the French *tricolore* with *the red, the black, and the green*. It seems here that Martinicans' right to enjoy the benefits of their status as citizens of (an overseas department of) France does not preclude a claim to pan-African belonging.

### **We're Queer! We're Here! But Why? Whither “Radical”?**

As Cohen notes, a truly radical or transformative politics has not resulted from queer theory thus far. In some cases, it has in fact “reinforced simple dichotomies between the heterosexual and everything queer.”<sup>95</sup> The radical promise of the antecedents of black/queer/diaspora work is located in scholarship, art, and activism “shaped by the burden of persistent colonialism and the euphoric promise of nationalism and self-determination” (Alexander and Mohanty); by activist intellectuals who had analyzed the “interlocking” spheres of race, gender, sexuality, and class through the prism of antiviolence organizing (Combahee River Collective); who had, in nonacademic spheres and languages, poetically called for *Black men loving Black men* as

a revolutionary statement of self- and community preservation (Beam, Marlon Riggs, and Hemphill); and moreover, have blocked the public arteries of London, Paris, Rome, Buenos Aires, and New York with their “dead,” tracing bodies and leaving their haunting presence on the streets as a sharp indictment of the callous state (Queer Nation ACT UP). (How) then do we engage (or foment) radical or transformative politics at this particular stony, contradictory conjuncture?

To put a finer point on it, I want to ask what positions have fallen out of our intellectual frames in black studies, women’s studies, pan-African studies, and queer studies. Does the absence of a revolutionary or radical (black) queer theory evidence that radicalism is in fact a “closed discourse”? Following Joy James’s intervention “Radicalizing Black Feminism,” I want to call attention to the existence of different impulses in the genealogies I have been tracing. James’s unique critical intervention in black feminist theory, in which she explodes the myth that all black feminisms are, perforce, radical, constitutes a crucial caution for black queer studies, queer of color critique, and black/queer/diaspora to not pose our work as always already “radical” or inherently progressive.<sup>96</sup> Perhaps part of black/queer/diaspora work is to revive, even now and especially when it is not fashionable, (at least) the query, whither “liberation”? Otherwise, we might do well to admit that ours is a bourgeois exercise and desist our popularist reimagination of “home,” which without some real connection to those embattled by daily insults of being poor, uneducated, perhaps undocumented, for example, *and* black and queer, amounts to voyeurism or worse. Can a *study* be radical, given what we have learned about the need to decolonize the epistemological lenses through which we define and construct research?<sup>97</sup> What about our pedagogies: what are the best ways to facilitate critical thinking and more ethical, beautiful, and joyful futures for our students (and children, lovers, and friends, wherever we find them)? In any case, the apparent abandonment of these questions and potential accountabilities in some quarters indicates a precipitous shift rightward (toward conservatism) that is neither especially queer nor theoretical, nor studious.

Cohen calls for “a politics where the non-normative and marginal positions of punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens” is the basis for progressive transformational coalitional work and a concomitant new research agenda for black studies, in which the central theoretic sees “deviance as resistance.”<sup>98</sup> Perhaps the transformative politics we have been waiting for will emerge through following and participating in actual political transformations on the ground. A significant part of my own current intellectual preoccupation is observing what this might mean for black queer diaspora research agendas. As one example, the concept of sexual-orientation inclusion advocacy, as practiced in Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago,

may provide fertile ground. This work by and on behalf of vulnerable populations of LGBT persons to be free from violence, harassment, and discrimination is far from a single-minded focus on “sexual rights,” as it extends participation and protection for minorities and vulnerable persons of all kinds in these self-consciously multicultural postcolonial countries. Thus these advocates’ queer work, which seeks to redeem anticolonial struggle, to borrow the title of a recent Arcus Foundation report that surveyed the field, is at once about “saving lives, promoting democracy, alleviating poverty, and fighting AIDS.”<sup>99</sup>

### In Conclusion

The work of the Black/Queer/Diaspora Work(ing) Group is to consider the states of diasporic black queer projects, in the context of various shifts in Empire(s) and affiliations. Stretching toward a loving global embrace, and focused on expanding capacity to do this work, our nascent offering of this special issue of *GLQ* is a small reflection (or refraction?) of this ambition. The contributions that follow form lines in the architecture of black/queer/diaspora work, which we draw together. These brilliant authors provide models toward thinking how to best represent our research subjects, and our selves, when our eyes/hands/ears must necessarily “settle” on a surface (to write, sing, act, do) but must also mine multi-dimensions, experiences, and shores. Agard-Jones suggests a new metaphor in this issue—sand. How many dunes to cross, as our bodies ache with desire? How many friends can we wrap ourselves around as we “chat back” dying and death in circles of belonging and care, such as those Gill offers us? The infectious, unrelenting beat of *kwaito* in a South African township provides the soundtrack for scandalous performances of black queerness on the radio—new subjectivities unfolding on the airwaves and in the streets of Jo’burg in Livermon’s account. Across the continent and overseas to Scotland, brass horns blare. Richardson listens in on a group of black men in a coastal town, playing their black masculinity loudly—improvising on a tired old theme to deafen cries of their exclusion. Now, back in time once more, and across another ocean, at a western edge of the North American continent, Tinsley invents black and other women of color who wield not only salty glances at each other but also rivet guns vibrating with the power to create new worlds. Through it all the Ife head flies on, simultaneously in Nigeria, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Texas, Miami, and all the places we visit here—appearing in discarded plastics, sequins, and rusted soda caps: dis/figured and refigured through *refuse*—storytelling and divining, all at once. Here the threads of our mourning clothes are laid down/bare.

## Notes

I must thank each of the brilliant intellectual-artist-activists who gathered for the first event (Natalie Bennett, Steven G. Fullwood, Lyndon Gill, Rosamond S. King, Ana-Maurine Lara, Xavier Livermon, Graeme Reid, Matt Richardson, Colin Robinson, Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, Rinaldo Walcott, and Michelle Wright); our new addition, Vanessa Agard-Jones; and those who joined us later, virtually and in spirit, making this issue so rich and significant. The peer-review process was a charmed exercise in finding the sharpest, most appropriate interlocutors, who turned out to be the most generous, too (I wish that I could print your names, to more openly acknowledge your work: thank you). My sincere and profound thanks for interventions on an early draft go to Ann Cvetkovich. Crucial commentary by Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley and Kamari Clarke pushed me significantly further. Still, the privilege of claiming the errors and foibles here belongs to me exclusively. In addition, I want to express my gratitude to George Chauncey, the Yale Program in Transgender, Bisexual, Lesbian, Gay Studies; Kamari Clarke, the Yale Center for Transnational Cultural Analysis; the Yale University Provost's Office; and Yale University Departments of African American Studies and Anthropology, for their support of the Black/Queer/Diaspora Work(ing) Group.

1. See Stuart Hall, "What Is This Black in 'Black Popular Culture?,'" in *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent and Michele Wallace (New York: Dia Center for the Arts, 1992), 21–33. I was reminded that Robert Reid-Pharr begins his "Queer Sweetback" chapter with this quote from Hall, in a similar context at the end of my editing process, while rechecking the source of my citation of Reid-Pharr's *Once You Go Black: Choice, Desire, and the Black American Intellectual* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).
2. While "Plum Nelly" was published by *Callaloo* in anticipation of the conference and distributed to conference attendees, *Black Queer Studies* mostly represents work presented at the conference. "Plum Nelly" includes creative work, critical essays, reviews, and an annotated bibliography of black queer studies: Nicholas Boggs, "Queer Black Studies: An Annotated Bibliography, 1994–1999," *Callaloo* 23, no. 1 (2000): 479–94.
3. Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberration in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2004).
4. Michelle M. Wright and Antje Schuhmann, *Blackness and Sexualities* (Berlin: Lit, 2007).
5. See works cited above, and especially the ambitious collection by Juan Battle and Sandra Barnes, *Black Sexualities: Probing Powers, Passions, Practices, and Policies* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010). This project heralds a more comprehensive black sexuality studies by including a number of themes and balancing the disciplinary divide by highlighting social science work. Among a number of

important essays, Matt Richardson and Enoch Page's "On the Fear of Small Numbers," in Battle and Barnes, *Black Sexualities*, historically breaks silence about the black transgender experience in the United States. This book was organized through a Ford Foundation–funded project headed by Battle and Marysol Asencio to assess the state of the fields of black and Latina/o sexualities, respectively.

6. While I hesitate to use the word *reciprocal*, because of the unevenness, there seems to be a resistance to taking up important radical theorists of the black world in much black/queer/diaspora work. For example, while Frantz Fanon has been mined by feminist and queer scholars, what might a political economy of black queer diaspora, taking up Walter Rodney, look like? Or a reimagining of Abdias Nascimento on race making and black erasure; or Claudia Jones vis-à-vis the circulation of texts and radical politics? See Walter Rodney, A. M. Babu, and Vincent Harding, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1981); Abdias do Nascimento, *Brazil, Mixture or Massacre? Essays in the Genocide of Black People* (Dover, MA: Majority Press, 1989; and Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007). Our citation politics have been selective and seem to avoid the (lesser-known?) more radical exponents of African diaspora theory.
7. The Caribbean, a particularly vigorous site for black/queer/diaspora work, has also been refocused in Faith Smith's new collection, *Sex and the Citizen: Interrogating the Caribbean* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011). Unfortunately, this work is so new that I did not have time to fully consider it for this analysis. Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage," *GLQ* 14, no. 2–3 (2008): 191–215; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Antonio Benítez Royo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
8. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).
9. Hortense J. Spillers, *Black, White, and In Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 168.
10. Moreover, scholars located in such professional arenas as education, public health, and law have been producing important work that can offer effective strategies. See especially Lance T. McCready, *Making Space for Diverse Masculinities: Difference, Intersectionality, and Engagement in an Urban High School* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).
11. The newest works to join these include Carlos Ulisses Decena's marvelous *Tacit Subjects: Belonging and Same-Sex Desire among Dominican Immigrant Men* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), Mignon Moore's sociological study *Invisible Fami-*

lies: *Gay Identities, Relationships, and Motherhood among Black and Latino Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); and my own critical ethnography *¡Venceremos? The Erotics of Black Self-Making in Cuba* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). Juan Battle, *Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud: Black Pride Survey 2000* (New York: Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2002); Wesley E. A. Crichlow, *Buller Men and Batty Bwoys: Hidden Men in Toronto and Halifax Black Communities* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Gloria Wekker, *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); David A. B. Murray, *Opacity: Gender, Sexuality, Race, and the "Problem" of Identity in Martinique* (New York: Lang, 2002); Juan Battle, Social Justice Sexuality Initiative, 2010, [socialjusticesexuality.com/about/](http://socialjusticesexuality.com/about/).

12. Please see Bryant Keith Alexander, "Reflections, Riffs, and Remembrances: The Black Queer Studies in the Millennium Conference," *Callaloo* 23, no. 4 (2000): 1285–305; Jennifer De Vere Brody, "Theory in Motion: A Review of the Black Queer Studies in the Millennium Conference," *Callaloo* 23, no. 4 (2000): 1274–77; and Vincent Woodard, "Just as Quare as They Want to Be: A Review of the Black Queer Studies in the Millennium Conference," *Callaloo* 23, no. 4 (2000): 1278–84.
13. See Shari Frilot, *Black Nations/Queer Nations?* (Third World Newsreel, 1995). I must note the Black Nations/Queer Nations workshop session that I offered as a cofounder of the Aya Institute, "Building Community from the Inside Out." Thematically, it focused on starting with personal emotional and spiritual development as a first step toward community building, in keeping with Aya's work of weekly drop-in groups, board development, consultation, and therapeutic interventions for community-based organizations.
14. See especially Barbara Smith, Audre Lorde, and Joseph Beam. Much primary material, including personal papers and ephemera, can be found at the Black Gay and Lesbian Archive of the Schomburg Center for the Study of Black Culture in New York City.
15. See Black Gay Research Group, [law.wustl.edu/centeris/pages.aspx?id=7848](http://law.wustl.edu/centeris/pages.aspx?id=7848) and [www.thebgrg.org/welcome-to-BGRG.html](http://www.thebgrg.org/welcome-to-BGRG.html), respectively (accessed February 2011). "[The] Caribbean Region of the IRN is a clearinghouse . . . of information, research, and resources, to connect individuals from around the region and the world. . . while the larger IRN is focused on academic scholarship, the Caribbean IRN promotes activism and creative work, as well as different kinds of engaged scholarship which seek to question, provoke and illuminate various ways of thinking around sexual minorities" ([www.irnweb.org/en/about/region/caribbean](http://www.irnweb.org/en/about/region/caribbean)). Herukhuti, *Conjuring Black Funk: Notes on Culture, Sexuality, and Spirituality* (New York: Vintage Entity, 2007).
16. Originally conceived of as a panel on comparative sexual rights, erotic autonomy, and "Archives and Politics 'For My Own Protection,'" my intention was to include in this issue a roundtable discussion featuring a few individuals whom I admire for the path-

breaking work they are doing to document/archive and improve black queer life and culture in a number of sites around the world (Steven G. Fullwood, Black Gay & Lesbian Archive, “Fire & Ink”; Zethu Matebani Forum for the Empowerment of Women; Colin Robinson, Coalition Advocating Inclusion of Sexual Orientation; Selly Thiam, None on Record; Ajamu X, Sharing Tongues; Rukus!) For a variety of reasons, this did not work out. These projects that propose to “save” culture, share tongues, and put on record provide a very differently configured and no less “political” politics, which the working group is committed to engaging. One of our immediate forthcoming projects, therefore, will be to reconvene, revise, and publish this important conversation.

17. My formulation owes a debt to the anthropologists Marshall Sahlins and Sherry B. Ortner as well as to Stuart Hall (previously cited). For Sahlins, the “structures of conjuncture” is the recursive engine of history. In structures of the conjuncture, interpellations or received meanings collide with audacious “acting out” impelled by the subjects’ own will (which is not necessarily against or strategically “resistant” to those discourses, laws, traditions, etc.), creating new discourses and practices. Ortner has marked this as a key node of practice (which my brand of black queer ethnography follows). Marshall David Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Island Kingdom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981); Sherry B. Ortner, *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1996).
18. Antonio Gramsci and Joseph A. Buttigieg. *Prison Notebooks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), quoted in James Clifford, “Taking Identity Politics Seriously: The Contradictory, Stony Ground,” in Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg, and Angela McRobbie, *Without Guarantees: In Honor of Stuart Hall* (London: Verso, 2000), 94.
19. From Audre Lorde, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (San Francisco: Crossing Press, 1980), 42.
20. Quoted in Woodard, “Just as Quare.”
21. Jasbir Puar, “Queer Times, Queer Assemblages,” *Social Text*, nos. 84–85 (2005): 121.
22. Jacqueline Nassy Brown, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail: Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
23. Kamari Maxine Clarke and Deborah A. Thomas. *Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
24. See, for example, *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, edited by David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996); Paul Gilroy, “It Ain’t Where You’re From, It’s Where You’re At,” *Third Text* 5, no. 13 (1991): 3–16; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstruct-*



ing *Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Carby, *Cultures in Babylon: Black Britain and African America* (London: Verso, 1999). Ignoring or effacing this not only elides the realities of transnational black life but also attempts to erase a formidable body of creative literature that documents and imagines this. See, for example, Paule Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press, 1981); Ana-Maurine Lara, *Erzulie's Skirt* (Washington, DC: RedBone, 2006); Dionne Brand, *At the Full and Change of the Moon: A Novel* (New York: Grove, 1999); and Thomas Glave, *The Torturer's Wife* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2008).

25. "Stroke" is another name—more common in British English usage—for what is often called a "(forward) slash" in the United States.
26. In feminism and queer theory, Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Lauren Berlant, *Intimacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), and Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), among others, have produced beautiful and usable examples of this. We are also profoundly shaped and inspired—from the time we were children and young adults—by the prose and poetry of writers like Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, Gwendolyn Brooks, Chinua Achebe, Derek Walcott, Dionne Brand, Toni Morrison, and others, who are of course masters of affective and performative writing. For many of us, therefore, black/queer/diaspora is as much about the writing—that is, not "writing up" data, reporting, or mimicking the prose style of French theory but attempting to convey feeling as supplement or complement to information—as (and articulated to) theory and methodology.
27. Critique need not be mean-spirited or biting to be incisive. Moreover, we find that reenacting the Battle Royal scene in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, where a group of young black men literally fight for the chance to win a college scholarship—until only one is left standing—while white men, drinking beer and slapping each other on the back, cheer, is no way to work an intellectual project. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 17–21.
28. From Audre Lorde, "A Litany for Survival," in *The Black Unicorn* (New York: Norton, 1978), 31–32.
29. Tinsley offered this way of refocusing my attention to love, after reading an early draft of this introduction. I am very grateful for her encouragement to boldly proclaim love.
30. See Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 146.
31. One must not see this collection as a static "organization" or even a "collective" or formal group. We are cotravelers looking for kin. One key aspect of this project is to foster productive and enduring working relationships among the participants. We look



forward to a highly collaborative process and adherence to principles of peer mentorship and training of graduate and undergraduate students. Toward that end, advanced graduate students participate with junior, newly tenured, and senior faculty members. As the project progresses, we look forward to hosting a transnational consortium of scholars, artists, and activists, housed in part at Yale.

32. This is not to suggest that “male autogenesis” could not be one of many options in a queer future, but to acknowledge the effects this has had to date on scholarship and politics—including the project of silencing other (feminized) voices. For incisive and searing readings of this in black studies, see Hazel Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); and Joy James, *Transcending the Talented Tenth: Black Leaders and American Intellectuals* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
33. Hortense J. Spillers, “All the Things You Could Be by Now, If Sigmund Freud’s Wife Was Your Mother: Psychoanalysis and Race,” in *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). For me, this is also intimately related to Essex Hemphill’s calling out of the psychoanalytic strand of Afrocentric thought that reproduces Eurocentric heterosexism: Hemphill, “If Freud Had Been a Neurotic Colored Woman: Reading Dr. Frances Cress Welsing,” in *Ceremonies: Prose and Poetry* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1992). Like Nina Simone said of her composition “Mississippi Goddamn!”: “This song is a show tune, but the show has not been written for it yet.” That is, “All the things” is aspirational (we “could be”) and urgently necessary (“now”), at once. I must thank Lisa Kahaleole Hall. After an especially frustrating queer studies symposium on transnationalism, in which people of color remained unthought of until scholars of color arrived in the room, she and I riffed, waxed, and played on her suggestion that Michel Foucault is not, in fact “the daddy” of all queer critique. Of course, there are a number of permutations of this genealogical puzzle.
34. Cathy J. Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?,” *GLQ* 3 (1997): 437–65. See also Cathy J. Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
35. Cathy J. Cohen, “Deviance as Resistance: A New Research Agenda for the Study of Black Politics,” *Du Bois Review* 1 (2004): 27–45.
36. M. Jacqui Alexander, “Not Just (Any)Body Can Be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality, and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas,” *Feminist Review* 48 (1994): 5–23. See also Alexander, “Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization: An Anatomy of Feminist and State Practice in the Bahamas Tourist Economy,” in *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, ed. M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (New York: Routledge, 1997), 63–100.
37. See Alexander, “Not Just (Any)Body,” 5.

38. See, for example, Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).
39. Jafari Allen, "Looking Black at Revolutionary Cuba," *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 1 (2009): 53–62; Allen, *¡Venceremos?*
40. This formulation is inspired by James C. Scott's work. See Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
41. This is not surprising when one follows the money. It simultaneously flowed from George W. Bush-era "faith based" neoliberal funding initiatives and organizations like Focus on the Family to black "megachurches" like that of Eddie Long's New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta; to abstinence-only provisos in foreign aid to do HIV/AIDS work in various places in the world; and from fringe evangelical groups like that of "ex-gay" Pastor Phillip Lee from the US-based "His Way Out" ministry, which do homosexual "reparative therapy" in the United States, Africa, and Caribbean. See, for one small example, IGLHRC's "Uganda: The US Religious Right Exports Homophobia to Africa": [www.iglhrc.org/cgi-bin/iowa/article/pressroom/pressrelease/868.html](http://www.iglhrc.org/cgi-bin/iowa/article/pressroom/pressrelease/868.html); and "Ugandans Oppose US Christian Right Interference in Africa's Sexual Politics," *Public Eye*, [www.publiceye.org/christian\\_right/exporting.html](http://www.publiceye.org/christian_right/exporting.html) (accessed May 30, 2011).
42. Jennifer Williams offered an incisive reading of this in her paper "The Audacity of 'Quare': The Practice and Politics of Black Queer Shamelessness" (presented at the States of Black Desire Conference, Paris, France, April 2011), which inspired my use of the concept of audacity.
43. M. Jacqui Alexander, "Danger and Desire: Crossings Are Never Undertaken All at Once or Once and for All," *Small Axe* 24 (2007): 154–66.
44. See E. Darick Johnson and Mae Henderson, *Black Queer Stories: A Cultural Anthology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).
45. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.
46. And what is it about race that both makes it so difficult to explicitly state this truth and compels me to explicitly state it, even at the risk of the usual "reverse racist" balderdash so often leveled against black and other people of color who call out mundane, routine features of our racialized lives?
47. Among these, see especially Juana María Rodríguez, "Queer Sociality and Other Sexual Fantasies," *GLQ* 17 (2011): 331–48; Jafari Sinclair Allen, "For 'the Children' Dancing the Beloved Community," *Souls* 11, no. 3 (2009): 311–26; and the incisive and necessary critique of a person not of color on a closely related theme: Judith Halberstam, "Shame and White Gay Masculinity," *Social Text*, nos. 84–85 (2005): 219–33.
48. Cymene Howe, "Undressing the Universal Queer Subject: Nicaraguan Activism and Transnational Identity," *City and Society* 14, no. 2 (2002): 237–79.

49. See, for example, Combahee River Collective, *The Combahee River Collective Statement* (Albany, NY: Kitchen Table, 1986); Hortense J. Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color*; Joy James and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, eds, *The Black Feminist Reader* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000); Toni Cade Bambara, *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (New York: New American Library, 1970); and Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York, Routledge, 2000).
50. More than a few of the members of the working group have experienced editors, senior colleagues, peer reviewers, and others who espouse these views, implicitly and explicitly. This certainly reveals their ignorance of this important work, but may also expose an unreconstructed racism and/or misogyny.
51. Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 110.
52. See Cheryl Clarke, "The Failure to Transform: Homophobia in the Black Community," in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000): 197–208; and Ron Simmons, "Some Thoughts on the Challenges Facing Black Gay Intellectuals," in *Brother to Brother: New Writing by Black Gay Men*, ed. Essex Hemphill (Washington, DC: Redbone, 2007).
53. Joseph Beam, "Brother to Brother: Words from the Heart," in *In the Life*, ed. Joseph Beam (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984): 230–42.
54. Audre Lorde, "School Note," in *Black Unicorn*, 55.
55. Hemphill, introduction to *Brother to Brother*, xliii.
56. Johnson and Henderson, *Black Queer Studies*, 6.
57. Sharon Holland, foreword to Johnson and Henderson, *Black Queer Studies*, ix.
58. Sharon Holland, "Foreword: Home Is a Four-Letter Word" in *Black Queer Studies*, ix–xii.
59. "Quare" of course refers to Johnson's important intervention in black queer studies, "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 21 (2001): 1–25.
60. Holland, foreword, x. The oeuvre of Sharon Bridgforth and Marvin K. White, two of the most important contemporary black lesbian and gay writers, both continue in this tradition of parsing "home" constituted within collapsed time in their poetry, performance, and prose. This is powerfully expressed in White's newest work, *Our Name Be Witness* (Washington, DC: Redbone 2011) and Bridgforth's performance novel *Love Conjure/Blues* (Washington, DC: Redbone 2004).
61. See David L. Eng, "Queering the Black Atlantic, Queering the Brown Atlantic," *GLQ* 17 (2010): 203.
62. Rinaldo Walcott, "Outside in Black Studies: Memory from a Queer Place in Diaspora," in Johnson and Henderson, *Black Queer Studies*, 90–106.
63. Thomas Glave, *The Caribbean: A Gathering a Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

64. See, for example, Diane Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here* (New York: Grove Press, 1997).
65. Sylvia Tamale, *African Sexualities: A Reader* (Oxford, UK: Pambazuko Press, 2011); Mark Epprecht, *Heterosexual Africa? The History of an Idea from the Age of Exploitation to the Age of AIDS* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008); Neville Wallace Hoad, *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Neville Wallace Hoad, Karen Martin, and Gracie Reid, *Sex and Politics in South Africa* (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2005).
66. In her 2006 feature film, *Rag/Tag*, for example, the Nigerian/British filmmaker Adara Nwandu masterfully tells a black gay love story, suffused with tensions between African and Caribbean people, middle class and poor, and between England and Nigeria as simultaneous homeplaces. The British director Ricki Beadle-Blair is also remarkable in terms of popular gay- and lesbian-themed theatrical productions portraying black queer protagonists: he went from his irreverent Channel 4 television program *Metrosexuality*, which portrayed a multiracial, multiethnic queer black British family of choice, to direct several episodes of the Logo cable network's *Noah's Arc* and the feature film sequel, as well as other projects including stage productions of *The Mangina Chronicles*.
67. Robert Reid-Pharr, *Black Gay Man: Essays* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).
68. I am using the term *classical era* to stand in for a more precise way to mark the *longue durée* of the 1980s: the moment in which conjunctures of black power, women's liberation and gay liberation, AIDS, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, structural adjustment, and urban decay, for example, set the conditions for the emergence of black lesbian and gay cultural expression in sites worldwide.
69. Phillip Brian Harper, "The Evidence of Felt Intuition" in Johnson and Henderson, *Black Queer Studies*, 106, 118.
70. Harper, "The Evidence of Felt Intuition," 113.
71. Rinaldo Walcott, "Somewhere Out There: The New Black Queer Theory," in *Blackness and Sexualities*, ed. Michelle M. Wright and Antje Schuhmann (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2007), 29–40.
72. Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 11.
73. David L. Eng, "Queering the Black Atlantic," 11.
74. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Juana María Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); Lawrence M. La Fountain-Stokes, *Queer Ricans: Cultures and Sexualities in the Diaspora* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Richard 999 Fung, "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn," in David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom, *Q&A: Queer in Asian America* (Philadelphia: Tem-

- ple University Press, 1998); David L. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).
75. Martin F. Manalansan, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
  76. Decena, *Tacit Subjects*.
  77. Urvashi Vaid, *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation* (New York: Anchor, 1995); Kenji Yoshino, *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights* (New York: Random House, 2006).
  78. I do not wish to overstate this. African Americanist scholarship has long contributed to this by jealously policing the boundaries of black studies against national, gender, sexual, and language difference, if not the boundaries of black identification itself. But at the same time, too often African Americanists are left to do the “dirty work” of calling out racism—which carries a heavy personal and political burden and vulnerability.
  79. To be certain, US racial formation is particular, and the role that the nation-state plays on the international stage is unique. Still, it is not historically “exceptional” with respect to its transformation in the institution of transatlantic chattel slavery, which can be seen throughout the Americas, for example.
  80. Roderick Ferguson and Grace Kyungwon Hong, *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 1.
  81. Ferguson and Hong, *Strange Affinities*, 1.
  82. Ferguson and Hong, *Strange Affinities*, 13.
  83. Walcott, “Somewhere Out There,” 32.
  84. Despite our best efforts, logistics, language, limited networks, and disparate measures of “quality” and “appropriateness” across different types of borders, as well as limitations of space and time (of would-be participants and of this publication), all proved formidable. While the contributors are in fact diverse by dint of place of birth, ethnicity, national heritage, degrees of identification with black hybridity and “mixedness,” gender expression, sex, religion and spiritual expression, and other measures; each of them, like me, has been trained and/or currently works in the “elite academy” of the United States. Most of the articles were researched in anglophone contexts.
  85. Walcott, “Somewhere Out There,” 33.
  86. Holland, foreword, xii; italics are mine.
  87. I have written about this elsewhere. See “One Way or Another: Erotic Subjectivity in Cuba” (forthcoming) and *¡Venceremos!* While “the erotic” has been theorized by several foundational thinkers, its political and intellectual genealogies vary. The important collection by Don Kulick and Margaret Willson, *Taboo: Sweet Identity and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork* (New York: Routledge, 1995), enlarged our understanding of sexuality and desire in the fieldwork encounter. However, my formulation of erotic subjectivity includes and goes well beyond associations with sexual

- identity, including Kulick's use of the term to refer to "sexual life." Erotic subjectivities are not only realized by confrontations with extrinsic power or structures; more pointedly, these practices are made through, and form one part of a complex process constituted by, embodied experiences, which include gender, race and color, and nationality.
88. Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: 1984), 57.
  89. The brackets underscore the particularities of black citizenship that Livermon draws out in his essay, which make South Africa a unique case.
  90. Combahee River Collective, *Combahee River Collective Statement*.
  91. See, for example, Edward Wilmot Blyden and Ralph Lynch Hollis, *Black Spokesman: Selected Published Writings of Edward Wilmot Blyden* (New York: Humanities, 1971); and W. E. B. DuBois, *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part Which Africa Has Played in World History* (New York: International Publishers, 1965).
  92. Rinaldo Walcott, "Queer Returns: Human Rights, the Anglo Caribbean, and Diaspora Politics," *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* 3 (2009): 1–19, 4, [sta.uwi.edu/crgs/november2009/journals/Walcott.pdf](http://sta.uwi.edu/crgs/november2009/journals/Walcott.pdf) (accessed January 23, 2010).
  93. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 26, no. 3 (2008): 1–14. Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (Boston: St. Martin's, 1993), and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (New York: Knopf, 1987) ("This is not a story to pass on") come to mind as important mediations on this methodological conundrum.
  94. Personal communication with the author.
  95. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens," 22.
  96. Joy James, "Radicalizing Feminisms," in *The Black Feminist Reader*, ed. Joy James and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 239–60.
  97. See, for example, Faye V. Harrison, *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further toward an Anthropology for Liberation* (Washington, DC: Association for Black Anthropologists, 1991); Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Zed Books, 1999); Carole Boyce Davies, Meredith Gadsby, Charles Peterson, and Henrietta Williams, *Decolonizing the Academy: African Diaspora Studies* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003); and M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).
  98. Cohen, "Deviance as Resistance," 27–45.
  99. Liz Galst, "Saving Lives, Promoting Democracy, Alleviating Poverty, and Fighting AIDS: The Case for Funding Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Populations," Arcus Operating Foundation, 2010, [www.arcusfoundation.org/images/uploads/downloads/Saving\\_Lives\\_Report\\_Arcus\\_Galst\\_2010.pdf](http://www.arcusfoundation.org/images/uploads/downloads/Saving_Lives_Report_Arcus_Galst_2010.pdf) (accessed January 6, 2011).