CHAPTER 10

Black Life/Schwarz-Sein: Inhabitations of the Flesh

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To have one's belonging lodged in a metaphor is voluptuous intrigue;
to inhabit a trope; to be a kind of fiction. To live in the Black
Diaspora is I think to live as a fiction—a creation
of empires, and also self-creation.

—DIONNE BRAND, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*

Indeed some of us did not die . . .

And what shall we do, we who did not die? . . .

I don't know the answer to that.

—JUNE JORDAN, "Some of Us Did Not Die"

Look for the life

Look for the reflections of the living

—JUNE JORDAN, "Nowadays the Heroes"

Only by becoming inhuman can the human being
pretend that they are.

—JAMES BALDWIN, *The Price of the Ticket*

Black Life is that which must be constitutively abjected—and as such has represented the negative ontological ground for the Western order of things for the last five hundred years—but cannot be included in the Western world of Man as such. As an ontological formation, Black Life not only forms a part of the modern West but must be understood as constitutive of this domain. The Middle Passage, transatlantic racial slavery, the plantation system, and the gendered racial terror erected on Black people were not one-time events; they spanned almost five hundred years, from the early fifteenth century to well into the nineteenth century, and their consequences can still be felt around us in many other places around the

globe, including continental Africa. Although the "proper" colonization of continental Africa did not extend over the same period, it must be seen as part of this continuum if we consider that the "scramble for Africa" took place almost contemporaneously with the abolition of slavery in Brazil, thus extending this form of racial terror to the 1970s, when Portugal "ceded" its African colonies. The subjugation, expropriation, enslavement, rape, and killing of Black Life continues today under different guises in, among other places, the prison industrial complex in the United States and the economic neocolonization of many African nations by the West.

Given this historical sedimentation, Blackness and Black Life have become a negative fleshly foil for the being of white Western Man.[1] Nevertheless, Black Life is continually made to appear as mere ontic scaffolding vis-à-vis the-world-Man—that is, as historical happenstance rather than as a force that fundamentally structures every part of being in the world Man. Black Life, which is intimately tied to anti-Black racism but never reducible to it, provides the ontological conditions of possibility for the historical or ontic existence of Black people, Black diasporas, Black culture and whiteness, modernity writ large. As a result, focusing only on the ontic leaves intact the structural basis for racial slavery, Jim Crow, neocolonial exploitation, and the prison industrial complex.[2]

Continuing the exploration of Hortense Spillers's notion of the flesh in my book *Habeas Viscus*, my essay focuses on Black Life/Schwarz-Sein as a constitutive ontological limit for the workings of modern life and being.[3] For Spillers the flesh—both opposed to the body and in a parasitic relationship to it—represents the pivotal domain through which Man marks the hierarchical species-level difference between himself and his various others, for instance, Latino, poor, incarcerated, indigenous, disabled, gender-nonconforming subjects, but especially African-descended populations. To say it more succinctly and in the inimitable words of Hortense Spillers, this means fundamentally misrecognizing how Black is vestibular not simply to culture but also to life and being in this here prison house of modernity.[4] If, indeed, the flesh supplies the constitutive relation to the world and, thus, to the earth, then we would do well to version Amiri Baraka, who, in the heady days of 1960s, said that Black was neither a nation nor chained to particular territories but a country. That is, we ought to insist on the flesh being our country, the enfolded mattering of the ungendered belonging to unbelonging.[5] As a result, it becomes paramount to understand and amplify alternate modes of being that do not rest on abjuring Black Life—and not sell our "birthright for a mess of pottage," as James Weldon Johnson's unnamed protagonist did—but embrace its

possibilities, albeit without erasing the traces of violence that give rise to them.[6]

One of the main ways in which this putatively natural difference between Man and his Black others becomes legible is through what Spillers refers to as the "ungendering and defacing project of African persons."[7] Accordingly, the genders and sexualities of Black Life are deemed incompatible with the world of Man, because Black subjects are projected to be in possession of either a surplus (hyperfemininity/hypermasculinity and hypersexualization) of gender and sexuality or a complete lack thereof (desexualization). As Spillers phrases this constellation: "The unsexed black female and the supersexed black female embody the very same vice, cast the very same shadow, since both are an exaggeration of the uses to which sex might be put."[8] In other words, the histories of racial slavery, colonialism, Jim Crow, the prison regime, etc., have congealed to debilitate Black subjects' ability to conform to normative genders and sexualities. The iconography of the restroom signs during the era of legal segregation in the US South underscores this disavowal of gender difference in no uncertain terms seeing that the white side is split into two doors, one for "ladies" and one for "gentlemen," whereas there is only one entryway on the "colored" side: The vestibule to the ungendering of the door of no return.[9]

This means that often if Black people sought recognition as properly human, they have needed not only to accept and perform an idea of humanity steeped in white supremacy and colonialism but also to don the drag of normative genders and sexualities. My point is, though, that this represents an opportunity for imaging gender/sexuality otherwise, for embracing and inhabiting the ungendered flesh, for fully and differently inhabiting the gift of Black Life. The post–civil rights era so clearly shows that pursuing a respectability politics based on disparaging different facets of Black Life such as wearing sagging pants, speaking AAVE (African American Vernacular English), patois, or even standard English with a newly immigrated accent from the non-Anglophone Black world, creating nontraditional social formations, and living nonnormative genders and sexualities, in favor of proper masculinity and femininity, nuclear families, speaking standard English without bringing your non-Anglo linguistic communities with you, etc., has not led to Black folks reaping the political, economic, and cultural benefits of full humanity. Far from it, given that the modern state bestows and rescinds humanity as an individualized legal status in the vein of property. Allocating personhood in this way maintains the world of Man and its attendant racializing assemblages. Accordingly, the entry fee required of Black folks for legal recognition is the

conformity to and acceptance of categories thoroughly marinated in the sanguine fluids of white supremacy and colonialism and stewed in the bitter sauce of normative genders and sexualities. In order for individual Black lives to be recognized as suitably human by the law their Blackness must be killed.

Denise Ferreira da Silva describes the affectability of the Black subject in Western modernity, which she sets off against the transparency of the white, masculine master subject, thus:

> In this ontological context, globality, the horizon of death, scientific signification has deployed the racial to produce modern subjects that emerge in exteriority/affectability and exist between two moments of violence: (a) engulfment, that is, "partial negation," the productive violent act of naming, the symbolic appropriation that produces them, inaugurating a relationship precisely because, in the regimen of representation interiority governs, it institutes unsublatable and irreducible subjects, and (b) murder, total annihilation, that which obliterates the necessary but haunting relationship between an I instituted by the desire for transparency (self-determination) and the affectable, always already vanishing others of Europe that the scientific cataloguing of minds institutes.[10]

Ungendering represents one pivotal mode of engulfment in the force field of Black Life/Schwarz-Sein as an ontology of affectability, which provides violent abjection and opens up possibilities for being otherwise. For instance, Toni Cade Bambara asks us "to let go of all notions of manhood and femininity and concentrate on Blackhood. . . . It perhaps takes less heart to pick up the gun than to face the task of creating a new identity, a self, perhaps an androgynous self, via commitment to the struggle. . . . I'm not arguing the denial of manhood or womanhood, but rather a shifting of priorities, a call for Selfhood, Blackhood."[11] My point is that the shifting of priorities Bambara demands with regard to the affectability of Black ungendering already exists in a variety of guises, and we ought to consult the histories, myths, speculations, and conjurings in order to embrace more fully the gift of Schwarz-Sein's nonnormative genders.

Using the racialized performances of gender of Joss Moody, the main character in Jackie Kay's 1998 novel *Trumpet*, and the musician Sun Ra as launchpads, my argument pays particular attention to the complex ways gender and sexuality function in the barring of Black flesh from the category of the human-as-Man. In addition, both Sun Ra and Joss Moody embody nonnormative figurations of Black masculinity that deploy the

violent ungendering of Black subjects as a condition of possibility for alternate ways of inhabiting the world. As Spillers remarks, "black men can't afford to appropriate the gender prerogatives of white men because they have a different kind of history; so you can't just simply be patriarchal. You have to really think about something else as you come to that option. . . . Men of the black diaspora are the only men who had the opportunity to understand something about the female that no other community had the opportunity to understand, and also vice versa."[12] Joss Moody and Sun Ra represent inhabitations of the flesh that bring to light the relational being-in-the-world of Black Life/Schwarz-Sein, in the process making the constitutive ungendered displacement of Black Life from origin and belonging habitable in the present and in the future by staging the affectability of Black ontological mattering as second sight, as one of the most luminous gifts Black Life/Schwarz-Sein has bestowed upon our world.[13] In focusing on the affectability of ungendered mattering in Joss Moody's and Sun Ra's conjurings, my aim is to highlight the different ways the histories of Schwarz-Sein/Black Life offer an archive of alternatives to being-in-the-World-of-Man in the vein suggested by Bambara. Both Moody and Ra confront us with "the terrifying and overwhelming possibility that there are no models, that we shall have to create from scratch," and as a result affectably stand in the flesh as both the fiction of empires and as self-creations.[14] In order to think more deeply about Black Life's relationship to the nonhuman, I will also briefly consider an underdiscussed aspect of Henrietta Lacks's cellular afterlife. The larger project will focus on other texts that welcome the ungendering of Black Life as speculative inhabitations of the flesh, such as Audre Lorde's *Zami*, Samuel R. Delany's *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand*, Nuruddin Farah's *Maps*, Octavia Butler's two Parable novels, Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*, and Luke Sutherland's *Venus as a Boy*, as well as the ungendered Schwarz-Sein of Black public figures such as Michael Jackson, Prince, Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey, and Janet Jackson.

Partially based on the life of white US-American jazz musician Billy Tipton, Jackie Kay's brilliant and beautiful 1998 novel, *Trumpet*, tells the story of Joss Moody, an Afro-Scottish jazz musician, who dies before the present tense of the novel is set in motion and is "revealed" to have been assigned female at birth and given the name Josephine Moore to everyone except his white Scottish wife, Millie. The novel is told almost exclusively through the retrospective narrations of Millie, who now has to come to grips with everybody knowing Joss's "secret," and their adopted son, Colman Moody. Joss's life is narrated by those who did not die, only some of

whom are looking for life. The readers also encounter how government officials, medical professionals, and a journalist enforce dimorphic gender norms and sensationalize Joss's gender expression. Take, for instance, the doctor, who certifies Joss's death:

> Doctor Krishnamurty got her red pen out from her doctor's bag. What she thought of as her emergency red pen. She crossed "male" out and wrote "female" in her rather bad doctor's handwriting. She looked at the word "female" and thought it wasn't quite clear enough. She crossed that out, tutting to herself, and printed "female" in large childish letters.[15]

Dr. Krishnamurty is only one of the many characters in Kay's novel who believe that they have the right to inspect Joss's genitalia and use this privilege to measure, tabulate, and sensationalize his personhood.

Over the course of the novel, readers encounter Joss as a trans man, father, husband, musician, friend, daughter, young queer woman, and a corpse. In the wake of his death Joss becomes a diffractive reflection of the other characters' own struggles with identification and belonging. What is striking, however, is that barely anyone except his wife and son mentions that Joss is a Black man, which seems peculiar in the spatiotemporal context of Scotland and England from the 1950s to the 1990s, a time period during which policy and discourse made abundantly clear that there was to be no Black in the Union Jack and the United Kingdom did not care for or about Black people. Hence, my question: What role does Blackness play in the will to know and therefore violently determine a supposedly mimetic correlation between Joss's anatomy and gender expression?[16] In order to better understand this, we should note that what Spillers calls the ungendering of Black Life appears in the arenas of sexuality and gender expression, among other places, in the mainstream deficitary imaginary concerning Black Life's constitutive not-queerness or transness, which is reinscribed through the incessant recurrence on the "innate" homophobia and transphobia of Black communities, whether they are located in the United States, the Caribbean, or different parts of the African continent—and, of course, in the constant stream of studies and articles that claim to show that Black people are not exceptionally homophobic or transphobic. Just to be transparent: I am in no way saying that homophobia and transphobia do not exist in African-descended populations but describing the putative excessiveness and surplus projected onto Blackness.

In a related fashion, yet also deviating from the norm, often Black public figures such as Caster Semenya, Michael Sam, Brittney Griner, Jason

Collins, Janet Mock, Frank Ocean, and Laverne Cox have been summoned as spokespersons for nonnormative genders and sexualities—whether they agree to take up these positions or not—which highlights the excessive queerness and transness of Black Life (surplus). In addition, we have to consider the long intertwined histories of genital policing and sexual violence Black folks have been subject to during the Middle Passage and plantation slavery and since, for example, the inspection of Black folks' genitalia on the auction block, the systematic use of rape and other forms of sexual violence during slavery and Jim Crow, as well as the long history of medicalized genital surveillance and experimentation, of which the Tuskegee experiment is only the most prominent example, and the very public court cases for the criminal transmission of HIV of Michael Johnson, a.k.a. Tiger Mandingo, and Nushawn Williams, a.k.a. Shyteek Johnson, in the United States and Nadja Benaissa in Germany.[17]

Of course, there is the case of Khoisan woman Sarah Baartman, who was "exhibited" throughout Europe during the early nineteenth century, while after her date Baartman's preserved genitals, her skeleton, and a plaster cast of her nude body were displayed at the Museum of Man in Paris until 1974, when these were removed from public view. Nevertheless, Baartman's remains were not repatriated to South Africa until 2002. We also see this inclination in the often now retrospectively submerged genitality of lynching, which I will underscore only through one example: the 1934 lynching of Claude Neal in Marianna, Florida. Neal was imprisoned because he was accused of killing a white woman, with little to no evidence, and abducted by a lynch mob. The local and national press printed announcements for the lynching, which drew over seven thousand white onlookers from eleven states, some of whom staged a riot after they arrived too late to witness the spectacle. Among many forms of torture, Neal was subjected to castration and the mob forced him to orally consume his severed penis and testicles. This tendency also appears in less "spectacular" arenas such as the Moynihan Report and in the recent billboards about the most dangerous place in the world for a child being the womb of a Black woman.

Overall, we see a clear relationship between visibility and knowability and their intimate ties to the inherent killability of Black Life. Black people's presumed excessive and pathological deviance becomes the ground for the disposability of Black Life. The frequently literal and at times only intimated genital policing and violation of Black folks I have cursorily outlined here forms a crucial part of both the persistent practices of "racializing surveillance" in slavery and its afterlives Simone Browne charts in her recent

book *Dark Matters* and C. Riley Snorton's argument about the different ways Black sexuality in the Western world is firmly encased in a glass closet, which according to Snorton is defined by "hypervisibility and confinement, spectacle, and speculation."[18] The history of the different ways Black Flesh is subject to violent genital surveillance brings together all four factors Snorton associates with the glass closet while at the same time gesturing toward the entombment W. E. B. Du Bois associates with the "thick sheet of invisible but horribly tangible plate glass [that] is between [Black people] and the world," as the partition of racial difference during de jure segregation in his 1940 autobiography, *Dusk of Dawn*.[19] While Du Bois is less concerned with the surveillance aspect of this haptically and sonically impermeable but visually traversable pane of glass, his metaphor of Black people being seen but not heard in this enclosure emphasizes just how fundamental to Black Life this enclosure is. As a consequence, to be Black is always already tantamount to inhabiting the glass confinement of "racializing surveillance."

This is all a circuitous way of getting at how Joss's Blackness is at once projected onto, displaced by, and a fundamental component of the uncovered "secret" of his gender expression after his death. The crisis Joss's death causes in the other characters and the presumed right of some to know and determine the ultimate truth imagined to inhere in Joss's genitalia results from both Joss's race and gender. The fundamental point to be made here is that Joss Moody, suspended in a perpetual state of vestibularity, is not supposed to exist in this context, not as a Black person, not as queer Black woman, and most definitely not as a Black trans man, which is why he is forced to invent himself, give birth to himself. Here, I am less interested in the jazz structure of the novel than I am in what Joss's irreducibly specific story, grounded as it is in a particular time and place, can tell us about Black Life and "the transgender potential for remaking Black manhood in the diaspora," to use Matt Richardson's words and Black un/genders in general.[20]

Jackie Kay writes about this perpetual state of vestibular unbelonging in a poem from her 1999 collection, *Off Colour*, entitled "Somebody Else":

> If I was not myself, I would be somebody else.
> But actually I am somebody else.
> I have been somebody else all my life.
> It's no laughing matter going about the place
> all the time being somebody else:
> people mistake you; you mistake yourself.[21]

Because Joss must invent and reinvent himself, he listens for signs of Black Life elsewhere, he looks to the suave Black masculinity of jazz performers. When Colman, Joss and Millie's adopted son, remembers his father, he thinks that Joss "looked real enough playing that horn in those smoky clubs; he looked real and unreal like a fantasy of himself. All jazz men are fantasies of themselves, reinventing the Counts and Dukes and Armstrongs, imitating them . . . Black people and music. Black people and music; what would the world be without black people and music" (*Trumpet*, 104). The perpetual self-reincarnation of the Counts and Dukes and Armstrongs serve as Joss's templates for living in Blackness and in masculinity in a spatiotemporal zone that resolutely denies his existence by demanding him to be somebody-else, anybody-else. This raises the questions: How does Black Life come to exist in spaces where there is no Black culture to speak of? How do you *be* Black without recourse to models for Schwarz-Sein, like Joss Moody in Scotland?

Jackie Kay also records how in the absence of other Black people in 1960s Scotland, Bessie Smith becomes her portable cypher for Black Life in very similar terms to how Spillers construes community as a "moveable feast":

> I was adopted in 1961 and brought up in a suburban house in a suburban street in the north of Glasgow. . . . I never saw another black person. There was my brother and me. That was it. . . . So the first time I saw Bessie it was like finding a friend. I saw her before I heard her. . . . I realized that I could choose always to have Bessie Smith in my life. . . . Nobody could take her away from me. And when I grew up and went away, I could take her with me. And I did.[22]

Being-somebody-else entails the demise of the not-somebody-else, it demands coming to grips with the death of languages, cultures, archives, genders, origins, homes, and belonging. Yet, being-somebody-else also engenders, in the words of Katherine McKittrick, "possibilities that are iterations of black life that cannot be contained by black death."[23] For "it is only when you are stranded in a hostile country that you need a romance of origins; it is only when you lose your mother that she becomes a myth," as Saidiya Hartman remarks.[24] In Kay's novel, Colman is far less captivated by his maternal ancestry than he is by his patrilineal descent, which leads Matt Richardson to write the following about the status of maternity in *Trumpet*:

> She (Josephine) is the absent presence of Black female experience in the diaspora, the denied past that sustains the present and the future.

> Without her, there can be no Joss. He is his own mother, so to speak. However, in order to be a (Black) "man," he has to deny his own reproduction. That is, his biological mother and his figurative "mother" in Josephine constitute the feminine that must be displaced from desire in order to fulfill the oedipal contract. To be a proper oedipalized male requires the phobic denial of identification with the (castrated) mother in favor of becoming the father.[25]

Though I agree largely with Richardson's analysis of the vicissitudes of maternity in the construction of Joss's and Colman Moody's Black masculinities, I would add that in both cases it becomes necessary to disavow maternity to a certain extent, because in the schema of racializing assemblages the white mother is not able to bestow symbolic significance of the benefits of whiteness on the Black child, nor can she serve as a guide for how to be in Blackness or explain the somebody-elseness of the Black child, especially when the assumption in this context is always already that the Black child cannot "belong" to the white mother and thus the British nation.[26]

In a video recording, Jackie Kay offers an emblematic anecdote before she reads of a few of her poems, including "Somebody Else," of a white woman asking her mother "Is that your daughter?" and demanding to know from Kay: "Where do you come from?"[27] Kay responds with her poem "In My Country":

> a woman passed round me
> in a slow watchful circle,
> as if I were a superstition;
> or the worst dregs of her imagination,
> so when she finally spoke
> her words spliced into bars
> of an old wheel. A segment of air.
> *Where do you come from?*
> "Here," I said, "Here. These parts."[28]

It seems as though in this particular constellation the loss of the white mother is a forgone conclusion, giving the existential question "Where do you come from?" a double signification since it presupposes not only that Kay as a Black person cannot form a part of Scotland's imaginary bloodlines but also that she cannot be of her mother. In "'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe': An American Grammar Book," Spillers takes the Moynihan Report, which argued that the "tangle of pathology" found in the

African American family was defined by a matriarchal structure because of the laws of racial slavery that yoked enslaved children to the status of the mother rather than the father, as her point of departure. Fusing this historical configuration with the law of the father in Lacanian psychoanalysis, Spillers refutes the Black matriarchy thesis in order to show how, instead, for Black people in the West "motherhood as female blood-rite is outraged, is denied, at the very same time that it becomes the founding term of a human and social enactment; 2) a dual fatherhood is set in motion, comprised of the African father's banished name and body and the captor father's mocking presence. In this play of paradox, only the female stands in the flesh, both mother and mother-dispossessed."[29] As Heather Russell reasons in her assessment of Spillers's overhaul of the Oedipus complex through the prism of the Middle Passage and plantation slavery, "the 'law of the Mother' . . . is fraught with intrinsic tension for black men, within both the symbolic and public/institutional orders. Rejecting the 'law of the Mother' and unable to name the Father, the 'law of Race' thus becomes guarantor of racial and masculine identity. Hence, the 'law of Race' becomes a metonym for the Father's name, the Father's law."[30] The whiteness of the mother compounds the rejection of the maternal in this context, because the social environment continually reminds both Kay and Colman that their mothers must be somebody else, and because the Black father remains outside this schema, the visual taxonomy of race becomes the proxy for both paternity and the father's law. Accordingly, while the law of race erases maternity altogether, it intimates that the father's Blackness can bequeath subjectivity to children like Colman.

This is one reason why Colman recollects continually pestering his father to relay to him a narrative of their familial origin, especially how his grandfather John Moore came to Scotland. Joss does reveal his father's story to Colman in a posthumous letter, but only in relatively broad brushstrokes, partially because he himself knows so little about this history: A Black man who arrived in Scotland in the early part of the twentieth century to be educated but wound up working as a servant, whose name, John Moore, was given to him by his employers, never saw his family again. John Moore's "story could be the story of any black man who came from Africa to Scotland. His story, I told you, was the diaspora. Every story runs into the same river and the same river runs into the sea" (*Trumpet*, 271). At an earlier point in the narrative Colman also recollects a different type of genealogical wisdom Joss imparted to him while he was still alive: "He said they didn't belong anywhere but to each other. . . . He said you make up

your own bloodline, Colman. Make it up and trace it back. Design your own family tree—what's the matter with you? Haven't you got an imagination?" (*Trumpet*, 59). It is this knowledge that Colman must come to understand and internalize, which necessitates becoming a permanent resident alien of the flesh as a country.

Similarly, in a dreamlike chapter of the novel entitled "Music," readers become privy to a glimpse of Joss's inhabitation of his music:

> The music is his blood. His cells. But the odd bit is that down at the bottom, the blood doesn't matter after all. . . . So when he takes off he is the whole century galloping to its close. The wide moors. The big mouth. Scotland. Africa. Slavery. Freedom. He is a girl. A man. Everything, nothing. He is sickness, health. The sun. The moon. Black, white. Nothing weighs him down. Not the past or the future. He hangs on to the high C and then he lets go. Screams. Lets it go. Bends his notes and bends his body. . . . He is blowing his story. His story is blowing in the wind. He lets it rip. He tears himself apart. He explodes. Then he brings himself back. Slowly, slowly, piecing himself together. (*Trumpet*, 136)

Although ultimately the blood might be irrelevant, it would be difficult to get under it without the mattering of its existence, and, not to put a too fine point on it, the bottom is also where the music plays "loud and long," which like Nel's Urschrei at the end of Morrison's *Sula* "had no bottom and it had no top," but surely enfolds much more than "just circles and circles of sorrow."[31]

Like Joss Moody, another jazz musician, Sun Ra, also knew all too well what it meant to live "all the time being somebody else" and, thus, create yourself from the rivers of blood that course through the veins of Black Life. According to gossip circulating and the official documents fabricated by the Feds after his death, Ra was born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1914 and assigned the name Herman Sonny Blount. However, Sun Ra, throughout his lifetime, vehemently denied these rumors, choosing instead to flip the "mistake" of being-somebody-else on its head, for instance, when he states: "People say I'm Herman Blount, but I don't know him. That's an imaginary person, he never existed. . . . If I tried to do anything with the name Sonny Blount, I couldn't. . . . I'm not terrestrial, I'm a celestial being."[32] Besides presaging Mariah Carey's infamous "I don't know her" by a few decades, though no less resplendent with glitter than Mimi, it must be said, Ra's insistence in word, sound, image, and deed that his roots are incontrovertibly otherworldly hints at another form of realness, which piv-

ots on both his personal somebody-elseness and the common conditions of Black Life.[33]

Sun Ra's 1972 film, *Space Is the Place*, depicts Ra and his Arkestra traveling to another planet via the medium of sound waves. Yet, in order to populate this new planet with Black people, Ra and his Arkestra must voyage back to Earth and, using their otherworldly music, save Black people from the daunting pimp figure named Overseer. Eventually, planet Earth combusts after the saviors (Sun Ra and his Arkestra) have returned to their new home planet. In one of the central scenes from the film, set in an Oakland community center during the Black Power era, Ra, who has just returned from his intergalactic travels, is confronted by young Black people about his racial and political realness; one woman asking Ra, "How do we know *you ain't somebody else*?" This is the response he offers: "How do you know I am real? I am not real, I am just like you. You don't exist in this society. If you did, your people wouldn't be seeking equal rights. You're not real. . . . So we're both, myths. I do not come to you as a reality. I come to you as the myth. Because that's what black people are. Myths."[34] Nevertheless, this did not preclude Sun Ra from exercising patriarchal power in his Arkestra, for instance, by relegating female members of his family of invented bloodlines, such as Vertamae Grosvenor and Rhoda Blount, to "ornamental" roles such as choreography, costuming, and vocalizing. Even one of his most consistent collaborators, June Tyson, was initially confined to this status and was sometimes asked to leave the recording studio if things were not going well: "I can't create with women in my environment," said Ra. Rumored to be gay and/or asexual during his time on this planet, Sun Ra resolutely refused any semblance of recognizable human sexuality,[35] more often refusing any hint of what might be considered sexuality and ungendering himself through his clothing, voice, and stage presence. He also articulated this ungendering as it applies to Black folks in toto in one of his broadsides from the 1950s:

> Negroes are not men.
> Negroes do not belong to
> the race called man. . . .
> The truth is that negroes
> are human beings, and
> in trying to be a man
> they are all out of course[36]

Ra lays bare here not only that Black folks dwell beyond the imaginary bloodlines of the world-of-Man but also, and, more importantly, that these

currents of imagined co/sanguinity transport racializing qua ungendering. In other words, in unbelonging to the "race called man," Black men cannot be "men" and Black women are not able to conform to the category of "woman" in the world-of-Man. Even though Ra, as opposed to Joss, is said to have been born into a Black community in early twentieth-century Birmingham, he still felt it necessary to invent his own bloodline, or rather do away with earthly sanguine waters altogether. Feeling out of place, Sun Ra recognized and lived according to the maxim that he *wasn't-never-nobody-else*. Whether he was feeling like a woman and looking like a man, or vice versa, he made sure that planet Earth had some inkling of what it feels like to sound like a no-no.[37]

The recent embrace of all that is nonhuman and inhuman in the broader field of cultural studies, appearing under the guise of posthumanism, animal studies, new materialism, object-oriented realism, has once again failed to systematically address the question of Blackness and the mattering of Black Life, even though, as Zakiyyah Iman Jackson states, the very "terrestrial movement toward the nonhuman is simultaneously movement toward blackness, whether blackness is embraced or not, as blackness constitutes the very matter at hand."[38] Which is to say, there is no sphere of the nonhuman untouched by the forces of racialized gendering, and *vice versa*. This means that seeking to better understand the nonhuman, we would do well to route this journey through and root it in the relational mattering of Black Life, in the fleshy ether of concocted bloodlines. If negro blood, indeed, has a message for the world as W. E. B. Du Bois prophesied in 1903, how is it transmitted when "making generations" is not an option and you have always already lost your mother, father, aunties, and uncles, which is another way of asking how the message radiates when the blood is not pumping through the veins of individuals designated as Black?[39] Let me give you a more concrete example. While most of you are now familiar with the story of Henrietta Lacks and the eternal afterlife of the HeLa cells, and their productive vestibularity for so many fields of science and industry, what has garnered far less attention is how the cervical cancer cells—the first human cell culture to exist independently of their humanoid form in the laboratory—of a poor Black woman from Virginia shaped the purported first complete genetic map of the human genome.[40]

Twenty years before the sequencing through the Human Genome Project in 2000, another sequence was completed in 1981 in the United Kingdom, albeit not using nuclear DNA (the forty-six chromosomes found in the nucleus) but mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA).[41] The primary difference between these two forms of biological mattering lies in the fact that mtDNA

is transmitted to succeeding generations *only* through the maternal line. What later came to be known as the Anderson sequence served as the reference for both the Human Genome Project and the Human Genome Diversity Project, which, as opposed to the Human Genome Project's avowed goal of charting the overall sequence of human DNA, was studying and preserving current human genetic diversity for the future, especially as it pertained to non-European indigenous populations—i.e., those parts of the human genome most likely to face "extinction."[42] Of course, why the "rare specimens" of specific genetic mattering associated with different indigenous populations around the globe might cease to exist or why they constitute distinct populations (racial groups) did not really figure into this project. In any case, at some point in the process it was revealed that against the grain of previous suppositions the Anderson line, now the standard against which all other genome cartographic renderings were measured, contained HeLa cells and did not consist of purely melanin deficient genetic material—i.e., British or European mtDNA. Once this knowledge became public, Anderson was resequenced in 1999 with the scientists "correcting" the map to conform to the Euro norm, thus excising not only any trace of Africanity but also any remnant of the HeLa cell line. I guess this is what happens when the "family of Man" meets the door of no return. What is the message for the world encoded in the somebody-elseness of Henrietta Lacks's genetic material? As an altogether different form of creating bloodlines ex nihilo, the retroactive transformation of the Anderson sequence had to be forcibly and retroactively made white and British, which is to say, we are not dealing with mere absence but with the violent killing and erasure of Black Life by any means necessary. As a result, Black Life must be excised from even the purportedly most fundamental parts of human life in order for it to even begin resembling human life, whether this occurs on the street, in the boardroom, in the university, or in the laboratory: *the Un-Blackening of human life*. While we can certainly debate whether the "Negro identifies being with life; more precisely with the vital force [because] his metaphysics are an existentialist ontology," as Léopold Sédar Senghor would have it, we would be remiss to not acquiesce to the fact that this represents, for all intents and purposes, an "ontology written in blood."[43]

Though the HeLa cell line was and continues to be so fundamental to scientific practice, it has also accrued much more narrative baggage than other cell lines. Much of the discourse around the HeLa line in the scientific community, particularly after Henrietta Lacks became known as the mother of these cells, has been about how these cells multiply so prolifically

and how they have a tendency to aggressively displace other cells with which they come into contact. If you, too, out here, suddenly realize the only music they are playing in the adjoining room is Hortense Spillers's voice telling us, "Let's face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name," get comfortable, grab some popcorn, and cue up that Michael Jackson, because you are most definitely not alone.[44] But make sure to take your time listening, otherwise you might miss not-quite-yet observable and the barely audible frequencies of the murmurs beneath the blood. Even though Michael might have proclaimed that "it don't matter if you're black or white" in the chorus of the song that inaugurated the late imperial period in his oeuvre, we do well to remember the concluding ad libs in this song: "It's black, it's white/It's tough for you to get by/It's black, it's white, woo," which are of course accompanied by his singular woohoohoos. Apparently, it do matter whether you are Black or white even at the cellular level, even after death.[45] You really could not make this shit up, even if you tried.

Michael too had to invent himself, because he was not supposed exist, because he was a fiction. Black boys with Afros from Gary, Indiana, were not supposed to become the world's biggest pop stars and most recognized public figures, and, if we are being honest, eleven-year-old children were not envisaged to sound the way Michael sings on "I'll Be There." How else can we explain the layers of somebody-elseness in the following descriptions of Jackson's first recordings for Motown: First, Greg Tate, "Yet part of the tyke's appeal was being able to simulate being lost in the hot sauce way before he was supposed to know what the hot sauce even smelt like. No denying he sounded like he knew the real deal."[46] And, second, Nelson George: "Whereas the folks at Steeltown [the Local Gary, Indiana, record company the group recorded for before Motown], Joe, and Bobby Taylor had all seen Michael's voice as a vehicle for a kid to sing as an adult, Gordy saw that the real money was in having a kid with adult skills sing as a kid."[47] As a child, Jackson's vocal apparatus mimicked being a grown Black man, only to relinquish both the twin "birthright" of his Blackness and masculinity once he had transmorphed into an adult Black man.

Was there ever a period when Michael was not engaged in the labor of being-somebody-else, where he did not hum to himself: *Wo Er war, soll Ich niemals werden*? Was Jackson being-somebody-else during the very public discourse about the shape, color, and size of his genitalia and buttocks as part of the first round of allegations of child sexual abuse against Jackson in 1993? Has there been a day in recent memory in which Oprah Winfrey was *not* asked to *be anybody but* a Black woman born in rural Mississippi

and raised in Milwaukee and Memphis? What modalities of somebody-elseness did eighteen-year-old Mariah Carey exhibit in her "relationship" with and subsequent marriage to her employer, Tommy Mottola, who was not only over twice her age but also the president of the record company that styled her in ways that would facilitate Carey's crossover success through racial passing? What form of somebody-elseness was Prince performing when he scrawled "slave" on his cheek and changed his public name to an icon, which typographically fuses the signs for male (♂) and female (♀) but cannot itself be phonated: ⚥, bringing to (Black) Life his lyrics from the previous decade: "I'm not a woman/I'm not a man/I am something that you'll never understand"?[48] Was there one moment in time when Whitney Houston was not vocalizing this self-same melody, killing us and herself with her songs? My queries are less concerned with authenticity, either personal or cultural, or with the fact that there are hardly any white celebrities with the same level of fame as Oprah, Prince, Mariah, Whitney, and Michael than with the still very much operative structural principle, or primal scene, if you prefer that lexicon, of Black Life that demands the annihilation and mortality of Blackness for Black people to exist in the mainstream of the Western world.

In his philosophy of Being, Martin Heidegger deploys the term *Dasein*, which in German signifies a mode of being rather than subjectivity or individuality, and he does so with the purpose of not collapsing being and the human. *Dasein* denotes the sphere of being that establishes beings and things as entities. Still, Heidegger differentiates between man's capacity for world-forming, the animal's poverty in world (*Weltarm*), and the absolute worldlessness of the stone.[49] For Heidegger, the tiered distinction between humans, animals, and minerals comes into existence primarily through the different ways these entities relate to death: "Death is the *ownmost* possibility of Dasein. Being toward it discloses to Dasein its *ownmost* potentiality-of-being in which it is concerned about the being of Dasein absolutely. . . . The ownmost possibility is *nonrelational* (unbezügliche)."[50] The nonrelational finality of death, or finitude in Heideggerian phrasing, creates self-reflexivity for the individual, revealing to them that they are a particular being and form a part of the ontological sphere of Dasein. The knowledge of one's own possible death leads to an authentic recognition of Dasein, which also constitutes the basis of Man's world-formingness. However, still lingering in the clearing of being-toward-death Heidegger argues, "We do not experience the dying of others in a genuine sense; we are at best always just 'there' too."[51] Even as Man's genuine encounter with the potentiality of his/her own mortality grants him/her the coveted

entry into to the exclusive Dasein club, the death of others, according to Heidegger, must remain stranded outside the establishment on a cold and rainy Friday night. Somebody must have forgotten to put them on the guest list.

I am left pondering, what if in all the hard work of always having to be somebody-else, we cannot but experience relationally the death of others, because it is also our ownmost mortality? Put differently, what might all of this mean for Black Life's relationship to death or, in Saidiya Hartman's formulation, "the intimacy of our experience with the lives of the dead," be they in the form of humans, cultures, languages, genders, origins, belonging, and so on.[52] In what sense does this familiarity with, not the dead per se but the "lives of the dead"—and this is a very important distinction—supply an ontology of Schwarz-Sein? I use this term both to inoculate the Heideggerian corpus with some much-needed melanin, and because it is the translation for the English language term *Blackness* as it circulates in German activist and academic circles. In addition, in strict opposition to the majority of words in the German language, particularly those associated with the worldliness of humans and animals, *Dasein* is not clothed in a dimorphically gendered definite article (*die/der*), Being is qualified by the gender neutral *das*.[53] I want the passage from Dasein to Schwarz-Sein to play an important role in theorizing the ontological silhouette of ungendering in Black Life as the enfolded mattering of the belonging to unbelonging, being-somebody-else as a way of life, the way of Black Life/Schwarz-Sein. In an analogous fashion Sylvia Wynter asks, "How can we come to know/think/feel/behave and subjectively experience ourselves—doing so for the first time in our human history consciously now—in quite different terms? How do we be, in Fanonian terms, hybridly human?"[54] In this formulation Wynter deploys the "habitual Be," also referred to as Be_2, nonfinite Be, Invariant be, which is one of the grammatical hallmarks of Black American English.

Russell and John Rickford describe this use of the verb *to be* as "distinctive because it occurs rarely or not at all in white vernaculars," adding that "outsiders . . . believe that black folk replace Standard English is and are with invariant be all the time . . ., but AAVE is actually more discriminating. For one thing, invariant habitual be describes only an event that is performed regularly or habitually. . . . Furthermore, unlike ashy, invariant habitual be is more than an isolated AAVE word; it is part of the grammatical system, an integral tile in the mosaic of the dialect."[55] Though in some cases ashiness might also be performed repeatedly, Be_2 emphasizes the active and continual Being of Schwarz-Sein, the praxis of Black Life.

This praxis is, according to June Jordan, a result of Black Life's "intimacy with the lives of the dead" given that it "has been constantly threatened by annihilation or, at least, the swallowed blurring of assimilation," and consequently AAVE "is a system constructed by people constantly needing to insist that we exist, that we are present." Jordan continues her rumination on the ontological dimensions of Black English in the following fashion: "There is no passive voice construction possible in Black English. For example, you cannot say, 'Black English is being eliminated.' You must say, instead, 'White people eliminating Black English.' The assumption of the presence of life governs all of Black English."[56] Thus, the Be_2 and the overall necessary ontological vivacity of AAVE provide linguistic instantiations of Black Life just as Schwarz-Sein modifies and envelops the Heideggerian notion of Dasein; they represent the somebody-elseness of Dasein.

It gets very tiring having to be-somebody-else and still knowing full well what it feels like to be a problem. And, though Michael might have endeavored to make himself and the rest of the planet relinquish the memory about the little Black boy with that big Afro and those Jackson 5 nostrils, the unmistakable welling up of the ungendering of Black Life in his voice, or rather his singing styles, always transmitted different stories drenched as they were in the bygone vocal sweat beneath the blood of Jackie Wilson, Diana Ross, Sylvester, Levi Stubbs, and Frankie Lymon.[57] Do we have the language to get at the virtually infinite layers of somebody-elseness of Jackson's "Rock with You" music video that marked his transition to adulthood? The video intermittently doubles the central image of Jackson dancing while strobe lights and backlighting refract from the sheen of his Jheri curl and the asymmetrically arranged sequins and sparkles that adorn Michael's long-sleeved shirt, pants, and boots completely cover his body from the neck down.[58] We see a diffractive cornucopia of Jackson's future and past somebody-elses. Perhaps the glittery Black fantastic in this video represents Michael Jackson's response to "Where are you from?" Maybe the optic dissemblance achieved by the soft ricocheting of the shimmering lights and gleam suggest his and our version of "Here. These parts." As does the burst of affectable mattering of Black Life that welled up in the quasi-resurrection of Jackson by professional MJ impersonator, Dimitri Reeves, during the 2015 Baltimore uprisings. More important, Jackson's voice and its afterlives can offer a glimpse of dwelling below the viscous mattering of Joss Moody's, Henrietta Lacks's, Michael Jackson's, and Sun Ra's imaginary bloodlines, as they mellifluously susurrate their ungendered messages of unbelonging for the world.

I should think that it would take a good long time for us to learn to hear the messages well.

NOTES

1. See, for instance, Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, "Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, To Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations," in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2015); and M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2009).

2. On the ways historical sedimentation becomes ontology, see Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

3. See Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2014).

4. "At this level of radical discontinuity in the 'great chain of being,' black is vestibular to culture." Hortense J. Spillers, "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words," in *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 155. See also Hortense J. Spillers, "The Idea of Black Culture," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 6, no. 3 (2006); and Sylvia Wynter, "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Désêrte: Black Studies toward the Human Project," in *Not Only the Master's Tools: African-American Studies in Theory and Practice*, ed. Lewis Ricardo Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon (Boulder, Colo.: Paradigm, 2006).

5. See Amiri Baraka, "'Black' Is a Country," in *Home: Social Essays* (New York: Morrow, 1966).

6. James Weldon Johnson, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (Boston: Sherman, French, & Company, 1912), 207.

7. Hortense J. Spillers, "'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe': An American Grammar Book," in *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 214.

8. Spillers, "Interstices," 164.

9. Margo Crawford, *Dilution Anxiety and the Black Phallus* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008), 8.

10. Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 29. Much gratitude goes to Brittnay Proctor for drawing my attention to the pertinence of Ferreira da Silva's concept of affectability for the study of Black ungendering. See Proctor's

"'They Say I'm Different': Theories of Black Gender and the Grammatologies of Funk" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2018).

11. Toni Cade Bambara, "On the Issue of Roles," in *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, ed. Toni Cade Bambara (New York: Penguin, 1970), 103. I am indebted to Cheryl Clarke for reminding me about Bambara's essay and its theorization of Black gender.

12. Hortense J. Spillers et al., "'Whatcha Gonna Do?': Revisiting 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book': A Conversation with Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Farah Jasmine Griffin, Shelly Eversley, & Jennifer L. Morgan," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 1/2 (2007): 304.

13. On the constitutive displacement of Blackness from both origin and habitus, see Nahum Dimitri Chandler, "Originary Displacement," *boundary 2* 27, no. 3 (2000).

14. Bambara, "On the Issue of Roles," 104.

15. Jackie Kay, *Trumpet* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 34. Hereafter parenthetically cited in the text.

16. Though I will not dwell too much on this point here, recent "scientific" evidence has shown that the biological basis of the dimorphic system of sexual difference is far from uncomplicated. See, for instance, Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Women and Men*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1992); and Claire Ainsworth, "Sex Redefined," *Nature* 518 (2015): 288.

17. On the Benaissa case, see Tinka Dippel, *Nadja Benaissa - Alles wird gut* (Hamburg, Germany: Edel Books, 2010); on Nushawn Williams and transgender rumors about Black celebrities, see C. Riley Snorton, *Nobody Is Supposed to Know: Black Sexuality on the Down Low* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); and on Tiger Mandingo, see Steven Thrasher, "A Black Body on Trial: The Conviction of HIV-Positive 'Tiger Mandingo,'" *BuzzFeed*, November 20, 2015, http://www.buzzfeed.com/steventhrasher/a-black-body-on-trial-the-conviction-of-hiv-positive-tiger-m. On HIV decriminalization as an important cornerstone of the Black radical tradition, see Jordan Mulkey, "Black Radical Tradition and HIV-Decriminalization," *Queer Black Millennial*, December 1, 2017, https://queerblackmillennial.com/black-radical-tradition-hiv-decriminalization/.

18. See Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2015), 16 and Snorton, *Nobody Is Supposed to Know*, 4. We should also note how the histories of racial passing figure into this equation, since, on the one hand, they heightened the dangers of surveillance and, on the other, they were always already about gender passing. In other words, there is no racial passing without the

embodiment of racialized gender roles. As Cheryl Wall notes, "'Passing' does not refer only to the sociological phenomenon of blacks crossing the color line. It represents instead both the loss of racial identity and the denial of self required of women who conform to restrictive gender roles." See Cheryl A. Wall, "Passing for What? Aspects of Identity in Nella Larsen's Novels," *Black American Literature Forum* 20, no. 1/2 (1986): 105.

19. W. E. B. Du Bois, "Dusk of Dawn: An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept," in *Writings*, ed. Nathan Huggins (New York: Library of America, 1986), 650.

20. Matt Richardson, *The Queer Limit of Black Memory: Black Lesbian Literature and Irresolution* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013), 109.

21. Jackie Kay, *Off Colour* (Newcastle, England: Bloodaxe Books, 1999), 27.

22. Jackie Kay, *Bessie Smith* (New York: Absolute Press, 1997), 9–11. Spillers states: "Community so that it could now stand for a 'moveable feast'. The idea that community is not strictly defined by four stakes in the ground, and you stand on that spot in the center. The idea is that community is a place that I never leave because I always take it with me, because it's now something inside me." Tim Haslett, "Hortense Spillers Interviewed by Tim Haslett for the Black Cultural Studies Website Collective in Ithaca, NY February 4, 1998," blackculturalstudies.org, http://www.blackculturalstudies.org/spillers/spillers_intvw.html.

23. Katherine McKittrick, "Mathematics Black Life," *Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (2014): 20.

24. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 98.

25. Richardson, *Queer Limit of Black Memory*, 125–26.

26. For an ethnographic consideration of how white women navigate being mothers of Black children in the United Kingdom that empirically gives credence to my remarks, see France Winddance Twine, *A White Side of Black Britain: Interracial Intimacy and Racial Literacy* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010).

27. Pamela Robertson-Pearce, "Jackie Kay," *In Person: 30 Poets* (London: Bloodaxe Books, 2008), DVD.

28. Jackie Kay, *Other Lovers* (Newcastle, England: Bloodaxe Books, 1993), 24.

29. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 228. Though referred to as the Moynihan Report after its principal author, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the document is officially titled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, see United States Department of Labor, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965). In Lacan's reformulation of the Freudian Oedipus complex,

"the law of the father" denotes the symbolic principle of differentiation and separation in language, which enacts the originary splitting of the subject.

30. Heather Russell, *Legba's Crossing: Narratology in the African Atlantic* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 39.

31. Toni Morrison, *Sula* (New York: Plume, 1987), 174.

32. Sun Ra, liner notes to *Sound Sun Pleasure!!*, El Saturn Records, 1970, audio recording. I thank Evie Shockley for first suggesting that I incorporate Sun Ra into my argument.

33. When Mariah Carey, whose nickname is Mimi, was interviewed on German television in 2001 and asked about Jennifer Lopez she stated, "I don't know her," while knowingly smiling. In recent years, clips from the interview as well as still images and GIFs from it have widely circulated on social networks, especially Tumblr and Twitter, because it represents a classic instance of insulting someone without expressly doing so. In other words, Mariah Carey indirectly says that Jennifer Lopez, despite her immense fame, is so beneath her stature that Carey need not even know who she is.

34. John Coney, dir., *Sun Ra & His Intergalactic Arkestra: Space Is the Place* (Plexifilm, 1974).

35. As with the discussion of Michael Jackson later, I am not interested in categorically determining and delimiting Sun Ra's sexual identity. First, gender or ungendering is the far more operative category in this scenario than any simple notion of sexuality, and, second, we should take seriously Ra's refusal to enact and define himself through the legibility of homo/hetero/bisexuality. If we do venture out into the spaceways of Ra's sexuality, we should be prepared for the possibility of no models and, thus, that his sexuality might have been glittery Blackhood or saturnine sparkle.

36. Sun Ra, "Negroes Are Not Men," in Sun Ra, *The Wisdom of Sun-Ra: Sun Ra's Polemical Broadsheets and Streetcorner Leaflets*, ed. John Corbett (Chicago: White Walls Press, 2006), 76.

37. Grace Jones, *Walking in the Rain*, Island Records, 1981, audio recording.

38. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, "Outer Worlds: The Persistence of Race in Movement 'Beyond the Human,'" *Dossier: Theorizing Queer Humanisms* 21, no. 2–3 (2015): 217. For a critique of posthumanism's failure to address racial difference and Blackness, see Alexander G. Weheliye, "'Feenin': Posthuman Voices in Contemporary Black Popular Music," *Social Text* 20, no. 2 (2002).

39. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. Donald B. Gibson (New York: Penguin Classics, 1996), 5. The phrase "making generations" is taken from Gayl Jones, *Corregidora* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).

40. On Henrietta Lacks, see Karla F. C. Holloway, *Private Bodies, Public Texts: Race, Gender, and a Cultural Bioethics* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011), 2–6; Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2010), 19–24; Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, 8–10; Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 79–81; and Jayna Brown, "Being Cellular: Race, the Inhuman, and the Plasticity of Life," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21, no. 2 (2015).

41. On the significance of the Anderson sequence and HeLa for the Human Genome Diversity Project, see Amade M'charek, "Race, Time and Folded Objects: The HeLa Error," *Theory, Culture, & Society* 31, no. 6 (2014); and *The Human Genome Diversity Project: An Ethnography of Scientific Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

42. On the problems of and the resistance to the Human Genome Diversity Project vis-à-vis indigenous populations, see Joanne Barker, "The Human Genome Diversity Project: 'Peoples,' 'Populations' and the Cultural Politics of Identification," *Cultural Studies* 18, no. 4 (2004); and Kimberly TallBear, *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

43. Léopold Sédar Senghor, "The Spirit of Civilization, or the Laws of African Negro Culture," *Presence Africaine* 8–10 (1956): 53.

44. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 203.

45. Moreover, the full version of the 1991 "Black and White" music video was banned in the United States, because Jackson grabs his crotch too frequently and vociferously and breaks some windows while dancing. We should also note the pertinence of Janet Jackson being banned from US radio and television after one of her breasts was forcibly exposed by a white man (Justin Timberlake) during the 2004 Super Bowl half-time show. In addition, the incident led to the FCC "crackdown" on televised "indecency" and the institution of a four-second delay in televised live broadcasts.

46. Greg Tate, "I'm White! On Michael Jackson," *Village Voice*, September 22, 1987, 15.

47. Nelson George, *Thriller: The Musical Life of Michael Jackson* (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2010), 33.

48. Prince and the Revolution, *I Would Die 4 U*, Warner Bothers Records, 1984, audio recording. Prince adopted the ☥ symbol from 1993 to 2000 during a labor dispute with his record company, Warner Brothers, about the ownership of his recording masters.

49. See Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

50. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 263–64. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen, Germany: Niemeyer, 1979), 263: "Der Tod ist eigenste Möglichkeit des Daseins. Das Sein zu ihr erschließt dem Dasein sein eigenstes Seinkönnen, darin es um das Sein des Daseins schlechthin geht . . . Die eigenste Möglichkeit ist unbezügliche." All the original German quotations are taken from Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*.

51. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 239. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 239: "Der Tod enthüllt sich zwar als Verlust, aber mehr als solcher, den die Verbleibenden erfahren. Im Erleiden des Verlustes wird jedoch nicht der Seinsverlust als solcher zugänglich, den der Sterbende 'erleidet.' Wir erfahren nicht im genuinen Sinne das Sterben der Anderen, sondern sind höchstens immer nur 'dabei.'"

52. Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 26 (2008): 4.

53. The pronomic gendering of the German language also makes it difficult to create/use pronouns that move beyond this dimorphism, as is the case with the third person singular in English (they), which is feminine in German (*Sie*).

54. Wynter, "Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species," 45.

55. Russell Rickford and John Rickford, *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000), 113–14.

56. June Jordan, *Some of Us Did Not Die: New and Selected Essays of June Jordan* (New York: Basic/Civitas Books, 2002), 171.

57. Though we can be fairly certain that he was moving away from traditional masculinity and Blackness visually, I am not convinced that, as some claim, Jackson was in the process of remaking himself surgically in the image of a white woman. As Francesca Royster remarks: "I don't think there has been enough theorization of Jackson's becoming gender as experienced through less material modes like voice, however. Through his cries, whispers, groans, whines, and grunts, Jackson occupies a third space of gender, one that often undercuts his audience's expectations of erotic identification." Francesca Royster, *Sounding Like a No-No: Queer Sounds and Eccentric Acts in the Post-Soul Era* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 119.

58. Krista A. Thompson writes the following of the many uses of blinding, shimmering, and glittery lights in US and Caribbean Black popular culture: "We might understand the use of material goods and the production of blinding light as a shield or apotropaic, simultaneously reflecting and deflecting the deidealizing gaze on black subjects. Moreover, the photographic effect of light, bling, visually suspends that which is not of the subject, the cultural screen. The popular expressions analyzed here, with

their attention to the reflection of light off of surfaces, highlight a space just beyond the surface, lingering on the gap between the viewer and the subject." Krista A. Thompson, *Shine: The Visual Economy of Light in African Diasporic Aesthetic Practice* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2015), 33. On the Black fantastic, see Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post–Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).