CIS-TEM FAILURE

Marquis Bey

Essays on Blackness and Cisgender

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ASTERISK: Gender, Trans-, and All That Comes After
A series edited by Susan Stryker, Eliza Steinbock, and Jian Neo Chen.

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For us. Yes, you too

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PREFACE: CISTEM FAILURE

We are not destined to our lodgings, fixed from without, immutably. We are not only what they say we are. The criteria used to classify is insufficient, the taxonomy rife with fissures through which we can, blessedly, fall. I am ever romantic about the ways we move within restraint, a captive capacity that dissolves the captivity, letting us become in ways that might, who knows, unshackle the fetters fashioned by the captors. If only we knew we could move. Even when chained in the hold, on the gang, to the fence, there is always a little wiggle room. Room to wiggle, those minute tremulous reverberations, is when the trap gets worked and where the work is another way to say *I am (not), I am (not), I am (not)*.

I was compelled to pen the words you hold in your hands, reader. Compelled, I say, by the gendered and ungendered, and *nega*-gendered, tugs on my subjectivity. The words' penning is the only way I can make sense of the thoughts, the feelings, the ways what has been called the body moves and lives in the world, albeit in ways that may not be legible quite yet. Or even in ways that are desirable for many. But the words had to be

penned regardless. They are words that do not merely describe, as if they could; they are words that, as words do, inaugurate worlds. What I pen here is an attempt to make something else, some other way to be, real. And to do that, in the words of the late Toni Morrison, *you got to give up the shit that weighs you down*. My, and your, given gendered ontologies have been weighing me, us, down. So ultimately, though this will be terrifying, we are to give it up. And I mean that.

Breathe. It will be okay, I promise.

My compulsion can be traced to many moments and no moments. The tracing isn't what matters, as if finding a telos, a continuous through line, bestows validity. What matters are the intensities and bubbled-up moments that inflect something indicative of a tremor. One of those tremors took place in conversation, in sociality, where the giving of oneself in language to another is a way to emerge into a different subjectivity on coalitional grounds. This conversation with someone much older, with whom I had been meeting for the first time, was nevertheless a conversation with a loved one, a friend, a comrade. Kinfolk, as we say. She, whom I'll call "L," expressed the way transness both was and was not her narrative, a story that was hers yet not hers to claim. I beamed, its sentiments familiar affective kin. And I invited more, because I yearned for more.

L, a butch lesbian—an imperfect nominative, we both admitted—was gracious. She desired, like me, more language than what we have. She desired a way to hold others and ourselves lovingly in language, and shared with me, pointedly: if she, her femme partner, and someone like Kim Kardashian are all hailed under the rubric of cisgender, then something is wrong. *Something is wrong*.

Cisgender cannot capture some of us who are nonetheless hailed by it. Of interest is when the term cannot sustain the subjectivity it lashes against. What happens when one is grabbed by cisness, struggling to free oneself from its grip, wanting not to fall into other hands—even if

one's own—but to fall, fall, fall? What happens when we, collectively, come to the realization that the way we have understood ourselves, and others have understood us, is inadequate—what happens when we can no longer pretend to the contrary that *something is wrong*?

BACK IN THE NINETIES, *The Matrix* was one of the most talked about films of the decade. Its innovation was impeccable, its fight scenes something my grandmother could watch over and over. Allusions and homages abound, from the back-bending evasion of flying bullets to the choice between the red and blue pills. I watched all of them, wanting there to be another world we didn't know of, a virtual nonspace where things were done differently. And honestly, that black and green color scheme was dope too.

Interestingly, something about the film went above my head back then. I missed it entirely. Who knows what might have been had I caught it, had I seen it as a gesture toward another possibility for how I could enter the world? It might have set my world ablaze.

> As Neo utters the word "change," a warning message—"SYSTEM FAILURE"—unexpectedly appears in capital letters over the program algorithm. The decryption freezes, but the zoom proceeds, the film's musical score holding a sustained string note that heightens our sense of what might next occur. Neo continues to speak as the shot pulls into extreme closeup on "SYSTEM FAILURE." The encroaching visual frame centers on the empty space between the "M" and the "F," those highly recognizable markers of legal and medical gender. As Neo makes the utopian claim of the speech, stating "a world where anything is possible," the virtual camera transits *through* the negative space between the coded layers of the "M" and "F" and into the blackness beyond.[1]

Cáel M. Keegan meditates at length on the Wachowski sisters, two trans siblings with the filmic gift of cinematic demigods. Muted radical trans politics and anticapitalist articulations emerge through their

submergence. As the visual frame reads "SYSTEM FAILURE," the camera, as Keegan says, encroaches upon the space between each word, a space between the "M" of "SYSTEM" and the "F" of "FAILURE." And between the infinitely joyous and generatively tumultuous space is blackness.

What I missed was the gift of other ways to do gender, to undo it, to go in between it, to explore and excavate the abysmal blackness through and beyond gender's instantiations. What I missed, and what could have engendered me differently, or at least showed me that there was a different way to be engendered, was the trans, the *alternate space beyond or through* gender "where a new—and *black*—world, 'without border or boundaries,' might be instantiated." What I missed, and what I am grateful to Keegan for gifting me, us, with, is the failure of the *cis*tem, which is to say, *the fantastic end of the enforced gender and race systems that a post/racial trans* aesthetics speculates toward and pursues*.[2] What is facilitated when it is blackness that backgrounds, foregrounds, and facilitates system, and better cistem, failure? Welcome to the blackness beyond.

It is astoundingly striking, that scene, and it makes me feel something now, though rather late. I'm after that moment, that scene, as a filmic reel for my life. To transit through the "M" and "F" and into the black space is rich with analytic heft. The gender binary is the system, or cistem, structuring how we are believed to be able to exist. It is what we are given as the world, not understood as a system per se with all the trappings of construction and orchestration but as simply the way of the world. The success of a totalizing system is its masking of itself, its ability to hide its, as it were, systematicity. The successful system is simply there, simply what we have. That is the gender binary, and we have not been permitted to see its systematicity, its forceful, intentional structuration.

The system, the "M" and "F." To go between and beyond it into the abyss is to initiate the failure of the system. It touts itself as impenetrable, but how easily we traversed its interstices, how easily, indeed, we discovered that it *had* an interstitial space. Intervening in the gaps of the system that

said it had no gaps, we have stalled it, or portended, at the very least, its untenability. What's more, that which invited us into the failure of the system, the failure of the *cis*tem, is an abiding, looming blackness. We are invited, then, to think deeply about the inextricability of blackness and cistem failure. It is blackness that resides in the cut between "M" and "F," not properly either of them, which is necessarily to say unable to abide its systematicity—blackness, in other words, promotes cistem failure.

What this treatise attempts to convey is how the cistem is as it is because of its exclusion of blackness, *and*, to be sure, because of how those who rebel against the cistem are invited into a dissent by blackness. Reading Keegan's reading, what you hold in your hands is a meditation on blackness as that which is disjoined from, which acts as a disjuncture relative to, which invites and initiates the failure of, the cistem defined by the impenetrability of "M" and "F." Extending this into realms of the autobiographical (how closely such questions nuzzle my own life) and the theoretical (how one has come to live the emotional life of ideas, those ideas that assert something new to know about life, or even to unknow about the life we have been given), you, reader, my companion traversing the myriad levels of infernal regimes of gender, will be trekking along a path lined with musings on the ways blackness and cisgender converge with, butt heads against, side-eye, and vanquish one another. If the failure of the cistem—the system of cisgender; the orchestral disciplinary endeavor to coercively cohere gendered subjectivity into a mutually exclusionary "M" or "F," deviation from which invites extermination, invalidation, and gaslighting—can be found in the effects of a blackness beyond, what is the relationship between blackness and the cistem? Might it be that those proximate to blackness invite the necessary failure of the system of cisgender?

Keegan goes to the end of the thought, conveying the constitutive blackness of the world beyond "M" and "F" where there are no borders or boundaries, of which the cistem is paradigmatic. When the failure of

the cistem is impending, blackness is present, and the bringing about of the cistem's failure inaugurates the wondrous cessation of enforced gender. Which is to say, as is this entire treatise that lies before you, gender abolition. Blackness's antagonism toward cisgender and cisgender's normativity, its antiblackness, calls into question the very apparatus of gender itself as an organizing frame. It is a frame that does violence, that curtails. So it is not a matter of massaging the rough edges of the frame; it is a matter of disposing of the frame. That disposal is the concerted, worked-at failure of the cistem.

THE DRIVING THRUST is this, as inelegantly straightforward as it may be: cisgender is a categorical ruse disingenuously hailing those who nevertheless do not and cannot sit comfortably within it. It is a structuration permitting narrow forms of en*gendering*—the coming into being through and as gendered embodiment precisely in order to come into being at all. Cisgender requires a physiognomic comportment, indeed, but also a social, intellectual, behavioral, and interpersonal habitus in order for it to maintain its coherency and imply its naturalness. Blackness, in turn, is irreverent toward cisgender. There is a *queerness and transness that constitute Blackness*, as Jian Neo Chen would assert, meaning: *The Black becomes the aporia between sex and gender such that the two never meet in any fashion that would satisfy the dictates of normative heterosexuality*.[3] Blackness and cisgender, put simply, have beef.

The nature of this beef is what I am primed to explore. This is not a meditation on black cisgender people, as a misreading might offer as an expectation; nor is this an abdication of the hierarchies embedded in the comportment of certain bodies over others. I offer here a reckoning with the disjunction blackness initiates in the fabric of cisgender. Suspended will be a delineation of check marks and re-re-rehashed criteria for ire at the commonsense assumptions that bestow upon someone cisgender status. *I am not going to argue that the transgendered body has a material specificity that marks it as different from a normatively gendered body*, a cisgender body, for reasons that include the sliding,

never-agreed-upon threshold for departure from cis and arrival in trans, as Gayle Salamon had in mind.[4] To do this would "assume a body," in Salamon's verbiage; it would assume a preexistent delimitation of the boundaries that clearly demarcate the cis from the trans. Cistem failure seeks the withoutness of borders and boundaries in service, unapologetically, of the abolition of the cistem's gender and gender's cistem.

There are many things that we already know. We can endlessly cite them in our articles, our monographs, in our Tweets and posts, our think pieces and blogs. We cite the radical feminist knowledge that *sex's difference from gender makes possible the account of un/alignment that constitutes cisgender and transgender as discrete and self-enclosed identities*. We cite that *whiteness is constitutive of binary gender as a construct*. We cite how we wish to be *against and beyond the constitutively white settler binary cis gender symbolic and social order*. We cite that *this problematizing of gender places her, the black woman, out of the traditional symbolics of female gender, and it is our task to make a place for this different social subject*. And we cite: *There is no body, no sexuality and, simply put, no sex outside the long history of Western imperialism's shattering of the world*.[5] All right, then, let's begin from here.

Might this require that we heed the possibility of cisgender itself being mythic in a way that necessitates a grappling with its mythos and putting pressure on the unqualified assertion of a material accrual of privilege? Might it require a recognition of cisgender's attachment to whiteness and, thus, its incompatibility with blackness in a way that troubles the blanketing of that very privilege presumed to be bestowed to *all* cis people? And might it mean that arriving at, or near, that Spillersian "place for this different social subject" will be a place that many of y'all may not be ready for, an abolitionist place that does not abide the trappings of legibility you snuggle with even when trying to bring about a radically just world? It can no longer be our end goal to say these things without considering deeply what they imply. Because it strikes me that it implies complete and total cistem failure.

In this spirit, *Cistem Failure: Essays on Blackness and Cisgender* is intent on mining the nexus of blackness and cisgender, its disjunctive relationship and, too, what the two might mean apart from one another. The essays herein are meditations, musings, prayers, and pissed-off rants about a regime that has curtailed all of our flourishings. The essays do not necessarily form a compounding telos wherein each cascades seamlessly into the next. Instead, approach them as a party crawl: "Back in the Day" has some actors and ideas and topics that start off the party; then, by "Heart of Cisness," the crew might have lost a couple people to the dope music blasting in the last bar or house or club, leaving the rest to hit up the next spot. And by "Blowing Up Narnia," we got a whole different cast of characters because everyone else dispersed throughout the night; but this new crew is driving the same car, texting the same numbers, drinking the same drinks, bumping to the same music. And it might even be the case that this preface and its cast make some guest appearances by the time we get to "The Coalition of Gender Abolition," as well as guest appearances throughout the essays. There is no straightforward plan or agenda for the night's crawl, only a shared impulse to keep the party going all through the night.

The essays will discuss cisgender itself, its fundamental characteristic as a ruse; they will discuss the life of those prescribed masculinity in terms of its constitutive and often overlooked and unmentioned, which is to say its assumed, cisness; they will discuss, sometimes, neither blackness nor cisness explicitly, but know, reader, that they are not absent. It is precisely when they are presumed absent that they are doing their most clever work. Know that they speak to and about you, even if you think yourself far from their content. Know that they bear on you; take that burden, for it is a burden that is intimidatingly relevant and, in its burdensomeness, monumentally transformative. But only if you dare.

ACKNOWL-EDGMENTS

I've said this before, but I don't really like writing these acknowledgments. It feels disingenuous; it's hard to chop up, discretely, the people who have helped me in this book process. Because, to be sure, everyone has, people whose names I don't even know. Not to say that I'm in touch or in tune with all the beings of the universe, only to say that my interactions with cashiers at grocery stores and movie theaters impact me in ways that have, perhaps inevitably, seeped into this book. But I'll just write the acknowledgments and that'll be that.

This book arose out of an attempt to understand my frustration with a phrase with which I ultimately, save for a few nuances I'd make, agree. That phrase, "Black people can't be cisgender," often appended with an exclamation point and nearly always with a capital "B," frustrated me because I need more. I needed them to say how, why, what the implications were, where it came from. I could not simply snap my fingers or nod my head to its articulation, for there was something, I suspected,

missing. So, this book is a compilation of the things I felt were missing, the hows and whys and implications and whences.

I could not have written this without the numerous conversations I've had with friends and colleagues and loved ones. I thank, in no particular order:

Susan Stryker, editor of this series, who first spoke with me at the American Studies Association's annual conference back in 2019. I remember walking up to you, Susan, after the panel discussion on the impact of "My Words to Victor Frankenstein." I remember you being so humble, but, like, actually humble, not fake humble. After the panel, I walked up to you and we hugged, a long hug that felt so loving and genuine. You invited me to talk after a meeting you were scheduled to have—a meeting, it turned out, with Duke University Press about the series in which this book is published—and we chatted for an hour about so many things. I was so thankful to converse with you, and you held me in that conversation so lovingly. This book is possible because of that holding.

And Jules Gill-Peterson, one of the not-so-anonymous reviewers of this book. It was you, Jules, I sat next to during the panel for Susan. And the day before I was on a panel with you, and you radiated in your awesomeness. (And Kadji too.) You were apologetic in the email you sent to me, after you got the go-ahead from Duke to reveal yourself as one of the reviewers, because you had never responded to my postconference email and the resources I sent you. But you didn't have to be; those conferences, especially for introverted people like us, I gather, are exhausting. But I loved the note you shared. I told my partner about it, about how loved and, to use our word for the linguistically uncapturable feeling of love, "squishy" your note made me feel. I was cared for in your response, and believe me, you grace this writing. I try to channel your spirit sometimes, a spirit of intellectual deftness and precision, like you demonstrated on that other panel we were on together—for Stanford's Gender Institute—on the TERF industrial complex, with grace. My conversations

in your presence have been so crucial, you don't even know. I came to a kind of courage by way of yours. So, thank you.

I wish also to thank my partner, Sarah, for the numerous conversations we've had about so many things in this book. I sifted through thoughts with you, and you've been nothing short of the most committed thinking partner I could ask for. And not only that, all the other kinds of labor and assistance we cultivate together are foundational for this book as well. I would not have finished it or written it like I did if there were not someone to put away the dishes or, indeed, someone for whom and with whom I could put away the dishes, someone creating a space of comfort and life alongside me. That we share our spaces, physical and intellectual, means that there is a cocreation of the conditions for sustainable life that indelibly affect me. You are critical to that process, and that process is critical for the things that I do. And I hope to continue cultivating that kind of space for you as well.

There are so many other people and things and ideas I could name, and that I should name. I could and should name Jess and Danny, for the former has been engaging with me on thoughts concerning blackness and gender for the longest, and the latter is someone with whom I have felt the most genuine expression of family and kinship and who is quite literally in this book. I could and should name Treva, whose work and conversations over the phone have gifted me invaluable insights on what blackness does and how to live gender. I could and should thank "L" for the conversation we had that took the thoughts herein and propelled them into my life and writing. There are so many others, but to attempt to name them might be beside the point. So I wish only to say, to all of you, and you may or may not know who you are: thank you.

BACK IN THE DAY

Back in the days when I was young, I'm not a kid anymore, but some days I sit and wish I was a kid again. Ahmad dropped this nostalgic slow-nod of a lyric when I was only two years old. I feel you, Ahmad, I wish some days that I was a kid again. There was something about back then that, I don't know, felt different. It's not some "Back in my day . . ." kind of thing you can imagine a crotchety old man saying, fist-shaking at the youths. I'm talking about that sense of newness, that sense of things not being rigidified. Which is to say, that sense of experimentation—mixing it up, mix-matchin' and mismatchin', being unenthralled with what has been said to be the only way to be.

Childhood is where a bunch of indeterminate, experimental things happen. Its indeterminacy and experimentation ground what I find to be a rich site of how stuff gets worked out, how stuff is newly known in the vulnerabilities of the working out of stuff. My childhood possessed a muted gender indeterminacy that glimpsed timid assertions of gender commingling with my blackness in ways unsutured from a presumptive

fixation on racialized blackness and cisgender status, but were, terroristically, pummeled away from emerging. My childhood, I give to you all, is an aperture into what kinds of relations one can have with their gendered or disjoined gendered imposition amid crawling roaches and *heating up the house with the oven*, amid terror and albeit brief *joy in the noise*.[1]

I begin with the house. In truth, I cannot say it was a home, a distinction that rests in whether one can or cannot dwell, by which I mean—to Martin Heidegger's delight—to be at peace and safeguarded from danger, from evils, from precarity, and most fundamentally from precisely the things that might disallow the emergence of what is wrongly labeled one's "nature." I was housed, and surely loved, but I did not dwell, was not at home, I have to confess.

One's house is usually where one finds loved ones, and that was for sure the case with me growing up. But the house was also rules, codes of conduct, expectations, coercions—oh, the coercions. The house was not always a place of solace; it was, sometimes, a place of terror, a place of disallowance, a place that mirrored the very structures quelling me. The house was where I wanted my hair in puff balls (because that was a thing back in this century's aughts) but my aunt was taken aback, said that if I were to have my hair styled that way, the kids at school would chant *Marquis is a faggot! Marquis is a faggot!* The house was also where my mother, upon the conclusion of a news story where toddler siblings in matching purple PJs conspired together to break free of their crib, was peeved about her inability to know for sure the gender of these toddlers. *That mother needs to put them kids in clothes where I know if they boys or girls*, she said.

I have to begin with the house because, though coaxed into reiterating a narrative of especially black households as fundamentally good and well-intentioned, there was still violence. Dirty laundry aired, I suppose. The house did not permit some things, and I would have—and

I think many others would have too—loved if the house had cared for all the parts of me. But perhaps I cannot blame the house for its stanching of my gender nonnormative wings, or in reality fledgling feathers at best, because it was only doing what its architectural sinew demanded. In my small and quiet skirts away from alignment, I loved the unknown of what had not been offered me. Those skirted deviant movements of hair that I did not have or ambulations that were quelled with swiftness swelled the abode. They were glimpses of the "trans," and the house's violence cannot have done anything but do what it did: disallow those movements. For trans is an itch that things are not enough, a project of undoing, be it gender, institutions, the fabric of the social world; trans is *a project that cannot be haunted because it never tries to build a house*.[2]

Those invalid movements and desires attempted to build no houses or structures. They sought only a creatively generative process of unbuilding, a weaving of subjective modalities through, precisely, the interrogative. Another way of unsanctioned being and becoming through abolishing gender's tethers on my ontological stitches. Those movements and desires were that of an invitational and capacious transness by way of its setting aside of architecture—which must delimit and exclude in order to maintain itself, prohibiting entrance of the improper and unauthorized debris from the gloriously unruly outdoors—in favor of *anarchitecture*.

The anarchitectural, by way of Jack Halberstam, is a process of unmaking that loves the process of re- and unbuilding more than the outcome of what the house looks like. If we have the body as house, as architecture, the process of anarchitecture does not care much for making things work inside the existing framework, brushing off dust there and tightening a screw here; it is excited about tearing the parameters apart. And this, Halberstam says, departs from the masculinist tendencies of modernist architecture and brutalist styles of a will to instantiate power—phallic erections and whatnot (which is not the same as the mere likeness or possession of a penis)—toward not a "feminine"

destination but, indeed, revelatory in the *project of dismantling and remaking*. As such, the anarchitectural indexes a certain orientation to the structural and purported rigidity of architecture. The building looks sturdy. It looks permanent, rigid, strong. And the building might get a new paint job or different decorations. Hey, it might even come under new management, changing the name on the front. But, it is presumed, the building is there, its load-bearing walls fixed.

Yet the anarchitect tinkers with the building and its logics of buildingness. That anarchitect—who I'm sure uses *they/them* pronouns (for now), I hereby tentatively decree—ain't building nothing, really, just tearing things down and messing with stuff so that what the building is to be is, precisely, that tearing and messing. Because what a building is can only be so much, is only permitted to be so much. So the anarchitect, well, they give glimpses of the things buildings can't be, insisting on what isn't and maybe can't be "there"—what has been necessarily voided in order for what is sanctioned to appear natural. And I like that. A lot. Because there is no fetishization of being at home or having a house to provide one with shelter. The desire for housedness is tweaked. There are other ways to feel sheltered and loved that do not rely on enclosing oneself in an impenetrable fortress. And maybe that desire that I had, inchoate as it may have been, is responsible for my infatuation with the trans, since transness, anarchitecturally, *offers an extensive vocabulary for expressing unbecoming*; anarchitecture, transly, is deployed *as a kind of wrecking ball that can knock and batter at the fortress of binary gender*. Unstitching the enclosure of the house's structural architecture is in fact more livable for some ways of becoming and unbecoming than the presumed house. I could not be loved, at least not all the way, in the house. It stanched too much. I needed more room than the architecture of the house could provide.[3]

But what else could I have expected? Well, I guess I expected, I demanded—I demand—that we, all of us, even if we have not yet emerged, be loved.

I still, despite all of this, wanted something else. I wanted the salvation of misalignment.

MAYBE IT STARTED with *The Powerpuff Girls*. My older brother, I imagined, was Blossom, his favorite color red and the oldest of the three of us; my cousin, Marcus, who had a bit of a temper at times and whose favorite color was green, I imagined as Buttercup; and I, the youngest, blue-lover and prone to lachrymose embarrassment, was Bubbles. Their fingerless might was awe inspiring to me, and the complexity of their interactions—love, anger, compassion, vulnerability, playfulness—was something I envied. It seemed even then that staying on this side of where I was told to begin and end meant I could not venture into other territories where emotional lives leapt gracefully.

The girls were one site of awe, to be sure. But they are not the figures of concern for me, even if I felt so strongly the sting of Bubbles being told "growing girls don't play with dolls" when I recalled the moments when I was told big boys don't do . . . whatever the hell "big" "boys" don't do (and, naturally, both Bubbles and I cried subsequently). What is most pertinent is the evilest of evil, the cruelest of cruel, the one whose name *strikes fear into the hearts of men* [*sic*]: Him.

Him is a Luciferian figure whose name stands for "His Infernal Majesty." Too, I'd say, Him is a sartorially gender-bending Satanic enby (Him's "Deviant Art" profile lists under the category "Gender": Male [*Or none*]). This is not to say that the show's creator, Craig McCracken, meant for Him to be identifiable as transgender. But this hardly matters most. Him gave us a villainous way to do and undo gender. With thigh-high jackboots, rouged cheeks, a pink tutu, pristine eyebrows, and a voice that swings from singsongy soprano to devilish bass, Him is unsettling. Unsettling to transphobes, for sure, but unsettling, too, because of Him's categorical irreverence. Him does not remain the same form; Him transforms sometimes, transmogrifies Him's body into a giant barrel-chested beast. In these instances, Him departs from the side Him

was expected to stay on, and if that side came with it a certain gendered expectation, it follows that Him refused cis—on this side of—gender.

Him may or may not be transgender, but Him is certainly trans, in a broad sense—a categorical gender contemptuousness. So, almost literally, but not exactly, but still illuminatively, Him is a trans villain(ess):

> [Him] becomes hell-bent on destroying the rest of "the last vestigial traces of traditional man" thereafter. . . .
>
> The task of interpreting, and dare I say *relating* to trans villainesses filters out the flimsy tolerance that is contingent upon the ability to pass as cisgender, labor as an obedient professionalized worker in neoliberal capitalism, and rethread social norms through a tapestry of white supremacy and heteronormativity.[4]

Villains in *The Powerpuff Girls* are terrorizing the Powerpuff Girls as, fundamentally, "sugar, spice, and everything nice," that stereotypic characterization of little girls. Him, as villain par excellence, as a trans villainess of sorts, deploys a demonic gender devilishness to combat not just the Powerpuff Girls but gender assignation itself; Him, a gender-bender and a dweller of the *across, beyond, the other side of* (Him's home is in a netherworld, a fractured domesticity with floating and swirling furniture. Uprooted masses of earth whirr around unfixed, moving ambulatorily—Him, in a Luciferian overturning of the cult of true womanhood of the 1950s, is the *devil* in house); Him, a prince(ss) of darkness, a differently hued blackness, is *trans to gender*; Him, living beneath the earth, in the underworld, *is trans to the world itself and all its coordinates of being*; Him, a swirling irreverence regarding gender as a categorical fixation where viewers come to realize that gendering Him is never sufficient because perhaps Him is indexical of something else.[5]

I was off-put back then, just a tad, because I didn't know what to do with Him. Him was presenting something, emerging through something, that troubled me too much; I believed the things they told me were possible and accepted their coordinates of being—that to *be*, one must be

either man or woman, and to be man or woman meant that you had to do man or woman. You could not do both, or neither, or something else entirely. Though Him troubled me, I want to believe that I continued to watch because there was something enticing and sustaining about feeling troubled. And that's what I am intrigued by: that timid inauguration into and through the troubling, a trouble Judith Butler called before I was even born "gender trouble," a gender trouble Butler, back then, for some reason could not quite call "trans." But I am calling it that now, and I am calling it that because the anarchitectural unbuilding is indexed in that language, in hindsight, of wanting something else. This is to say, I desired. I desired another way that was prohibited to me, and that desire, which manifested in enactments and speech and thought and politicality, matters. And it matters *just as much as any more observable social behavior like homoerotic sex or gender nonconformity*. It fuels how I texture my traversal of the world, how I engage others and on what grounds I consider engagement, what is permitted and deemed possible with and for others. That desire is both immaterial—which does not discredit its efficacy—and material, as it is unobservable yet is that which produces my methods of engagement. I desired the possibility of Him, and though I do not look like Him, nor do I have the same gendered impact on the world and others as someone like Him, to desire an outside and otherwise to the architectural lodgings you've been forced to bear is consequential. The enactment of transing permits identification *with people who were not in some observable ways "like" you*, so being trans to gender might express a desire, which fuels action—indeed, which *is* action—to engender modes of life unsanctioned. To desire and engender the undermining, the rejection, the subversion, the disdain for, the cistem.[6]

I didn't think then, nor do I think now, that in those moments I was transgender. But I gazed a little too long, smirked in shy affirmation at a murmurous *trans* as an ineffable longing and tinkering toward unsanctioned deviant ~~gendered~~ movements, desires, subjective tremors; glitchy subjectivity in service of a radical trans feminist subjectivity-as-politicality.

Subjectivity found and unfound elsewhere—found and unfound, maybe, in the social world that will emerge after the abolition of this one, a terrain that is still consequential and attendant upon our sense of (un)self even though it is not (yet) here. I was not and am not, now, in the pervasive sense, transgender, but it is possible—and, perhaps, imperative—that trans index a certain way of life unbeholden to the mandates of gender. Trans ways of life can be shared by people who may not have undergone affirmative surgery, who may not dress as the gender "opposite" to that which they were assigned, who may not use pronouns that "clash" with their natal assignation of what others might expect. As way of life, trans opens up affiliation with it on deeper grounds than the corporeal; as way of life, trans yields something radical in the relational, in the ethical and social, the ontological and epistemic. Trans offers variegated ways to emerge into oneself. Those variations of a self I knew not, a self that was foreign to me but deeply felt as kin, are what intrigue me now, and what continue to haunt me in ways removed and intimately visceral.

With one character, compounded by a smattering of animated behaviors and words from others in Townsville, *The Powerpuff Girls* gave me something I couldn't articulate back then. What it did flawlessly was insist on the possibility of being more than simply what was given. And that, just that, can be everything.

I think you have to actually have a gender to be gay, and I don't think Frieza has one.—SoldierPhoenix, IGN Boards, 2014

That might have all trickled into *Dragon Ball Z*. I was a kid who liked drawing, though my artistic form now consists of words rather than images. Any kid looking for cool things to draw found a trove of human and Saiyan subjects in the animated physiques of Goku and Vegeta, Piccolo and Cell, Trunks and Gohan. The ripples, the detail, all of it provided canvases to reinscribe into our own notepads, their spectacular worlds our spectacle to be reproduced on our pages, living their gorgeous monstrosity with each pen-stroke.

Aside from the illustrative opportunities, there was raised an identificatory question for me: the answer to the oft-asked "Who's your favorite *DBZ* character?" to which many responded, of course, Goku, was not my answer. I was not looking for the most powerful, most badass fighter on Earth or Namek. And though I might have tentatively answered the question on the grounds of coolness by choosing Piccolo—who I must say, y'all, is the blackest motherfucker on that, or any, show[7]—on the grounds of identification, however, or on the grounds of who provided me with an amplification of my subjective curiosity for possibility to become more than what has been given, was Frieza.

Frieza is, more than he knew, the horrible story. He controlled his own imperial army in Universe 7, feared by many for his ruthlessness. He is the primary antagonist for the third season of *DBZ*, it being known, aptly, as "The Frieza Saga." But he was more than all of this; he jammed the continuity of brolic *DBZ* fighters, giving kids like me, given to the nonmasculine, the queer- and trans-adjacent, different possibilities for living life.

His voice was the queer inflection for me. It was enrapturing, though for others in the *DBZ* fan world it was unsettling, an automatic scarlet gay letter. Frieza's voice, for me, was a welcome halt to the seamless trajectory of the Namekians' deep growl or Vegeta's too-cool-for-school timbre. Frieza introduced the valid commingling of a certain kind of toughness I would later critique, but nonetheless a toughness that could coexist with what is so often maligned as a "gay voice." To me, he sounded like a way out, an aperture looking out onto the grand gender terra.

He had four different forms. The first is what folks often remember, the puny-looking introductory form with "that voice." He morphs into a devilishly horned muscle-bound iteration that Vegeta calls, quite simply, "absolute madness." This form has that raspy, grainy, tough-dude voice so beloved by teenage boys growing into a masculinity characterized by

anything and everything not-gay. His next form wasn't all that transformy to me, I recall. It was just another version of the previous iPhone: a bit more filigree, but pretty much the same, only now his head looked like that of an Omeisaurus. His final form, however, bucked final formality. Final forms are supposed to reveal the monster within, manifest the once-dormant beast just waiting to erupt and wreak monstrous havoc. But Frieza's final form: sleek, quaint, even. Like an adult-sized nubile baby. In an interview, Akira Toriyama, the creator of *Dragon Ball Z*, said Frieza's final form was purposefully made to look small and less menacing: Toriyama wanted to go against the expectation that villains and monsters become bigger and meaner-looking the stronger they are. This Frieza is sleek, unassuming. But the best part: his voice is back to its high inflection. At his most powerful, Frieza is not massive and masculinely grotesque; he is, if you will, thoroughly *feminine*. There was, for me, fertility there. That was a site, although villainous, for me to see another kind of strength and power not affixed to what my action figures looked like. I claim Frieza as transy kinfolk, affectively. He beautifully, ravagingly misaligns.

What many so often mistook for and imposed as "gayness" was paltry language. They had only the language of, definitionally, gender-nonconformity, which equals a man who desires sexual intimacy with other men which equals effeminacy which equals gay. But even they were off, so, so off. Frieza, I don't think was gay—but who knows; Frieza may have had a raucously, beautifully deviant sex life—because gayness disintegrates on Frieza. Frieza may not have had a gender, as Soldier-Phoenix so acutely and surprisingly put it on the Imagine Games Network message board. Frieza defied gender; Frieza, perhaps, didn't really care about gender—"gender" was not on Frieza's level as he was way too trans for that, too irreverent toward the ways gender requires linear and aligned form, being a good and proper subject. And I want to locate that as the site of my affinity, my love for Frieza. I must say there were moments when I rooted against Goku as the inevitable victor. I wanted Frieza, evil as he was, to come out on top, if only to show all those other

kids I knew who homophobically encountered Frieza that he would not lose because of his departure from their gendered castigations, his departure from their expectations. And he didn't. I just wanted them to see that. Frieza's voice, his black nails that I want so badly to think is not their natural color, his darkened lips that I want so badly to think is not their natural color too—all of this made Frieza a force. His transgressions made him loveable in some small way.

AND IT MIGHT HAVE all resulted in my glorious meltdown with *Steven Universe*. The show is one of the queerest shows to have ever had eyes laid on it. *Steven Universe* allows chosen family to take center stage, nonheteronormativity to flourish, emotional breadth to stretch its limbs, and intergalactic kin to be forged through words and shields and fists and whips and spears. Steven and Garnet and Pearl and Amethyst express a subjective polysemy, a testament to the possibilities within and without, possibilities, too, within withins and within withouts. *Steven Universe* permits the validity of fusion. Beings the result of fusion *are the product of multiple Gems (or half-Gems, who can fuse with both Gems and humans). Fusions are formed when the participants are emotionally harmonious with each other. This state can be spontaneous, but it is usually achieved deliberately through a synchronized dance*.[8] Fusions, put differently, express the potentiality of one as more than their given ontologies—one can be and become more than what we've been given.

Which is why I cannot help but love, but desire as possible, Stevonnie. Stevonnie is the fusion of Steven and his best friend, Connie Maheshwaren. On the account of the show's creator, Rebecca Sugar, Stevonnie is intersex and nonbinary. "I am an experience," Stevonnie's Instagram profile reads, echoing Garnet's description of them—"You are not two people and you are not one person. You are an experience" (S1, E37)—"Intersex, non-binary, they/them," their profile concludes. I never really wanted to be the conflation of masculine and feminine, as if those are the only kinds of gender one could mix and match; much less did I

understand myself then or now as being feminine on the inside, having some essential gendered core I was tapping into to others' chagrin. I wanted unheld and unbeholden subjectivity. A possible name for this is a gender identification not subject to the dictates of the gender binary or sexual dimorphism.

Such an identification, I think, is shorthanded in nonbinariness. They/them pronouns index this. For now at least. I've taken to thinking of and emerging through myself via the *they* and the nonbinary. At this time, which may change whenever the mood and sociopolitical efficacy strikes me. This affiliation with and usage of—not identification as or feeling that I am—nonbinariness is, at base, for me, a politicized gender irreverence. *They/them* is not really the "correct" way to address me; I'd actually be fine with being addressed by *he/him* pronouns, *she/her* pronouns, *xe* pronouns, *hir* pronouns—literally any. And, in fact, I have been, which is pretty cool to me. My recourse to they/them pronouns to describe myself is an attempt to mark my irreverence toward the gender binary, and to mark my tentative and always-in-process relationship to gender nonbinariness. Put differently, this is not to say I "am" nonbinary but, more pointedly, to say I seek a nonbinaristic relationship to my own understanding of my gender—an attempted unrelation to gender, as it were. So, it matters less what pronoun one uses for me; I am, ultimately, pronoun indifferent. That capaciousness is simply another attempt to express an irreverence and disdain for the gender binary and the ways it might inhere in pronouns. What I ultimately want to do is decline gender. So, really, use whatever pronouns for me that you want. Just don't *gender* me. *Don't you put that evil on me*.[9]

I can't lie and say that this is original; though I came to nonbinariness by way of a genuine desire to encounter the world politically, intellectually, discursively, and relationally differently rather than corporeally differently, I did also find solace and affirmation (and encouragement, to be sure) in Emi Koyama.

Koyama is responsible for really making trans feminism a thing. And for that I am already indebted. Via this trans feminism, Koyama bears a particular relationship to gender, one that is not just, say, an emphasis on transgender woman or insistent on the validity and importance of representing trans people positively in media. Koyama, unlike me, *used to identify as this gender and that gender, and even the neither gender*. But, like me, *nowadays she's tired of it all. "Genderqueer" used to work just fine when it was a non-identity, but now that there are communities of genderqueer people who identify with the label "genderqueer" it no longer quite applies*. There is something refreshing in Koyama's yearning for language that in fact fractures language inasmuch as the language we have is predicated on logics of staying on the side of the gendered world you were told to, and doing what that side demands. Nonbinariness, then, indexed in they/them pronouns (for now), is what Koyama explains as *not identify[ing] with any particular gender, but*, Koyama is keen to make clear, nonbinariness *does not so strongly identify with the state of having no gender to claim that as an identity either*.[10] Nonbinariness is the rejection of gender as an organizing apparatus for one's subjectivity. It is the refusal to be required to show up in the world on gendered grounds in order to show up at all. Nonbinariness is not itself a gender identity. Do not bring that mess to me, to us. It does not want your cookies, your pamphlets, or anything else you're selling, gendered world; it does not wish to hear your "Good" Word. It is too preoccupied with living in the world that this world cannot yet bear, living abolished (un)gendered life here and now, to your chagrin.

Stevonnie, then, is and must be more than positive nonbinary gender representation. Stevonnie, with their Gem-human fusion never before seen in literally any galaxy, is more than "representation" could do. We are not to end at representation; we cannot simply say that now, finally, we *see* a Stevonnie on TV, ergo, we've arrived. I don't even know if we can "see" nonbinariness. Stevonnie might be necessary as a beginning—but I'm not sure, the qualifying concession makes me uneasy—for

Stevonnie-like *representations do not simply re-present an already existing reality but are also doors into making new futures possible*. Stevonnie, representationally, *bring[s] new visual grammars into existence*, but it is the after-representation where things really happen, the new visual and haptic grammars made possible because Stevonnie, ancestrally, elder-ly perhaps, facilitates other ways of being—ways that may break out of representational logics altogether.[11] Stevonnie gives precedent for the first step in my departure from my human form, a form endemically white and cis and masculine. Before them, I didn't know that it was possible for Gems and humans to fuse, for one to be neither this thing they gave me nor the only other thing being rationed out. One could be, maybe, simultaneously, both and neither. And I get it, why they didn't offer this as an option. They made bank off of the two and only two choices. Who would want to go back to those options—which is really just one option, unchosen—when there is so much room to move in the options not given?

Steven Universe is not another show in which the boy protagonist befriends and eventually, inevitably falls in love with his girl best friend; it is not another show that nods toward "progressivism," throwing in a "Strong Female Character" to solidify its progressivism. It gives so much more, is so much richer. The Gems' shapeshifting gives mutability to our bodies, our subjective inhabitation. One is not confined to what one has been given. The seriousness with which mutability is offered as possible is a heels-dug-in rejoinder to the noise surrounding mutable life. Surrounding trans life. When they tell you, in the face of your nonbinary identification and they/them pronouns, "I identify as an attack helicopter," Amethyst *actually shapeshifts into an attack helicopter*. Like, OK, you identify as an attack helicopter? So do I, in this moment, and I take that seriously. Now where do we go from here? Where do we go from the taking seriously of radical identifications? From dis- and misidentifications? Rose Quartz believed deeply that all life is precious and worth protecting, and that must include the life of those who misalign

with the implicit parallelisms that bestow life and livability. Life that looks like, yes, identification as an attack helicopter and, too, life that looks like a fourteen-year-old boy with a pink pet lion reminiscent in affect of Ash Ketchum's Charmeleon. Because perhaps someday long, or shortly, after the gamerdudebro throws out his identification as an attack helicopter in order to shut down your nonbinariness there will be someone whose livability is predicated on their, as it were, attack helicopterness. And I want to start to cultivate that as a possibility now, no matter how absurd, because today's absurdity was yesterday's transsexuality, and possibly tomorrow's attack helicopterality.

In the third episode of the fifth season we are introduced to "defective" gems known as the "Off Colors." No lie, I grinned super hard watching this episode, lounging in my mother's bed as I was home for the holidays and she was putting up Christmas decorations. The Off Colors live among one another, fearful of being found by scanners who'd detect their gems and shatter them for their imperfections, which is only to say their misalignment with how Gems are supposed to be. They live anyway, knowing that doom might be literally around the corner or down the path of a cavern. Their little space is where only those who don't belong, belong. How lovely is that? What is it like to come together with others on the grounds that you do not fit? The Off Colors belong together precisely because they do not belong. A promiscuous assemblage of things that are not supposed to live but live nonetheless. They are, as Garnet remarks in a different context episodes later, "on the outskirts of the possible" (S5, E15). And that is what it has been all about for me. It is where my grin and giddiness reside. Stevonnie and the shapeshifting and the fusions and the awesome gender play show what life could be like if the outskirts and the nonbelongers were our starting place. When we begin there for our ethical comportment and sense of what exists, we get something else. What I'm getting at is maybe more sentimental than anything: with all its gender radicality, its chosen kinfolk, its intergalactic extirpation of embodied common

sense, Stevonnie brings to me, and to us too, livable life on the outskirts of the possible.

: : :

Again, I didn't think then, nor do I think now, that in those moments I was transgender. I didn't necessarily want to be Bubbles, my brother to be Blossom, my cousin to be Buttercup. And I didn't think we already were, because it was crucially clear that we were boys, had to be boys, had to continue being—which is to say becoming, painstakingly—boys, and boys could not be the Powerpuff *Girls*. I didn't want to be Frieza, nor Stevonnie. Yet still, blessedly, I felt for and with all of them. This was an identification of proportions monstrously small and exceedingly massive, an identification falling across professed and liminal and allusive genders but also, more deeply, an identification *through* genders into another gendered, another transed gendered or something-like-but-not-gendered, existence. When Bubbles teared up at being told "growing girls don't play with dolls," I felt kinship with her. I have been told, too, that growing boys don't play with action figures, growing boys don't wear their hair in puff balls, growing boys don't hang out with, platonically, girls. (When I first got a MySpace profile, curating my friends list, my brother instructed, "You gotta have you some niggas. You can't just be cool with girls.") I wanted to cry, too, and sometimes did, because people like us, Bubbles, we mourn the loss of those ways we were free and freeing.

While I was not, in those moments, transgender, I was, however, if I am allowed to say this, trying to develop a kinship, a coalitional solidarity, with the trans. I was made cis, and that which I am trying to emerge into is a refutation of cisness's hold over me. As coercive assignation as male at birth ([C]AMAB) creates the expectation of continuity, cisgender comes into being through a constructed declaration. One, irrespective of the assignation, inasmuch as the assignation is imbued with a sovereign divine decree—whether medico-juridical, or that of a deity—must do something with that assignation. What I did with that assignation

was lament it, though I did not conceptualize precisely what that assignation was; what I did was yearn for unassignation, move toward nega-assignation through secretly moving my body and my hands and my hair and my voice in deviant ways, imagine myself as being more capacious in my stylizations of a burgeoning subjectivity. They made me cis, yes, but there were substantive moments—a substantiveness that amounts not really to the criteria that might traverse a recognized gendered threshold, I admit—where I rejected the making. There were moments when the cistem failed, and I intentionally, though fleetingly, briefly, chose the wrong answer, sabotaged my test scores so that I could see what it felt like to, not fail, but ace another test.

I'VE LONG DESPISED the "born this way" narratives. It takes on the logic of cisnormativity and the belief that the more long-standing something is, the more valid, the more true, it is. It says that if you have been such and such a way since a young age, that way must be what you truly are. And it makes sense that many queer and trans folks sought to adopt this language, as it made them more intelligible, more understood, and isn't that all we really want, to stave off our emo teenager-ness of "Nobody understands me!"? I in fact do not believe that I, or anyone, is born any particular way, if that is to be taken as having some legible innate desire or identification preexistent to and independent of the ways we are socialized, the language available to us, the other entities we have to interrelate and thus emerge in the world with and through. *I often say I knew I was a girl since the age of three or four*, Janet Mock confesses. But, *when I say I always knew I was a girl with such certainty, I erase all the nuances, the work, the process of self-discovery. I've adapted to saying I always knew I was a girl as a defense against the louder world,* she says, a world that required reckoning only on its terms.[12] There is so much tinkering and experimentation and figuring things out, so many false starts. To say that one always knew one was "trapped in the wrong body," a paltry and insufficient narrative, erases all the hours of sheer toil, the *years of passionate detective work* that are absolutely integral to forging, piece by piece, trans subjectivity. All the *pained questioning, theories formed,*

ditched, taken up again, revised, before finally somehow through the osmosis of popular culture, they arrived at the answer that they were trans.[13] I, we, needn't say that we have known since the origins of our thoughts that we were not what they claim we are. We needn't play their game, adopt their rules and grammar, though I know that is a way we might be heard by them. But the interest here is cistem failure, and the belief in the increased validity of a claim the more long-standing it is, is, indeed, the cissiest of cistems. Failing the cistem and making it fail might mean we are permitted to simply say that while maybe we didn't know we were girls when they said we were boys, boys when they said we were girls, maybe we can be entirely comfortable saying simply I do not know what I *am*, but I know for sure that I am not what you say I am.

I surely was not born this way, which is to say on this side, cis, etymologically. I was very deliberately, very meticulously, crafted through violent means to remain on this side. I still rebelled, but not in conflagratory ways; there were few explosive or spectacularized displays of a femininity that belied how my person was conscripted, few sartorial manifestations of a femininity thought not my province. I have long been one of pretty basic bodily adornments, a choice made in part because of my lack of style but also, I have come to realize, because of a desire to refuse to announce in a clarion sartorial call on which side I fell. (Though this is in some ways disingenuous, as my basicness is largely read through a masculine vein understood as the lack of "putting on" something, a way to mark femininity and its adornments as added "frills.") But still, to be seen as being on "this side" is closer to a making-fit and further from a seeing-as. When Jordy Rosenberg writes, novelistically, *I am a guy by design, not birth*, I know he is speaking of a particular kind of trans masculinity.[14] But none of us, if I can say this in a way in which you understand what I'm suggesting—which some of y'all won't; some of y'all will misconstrue my words, which, I guess, is understandable—none of us are guys by birth: we are all, because we have been, at every turn, coaxed and goaded and pummeled and threatened and required to erect a very constructed architecture, guys by design. A horrible, awful, entic-

ing design. I might be so bold as to say I was not born cis; I was made, diligently, maliciously, cis.

But what happens when you reject the making? What happens when we do not run back to the side we've been tasked with staying on? It is intriguing what happens, or what might happen, if we commit to wearing the garb, sharing the politics, having the tonal registers, speaking the language of other sides nowhere near this side even if we are said to still have an address saying that we are from and live on this side. It does not seem like it is even all about looking the part, as if there is only one part and as if there is only one look. It is not even about the address on your ID, because how many times have we gone to the DMV, presented our documents, asked if the written address is still current, and said no. Sometimes we feel ashamed, but how joyous is the feeling of having moved somewhere else, to somewhere unsanctioned by the regulative mandates of too-rigid identification documents? It's that joyfulness in the moving elsewhere that I'm after. Because, really, we are and must always be moving. That ID says I live there, at that address—an address on their grid—but, really, I am not always there. Right now, I am here, at this DMV. Sometimes I am in my car, on the road, which is where I might feel most comfortable. Sometimes I stay with a buddy for a week, crashing on their couch and eating Pringles while binge-watching reruns of *The Office*. Sometimes I am at work or on campus or at the store or running errands. And, yes, sometimes I am at the address on my ID, but I am in this room, then that room; sometimes I am in the shower or in bed; sometimes it is dirty or clean; sometimes the aroma lingers from the feast I prepared; and sometimes I have guests over, some of whom stay the night and some of whom forget their bags, which go into my closet for years. Is that the same address? It is not, then, that I want the address on my ID to "match" where I am because I am always elsewhere, I want to be elsewhere, unable to be *addressed*. And that's the thing that I am running, ceaselessly, toward, away from the address they put on my ID.

NOTES

PREFACE

1. Keegan, *Lana and Lilly Wachowski*, 46. Emphasis in original.

2. Keegan, *Lana and Lilly Wachowski*, 46. I must also note that my operative term has been utilized in a similar, though still different, context. Viviane Vergueiro's thesis "Por inflexões decoloniais de corpos e identidades de gênero inconformes: uma análise autoetnográfica da cisgeneridade como normatividade," drawing on decolonial thought and world-systems analysis, reads:

> I use "world-cystem" in reference to Grosfoguel (2012, 339), who characterizes a "Westernized, christianity-centric, modern, colonial, capitalist, patriarchal world [c]ystem" that produces "epistemic hierarchies" that—according to the specific reading that this thesis offers—exclude, minimize, or silence non-cisgender perspectives. The grammatically corrupted "cystem," like other, similar corrruptions, has the objective of emphasizing the structural and institutional character—the "cystemic"—of cis-sexist perspectives, to move beyond the individualizing paradigm of the "transphobia" concept. (15; translated from Portuguese by my partner: thank you ☺)

3. Chen, *Trans Exploits*, 96; Richardson, *Queer Limit of Black Memory*, 7.

4. Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 1.

5. Detournay, "Racial Life of 'Cisgender,'" 60; Krell, "Is Transmisogyny Killing Trans Women of Color?," 234; Chen, *Trans Exploits*, 98; Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 80; Rosenberg, *Confessions of the Fox*, 296.

BACK IN THE DAY

1. First italicized portion from Beanie Sigel, "Remember Them Days," 2000; second italicized portion from Psalm One (ft. Manic Focus), "Joy in the Noise," 2017.

2. Awkward-Rich, "Trans, Feminism," 833.

3. The italics in this and the two preceding paragraphs come from Halberstam, "Unbuilding Gender." Emphasis added.

4. Blanchard, "In Defense of the Trans Villainess."

5. Italicized portions from Warren, "Calling into Being," 271.

6. Italicized portions from Stein, *Avidly Reads*, 70.

7. I say this tongue in cheek, of course. I don't *really* mean this.

Actually, yeah, I do mean this. The blackest, hands down.

8. "Fusion Gems," Steven Universe Wiki, https://steven-universe.fandom.com/wiki/Fusion_Gems (accessed September 3, 2021).

9. "Don't you put that evil on me, Ricky Bobby! Don't you put that on us!" *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby*, dir. Adam McKay (Columbia Pictures, 2006).

10. Italicized portions from Emi Koyama "Frequently Asked Questions: Basic Information," Eminism.org, https://eminism.org/faq/basic.html (accessed September 3, 2021).

11. Italicized portions from Tourmaline, Stanley, and Burton, *Trap Door*, xviii.

12. Mock, *Redefining Realness*, 16.

13. Italicized portions from Seymour, "None Shall Pass."

14. Rosenberg, *Confessions of the Fox*, xii.

HEART OF CISNESS

1. Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet," King Solomon Baptist Church, Detroit, Michigan, April 12, 1964, http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/blackspeech/mx.html.

2. ross, "Call It What It Is."

3. Ziyad, "My Gender Is Black." The quote in the sentence preceding the block quote here is from Joshua Chambers-Letson, *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life* (New York: NYU Press, 2018), xiv.

4. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 77, emphasis in original; "trans to gender" is from Warren, "Calling into Being," 271.

5. Chaudhry, "Trans/Coalitional Love-Politics," 530, 535. Chaudhry notes that in the field "there is, as yet, limited scholarship attending to how cisgender has emerged and been taken up institutionally in opposition to transgender"—a very astute observation (522). This very book is an attempt to put forth that scholarship.

6. Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*, 7, 2.

7. Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*, 136.

8. Crawley, "Stayed | Freedom | Hallelujah," 29.