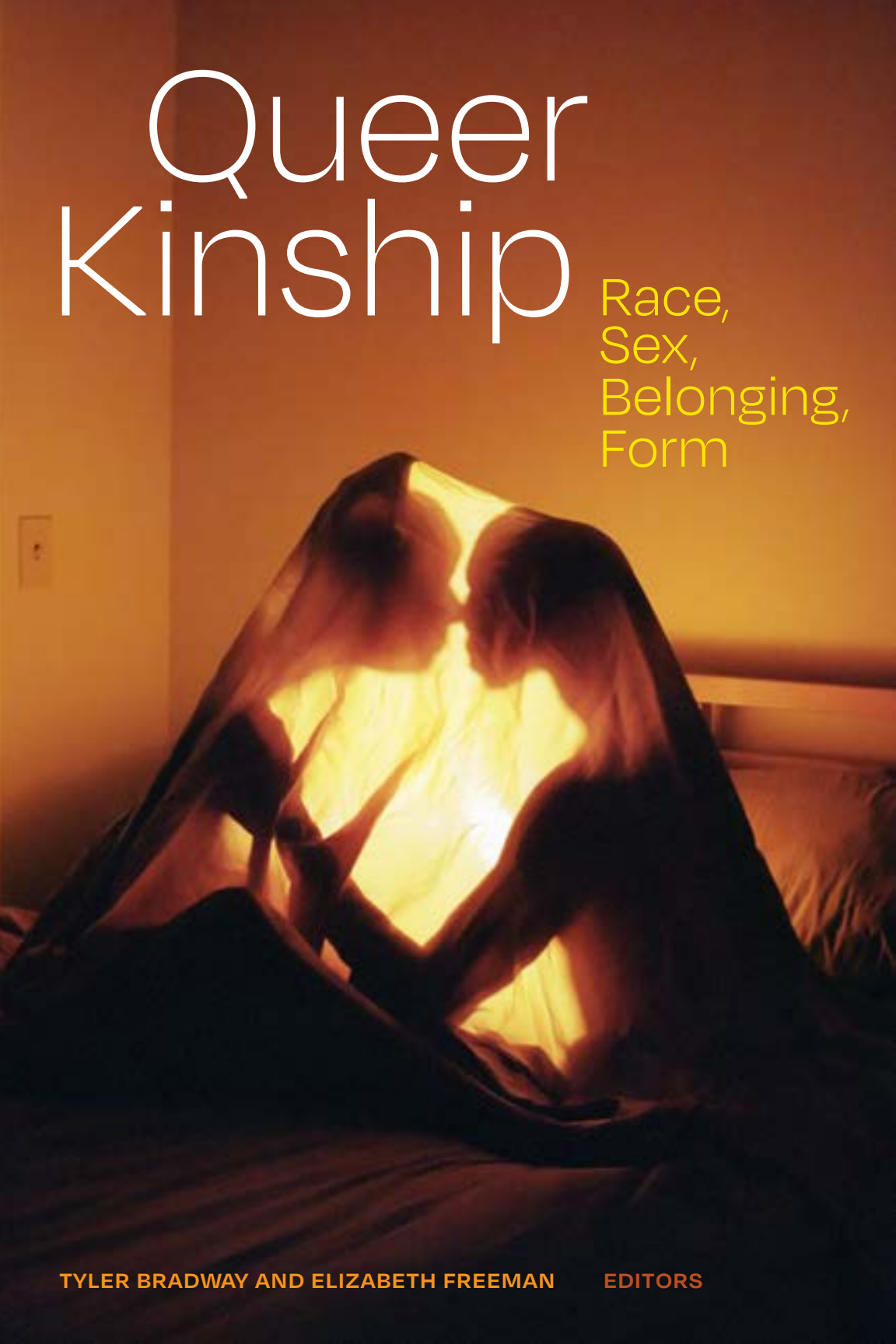
Queer Kinship

Race, Sex, Belonging, Form



TYLER BRADWAY AND ELIZABETH FREEMAN EDITORS

Queer Kinship

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Lauren Berlant, Lee Edelman, Benjamin Kahan, and Christina Sharpe

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ELIZABETH FREEMAN, EDITORS

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TYLER BRADWAY AND ELIZABETH FREEMAN

Introduction
Kincoherence / Kin-aesthetics / Kinematics

Queer theory has always been a theory of kinship. Think, for example, of the centrality of the Oedipal family—with its closeted urges, taboos, and perverse identifications—to Sigmund Freud and queer uptakes of psychoanalysis; of Michel Foucault (1990) tracing the deployments of alliance as they laminate onto the deployment of sexuality; or of the origins of private property that Friedrich Engels (1902) discovers within the social form of the bourgeois nuclear family, understood as contingent by him and by sexuality studies. Inspired by yet deeply critical of these accounts, so many of the foundational texts of queer studies devote themselves to what we might call "kinship theory." We see this project, for example, in works by Gayle Rubin (1975, 1984), Adrienne Rich (1980), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985), Hortense Spillers (1987), Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Judith Butler (2002), and Kath Weston (1991). Kinship theory—as practiced in queer, feminist, and critical race studies—contests structuralist accounts of kinship, particularly as the latter naturalize the mutual imbrications of heteronormativity, patriarchy, white supremacy, and Western imperialism. This project endures in scholarship over the past decade or so by Elizabeth Freeman (2007, 2019), Richard T. Rodríguez (2009), David L. Eng (2010), Mark Rifkin (2011), Sharon P. Holland (2012), Juana María Rodríguez (2014), and Adele Clarke and Donna Haraway (2018), among others. At the same time, kin-

ship theory weaves critique with imagination to dream belonging otherwise. Indeed, queer theory rewrites kinship as a bodily practice rather than a cultural substrate (Freeman 2007), composed through ephemeral encounters such as sex, friendship, and activism (Berlant and Warner 1998; Dean 2009; Freeman 2010; Roach 2012), pointing beyond heteronormative organizations of intimacy, care, desire, and even reproduction (Muñoz 2009; Franklin 2013; Rodríguez 2014; Lewis 2019). Here, kinship names a radical and open-ended field of relational experimentation. In short, the problems and the promises of kinship animate queer theory even when they have not been named as such.

Of course, queer theory frequently eschews the idiom of "kinship." More often, theorists prefer terms such as *relationality*, *belonging*, *intimacy*, and *sodality*. These terms are typically used in lieu of kinship, as important qualifiers to a notion of kinship modeled on the heteronormative nuclear family, or in contradistinction to theories and vernacular understandings of lesbian and gay families as sites of everyday solidarity and long-term security (see Weston 1991).[1] To be sure, queer scholarship, including our own, has found great promise in such diffuse and poststructural grammars for sociability. Yet the expansiveness of "queer belonging" may also risk evacuating the historical specificity of kinship as an idiom of state power, white supremacy, and Western modernity. To put this bluntly, we find ourselves asking a simple question: if everything is kinship, what isn't?[2]

Thus, although we share the ethos behind calls to "forget family" (see Halberstam 2007), we also note the intractability of kinship as an ideology, a material relation, an affective structure, and a narrative frame for conceiving, organizing, and living relationality in the contemporary moment. In this respect we draw inspiration from Judith Butler's claim, articulated in conversation with Gayle Rubin (1994, 87), that there is "some value in holding on to the term 'kinship' precisely in order to document that shift in the way in which the social life of sexuality is reconfigured and sustained." The idioms of kinship make perceptible the mobile grounds of sexuality's social life as well as its vital intersections with Indigeneity, race, and ethnicity. Indeed, insofar as *queerness* denotes an excess or perceived deficiency in relation to the normative family, the term always includes and indexes racialization (Cohen 1997). Our goal is not to foreclose queer experiments in belonging beyond kinship, then, but rather to understand their complex relationships to the historical, ontological, and epistemological violence that kinship engenders.

However, the trouble with kinship is that we do not always know where we stand in relation to it. This is because the idioms of kinship are not simply riven with ideological ruses waiting to be exposed; they are also invested and bound up with desire, fantasy, and affect. Indeed, as Butler notes elsewhere, the desire for the state to legitimize one's relationships within its extant terms represents a wish to become "socially coherent" (2004, 116). To think through the interleaving relations of queerness and kinship, then—the kinship of queerness, the queerness at the heart of kinship—means confronting what we call their (kin)coherence, their (k)incoherence. As a concept, *kincoherence* fuses the mutually constituting and complicating forces, desires, practices, relations, institutions, and forms that render kinship a horizon of violence and possibility. It recognizes that there is no theory of kinship without desire, and it foregrounds what we take to be kinship's salutary promise for queer theory and its attachment to problems of social legitimacy and sexual dissidence. Kincoherence traces, theorizes, and engages kinship's fraught and overdetermined nature: our desire to forget kinship and the apparent impossibility of doing so, queer kinship's creative experimentation with relationality, and its ongoing imbrication with entrenched idioms of ancestry, descent, and family.

By placing kincoherence at the center of queer kinship theory, we are fascinated by relationality's *durability* as much as its immanence. After all, kinship does not exist without extension over time (see Freeman 2007). Kinship promises. Kinship endures—or, as Butler (2017) argues, its grounding in duration is exposed precisely when it fails. It is strangely futural and retrospective, moving in queer temporalities and through corporeal uptakes. Kinship must be reproduced materially (see Stevens 1999), and this reproduction also makes possible forms of kinship that multiply beyond those we inherit, beyond those that appear to be fixed (think of informal terms such as "ex-stepmother," or "brother-out-of-law"). At the same time, the categories of kinship exist beyond the individuals occupying them (see Sahlins 2013). We cede ourselves to the roles of engroupment, violently or joyously, with resignation or with desire, or both and neither. Claude Lévi-Strauss and Freud notwithstanding, kinship lacks a center: it is diffuse and mobile, a *doing* (Bourdieu 1977) that we discover in a vast web of relationality that crosses "official" and uncodified social bonds alike. In this volume alone, kinship appears as interdependency (Butler), ecstasy (Aftab), fantasy (Hurley), memory (Pierce), performance (Brito), oath (Dong), decision making (Weston), care (Çalışkan), anonymity (Allen

and Garrison), contract (Saha), racialization (Chamberlin), reproduction (Fielder), governmentality (Rifkin), and so on.

As these examples suggest, kinship happens simultaneously on the terrain of kinetics, or forces acting on existing mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, *and also* on aesthetics, or the principles of artistic and symbolic organization.[3] For this reason, we advocate kin-aesthetics as a core methodology for queer kinship theory. As a philosophical term, *kin-aesthetics*, containing not only *kin* but also *kinetics* and *aesthetics*, concerns itself with how processes of *figuration*, whether they take place as social practice or in imaginative texts, de-form and re-form the categories and genres by which we experience our relationships. Kin-aesthetic activities make and unmake the social field. Kinship needs kin-aesthetics because kinship is a symbol system as well as a set of practices. But kin-aesthetic practices are not epiphenomenal to a deeper and invariant structure of kinship; neither are they simply a floating discourse untethered from the material relations and conditions of belonging. Rather, kin-aesthetics are the site of kinship's renewal, transformation, and extension beyond the present. This is why so much depends on the details of a ritual or the dramatics of an exchange. Of course, one queer performance does not remake an entire social system. Yet the kin-aesthetics of kinship materialize and renew both bodies and social ties in ways that grant "a future, but one with an uninevitable form" (Freeman 2007, 299). In short, *kinship needs form*. Form—by which we mean principles of ordering that crisscross and interarticulate extant structures and their possible dismantling or reconfiguration—makes the symbolics and phenomenology of kinship move.[4]

Wherein lies the queerness of kin-aesthetics? Here is one illustration, though surely not the only possibility: Leo Bersani's (Dean et al. 1997, 6) notion of a "correspondence of forms" in which visual, aural, and other resonances across things situated in disparate spaces can give rise to new relations, new solidarities. This is not the same as identification or fantasies of likeness because the rhymes are always between a subject and the part objects through which the *imago* finds itself decomposed and recomposed. These relational moments do not just re-form the subject; they offer new social imaginaries. Bersani turns, we might say, from the form of the family, the family tree or kinship diagram that has led to coercive inclusions and murderously violent exclusions as well as fundamental misrecognitions, to "families of forms" (14). Formalism, or figuration, becomes for Bersani a mode of self-extension, self-accretion, movement outward toward others, and eventually of "some other kind of sociality" (9). In conver-

sation with Bersani, Kaja Silverman notes how such an approach to form "rethink[s] the relational in terms of design" or in terms not only (or not even) of "mothers, fathers, lovers, etc., but also [of] line, shape, composition, color" (9)—in short, of aesthetics. Implicit here is a notion of figuration itself—not only the figures articulated or exchanged within a specific form—as a site for the creation or recreation of relationality.

In their shared attunement to kin-aesthetics, queer theory and kinship theory have much to contribute to ongoing debates about formalism and the politics of aesthetics (see, for example, Rancière 2004; Wolfson and Brown 2006; Marcus and Best 2009; Doyle and Getsy 2013; Levine 2015; Ngai 2015; Amin, Musser, and Pérez 2017). Binding *kin*, *kinetic*, and *aesthetic* into *kin-aesthetics* highlights how kinship and art are both, as social practices, bound up with the work of the body; they work on and through the materiality of the body. If kinship constitutes a mode of corporeal dependency (Freeman 2007, 298), it depends on the aesthetic to reorganize, renew, and otherwise transform the body's relational horizons. Likewise, and as with sexuality, aesthetic objects move in time: they circulate and in these movements transmit, as Natasha Hurley (2018) argues, vestigial social histories that simultaneously afford possibilities for reimagining the lifeworld of queerness itself. The aesthetic is thus central to the history of sexuality and to the deployments of alliance and affinity alike. Indeed, as anthropological studies of so-called fetish objects and gifts demonstrate, kinship extends itself through the aestheticization of objects that are taken to be metonymic of particular social bodies (Taussig 1993; Viveiros de Castro 2009). The kin-aesthetic thus foregrounds how form is a technology that a social body uses to replicate, remake, and extend itself through time, both backward and forward, as Brigitte Fielder's contribution to this volume makes especially clear.

It may be tempting to think that kin-aesthetics can release us from the binds of kinship, into a queer field beyond or after kinship. Yet we take seriously Butler's warning, sounded in her contribution to this volume, to resist a certain *kinship idealism* (40). This requires us to avoid a simple dichotomy between queerness and kinship in which the former is detached from its temporal and historical entwinement, and even complicity, with the exclusions, violences, and abandonments of kinship. But perhaps more importantly, we resist an idealism that presumes heteronormative kinship's stability and sovereignty, thereby ignoring how the concept of kinship depends on "possibility of [its] disruption" (Butler 2017, 4). If a certain breach haunts the very core of kinship, as Butler contends, then it may not be so

easy to categorically distinguish relational forms as straight or queer, conservative or radical, fixed or transient. Certainly, this means that queerness emanates from the heart of kinship and that kinship circulates through bodies of queerness and queer theory alike. But it also demands a *relational formalism* (Bradway 2021), attuned to the queer temporalities of social figuration and the bonds it tethers and unravels. Relational formalism tracks the *unfoldings* of belonging in and across time; it understands intimate bonds as a meeting ground of the social and the psychic, the political and the affective. In this way, it grasps the *kincoherence of kin-aesthetics*—the potential, that is, for the symbolic and material practices of kinship to bind and unbind us—and the *kin-aesthetics of kincoherence*—the figural mediation of relationality and the formal configurations that it takes.

Even as this collection makes evident the durability of kinship as a concern for queer theory, we wish to orient this concern within a new context—namely, the kincoherence of belonging in the contemporary moment, shaped as it is by the intellectual and sociopolitical contexts of Trumpism and neoliberalism, gay marriage and anti-immigrant xenophobia, homonationalism and boomerang babies, and Black Lives Matter and COVID-19. We contend that queer theory needs kinship theory to understand and respond to the kincoherence that infuses the present.

Why Kinship Now? On Kincoherence

We turn to kinship in a queer moment. On June 26, 2015, the *Obergefell* decision effectively authorized same-sex marriage within the United States, expanding kinship law and policy to include couples consisting of two people legally defined as men or two people legally defined as women. Ten days earlier, Donald Trump had announced his campaign for the presidency, invoking anti-immigrant xenophobia and promising to brutalize immigrants with the full power of a white nationalist state. The Trump administration kept its promise. Building on existing precedents established under Obama and Bush, Trump expanded and intensified the detention, separation, and unmaking of migrant families. In the supposedly bright afterglow of *Obergefell*, we are witnessing the emergence of a new vocabulary for negating kinship and new apparatuses for rendering migrants kinless, with dire consequences. For example, children violently separated from their parents were legally reclassified as "unaccompanied" minors, as if they had arrived alone (Bump 2018). In another example, Trump sought to

deny birthright citizenship to the children of undocumented immigrants based on a reinterpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment (Davis 2018). Undoubtedly, the history of the state is bound up with a history of fungible kinship: from transatlantic slavery and settler colonialism through Chinese exclusion and Japanese internment, the state materializes its power to exclude and exploit by rewriting who does and does not count as kin. This moment is not exceptional in that lesbian and gay kinship (along with whatever forms of transgender and bisexual kinship are intelligible under the rubric of "same-sex marriage") is vested with the authority of the state in the form of the *domestic couple*—domestic in the dual sense of homed and conferred with citizenship. It is this form that was denied to enslaved people and Chinese immigrants, forcibly imposed on Indigenous North Americans, and disrupted during Japanese internment. And it is this form that justifies the shredding of migrant relationalities, which are associated with mobility, contingency, temporary housing, lack of documentation, and perverse extensivity (i.e., racist fantasies of "anchor babies" and misuses of family reunification policy). Queer kinship theory, as it variously intersects with trans theory and critical race theory, writes from within the nexus of these fraying and tethering bonds.

Currently, migrant families understood as potentially in need of state resources are disaggregated into vulnerable masses subject to state surveillance, detention, and even torture, whereas gay and lesbian individuals understood as potentially capable of sustaining themselves without state aid are given the resources to pool their property and pass it on, a form of flourishing. Yet neoliberalism's winnowing of social life to the individual has substantially eroded the material support for even heteronormative (or homonormative) kinship.[5] The nuclear household, ideologically and legally sacrosanct, is unsustainable even for many of the straight, white, middle-class families of whom it has become iconic, precisely because of the way market forces have superseded other ways of organizing care and dependency: squeezed by rent and debt, increasing numbers of people live with their parents (Picchi 2016), with their adult children, in combinations of monogamous-dyadic couples and roommates, or with other families (Fry 2018)—not to mention the rise in people renting out parts of their living spaces via Airbnb. Other chrononormativities (Freeman 2010) of the middle-class family, such as entering a stable profession, buying a home, reproducing, and retiring, are consequently disrupted as well. Figured as pathological dependency, the co-residence of parents and adult children, along with the accompanying refusal or inability of young adults to get

jobs, buy homes, and/or form families, gives rise to stigmatized cultural narratives about "bad kin" who refuse to grow up, such as the "Peter Pan millennial" (Shaputis 2004). Yet such narratives are also symptomatic of a broad queering of the chrononormative plots that structure heteronormativity. Indebted and/or unemployed individuals, often unwillingly queered by economic precarity, "grow sideways" (Stockton 2009): they cannot come of age or mark their coming out, as it were, through a separation from and subsequent reproduction of the family.

In brief, even as more and more of the denizens of late capitalism are forced into familial or family-like structures of privatized dependence or interdependence as the social safety net shrinks, neoliberal privatization and the debt economy have furthered the dissolution of the heteronormative nuclear family, a dissolution that began under industrialization (see D'Emilio 1983). Even for US citizens, then, kinship is increasingly disestablished from the state even as the state simultaneously expands a very few relational forms and economic arrangements that it will recognize under the aegis of kinship. Although neoliberalism intensifies this dialectic, it is not new. On the contrary, this tension underpins the formation of the white supremacist state as it destroys the kinship ties of migrants and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and confers citizenship on only white heteronormative organizations of belonging.

At the time of this writing, the COVID-19 pandemic has made the queer chrononormativity of contemporary kinship dramatically apparent while simultaneously pointing up the significance of kinship as a horizon for social theory and public health policy. As we all know by now, COVID ruptured chrononormativities of education, labor, healthcare, sex, and courtship, among many other social rhythms and rituals. The mourning of graduations, weddings, summer vacations, and in-person instruction was often louder than the mourning of the hundreds of thousands killed by the virus. As chrononormativity foundered, new kin-spatialities became salient: the household, for example, took on increasing focus as a unit of social analysis, indexing the space of quarantine, a scene of likely transmission, a unit where bodies breathe in proximity to one another. So did new kin-temporalities: the household became rezoned around fourteen-day increments of self-quarantine after potential exposure, and its horizon stretched onward to an uncertain "end" of the pandemic, which, as we write, might or might not arrive. Households became supplemented with pods, "quaranteams," bubbles, and other small social units that attempt to balance the risks of contagion against the need for interaction (Schumaker

2020); new COVID-related "safe-sex" guidelines emerged to structure eroticism around the dangers of respiratory contagion (NYC Health 2020).

We might even say that COVID has made kinship—or the refusal and denial of kinship—visceral in ways that supersede its usual coding in terms of blood and phenotypic resemblance. As Amber Jamilla Musser (2020) argues, the corporeality of sweat, inspired by the anxiety and uncertainty wrought by COVID, makes apparent "complex forms of affective connection and the persistence of metabolism and transformation." Attending to the specifically racialized ecologies of sweat and breath that justify white supremacist refusals to count Black people as members of the human family, Musser observes that the anxiety of the pandemic "activates specters of black death, possibilities of black love and care, and knowledge of black forms of survival" (Musser 2020). Indeed, if COVID reanimates the state's genocidal passivity in the face of HIV/AIDS as well as the shouldering of care and dependency by queer kin, it also indexes the genocidal sovereignty of anti-Blackness. As Musser points out, the pandemic disproportionately affects Black people and people of color; it is part of and intensifies the already oppressive atmosphere of anti-Blackness, racialized state violence, and racial capitalism that undergirds social life and, according to Christopher Chamberlin's contribution to this volume, kinship itself in the United States. This entwinement was made especially clear in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder by police on May 25, 2020, which sparked mass protests for Black Lives, for Black Trans Lives, for defunding and abolishing the police and prisons, and for redistributing the resources of the state in ways that support the preservation, care, and flourishing of social life.

We see queer kinship across these experiments in sociality and affinity. Absent state investment in the care of dependents, people create new ways of sharing resources and caretaking, such as the communities of care among disabled queers of color described in Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's (2018) *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*, which have now, under COVID, extended to neighborhoods and networks of people who do not identify as disabled or as people of color, although they certainly include networks of both such constituencies (see also Spade 2020 and Samuels and Freeman 2021). Or they draw upon older models such as the intergenerational or extended-family household (Roberts 2010), the dormitory (Bowles 2018), or hot-bedding (sleeping in the same bed in shifts, originally a military practice that has gained attention in England and Australia; see Hind [2006]). In the contemporary moment, many of our assumptions about heteronormative kinship thus no longer hold, and as D'Emilio (1983)

once suggested, perhaps such moments of contradiction create opportunities for imagining the politics of belonging more queerly.

Yet the radical promise that queer forms of belonging offer—a promise we take seriously—paradoxically emerges from contemporary kinship's intensifying significance and insignificance to the state. This dialectic becomes evident only when we understand recent conflicts over kinship—the Supreme Court's gay marriage decision, the border patrol's separation of migrant families, neoliberalism's dependence on the very privatized structures of caretaking that are being eroded by a trickle-up economy—not as isolated from one another but *part of a vast renegotiation of the forms that belonging may take*. This is why it is imperative for queer theory to think *with*—which does not mean supporting, but attending to—the discourses of kinship, and of family in particular, which remain at the heart of the state's biopolitical management of social belonging: its investment and divestment of specific forms of relationality with power, resources, and authority. For example, Elizabeth Povinelli's (2002, 2006) work clarifies the degree to which Indigenous populations must still make claims to land based on patriarchal genealogical kinship, even as non-Native LGBTQ rights must be articulated through a language of romantic intimacy that showcases love, affinity, and choice. Moreover, as work by Jennie Livingston (1990), Marlon Bailey (2013), and others on queer ballroom culture and its accompanying "house" system of mutual support has clarified, the kinaesthetics of kinship can actually *reconfigure* social life. For example, Bailey's work shows how the language of mothers, fathers, and children in ballroom life produces a model of "platonic parenting" in which adult sexuality and the mentoring of younger or less experienced people are separated for the purposes of creating a stable "home" life, a model that straight cisgender people might take as salutary for raising children. Therefore, kinship is kincoherent: fungible and intractable, disestablished and sanctioned, dispersed and consolidated, its idioms simultaneously symptomatic and performative, sedimented with historical forces and yet capable of cracking open new fault lines in the social body.

The Kin(d)ness of Strangers: Queer Theory and Kinship Theory

Kincoherence, and indeed much of this volume as a whole, thus recasts some of the most important debates in the field around queer relationality and temporality. Among the most prominent has been the ongoing reflec-

tion on the "anti-social thesis." In broad strokes, some (Bersani 1987, 1995; Edelman 2004) understand queerness as a negation of identity, belonging, and even the social itself. For anti-social theorists, queerness is a "corrosive force" (Edelman 2004, 26) that momentarily dissolves a symbolic order that solders us to fantasies of the future. It is no coincidence that figures of kinship, such as "The Child" or "The Family," are key sites of critique for anti-social queer theory; the fantasy of the future condensed in and codified through kinship figures merely reproduces the heteronormative strictures of the present and the past. At its best, these theorists contend, queer theory embraces the relentless, untranscendable, and undeniable drive that disturbs all figurations and stabilizations of social order. By contrast, others (Muñoz 2009; Freeman 2010; Rodríguez 2014) see a different possibility in queerness: they see potentiality, in fact, as a queer force continually unleashed by the friction of bodies, temporalities, and affects. For these theorists, the social is not so much an *order* as an unfolding practice that fails to reproduce itself just as often as it succeeds. From those failures, queerness leaks out on all sides, rearranging and recalibrating the social in frequently surprising and always richly embodied ways. Kinship plays an important role in this "queer hypersociability" (Freeman 2019) precisely because it is a site to glimpse the emergence of new relational forms.

All too often these two modes—anti-social and hypersocial—have been placed at odds, conceived as irreducibly opposed in their approaches to pessimism or optimism, drive or desire, history or temporality (see Berlant and Edelman 2014). Yet we contend that kincoherence necessarily draws energies from both queer negation *and* proliferation. This is because, as Butler suggests, "there seems to be no way to think the bonds of kinship without understanding first what breaks them. *That breakability is the bond*" (Butler 2017, 21, emphasis ours). Therefore, even the dissolvent corrosions of queerness also coagulate. Kincoherence illuminates the simultaneous unbinding and multiplying of relational forms; it understands these forms as emerging within and through the social and the historical (understood as embedded and embodied) while stressing that they are not fully determined by them, either; it stays alert to the desires, fantasies, and imaginary longings that weld our attachments to kinship and our kinship attachments; yet it also embraces fantasy as a densely social scene with many affordances for queer belonging just waiting to be tapped.

Thus conceived, kincoherence affords a new vantage point for debates over the history of sexuality (Traub 2013). As Rubin notes in the 1994 interview with Butler about kinship that we cited earlier, Foucault's account of

the "deployment of sexuality" has often been misread as a displacement of the "deployment of alliance" (Rubin [1994] 2011, 297–98). As Foucault (1990, 116) contends, it is not that modern regimes of biopolitical regulation replace older structures of kin-based power but that one is "superimposed" on the other, the two "turning about one another" (113) in an ongoing, complex dance. Thus, as Butler and Rubin note in this conversation, it is not a question of kinship *versus* sexuality but of their intimate and mutually enforcing relations to each other and, we would add, to the racializing effects of dominant kinship law and symbolics. The dance of sexuality and alliance with race continues in the present, with moves that Foucault may not have anticipated. Indeed, the phrase "the deployment of affinity" (Freeman 2002, x) allows us to think about emergent biopolitical logics of sexuality and kinship that overlay those so persuasively mapped by Foucault, from the flourishing of new languages of relationality untethered from family (Facebook friend, monogamish, play partner, etc.) that are bound up with new modes of capital, such as affinity marketing and data mining, to the hardening logic of blood ancestry, mapped by DNA and genomes and commodified as the essence of kinship.

As well as clarifying the dialectic of alliance and affinity, Rubin and Butler's ([1994] 2011) conversation proleptically speaks to queer theory's contemporary meditations on methodology. Indeed, Rubin calls for an anthropologically inspired relation between empiricism and theory that anticipates Heather Love's *Underdogs* (2021) on queer deviance and the social sciences and Kath Weston's remarks in her interview for this volume. Accordingly, even as many of the works in this volume are indebted to poststructural theories of language, our collection furthers a long-standing dialogue between queer theory and the social sciences, especially anthropology, and owes a debt to important texts such as Weston's (1991) *Families We Choose*, Collier and Yanagisako's (1987) *Gender and Kinship*, Schneider's (1984) *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*, Franklin and McKinnon's (2001) *Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies*, and Sahlins's (2013) *What Kinship Is—And Is Not*.

Kinship theory, in turn, provokes new questions about methodology for queer theory because kinship theory refuses or queerly eludes sequential orderings. As Rubin and Butler ask, what comes first, the material arrangements of kinship (Lévi-Strauss) or the psychic or symbolic ordering of them (Freud and Lacan)? Rather than answer this question, we note that the quandary itself tells us something important. For Rubin and Butler, two different notions of "intractability" emerge, the structure of language for Butler ([1994] 2011, 282) and the long durée of social phenomena for Rubin

(283). These are crucially also questions of temporality. For Butler, the entrance into language depends upon gendered differentiations that "persist" (282) beyond rearrangements of family structure and gender roles. Rubin agrees that "the kind of social change we are talking about takes a long time, and the time frame in which we have been undertaking such change is incredibly tiny" (283), and that "the imprint of kinship arrangements on individual psyches is very durable" (283). Rubin sees the social terrain of "sexual conduct" as precisely where the binary-gender model that structures psychoanalytic accounts of language, the unconscious, and kinship falls apart or gets "convoluted" (294): in historical time, as opposed to the time of the unconscious, the social life of sexuality and gender *moves*. It is kinematic, if by this we might reference theories for converting one kind of motion into another, here the movement of the psyche into social movements and vice versa.

Perhaps the most iconic kinematic of queer kinship is the movement away from oppressive families of origin toward alternative structures of belonging that may offer intimacy, care, eroticism, and dependency in other forms: throuples, friendships, cousins, mentors, companionate marriages, nesting partners, roommates, queer platonic partnerships, fuck buddies, and so on (Weston 1995). In their contribution to this volume, Leah Claire Allen and John S. Garrison powerfully critique this paradigmatic narrative; they stress racialized and other exclusions that haunt figurations of queer kinship often seen as utopian, such as the liberal appropriation of "chosen family" and queer friendship. Yet queer kinematics are not exhausted in the move away from normative kinship; they also arise in movements within, across, and between it, which queer theory has often failed to see as a consequence of overlooking trans experiences and of centering whiteness.

Indeed, trans and trans of color theory has theorized movement, *transition*, within, across, and between putatively normative structurings of gender without assimilating those movements to a telos of gender normativity (Snorton 2017; Gill-Peterson 2018). On the contrary, trans theory emphasizes the *relational* structures that enable trans communities to survive, nurture one another, share knowledge—including knowledge that enables transition—and to resist medicalizing discourses that stigmatize and police gender nonconformity. Hence, white trans and trans of color kinships are especially important to this volume, for they press back against queer theory's long-standing tendency to conceive of queer fluidity through trans embodiment. Aqdas Aftab's and Dilara Çalışkan's contributions move

our attention instead toward trans relationality, particularly as it manifests in affective kinematics that flourish in the shadows of colonialism, police violence, medical stigmatization, and trauma. As their essays show, the affective kinematics of trans kinship do not move in one direction—toward shame or pride, melancholia or ecstasy—but lead to altogether different choreographies for how affect creates trans bonds.

However, kinship's kinematics cannot be understood only as creative appropriations or redirections of normative kinship assumed to be fixed and static. On the contrary, the state has its own kinematics of kinship, evident in its forced dispossession of BIPOC kinship ties, production of kinlessness, and imposition of white supremacist logics of belonging. This is why we insist on the intimacy of kinlessness and kinematics, and on the necessity of thinking through queer kinship theory and critical race theory together.

Kinlessness and Kinematics: Critical Race Theory and Kinship Theory

The foundational structuralist, poststructuralist, and empiricist studies of kinship have too often overlooked the kinematics of kinship: the way that those whose natal and affinal ties are destroyed nevertheless create compensatory psychic and social structures. In particular, much of kinship theory has failed to understand the legacies of chattel slavery, settler colonialism, and immigration restriction in the United States as crucial sites of kincoherence in way we detail below. These are the histories from which queer-of-color critique, queer Indigenous studies, and BIPOC queer theory have emerged. Even as mainstream kinship theory has proceeded without much attention to the destruction and forced reconfiguration of families of color, these fields understand kinship as central to the structural position of BIPOC in particular as queer, regardless of the actual arrangement of BIPOC households (Spillers 1987; Cohen 1997; Ferguson 2004). At the same time, these theories and epistemologies track how BIPOC and other queer-of-color communities convert the destructive energies of racism, colonialism, and imperialism into mobile collective practices and systems of meaning (Stack 1983; Muñoz 1999; Shah 2001).

Most foundationally, perhaps, kincoherence and anti-Blackness are deeply entwined in the production of Black people as kinless. In Black studies, for example, Orlando Patterson's (1982) groundbreaking book *Slavery and Social Death* introduced the idea that enslaved people, rather than be-

ing killed outright, were reduced to the status of the subhuman precisely through the sundering of their natal kinship ties: torn from their birth families, renamed, barred from legal marriage, with no rights over their children, they had neither legal nor symbolic kin. Focusing especially on generationality, Patterson writes that "slaves differed from other human beings in that they were not allowed freely to integrate the experiences of ancestors into their lives, to inform understanding of social reality with the inherited meanings of their forebears, or to anchor the living present in any conscious community of memory" (5). Hortense Spillers (1987), in an essay central to queer critical race theory and intersectional kinship studies alike, beautifully and uncompromisingly lays bare the paradoxes of this social death in the United States. She reminds us that slavery in the United States not only made the enslaved kinless and therefore genderless but also granted them one negative inheritance: in the doctrine of *partus sequitur ventrem* adopted as law by the 1662 Virginia colony and by other colonies soon afterward, children's status as free or enslaved followed the condition of the mother. *Partus* legitimated the rape of enslaved Black women by white men, producing mixed-race, enslaved children. In other words, racial stigma was the one "property" transmitted by enslaved parents to their children, along a matriarchal line. Even after slavery had formally ended, mixed-race people of African ancestry were categorized as Black via the "one drop" rule in which the great-great-grandchildren of a Black person were legally Black, even if all other relatives were white. This legacy, Spillers notes, effectively makes "Mother Right, by definition, a negating feature of human community" (80). And as demonstrated by Brigitte Fielder (2020), a staple of nineteenth-century American fiction was the ostensibly white character who learned of such Black ancestry and was "born backward" into Blackness, acquiring a surfeit of family members: the opposite side of the coin of kinlessness is what Fielder terms "kinfullness." In terms of both temporal succession and lateral relations, the denial and belated restoration of Black kin to one another made for especially acute, and often queer, kincoherence.

In Black culture, then, the negative version of queering has also had a compensatory, affirmative aspect: Spillers states that captive persons were also "forced into" patterns of "dispersal," into "horizontal" relatedness, and hence into "certain ethical and sentimental features" (75) tying them to others, engendering new forms of affinity and solidarity. And as Herbert Gutman's (1976) and Carol Stack's (1983) work on Black families and communities clarifies, racist accounts of Black kinship overlook its expansiveness and creativity. Brothers, othermothers, honorary aunties: even osten-

sibly heterocentric Black communities have always had a vocabulary that exceeds the state's imaginary, and in this they have much to teach queer theory. Most recently, Saidiya Hartman (2019, 227) has captured much less sanctioned Black intimacies in her book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* in her phrase "the social poesis that sustains the dispossessed."

Indigenous people in North America and beyond have undergone a similar destruction of the relational ties that preceded colonialist invasion, a destruction that was one means of denying land sovereignty. Accounts of Native Americans as "savage" frequently relied on descriptions of their nonmonogamous sexual practices and their systems for adopting children. By the late 1870s, boarding schools were established to remove Native children from their homes and inculcate them into European American gender roles, including monogamous heterosexual marriage (Rifkin 2006, 31). As Joseph M. Pierce argues in his contribution to this volume, this practice constituted a "destructuring of the possibilities of being in good relations" (99) with Native communities: a sundering not only of existing kinship ties but also a violent displacement and dispossession of Indigenous practices and conceptions of kinship that are incommensurable with white settler ideologies. The General Allotment Act, or Dawes Act, of 1887 granted plots of stolen land back to Native American men who were "heads of household," subjecting them to federal and local inheritance law. The effect of this was "a barrier to native efforts to merge land claims through extended chains of familial belonging or to maintain ties of lineage and tribal identification through the transfer of land along alternate lines of descent or affiliation" (Rifkin 2006, 35). In other words, in Indigenous American history as in the histories of other colonized subjects, kinship law—indeed, as Rifkin forcefully argues in his essay in this volume, the deployment of "kinship" itself from Louis Henry Morgan onward—was a mode of land dispossession. To achieve citizenship, families were also required to assume the last names of the paternal head of household, contravening maternal lineage as well as installing marriage and parenthood at the center of social and individual meaning at the expense of "more collective forms of subjectivity articulated within familial idioms" (Rifkin 2006, 35). As Rifkin contends in this volume, queer theory and cultural theory have all too often failed to reckon with the imbrication of kinship with settler colonialism and liberalism's racialized social imaginary, wherein kinship is understood as private and thus dislocated from political governance (156).

Other intersections among economic exploitation, racialization, and kinship suggest the impossibility of doing queer-of-color critique with-

out both kinship theory and queer theory. For example, the 1875 Page Act that excluded Chinese women from immigrating was predicated on the threat of Chinese women, figured as prostitutes, concubines, and polygamous wives, to white men and their families (Luibhéid 2002). As Nayan Shah (2001) demonstrates, male laborers, initially too underpaid to send for their wives and eventually prohibited from doing so, formed communities and affinities of "bachelors" that anticipate some aspects of urban white queer community. As the work of Nancy Bentley (2002), Jared Hickman (2014), and Peter Coviello (2019) clarifies, even a population as seemingly white as the nineteenth-century Mormons found their polygamous marital practices equated with a racialized "barbarism" and slavery, such that they traded polygamy for both Utah statehood and white privilege. In yet another example of racialized queerness articulated through the symbolics of kinship, contemporary Latinx populations are figured as overly reproductive drains on social services, whereas the racist figure of the "anchor baby" is used to stigmatize Latinx migrants. And even the "model minority" stereotype attaching to Asian Americans depends on the ideal of small nuclear families who invest in their children's education.

These genealogies underscore that there can be no history of queerness without an attention to the ways that kinship operates as a key site of dispossession, exploitation, and struggle for racialized and minoritized social groups. Kinship cuts across them, yet these histories are also distinct and in many ways incommensurable. But they do register how communities of color have developed their own epistemological paradigms and social practices for thinking kinship, which are articulated in the context of their being positioned as queerly aslant of normative kinship. Therefore, to make kin under the sign of kinlessness is a radical act. So too is the struggle to preserve notions, practices, and feelings of kinship that live outside, beneath, or alongside official kinship. The goal of queer kinship theory is not to make these bonds legible in the language of kinship but to register their kincoherence, to let their kincoherence trouble who and what counts as bonded, as well as to ally with them affectively, politically, and theoretically. This is why we argue it is essential that queer kinship theory remain in conversation with queer-of-color critique as well as social, historical, and anthropological research actively committed to tracing the histories of racism that shape modern kinship: the point is not to convert one to the other but to track their kinematic interrelations.

The volume dramatizes these kinematic crossings by juxtaposing scenes of kinship from a range of nations—including the Cherokee Nation, the

United States, Britain, Scotland, India, China, Turkey, and Brazil—and Indigenous, Native, and diasporic communities. By no means does this volume present an exhaustive, let alone representative, account of queer kinship or queer kinship theory across the world. Yet collectively our contributors stress the importance of foregrounding and learning from non-Western, non-European, and nonwhite ways of thinking and doing kinship that have all too often been erased, expunged, eclipsed, silenced, or misrepresented within cultural theory. In this respect, queer kinship theory rejects an older structural anthropology driven to *compare* and *systematize* kinship systems across nations and cultures. Indeed, we refuse any separation of kinship from the state and likewise from any conception of the state that fails to account for kinship as a biopolitical technology of imperialism, colonialism, and empire. And, most importantly, we understand kinship as a way of *doing relationality* that is also always a way of *thinking relationality*—kinship as embodied, aesthetic, and erotic *theory*. If the kinematics of queer kinship are global and transnational, as we insist, then queer kinship theory must be continually unsettled, provincialized, and ultimately displaced by practices of kinship that outstrip our own conceptual limitations and lineages.

Mapping the Collection

The contributors to this collection each stake their own claims about the politics of queer kinship. They draw on different methodologies, historical moments, and cultural archives. Yet they all see the intersections of queerness and kinship as a vital concern for contemporary thought. Together, their essays demonstrate the manifold ways that queer theory and kinship theory might speak to each other. Each forges a new conceptual frame for thinking the kincoherence, kinematics, and/or kin-aesthetics of queer kinship.

The first section, "Queering Lineages," builds on queer theory's foundational critique of sequential models of reproduction, mapping new ways to think kinship outside of linear genealogy. In these essays the queerness of kinship, its kincoherence, lies in temporal unfurlings that create surprising opportunities for solidarity, reproduction, memory, and responsibility. In the opening essay, "Kinship beyond the Bloodline," Judith Butler pushes back on the distinction between "real" and "fictive" kinship by reimagining the "blood tie" through the shared legacies of racialized violence enacted

through kinship. Butler's essay opens up alternative temporalities for kinship that are a touchstone for the section as a whole. In "The Mixed-Race Child Is Queer Father to the Man," Brigitte Fielder explores such trajectories by looking to the Harlem Renaissance author Alice Dunbar-Nelson, discovering in her work a "racialized version of mixed-race self-begetting" (51). By attending to moments of paradoxical self-begetting, Fielder uncovers queer genealogies of interracial kinship taking place on the terrain of the aesthetic, which contest notions of racial reproduction as purely biological. Moving from the literary to the anthropological, Dilara Çalışkan's ethnography, "World Making: Family, Time, and Memory among Trans Mothers and Daughters in Istanbul," traces how trans women in Turkey transmit intergenerational memory without a linear model of inheritance. Their practices upend normative mappings of parent and child; provide modes of enduring in the face of erasure, abandonment, and systemic violence; and kinematically convert the forward movement of time into a reverse implantation of memories from "younger" to "elder" trans people distinguished not by age but by time of transition.

The essays in our second section, "Kinship, State, Empire," call for queer theory to contend with non-European modes of thinking kinship. These essays confront the intimate, if often mystified, relationship between kinship and the imperial state: the constant, kinematic transmutation of contract and status, family and nationhood or empire. In "In Good Relations: Native Adoption, Kinstillations, and the Grounding of Memory," Joseph M. Pierce, who is similarly invested in reversing normative relationships between pastness and presence, sees "kinstillatory" practices, centered on the land as "spiritual guide" and "ancestral kin," as affording decolonial notions of relationality and memory that hold out the possibility of a return to an Indigenous way of belonging "in good relation" (98). Whereas many posit queer kinship as a response to heteronormativity, Pierce argues for new attention to Indigenous models of kinship outside of settler colonial epistemologies. Poulomi Saha, in "Queering the Womb: Surrogacy and the Economics of Reproductive Feeling," juxtaposes postcolonial India's efforts to ban commercial surrogacy with the proliferation of surrogacy narratives, which figure contractual and economic relationships as intimate bonds forged through sentimentality. For Saha, queer kinship is less a mode of "romantic, utopian affiliation" than a "neoliberal jouissance" articulated through "transactional, paid labor" and irreducibly bound up with the "governing reality of the global market" (121). Mark Rifkin's "Beyond Family: Kinship's Past, Queer World Making, and the Question of Governance"

is likewise invested in the question of governmentality, but he sees in Indigenous forms of relationality the prospect of queer governance, of "non-heteropatriarchal formations of belonging, decision making, and resource distribution" (138). To theorize this possibility, Rifkin disrupts the equivalence often drawn between family and kinship, demonstrating, along lines convergent with Pierce's, that Indigenous social logics are neither determined by nor analogous to neoliberal understandings of the family and the state. In "Ecstatic Kinship and Trans Interiority in Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*," Aqdas Aftab extends this section's critique of colonialism's enforcement of white normative kinship. Aftab, whose essay pulls on some of the same threads as Çalışkan's, looks to Black trans fiction to develop a "trans hermeneutic" that subverts a colonialist gaze, one that both fetishizes trans embodiment and violently reduces trans to either "medicalized dysphoria or gender deviance" (178). Instead, Aftab's trans hermeneutic discovers trans interiority as a scene of "ecstatic kinship" that enables the flourishing of decolonial and diasporic trans of color belonging across generational lines (159). Last in this section, Juliana Demartini Brito's essay, "Marielle, Presente: The Present and Presence in Marielle Franco Protests," takes kinship to the streets, tracing queer modes of assembly enabled through activists' performances of kinship. Focusing on the mass protests that emerged in Brazil in response the brutal murder of Marielle Franco, Brito puts queer theory and Latin American studies in fresh conversation and articulates a temporality for queer belonging structured around an inexhaustible desire for an impossible justice.

The essays in our final section, "Kinship in the Negative," innovate new idioms for queer belonging (or unbelonging) that put pressure on kinship as such. In this respect, they build on the important traditions of queer negativity and the anti-social thesis, yet they also move these traditions in new directions by thinking about negativity in distinctly historical and social terms. From within an Afropessimist framework, Christopher Chamberlin's "Akinship" understands the social as instituted precisely *by* the foreclosure of Black kinship under slavery and beyond it. He argues for an analytic of kinship that puts policing, a "mode of racial production" (205), at the heart of Lévi-Straussian elementary structures of kinship, insofar as anti-Black policing not only negates Black kinship (thus producing "a-kinship") but also establishes the grounds for including new forms of non-Black kinship (thus producing "akin-ship," or the proximity of anti-Black policing to even the most seemingly extensive forms of kinship). Similarly tarry-

ing in the negative, "Against Friendship," by Leah Claire Allen and John S. Garrison, refuses the popular association of queer kinship with "chosen family," iconically condensed in narratives of friendship. Where these narratives have been fully assimilated to neoliberal mystifications of individualism, choice, and whiteness, Allen and Garrison stress the destructive and difficult nature of friendship, perhaps especially queer friendship, as a scene of exclusion, conflict, radical self-undoing, and, on the final horizon, a queer kind of solipsism. Also reimagining the anti-social thesis, in "Kidless Lit: Childlessness and Minor Kinship Forms" Natasha Hurley refocuses Lee Edelman's (2004) polemic against "reprofuturity" on nonfamilial child relationality, or social attachments to "*other people's children*" (251). For Hurley, childlessness provocatively turns childhood itself into the site of stranger-sociability—one might call it "stranger danger"—that queer theories of friendship have generally accorded to adults (see Roach 2012). Aobo Dong's "Till Death Do Us Kin: Sworn Kinship and Queer Martyrdom in Chinese Anti-imperial Struggles" turns the volume back to blood, this time not the false certainties of bloodline critiqued by Butler but the violent blood that Butler also invokes, here the blood of sacrifice, oath, and martyrdom. For Dong, late Imperial and early modern Chinese blood brotherhoods enact a "death-driven kinship" (278) shaped by an "ethos of collective sacrifice" (284). The logic of martyrdom subtending these practices of friendship echoes Allen and Garrison's call for a less pastoral vision of friendship than the one that has organized queer theory from Foucault's "Friendship as a Way of Life" ([1981] 1998) onward. Finally, we conclude with an interview with Kath Weston, the author of *Families We Choose: Gays, Lesbians, Kinship* (1991), a foundational text in queer kinship theory and a flashpoint for many of the essays throughout the volume. Weston reflects on the conceptual transformations that queer scholarship on kinship has made possible, particularly in sociocultural anthropology and political theory. Rather than conceive of queer kinship as a structure or form, Weston approaches queer kinship as an embedded social practice and urges the development of new theoretical idioms that account for its dramatic transformations in the twenty-first century.

Taken together, the essays in this volume remind us that kinship is at once a scene of violence—psychological, imperial, neoliberal, interpersonal—and of creativity. Kinship is a technique for exclusion and inclusion, and a set of conceptual building blocks for forms of relationality that obviate and lay bare its biopolitical work. Kinship is a domain without

which we cannot think in some ways but beyond which we absolutely must think, act, and live. May these essays help kindle that fire.

Notes

1 See also theories of relationality developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari ([1980] 1987), Bruno Latour (2005), Karen Barad (2007), Jane Bennett (2010), Donna Haraway (2016), and Elizabeth Grosz (2017), among others, and even theories of stranger relationality that inform studies of nationalism (Anderson 1983) and the public sphere (Warner 2002). Haraway's recent work (2016) notably relies on the language of kinship while radically redefining it in posthuman and multispecies terms.

2 See also Butler (2004, 126): "Kinship loses its specificity as an object once it becomes characterized loosely as modes of enduring relationship" and "the relations of kinship arrive at boundaries that call into question the distinguishability of kinship from community, or that call for a different conception of friendship" (127).

3 On "kinetic kinship," see Hayden (1995). On kin-aesthetics, see Freeman (2002). On the role of aesthetics in materializing forms of sociability that can feel like or be experienced as kinship, see Nealon (2001), Bradway (2017, 2020, 2021), Seitler (2019), and Brigitte Fielder's contribution to this volume.

4 On form as constraint and affordance, see Levine (2015).

5 On the relationship among neoliberalism, debt, and the family, see Cooper (2017).