

ATMOSPHERES OF VIOLENCE



**STRUCTURING ANTAGONISM
AND THE TRANS/QUEER
UNGOVERNABLE**

ERIC A. STANLEY

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BUY

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TRANS/QUEER UNGOVERNABLE

ERIC A. STANLEY

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*For those lost to the world
and all who remain
as its antagonism*

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READING WITH CARE

This book describes a number of anti-Black, ableist, racist, and anti-trans/queer scenes of violence. This structuring violence appears as corporal attack, medical neglect, murder, suicide, and suicidal ideations. Throughout the text I articulate why I believe the event calls for a renarration while, in other moments, I refuse to reproduce the incident. These imperfect decisions are guided by a radical commitment to keeping each other alive and toward ending the world that produces this unfolding archive.

Another way we might read with care is by supporting people that are locked up with little access to materials. To this end, all author's profits from this book will be donated to the LGBT Books to Prisoners program, a "trans-affirming, racial justice-focused, prison abolitionist project," which provides books to imprisoned people for free. Please join me in supporting them or other Books to Prisoners projects. The mission statement follows.

LGBT Books to Prisoners is a donation-funded, volunteer-run organization based in Madison, Wisconsin, that sends books and other educational materials, free of charge, to incarcerated LGBTQ people across the United States. We have been doing this for over ten years and have sent books to over nine thousand people in that time.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Recalcitrant to the fiction of the singular author, *Atmospheres of Violence* has been formed in collective struggle. From affinity groups and breakaway marches to nights turned mornings doing jail support—pedagogies of action are everywhere in these pages.

My family, grown between Santa Cruz and San Francisco, is the precondition of this book's completion. Their support has allowed me to stay in the terror and joy that is this project's archive and the world in which it was written. For the last many decades we have built kinship against the limits of blood. Beck, Bells, Jazzon/Joy, Kenny T, Logan, Luton, Momzo, Mr. Fibblers, Patsy, Slakes, T, Tran, thank you.

Toast, you have read most of these words and continue to shelter me when it all collapses.

Much of the thinking that eventually became this book began while I was a student in the History of Consciousness department at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Adam Reed's friendship helped me survive those first years. Many from that time remain coconspirators today, including Anika Walke, Apryl Berney, Cindy Bello, Erin Gray, Eva Hayward, Felice Blake, Greg Youmans, Jennifer Watanabe, Jeremy Tai, Kalindi Vora, Nick Mitchell, Nicole Archer, Marcos Becquer, Martha Kenny, Michelle Erai, SA Smythe, Soma de Bourbon, Trevor Sangrey, and Trung Nguyen.

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I first encountered Donna when I was a student in her undergraduate course “Science as Culture and Practices.” Her wild storytelling pedagogy lured me deep into a world-building optimism that pushed against my skepticism. I was then, as I continue to be, captivated by her ability to fashion seemingly disparate histories into ways of knowing that teach us how, as she might say, to stay with the trouble. Her insistence that it’s often much more important to hold something together than it is to take it apart is a lesson that I try to stay with. In addition, she ushered me through the university’s logistics and patiently guided me through its aftermath.

José, although far from California, offered me protection from the often-treacherous waters of queer studies. Through the dialectics of gossip and advice, he gave form to an intellectual life that existed in the fullness of the social and not simply as its commentator. He, like many in this book, was stolen from a world that could not hold his multitudes and we are all the more lost without him here.

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As is evident throughout this text, my desire to wade together is definitive. My years of collaboration with Chris Vargas—our filmmaking and exhibitions, our laughter and trauma—is evidence that we are remade by each other.

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In the end, which is to say the end's beginning, this book is indebted to the world yet to come and to those whose love and rage are building it now.

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INTRODUCTION RIVER OF SORROW

If they attack me, I'm going to
attack them, with my bomb.

—*Marsha P. Johnson*

But how do we pass from the atmosphere
of violence to violence in action?

—*Frantz Fanon*

The soft blue-black wake rhythmically laps at the rocky shore—gravity's reminder of trans/queer endurance on the edge of a city, at the end of the world. Marsha P. Johnson's body was pulled from the Hudson River's brackish water on July 6, 1992, not far from the Christopher Street Piers and the neighborhood where she spent most of her life. The piers were a sacred place for trans/queer people of color who gathered there, building life from discarded hope and corrugated cardboard—capital's debris refashioned so that marooned community could grow on the banks of the island the Lenape call Manna-hata. In the years after her death, the force of development has all but annihilated what remained of the piers, as they were enclosed by razor wire then infilled with the bullish desolation of luxury condos and the austerity of their new owners. Gentrification's protracted accumulation has left little evidence of the generations that called the piers, for lack of anything better, home.¹

Marsha P. Johnson's official cause of death was suicide, but many of her friends, including the now legendary Puerto Rican trans activist Sylvia Rivera,

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believe she was murdered, perhaps by a trick that turned violent, or the police. Along with the anecdotal evidence that circulated through the gossip of the street, which suggested her ends were not her own, Sylvia said that the two had a pact to die together and that Marsha would not have left without her: “Every time I look at that damn river and I sit there and meditate on the river I feel her damn spirit telling me, ‘You gotta keep fighting, girlie, cause it’s not time to cross the River Jordan!’”² For Marsha and Sylvia, the River Jordan, the name they gave to the Hudson, was the metaphoric (non)space where they would transition, together, out of the bondage of a life circumscribed by imminent risk and into the promise of an elsewhere.

Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera’s chaotic splendor militantly unsettled the coercive gender normativity of both the dominant culture and the growing lesbian and gay activism of early 1970s New York City. In contrast to many others in the scene, Marsha and Sylvia were committed to surviving by any means necessary, which included sex work, hustling, and boosting. They lived in the underground of the economy and were always on the run from landlords, cops, and sometimes each other. Collectively they founded STAR (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries) in 1970 and then STAR House, first in a trailer, then in a building on 2nd Avenue, a mutual aid survival project that attempted to steady the perpetual instability of their besieged community. As Black and Brown street queens, their social worlds collided with the vengeful drive of gay respectability that rendered them, and their people, as parasitic impediments to the spoils of assimilation. That is to say, while their organizing labor was central to the emerging Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and later the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA), they were produced as resistant objects, unwilling to adhere to the lesbian and gay party line. Their struggle against the mandates of the GLF, GAA, and other activists was met with the same malignant hostility that mainstream culture served them.³

This antagonism was dramatized at the 1973 Christopher Street Liberation Day, when Sylvia scaled the stage and took control of the microphone from Vito Russo, which ignited a hissing thunder and faint applause. In response to the crowd’s disgust, she shouted, “Y’all better quiet down!” continuing, “I’ve been trying to get up here all day for your gay brothers and your gay sisters in jail that write me every motherfucking week and ask for your help, and you all don’t do a goddamn thing for them.” Just four years after Stonewall, she was already living the painful betrayal of the movement’s assimilatory agenda. Sylvia’s radiant solidarity with others experiencing houselessness and incarceration was meant to implode the joyful celebration—a barricade against the

good feelings that are assumed to be on the other side of struggle. “I have been thrown in jail. I have lost my job. I have lost my apartment for gay liberation and you all treat me this way? What the fuck’s wrong with you all?” Her treatment by lesbian and gay activists was a mirror for the ways she was abused by the thrust of heteronormativity and its gendered directives, which, in theory, they were all fighting to radically transform. Through exhausted rage, she concluded her manifesto with a twist of condemnation and a call to action: “The people are trying to do something for all of us, and not men and women that belong to a white middle-class white club. And that’s what y’all belong to! Revolution Now! Gay Power! Louder! Gay Power!”⁴

In response to these historical and ongoing forms of degradation, which include the booming whiteness and gender normativity of what consolidates under the sign LGBT history, Marsha and Sylvia have been revived as emblematic of a trans of color politic from Stonewall to the current moment. While important, this vital recovery performs a second-order displacement by solidifying their identities, which were, in practice, constantly lived in beautiful inconsistency. Imposing a more current identity on a subject of history is part of the trouble—a trouble we can never avoid—as we account for specificity and also for tendencies of reoccurrence that build beyond themselves. What I hope *Atmospheres of Violence* preserves is the spirit of Sylvia and Marsha’s commitment, conscious or not, to being against the intelligibility culled by a liberal state. In other words, they were working, by way of theorizing, the messy points of contact between the ends of language and the chaos of a desiring life experienced as the force of discipline and escape. To this end, both their organized disappearance in LGBT history and their reemergence as an activist ideal extinguish their disruptive legacy—the unruly ways they refused cold abjection and calcified memorialization. Sylvia and Marsha, along with so many others, ought to be brought into the collective archive, but if their appearance does not destabilize the mode of their arrival, then we have failed to do more than accommodate difference—the neoliberalization of identity as modernity’s sedimentation.⁵

In an attempt to be with the ungovernability of Marsha and Sylvia, this book refuses an ascendant narrative that situates the potentiality of trans/queerness as but an expression of a sterile identity. And while I’m deeply aware of how queer (and by extension its theorization) has been ambivalent and at times hostile toward gender nonnormativity (trans or otherwise), following the ways Marsha and Sylvia brilliantly confused an understanding of gender and sexuality as idiosyncratic, it is the phenomenology of racialized violence



FIGURE I.1. Sylvia Rivera photographed on the Hudson River dock in front of her home at the encampment where she lived. March 19, 1996. Photo by Valerie Shaff.

that brings them back into contact. Much of the violence that gets marked as homophobic is retaliation against an assumed gender transgression; relatedly, more often than not, anti-trans violence is accompanied by what might otherwise be understood as homophobic utterances. I don't mean to conflate the two at the level of identification, nor at the intensity of attack. Yet that trans women are often called "fags" during a moment of harm, and those who might otherwise identify as fags (trans or not) are brutalized, like many lesbians (trans or not), because of their *inappropriate* masculinity, calls for us to attend to how gendered and sexualized violence emerge together yet unfurl differently.⁶

My insistence that anti-trans/queer violence structures the social remains necessary as it unravels the stability of an LGBT identity outside the viscosity

of context. What holds that fantasy together enables the material undoing of so many others. It was, after all, white gays and lesbians that forcefully confronted Sylvia on the stage, as it has also been (some) lesbian and gay people who have been deeply committed to destroying trans as a way of being in the world, along with the people who find life within it. This is not to suggest that trans people do not also identify as lesbian, gay, and/or bisexual (or any other a/sexuality), or that the attacks lodged by LGB people have the same structural power as their avowed hetero/gender-normative coconspirators, but here we are tasked to think of trans/queer as tendencies and not codified identities as both a theoretical intervention and a fact of history.⁷

States of Equality

We are living in a time of LGBT inclusion. This is evidenced, at least in the United States, by the legal expansion of marriage, lesbian and gay military recruitment, and the proliferation of LGBT characters in popular visual culture. Against the narrative arc of rainbow progress that proclaims that these changes mark a radical shift in the social, *Atmospheres of Violence* argues that inclusion, rather than a precondition of safety, most properly names the state's violent expansion.⁸ I do this by attending to a wicked archive of murders, the ongoing HIV/AIDS pandemic, suicide notes, incarceration, police video footage, and other ephemera of attack. These scattered cases, when read together, build my claim that anti-trans/queer violence is foundational to, and not an aberration of, modernity. Related, rather than imagining the law as the mechanism through which relief from such harm might be offered, it is one of its methodologies of proliferation. Following the ungovernable, we are asked to release the fantasy of reforming these same institutions, here the law and by extension the state, that have caused and continue to cause destruction, not simply in effect but as their aim. Such abdication also recalls the interplay between the horizon, as José Muñoz might have it, and horizontalism. Here the pragmatism of the present is smashed in the name of a life we might survive. This shuttling between description and experience remains the tension that holds the possibility of transformation. To this end, I write through the pedagogies of direct action that remind us how disciplinary power's force resides in its resolute incoherence. My ambivalence, then, rises as both a procedural commitment to the dangerous task of representing violence and a defense against the counterrevolution of public policy, with its offer of salvation outside the thickness of struggle. However, this unease does not emanate from a confusion toward the kinds of worlds I hope grow and those that must be obliterated, nor

from a belief that study is in contradiction to action, but from the turbulent insight gleaned from this collective planning.⁹

The time of LGBT inclusion is also a time of trans/queer death. From the phenomenological vault of nonexistence lived as quotidian withdrawal, to the gory details of gratuitous harm—the archive engulfs. Nonetheless, anti-trans/queer violence is written as an outlaw practice, a random event, and an unexpected tragedy. Dominant culture's drive to dissolve the scope and intensity of this violence is expected. Yet mainstream LGBT politics also colludes in this disappearance in exchange for recognition, however partial and contingent. Through this privatization, meaning the continued trafficking in a belief that things might be any other way while leaving the social intact, the enormity of anti-trans/queer violence is vanished.¹⁰

Thinking violence as individual acts versus epistemic force works to support the normative and normalizing structuring of public pain. This is to say, privatizing anti-trans/queer violence is a function through which the social and its trauma are whitewashed, heterosexualized, and made to appear gender-normative. This relegation of anti-trans/queer violence, which always appears in the syntax of race, casts the human—the referent for cis white mourning—as emblematic. While mainstream LGBT politics clamors for dominant power through a reproduction of the teleological narrative of progress, it also reproduces the idea that anti-trans/queer violence is an aberration of democracy—belonging only to a shadowed past, and increasingly anachronistic.¹¹

This privatization of violence also compels through the managed translation of cultures of attack into personal incidents. At the center of this privatization is the figure of the human that produces itself as the sole beneficiary of rights before the law. The human's singularity comes into relief against its ability to trade the many with the particular. In contrast, rights, the mechanism of protection from the state's discipline, are assumed to be the province of all. Yet by reading the anterior magic of the law, it is not so much, or at least not only, that humans (alone) have rights. It is the conditional enactment (granting of rights) that constitutes the human as benefactor of its own creation. This recursive logic is important as it troubles the deployment of equality under a system of law imagined and maintained, at the atomic level, as exclusion. This double lie of formal equality is necessary for the law to lay claim to, and act as arbiter of, what might be called justice. The law, then, is a systematic and systematizing process of substitution where the singular and the general are shuttled and replaced to inform a matrix of fictive justice. Consequently, for the law

to read anti-trans/queer violence as a symptom of civil society, justice would demand the dismantling of its own administration.¹²

Against the law, the constitutive possibility evidenced by trans/queer generativity—its disruptive worlding—guides my own attachments. Yet this striking capacity resides within the context of a state that always seeks its managed liquidation. Or, to put it another way, while people who do identify as trans and/or queer figure largely in this text, I make no claim about identification other than that sexuality and gender, as nodes of power, are formed in and as a relationship to racialized violence. I say this in an attempt to stall a misreading that might claim I have something definitive to say about trans/queer or otherwise LGBT people. In contrast to such generalizations about identity, this is a study of the shattering power that threatens, and at times erupts into the deadly force that not only kills but makes life unlivable—an atmosphere of violence.¹³

Here, violence takes on a set of shifting definitions—it appears sometimes as the force that ends life, and at other times it is the only way life might unfold. This is to suggest that what gets called violence under a regime of racialized and gendered terror can also yield the terrain that allows for safe passage out—a leap that freedom fighters invite us to take. I focus on scenes of harm where my explicit stake is in ending those iterations in the name of a more habitable planet, yet I also resist the idea that all forms of violence are interchangeable. This line of thought renders minoritized defense as equal to the mechanisms of the settler state. Or, this equivocation produces community resistance as indistinguishable from genocide. Under such logic, which we might also call legal equality, all instances of force appear undifferentiated, while survival is castigated. Indeed, *equality* concretizes the structuring antagonism that produced it in the first place, which means subjugation becomes intensified. This is another way to tell the story of the New Jersey 4, a group of Black lesbians who were strangled and punched by a straight man in New York City's West Village. In the aftermath of the night's events, it was he who declared it “a hate crime against a straight man” and was awarded restitution, while the four women were sentenced to prison for the crime of surviving.¹⁴

If the privatization of anti-trans/queer violence delineates not only what constitutes injury but also what redress might approximate, then this is also one of the ways state violence is made ordinary. Further, while I'm attentive to what is more generally understood as state violence, the ways individual acts, like the audience attacking Sylvia, collect up in the name of authority also calls for an

expansion of what demarcates those borders. As a material concept, the state remains important because, as Karl Marx reminds us, “It is therefore not the state that holds the atoms of civil society together, but the fact that they are atoms only in imagination in the heaven of their fancy. . . . Only political superstition still imagines today that civil life must be held together by the state, whereas in reality, on the contrary, the state is held together by civil life.”¹⁵ While this definition accounts, in part, for Marx’s optimism toward the state form as a vehicle for redistribution, that optimism decomposes under the weight of difference as it is instrumentalized through racial capitalism’s accumulative drive. Moreover, the parameters of “civil life” as the domain of the human in turn produce the fiction of the state that distributes it. As anarchists like Kuwasi Balagoon saw in nationalism, and Frantz Fanon discerned in his analysis of colonialism, the state is fashioned from singularities, yet the structure maintains the racialized, gendered, and classed demands that enable its appearance as an intelligible force.¹⁶

Further, the state relies on this theo-juridical genealogy to lay claim to its own inevitability. We are under the administration of the state because we are its subjects; we are subjects because we reside under the state’s rule. Through this tautology, the state is not something external to the social but is civil society’s collective projection. This relationship between those held by the state (perhaps most importantly as exclusion, or negative value) and the state form might be called, by Michel Foucault and others, normativity. Yet just as the state is able to maintain itself through adjustment and absorption, normativity too is defined not exclusively by its rigidity but through its flexibility. While this argument allows us to see how power’s methodologies are strikingly incoherent, their impacts remain rather predictable. Indeed, those categories most viciously subjected to violence have persisted since the moment of settler contact and chattel slavery, yet the tools administering this cruelty are ever adapting, which is among the reasons for their endurance.¹⁷

Thus, I work to apprehend, as might be expected, direct attacks—the personal or group acts committed against specific people where consistency and similarity build a frequency of shared destruction that undoes the assumed singularity of their actors. Through an attention to the phenomenology of these murders, we are able to push against the narrative that argues these are *random acts* that express nothing beyond the will of their instigators. However, in tandem with these direct attacks is a paradigmatic neglect, perhaps akin to Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s “organized abandonment,” where rhythms of restriction that might not reveal themselves as such forcefully reduce one’s capacity toward the world.¹⁸ This includes the anti-Black distribution of HIV/AIDS,

imprisonment, houselessness, and other practices that do not simply impact populations but forge such a totalizing power that they radically constrict not only life chances but life itself. This structuring antagonism offers a method for considering violence as a generalized field of knowledge that maintains this collective undoing, lived as personal tragedy, of those lost to modernity. Yet violence also remains a tactic of communal interdiction, anticolonial struggle, and trans/queer flourishing against an otherwise deadly world.¹⁹

On Divinity

Written in the ashes of the devastation that was the First World War and before its hyper-intensification in the second, Walter Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" remains a place to think the connections among violence, the law, and the question of justice. For Benjamin, the task is to address how one might disaggregate those spheres, or by what criteria one might conclude whether the means or ends of violence are just. Benjamin elucidates: "One might perhaps consider the surprising possibility that the law's interest in a monopoly of violence vis-à-vis individuals is not explained by the intention of preserving legal ends but, rather, by that of preserving the law itself; that violence, when not in the hands of the law, threatens it not by the ends that it may pursue but by its mere existence outside the law."²⁰

For Benjamin, law produces violence while also adjudicating its own production. It thus resides as a limit mechanism outside/in the very jurisdiction it prescribes. It is impossible, then, to think of violence outside of law, because the law (either lawmaking or law preserving) is entangled with and constituted through force. This, for Benjamin, produces a feedback loop, a repetition where there seems to be no outside—mythic violence. This reading prohibits the juridical common sense that proclaims that law is aimed toward, or even capable of, ceasing violence in the name of justice. Indeed, here the law appears as the instantiation and compulsory replication of the founding violence of its own necessity.²¹

In Jacques Derrida's extended reading of Benjamin's text, he suggests that "law tends to prohibit individual violence and condemn it not because it poses a threat to this or that law but because it threatens the judicial order itself."²² Derrida goes on: "The State is afraid of fundamental, founding violence, that is violence able to justify, to legitimate, or to transform the relation of the law, and so to present itself as having a right to law."²³ For Derrida, this founding violence is that which is able to denaturalize the law's inevitability as well as our relation to it. The state, then, is both fearful of and produced by violence, and

therefore its aim is to monopolize violence so that its monopolization cannot come under suspicion.

As an example, Benjamin offers the modern police. The police under parliamentary or liberal democracy, and not monarchy, are both the limit and the sign of law as they simultaneously produce and then enforce this production. Through this structure, police become spectral, everywhere and nowhere—a phantom abstraction with deadly consequences. Derrida suggests this is because “in absolute monarchy, legislative and executive powers are united. In it violence is therefore normal, in keeping with its essence, its idea, its spirit. In democracy, on the other hand, violence is no longer according to the spirit of the police. Because of the supposed separations of powers, it is exercised illegitimately, especially when instead of enforcing the law the police make the law.”²⁴ This leads Derrida to suggest that “democracy remains to come: engender or regenerate”²⁵—*avenir*, yet-to-come. His declaration, when turned on itself, helps show that democracy might not be *avenir* but indeed is already here. The violence of sovereign rule is transformed in its distribution but not necessarily its impact. Perhaps reading Derrida beyond himself, democracy maintains the force of monarchical violence while concealing its own spirit. Tracing this weave of law, police, and democracy, but with radically different ends, this book argues that racialized anti-trans/queer violence is a necessary expression of the liberal state. This claim resides in a long genealogy of anticolonial feminist thought that sees the connections between settler colonialism, chattel slavery, and their legal and extralegal afterlives that form the celebration of unfreedom we call democracy.²⁶

While both Benjamin and Derrida expand our vocabularies for reading violence and the law, Sylvia, Marsha, and other militants fill this analysis with the fleshiness of lived theory. That the law is the foundational excess of its own condition has always been known, yet differently articulated, by those held under its racial and gendered subjugation—fugitivity’s philosophy in action. For example, organizers fighting against the impunity with which police have and continue to murder Black people as the twin of the prison’s drive to capture Black flesh elucidates the ruse of justice within the system that bears its name. Or, this praxis collapses the law’s image as administrator and representation of justice, when that same system was built on and sustains itself through an anti-Blackness concretized in the U.S. through chattel slavery, whose abolition has yet to come. Growing such an analysis loosens our deep attachment to the idea that the legal system’s function is to end violence, while it also weakens the faith in the law as the sign of freedom’s recital.

Going further, it is not that I'm arguing that the United States is a broken democracy, through which a change in leadership or a representational electorate would bring into being a more egalitarian civil society. Indeed, it is democracy in action, and not its attrition, that betrays the radical potential we so easily believe it to possess. This is not to say that the historic and ongoing obstructions of the democratic process, including racist poll taxes, felony disenfranchisement, and so on, are fictitious but that they are structured into democracy, as is a fatal belief that it could be otherwise. Given this, what we must confront, as it perpetually confronts us, is that the multiple prohibitions that reside under democracy's watch are not its inconsistencies but its central logics.

Following this abolitionist epistemology, and with an anticolonial anarchism that recognizes the state form (democratic or beyond) as the dreadful condition it has always been, I continue to ask, perhaps without the fantasy of a response: How do we dream the concept of justice through—which is to say against—the law? Or, if we know that the law is not the remedy to violence as promised, then we might look toward infrastructures of interdependency—aesthetic, organizational, and more—that attend to harm without reproducing its inevitability under a claim of its cessation. By extension, if the state, even as an experiment in democracy, is unable to offer us relief, then what forms of being together in difference might grow the world we want and need?²⁷

Ma Commère

Staying with this shattering state of violence, Frantz Fanon's corpus, written during his short life, is the most consistent anchor of this book. His sustained attention to the mercilessness of colonial violence, a ferocity that not only organized life for those under its administration (and its administrators) clarifies how its completeness seized the very possibility of being for those in its grasp. Beyond the "individual question" he read in Sigmund Freud's version of psychoanalysis appears Fanon's sociogeny, a mode of analysis that understands the psychic world as always in a bounded relationship to its externalization in the physical.²⁸ Methodologically, a sociogenic approach prohibits us from falling back into the idea of Cartesian subjectivity and its fantasy of an internal/external split. As informed by his clinical posts as he was by his work with the Front de libération nationale (FLN) and the Armée de libération nationale (ALN) in an armed struggle for Algeria's decolonization, Fanon's theorization of racialized violence and its gendered and sexualized contours continues to animate not only this book but generations of insurgent study.²⁹

Among the anxieties that returning to Fanon summon is the ethopolitical limits of thinking Fanon outside of his geopolitical and historical context. Indeed, specificity matters, and stretching his work is always a risk; however, as with most theorists of coloniality, this suspicion can also act as a kind of discipline by assuming that we, as his posthumous readers, know where he properly belongs. At the same time, white European thinkers are permitted to travel and then return to explain the entirety of the world. However, as his readers know, Fanon was working in scattered locations, and just as many registers, from his childhood in Martinique and education in Lyon, to his post in Algeria's Blida-Joinville Hospital, exile in Tunis, and his deathbed in Bethesda, Maryland. This is not to dismiss these concerns, as they must always stay with us, but to ask again: What is preserved, and what is displaced by provincializing Fanon?

Perhaps more unorthodox than thinking with Fanon beyond these geopolitical and historical confines is my insistence that his work ought to be, in that it already is, trans/queer study. While I am not the first to state this proposition, there is still much that Fanon brings to any consideration of racialized gender and/or sexuality, and that these concerns can and must be read back onto Fanon's texts. In other words, it is my hope that I've not worked through a process of application in which his analysis is overlaid onto our historic moment but rather a chaotic disruption, a rebellious training, and, in the end, an experiment in collective thought.³⁰

While sexuality and its vicissitudes are everywhere in Fanon's writing the place where he most directly addresses on the level of description the existence of gender nonnormativity in both the colony and the metropole, is the following footnote from *Black Skin, White Masks*:

Let me observe at once that I had no opportunity to establish the overt presence of homosexuality in Martinique. This must be viewed as the result of the absence of the Oedipus complex in the Antilles. The schema of homosexuality is well enough known. We should not overlook, however, the existence of what are called there "men dressed like women" or "godmothers" [*ma commère*]. Generally they wear shirts and skirts. But I am convinced that they lead normal sex lives. They can take a punch like any "he-man" and they are not impervious to the allures of women—fish and vegetable merchants. In Europe, on the other hand, I have known several Martinicans who become homosexuals, always passive. But this was by no means a neurotic homosexuality: For them it was a means to livelihood as pimping is for others.³¹

A cursory reading of the passage might place Fanon in the long tradition of homophobic/transphobic thinkers who are able to imagine the world-ending force necessary for decolonization yet are unable to envision gender beyond the binary. This may be partially true. But we might also want to approach this passage, as we do many others, as symptomatic of the colonial condition, which in the first instance maintains the fiction of gender and sexual normativity. Keguro Macharia's incisive attention to the footnote suggests, "perhaps, more simply, Fanon cannot imagine the possibility of the desiring black homosexual within the frames provided by colonial modernity."³² Along with Macharia, who helps guide us through both the boundaries and openings in Fanon's thought, how do we read with and not in spite of this impossibility? In other words, how does an impasse become yet another door?

Curiously, Fanon also confuses "godmothers," the figurative stand-in for gender nonnormativity, who he assumes to have "normal sex lives" (meaning non-homosexual), with the more tragic figure of the homosexual. The Black queer, for Fanon, either is absent, as he is in Martinique, an effect of the lack of the Oedipal complex, or in Europe he is imagined to be exclusively male and only queer as a condition of survival, not of pleasure and/or identification. The place of Black queer women's sexuality, not unlike all women of color's sexuality, remains elusive at best. In the end, Fanon depathologizes transness (if we are willing to read godmothers as such) through his assumption of their sustained affiliation to heterosexuality—the "allures of women" and their ability to "take a punch." In short, godmothers, for Fanon, seem to be straight men in drag—a misreading that aligns with, and does not challenge, the colonial parameters of gender and sexuality.³³

However, reading this passage within his general scheme for thinking the totality of occupation, we might also see how Fanon is working toward an argument where heterosexuality and normative genders are fashioned and reconfirmed by this same colonialism he is committed to opposing. Or, here he is also sketching the ways colonialism produces and does not simply constrict already existing categories of gender and sexuality. Again, if we attempt to work with Fanon by simple substitution, where we look for existing terms in an attempt to overlay them, then we will gain little. Yet what remains in his incompleteness, and more importantly what resides around it, continues to be vital for thinking gender as among the disciplining forces central to colonialism, a point anticolonial feminism has long made.³⁴

Further, while Fanon's thoughts on nonnormative gender and homosexual-ity often fall out of focus, his theorization of violence fills the void. This analy-

sis of violence is often overdetermined by its many commentators, illustrating the very relations of colonialism he studied. For example, in Hannah Arendt's infamous condemnation of his work, which was situated within her overall critique of student movements of the late 1960s, Black radicals specifically and Black people in general served as her primary target.³⁵ There she blended anti-Black racism with a post-left liberalism in a performance of Enlightenment rationality where, for her, Marx's resistance to emotions stands against her assumed hyper-affectivity of Blackness. Through a categorical misreading of Fanon, Arendt, along with many others, dismissed the question they are never forced to ask: "But how do we pass from the atmosphere of violence to violence in action?" I stay with it, because for Fanon, and for us, the question is not whether we engage in violence or not but an insistence that the time of violence is already here.³⁶

Speaking from a jail cell on the question of violence in 1972—a decade after Fanon's death but no doubt informed by his work—Angela Davis confirms that "because of the way this society is organized, because of the violence that exists on the surface everywhere, you have to expect that there will be such explosions, you have to expect things like that as reactions."³⁷ By enumerating the relentless legal and extralegal forms that she as a Black woman, and Black people in general, experience, from deadly church bombings to armed Klan attacks, Davis repositions violence's temporality: "When someone asks me about violence, I just find it incredible. Because what it means is that the person asking that question has absolutely no idea what black people have gone through, what black people have experienced in this country, since the time the first black person was kidnapped from the shores of Africa."³⁸

Here Davis asks, as a Black feminist provocation: What constitutes the moment of violence—its beginning or its ends—for those living and dying under the relentless force of total war? This question reminds us that violence names the deadly atmospheres of colonialism, as well as the "reactions," or what Fanon called revolutionary violence, that might offer preservation. Thus it remains both a practice of aimed liquidation and at times the only modality through which life can and must unfold. This antagonism prohibits the wholesale rejection of violence (even as means) or a politics of nonviolence, when its time is already here. Or, put more bluntly, pacifism, as methodological sanctity, as ends without means, remains not as violence's end but, under the current order, is the gaslight the state always leaves burning.³⁹

Looking Away

The specter of representation, its world-building and world-destroying power, is everywhere in these pages. Connected to this affective materiality is how representation drags with it the question of aesthetics in the multiple scenes of devastation that I'm attending to. I do not reproduce these scenes in image because of the ways they circulate as objects of pleasure that do little to confront their ongoingness. However, I do anxiously narrate a number of them in an attempt, however failed, to pay quiet attention to the specificity of not only lives but also deaths. In translating these untranslatable episodes into the written word, of retelling the horrors that consumed and continue to stalk the everyday of many more, any claim to purity must be lost. We are left to ask: How might we enter into these scenes as a praxis of care, as an exercise of solidarity, when the very possibility of ethics has already been destroyed? Pushed further, while we must forcefully resist a pornography of violence where death becomes yet another metaphor for the still living, turning away from the scene ensures its continuation. Or, as C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn ask, how do the deaths of "trans women of color circulate, and what are the corporal excesses that constitute their afterlives as raw material for the generation of respectable trans subjects?"⁴⁰

Indeed, one of the reasons graphic images of violence, from lynching postcards to current videos of police violence against Black people, are so pervasive is because of the visual pleasure imbued in such consumption. Following this logic, my narration would also allow for such libidinal satisfaction, yet I keep returning to what is perhaps an even more overwhelming consequence—the calcification of this violence with no plan to break through. Perhaps put another way, I stay with the harm not because I want to reviolate those of us who have already survived such violations but because I want us to end the version of the social that demands this continuum. For such a strategy, we have no clear path that might be known in advance, or from the outside; all we have is the commitment, however provisional, however incomplete, to a world of images that imagines the world against differential death.

Internal to this question of representing violence is the fact that representation itself is a mechanism of extraction and reduction. Indeed, I remain ambivalent, along with Saidiya Hartman, because of the ease with which "such scenes are usually reiterated" and how "they are circulated and the consequence of this routine display of the slave's ravaged body."⁴¹ This routine display of durational terror is also coupled with the realization that pleasure, too,

is incited, not only by those who might be properly phobic, but also by a social that sighs in relief, however unconsciously, that its established order is once again confirmed. And yet these scenes will only return as a surprise to those who do not live them. This is not to trivialize the ways trauma persists, seized by an image and distributed in its reproduction, but that this violence is allowed to go unannounced is among the reasons it continues. I take my etho-methodical query alongside Fred Moten: “Is there a way to subject this unavoidable model of subjection to a radical breakdown?”⁴²

Pay It No Mind

Atmospheres envelop. Held by gravity, the layers of vapor that constitute them are the conditions of breathing life but also the possibility of that life’s rendition. For Fanon, *atmospheres* summon the plastic totality of colonization. Rather than an event, or an era of imperial expansion that has a beginning and an end, for him, and for us now, atmospheres describe not simply the assemblages of gendered and racialized force and their contestation but the thick hang of fog that allows us to know little else. As a methodology of molecular relationality, violence holds us to the world, an atmospheric constant whose consistency must be fundamentally disturbed if we are to survive. Thinking atmospherically, then, reminds us that there is no escape, no outside or place to hide, yet through techniques of struggle collective life might still come to be.

Atmospheres of Violence is grown through four chapters that serve as an extended meditation where scenes of direct attack and cases of paradigmatic neglect build an entangled archive of trans/queer destruction. While extending outward, the majority of the cases I attend to occur within the emergence of what might be called the time of LGBT inclusion, here inaugurated by the Stonewall uprisings of 1969 and their intensification in the last two decades of assumed legal protections. Of course, this temporality is suspect, and among the arguments I make is that the assimilatory agenda has been coterminous with radical demands, as evidenced by Sylvia’s disgust at the upper-middle-class whiteness of the early 1970s. Rather than anti-trans/queer violence being remnants of the past, the ways harm is coupled with, and at times intensified through claims of equality are central to understanding how modernity is contingent upon violence’s continuation. To this end, along with Fanon and many others, I insist that the liberal state, or more precisely the para-colonial democratic state, can never be anything other than an engine of brutality. This assertion, rather than a descent into nihilistic inaction, opens up our histories

and futures of practicing interdependency otherwise—a post-politics for the end of the world that might just save us from the present.

Further, while the majority of the book is an attempt to put into words these forms of violence and trace their ontological echoes, I am equally committed to the ways trans/queerness has and continues to spectacularly endure, and how this persistence is marked by a generativity that finds form in artistic and organizing practices, and in quotidian acts of getting by in a world that wishes our end. To be clear, this is not to suggest that the aesthetic will save us from the aggregate hardness of the social, nor to contend that the aesthetic is not central to organizing, which includes organizing ourselves. Yet what I want to hold is the nondialectical, where resistance might not necessarily get us free, but freedom surely won't come with anything less.⁴³

Chapter 1, “Near Life: Overkill and Ontological Capture,” focuses on the ruthless pageantry of anti-trans/queer murders. It opens with a reading of a political funeral organized by Gay Shame, an activist collective in San Francisco. The action was in memory of Gwen Araujo, a trans Latina woman who was murdered, and Jihad Alim Akbar, a Black man who was shot to death by police in the Castro. Through an attention to the physicality and intimacy of ruthless attacks, I show how these acts are not simply about killing the individual but about ending trans/queer possibility. By reading the legal concept of overkill, the name given to forms of murder that go beyond biological death, I argue that these killings produce an ontological limit of trans/queer subjectivity. In the wake of Fanon's rereading of Hegel, I offer the concept of “near life,” or a form of (non)subjectivity that resides adjacent to the fully possessed rights-bearing subject of modernity.

Chapter 2, “Necrocapital: Blood's General Strike,” shifts from the hyper-visual scene of murder and mutilation and toward the everyday forms of abandonment that can be tracked through the material semiotics of blood. Stretching from chattel slavery and its afterlives to the days following the Pulse shooting, where prospective blood donors were turned away because of a ban on “men who have sex with men,” I trace the ways racial capitalism produces meaning and profits from HIV/AIDS. This attention to how the affective and materialist economies of blood allows for, or more precisely demands, an expanded definition of exploitation that includes cellular labor. Throughout, I chart forms of exclusion that are also productive, or what I call negative value, which troubles the idea that compensation offers remedy. Ending with ACT UP's Ashes Action, I ask what forms an anti-necrocapitalist demand might take.

Chapter 3, “Clocked: Surveillance, Opacity, and the Image of Force,” opens with a reading of a closed-circuit TV scene of Duanna Johnson, a Black transgender woman who was viciously beaten by Mississippi police while in custody in 2009. Through this video, I center the question of representation’s form, and not only its content, as constituted by anti-trans and anti-Black optics. Against this scene stands *Time* magazine naming 2014 as the “Transgender Tipping Point.” Here I trace how the demand for positive representation, as a practice of assimilation, is offered as the primary, and perhaps exclusive, space of struggle. In contrast, through a reading of Tourmaline and Sasha Wortzel’s 2018 film *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* I ask how we might build a radical trans visual regime that does not collapse into expanded surveillance and its consequences.

Chapter 4, “Death Drop: Becoming the Universe at the End of the World,” offers a close reading of a 2010 note written by Seth Walsh, a gender-nonconforming thirteen-year-old. In its lucid cruelty, the note ends with the line, “Hopefully I become the universe.” After writing these words Walsh took a step off a stump in their backyard and into the obliteration of self-negation—a death drop. The other case in the chapter is the incarceration and forced gender transition of Ashley Diamond, a Black trans woman who smuggled video testimonies of the abuse she endured out of her Georgia prison cell. Here, I reflect on how, for modern forms of violence, surviving, too, becomes a space of torture. The note and the videos, read with Fanon’s “new man” from the final pages of *Wretched of the Earth*, helps us anticipate what “becoming the universe” means for those who live against the vestiges of Enlightenment’s colonial universalism.

I end with a coda, “Becoming Ungovernable,” which meditates on Miss Major’s decision to change all of her identification documents as a way of marking herself as a trans person. While surveillance practices of all kinds are attempting to expand their reach, Major offers a divergent path for a trans life that is not moored to positive representation or state recognition. Along with Major, I think with the precarious double bind of trans/queer youth of color that the state has deemed “ungovernable.” This legal designation can also lead toward their capture in juvenile jails, which again shows the limits and possibilities immanent in being labeled as such. It is the collectivizing of these practices that offers an alternative to democracy and its mandates of legibility. These commitments to becoming ungovernable—gender fugitives on the run from classical recognition by way of provoking an encounter with unintelligibility—illustrates the fierce strategies necessary for being, as Denise Ferreira da Silva suggests, a “nobody against the state.”⁴⁴

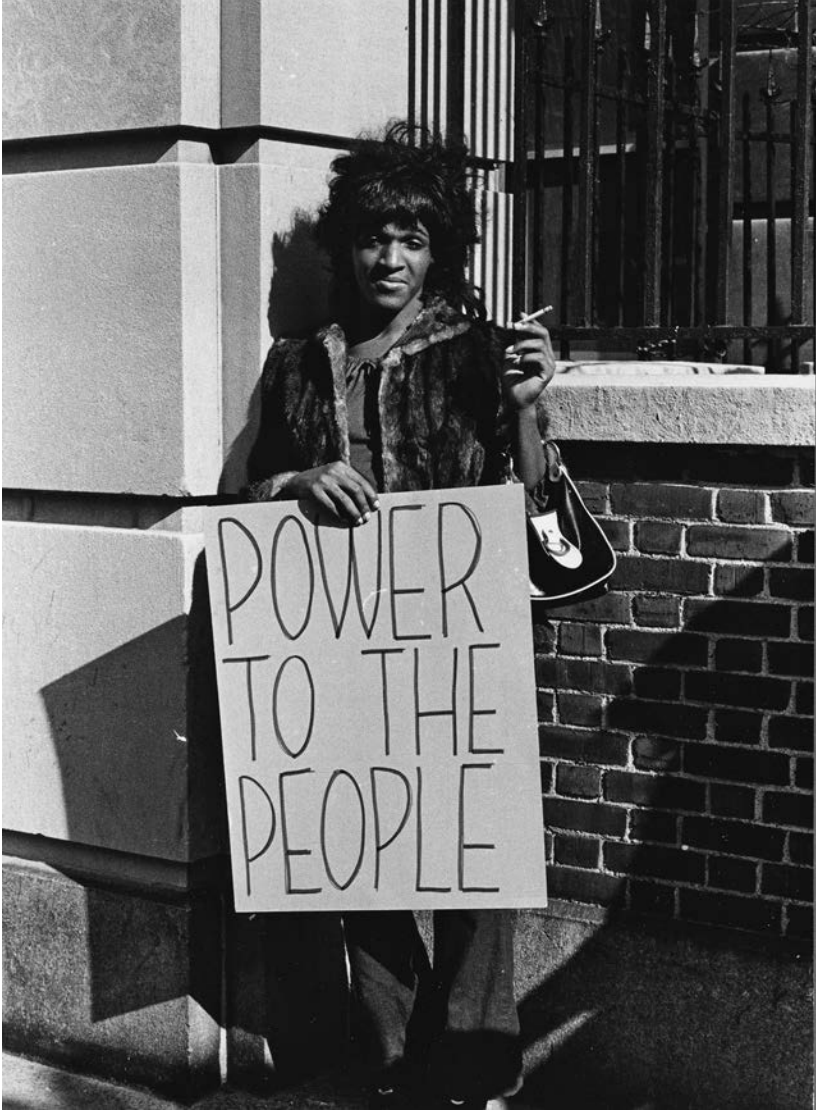


FIGURE 1.2. Marsha P. Johnson pickets Bellevue Hospital to protest treatment of street people and gays, ca. 1968–75. Photo by Diana Davies, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

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The Marsha P. Johnson quote opening this introduction comes from an interview in which she was asked about the dangers of street-based sex work (figure 1.2). In response, she said she always carried her mace, or her “bomb.” Going further, her will to survive necessitates a readiness to be prepared for an attack, and to respond to that violence in any way that might end it. Johnson, like many other trans women of color, was exiled to the edges of civil society—she rocked between chronic houselessness and incarceration in psychiatric facilities, while also living with HIV. Her commitment to protecting herself and “her people” again demonstrates that for those in the crucible of force, the violence/nonviolence binary crumbles. Her claim to a revolutionary form of violence is also productively spoiled by her campy reading of the austerity of early 1970s radical politics. The interviewer asks her about her bomb: “Did you ever have to use it yet?” Marsha replies, “Not yet, but I’m patient.”

The River Jordan also patiently awaits. As monument to history’s future, cruising and communion gather at the water—reminding us all that death is not inevitable and that pleasure, too, is our inheritance. The metaphor is also material as we work to assemble meaning in the ruins of modernity’s still unfolding catastrophe and in the hope of organizing its end. In this atmosphere of violence, its incessant flow is a testament to the brutal ends Marsha P. Johnson and so many others have met. Yet the haunt of the past, like the laze of the river, reminds us that against the current of time, and of time’s end, trans/queer existence, even as nonexistence, remains.

NOTES

Introduction. River of Sorrow

Epigraph: “Rapping with a Street Transvestite Revolutionary: An Interview with Marcia Johnson,” in *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*, ed. Karla Jay and Allen Young (New York: NYU Press, 1992), 114–18. Tourmaline is the eminent researcher and archivist of Marsha P. Johnson. Her uncompensated archival labor, oral histories, and digitizing of those sources has been vital to our collective knowledge. I, and we all, are indebted to her work, much of which has been collected on her blog “The Spirit Was . . .,” <https://thespiritwas.tumblr.com/>. The title of this introduction comes from Anohni’s song about Marsha P. Johnson by the same name. Antony and the Johnsons, “River of Sorrow,” from *Antony and the Johnsons* (Durtro, 2000).

Epigraph: Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 2005), 71.

- 1 Here I am thinking about the ways earth and water in particular, but space in general, hold the histories of their molecular entanglements. See, for example, Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019); Dora Silva Santana, “Transitionings and Returnings: Experiments with the Poetics of Transatlantic Water,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (2017): 181–90; and M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005). The violent gentrification of the piers has been met with resistance organized primarily by trans/queer youth of color, including FIERCE! and others. Related, my point here is not to suggest that people do not still build life at the piers but to highlight how New York City supported the massive displacement of those previously in the neighborhood, decimating trans/queer of color social life. For more on this history, see Martin Manalansan, “Race, Violence and Neoliberal Spatial Politics in the Global City,”

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Social Text 84–85 23, nos. 3–4 (2005); Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); *Fenced OUT* (New York: FIERCE, Papertiger TV, and Neutral Zone, 2000), DVD.

- 2 “Randy Wicker Interviews Sylvia Rivera on the Pier,” *Vimeo*, 2011, <https://vimeo.com/35975275?cjevent=fab96cof7da911e983f80oadoai1coeod>.
- 3 The ongoing degradation of working-class Black and Brown trans history has, not surprisingly, suppressed much of STAR House’s as well, which remains speculative and incomplete at best. See Leslie Feinberg, “Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries,” *Workers World*, September 24, 2006, <https://www.workers.org/2006/us/lavender-red-73/>; Benjamin Shepard, “Sylvia and Sylvia’s Children: The Battle for a Queer Public Space,” in *That’s Revolting! Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*, ed. Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore (Brooklyn, NY: Soft Skull, 2008), 123–40. See Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Plume, 1994), for an oral history of Stonewall. For an early analysis of the links between the rapid gentrification of the Village and Marsha’s homelessness, see Steve Watson, “Stonewall 1979: The Drag of Politics,” *Village Voice*, June 4, 1979, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2019/06/04/stonewall-1979-the-drag-of-politics/>. For another account of this history, see Rachel Corbman, “Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson: Listen to the Newly Unearthed Interview with Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries,” New York Historical Society, June 26, 2019, <http://womenatthecenter.nyhistory.org/gay-power-is-trans-history-street-transvestite-action-revolutionaries/>. There is much more to be said about the forms of sociality STAR House created. On the question of their reproductive labor and care work, see Nat Raha, “Queer Capital: Marxism in Queer Theory and Post-1950 Poetics” (PhD diss., University of Sussex, 2018), 133–39.
- 4 A video of Sylvia Rivera’s speech is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jb-JIOWUw10>. L.O.V.E. (Lesbians Organized for Video Experience), a feminist video collective founded in 1972, owns the only available footage of the rally and her speech. For an early critique of the racism in early LGBT activism, see Third World Gay Revolution (New York City), “What We Want, What We Believe,” in *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*, ed. Karla Jay and Allen Young (New York: NYU Press, 1972), 363–67.
- 5 For a foundational critique of the whiteness of LGBT studies, see Cathy J. Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?,” *GLQ* 3 (1997): 437–65; E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, “Introduction: Queering Black Studies/‘Quaring’ Queer Studies,” in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 1–17. On this question of writing history and its refusal, see Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 26 (June 2008): 1–14. Neoliberalism appears here most vividly through the simultaneous privatization of violence and the inclusion of identities. For example, the attack against Sylvia on the stage in 1973 evidenced the collusion, even then, of lesbian and gay identity with racial and gender norms. Rather than a demand

for the end of coercion, they sought a claim to normativity through the exiling of Sylvia and all gender-nonconforming people of color. This unruliness might also be related to Dora Santana's theorization of "mais viva" as a form of vitality that exceeds capture; see Dora Silva Santana, "Mais Viva! Reassembling Transness, Blackness, and Feminism," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (2019): 210–22. For a much more complete consideration of the ways queer studies holds on to its ideal figures, see Kadji Amin, *Disturbing Attachments: Genet, Modern Pederasty, and Queer History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

- 6 I'm not suggesting that homophobic and anti-trans violence are interchangeable, but because of the way the social produces gender and sexuality, their actors do not necessarily make this distinction. Further, both *trans* and *transgender* are, like *queer*, historically and geopolitically located terms. To this end, their deployment always conceals as much as it illustrates. For more on this transnational un/intelligibility, see Aren Z. Aizura, *Mobile Subjects: Transnational Imaginaries of Gender Reassignment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), especially the introduction, "Provincializing Trans."

Those that are most loyal to masking the dependency between gender and sexuality hide under the pitch of "gender critical feminists." TERFs (trans-exclusionary radical feminists), as they are often called by trans activists and others, but a marker they refuse as a slur, understand trans people to be a threat to the sanctity of the categories of women/men, and by extension to sexual identities. Through a eugenicist logic by way of gender essentialism and its fever dreams of biological determinacy, TERFs fortify the border wall between gender and sexuality. "Biology is not bigotry"—their semiotic attempt to disavow charges of transphobia via a reinscription of their own subalternity—is performed as absolute abjection. Through a synchronized sleight of hand, cis womanhood becomes the victim of patriarchy, not because of the misogynist structuring of the social but because of trans women's existence. This is not to suggest that cis women are any more transphobic than cis men. However, what is unique is that TERF anti-trans attacks are launched from inside feminism and under its name. This is the other side of the reality that much if not most physical anti-trans violence is committed by cis men. For a very early interview with Sylvia and Marsha, which includes a discussion with them about men and sexism, see Jeffrey Masters, "Earliest Known Recording of Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera Found," *Advocate*, December 29, 2019, <https://www.advocate.com/transgender/2019/12/29/earliest-known-recording-marsha-p-johnson-sylvia-rivera-found?>. For more on the tensions between queer and trans studies, see Susan Stryker, "Transgender Studies: Queer Theory's Evil Twin," *GLQ* 10, no. 2 (2004): 212–15.

- 7 This persistence of a phobic relationship, not to that which is threat but to that which one maintains domination over, is a contour of violence this book charts. Here the imagined boundary between gender and sexuality must not simply be policed, but those of us who cross must be both absorbed into and forcefully excluded from the social fantasy they wish to preserve.

- 8 On the mainstreaming of the LGBT movement, see Roderick A. Ferguson, *One-*

Dimensional Queer (Cambridge: Polity, 2018); Myrl Beam, *Gay, Inc.: The Non-profitization of Queer Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018); Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon, 2003). A 2019 survey shows that younger people are becoming “less tolerant” of LGBT people. See “Accelerating Acceptance 2019,” GLAAD, June 24, 2019, <https://www.glaad.org/publications/accelerating-acceptance-2019>.

- 9 I am suggesting the term *anarchism* to provisionally reference the long political tradition of left thought (and action) against the state form. While there are important arguments to be had within this contentious genealogy, what is useful here is its naming of the structuring limits of the settler state as well as a glimpse of how horizontality might offer another path for being in the social. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 1–18. Horizontalism is a theory of collective organizing popular in many antiauthoritarian projects. For one account, see Marina Sitrin, *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2006). On the necessity of collective study, see Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Brooklyn, NY: Minor Compositions, 2013).
- 10 LGBT politics refers to mainstream, U.S.-based national LGBT organizing, most notably the Human Rights Campaign and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.
- 11 Of course, in a world that aligns life with the normal and relegates the abnormal to the space of death, normality is hard to argue against. However, this push for normativity has the power of further obliteration of the unassimilable. The activist work done by groups like INCITE! Women of Color against Violence shows the connections between interpersonal violence and larger systems of state violence. For more, see Angela Y. Davis, “The Color of Violence against Women,” *Colorlines* 3, no. 3 (fall 2000). Dan Savage’s 2010 video campaign “It Gets Better,” which urges people to make videos stating that LGBT life after youth is filled with less pain and terror, vividly reproduces this logic. See www.itgetsbetterproject.com.
- 12 “Fictive justice” is a way of talking about how legal precedent forces a kind of “justice” based on analogy. In other words, judgments rely upon previous cases and thus function through a series of abstractions. For a foundational example, see Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas (New York: New Press, 1995), 357. Here Crenshaw shows how the law is unable to apprehend the multiplicity of identity. In relation to trans studies and politics Dean Spade’s work continues to invite us to think beyond and against formal equality and rights-based politics as the basis for what he calls a “critical trans politics.” Dean Spade, “Introduction: Rights, Movements,

and Critical Trans Politics,” *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 1–21. There are also instances when anti-queer violence erupts onto the social screen, for example, the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard. Shepard, a white, gay, twenty-one-year old college student, it could be argued, was held as referent for all anti-queer violence because of the relative ease of mourning for Matthew. Although this might be true, anti-queer violence must be simultaneously put on public display and made to disappear so that the murders of queers exist outside of national meaning. Mourning for Matthew, through the spectacle of a mocking pain, works to disappear the archive that is queer death.

- 13 For more on the place of death in trans/queer studies see Jin Haritaworn, Adi Kuntsman, and Silvia Posocco, eds., *Queer Necropolitics* (London: Routledge, 2014).
- 14 Here I am thinking about the ways groups like the Black Panther Party, American Indian Movement, Black Liberation Army, Weather Underground, Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional, the George Jackson Brigade, and many other armed leftist groups of the 1970s and 1980s have pushed against the idea that meeting the massive violence of the state with passivism is the best, or only way to build resistance. Also see *INCITE! Women of Color against Violence*, ed., *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: South End, 2006). For more on the question of state violence, race, and sexuality, see Chandan Reddy, *Freedom with Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the US State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). For more on “nonviolence” and state violence, see Peter Gelderloos, *How Nonviolence Protects the State* (Cambridge, MA: South End, 2007). In response to the case of the New Jersey 4, communities, mostly in the Bay Area, organized for their freedom. See “Free the New Jersey 4,” <https://freenj4.wordpress.com/>. For more on the way the attacker produced himself as a survivor of a “hate crime,” see Nicole Pasulka, “How 4 Gay Black Women Fought Back against Sexual Harassment—And Landed in Jail,” *NPR*, June 30, 2015, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/06/30/418634390/how-4-gay-black-women-fought-back-against-a-sexual-harasser-and-landed-in-jail>.
- 15 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The Holy Family,” in *Collected Works*, vol. 4 (New York: International, 1975), 121.
- 16 This is a concern Foucault also suggested in his criticism of Marxism. See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (New York: Vintage, 1980), 58–59. I’m also aware that Marx’s statism is the subject of much debate. This tends to circle around readings of the *Communist Manifesto* and his work after the Paris Commune. In short, communism, for some readers of Marx, would dissolve the state form because it would abolish class. However, under my reading of the state as internal to itself, this does not at all seem inevitable. While it might seem redundant, the insistence on “racial capitalism” in this book is always seeking to understand the racial, colonial, and gendered contours of capital.

- 17 Here I am thinking both with, but perhaps beside, Foucault's investigation of how norms become the force of modernity. See, as one extensive example, Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974–1975*, translated by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2003). The concept of negative value is also in conversation with Lindon Barrett's work on Blackness and value. See Lindon Barrett, "Exemplary Values: Value, Violence, and Others of Value," *Sub-Stance* 21, no. 1 (1992): 77–94. For more on the force of normativity and sexuality, see Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998): 547–66. For an anarchist analysis, see Kuwasi Balagoon, "The Continuing Appeal of Anti-Imperialism." *Prison News Service*, no. 65, <https://kersplebedeb.com/posts/balagoon-3/>.
- 18 See Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "What Is to Be Done?" *American Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (2011): 245–65.
- 19 For a discussion of "life chances" in respect to trans low-income and/or people of color, see Spade, *Normal Life*. On homelessness, see Craig Willse, *The Value of Homelessness: Managing Surplus Life in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). A phenomenology reading of anti-trans/queer violence can be found in Gayle Salamon, *The Life and Death of Latisha King: A Critical Phenomenology of Transphobia* (New York: NYU Press, 2018). On anti-Blackness and HIV/AIDS, see Dagmawi Woubshet, *The Calendar of Loss: Race, Sexuality, and Mourning in the Early Era of AIDS* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015); and Adam Geary, *Antiblack Racism and the AIDS Epidemic: State Intimacies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). Again, Foucault argues that among the attributes that name modernity is the shift from sovereign power to biopower. Yet rather than "progressing" from the absolute violence of the sovereign, through the racial state, violence is (re)distributed.
- 20 Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writing*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken, 1986), 281.
- 21 For more, see Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 77–78. I am also attentive to multiple definitions of the German *gewalt*. Along with David Lloyd, I'm thinking of it as a continuum of violence and force. David Lloyd, "From the Critique of Violence to the Critique of Rights," *Critical Times* 3, no. 1 (April 1, 2020): 114–15.
- 22 Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mythic Foundations of Authority,'" in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992), 33.
- 23 Derrida, "Force of Law," 34.
- 24 Derrida, "Force of Law," 46.
- 25 Derrida, "Force of Law," 46.
- 26 For more on the relationship between representational democracy and colonialism, see Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014). Also see Fred Moten, "Democracy," in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, 2nd ed., ed.

- Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (New York: NYU Press, 2014), 73–75. Angela Davis made a similar argument about the police, via Frantz Fanon, in her writing while incarcerated. See Angela Y. Davis, “Political Prisoners, Prisons, and Black Liberation,” in *If They Come in the Morning: Voices of Resistance*, ed. Angela Y. Davis, Ruchell Magee, and Julian Bond, 27–43 (New York: Third Press, 1971).
- 27 By abolitionist epistemology I mean those who recognize the ongoingness of capture to expand under calls to reform them. Collectives like Critical Resistance have done much of the work of theorizing a modern abolitionist politics; see <http://criticalresistance.org/>. Also see Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories, 2003); Dylan Rodríguez, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). For more on the internalization of crime and punishment logics, see Paula X. Rojas, “Are the Cops in Our Heads and Hearts?,” in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, ed. INCITE! Women of Color against Violence, 197–214 (Boston: South End, 2009).
- 28 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove, 1967), 31.
- 29 For more on sociogeny, see Sylvia Wynter, “Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What It Is Like to Be ‘Black,’” in *National Identities and Sociopolitical Changes in Latin America*, ed. Mercedes F. Dúran-Cogan and Antonio Gómez-Moriana (New York: Routledge, 2001), 30–66; C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 184–86; David Marriott, “Inventions of Existence: Sylvia Wynter, Frantz Fanon, Sociogeny, and ‘the Damned,’” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 11, no. 3 (2011): 45–89.
- 30 Some selected works in Fanon studies with an attention to gender, sexuality, and/or queerness include T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Frantz Fanon: Conflicts and Feminisms* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997); Darieck Scott, *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination* (New York: NYU Press, 2010); Kara Keeling, *The Witch’s Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); David Marriott, *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007); David Marriott, *Whither Fanon? Studies in the Blackness of Being* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018); William M. Paris, “Humanism’s Secret Shadow: The Construction of Black Gender/Sexuality in Frantz Fanon and Hortense Spillers,” *philoSOPHIA* 8, no. 1 (2018): 81–99. For important work on Fanon and trans studies, see Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*. I use the term *freedom* here and throughout the text as a placeholder for that which is still to come. In this, I mean to suggest that rather than its liberal deployment as a freedom from, here I am interested in the project of freedom with, a relational experiment in what it might mean to be beyond the human.
- 31 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 180n44. For more on the etymology of “*ma commère*” in the Antilles, see Charlotte Hammond, *Entangled Otherness: Cross-*

- Gender Fabrications in the Francophone Caribbean* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), 14.
- 32 Keguro Macharia, *Frottage: Frictions of Intimacy across the Black Diaspora* (New York: NYU Press, 2019), 47.
- 33 For other readings of this footnote, see Neville Hoad, *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 38–39; Lewis R. Gordon, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to His Life and Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 63–65. For an extended reading of women of color and sexuality in Fanon’s work, see Françoise Vergès, “Creole Skin, Black Mask: Fanon and Disavowal,” *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 3 (1997): 578–95. On the question of the Oedipal complex in the Antilles, see Ronald A. T. Judy, “Fanon’s Body of Black Experience,” in *Fanon: A Critical Reader*, ed. Lewis R. Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Renee T. White (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 68–70.
- 34 That colonialism produces what we come to know as normative gender and sexuality has been well argued by many anticolonial and specifically Native feminists. See, for example, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, *Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty: Land, Sex, and the Colonial Politics of State Nationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); Tom Boellstorff et al., “Decolonizing Transgender: A Roundtable Discussion,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (2014): 419–39; Joanne Barker, ed., *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).
- 35 Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1970), 18–21.
- 36 For Arendt, it is essential to separate power, strength, force, and authority from violence. However, I am unconvinced of the usefulness of this idea.
- 37 The footage from Angela Davis’s interview can be found in the film *The Black Power Mixtape*. Göran Hugo Olsson et al., *The Black Power Mixtape 1967–1975: A Documentary in 9 Chapters* (New York: MPI Media Group, 2011).
- 38 Angela Davis, in Göran Hugo Olsson et al., *The Black Power Mixtape*.
- 39 Judith Butler offers a philosophical survey of nonviolence, which is, for them, a world-preserving force. Butler argues that, “When any of us commit acts of violence, we are, in and through those acts, building a more violent world.” Judith Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind* (London: Verso, 2020), 19. In contrast, I am suggesting that nonviolence is, under the current order, the way we are disciplined into accepting harm as a condition of our own making.
- 40 C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn, “Trans Necropolitics: A Transnational Reflection on Violence, Death, and Trans of Color Afterlife,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*, ed. Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura (New York: Routledge, 2013), 74. For an extended reading of the work of race, representation, and the production of unfreedom, see David Lloyd, *Under Representation: The Racial Regimes of Aesthetics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), especially the chapter “Representation’s Coup,” 95–123. Here I am also thinking with Christina Sharpe’s conception of “defending the dead.” See Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 10–11. Re-

lated to the flattening of the image, the category “trans women of color” now tends to function as a screen for white cis projection that renders all who might identify as such to be both the sign of absolute abjection and radical potentiality. In other words, Marsha and Sylvia are distilled into stand-ins for everything but themselves.

- 41 Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.
- 42 Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 5.
- 43 For more on the radical potentiality of queerness, see Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*.
- 44 “Refuse Powers’ Grasp: Introduction,” *Arika*, n.d., <http://arika.org.uk/events/episode-8-refuse-powers-grasp/introduction>.

Chapter 1. Near Life

Epigraph: Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove, 1967), 139.

Epigraph: Graffiti written on the restroom wall at the University of California, Santa Cruz, 2006.

- 1 Kelly St. John, “Hayward/Transgender Teen Did Nothing ‘to Deserve Death’/But One Accused Killer Said He Vomited on Finding She Was Male,” *SFGate*, July 27, 2005, <https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/HAYWARD-Transgender-teen-did-nothing-to-2620082.php>.
- 2 Throughout I shift between using trans/queer people’s first, last, and sometimes both names. I do this because I want to hold the tension between our assumed familiarity with them, while at the same time I don’t want to reproduce them as legalistic objects. I also only use the names and pronouns they used. However, if they are only gendered outside of their own self-description, then I use “they.”
- 3 Kelly St. John, “Chilling Time Line of a Killing / Death of Transgender Teen Described in Grisly Detail,” *SFGate*, February 26, 2003, <https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Chilling-Time-Line-of-a-Killing-Death-of-2668044.php>.
- 4 Jaxon Van Derbeken, “Oakland Man Killed by S.F. Cops Had Troubled Past/ Knife Wielder Denounced Gays, Minorities,” *SFGate*, October 10, 2002, <https://www.sfgate.com/health/article/Oakland-man-killed-by-S-F-cops-had-troubled-past-2786521.php>; Mattilda, AKA Matt Bernstein Sycamore, “Gay Shame: From Queer Autonomous Space to Direct Action Extravaganza,” in *That’s Revolting! Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*, ed. Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore, 237–62 (Brooklyn, NY: Soft Skull, 2004).
- 5 For an investigation into the whiteness of the Castro, see Marlon Riggs’s experimental documentary *Tongues Untied* (1998). The Castro has a long history of being a space exclusively for gay white men and hostile to everyone else. See Wyatt Buchanan, “Gays at Receiving End of Bias Claim / Investigation at Castro Bar Opens Dialogue about Prejudice,” *SFGate*, June 26, 2006, <https://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Gays-at-receiving-end-of-bias-claim-2659647.php>.
- 6 For more on the history of the organizing collective Gay Shame, see Mattilda,