BLACK MADNESS :: MAD BLACKNESS

THERÍ ALYCE PICKENS

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For the MAD BLACK *and* BLACK MAD *everywhere*

CONTENTS

So my "method," to use a new "lit. crit." word, is not fixed but relates to what I read and the historical context of the writers I read and to the many critical activities in which I am engaged, which may or may not involve writing. It is a learning from the language of creative writers, which is one of surprise, so that I might discover what language I might use.
—BARBARA CHRISTIAN, "The Race for Theory"

Call it the taint—as in
T'aint one and t'aint the other—
illicit and yet naming still
what is between.
—NATASHA TRETHEWEY, "The Book of Castas," *Thrall*

Let me tell you a secret. My first book, *New Body Politics* (Routledge, 2014), bowed to the exigencies of a traditional intellectual project. It started as an ambitious little dissertation with loosely connected ideas. Like most drafts, it was a large-scale project that felt unwieldy even as I worked because I wasn't sure what intervention I wished to make. Over time, I reshaped it into an argument that was more specific and tailored. I used my Muggle-born intellectual talents to craft it into a traditional monograph: five chapters, a separate introduction, and a clear conclusion. The argument moves in a set of concentric circles from the specific to the broad, desiring to prove a point about how the fragility of the body works within contemporary African American and Arab American literatures.[1] Much like other literary and cultural criticism monographs, I examine primary sources and use second-

ary and theoretical sources mostly to frame my discussions of the literature. This traditional style serves a very particular purpose in the profession: it demonstrates that I have enough competence in the field to make an argument, and prove it using literature and other cultural artifacts as my source material. Plus, tenure.

I tell you this so-called secret (I mean everyone will know now) and draw attention to the picayune parameters of my project to make a modest point that might comfort some people: this is not the only way to create a book project. Clearly, the second book project can have a different genesis and, as is the case with the one you now hold, an entirely different purpose. For *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness*, my aim is not to trace an idea or prove an argument, but rather to open up two fields to each other. To be honest, I was less curious about (and less interested in) literature as a set of primary sources than as a set of theoretical ones. They speak back to critics. And, if critics do not listen, we (ma)linger in thinking of them as having value because they solely illuminate a topic we have already decided to discuss. What happens when we view them as the drivers of these conversations? What solipsism do we avoid when we view them as theoretical sources that change the conversations critics are already having? This not only alters our engagement with primary sources but also fundamentally changes our relationship to secondary and theoretical sources.

For this reason and this outlook, I would label *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness* deliberately wayward. To be fair, this outlook is not new: I join the tradition of Black feminist scholars who understood their projects would reverberate beyond the strictures of traditional academic or institutional structures.[2] The objects of inquiry here are not a series of primary sources but rather a set of conversations. The literature is there to open up the conversations critics have neglected to have. So, this book is not patterned in a traditional fashion: it does not have five chapters, a separate introduction, and a conclusion. The topic, Blackness and madness, does not allow it. Although one might push through an introduction—provide some degree of orientation—concluding becomes an impossibility. No one can end a discussion about intertwined Blackness and madness neatly, if at all. I have chosen not to. I have also deliberately placed an image at the end of the project that serves as a second cover. It is a provocation: a gesture that there is more room to explore, possibly another beginning. In addition, the work often buried in footnotes or hidden by the invocation of a scholar or phrase has sometimes been laid open. At times, awkwardly so. I meander with these

critical conversations so that someone can think alongside me. The kind of organization and clarity demanded by my subject matter may not be familiar. Dear reader, you may have to learn to think madly. Blackly.

Footnotes and epigraphs operate here with my particular kind of scholarly quirk. I use them in this writing similarly to how I have used them before in that I expect them to do a substantive amount of work in pushing the conversation beyond the four walls of this text.[3] Often, as critics, we are disciplined to read and write such that we bury the labor of research and conversation in the footnotes and privilege our own voices in the prose. While this strategy is useful for presenting a more traditional argument, my wayward project here requires that the footnotes and epigraphs differently participate in and shape the conversation of which they are a part. I chose my epigraphs from Black women's poetry since they push the debates in new directions, hint at possibilities, when and where I enter. The footnotes are not solely explanations of sources and methodologies, but they also signify, joke, pun, turn a phrase, explore. Both the footnotes and epigraphs are asides, witticisms, and musings. They expose how certain voices and ideas move through my work here and could, later, move through another scholar's. I invite you to theorize from above and below.

I am profoundly guided by a distrust of linearity. The progressive linear narrative seeks to make neat and orderly a set of events and ideas that are messy by design. From a pedagogical standpoint, the linear narrative is useful since it helps us create and impart a story about how we think. Nonetheless, I find it ungenerous for my particular pedagogy here. To teach myself (and perhaps others?) how to think differently means that linear narratives about our work in Blackness and madness have to become unstable. Within this monograph, the result is that the conversations (what are elsewhere called chapters) could feasibly flow from one to another (echoing the tracing or mapping desires of a traditional monograph), but they also could (should?) be read as overlapping discussions. They refer back to each other, revise, augment, and, sometimes, may contradict. This still serves the primary function of this book: to get us to think about how we think when we think about Blackness and madness. In terms of method, this allows my project to abide in, foster, and participate in the kind of messiness that a study of Blackness and madness requires. For that reason, Barbara Christian's words function not only as epigraph but incantation. Of her own method, she writes that it is "not fixed but relates to what I read and the historical context of the writers I read and to the many critical activities

in which I am engaged, which may or may not involve writing. It is a learning from the language of creative writers, which is one of surprise, so that I might discover what language I might use."[4] The skepticism about linearity here reverberates as a suspicion about language itself such that I refuse to trust the stories we've heretofore told about Blackness and madness. This book looks for the surprise.

When reflecting on this particular book project, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the relative privilege in which it was crafted. I started this project prior to tenure, but finished it after. The freedom to write what you wish at the pace you need exponentially increases after securing the stability tenure provides. I undertook this project feeling battle weary and cynical about the mere possibilities of writing and researching Blackness and madness, especially in a geopolitical space architected by hatred of those two identity categories (among others). I understand my own precarity—in raced, abled, and gendered terms—too acutely to ignore how it expands and constricts my work. And, yet, the freedom to write and think allowed for a set of experiments that permit me to expansively explore what it means to be Black and mad. This is at the crux of the conversations that follow: the contradictory and all too common conundrum of existing at the interstices, intersections, and, still, the margins. Here, Natasha Trethewey's poetry echoes, also as incantation. This is the taint: the putatively unwanted, forgotten, ignored, or ugly space out of which something else can emerge. It is not one and not the other. Quite literally, the "not." And, yet, it also exists as a space of beauty and darkness all its own. To name it, "call it the taint,"[5] knowing it is illicit, strikes me as the primary conceit of this project: I name and call and write in the spirit of discussing not only what remains taboo but also pressing us to discuss it in ways that disrupt how we avoid the subject. Taint one. Taint the other.

I am humbled daily by my faith walk, the overwhelming love of the cross. I would rather have splinters near the foot of Calvary than smooth hands standing on my own. I am grateful for those who cared about me while I cared about this project. I write their names here as acknowledgment, knowing that mere mention does not suffice as thanks. Some people are mentioned more than once because they filled multiple roles. I apologize for any oversights.

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I beg to dicker with my silver-tongued companion, whose lips are ready to read my shining gloss. A versatile partner, conversant and well-versed in the verbal art, the dictionary is not averse to the solitary habits of the curiously wide-awake reader. In the dark night's insomnia, the book is a stimulating sedative, awakening my tired imagination to the hypnagogic trance of language. —HARRYETTE MULLEN, "Sleeping with the Dictionary," *Sleeping with the Dictionary*

Let's start with a comparative analysis that does not work.

In Leonard Kriegel's autoethnographical essay "Uncle Tom and Tiny Tim: Some Reflections on the Cripple as Negro" (1969), he declares, "Uncle Tom and Tiny Tim are brothers under the skin."[1] Using what he terms a "functional analogy" to Blackness, Kriegel traces his experiences in New York City as a so-called cripple, building a case for equal treatment socioculturally as well as under the law.[2] He links the mandate that disabled people request police escorts to their destinations (suggested by former New York City mayor John Lindsay) to calling a Black man "boy" in a white crowd. Kriegel uses Frantz Fanon as an epigraph and as an interlocutor throughout to critique the injustices he experiences, asserting that Blackness is both "analogy and method" even if the two are, according to him, not something Black America "can yet give itself."[3] In addition to these analogies, Kriegel offers explanatory glosses of his life that speak to living within and internalizing ableism: He feels as though his existence causes his mother pain. He calls his condition a public embarrassment. Within rehabilitation facilities,

he strives to be fixed. At no point does Kriegel discuss a community of similarly (disabled) embodied people, even though he lives in the rehabilitation facility. The message is plain: being a cripple is bad, and it is just like, if not worse than, being a Negro.

Quite frankly, Kriegel's essay is painful to read. The outdated language, the faulty analogy, the internalized ableism, the profound lack of community—all of these depict experiences of disability and Blackness detached from social and/or political context. In Kriegel's essay, Blackness and Black social movements provide a loose social mooring. To write at the tail end of the 1960s in New York requires an engagement with Blackness as a matter of accuracy and rigor. So, Kriegel's essay considers—as it should—the import of social positioning vis-à-vis Blackness. Thinking of the essay as an artifact, it clarifies how the Black power movements and civil rights gains of the 1950s and 1960s paved the way for disability activism around the Rehabilitation Act (1973), and, by extension, the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), among others. Frantz Fanon provides the essay's central theoretical interlocutor, which could potentially position the "like race" idea less as analogy, shifting the discursive terrain such that the essay centralizes the projected experiences of Blackness. It doesn't. Fanon's theories do prove useful, however, in thinking about the social situations that difference creates and abets.

Even though the essay references the world, it is not grounded in it. As a result, the analysis fails on a few registers. The "like race" analogies for disability function as missed opportunities for nuance. There are only certain well-worn paths that logic can follow. First, the comparative element leaves Kriegel little choice but to think through the relationship in hierarchical terms where one identity is more or less disenfranchised than the other. Indeed, this vacillates for Kriegel depending on the situation (i.e., the disabled have less social options, but Blacks have been victimized more), which demonstrates a kind of sophistication in understanding that each identity category operates differently depending on social context. Yet, the analogy still facilitates racist erasure: despite the fact that Kriegel's rehabilitation facility is in Harlem, he does not think through the life of the Black disabled person, nor does he speculate about the interiority of those around him. They are merely sullen. The "as" of the simile and, by extension, the "like" of the larger analogy elide the differences between these identities because rhetorically one replaces the other. Erasure then allows for a collapse of important distinctions in experience (i.e., difference between Kriegel's European immigrant mother and the Blacks in Harlem), and the depiction of Blackness

as an abject monolith incapable of providing its own analogy and method. Placing Fanon in this context only allows him to expose and explain Blackness as a pathology of the West, rather than allow Fanon to function as a theoretician that dialogues with and about Blackness and disability (albeit one who makes certain problematic "like race" analogies himself). In its failure, Kriegel's essay foregrounds why the "like race" analogies are missed opportunities: They potentially promise a useful engagement with Blackness and disability because they grant that the two share social similarities. However, without addressing collective histories, theoretical impulses, and subjectivities with nuance, the analogy reinscribes the erasure it originally promises to rectify.

Although Kriegel's essay was published in 1969, the theoretical and methodological residues of his project remain. To think through the relationship between race and disability requires answering several questions: How might we read race and disability outside the confines of the scripts heretofore provided? In what ways do we need to shift or challenge existing analytical paradigms? To what aesthetic practices and thinkers do we need to turn to expand our imaginations vis-à-vis these two discourses and material realities? What sacred cows or shibboleths do we need to leave behind methodologically, theoretically, aesthetically?

This project, *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness*, turns to madness and Blackness to answer these questions about race and disability more broadly. Critical discourses about madness and Blackness tend to implicate but not include each other.[4] As a consequence, the criticism recapitulates several pervasive but incomplete ideas. One of those is the loose rendering of Blackness and madness as analogous to each other. More often, the two discourses are examined as extensions of one another, too slippery to parse, yet so inseparable that one can elide or replace the other. In contrast, I theorize that madness (broadly defined) and Blackness have a complex constellation of relationships. These relationships between Blackness and madness (and race and disability more generally) are constituted within the fissures, breaks, and gaps in critical and literary texts. Black madness and mad Blackness then are not interchangeable or reciprocal. Rather, they foreground the multiple and, at times, conflicting epistemological and ontological positions at stake when reading the two alongside each other. In exploring these critical possibilities, I explicate how this set of relationships has, makes, and acquires meaning in the various spaces they occupy without necessarily guaranteeing emancipation or radicality. I turn to what may be an unlikely site to explore:

Black speculative fiction. These artists-theorists disrupt Western epistemology such that their work becomes a locus for thinking through putatively strange Black minds.[5]

Short and Simple: These Three Words

Allow me to explain the title as an inroad to describing our current critical moment.[6] *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness* rests on the idea that ability and race are intertwined, as Michelle Jarman notes, "two dynamic discursive processes that inform one another."[7] Suturing madness and Blackness together, I debunk the perception that the title is redundant, oxymoronic, or excessive. In an ideological construct of white supremacy, Blackness is considered synonymous with madness or the prerequisite for creating madness. To push them together syntactically runs the risk of appearing repetitive, but it also prompts the possibility that the two must be parsed.

   Despite my academic and personal proclivity for politesse and rigorous specificity, I choose to rest in the vagueness and insult mad brings.[8] I mobilize this word as part of my critical armature because this discussion requires a direct engagement with slippery and insulting language.[9] Mad carries a lexical range that includes (in)sanity, cognitive disability, anger, and, for anyone who remembers the slang of the 1990s, excess (usually synonymous with too or really). In common parlance, it is used pejoratively and remains rather vague. However, mad studies takes up madness to "represent a critical alternative to 'mental illness' or 'disorder' as a way of naming and responding to emotional, spiritual, and neuro-diversity."[10] Mad studies perspectives mobilize activist and scholastic impulses in their refusal of the historical definitions of madness as "irrationality, a condition involving decline or even disappearance of the role of rational factor in the organization of human conduct and experience" and the equation of madness with lack or inability.[11] In this field, the biopsychiatric definitions of madness that proceed from this historical definition—wedded to inability and irrationality—no longer hold since they disenfranchise the perspectives of those harmed by psy-disciplines. In this study, I take seriously the critical impulses of mad studies: I keep a tension between psychosocial definitions of madness (without attributing causality) and biomedical definitions (without attributing authority), while resisting an uncritical celebration of madness as experience or as metaphor. Even though this project focuses on those who would be labeled mad or embrace being mad, I also do not veer too far away from

the critical possibilities of madness as a "slippery and unruly object."[12] When madness does not solely refer to the experience of a mad person but rather pans outward as a larger discourse, it challenges how "the psychic, cognitive, and affective dimensions of experience are parceled out into categories . . . all under the supposedly 'empirical' authority of medical science and psychiatric expertise as much as through the exercise of legal and juridical power."[13] In other words, it is everywhere and affects everything. Maddeningly so.

In *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness*, Black functions as a racial category, cultural affiliation, and social position. I use Black for its lexical and sociocultural range. It includes a wide variety of people and experiences within the diaspora and does not limit the discussion to a specific geopolitical imaginative space. Unfortunately, my discussion is limited in scope to the parts of the diaspora that share an intellectual inheritance with North America and Europe. As Julie Livingston's *Debility and the Moral Imagination in Botswana* (2005) and Nirmala Erevelles's *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts* (2011) make clear, definitions of Blackness and disability cannot and should not be moved carelessly across transnational borders.[14] Yet, given the vastness of colonial and imperial projects where race determines life and death, the study of Blackness emerges as a fecund space to think through how material consequences manifest. As I have claimed elsewhere, a turn to Blackness "authorizes a reconceptualization of history, culture, and politics" if the field is understood as "a set of traditions, reading practices, and valuation systems operating alongside, intertwined with, but also independent from those of whiteness."[15] Like madness, Blackness is also everywhere and affects everything. It is my hope that despite the necessary geopolitical limitations of my project, it later proves useful for those studying other Blacknesses.

I choose to nominalize Black and mad by adding the suffix "ness" to attend to the two words as both description and category. I bring them together grammatically to theorize about the constellation of relationships that comprise the two. Nirmala Erevelles, in writing about the Middle Passage, rereads Hortense Spillers's work to point out that the simplified causal relationship—slavery produces disability—does not fully encompass the way disability and Blackness function. Rather, "disability/impairment and race are neither merely biological nor wholly discursive, but rather are historical material constructs imbricated within the exploitative conditions of transnational capitalism."[16] My staged grammatical intervention in the title calls attention to how a revision of this sort works. It is at once a ref-

erence to the material conditions and consequences as well as a discursive attending to the categories' imbrication. Nominalizing the two also staves off what Rachel Gorman argues is "the mad subject . . . constituted as the white subject at the horizon of whiteness"[17]: that is, the mad white subject who can be embraced by whiteness through a discourse of universality. In this formulation, Blackness modifies (and I use the grammatical term deliberately) who and what is mad. Madness as noun calls attention to what Sami Schalk insists is a useful slippage between materiality and metaphor in Black studies. She argues that within Black literature, disability takes on "concrete and metaphorical meanings" such that disability can "symbolize something other than disability while still being about disability." In so doing, "disability metaphors therefore allow us to explore the historical and material connections between disability and other social systems of privilege and oppression."[18] As with Erevelles's formulation, the two categories do not exist in a simple causal or analogic relationship; they inform each other such that madness modifies how we understand Blackness.[19]

The third putative word of the title, the double colon, teases and disrupts. The title signals that there are differences between Black madness and mad Blackness but one is not an analogy for the other, nor does one explain the other, nor does one cause the other. Although the double colon tends to stand for analogy, the use of it here does not affirm that the two are such, but rather questions the grammars and assumptions that lie dormant in thinking of them as analogous (a query I highlight by calling the double colon a word above). I toy with the double colon as a convention of the academic project specifically because what typically follows the colon is supposed to explicate or clarify. In this case, the so-called clarification is meant to unsettle. The double colon also nods to the tradition of Black speculative fiction on which this project focuses. In the introduction to *Afro-Future Females: Black Writers Chart Science Fiction's Newest New-Wave Trajectory* (2008), Marleen Barr claims, "A period printed on a page resembles a planet backgrounded by white space vastness."[20] Whereas Barr usefully thinks of the period as a manifestation of Black/white encounter in science fiction authorship, I find the period-as-planet evocative for how it forces a more expansive understanding of that which we once thought of as finite. Again, the causal, analogic, and explicative relationships do not fully capture how Black and mad function together. Instead, the four period/planets of the double colon invite us to think of them as more vast in scope than heretofore imagined.[21]

As my explication of the title suggests, this project brings the conversations within disability studies and critical race studies together somewhat uneasily without positioning either as emancipatory vis-à-vis the other. Since disability studies, as a field, borrows heavily from the gains of critical race studies and women's studies, race is always already embedded in scholastic discussions of disability. However, the principles of critical race studies tend to have a penumbral presence because disability studies rarely engages whiteness as a social position and often thinks of Blackness as a contribution rather than part of its construction.[22] As long as whiteness remains the normative racial category, investigations of disability that do not address whiteness directly leave open crucial lacunae. In *Disability Theory* (2008), Tobin Siebers brings to bear the advances of critical race theory to disability theory as a way to formulate a complex understanding of how identity theories work, contingent as they all are on what he terms "the ideology of ability."[23] I agree that a commitment to and desire for ability undergirds common praxis, but Siebers misses an opportunity to examine how the presumption of ability accompanies whiteness and how much such a presumption undergirds disability theory and scholarship (I take this up in greater detail in the third conversation). Likewise, Lennard Davis's *End of Normal* (2014) speculates that now diversity does the semantic and cultural heavy lifting that normal used to perform as he rethinks the accepted wisdom on topics as varied as Freud and end-of-life decisions. Yet, as compelling as Davis's work is on these subjects, it takes as its premise that we have moved beyond identity.[24] Lurking within this logic is the same rhetorical movement performed by Nietzsche: as soon as decolonization opened up the space for those who had been objects of history to assert themselves as subjects, subjects faced their theoretical death. We have not moved beyond identity because we have not moved beyond whiteness as a standard, invisibilized though it may be. Here, Alison Kafer's questions about the future of disability studies, methodological inclusion, and theoretical impulse become particularly instructive: "In which theories and in which movements do we recognize ourselves, or recognize disability, and which theories and movements do we continue to see as separate from or tangential to disability studies?"[25]

One such opportunity for the future of disability studies lies in its inclusion of madness. In what some scholars term a twist of irony, disability studies "forged as it has been with physical impairment as its primary terrain, has inherited damaging ableist assumptions of 'mind.'"[26] I concur that in the field of disability studies, "physical disability stands in for disability *in*

toto" and that, in general, "intellectual disability is more readily and widely deployed as a device of dehumanization than is physical disability."[27] For that reason, the future of disability studies must include scholars of rhetoric who are at the forefront of work on intellectual disability with their explorations of autism, neuroatypicality, and mental illness.[28] *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness* opens up the opportunity to examine how the charges of cognitive disability and mental illness (i.e., *drapetomania* as a mental illness causing Black slaves to run away) or congenital, race-based neuroatypicality (i.e., all Blacks are mentally deficient) bear repercussions for imagining, analyzing, and theorizing Blackness and madness.[29] As mentioned before, madness remains slippery, as both real and imagined, claimed and refused. What remains stable is that madness is understood as a function of language, one with which disability studies must engage as text. Following the logic of Tanya Titchkosky in *Reading and Writing Disability Differently* (2007), we must begin to read madness as a text in our studies, since "claiming to know disability, while not experiencing a need to reflect upon the assumptions, organization and consequences of this knowledge is a common yet potentially oppressive social practice."[30] I would add that it is definitely an oppressive scholastic practice if we choose not to reflect on how our intellectual enterprise is upheld by sanist notions of mind.

Thus far, critical work, including my own, about Blackness and disability has, like disability studies generally, focused on physical disability and chronic illness. For those scholars situated in or claimed by disability studies, the discussions of Blackness and disability have been illegible because they challenge certain academic conventions. For instance, Christopher M. Bell's edited collection *Blackness and Disability: Critical Examinations and Cultural Interventions* (2011) functions as one of the inaugural moments of Black disability studies (more in the first conversation), since it sought to shift the conversation in African American studies from being ableist and the conversation in disability studies from being "concerned with white bodies."[31] The collection includes scholars whose citational praxis does not always make use of well-known disability studies scholars or whose work does not necessarily include the word disability. To my mind, what appears to be a set of mistakes actually reveals that when Blackness and disability cohere, they challenge each other institutionally and allow for the possibility that disability or race may be called by other names. As with the language of madness, no language regarding disability is neutral, which means that the euphemisms in common parlance (i.e., the sugar for diabetes, or touched

for cognitively disabled) make their way into critical literature differently as well (i.e., health care discrepancies and differentials in treatment for diabetes, or discussions about outsiders within a family/community). What appears to be a gap in this discussion of race and disability actually requires a rereading of the critical literature, since in Black cultural and critical contexts, disability is often operating in other registers. As mentioned in the preface, one has to think Blackly or madly. Tamika L. Carey, in *Rhetorical Healing: The Reeducation of Contemporary Black Womanhood* (2016), links the discourse of healing and wellness to Black women's literacy of their environment. Disability—as a set of social and cultural practices—subtends Carey's discussion when she elaborates on Black women's writing as a set of "talking and reading cures" that allow them to detail the complexities of racism and sexism.[32] Far from considering disability auxiliary or merely part of an overcoming narrative, Carey's articulation of wellness allows disability to be the vector through which some of the Black women writers in her study articulate their encounters with misogynoir. One of the other registers at stake is erasure: Rebecca Wanzo's *The Suffering Will Not Be Televised* (2009) explores how Black women's suffering, because of an American obsession with sentimentality in narrative, remains illegible to a larger public. Here, disability functions as a social structure that by virtue of ableist reliance on pity and sympathy determines who gets to belong to the category disabled and whose experience of illness can be validated in the public sphere. Recent projects, including the fiftieth anniversary special issue of *African American Review* on Blackness and disability (just to name one), have attempted to rectify these lacunae, push against the invisibility of race by proposing new methodologies (e.g., Christopher M. Bell's representational detective work, Sami Schalk's emphasis on materiality in metaphor, Leon Hilton's theorization of wandering, Anna Mollow's schema of fat Black disability studies), mining historiographical gaps (e.g., Douglas Baynton's exploration of civil rights discourse, Dea Boster's analysis of slavery, Michael Gill and Nirmala Erevelles's rereading of Henrietta and Elsie Lacks), performing hermeneutical readings of various texts (e.g., Jeffrey Brune's archival work on John Howard Griffin, Timothy S. Lyle's interrogation of pleasure in Pearl Cleage, Dennis Tyler Jr.'s staged conversation between James Weldon Johnson's fiction and autobiography, Sarah Orem's readings of Black disaster in *Grey's Anatomy*), or pushing against national boundaries (e.g., Julie Livingston's exploration of Botswana, Claire Barker's emphasis on postcolonial literature).

I choose to name these scholars explicitly as part of a scholarly politic

that lays bare what work has already been done and by whom so that we can no longer remark that the two fields do not speak to each other. Moreover, unearthing where disability appears in Black studies and where Blackness appears in disability studies scholarship bolsters one of the main contentions of *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness*. There exists a wide constellation of critical relationships between Blackness and disability writ large, and Blackness and madness in particular. Mining landmark scholarship in Black studies bears this out. For example, Valerie Smith's discussion of the garret space in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, in addition to being a crucial study for Black feminist thought, positions the architecture of confinement and therefore that which creates disability as preferable to the conditions of slavery and enabling freedom.[33] Neither Smith's work nor the text under scrutiny explicitly heralds disability as radical, but each makes that potential clear. Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s concept of the "talking book" assumes a wide variety of possibilities for communication that includes double voicing, intertextuality, and silence. To trouble notions of how a text speaks is to allow for the possibility that cognition, communication, and ability upend or cocreate said text. Gates's and Smith's work remains undergirded by the presence of disability even if it is not explicitly acknowledged and called as such. Disability does appear explicitly in some texts, such as Alice Walker's meditations on her blindness in "Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self" (1983) and Audre Lorde's essays in *Burst of Light* (1988) and *Cancer Journals* (1980). In the work of the political scientist Cathy J. Cohen, disability surfaces in a discussion of HIV/AIDS. Cohen's *The Boundaries of Blackness: HIV and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (1999) indicts the segments of Black communities that refused to care for the ill and the dying based on narrow definitions of racial identity. Of late, critical race scholars La Marr Jurelle Bruce and Nicole Fleetwood examined the prevalence of disability in discourses surrounding Black celebrities Lauryn Hill and Rihanna, respectively, in a special issue of *African American Review*, edited by Soyica Colbert, on Black performance. They each argue that for these Black women entertainers disability—particularly madness—changes public perception of their voice. For Lauryn Hill, the use of crazy-as-insult makes it permissible to ignore her critiques of the music industry and its exploitation of her. For Rihanna, mobilizing craziness allows her some latitude in her creative and erotic projects. Bruce and Fleetwood's work—limited only because of the genre of the article—focuses on how Blackness mediates the understanding of presumed disability and in some cases facilitates erasure.[34]

Black Madness :: Mad Blackness furthers the conversations above by foregrounding the spaces where Blackness and madness become usefully entangled. My goal, however, is not to unravel them but rather to pinpoint the facets of their intertwining so that we might rest with the knots history and culture have created. This project attempts an intellectual cartography. Invoking Morrison, "I want to draw a map . . . of a critical geography and use that map to open . . . space for discovery, intellectual adventure, and close exploration,"[35] since the ways we've drawn connections and borders between Blackness and madness have heretofore closed off possibilities or rendered them in simplistic terms. In offering a way to read and conceive of Blackness and madness conjoined, this project assumes what most intellectual cartographies have borne out: racism and ableism are quotidian practices in which the experience of being raced and being disabled are mundane. For that reason, one cannot have race without disability, nor disability without race. We used to remark often that disability studies has been slow to discuss issues of race and vice versa. As my discussion above has made clear, we should revise that to point out that despite the increased conversations about race and disability generally and madness and Blackness in particular, scholarship tends to tenuously connect the two, and that connection, however critically useful, can be and has been easily severed for reasons of political expediency. This is what happens when Blackness is considered a problem for disability revolution. This is what happens when disability is considered a problem for Black revolution. In what follows, I theorize about the places where and reasons why the relationship between the two refuses to so easily fall apart.

I turn to an unlikely site to discuss Blackness and madness: Black speculative fiction. As so many others have already proven, race and ability are historically and materially constructed. So, my recourse to a genre that deliberately unmoors itself from time and space may seem strange. This unlikely site, what science fiction critic Darko Suvin termed the "literature of cognitive estrangement,"[36] distinguishes itself in its attending to the fact in the fiction.[37] This formulation usefully clarifies how speculative fiction comments on the sanity of the world it inhabits and how that genre attempts to define sanity. However, the idea of "cognitive estrangement" needs some clarification vis-à-vis madness. That is, what does speculative fiction do in its discussion of madness? First, "cognitive estrangement" implies dissonance and distress, but does not imply madness per se. The term cannot stretch

to accommodate experiences of madness like those that mad studies takes seriously: those that are patient-centered and skeptical of psy-disciplines, particularly those that allow for or court a narrative resolution. To be clear, this strikes me as a limitation of "cognitive estrangement" as a term, not mad studies as an interdisciplinary enterprise or Black speculative fiction as a literary endeavor. The term madness, my staged grammatical intervention in this project's title and method, helpfully intervenes as a way to prompt a discussion of the fact in the fiction, the strange in the cognitive, the dissonance in the distress, but it does not take for granted that madness will be resolved by the narrative's end.

Second, the understanding of "cognitive estrangement" in speculative fiction has to be situated within a conversation about how race functions in that genre. I concur with Isiah Lavender III's description of the "Black-ground" of speculative fiction, the space where the race meanings in the genre become discernible and andré carrington's idea that the creation of speculative fiction ushers in the creations of refracted Blacknesses.[38] For both Lavender and carrington, reading race requires reading against some of the cognition that guides the creative work within this genre. So, if we are to consider that speculative fiction attempts to unsettle how readers think, but typically fails to do so in the area of race, then we must consider how a discussion about race also requires that we shift reading practices. Madness then opens up "cognitive estrangement" to question just exactly how strange cognition about Blackness and madness can be. In other words, Darko Suvin did not know how right he was: we must attend to the facts of Blackness and madness in the (speculative) fiction.

Reading madness and Blackness conjoined in Black speculative fiction indexes the profound possibilities within that genre. Slippages within the genre take for granted multiple forms of cognition, mental engagement, and racial difference such that Black speculative fiction becomes a welcoming place for those who are seeking a way out of their minds. A less tongue-in-cheek, though no less slippery answer lies in one of the premier Black speculative fiction artist-theorist's ruminations on the utility of the genre with regard to theorizing about the world. In Octavia E. Butler's essay "Positive Obsession," she wrote for *Essence* readers a rebuttal to (or a rebuke of) the question "What good is all this [science fiction] for Black people?"[39] She counters the assumption embedded within the question that literature must do something for material conditions. She points out not only that she resents the question but also that the genre "stimulates imagination and

creativity," "gets reader and writer off the beaten track," and, in its "examination of the possible effects of science and technology or social organization and political direction," prompts "alternative ways of thinking and doing."[40] More importantly for this discussion, her enumerated answers as well as her rhetorical questions (answers by paraleipsis) suggest that the unmooring of time, space, and culture in science fiction prompts the necessary tumult required to reimagine the world.

Butler (like the rest of the writers that follow—Nalo Hopkinson, Tananarive Due, and Mat Johnson) operates as a theorist in line with Barbara Christian's formulation of theory and narrative, as outlined in "The Race for Theory": namely, their narratives, riddles, proverbs, stories, and fiction are how they theorize in dynamic rather than static forms.[41] Their conversations about time, social location, space, and place invite readers to reexamine how to read Blackness and madness alongside each other. They each scrutinize the monstrous intimacy of the novel,[42] highlighting how it functions as a pedagogic enterprise designed to inculcate and discipline Black bodies with their own erasure. In much of this project, I focus on the way their theorizing manifests in the content of their fiction. It is only at the end of this project that I deliberately turn to a discussion of genre (the novel) itself. These writers participate in a rich tradition of Black speculative fiction that upends the erasure of Blackness in fiction writ large and the dismissal of madness as mere metaphor. At the interstices of a raced and gendered madness, we find the seams of the Enlightenment project. When speculative fiction writers suspend time, space, and culture, they force further apart the disjuncture between what is natural and what is cultural inheritance. Even though the content of the fiction under scrutiny seeks to disentangle itself from time as a particular concept, the fiction remains steeped in discourses that have long histories, including racist antebellum pseudoscience, disability as the rationale against civil rights gains, and rhetoric that binds white racism to a series of unspeakable and unintelligible acts.[43] Yet, their writing does not obscure the tension between systemic racism and ableism, on the one hand, and seemingly individual and singular intimate acts, on the other. What these writers foreground is that it would be willfully naïve to assume white madness as the only rationale for racism or to dismiss how much racism is mundane and so is madness, but the latter is not an excuse or a reason for the former.

To be clear, I do not believe that this project has implications solely for Black speculative fiction (as I discuss in the final conversation). Given the

history of literacy and race in the United States, all Black writers are a science fiction come to life. Including me. Given the history of disability and science, many disabled people live in the interstices of science and fiction. Including me. Within the long history of Black literature, madness surfaces not solely as pathology or as part of a holy fool tradition, but also as a viable alternative to engagements with white racism even if it does not result in increased agency. Madness becomes the place to engage because racism adheres to a peculiar kind of rationality, predicated on the long history of the Enlightenment and its material effects. Critical mad studies, when combined with critical race studies, becomes beneficially disruptive as a way to call attention to Black madness as a viable social location from which people have been engaged. From Pauline Hopkins's novel *Of One Blood, Or the Hidden Self* (1902), which might be termed Black speculative fiction, to Angelina Weld Grimké's play *Rachel* (1914) to George Wolfe's play *The Colored Museum* (1986) and others, Black mad characters are everywhere. Their madnesses and their Blacknesses are expansive. Furthermore, the examples of Blackness and madness do not merely exist in fiction. They find their way together into the public sphere and global headlines as examples of what occurs when the full force of delegitimizing power gets marshaled against two social locations whose construction tends to hinge on their relationship to nonnormativity: media discussions of Black rage, the aftermath of state-sanctioned and extrajudicial killings of Black people, and the gaslighting of non-Black allies.[44]

In my methodology, I take for granted that the reading acts that privilege madness and Blackness are participatory. Shoshana Felman and Toni Morrison agree that reading madness and race respectively requires participation in the form of decision-making on the part of the reader.[45] Their understanding of the world must be engaged—in order to be confirmed or disrupted. According to Felman and Morrison, readers must decide which portions of the content they will privilege in their interpretation. Felman's "scandal" that no reader is innocent resonates with Morrison's "playing in the dark," since no reader can be divorced from discussions of race in American letters. To read Blackness and madness then, to participate in such readings, requires that readers bear the responsibility of interpretation: understand that multiple interpretations are available and that their choices indicate a stance on Blackness and madness itself. Since Felman and Morrison's ideas yoke reader response to social, political, and cultural context, they become incredibly useful for thinking through the way mad Blackness and Black

madness exceed the boundaries of the text. Indeed, the significant material consequences of each suggest that texts were never meant to hold madness or Blackness. Readerly participation also applies to critical understandings of the two discourses as well. For this reason, each of the conversations in *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness* begins with a discussion of how the critical discourse shapes our engagement. I start there because critics, as readers, are implicated in the scholarly writing about Blackness and madness. Margaret Price's *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life* (2011) points this out beautifully by indicating that we are all implicated as scholars in discussions of madness.[46] The professoriate hinges on our ability to pass as sane, or rather the right type of sane.[47] It is the same critique scholars of race have been making for years: to address Blackness/madness imperils the twin pillars of whiteness and sanity that uphold Western notions of intellectual enterprise.

To that end, I draw on those who read within the folds and breaks, a concept and methodology that attends to connections between discourse and materiality as infinite and inextricably bound. The complex web of relationships between Blackness and madness (and race and disability) is constituted within the fissures, breaks, and gaps in critical and literary texts. Hortense Spillers's work in "Interstices: A Drama of Small Words" (1984), and "'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe': An American Grammar Book" (1987), opens up this critical space and methodology in her discussion of the flesh. She depicts the flesh as a text that has, makes, and acquires meaning. The flesh of Black women in particular, since it has been erased from history, in its abrogated status exists within what Deleuze later terms the fold: a space not solely of possibility, but one that continuously gets erased. Since Deleuze develops the fold vis-à-vis Leibniz's understanding of the Baroque aesthetic (read: within a tradition of Western and Enlightenment thought), I find it useful to think through how the fold shows up in the aesthetic praxis of the artists-theorists under scrutiny. The fold exists within the self, between the self and other, and between groups of others, as a space from which to interpret and understand the various critical and creative possibilities available. In addition, development does not occur on a linear plane: it constantly folds, unfolds, and refolds. Most important for my readings, the fold functions as a space that creates and sustains possibility. Spillers's work not only anticipates Deleuze but also expands its reach by making explicit which subjects consistently live within the fold, an idea disability studies scholar Lennard Davis echoes when he writes about the way ideas and subjects within

the fold get erased.[48] Yet, the fold as understood by Deleuze is not merely the place where history and aesthetics rest. It is mercurial and oppositional, since, as Hortense Spillers theorized prior to Deleuze, it is emblazoned on Black flesh. Fred Moten's *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (2003) conceptualizes the "break," a methodological kissing cousin to the fold, as a racialized space that pinpoints how history, music, and race—as discursive concepts and material consequences—function as oppositional even as they are coextensive. Moten's "break" signals the kind of rupture that creates and catastrophizes Blackness and madness, which he punctuates by using other words to describe the break like the cut, or the process of breaking, like invagination, or intussuscepted (all of which I borrow).

In theorizing about the constellation of relationships between Blackness and madness, I find that they have, make, and acquire meaning differently in fiction and critical conversations. For this reason, each discussion makes room for an investigation of the gaps and fissures in critical literature as well as where fiction intervenes. The artists-theorists in this study all challenge the current critical conversations in their dynamic theorizing. My readings of both the critical literature and the fictive text examine the fold (the break, the cut) and the processes that make the fold legible (invagination, intussusception). These ruptures require reading texts countermnemonically with an eye toward gaps and mistakes.[49] I ask pointedly about the way critical conversations are constructed, rehearsed, and furthered. I also ask about where the fiction opens up the possibilities critical conversations have foreclosed. I read within the rupture, the break, the fold, finding the potentials, pitfalls, and the processes of Black madness and mad Blackness. I deliberately stray away from conceptions of Blackness and madness, such as that of Anne Cheng's "racial melancholia," which understands racial identity as beholden to grief, or Paul Gilroy's "postcolonial melancholia," which views history only through the lenses of nostalgia and melancholia.[50] Despite their utility in thinking through the effects of internalized colonialism and racism, melancholia conceptually cannibalizes all other affective engagement and tends to prioritize itself over race, even when the two are supposedly sutured together. To read within these folds points out how Blackness and madness exceed and shift the boundaries and definitions of human, specifically how the assumed subject positions of unknowable excess (that is, Black madness and mad Blackness) jeopardize the neatness with which we draw the line between self and other. Be clear. This is not meant to be an emancipatory

theory of agency for Black mad or mad Black subjects. Instead, this project may delineate the costs of hope and the aftermath of degradation.

With good reason, this project pulls from the intellectual activist impulses of both African American studies and disability studies. African American studies as an interdisciplinary field challenges the willful gaps and erasures in other fields, privileging Blackness as a critical analytical category. It is from this impulse of redress and address that I approach disability studies' insistence on the variability of human embodiment and mental ability. I find that the two fields challenge one another to examine points of erasure both inside and outside their own interdisciplinary spaces. They also warn against the commodification of movements by institutions as a proxy for fixing the material conditions of disenfranchised racial minorities and people with disabilities. Though I suture them together, I also seek to parse Blackness from disability, disability from Blackness, since each field has used the discourse of the other to metaphorize its own conditions, even as I take seriously the way both methodologies trouble their relationship to normativity. In this way, my project is indebted to queer studies for its critique of normal as a category, and expansive definitions of familial and erotic attachment. As part of my engagement with these fields, I participate in what Erica Edwards terms "a politics of curiosity" or in Alison Kafer's "unanswered questions and contradictions" that seek to open up new, if fraught, intellectual terroir.[51]

Because of my emphasis on the processes and potentials of Blackness and madness together, I choose to read the two through the lens of intersectionality. This particular theoretical approach—described as such by Kimberlé Crenshaw and theorized well before her[52]—relies on the interrelated nature of identity as formation and lived experience. I harness the motility associated with Crenshaw's idea of the intersection. In "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" (1989), Crenshaw mobilizes the legal example of diagraming an accident to point out the malleability of the intersection theory. Scholars have troubled intersectionality for being "gridlocked" or not accounting for the control of bodies through "affective capacities and tendencies," so I find it useful to return to Crenshaw's original example for what it offers this inquiry in terms of malleability and affective control.[53] Crenshaw notes that "it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine

which driver caused the harm."[54] In this metaphor, the accident's causes may be multiple—both knowable and unknowable. Extending the metaphor for a moment: the accident could be caused by the drivers, the road, the pedestrians, or poor signage, any of which includes the possibility of affective control by a larger structural entity. Moreover, the accident metaphor relies on a sense of motility, since identities are not static, nor are they understood in this framework as acting equally at the same time. Indeed, the idea of the intersection requires that one encounter it, approach it, or deliberately traverse it—eking out the space for intersectionality to think through identities as in flux and in processes of becoming as well as being spatially and temporally contingent.

Though I make use of the fold and I mention the processes of becoming, I am clear that I do not wish to take up another Deleuzian framework that has been proposed to accompany intersectionality: the assemblage. Jasbir Puar proposed that intersectionality be complemented by Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage.[55] Her rationale is that the "geopolitics of reception" does not deploy intersectionality to its original end.[56] I share Puar's concern that intersectionality has been misused to recenter whiteness and does not move smoothly across transnational borders, a concern voiced by Nirmala Erevelles, Julia Livingstone, and Clare Barker, as noted above. Yet, it is troubling that a theory crafted by and for Black women would be used to erase them again.[57] Intersectionality is an epistemological intervention: it reorients how and from whom we understand the Enlightenment project. Redirecting that orientation back to Deleuze and Guattari (especially given that Hortense Spillers's work anticipates and expands Deleuze's ideas about the fold) reasserts the import of white European epistemologies over and against those of Black women and validates continental European intellectual traditions as standard. Taking a cue from Brittney Cooper's project in *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women* (2017), I understand Black women's intellectual projects as schools of thought that from the nineteenth century onward sought to prioritize the specificity of Black women's embodied theorizing.[58] Since intersectionality arises out of that intellectual space, evacuating Black women from it prioritizes an ideology that abets their erasure. To foist assemblage onto intersectionality also reduces Black women's embodied theorizing and becomes merely another vehicle for the enactment of privilege since it shifts the conversation away from them and their ideas about world-making.[59] It is in the nature of privilege to find ever more places to hide. Accounting for this, I find that despite the fact that the

assemblage and the fold share a similar emphasis on process, the assemblage (as a concept for discussing identity) brings with it a set of ideas that does not suit my inquiry.

What I am also unwilling to take with the theory of assemblage is the freighted territory of the cyborg: the feminist materialist theory of becoming developed by Donna Haraway that combines human, animal, and machine as a radical political enterprise that ushers in the future both theoretically and practically. I have found it useful as a thought exercise that complicates the relationship of the body to itself and to others and deals with our very real reliance on machines and kinship with animals. Since the cyborg opens up the conversation about futurity—which usually elides madness and Blackness—it also becomes a useful space to consider who we are becoming.[60] Certainly, to think through our kinship with machines is apropos for discussions of disability given the medicalization of certain bodies, and remains so given my emphasis on speculative fiction. But the cyborg is an incomplete, politically fraught, and ethically suspicious answer to a series of questions about raced and disabled futurity. Material reality must reckon with what others have pointed out are the lived experiences of the Black and disabled body, what amount to (in this project, at least) the gaps and folds within Black speculative fiction. Read in alignment with Tobin Siebers's theory of complex embodiment and Alison Kafer's questioning of spatial, cultural, and temporal logics, the emphasis on the cyborg and the desire to supersede the body has an antagonistic relationship with concerns at the heart of disability studies: pain, fiscal access, and the validity of embodied experience, to name a few.[61] What happens when one does not desire cyborgian intervention as cure? What of those for whom material cyborgian realities are more painful than useful or pleasurable? As much as cyborgian futures promise a radical set of possibilities for considering disability, we ought to be wary of them because they are also reliant on a set of middle-class (or rich) realities.

I have elsewhere pointed out the way the cyborg's promise of radical potential hinges on an original white Western subject.[62] Leaning on Donna Haraway's original definition, João Costa Vargas and Joy A. James understand the Black cyborg as a postbellum construction that requires Black degradation: "A Black cyborg: a modified, improved human whose increased ethical, spiritual, and physical capabilities generate unusual strength, omniscience, and boundless love."[63] They invoke Haraway's understanding of the cyborg as both real and fictive to pinpoint how the Black cyborg re-

lies on a set of interracial dynamics that extend from a history steeped in anti-Blackness. The Black cyborg is required to participate in its own self-abnegation since it is built on top of the foundations of American democratic and imperial projects reliant on phobic understandings of Blackness. The Black cyborg, then, in Vargas and James's formulation, echoes that of the disabled cyborg: neither can escape the desire for normalcy that erases Blackness and madness both. Alison Kafer reads in the gaps of Haraway's work and its intellectual genealogy to reinsert the oft-overlooked contributions of women of color—among them Octavia E. Butler and Chela Sandoval—to the definition of the cyborg. She pinpoints that the cyborg as transgressive figure has limited potential precisely because of how it has been developed and mobilized in ways that erase women of color and reify the virgule between disabled and able-bodied. Though the cyborg asks for blasphemous interpretation—a promise and proposition Kafer, Vargas, and James readily champion—as part of its political transgression, I question how much the cyborg can map a future of any kind when it relies on a past and path of erasure. What the cyborg ushers in—that I'd prefer to leave aside for this discussion—is an assemblage yoked to anti-Blackness and able-ism, a method of becoming that requires theoretical overcoming since the theories rely on but refuse disabled and Black embodiment.

The sections that follow function as a conversation about madness and Blackness, each one questioning and returning to the ones before to uncover, recover, discover the relationships between these two concepts. They are not, as mentioned in the preface, meant to form a narrative arc. My intention in bringing madness and Blackness together theoretically is not to create a linear narrative about the constellation of relationships that comprise the two. Instead, I wish to open up several interrelated conversations that intertwine, agree, and, perhaps, rebuke each other. Each section begins with a discussion of the critical literature as an inroad to raising questions that scholars have overlooked or elided. I segue into the fictive texts, not as illustrative examples of the critical conversations but rather as interventions. The artists-theorists in this study press us to pause in the breaks of the critical literature and undergo another process of intussusception. Their work revamps how we might think about the questions we raise regarding Blackness and madness and the relationships between the two.

The first conversation, "Making Black Madness," examines the somewhat canonical idea that race and disability mutually constitute each other. Tracing this idea through its genesis in disability studies, I find that this idea

only leaves room for recuperative historical or emancipatory projects. Octavia E. Butler's *Fledgling* (2005) intervenes in its depiction of Black madness, theorizing about the way intimate relationships disrupt the impulses that undergird mutual constitution. Ultimately, Butler interrogates whether the concept of mutual constitution is a useful reading strategy. The second discussion, "A Mad Black Thang," parses mental illness and cognitive ability to think about what happens when madness exists in the context of Blackness. I argue for the concept of mad Blackness, since it invalidates Western dependence on ocularity and linear progression by shifting conceptions about or amplifying the reaches of Blackness and madness. As a sonic novel, Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* (2000) meditates on the potentials of silence and putative mad speech. Hopkinson's work allows for mad Blackness to transform how we conceptualize madness within intraracial spaces.

Following a politics of curiosity, in the third conversation, "Abandoning the Human?," I ask what it might mean to unmake Black madness. That is, how might we disengage with the ideas that undergird these concepts? Tananarive Due's conception of the nonhuman in her *African Immortals* series (1997–2011) shifts the discursive terrain by questioning what it means to desire Blackness, how and why (cognitive) ability continues to have ideological weight, and what interpretive strategies exist that privilege mad Black epistemologies. Her series functions as a heuristic that allows us to test how and why Blackness and madness acquire critical purchase in a world designed for their erasure. Due's work also presses critics to articulate when and why we might abandon the concept of the human—residues of the Enlightenment project—in favor of Blackness and madness. In the final section, "Not Making Meaning, Not Making Since (The End of Time)," I question the ideological conceit at the heart of both disability studies and Black studies, when viewed from the standpoint of a linear progressive narrative—that Blackness and madness must mean something. Here I commit an act of literary theorist blasphemy by trying to sort through which conditions would make it possible for Black madness to lose meaning but not value. Understanding Mat Johnson's irreverent Black mad characters as a starting point for such musings, I conjecture about what happens to the Black mad and the mad Black at the end of time. As mentioned earlier, I turn to the way Johnson describes and engages the novel specifically because the genre presumes the validity of linear progressive narratives. Johnson's work not only questions the possibilities within the novel but also permits *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness* to pan outward beyond Black speculative fiction to think about

what Black novels do writ large. Caveat: this book does not have a conclusion. As I explain in more detail in the preface and in the final section, reading and theorizing mad Blackness and Black madness demands an elliptical openness that refuses linearity and progression toward traditional conclusions. Rather than artificially foist one upon this discussion, I've chosen to leave it somewhat open. This is a mad Black book, after all.

I mobilize the malleability of intersectionality and the de facto validity of embodied, lived experience for the purposes of this conversation. Rather than recenter the conversation on whiteness as a guiding paradigm, I choose to examine the places where normativity breaks: the accident in the middle of the intersection, as it were. My readings focus on the gaps, mistakes, folds, and breaks. I assess the damage, and provide a lens for reading Blackness and madness together. To my mind, the mad Black/Black mad subject is not simply standing at an intersection but also actively changing it. In what follows, I seek to figure out how.

PREFACE

1   Several book reviews have pointed out the utility of the work within the fields
    with which it is engaged and places where the project could have gone further.
    See Fadda, "Review of *New Body Politics: Narrating Arab and Black Identity in
    the Contemporary United States*," Harb, "Review of *New Body Politics: Narrat-
    ing Arab and Black Identity in the Contemporary United States*," Kafer, "Review
    of *New Body Politics: Narrating Arab and Black Identity in the Contemporary
    United States*," Khrebtan-Hörhager, "Review of *New Body Politics: Narrating
    Arab and Black Identity in the Contemporary United States*," and Vedere, "Re-
    view of *New Body Politics: Narrating Arab and Black Identity in the Contempo-
    rary United States*."
2   This insight became more apparent after I read Brittney Cooper's *Beyond Re-
    spectability*. I thank her profoundly for her labor in laying that bare. See Cooper,
    Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women, 11–32.
3   For other works where I have used this strategy, see Pickens, "The Verb Is No";
    "What Drives Work"; and "Blue Blackness, Black Blueness."
4   Christian, "Race for Theory," 288.
5   Trethewey, "Thrall," 59.

INTRODUCTION

1   Kriegel, "Uncle Tom and Tiny Tim."
2   Kriegel, "Uncle Tom and Tiny Tim."
3   Kriegel, "Uncle Tom and Tiny Tim."
4   This occurs in scholarship that is primarily about race but includes a discus-
    sion of dismemberment, embodiment, or mental illness without exploring

disability studies angles. This occurs in scholarship that is primarily about disability, but only includes a discussion of race as tangential or in reference to something else wherein the scholarship about race has only a footnote or a brief citation.

5   Bradley Lewis's project generally asks the two fields of literature and medicine to speak to each other. He uses Chekov as a case study to think through the way we tell stories about depression. Though Lewis's work is useful for examining the way we narrativize medicine in fiction, I find it unhelpful for my purpose here: to expose how the discourses of race and disability broadly and madness and Blackness specifically transform one other. In *Depression*, he traces the etymology of melancholia and depression through Aristotle and Plato, finding that neither the humoral (Aristotle) nor the divinity (Plato) shy away from implicating Blackness as abject. As he describes the intellectual genealogy, Foucault takes up the Aristotelian understanding, thinking of humoral theory as the way depression is discursively constituted. As I explain in the methodological section of this introduction, melancholia and attendant humoral theories tend to cannibalize discussions about race since they allow little room for other ways of understanding the affect of depression (its causes, repercussions, etc.). This project is markedly different from that of Ann Cvetkovich, who ties depression to a set of cultural locations through affect theory. See Lewis, *Depression*; and Cvetkovich, *Depression*.

6   I choose to signify on Stevie Wonder's work for two reasons: first, as a Black blind musician, he often foregrounds the historical freight and psychoaffective weight of Blackness and disability in the public sphere. Second, even though I do not focus on Blackness and physical disability, I do not want to miss how those discussions have paved the way for my own work. One such discussion would be Terry Rowden's book on Blackness and blindness, *Songs of Blind Folk*.

7   Jarman, "Dismembering the Lynch Mob," 91.

8   In making this intellectual move to consider madness as socially constructed as well as materially bound, I lean on the legacy of Michel Foucault. Rather than rehearse Foucauldian arguments about the discourse of madness, I find it useful to point out that the scholarship upon which I more directly rely has Foucault's work on madness as a discursive construct as its foundation rendering such rehearsals and repetition unnecessary.

9   Most disability studies scholars who discuss mental or cognitive disability have some notations on language. I echo the sentiments of Margaret Price, who reminds us that no term is neutral in our discussions of psychiatric disability, mental illness, cognitive disability, intellectual disability, neurodiversity, neuroatypicality, psychiatric system survivors, mental health service users, craziness, and, of course, madness. Even though language acquires a particular urgency when discussing the mind, my aim to use mad recognizes the complex history the term carries as well as the full expansiveness of its lexical range. See Price, *Mad at School*.

10   Menzies, LeFrançois, and Reaume, *Mad Matters*, 10.

11 Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, 1.

12 Aho, Ben-Moshe, and Hilton, "Mad Futures," 294.

13 Aho, Ben-Moshe, and Hilton, "Mad Futures," 294.

14 It is also true that discussions of Blackness cannot and should not slide easily across cultural borders. For this reason, I choose not to engage Sander Gilman's work. In the chapter that appears in *On Blackness without Blacks* (1982) and, largely unchanged, in *Difference and Pathology* (1985), when he connects the degeneracy associated with Black sexuality to a discussion of Freud and race, it is in service of a discussion of Jewishness. It collapses the significant differences between the way race functions for Jewishness and Blackness. Though he understands that a common feature of Blackness and madness combined is a fear of the other's potential destruction and wildness, he neglects to think through how Blackness has more than just phobogenic potential. Useful for my purposes in this argument is his historical discussion of how Black Americans were implicated in the US census of 1840 as more insane than their (free) white counterparts. Gilman's explanations of madness also do not complicate the work of mad studies scholars who are, useful for my purposes, interested in defanging biopsychiatric definitions of madness and institutional instantiations thereof of their significant narrative and political power. Gilman's historical exploration of madness in art as a repressed secret in *Picturing Health and Illness* (1995) and madness as a cultural fantasy of ugliness in *Disease and Representation* (1988) are each incorporated in my understanding of madness as a slippery discourse that finds its way into multiple cultural locations. Such an understanding of madness as unruly undergirds my desire to mobilize artists-theorists to dialogue with and challenge critics.

15 Pickens, "Modern Family," 131.

16 Erevelles, "Crippin' Jim Crow," 87.

17 Gorman, "Quagmires of Affect," 312.

18 Schalk, "Interpreting Disability Metaphor and Race," 141.

19 Dennis Tyler Jr.'s article "Jim Crow's Disabilities: Racial Injury, Immobility, and the 'Terrible Handicap' in the Literature of James Weldon Johnson" also identifies how this slippage functions in the early twentieth century. According to Tyler, Johnson mobilizes disability as metaphor and materiality to underscore how it functions in determining who is legible as Black and white.

20 Barr, "All at One Point," xi.

21 During the review process, one reader pointed out that the double colon is also commonly used to introduce emotion or affect into a written conversation (i.e., :: blinks innocently ::) either to add genuine emotion or snark. Though that usage is less evocative for me here since it requires book-ending phrases with the double colon, it does bear mentioning as a way that the double colon refuses to provide easy clarity.

22 Black Dance Studies scholar Takiyah Amin discussed the problems with a "contribution model" of engaging Blackness. Her point was that thinking of Blackness as a contribution erases the role it plays in creating through either Black

bodies or methodologies/praxis of Black creative/critical thinking. See Amin, "Beyond Hierarchy."

23 Siebers, *Disability Theory*, 26.
24 Davis, *End of Normal*, 1–15.
25 Kafer, *Feminist. Queer. Crip.*, 149.
26 Donaldson and Prendergast, "No Crying," 130.
27 Bérubé, *Secret Life of Stories*, 27. Margaret Price also makes this point when she notes that the terms used to describe madness writ large have embedded within them dehumanizing logics. See Price, *Mad at School*, 1–24.
28 These include but are not limited to Jay Dolmage, Stephanie Kerschbaum, Margaret Price, and Melanie Yergeau.
29 See Cartwright, "Diseases and Peculiarities" and Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification*. Michael Bérubé's *Secret Life of Stories* explores the idea that a character need not have an intellectual disability for intellectual disability to affect the action of the text. Given the history of Blackness in the United States, I wager that this idea has been consistently at work in Black literature since its inception. This is one of the points hinted at in Christopher M. Bell's "Introducing White Disability Studies" as well.
30 Titchkosky, *Reading and Writing Disability Differently*, 40.
31 Bell, *Blackness and Disability*, 3.
32 T. Carey, *Rhetorical Healing*, 20.
33 V. Smith, "Loopholes of Retreat."
34 I would be remiss if I did not note the fact that there has been a recent explosion of scholarship on disability and race more broadly. Julie Avril Minich brings together the fields of Latinx studies and disability studies in her work *Accessible Citizenships: Disability, Nation, and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico* (2013), examining how Chicano/a communities mobilized disability as a way to expand the understanding of political community. Recent work in Indigenous studies and disability studies pinpoints that "disability was not always seen as such," but that some Indigenous cultures—I reference Siobhan Senier's work on Mohegan people in particular—understood disability as part of varied human experience (Senier, "Traditionally," 213–29). Eunjung Kim also explores disability in a Korean context in *Curative Violence: Rehabilitating Disability, Gender, and Sexuality in Modern Korea* (2017).
35 Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 3.
36 Suvin, "SF Novel in 1969," 158.
37 Darko Suvin develops a theory of science fiction in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, clarifying that science fiction is not as far removed from realist fiction as one might desire to think. See Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*.
38 Lavender, *Race in Science Fiction*, 7; carrington, *Speculative Blackness*.
39 Butler, "Positive Obsession," 135.
40 Butler, "Positive Obsession," 134, 135.
41 My thinking in this regard comes from several locations, including Barbara Christian's "Race for Theory"; Ann Cvetkovich's *Depression*; and the late José

Esteban Muñoz memorial at the American Studies Association Minority Scholars breakfast. Rather than impose on scholars in their grief (though the Muñoz memorial speeches eloquently honored his work and were endlessly quotable), I choose to cite the work from which this idea came. See Christian, "Race for Theory"; Cvetkovich, *Depression*; and Muñoz, *Disidentifications*.

42 I borrow this term from Christina Sharpe's book of the same name in which she interprets the conditions that make violence fundamental to the New World Black subject. In her words, monstrous intimacies are "a set of known and unknown performances and inhabited horrors, desires and positions produced, reproduced, circulated, and transmitted that are breathed in like air and often acknowledged to be monstrous" (*Monstrous Intimacies*, 3). The novel, as I argue, is a monstrous, intimate space where disciplining violence gets enacted on bodies and subjects deemed nonnormative.

43 See Boster, *African American Slavery*; Cartwright, "Diseases and Peculiarities"; and Baynton, "Disability."

44 All of these could refer to multiple instances within the public sphere. However, one particular instance comes to mind. When officer Darren Wilson described his fatal encounter with Michael Brown, he described Brown as a demon, an unstoppable force that needed to be shot to be subdued. Officer Wilson shot and killed the eighteen-year-old Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9, 2014. Wilson was not indicted of killing Brown and was cleared of violating Brown's civil rights. In addition, the protesters who identified with the activist group Black Lives Matter were described as unreasonably angry and singularly discontent as opposed to understanding themselves as part of the long view of history. The reaction to non-Black allies was hostile and tended to question their sanity and intelligence. This is but one instance and is part of a larger pattern of using the associations with Blackness and madness to defang social and political critique. For Wilson's description, see Calamur, "Ferguson Documents."

45 Felman points out that madness is participatory in a few publications, notably *Writing and Madness: Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis*, and in a section composed of three essays in *The Claims of Literature: A Shoshana Felman Reader*. Toni Morrison makes this point on multiple occasions, most notably in her critical text *Playing in the Dark* and with her short fiction "Recitatif."

46 Price, *Mad at School*, 141–75.

47 I discuss how this works in Mat Johnson's *Pym*. I point out how this discourse functions both in the fiction and in the academy. See Pickens, "Satire, Scholarship and Sanity."

48 Davis, *End of Normal*, 130.

49 See Nyong'o, *Amalgamation Waltz*.

50 Cheng, *Melancholy of Race*; Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*.

51 Edwards, *Charisma*, xvii; Kafer, *Feminist. Queer. Crip.*, 19.

52 See B. Cooper, *Beyond Respectability*.

53 Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*; Puar, "Cyborg," 63.

54 Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing," 149.

55 Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 211–16.

56 Puar, "Cyborg," 53.

57 In *Habeas Viscus*, Alexander G. Weheliye turns to the racial assemblage as a way to discuss the work of Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Wynter, two Black women theorizing about Blackness and gender since "the idea of racializing assemblages . . . construes race not as a biological or cultural classification but as a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite humans, and non-humans." He sets up these ideas in contrast to bare life (Agamben) and biopolitics (Foucault), which in their original instantiations ignore race and racism and their profound impact on notions of humanity. In as much as I find Weheliye's formulation useful, the assemblage, since it does not deal with biology or culture stringently, cannot account for the interplay between Blackness and madness in the same way as intersectionality does.

58 Cooper's project makes very clear that Black women's intellectual commitments were not incidental or coincidental. They were part of an intellectual tradition that theorized out of their quotidian embodied experience as a bulwark against racist and sexist material conditions. See B. Cooper, *Beyond Respectability*.

59 See B. Cooper, "Love No Limit."

60 Rosi Braidotti's text *The Posthuman* usefully explicates the intellectual lineage of the cyborg, noting that it comes from a set of ideas that privilege privileged conceptions of the human.

61 Siebers, *Disability Theory*; Kafer, *Feminist. Queer. Crip.*

62 See Pickens, *New Body Politics*, 116–46.

63 Vargas and James, "Refusing Blackness-as-Victimization," 198.

CONVERSATION 1. MAKING BLACK MADNESS

1 Bell, "Introducing White Disability Studies," 278.

2 Though Christopher M. Bell's essay holds this distinction, and rightfully so, he was not the only person to discuss race and ethnicity. Others—Rosemarie Garland Thomson, Douglas Baynton, David Yuan, and G. Thomas Couser—had done so before him. His contention was, and I concur, that disability studies as a field had consistently participated in the erasure, silencing, or ignoring of the intersections between these categories. He was the first to suggest (by not suggesting) a set of methodologies, analytical strategies, and representational politics.

3 Bell, "Representational Detective Work," 3.

4 Douglas Baynton's work discusses this in detail. He examines historical narratives in which disability and race or disability and gender intersect at the moment of articulating a claim to civil rights. See Baynton, "Disability and the Justification."

5 Cynthia Wu and Jennifer James ("Race, Ethnicity, Disability, and Literature") point this out in their introduction to *MELUS*'s special issue on race, ethnicity