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feminist esoterisms
and the abolition of man

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Feminist Esoterisms and the Abolition of Man

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Preface. In the Cards

I didn't think much of anything about tarot until sometime around 2016. I'd seen tarot reading represented as "fortune telling" in countless movies and television shows, which always seemed to give it a racialized connotation (via Romani or Creole people), associating it with nomadic social formations in suspicious, if not outright antagonistic, relation to the state. But those representations always simultaneously positioned it as superstition (perhaps even the most exemplary superstition), and usually implied a scam. In the media, tarot hovered somewhere in the vicinity of grift, hoax, nonsense.

Tarot is also a highly gendered practice, and its appearance in cultural texts as nonsense always slides into the mythology of the irrational feminine. The mainstream approach to tarot—in equal measure dismissive and demonizing—allows for a politics of representational countersignification, and tarot seems to have a rather significant presence in various feminisms, with a highly visible presence on social media platforms like Instagram. That is largely where my interest in tarot lies: in contemporary feminist practice, which can also be a practice of anticapitalist, abolitionist, and decolonial worldmaking.

But when I first really began to notice tarot, I wasn't thinking about any of this. I was at a community farmer's market in Richmond, Virginia. I was there with my child, Isadora, who was four, and their mother, Julietta, my best friend. As our queer family wandered the park, dreaming up a week worth's of food from the produce on offer, Isadora found an independence that suited them. They spoke with the farmers (who often gave them a loose berry, or snow pea), or watched musicians (sometimes joining in with spare instruments set out for just such impromptu jams). At some point, I became aware that they had taken to a young person at a rickety card table offering ten-dollar tarot readings. Realizing that Isadora was occupying their time, and potentially making it appear they weren't available to do a reading, we paid them to read for Isadora.

Tarot readings became a common, if irregular, occurrence. Isadora would sit as Natasha pulled cards; usually they would talk without anyone else listening, but once, I sat in. Natasha did a very simple "Three Fates" reading and I was amazed by their ability to explain what they thought the cards meant to a four-year-old. They framed it less in terms of time, and more in terms of things Isadora might be struggling with and aspiring toward. Isadora was completely entranced and appeared to be really thinking through what Natasha was saying. It wasn't in any way a scene of "fortune telling." It was a scene of pedagogy, one that didn't involve a teacher "explaining" something they "knew," but instead involved a complex dance to make sense of a few cards where the reader offers enough of a guide for the querent to construct meaningful sense; *which* cards in which position introduces the necessary aleatory spur to the event, but the event really gathers the whole situation into itself as the reader and querent craft a narrative together. In this moment, I had my first sense that tarot is a practice of modulating attention to the necessarily situated and situational character of all interpretation.[1]

Around the same time, I noticed a curated section of tarot and witchcraft books growing just inside the door, right across from the counter, of Chop Suey Books in Richmond. As someone who reads a lot, I've spent a lot of time in the store since moving to Virginia, and over the years I've come to know the people who work there, following some of them on Instagram. Julie, who curated this particular selection of books, began to devote their Instagram account more and more to tarot, and with a friend, they created a small collective called Practical Witch Supply. The collective offered readings and classes. One of their first nondigital productions was a zine, available at the now-thriving Richmond Zine Fest (held at the Richmond Public Library), called *Anti-Capitalism: Spells and Thoughts*. It offers four spells: "Spells for Turning Anxious Energy/Depression into Righteous Anger," "Spell for Money Healing," "Spell for Protection Against Capitalism," and "Spell for Re-Imagining the American Dream."[2] The spells sometimes suggest gathering with a group "as we are able," but many presume the possibility of a seemingly solitary practice. They work with simple things likely to be at hand: thread, button, flame, breath, something sharp that can cut. What Practical Witch Supply was doing piqued my interest enough that I began to read books that they recommended and took up a fledgling tarot practice.

One of the first books I bought on tarot was Michelle Tea's *Modern Tarot*, a book firmly located in US West Coast queer and feminist punk politics. Tea

notes that "we are living in a moment of renewed interest in the mystical. Call it New Age or 'Woo,' call it Witchcraft or the Intuitive Arts or Mind-Body-Spirit; name yourself Bruja or Conjure or Pagan or Priest/ess. The point is, I can't swing a magic wand without hitting someone who's got a crystal in their pocket, or just got their aura read, or is lighting a candle for the new moon" (2017, 6). Tea subtly connects this "renewed interest" to feminist politics (summoning the second-wave mantra, "the personal is the political") and to a kind of attention to materiality and affect that I find enormously resonant with a lot of work in affect theory and feminist new materialisms. Tea writes:

> People are turning to ancestral practices for a sense of enduring longevity, and comfort. To help stay sane and grounded in the midst of so much cultural insanity. To source a different kind of power in hopes of making changes both personal and political. From learning meditation to fighting off a cold with some homemade fire cider; from indigo-dyeing your curtains to strengthening your intuition with the aid of the Tarot, such old world practices are capturing our imaginations and providing us with meaningful ways to impact our world. Tarot offers moments of deep connection during a time when connection is ubiquitous but rarely delves beneath the surface. And in a time where most religion seems irrelevant—dated, boring, antagonistic to peace—the affirming and personal nature of the Tarot offers a spiritual experience that is gentle, individual, and aspirational. (7)

At first, I read all of this with a great deal of embarrassment. Despite an abiding interest in gothic literary texts that engaged with mystical or "supernatural" forces to register the intragenerational violences of capitalist coloniality, my understanding of esoteric and occult knowledges was influenced by the highly dismissive attitude of critical theorists like Theodor Adorno, who scathingly dismisses such knowledge in *The Stars Down to Earth* and, with Max Horkheimer, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. My education sutured my thinking to Theory with a capital *T* (mostly "difficult" male, European philosophers), which meant I felt like esoteric texts could be engaged only via critique, only across a distance of skeptical disbelief.

Alexander Chee's story, "The Querent," presented tarot in a way that bypassed my skepticism about "woo-woo" knowledge by tapping into the kinds of interpretation I practice as a literary scholar, even as it short-circuits distinctions between reading and writing, between production and reception. Chee writes:

> Much of what I love about literature is also what I love about the Tarot—archetypes at play, hidden forces, secrets brought to light. . . . I felt too much like a character in a novel, buffeted by cruel turns of fate. I wanted to feel powerful in the face of my fate. I wanted to be the main character of this story, and its author. And if I were writing a novel about someone like me, this is exactly what would lead him astray. (2018, 23)

Tarot is the production of story: a patterning of symbols that is simultaneously rule-bound (there are vast traditions of knowledge surrounding tarot interpretation, often drawing from many different religious and esoteric pasts) and completely aleatory. Tarot is a way of storying the world in its ongoing unfolding, a way of sensing tendencies flowing through the present that are virtual, subjunctive, potential. Chee writes, "I learned to offer readings as a portrait of the possibilities of the present" (30). These possibilities adhere in the situation, and tarot is never just about a "reader" (or "querent") and the cards, but about an entire sprawling scene of more-than-human encounter (Snaza 2019b). Tarot is a ceremony for attending to what haunts the edges of what is perceptible, feeling out and articulating what else might be happening.

Chee's story disputes what Tea called the "ancient" or "old world" status of tarot. Arguing that "Tarot is only about one hundred years old" (24), Chee writes:

> The conventional history given on most mainstream Tarot study websites says that Tarot began as Triunfo, a card game popular among the nobility in fifteenth-century Italy. It involved neither fortunes nor heresies, though it was informed by esoteric and occult knowledge. It did not become what it is to us now until around the early twentieth century, through the efforts of the Society of Golden Dawn, the group of spiritualists that Crowley and Harris belonged to, who were attempting to codify that esoteric knowledge. They saw their deck as a tool for educating students in everything from Egyptian mythology to astrology to kabbalah. (24)

Tarot, in short, isn't very traditional, and even a rudimentary genealogy of it as a practice reveals that it is, at best, a tangled mess. Its history resonates from within European theology and statecraft turned toward the colonialist project we now gather under the name of modernity, and one of its most important mutations is explicitly linked to a project of unifying distinct esoteric traditions.

But the idea that tarot reading is pedagogical—an educational experience—is profoundly attractive to me, and Mathew Arthur helped me understand

how the pedagogical event of tarot reading may be amenable to a decolonizing reorientation precisely because of this messy history. In August of 2019, I was in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, for the first Society for the Study of Affect Summer School (SSASS), where I was coteaching a seminar with Chad Shomura on affect theories of the event. Across the week, Chad and I spent hours with a few dozen others thinking about what work "the event" does in our imaginations of worlds that exceed colonialist orders, that wouldn't be oriented around what Sylvia Wynter (2003) calls Man to describe the heteropatriarchal and colonialist overrepresentation of the human. (These conversations are everywhere felt in this book.)[3]

After the first day's sessions, Mathew and I ended up outside and somehow got to talking about tarot. For the remainder of the week, every time we found ourselves together we'd talk tarot, feminist science studies, the politics of settler engagements with Indigenous knowledge, and spirituality. In the middle of the week, Ann Cvetkovich came to Lancaster to deliver something like a keynote at SSASS. The first part was a talk giving an overview of her earlier work, with particular attention to how she came to affect theory through reading queer archives. She also described current work emerging from her time as a "killjoy" helping visitors process their experiences of visiting Allyson Mitchell and Dierdre Logue's *Inside Killjoy's Kastle* in Toronto and Los Angeles (Cvetkovich 2019).

After the talk, there was an intermission for people to use the washroom, grab a snack, move around and stretch their limbs before the Q&A. After using the washroom myself, I ran into Mathew on my way out, and our enthusiasm about Ann's talk spilled over into more tarot talk. Walking by and hearing me tell Mathew that I was reading Starhawk, Ann joined our conversation. She told me I needed to look at Vicki Noble's *Motherpeace*, a "woman-identified" tarot practice heavily influenced by Starhawk, and she said she had brought a brand-new deck with her, wondering if it would be fun to do the Q&A with the cards: each person who asks a question would draw a card, and it would guide her answer. She told us she had been hesitant, uncertain about how it might be taken, wondering if this was the right space to perform the discussion this way. When we walked back into the conference room a minute later, Ann announced her plan with the cards and passed them around the room to gather everyone's energy. The question I asked was about how to think through the complex affective and political stakes of reading second-wave feminist texts—it was one of my first attempts to articulate, in public, the queries that give rise to this book. Before she answered, I drew

the Moon, which "represents the core of the ancient female mysteries" according to Noble's *Motherpeace* ([1983] 1994, 129), even "a call to enter into the darkness" (129). While much of what Ann said that day and the next has shaped how I think about esoterism, it was her willingness in this academic context to practice tarot reading that reshaped my sense of what my project was and where it could go. I felt *Tendings* bloom into existence in that room.

I have come to think of tarot as one specific version of what Cvetkovich calls a "utopia of ordinary habit":

> Although the term *practice*, a repeated action whose meaning lies in the process of performance, might seem more appropriate here, especially because of the connections between daily practice and spiritual practice, the positive and negative connotations of the term *habit* are also relevant. Habit encompasses both the desirable and healthy regularity of practice and the putatively unhealthy compulsions and obsessions of addiction. . . . [H]abit can be a mechanism for building new ways of being in the world because it belongs to the domain of the ordinary, to activities that are not spectacular or unusual but instead arise from everyday life. (2012, 191)

This interest in the ordinary and the everyday guides *Tendings*'s elaboration of esoterisms, where specific ways of being in the world are inseparable from ways of knowing. The ordinary can be an otherwise, an elsewhere.

In *Luz en Lo Oscuro*, Gloria Anzaldúa writes, "When troubled, conocimiento prompts you to take a deep breath, shift your attention away from what's causing pain and fear, and call on a power deeper and freer than that of your ego, such as la naguala y los espíritus, for guidance. Direction may also come from an inner impression, dream, meditation, I Ching, Tarot cards. You use these spiritual tools to deal with various problems, large and small. Power comes from being in touch with your body, soul, and spirit and letting their wisdom guide you" (2015, 151). Anzaldúa's words remind me that my practice of tarot reading is, first and foremost, about attention. As Tea says, "Magic is just what comes about when you concentrate on something in so singular a way, with both purity of heart and an eye for what's possible" (2017, 25). Tarot isn't at all about "fortune telling" but is instead about a specific ritual practice of modulating attention, including attention to the ways we are affected by spirits and materialities that we mostly ignore as part of being post-enlightenment, conscious subjects. It's one practice of inviting the aleatory into our meaning-making and feeling connections between our particular presents and all the other presents, pasts, and futures that virtually, subjunctively haunt us.

INTRODUCTION

Tending Endarkenment Esoterisms

"Now let us shift. . . ."

I want to linger for a moment with this invitation, this hortatory subjunctive. These are the first words in the title of the last chapter in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Luz en Lo Oscuro*: "Now let us shift . . . conocimiento . . . inner work, public acts." She subjunctively summons a plural first person "us" before turning to the second person in key passages. Describing the "bridge" that she associates with coming to consciousness, Anzaldúa writes:

> You stand on tierra sagrada—nature is alive and conscious; the world is ensouled. You lift your head to the sky, the wingspeed of pelicans, the stark green of trees, the wind sighing through their branches. You discern faces in the rocks and allow them to see you. You become reacquainted with a reality called spirit, a presence, a force, power, and energy within and without. Spirit infuses all that exists—organic and inorganic—transcending the categories and concepts that govern your perception of material reality. Spirit speaks through your mouth, listens through your ears, sees through your eyes, touches with your hands. (2015, 137–38)

This second person address, within the context of a plural "we" formed in the wake of the exhortation, individuates the addressee but also holds them in the text's ongoing present tense. This is a ceremony, meditation, prayer—

addressed not to some kind of transcendent deity so much as to *tierra sagrada*. This land—understood as materialities of spirit, or the spiritualities of the material—stretches across all kinds of boundaries and borders that are typically policed in modernist, post-enlightenment ontoepistemologies and their animacy hierarchies.[1] What's more, the speaker—and presumably, then, any listener or reader—is *also* spirit; there is no clear distinction here between knowing subjects and known objects, between people and worlds.[2] We aren't bounded selves—"post-Enlightenment subjects" (da Silva 2007)—so much as participants in the ongoingness of worlds.[3]

Another name for the genre of Anzaldúa's second-person address might be pedagogy: an experienced person or elder leads another (or others) through a modulated, rhythmic course—a curriculum—of encounters with more-than-human environments that stimulate learning. Anzaldúa's is a ceremonial pedagogy of *tierra sagrada*, something adjacent to what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) has called "land as pedagogy." Writing from "the milieu of Nishnaabewin, not the institution of the school," Simpson says that "within the context of humility and agency, decisions about learning are in essence an agreement between individuals and the spirit world" (155). She notes, "This makes sense because this is the place where our Ancestors reside, where spiritual beings exist, and where the spirits of living plants, animals, and humans interact. To gain access to this knowledge, one has to align oneself within the forces of the implicate order through ceremony, ritual, and the embodiment of the teachings one already carries" (155). Learning and living are not distinct, they are the co-compositional impulses of the biocultural creatures that we are, and these impulses reside less in us as subjects or selves and more in the spiritual-material worlds we participate in. In *Pedagogies of Crossing*, M. Jacqui Alexander focuses on spiritual practices "through which the Sacred becomes a way of embodying the remembering of self, if you will, a self that is neither habitually individuated or unwittingly secularized" (2005, 3). Letting the words of Anzaldúa, Simpson, and Alexander resonate together, we can find the lesson that landed, grounded pedagogies are always specific, non-universal, and nonuniversalizable. They can focus our attention on how we participate in tending worlds that turn away from enlightenment world (singular) and its colonialist, homogenizing violence. And they invite us to feel how as spirit, we are always already other than self in any "habitual" sense.

Tendings: Feminist Esoterisms and the Abolition of Man is my attempt, from where I am, to practice something of the attention and care demanded by Anzaldúa's "Now let us shift." It is a book about everyday practices as

they participate in the strengthening or dissolution of what Sylvia Wynter calls Man as the overrepresentation of the human (2003). I am interested generally in what decolonial theorists call the pluriverse. Building on the Zapatista call for "a world where many worlds fit" (2018, xvii), Arturo Escobar summarizes his decolonial approach to the pluriverse thus: "*The diversity of the world is infinite*; succinctly . . . the world is made up of multiple worlds, multiple ontologies or reals that are far from being exhausted by the Eurocentric experience or being reducible to it" (68). I understand pluriversal politics as the disruption and dismantling of Man's homongenizing world, and I am especially interested in how that happens at the level of everyday practices.[4] Practices are how we participate in worlding, and the everyday names, for me, a spatiotemporal problematic where *tending* is at stake. This book is a meditation on how we participate in the tending of the colonial world and, potentially, otherwise worlds.[5] I might call this, after Denise Ferreira da Silva, who is echoing R.E.M., "the End of the World as we know it" (2014, 84): world in the singular, a world oriented around Man.

My point of departure for thinking all of this through is a pervasive interest in esoteric or occult knowledge in contemporary feminist and queer cultural production where "the witch," as Kristen Sollée writes in *Witches, Sluts, Feminists*, "is having a moment" (2017, 13). Looking around social media and the curated displays at my favorite bookstores, it's hard not to agree with Sollée; consider the flood of publications like *Queering the Tarot* (Snow 2019) and *Post-Colonial Astrology* (Sparkly Kat 2021); television shows like *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-present), the *Charmed* reboot (2018-present) and *Siempre Bruja* (2019–2020); and the endless streams of Instagram tarot and astrology posts. There are a lot of esoteric vibes in feminist and queer discourse today outside the academy.

Inside, something else seems to be going on, with much of the most exciting feminist and queer theorizing happening in and around fields we call new materialism, science studies, affect theory, and posthumanism.[6] The animating impulses of these currents in contemporary theory all look to call into question certain ideas about what humans are and how they relate to the nonhuman world, and they often (but not, of course, exclusively) articulate their versions of this questioning by turning to work in enlightenment (techno) sciences like biology, physics, chemistry, geology, ecology, and neuroscience.[7]

Let me simply juxtapose two passages. The first is from Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*, one of the most influential books in the "new materialisms," and a book that guides much of my thinking in *Tendings*:

> For the vital materialist, however, the starting point of ethics is less the acceptance of the impossibility of "reconcilement" and more the recognition of human participation in a shared, vital materiality. We *are* vital materiality and we are surrounded by it, though we do not always see it that way. The ethical task at hand here is to cultivate the ability to discern nonhuman vitality, to become perceptually open to it. (2010, 14)

The second is a passage from *Dreaming the Dark*, by Starhawk, the primary organizer of the Reclaiming network of covens in the San Francisco area beginning in the 1970s:

> Estrangement permeates our society so strongly that to us it seems to *be* consciousness itself. Even the language for other possibilities has disappeared or been deliberately twisted. Yet another form of consciousness is possible. Indeed, it has existed from earliest times, underlies other cultures, and has survived even in the West in hidden streams. This is the consciousness I call *immanence*—the awareness of the world and everything in it as alive, dynamic, interdependent, interacting, and infused with moving energies: a living being, a weaving dance. (9)

Published twenty-eight years before *Vibrant Matter*, the claims are, ultimately, quite similar to Bennett's (even if I want to mark a tendency in her language toward colonial grammars, which I will return to in chapter 2). This similarity leads me to wonder: given that both new materialisms (and other varieties of more-than-humanist feminist theorizing) and esoteric feminisms are similarly concerned with attunement to the more-than-human, how might we think about their very different relationships to the institutionalization of feminist thinking and practice in our moment? Reductively, why is it that esoteric feminisms are proliferating outside of the academy while more-than-humanist theories attuned to post-enlightenment science are thriving inside universities?

At stake in this divergence within contemporary feminist thought is, perhaps most obviously, the matter of what we often think of as spirituality. Anzaldúa reminds us that "academics disqualify spirituality except as anthropological studies done by outsiders, and spirituality is a turn-off for those exposed to so-called New Agers' use of flaky language and Pollyanna-like sentiments disconnected from the grounded realities of people's lives and struggles" (2015, 39). New materialisms, by articulating their claims about vital matter and nonhuman agency within the coordinates of post-

enlightenment secular(ist) science, upset some important presumptions about the human and its relations to the world, but also continue to tend (in the sense of granting attention to and caring for) the specific grammars and logics of that science, which I follow Denise Ferreira da Silva and Sylvia Wynter in seeing as *colonial* logics because of presumptions about liberal selves as knowing agents and the orientation of truth claims toward objective universality. And this raises for me some questions about scholarly feminist field imaginaries.

In 2008, two years before Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* was published, Sara Ahmed was already wondering about what kinds of narrative fantasy generation and policing were required to found what was coming to be called the "new materialism." In particular, she pressures the adjective "new" and the work that does, or refuses to do, in grounding the present feminist moment in claims about feminism's past(s). Thinking through the "politics of attention" that sustain (I would say tend) field imaginaries, Ahmed avers that, as a matter of ethics, "we should avoid establishing a new terrain by clearing the ground of what has come before us" (36). Ahmed's particular interest in "Imaginary Prohibitions" is the role of scientific knowledges and attention to "matter" in feminist theory, where the provocation of new materialisms to "tak[e] heed of developments in the natural sciences" (Coole and Frost 2010, 3) has to actively (if not necessarily consciously) disavow all the ways that has been happening within feminist history in order to "clear the ground" on which the adjective "new" can be enunciated.[8]

Tendings is also concerned with the role of science in feminist theorizing, and with the questions this concern raises about how fields work, but my specific interests are different from Ahmed's in two ways. First, I want to ask not about how a history of scientifically oriented feminism gets forgotten by the current scientifically oriented feminism, but about why *scientifically oriented* feminisms are a presumptive field attachment. That is, I wonder what role "science" (or, as science studies would prefer, sciences or scientific practices) plays in how "feminist theory" works as a matter of tending, which is ultimately what I think a "discipline" or "field" is: a pattern in the ongoingness of worlds. I wonder how attachment to science articulates feminism through what I will call, after Anzaldúa but also work in science studies itself, a politics of disqualification whereby spiritual, esoteric, or nonrational (according to enlightenment standards) knowledges have to be disavowed, ignored, or discredited.[9] Second, I want to ask about the ways that attachments to "science" also enclose feminist theory in homogenizing colonialist grammars of enlightenment at the levels of the (knowing, "self-determined") subject

and the emplotment of history. As Jayna Brown puts it, "a trust in Western scientific knowledge must be interrogated, and the 'we' of new materialist thinking situated historically. . . . Materialist studies need to attend to the ways in which systems of inequality are embedded in our understandings of that materiality and the processes by which scholars theorize it" (2021, 124). This question of a first-person plural—the kind of socialities that endure in/as worlds—and its subjunctive articulation guides *Tendings*'s interest in esoterisms as, perhaps, the possibility of a "we" that refuses the homogenizing aims of universality and inclusiveness. That is, I wonder if a "scientific" we—a we that is produced through grammars of universality and its globally homogenized subject—is also a colonialist we. Modulating this "we" from an indicative presumption to a subjunctive, future-oriented dream of the end of the world (singular) requires that we don't reify science, but that we assume that it too is *storytelling*.

"Science and story are not discrete," says Katherine McKittrick, riffing on Wynter, "rather, we know, read, create, and feel science and story simultaneously" (2021, 9). What we have come to call "science"—even in feminist theory that is critically committed to thinking through science's intersectional politics in complex ways—is part of how worlds are storied around Man into world. McKittrick states, "Although science is a knowledge system that socially produces what it means to be biologically human, it is also the epistemological grounds through which racial and sexual essentialism is registered and lived" (131). This isn't about being opposed to the kinds of careful attention to more-than-human material worlds that happen in and around various practices marked as "science." It's about how those practices—what I call tendings—are articulated through colonial grammars, what Brown calls "the epistemological grounds" of Man. There are sciences that (attempt to) turn away from enlightenment, colonialist science. Sandra Harding talks about "sciences from below," especially feminist and postcolonial sciences. Leroy Little Bear (2001) theorizes a distinction between a decolonial "native science" and "Western science" (arguing in favor of specific modes of collaboration). Britt Rusert tracks "fugitive sciences" linked to abolitionist politics in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Donna Haraway's "Situated Knowledges" makes very clear that each of these would have to turn on "the standpoints of the subjugated" (1991, 191), where knowledge is articulated through careful (response-able) attention to the specific political relations shaping encounters that generate claims without denying "the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge" (191). There are, potentially, subjunc-

tively esoteric "scientific" tendings, but in improvisationally tending other grammars of worlding, they may become quite unrecognizable as "science."

I have been wondering if some of this investment in science is about the knowledge economies of the university today, and specifically about what Robyn Wiegman calls feminist and queer field imaginaries. Given how the institutionalization of fields of minority knowledge—women's studies, gender studies, ethnic studies—has always been uneasy and disputed (as, for example, when they were recently called "grievance studies"), the fields are always engaged in agonistic contact with university homogenization and capture (Wiegman 2012; Ferguson 2012). These fields ("our" fields?) always risk running afoul of logics of disqualification precisely because they deviate from enlightenment grammars of knowing (with a presumption of disinterested, nonpolitically motivated knowledge production), so one way to (perhaps less than generously) read the investment in scientific knowledges is as a way of grounding their "political" claims on supposedly settled ontological grounds. And this is no less the case when the explicit aim of the feminist theorizing is to rethink "ontology" as queer becoming by turning to work, for example, in biology or physics (thinking about this is part of what motivates my interest in grammar, as I will explain below).[10]

One hunch I've had is that for most of us feminist and queer thinkers interested in new materialisms, affect theory, posthumanisms, more-than-human ecologies, and so on (mostly trained, as we are, in the social sciences and humanities), part of our interest has to do with how these can feel like esoteric knowledges. How many of us can really follow the finer points of Barad or Stengers's engagements with physics, or Haraway's engagements with biology? Those texts are exciting to me, at least, because they tune into and make palpable worlds that feel very different from mine, more-than-human relationalities that feel hyperspecific (sometimes in single laboratories, for instance). It's not just about knowing different things, but about knowing differently, knowing otherwise. So maybe all these "new" turns in feminist thinking *could be*, at least subjunctively, esoteric orientations, if they could be storied differently, oriented not toward enlightenment universality but toward endarkenment pluriversality.[11] This would mean, among other things, giving up on grounding claims—about politics or the human or anything else—in a presumption that there exists one world. The book's project, then, is articulating a feminist and queer tending of the more-than-human that draws from work (and worlds) disqualified by enlightenment science and work that understands enlightenment logic as a matter of colonial tending.

Turning Away from the Light: Esoterism and Endarkenment

The tensions between a secularist, scientifically oriented feminist and queer thinking of more-than-human worlds and an avowedly spiritual, esoterically oriented feminism lead me to two questions that guide this book.[12] First, what happens to how we think about worlds—and ourselves as participants in those worlds—if we give up on presuming post-enlightenment rationality and its disqualification of spiritual knowledges? And second, how does an orientation toward the political articulation of a pluriverse—a world where many worlds fit (Escobar 2018)—affirm the necessity of *many* knowledges (and the socialities that are co-compositional with them) flourishing without being subjected to the kinds of epistemological and biopolitical violences that mark coloniality? Asking these questions, I have found myself consistently pulled away from the enlightenment grammars of a universal, homogeneous world and toward what I call esoterisms: bounded fields of more-than-human affective relationality that endure precisely through the ongoing attention to and care for their material, energetic, spiritual conditions of persistence. To compose this concept, I explore the current feminist and queer turn to the esoteric (tarot, magic, witchcraft, astrology) to pressure a kind of secularist investment in enlightenment science and rationality, but I also feel out how these occult-adjacent practices still largely operate with the conceptual grammars of enlightenment rationality. To articulate that orientation, and the potentialities for otherwise orientations that always eventually recur, I organize the book around a tension between enlightenment and endarkenment as tendencies of worlding.

What I'm calling esoterism in this book is distinct from what that means in the indicative archives of history and anthropology. I'll offer a first sketch of this difference using the definition offered in Antoine Faivre's canonical *Access to Western Esotericism* (1994; but originally published in French between 1976 and 1979). Faivre's book lays out a vast archive of what he calls "Western esotericisms," a distinct tradition that, for him, lurks on the borders of Christianity, especially as it draws from "Eastern" traditions, most importantly Hindu (but also Egyptian and Sumerian) traditions. In an effort to clarify what both "Western" and "esotericism" mean, Faivre lays out six elements, the first four of which are "fundamental":

1. Symbolic and real correspondences ("as above so below")
2. Belief in a "living nature"

3. The interrelation of imagination and practices of mediation (via symbols, rituals, etc.)
4. Experiences of transformation (including initiation and alchemy)
5. Insistence upon concordance (the search for a single, universal knowledge)
6. Transmission by initiation (1994, 10–15)

While Faivre is writing without much engagement with the explicitly feminist esoterisms of his moment (especially goddess religions), these elements don't require any reconfiguration at the abstract level to fit feminist and queer witchcraft projects. What's perhaps more striking is that they fit the "new materialisms" as well, and this project initially emerged from thinking about that confluence. New materialist theories and these esotericisms would, despite their shared commitment to concordance, fall into dispute about how to understand it. That is, a new materialist valorization of scientific rationality (in the form of verifiability according to strict controls) disqualifies most of the esotericist knowledges because they are too "particular," too based in a nonuniversal (read: nonscientific) rationalities. Rather than take a side, what I want to do in *Tendings* is to think about knowledging *without* presuming or aspiring to concordance.

Rejecting concordance turns out to have ripple effects across how I think about the other five elements too. For instance, while I will also affirm pedagogies of initiation, I worry about the ways that Faivre—based on his particular archive—thinks about initiation (and therefore all the semiotic and knowledge practices adumbrated in elements 1–4) through a logic of hierarchized homogenization. To whit, he defines the esoteric dialectically against the exoteric by referring to "what is reserved for an elite versus what is addressed to all" (33). My concept of esoterism foregrounds, much more than any specific beliefs about knowledge, a highly processual understanding of esoterisms as practices operating in tension with the exoteric, but with a crucial difference from Faivre. When the "empirical" esoterisms studied by Faivre are secret, elite societies that seek power in the wider field, they remain entirely within what I will call the homogenizing colonial grid of the singular world (they presume a universal sociality but with highly restricted access to knowledge practices tied to control). Some of these esotericisms have tended toward statal homogenization, toward imperialism, toward (cis)masculinist violence.[13] For me, the *exoteric* names that presumptive totalizing frame (world, singular), and a refusal of reference to it as the (only) field of intelligibility

is precisely what is at stake in what I'm calling "esoterisms." Esoterisms, in my sense, would reject any possibility of elitism, vanguardism, or representational concentration of power-knowledge. My use of "esoterisms" is processual in that it does not name specific phenomena that can be empirically known, but instead is meant to draw our attention to the tending of worlds in which more-than-human socialities and knowledge practices would be co-compositional.

It is worth saying directly at this point that while *Tendings* proposes that we take (more) seriously and make (or keep) space for esoteric, nonscientific, spiritual knowledges both in our feminist, queer, decolonial, and abolitionist projects and in our spaces of pluriversal gathering (such as a university), this is not, in and of itself, a necessary break with homogenizing and disqualifying logics of enlightenment humanism. In fact, just as my thinking about new materialisms is always in conversation with decolonial, abolitionist, and queer of color critiques of the field, I will attend to the ways that feminist and queer esoterisms sometimes similarly tend to(ward) coloniality. Thus, by rejecting concordance—and the ontological presumption of a single world—I am weaving a conception of esoterism that might gather practices explicitly marked as "esoteric" and practices marked as "science" as well as modes of knowledging that have little resonance with either of those labels.

To amplify this difference between the empirical concept of esotericism laid out by Faivre, and esoterisms as speculative, subjunctive worldings (as I theorize them in this book), I cannot simply insert the adjective "new," for all the reasons Ahmed articulates in her critique of the "new materialisms." Rather, across this book, I map my elaborations of tending—as the attentive and careful participation in the endurance of worlds—by orienting my analysis around two main concepts: esoterism and endarkenment. Endarkenment names a kind of heuristic orientation: an adjectival (indeed, deictic) marker of the directionalities (outside of Euclidian geometric space) that turn away from enlightenment, which is to say, from Man. Enlightenment, too, names a tendency, or an orientation of tending in the polyvalent sense: an ongoing durability or endurance that is ontogenetically a matter of how attention and care are practiced. Specifically, by "enlightenment," I do not mean a discrete historical moment in the philosophical and political career or Europe, although it also cannot be detached from those geopolitical and historical coordinates. What I mean may be similar to Foucault's reading of enlightenment as an *ethos*, but unlike him, I see this orientation as one that can be refused.[14]

My basic sense of what enlightenment tending entails begins with Kant's famous essay "What Is Enlightenment?" in seeing it as the "free," reasoned, public debate about matters of importance where that discussion allows a powerful state to use its force to enact policy; this represents the maturing of "mankind" because people recognize enlightenment law as *just* to the extent that it is rational. Collective reason—asymptotically universal in ambition (and highly restricted in practice)—props up sovereign, biopolitical power.[15] This power's apogee appears in the kinds of large-scale state-planning projects James C. Scott analyzes in *Seeing Like a State*, where rational and centralized state power seeks an absolute homogenization, destroying worlds in order to generate a world of transparent legibility. This homogenization is necessarily linked with what I call, following Anzaldúa, Latour, and Stengers, a politics of disqualification. Scott writes: "The imperial pretense of scientific modernism admits knowledge only if it arrives through the aperture that the experimental method has constructed for its admission" ([1998] 2020, 305). What counts as reason, as "public" discourse in the statal sense, is a question of homogenizing, colonialist grammars. Enlightenment is the orientation of biopolitical state power toward a single world of universal intelligibility and planning, where the violences of extraction, expropriation, accumulation, and dispossession attend the distribution of non-Man knowledges and socialities (always mutually co-compositional) *within* that grid.[16] Enlightenment is the fever dream of world in the singular, structured by "light's violent, surveilling reach" (Cervenak 2021, 63).

Endarkenment is the opposite; or rather, I'm using it to feel how a wide array of practices deviate and tend otherwise worlds. If we imagine Man as a single, central point of light organizing enlightenment space, then darkness abides and withdraws in every direction beyond any kind of (grammatical) mapping. My use of the word "endarkenment" is indebted to Ashon Crawley's call for "endarkened logics of otherwise sociality" (2017, 209) and to *On Spiritual Strivings*, in which Cynthia Dillard draws on Black women's experience to theorize "an endarkenment feminism [that] seeks to resist and transform [racist and sexist] social arrangements . . . , seeking political and social change on behalf of the communities we represent as the purpose for research, versus solely the development of universal laws or theories for human behavior" (2006, 27). Dillard's formulation underscores how "endarkenment feminisms" are committed to situated knowledges and standpoint epistemologies, spiritual practices, and communitarian ethics expressed in everyday relations as care and vulnerability.[17] Dillard writes: "To know something is

to have a living relationship with it, influencing and being influenced by it, responding to and being responsible for it" (20). Taking living and knowing as co-compositional in the tending of worlds can be constellated with Zoe Todd's argument that "Indigenous thinking must be seen not just as a well of ideas to draw from but a body of thinking that is *living and practiced by peoples with whom we all share reciprocal duties as citizens of shared territories (be they physical or the ephemeral)*" (2016, 17).

Because I understand coloniality to be a vast and immanently organizing "event" that takes manifold evental forms such as franchise and settler colonization, slavery and its afterlives, extractivist capitalism, and nation states articulated through governmentalities of the subject, endarkenment orientations turn away from liberal subjects (of knowledge, of state participation) and away from homogenizing grammars of temporality (that is, from "history"). I fully acknowledge that the very project of writing an academic book on this (or really any other) "critical" question implicates me in precisely these governmentalities.[18] This noninnocent participation is precisely what the book sets out to theorize: tending is not something that happens "outside" of the colonial field it would disrupt, which is why the question of orientation becomes so crucial: it's not about our positionality as such, as if politics follow from the sheer fact of self-location, but how we attune to what makes *this* positionality possible, what this modality of being (as verb) that "I" am brings into contact and cares for.

To turn away from Man's light is not to turn in any single direction, and I try to think through these other worlds (plural) as much as possible from what Julietta Singh (2018) calls dehumanist perspectives by thinking relationally with the dehumanized, the dysselected, *les damnés*. This means attending to the "dark materialisms" of what Tavia Nyong'o calls Afro-fabulation (2019, 47), where the everyday is "the texture out of which the eventfulness of fabulation arises" (5).[19] It is also to feel what José Esteban Muñoz calls "the brownness of the world" (2020, 118), and Audre Lorde calls "what is dark and ancient and divine within" each of us (2007, 69).[20] As Paule Marshall wrote in "Reena," "We live surrounded by white images, and white in this world is synonymous with the good, light, beauty, success, so that, despite ourselves sometimes, we run after that whiteness and deny our darkness" ([1970] 2005, 27). Darkness animates (and is animated by) non-Man worlds, but I think of darkness in its paraontological distinction from the people racialized as "dark," and I emphatically do not mean to conflate darkness with Blackness, or Indigeneity, or Brownness. Endarkenment thinks of racialization

as a matter of evental tending, not identities: identities are features of subjects.[21] Endarkenment worlds are about intimate and erotic participation, not the identitarian capture of being, becoming, worlding.[22] This is a matter of what J. Kameron Carter calls "that dark knowing that exceeds theo-political constraint" (2020, 171). Beyond enlightenment (empiricist) fetishization of light and vision, there are vast realms of perceptual, sensorial, spiritual, affective relationality.

Knowledge practices involve sustained relational responsibilities, and these demand ongoing care. Knowledge is always contextual, always emergent from specific socio-material-semiotic webs, and the political question is about how entities—which are, in fact, nothing more than expressions or ongoing effects of events—*participate* in the ontogenesis of worlds. This is where many of the risks of appropriation, mistranslation, erasure, and other colonialist forms of encounter reside. Audra Simpson's (2014) work on the Indigenous politics of refusal, especially around anthropological work that extracts and accumulates knowledge from Indigenous groups, addresses this problem in a different context, as does Kim TallBear's (2013) work on genetic technoscience as a problem for Indigenous belonging and sovereignty. Not everything can or should be made available to outsiders, and indeed, one significant axiom of my approach in this book is that I must learn to responsibly think with concepts and practices that I *do not own*, cannot master, am not able to reduce to property.[23] I am explicitly not trying to "do" Black studies or Indigenous studies in this book, but rather attending to the ways my feminist and queer thinking, writing, and teaching participate in the (more-than-human) pluriversal politics of abolition and decolonization.[24] I follow Wynter in feeling the absolute necessity of a collective dismantling (or dissipation) of Man. But esoterisms, as bounded socialities that seek to flourish as worlds—through tending—have evental borders, and I am also trying to tend (toward) an ethics of affirming refusal, affirming the flourishing of worlds that do not include everyone, that do not include me. Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena write, "Encounters (everyday or extraordinary) across partially connected (and also heterogeneous) worlds may be sustained by conversations that draw from domains in which not all participants in the encounter participate" (2018, 9). For this reason, much of the book tends to my particular situation as a white settler feminist and queer reader, listener, and teacher as I move through the pedagogical sites of farmers' markets, academic conferences, bookstores, musical performance spaces, and classrooms. The question for me is what it means to affirm worlds that aren't mine

not by participating "in" them but rather by (at)tending to how my everyday practices enable or disenable those other worlds' persistence.

Tending Feminist, Queer, Decolonial, and Abolitionist Worlds

Tending, for me, is a capacious, polyvalent term—less a technical or philosophical concept than an irreducibly polysemous index of what I call the eventual ontogenesis of worlding.[25] Worlds are composed in and through events, where a vast array of intra-active actants—"humans" and nonhumans on multiple spatiotemporal scales of intimate dispersion—are made by worlds in the same gesture as they make worlds.[26] Worlding can baffle the grammars of enlightenment rationality, agency, and temporality we are habituated to think and feel the world through; or, more simply, enlightenment, colonial grammar is the homogenizing *capture* of otherwise worldings. Endarkenment is the word I'm using to tune into socialities that escape, refuse, or disrupt that capture, tending non-Man, not (completely) colonized worlds. Worlding is not a (merely) human matter. For Anna Tsing, "we are surrounded by many world-making projects, human and not human. World-making projects emerge from practical activities of making lives" (Tsing 2015, 21–22). What Tsing here calls "practices" marks the milieu I'm trying to think in with what I call "tending." Starting from more-than-human ontogenic worlding, I want to think about tending in a cluster of four (maybe five[27]) semidistinct, interdependent ways: as inertial but eventual ongoingness, as care, as attention, and as anticipation. Even when I use tending in ways that seem (based on context cues) to amplify specific meanings, they all resonate.

The first sense of tending comes from process philosophy, where what's at stake is, as Deleuze and Guattari say, "a world created in the process of its tendency" (1983, 322). In his book on Alfred North Whitehead, Didier Debaise notes that "the sole aim, the sole goal of any 'society,'" "is to maintain its historic route, the movement of its inheritance, the taking up, the transmission of the acts of feeling that compose it" (Debaise 2017, 73). Societies endure in and as affective transmission. Their hanging together *as* societies is a matter of the tendency to hold particular patterns across their eventual ontogenesis. Tending names the ways that societies—which include small ones like a water molecules and vast phenomena like coloniality—are oriented in their becoming toward endurance, a conglomeration of felt semistability. The colonial world tends to endure in its unlimited drive toward mastery (Singh 2018). But this world is always shifting in specific material (often violent) encoun-

ters with otherwise worlding, always troubled by an "immanent outside" (Massumi 2019) that animates it, but which it has to enclose to maintain its historical tendencies.[28] This grammar of capture tends (toward) the homogenizing plotting of selves and stories.

Stories participate in the ontogenesis of worlds; they are the material-semiotic patterning that circulates within, across, through a world. I get this claim from Sylvia Wynter, whose concept of "the sociogenic principle" (2001) reconfigures Fanon's (1967) "sociogeny" via a turn to cybernetics in order to think about how different praxes or performances of the human—as a *genre* of living—take place as the entangled becoming of story and life, mythos and bios. Different genres of the human are sustained through the circulation and autopoietic materialization of stories. Different stories or practices of storytelling are co-compositional with different genres of the human, where specific, historical forms of being the entities that we "are" are inseparable from "descriptive statements" (2003, 264) about what it is "to *be*, and therefore what it is *like to be*, human" (Wynter 2001, 31). In the post-1492 moment (Wynter 1995), "*storytellers storytellingly invent themselves as being purely biological*" (Wynter and McKittrick 2015, 11) in relation to a "biocentric descriptive statement" (2003, 264), and Man uses the global violence of what Alexander Weheliye (2014) has called "racializing assemblages" to overrepresent "itself as if it were the human itself" (Wynter 2003, 260). While Wynter sometimes sees this bios-mythos "hybridity" as a particularly human matter, I want to follow Jayna Brown's move "from Wynter's call for a new genre of the human to new genres of *existence*, entirely different modes of material being and becoming" (2021, 9). Storytelling might then name the patterning of all worlds, including those we now think of as pertaining to "humans" as participants.[29]

Thinking through this participation—and its complex hierarchies, asymmetries, and ethico-erotic frictions—is what the second sense of tending amplifies: tending as care, as cultivation, in specific practices of holding material worlds together through immanent participation.[30] Such participation is always necessarily specific and situated, a matter of haptics, an erotic biopolitics of touch. In Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's more-than-humanist remix of feminist care ethics and standpoint epistemologies, "standpoints manifest visions that have *become* possible by collective ways of learning to care for some issues more than others—rather than by following a normative ideal. . . . [S]tandpoints, even when they develop normative tendencies, are not fixed or essentialist, they depend on material configurations and on

our participation in (re)making them" (2017, 59). This (re)making refers to the ways that worlds endure as worlds through care practices. What we tend, what we care for, is inseparable from how more-than-human worlds (Whitehead's "societies") endure.

I want to highlight Puig de la Bellacasa's word "manifest," which moves toward esoteric discourses of magic, as a way of approaching the third resonance of tending, via lexical proximity: what Ahmed calls "the politics of attention" (2008) or what Tsing calls "arts of noticing" (2015). I am interested in modes of attention—where that word refuses to be enclosed within conscious thought and even within the kinds of perception we associate with "living things" as presumed in biological discourse—as the material feeling that the tendencies of worlds to endure (and come into situational contact) works *through us*, thereby opening up the possibility of affectively sensing the evental ontogenesis of worlding and *tending* in some directions rather than others. When worlds collide with other worlds (as they do at every moment), the encounters among all the tendencies involved in those worlds generate specific margins for improvisation, and I'm trying to think about how we feel or attune to those margins, how we learn to play them (Massumi 2014).[31]

One way to think about the imbrication of attention and care at the affective level is to evoke here, anticipating a slightly slower engagement in chapter 4, Lauren Olamina's poem on the first page of Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*: "All that you touch / You Change. / All that you Change / Changes you" (O. Butler [1993] 2000, 3). These lines propose the evental ontogenesis of the world (as Change) but also the complex modalities of participation—animated by *touch*, not by enlightenment vision or rational or empiricist epistemologies—that keep worlds going.[32] The word "all" suggests a nonuniversal expansiveness; this is an "all" not of rational abstraction or conceptual (or juridical or carceral) universalization, but an affirmation of the entirety of haptic contact. "All that you *touch*" is not everything, but some things, a messy multiplicity of them. Worlds "are" situational touch across intimately distributed scales of time and space, and they are sustained by affective semiosis—the patterning or "meaning" that I find in Wynter's conception of storytelling—which is also inseparable from practices, including everyday ones, from a whole erotics of care. Tending is a matter of what Audre Lorde calls "the necessity of reassessing the quality of all the aspects of our lives and of our work, and of how we move toward and through them" (2007, 55). Tending is about how we move through and sustain worlds in our participation.

Lorde also helps me hear how tending as attention and care always summons attending in my fourth sense: as waiting, as anticipation, as a feeling for the "not yet" that Muñoz felt in queerness (2010,1). It invites us to cultivate what Bennett calls "a certain anticipatory readiness . . . a perceptual style open to the appearance of thing-power" (2010, 5). Anticipation need not reach toward the new, but it can take shape as the desire for temporal endurance. Elizabeth Povinelli, thinking with Indigenous people around Anson Bay in Australia, reminds us that "in these situations, to be the same, to be durative, may be as emancipatory as to be transitive" (2011, 130). This tension between a proleptic hope signaled by the "not yet" and a politics of endurance is, in the evental ontology I am trying to think with in this book, one that is not to be worked out in abstraction, where critical calculation enables the construction and elaboration of ever-more-inclusive theories of the world's vast horrors, but rather in lived praxis, in the everyday, other-than-fully-conscious realm of living as participation in worlds as they collide (Massumi 2014). In events, the temporal logics of enlightenment causality and progress aren't the ontologically *given* coordinates of worlding so much as enduring tendencies that require, for their durativity, the tending of participants; these grammars are orienting in the sense that they prime events for particular, "probabilistic" outcomes but those outcomes are always in virtual contact with different potential worlds, potential endurances, potential becomings. Turning myself toward what Weheliye, riffing on Wynter, calls "the abolition of Man" (2014, 4), I am trying to feel out how in this complex assemblage of tending we can tap in the virtual, subjunctive potentialities for otherwise worlds that always attend *this world* and its crushing coloniality. And I'm trying to feel out how this abolition, this decolonization, can guide our everyday practices. As Leanne Simpson writes, "If we want to create a different future, we need to live in a different present, so that present can fully marinate, influence, and create different futures" (2017, 20). Esoterisms (can) tend these different futures, these endarkenment worlds after or beyond Man's homogenizing world.

Tending the Grammatical

Much of my attention in this book turns toward the grammatical: to the structuring logics of boundary maintenance spanning multiple modalities of worlding, to the basic iterative structures articulated in stories that hold worlds together. I mean grammar in the everyday sense of the patterning of sentences, but also, following Hortense Spillers and Saidiya Hartman, in the

expanded sense of architectures of the thinkable and doable within a particular cosmological or metaphysical field.[33] One way to think with Spillers and Hartman is in a tension between descriptive, and pre- or proscriptive approaches to grammar.

Rules attempt to govern the ongoingness of worlds in their tendings, and a whole range of things—including criminality, delinquency, fugitivity, refusal, failure, aberration, and errancy—disrupt those rules.[34] Pre- and proscriptive grammar tell you what is "correct," and in the inherited grammars of Man's world, this often amounts to an enclosure of the potentiality of worlding within specific parameters of "parts of speech" and the standardization of language (and thinking) toward state legibilities. But there are other(wise) grammars—or anagrammatical energies[35]—where different patternings (can) happen. We might attune to the potentialities hovering around broken rules, "bad" grammar, inappropriate semiosis because those are indices not of nonsense, but an entirely different, subjunctive, field of potential worlds that move according to different grammaticalities.

As a matter of how worlds are patterned, grammar is a site where worlding encounters its semiotic conditions, for worlds are always co-compositional with storytelling and the ways stories emplot things like "subjects" and "actions." Stories distribute agency and its absence (or diminishment), and they pattern events (for instance as "causality" or "chronology"). Stories sociogenically shape the tending of biocultural human creatures, overrepresenting Man precisely because the stories are *immanently* material, co-compositional with worlds in their ongoingness (Wynter 2001). In the post-1492 moment, this requires tuning in to how coloniality—in its differential biopolitical and heteropatriarchal modes as franchise and settler colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade and its afterlives, extractivist capitalism, secularist science, and nation state governmentalities—shapes semiosis through modulating its epistemic, grammatical fielding.

My interest in endarkenment tending is, in part, a way to move away from the critical logics underwriting this framing of structural or grammatical "antagonism" (logics that operate within the colonial, homogenizing grammar of Man) toward improvisational grammaticalities that enact, as orienting tendencies, worlds that wouldn't be structured by the universalizing grammars that make it seem like affiliation is an either-or choice.[36] It's not about critical decision so much as affective participation, how we (adjacently) tend the dismantling of the world that encloses our questions about what might be possible.[37]

My attention in this book is sometimes on nouns and their (colonial) declension into subjects and objects—distributed differentially through (de) humanizing assemblages and their animacy hierarchies—but also to the grammar of verbs, particularly around tense as the structuration of temporality (a site of struggle around homogenization and dispersal[38]), and shifts in verbal mood. There are four verbal moods in English. The imperative gives commands, and except as a problem to be improvisationally disrupted when possible (as I discuss in chapter 4), I have no particular interest in it.[39] The interrogative asks questions, and I'm attentive—especially in chapters 1 and 4—to how the force of the interrogative can unsettle worlds and/or summon them. The indicative mood describes states of affairs, facts, empirical reality; when it appears, it is meant to delimit and define reality, truth, things that are solid and indubitable (or, at least, to cover over such things with untruths, dissimulations, deceptions). This mood, too, is one I seek to disrupt as much as I can (whatever the grammar of my individual sentences).

This brings me to the fourth, subjunctive mood, which makes no such claims, instead shifting into the realm of counterfactual, the possible. For Wai Chee Dimock, the subjunctive's "allegiance is to a ghostly region, a kind of syntactic underground, hovering just below the threshold of actualization, casting its shadow on the known world, turning sharp bright lines into a dense thicket, at once insubstantial and impenetrable, a vectorial field not yet hardened or pruned. A still-undecided past and a still-hypothetical future are housed by this syntactic form: counterfactual, not often accredited, but available all the same as virtual sites, thinkable versions of the world" (2009, 243). The word "virtual" here comes close to, or can be read proximally to, that word's use in the conceptual web of Deleuzian thought[40]—indeed, Dimock's gloss on the subjunctive here offers a surprisingly accurate, if manifestly gothic, riff on the virtual as a modality of what might have been and may yet be.

It's not that I'm uninterested in what is, but what I want to think through and learn to feel in this book takes shape elsewhere: in this "ghostly region." Dimock remains an excellent guide here: "If works of fiction are always subjunctive to some extent, dwellers in some counterfactual universe, literary scholarship can also afford to go some length in that direction. Indeed, taking our cue from the texts we study, our methods can be part empirical and part conjectural, starting out with some hard facts, but stretching these into airy vehicles, tentative on purpose, carriers for ghostly trajectories half-formed, half-glimpsed, and half-intuited" (244). My abiding concern is that colonial

grammars operate through homogenizing logics that presume the indicative mood; they speak in facts (which can be proven and disproven), they articulate history as the causal or semicausal accumulation of such facts, and they ground the struggle for future worlds in their linear emplotment of history.[41] In "Venus in Two Acts," Hartman asks: "Is it possible to exceed or negotiate the constitutive limits of the archive? By advancing a series of speculative arguments and exploiting the capacities of the subjunctive (a grammatical mood that expresses doubts, wishes, and possibilities), in fashioning a narrative, which is based upon archival research, and by that I mean a critical reading of the archive that mimes the figurative dimensions of history, I intended both to tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling" (2008, 11). My interest in the subjunctive is about trying to feel out (both in and through the texts I engage at length) other possibilities for processually enacting, in praxes of more-than-human tending, different kinds of worlds than Man's asymptotically homogeneous world.

I am guided here by Dimock and Hartman, and also by Maryse Condé's subjunctive recreation of Tituba, which I explore in chapter 1, "'What Is a Witch?': *Tituba*'s Subjunctive Challenge." I closely read Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* as a frustrating fiction oriented—at the level of its enunciation as the "re-creation" of spare historical "fact" and at the level of the narration and its decolonial, poethical grammars (da Silva 2014)—toward the refusal of the indicative mood, or rather, toward helping readers feel out the coloniality of that mood. Whenever Tituba, as narrator, encounters the question "What is a witch?," she answers by problematizing the utterance, situating it in a context of heteropatriarchal coloniality's violent encounters with the knowledges and worlds she tends and inherits from Mama Yaya. Condé's novel shifts from the indicative to the subjunctive and in doing so offers a theory of endarkenment esoterisms that isn't legible in its representation per se (we do not see an endarkenment esoterism depicted in any "clear" way) but in its rhetorics, narrative emplotments, vertiginous anachronies, and metadiegetic moves. Condé's novel foregrounds how "the witch" as a discursive field is delimited in the colonial context, marking confrontations between enlightenment's homogenizing world and the knowledge practices and worlds (the esoterisms) that Man disqualifies and subjects to violence. In the process, the novel unfurls a richly erotic (and potentially queer) attention to how worlds collide in violent and traumatic ways, but also in ways that generate pleasures, desires, and more-than-human (which includes spiritual) relationalities.

What I learn from Tituba, as character and text, is method of reading deictically and subjunctively that I carry through the following three chapters, which work something like a spiral, accumulating concepts additively as I track how tending works in three specific sites of pedagogy: (feminist) bookstores, underground music performance spaces, and the university. In my previous book, *Animate Literacies*, I theorized the "literacy situation," in which "a whole host of actants and agents animate literacy in scenes of pre- or aconscious collision and affective contact. . . . The situation is where intrahuman politics of race, class, gender, sexuality, and geography shape the conditions of emergence for literacy events that animate subjects and the political relations with which they are entangled" (Snaza 2019b, 4). Tituba helps me explore how "events" of conscious meaning making, such as applying the name "witch," always emerge in colonial situation, where there is always more going on than any participant can rationally know. Reading "through" witchcraft to the subjunctive tendencies that haunt that concept, the book theorizes across distinct if not entirely or always separate sites of pedagogy that I encounter as I move through my worlds, paying attention to pedagogical encounters (ceremonies) where those subjunctive possibilities can be *felt*.

In contrast to how Tituba as narrator and Condé as writer refuse the indicative logics that would stabilize "witchcraft" as a material-semiotic field, in chapter 2, "Feeling Subjunctive Worlds: Reading Second-Wave Feminist and Gay Liberationist Histories of Witchcraft," my focus is on second-wave feminist and post-Stonewall gay liberationist histories of witchcraft. These are texts that often appear on displays of feminist esoteric books in bookstores I frequent, and they would seem to inform a vast amount of the current explosion of feminist and queer writing on witchcraft and other esoteric practices. By taking up Tituba's subjunctive modulation of the indicative, I read Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English's *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses*, Arthur Evans's *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture*, and Starhawk's *Dreaming the Dark*—texts that I see as articulating the general field in which the contemporary "reclaiming" of feminist and queer esoteric practices happens—to feel out their tendencies toward enlightenment logic. Attentive to moments where their indicative logics break down, by seeing them as "doing history badly" (Freeman 2019), I attempt to modulate their indicative claims toward the subjunctive. While the goddess feminism in these texts was famously used as an essentialist foil against which a "contaminated" or "cyborg" feminism could be articulated (Haraway 1991), this chapter is invested in thinking

about what happens if we instead read these texts as a tangled, messy, problematic archive. This archive allows me to do two things at once: chart a set of topoi or keywords around which my understanding of esoterisms take shape (these include care, erotics, a more-than-human perception that is at least open to spiritual participation, and education as initiation to a bounded sociality), and think in detail about how homogenizing grammars try but also fail to enclose the subjunctive potentiality of esoterisms within the indicative, colonialist formation "witchcraft." When we participate in contemporary feminist and queer esoterisms—like witchcraft, tarot, astrology, and so forth—there are thus crucial questions to be asked about how certain kinds of participation tend coloniality more than they disrupt it.

I amplify the question of participation in "Man's Ruin: Hearing Divide and Dissolve," the third chapter, where I explore how we attune to and tend our participation in coloniality and its potential disruption, and I do this by asking how we might come to *hear* settler colonization as a spatiotemporal problematic. Extending and shifting from chapter 2's engagement with how esoterisms appear in my situation as a feminist, queer reader and social media consumer, this chapter finds me thinking about the "everyday" rituals of attending underground metal shows (and musical performance more generally), playing vinyl records, and walking around wearing earbuds linked to streaming services as pedagogical events, indeed as decolonial pedagogies of subjunctive space. Hearing Divide and Dissolve—an Indigenous and Black duo who play slow, instrumental doom metal that blurs into free jazz—I think about performance as a field in which tending is modulated and practiced. Divide and Dissolve's music—which is always co-composed in, with, through particular spaces because the sonic itself is irreducibly spatiotemporal—allows us to hear the sound of endarkenment worlds that circulate, subjunctively, throughout the colonial capture of homogenization. And they do this, as Dylan Robinson's *Hungry Listening* (2020) helps me consider, by refusing the kinds of settler ("hungry") listening that presumptively make the whole world available to liberal subjects expressing their (free) taste. That is, Divide and Dissolve's music affectively poses the question of participation in (settler) coloniality, and works to summon into the event of performance the *feeling* of otherwise, endarkenment worlds.

Chapter 4, "Ceremony: Participation and Endarkenment Study," brings all of these concerns with tending into an extended meditation on the everyday politics of endarkenment in the university and its colonial ecologies of accumulation, dispossession, and affective suture to Man. In many ways the

crescendo of this project, the chapter explores what it means to (at)tend the educational undergrowth (Snaza and Singh 2021) of the university as a colonialist assemblage articulated around the production of post-enlightenment subjects of science and history (da Silva 2007), around Man (Wynter 2003). The chapter elaborates Sylvia Wynter's "ceremony" (at once concept and praxis) as a question of education as worlding—where knowledge is co-compositional with a sociality—and the ethics or politics of pedagogical encounters adhere in improvising toward endarkenment, a problematic I call, after Erin Manning, "event-care." The chapter locates these concerns in three relationally evental happenings: a sign appears outside the building I work in detailing entanglements between its namesake—the first president of the university—and the transatlantic slave trade; I study Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake* in that building, as the sign and Sharpe's book push us to think of our class itself, our study (Harney and Moten 2013), as (erotic) participation in the wake; and Alexis Pauline Gumbs performs on campus at a celebration to mark the anniversary of a feminist organization, conjuring endarkenment ceremony in a situation presumptively organized through Man's grammars. I draw out Gumbs's ceremonial poetics by engaging her trilogy of Black feminist study, *Spill*, *M. Archive*, and *Dub*.

These three events, nested within other events situated at different scales, allow me to think through the vibratory, improvisational potentiality of the everyday, of practices that tend endarkenment worlds. The everyday is where the violence of coloniality takes place, where the wake of slavery, (settler) colonialist violence, and extraction are embedded so as to almost disappear to Man's perception, relegated at best to an increasingly irrelevant "past" or simply naturalized as the way nature—or the economy—works (Hartman 1997; Wynter 2003; Murphy 2017; Coulthard 2014). Dwelling with Sharpe's account of the evental ontologenesis of worlds, I argue that the colonial world is not a fact, not a structure that awaits dismantling (Wolfe 2006), where this dismantling can only follow upon the elaboration of a universal critical frame that could orchestrate a global "we" against coloniality. Rather, the colonial world is but one possible pattern in the ongoing ontogenesis of worlds, a pattern that holds thanks to how, for many of the Earth's inhabitants, our everyday practices tend this world whether we attune to it or not. At every single moment, we engage in practices that either uphold or disrupt (and often both) the world of Man. In the post-1492 moment, we all participate in this, but participation is highly uneven—it can be humiliating, punishing, or violating; it can also be immensely pleasurable, "rewarding." What I try to

practice in this book is a deictic attunement, attending to how these questions arise for me in my own everyday worlding.

The everyday, and its erotics of participation, is also therefore a site of uncertainty and possibility where tending is *at stake*. Erin Manning invites us to think our evental participation as "opening . . . the everyday to degrees and shades of experience that resist formation long enough to allow us to see the potential of worlds in the making" (2016, 15). What she calls "degrees and shades" points toward that "ghostly region" (Dimock) of the subjunctive, and also toward endarkenment: worlds beyond Man's colonialist homogenization of the human, worlds that tend different "genres of existence" (Brown 2021). Education here becomes a site of multiscalar collision of worlds, where evental participation tends some worlds rather than others, tends some kinds of (non)self more than others. If enlightenment ceremony conjures subjects (on the colonial grid of Man's homogenized world), endarkenment ceremony suspends selves except insofar as we can come to feel ourselves *as* participation, as patterns (specific but not stable, durative but processually open) in the worlding of worlds. And it helps us feel our affective participation in a collective, distributed, heterogeneous, pluriversal dream of the end of the world as we know it, which is to say the dream of the endlessly pluriversal improvisation of being.

Notes

Preface. In the Cards

1. Natasha continues to offer tarot readings in a variety of modalities, including a weekly single-card reading by text that has sustained me throughout the process of finishing this book. https://www.moonhanded.studio/.

2. Rather than a kind of nationalism, this spell simply uses the "American Dream" as a deictic point of reference before using a thread practice to guide reflection: "The thread forms a net to catch us. As we affix, we think about everything and everyone that supports us. We think of the thread as hands reaching out, forming a network, offering our support at the same time as receiving it."

3. Beyond all the excitement of SSASS itself—an enormously generative event that has, so far, also given rise to at least one other book: Hil Malatino's *Trans Care* (2020)—it was on SSASS's opening day that I received my first physical copy of my book *Animate Literacies*. The entire week felt magical, like a world opening up before me.

Introduction. Tending Endarkenment Esoterisms

1. Languages differentially distribute agency through their animacy scales (Chen 2012), which in English (and most of the other colonial languages) involves grammatical markers of subject and object status through which agency is emplotted. Subjects act and objects are acted upon. Subjects shape an inert, passive world of matter: "When rewriting reason as the secular regulative force acting on every existing thing, the framers of science transform nature into the holdings of a power that acts solely as law, that is, universal *nomos*" (da Silva 2007, 47). In da Silva's account of the colonial grammar of homogeneous worlding, the "world" is affectable and lawful, while the subject at least asymptotically achieves self-determination (what she calls "transparency"), a masterful movement through the world that is about control of self *and* control of the (outer) world by manipulating its laws. This is the post-enlightenment subject, the

subject of (Western techno)science and history, the subject Wynter calls Man. As I try to notice how this subject structures world, I am also trying to feel out other patternings that are possible beyond subjects, patternings that may not even take legible form as "selves," at least within colonial grammar. Rather, these "non-selves" (Moten 2018, 187) are particular, semistable patternings within worlding, and they endure in and as tending endarkenment, non-Man worlds. What's at stake here is thinking the absolute intimacy between the axiom that all matter is vital or animate (which upsets the purported inertness of objects) and the necessity of thinking outside of the grammars of knowing subjects, since those grammars articulate Man's world, even if such subjects "critique" it.

2. In *Ontological Terror*, a "black nihilist" reading of the ontometaphysical tradition that reaches a certain point of inflection in the thought of Martin Heidegger, Calvin Warren suggests "Being" and even the human will prove unworkable concepts, and he turns, instead, to "spirit." Warren writes, "I would suggest that this thinking lead us to spirit, something exceeding and preceding the metaphysical world. We are still on the path to developing a phenomenology of black spirit, but it is an important exercise. I will continue this work in subsequent writing, but I can say for now, the aim is to shift emphasis from the human toward the spirit" (2018, 171).

3. I conceptualize endarkenment as the improvisational patterning of worlds that don't presume the form of the (colonial, enlightenment) subject, or necessarily even of the self. Throughout this book I attend to the colonial production of the subject, but also to its subjunctive outsides, the virtual potentialities for otherwise being that haunt its articulation, what Fred Moten calls "an improvisatory suspension of subjectivity" (2018, 51). For Marquis Bey (2021), race and gender are part of a structuration that creates an ontological cut or marking which makes "the subject" possible, and they too are interested in different ways of being than subjecthood and subjectivity. Which is to say that we can cultivate—or tend—a reading practice that feels out what might be happening "beyond, beneath, and beside" the subject (Sedgwick 2003, 8), where the patterning of worlds, what Mel Chen calls "differential being" (2023), happens in ways without pregiven shape and texture, where colonial tendings are disrupted by other tendings, where worlds frictionally relate.

4. My thinking about pluriversal politics is also informed by Marisol de la Cadena's *Earth Beings* (2015); Marisol de Cadena and Mario Blaser's edited collection *A World of Many Worlds* (2018); Escobar's newer *Pluriversal Politics* (2020); and Martin Savransky's *Around the Day in Eighty Worlds* (2021).

5. My use of "otherwise" is inspired by what Ashon Crawley calls "otherwise possibilities": "The urgency of our times, times that began *before* the inaugural events of Christopher Columbus's 1492 blue oceanic colonial expansionist mission, demands a thinking about what we might call '*otherwise*' possibilities, *otherwise* inhabitations, *otherwise* worlds. The *otherwise* in all its plenitude vibrates afar off and

near, here but also, and, there" (2020, 28). I am also inspired by Kandice Chuh's *Imagine Otherwise*, where she argues that "to imagine otherwise is not about imagining as the other, but rather, is about imagining the other differently" (2003, 9).

6. Rebekah Sheldon finds a "dark correlationism" or "new critical occultism" (2016, 139) running through object-oriented ontology and new materialist thought, which is one of the primary reasons I would include those as, at least subjunctively, esoteric projects. It matters that this occult influence is itself occulted, an acknowledgement of the politics of disqualification governing most of the academy.

7. For work on biology, see Haraway's *Primate Visions* (1989), *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (1991), *When Species Meet* (2008), and *Staying With the Trouble* (2016) and Willey's *Undoing Monogomy* (2016). For work on physics see Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), Daggat's *The Birth of Energy* (2019), Kirby's *Quantum Anthropologies* (2011) and Stengers's *Cosmopolitics* (2011). On chemistry, see Frost's *Biocultural Creatures* (2016). On neuroscience, see Pitts-Taylor's *The Brain's Body* (2016). On geology, see Yusoff's *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2018).

8. It is worth noting that in all the attention to biology and physics in Coole and Frost's introduction to *New Materialisms*, it's easy to miss this sentence: "In this monolithic but multiply tiered ontology, there is no definitive break between sentient and nonsentient entities or between material and spiritual phenomena" (2010, 10).

9. Taking up and reworking Bruno Latour's work (1993), Isabelle Stengers sees modern science as a practice of confrontational dialectical distanciation: "In order to present themselves as scientific, they *need* to disqualify the opinions, the beliefs, of others, the nonmodern practices of which some claim to serve as rational substitutes" (2011, 285). This disqualification takes place in experimental "purification" of knowledge claims (over and against "fetishistic" knowledges) (329), and, although Stengers does not often put it in precisely these terms, a directly colonialist mastery of the world (Singh 2018). Stengers's proleptic formulation of a cosmopolitical science conjures the ghosts of this colonialist violence: "If other peoples know how to keep watch over their ancestors and restore their voices through the worlds they create, the history we have invented for ourselves is haunted by the ghosts of those it has crushed, vanquished, or bowed, and by the shadow of everything our reasons, our criteria, have destroyed, or reduced to silence or ridicule" (398). The violence of disqualification renders non-Man worlds and their knowledgings legible within colonialist grammars and the accompanying homogenized frame of temporality but only by disqualifying the affective, material, spiritual conditions of their thriving as worlds (Savransky, 2021). Haunting is a kind of tending (Gordon 1997; Young 2006).

10. The kinds of depoliticizing claims about queer nature Jordy Rosenberg (2014) worries about adhere in one version of this tendency to ground feminist

and queer politics in nature, matter, becoming, and so forth as if the ontological claims about how worlds work self-evidently lead to feminist and queer politics.

11. It might be worth noting that both Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" (1991) and Isabelle Stengers's *Cosmopolitics* (2011) make direct but *uncited* reference to Starhawk. See also Rebekah Sheldon's (2016; 2019) work on the occult influences on object-oriented ontology. Josh Ramey's *The Hermetic Deleuze* (2012) is relevant here too, although I don't think anyone would classify Deleuze as a scientifically oriented thinker.

12. My understanding of secularism is heavily informed by Talal Asad's *Formations of the Secular*, which argues that "secularism doesn't simply insist that religious practice and belief be confined to a space where they cannot threaten political stability or the liberty of 'free thinking' citizens. Secularism builds on a particular conception of the world ('natural' and 'social') and of the problems generated by that world" (2003, 191–92). Asad notes one especially crucial axiom of the secularist project: "Beliefs should either have no direct connection to the way one lives, or be held so lightly that they can easily be changed" (115).

13. Throughout modernity, esoterisms have been aligned with projects of colonial empire such as John Dee's renaissance magic. See Frances Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*. Dee "identified completely with the British imperial myth around Elizabeth I and did all in his power to support it" (2001, 100). They have aligned with political visions that affirm patriarchal and fascist social formations. See Eileen Joy's talk, "Building a Tribe Outside the System: Allen Frantzen, Jack Donovan, and the Neomedievalist Alt-Right," Annual Humanities Lecture, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA (March 2018). On occult currents in accelerationism (including the fascistic "dark enlightenment" of Nick Land), see Rebekah Sheldon, "Accelerationism's Queer Occulture" (2019). In *The Ahuman Manifesto*, Patricia MacCormack notes that esoterisms show up in "a nostalgic right-wing return to tradition" both in "neo-fascist occultism" and in some less obviously troubling esoterisms (2020, 102). But they have also aligned with anticolonial struggles on occupied lands and throughout the Black Atlantic. See the collection *Sorcery in the Black Atlantic*, edited by Luis Nicolau Parés and Roger Sansi (2011).

14. Foucault's essay "What Is Enlightenment?" ends with an admonishment to those who would conflate enlightenment with humanism, arguing that at least as far as the eighteenth century is concerned, he is "inclined to see Enlightenment and humanism in a state of tension rather than identity" (1998, 314). Moreover, Foucault proposes that however we conceptualize it, we have to be wary of "everything that might present itself in the form of a simplistic or authoritarian alternative," a form of "blackmail" (313).

15. Kant's short 1784 text zeroes in on relations between freedom, authority, and knowledge, locating Enlightenment as "man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity" (1970, 33) in precisely the possibility of free, intellectual

exchange *in public*, which is to say, in print. Enlightenment is thus inseparable from what Benedict Anderson (1983) calls print capitalism, and the possibility of suturing a "nation" to affective forms of belonging that exceed material interpersonal contact. Rejecting a notion of authority that would oppose it to freedom of thought, Kant instead wants to ground public obedience to state power precisely in the free circulation of critical thought. This grounding makes crucial use of a distinction between the public and the private, where in their positions as private individuals playing specific roles, "one must certainly not argue, instead one must obey" (42). But, "the *public* use of one's reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among mankind" (42).

16. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's *Becoming Human* similarly thinks about Man's homogenization working through differential ontologization (where that overwrites evental emergence as "being" in what she calls "ontologized plasticity"). Analyzing logics of what we often name dehumanization, Jackson writes, "animalization is not incompatible with humanization: what is commonly deemed dehumanization is, in the main, more accurately interpreted as the violence of humanization or the burden of inclusion into a racially hierarchized universal humanity" (2020, 18). Inclusion within humanity, or homogenization around Man, actually requires the production of the non-, in-, and less-than-human as constitutive insides that are ultimately *within* the evolutionary frame of Man's "biocentric descriptive statement" (Wynter 2003).

17. Dillard explains her "'endarkened' feminist epistemology" by anchoring it in the specificity of Black women's experience (and more specifically their experiences as school leaders), and laying out its six key assumptions: "Assumption #1: Self-definition forms one's participation and responsibility to one's community" (2006, 18); "Assumption #2: Research is both an intellectual and a spiritual pursuit, a pursuit of purpose" (20); 3: "Only within the context of community does the individual appear (Palmer, 1983) and, through dialogue, continue to become" (22); 4: "Concrete experience with everyday life form the criterion of meaning, the 'matrix of meaning making' (Ephraim-Donker, 1997, 8)" (23); "Assumption #5: Knowing and research and both historical (extending backwards in time) and outward to the world: To approach them otherwise is to diminish their cultural and empirical meaningfulness" (24); and 6: "Power relations, manifest as racism, sexism, homophobia, and so on structure gender, race, and other identity relations within research" (26).

18. My sense of "implication" here is indebted to Michael Rothberg's *The Implicated Subject* (2019) which theorizes the implicated subject as a nonhomogeneous field of responsibilities that fall outside of a binary model of perpetrator and victim.

19. Tavia Nyong'o writes, of recent posthumanist moves toward "dark ecology," "In this sudden profusion of darkly vibrant speculative realisms, too little

time or real patience is given to the dark precursors to these blacknesses and darknesses in the red record of genocide, slavery, and colonialism out which this new world was worlded" (2019, 108). The performance Nyong'o turns to as a counterforce to this lack of patience is by Guatemalan artist Regina José Galindo, *Piedra* (2013). Nyong'o's reading carefully attends to the specifics of the situation, in which a naked body crouches on the ground, covered in charcoal paint, becoming "like" a stone in ways that dramatize histories of racism and extractivist capitalism. Nyong'o ultimately discovers a kind of tending I would call endarkenment in that it gathers feminist projects without homogenization: "Something no more wondrous, no less pedestrian, as a small black stone sitting, warming, in the Brazilian sun, can be a seed around which the crystal image of Black and Latina feminist recollection unfolds in the singular plural" (108).

20. José Esteban Muñoz writes that "to become attuned to the brownness of the world is to see what is here but concealed. It is a sustained practice of seeking, finding, and, again, touching an aspect of being with and in the world" (2020, 118–19). He finds an apt instantiation of this attunement in Ricardo Bracho's 1997 play *The Sweetest Hangover (and Other STDs)*, which conjures "a world without white people" (18). In the play, Thing 2 suggests to Thing 1 that "he get over whiteness by simply blinking his eyes and letting in darkness. This ritual thus magically expels whiteness from the play, leaving a brown world of feeling, organized by affective belongings between people of color" (18–19). While my primary understanding of whiteness is a diagram that organizes affective worlds—a part of the homogenizing grammar of colonial modernity—Muñoz's references here to "white people" and "people of color" refuses the abstraction of "systems" from material, corporeal entities that are intra-active with them. Such abstraction would locate darkness as an idealist horizon, a kind of symbolic or merely metaphorical orientation that is absolved from engaging ongoing histories of violence as they structure material situations. For Muñoz, though, darkness is a matter of "the brownness of the world."

21. On the paraontological, see Moten's *Stolen Life* (2018) and Bey's *The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Gender* (2021), both of which elaborate the work of Nahum Chandler.

22. Tim Ingold writes, "Rather than thinking of ourselves only as observers, picking our way around objects lying about on the ground of a ready-formed world, we must imagine ourselves in the first place as participants, each immersed with the whole of our being in the currents of a world-in-formation: in the sunlight we see, the rain we hear and the wind we feel in. Participation is not opposed to observation but is a condition for it, just as light is a condition for seeing things, sound for hearing them, and feeling for touching them" (2011, 129; cited in Escobar 2018, 87).

23. This sentence is informed by Jennifer Christine Nash's *Black Feminism Reimagined* (2019) and Julietta Singh's *Unthinking Mastery* (2018).

24. La paperson writes, "Everywhere land refuses and resists—whales that destroy ships, bees that refuse to work, bombed islands that reconstitute themselves. The land also resists in the form of people; Indigenous peoples' resistance is the land's resistance. Indigenous people continue to subvert legal and capitalist technologies as part of that resistance. And technologies and technological beings resist too" (2017, 21).

25. Anticipating chapter 4, Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* proposes what I want to call an evental ontology of worlds, or, more specifically, a sense of worlds as eventally ontogenetic: events make worlds; worlds are evental. We might say, summoning Sara Ahmed, that worlds are "hap": "Caring about what happens, caring whatever happens. We might call this a hap care" (2017, 266). Caring for and about what happens animates the practices Sharpe calls wake work (2016, 5), where, as I will draw out more in chapter 4, the wake of transatlantic racial slavery is part of *all of our* situations, which means the question becomes how we think our differential participation in that wake, how we tend it in ways that enable its endurance or how we tend other, endarkenment worlds. Sharpe focuses on the ship Zong (along with cultural and theoretical work that returns to that ship) as a participant in Middle Passage and the site of the emergence of insurance as part of global capital's extraction of value from lives rendered fungible. Sharpe writes, setting up the turn to Zong, "*The event*, which is to say, one version of one part of a more than four-hundred-year-long event . . ." (37). Events within events, part(ial) events, version of events: for Sharpe, as it were, it's events all the way down. The world is evental; there is no stable ontology or material substrate upon or against which things "happen" (to again hear Ahmed); worlds are processual, they emerge in and from events, they *are* events. If "the wake" of slavery is a way of naming our world, it's only because at every single moment—where moment might include time spaces that far exceed the human in their molecular speed or their geographical and ecological slowness—it is recreated, reaffirmed, reinstantiated. Man's world is not the aftereffect of the ontological rupture of Middle Passage (and European colonization) so much as it is a world that is continually remade (I might say practiced or performed) in anti-Black (and anti-Brown, anti-Indigenous, heteropatriarchal) ways, within colonial grammars. The colonial, enlightenment world tends to maintain its historic route.

As Sharpe puts it, "At stake is . . . antiblackness as total climate. At stake too is . . . recognizing an insistent Black visualsonic resistance to that imposition of non/being" (2016, 21). In "the hold" of Zong—as one part of an event that is in turn within the centuries-long event we can call colonial modernity (and its totalizing homogenization)—there is always this resistant excess, a "Black aliveness" (Quashie 2021) to mark just one of many names for the animating darknesses I'm turning toward in the book, that emerges from and tends the endurance of its own subjunctive possibility. Quashie's book—perhaps one of the

most beautiful examples of close reading I have ever encountered—opens with the invitation to "imagine a black world," where I would mark that indefinite "a" in contradistinction to the (definite) singular world of Man. He writes, "we have to imagine a black world so as to surpass the everywhere and everyway of black death, of blackness that is understood only through such a vocabulary . . . a world where blackness exists in the tussle of being, in reverie and terribleness, in exception and in ordinariness" (2021, 1). While I am drawn here to Quashie's "black world" because of the precise questions of *In the Wake*, I might constellate it with the ongoingness of what Leanne Simpson calls "radical resurgence": "Radical resurgence means an extensive, rigorous, and profound reorganizing of things. To me, resurgence has always been about this. It has always been a rebellion and a revolution from within. It has always been about bringing forth a new reality" (2017, 48–49). Quashie and Simpson tend different esoteric worlds, but they resonate in their insistence that such worlds endure *despite* coloniality's crushing violences.

26. I am using terminology from science studies: "intra-action" is Karen Barad's (2007) way of conceptually marking how bounded, discrete entities are produced in, by, through, and with their articulation in apparatuses (technological apparatuses of measurement in physics, or conceptual apparatuses in theory). Entities do not preexist their articulation (2007). Actant is Bruno Latour's (2004) word for any participant in knowledge, human or non.

27. While not explicit in the text, I also hear in tendings "tender," not as a modality of exchange per se ("legal tender" is money) so much as a kind of tenderness, a word that has a particular resonance in recent queer discourse, and that has important ties to vulnerability.

28. Didier Debaise writes that "each event is a passage, inherently unique in its moment, different from all others, according to a rekindling of the principle of indiscernibles, but there are elements that do not pass" (2017, 35). Events emerge and perish; they are bounded both temporally and spatially, even if they might have shapes that look blurry or diffuse according to certain post-enlightenment logics. And their perishing sets the conditions for the next event. This conception of worlds as (generated from) events thus introduces a particular potential for evental *disruption*. Worlds—as more-than-human socialities made up of "societies" in Whitehead's sense—will tend to endure in their evental ongoingness. This tendency could be said to be probable: heteropatriarchal coloniality—and its anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, anti-Brown, extractivist logics—works by modulating the most likely outcome of these events at all kinds of scales. Coloniality itself, then, is, considered from the standpoint of what has been called ontology (as the study of what "is"), a tendency in the patterning of worlds. Decolonization is about differential, otherwise, endarkenment patterning (which includes material and political land relations). Because there are "elements that do not pass," there's an opening to practice tendings toward the

End of the World as we know it (da Silva 2014). How might we participate in practices such that Man can no longer (come to) pass?

29. In my book *Animate Literacies* (2019b), I propose that we think of literacy as a more-than-human phenomenon, a practice that unfolds relationally in all situations, which means that human storytelling (what we call "literature") is a *version* of a wider field of literacies or more-than-human meaning making processes.

30. While I will engage with specific conceptions of care throughout *Tendings*, my general sense of the feminist, queer, trans, decolonial, and abolitionist politics of care has been shaped by Joan Tronto's *Moral Boundaries* (1993); Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's *Care Work* (2018); Hil Malatino's *Trans Care* (2020); and the Care Collective's *Care Manifesto* (2020). I would especially like to sound Mel Chen's "wish" in the afterword of *Animacies*: "Well beyond rejecting secularism or spirituality, I wish for an ethics of care and sensitivity that extends far from humans' (or the Human's) own borders" (2012, 237).

31. Brian Massumi foregrounds play in evental emergence, at least for those entities within worlds that we think of as vital. He writes, "Our freedom consists in how we play our implication in the field, what events we succeed in catalyzing in it that bring out the latent singularity of the situation, how we inflect it for novel emergence" (2015, 158). There is, in the wake (Sharpe 2016), not just a continuance of colonial, homogenizing logics, but also a kind of surplus, what Massumi calls here "the latent singularity, " Deleuze calls the virtual, and I might call the subjunctive.

32. I return to touch and haptics many times in this book, but I should note my thinking about this is heavily informed by Erin Manning's *Politics of Touch* (2006).

33. My use of "grammar" to signal this complex follows Hortense Spillers's "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (2003), an essay that thinks anti-Blackness as a structure of worlding that articulates the (white) subject through complex assemblages of (un)gendering that preclude the grammatical, juridical, "human" possibility of a Black "subject" within the colonial and heteropatriarchal world. My thinking about grammar is also always in conversation with Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection*, in particular her attention to how "the particular status of the slave as object and subject" (1997, 54) requires a rethinking of the entirety of the political, because its grammar precludes the possibility of a Black subject since "those subjects removed from the public sphere are formally outside the space of politics" (65). As Tiffany Lethabo King puts it, "Hartman's theorization of fungibility represents a Black mode of expression, screaming, or utterance that exceeds the narrow humanist and settler grammars of labor (and land as property)" (2019, 22). In this expanded sense, grammar may be something like a synonym for what Foucault has called an "episteme," "the pure experience of order and its modes of being"

(1994, xxi). Epistemes are historical in the sense that they, like everything else in worlds, are constantly becoming, and this becoming's overall tendencies are something like aggregate outlines of microencounters happening across societies (in Whitehead's more-than-human sense) at multiple differential scales. They are "anterior to words, perceptions, and gestures" (xxi), where ordering logics immanently pattern worlds by patterning practices that tend worlds. Grammar is about the ways that our attention to worlds takes place *within* the ongoingness of worlds that carry, as tendencies, previous patterns which shape the field of possible (and probable) worlds we think, feel, and participate in.

34. Saidiya Hartman has called this, with a beautiful use of the subjunctive, waywardness: "an ongoing exploration of *what might be*; it is an improvisation with the terms of social existence, when the terms have already been dictated, when there is little room to breathe, when you have been sentenced to a life of servitude, when the house of bondage looms in whatever direction you move" (2019, 228).

35. Building on Moten's attention to grammar in *In the Break*, Christina Sharpe writes, "I arrive at blackness as, blackness is, anagrammatical. That is, we can see the moments when blackness opens up into the anagrammatical in the literal sense as when 'a word, phrase or name is formed by rearranging the letters of another'" (2016, 76).

36. Returning to and extending Spillers, Frank Wilderson III has thought this in terms of the "structures of US antagonisms" between white, Black, and Indigenous worlds as they differentially participate in the homogenizing anti-Black and anti-Indigenous singular world of coloniality in the North American context. Wilderson's account, like that of Orlando Patterson, foregrounds how "the imaginary of the state and civil society is parasitic on Middle Passage. Put another way, No slave, no world" (2010, 11). The colonial grammar that presumes Man as the post-enlightenment subject is inseparable from the anti-Black and anti-Indigenous violence of enslavement and elimination, violence that Afro-pessimists call "gratuitous violence" as opposed to the contingent violence that attends contacts among groups where we imagine violence may be avoided through changes, however radical, within the structure of world singular. What he dreams of is the end of the homogeneous world, then, but he's also skeptical of certain kinds of alliance or affiliation. There is thus a lot of conversation about the incommensurability of justice movements (Tuck and Yang 2018), which have often turned on tensions between Indigenous and Black futures, or between decolonial and abolitionist projects.

37. I follow Wynter in extending "tending" to a wider field than gender performance (as I explain in chapter 2), but Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* signals precisely the distributed, participatory agency I am trying to think in *Tendings*: "Gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. . . . There is no gender identity behind the expressions

of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (1990, 25).

38. In *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty writes, "I would suggest that the idea of a godless, continuous, empty, and homogeneous time, which history shares with the other social sciences and modern political philosophy as a basic building block, belongs to this model of higher, overarching language. It represents a structure of generality, an aspiration toward the scientific, that is built into conversations that take the modern historical consciousness for granted" (2000, 75–76).

39. See my discussion in chapter 4 of the "order-word" in Erin Manning's *For a Pragmatics of the Useless* (2020). It is, however, worth noting that these categorical modal differences are backformations (that become pre- and proscriptive) belying how the imperative leaks into the subjunctive in practice. As Kris Trujillo reminded me, especially hortatory subjunctives, and especially in certain contexts, can affectively function more as imperatives than anything else. And these imperatives in the grammatical form of subjunctive utterances can be linked to struggles over the universal "correctness" of specifically white and middle-class expectations (Delpit, 1995). Which is to say, Man's subjunctives can still function imperatively.

40. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (2002); Didier Debaise, *Nature and Event* (2017); and Steven Shaviro, *Without Criteria* (2009).

41. There is, as Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009) notes in the context of the ongoing anthropogenic climate catastrophe, a generative grammar within what we call "historiography" that presumes a particular kind of subject (of knowing and acting) that writes itself into futures which are *always imagined* as materially continuous with the legible "past" that is the (ultimately very tiny) past of *homo sapiens*, which also turns out to be (although Chakrabarty doesn't put it quite this way) a specific effect of the aggregate worldings we gather under the geological nomenclature of the "Holocene." History links the past and future not just through the present of a grammatically (and metaphysically) self-determined subject, and through specific options for conjugating tense, but through an abiding and presumptive narratological frame that is inseparable from *ecological* or climatological conditions of worlding that *far* exceed the human. History is, as da Silva argues, about "comprehend[ing] the universality of differentiation" (2007, 64). Homogenization is paradoxically committed to differentiation, which is why I am trying to think it as a matter of grammar: homogenization does not flatten distinctions among things or entities but rather multiplies them by articulating them within *homogenizing* frames that purport to order those things into a known or knowable whole. Mark Rifkin's extension of work on queer temporalities to think about how this works in settler colonialism notes that worlds have their own specific temporalities, and the scene of colonial contact is in part

about the violent assertion of a single temporal, historical frame that includes Indigenous worlds precisely through disqualifying (and attempting to eliminate) their evental ontogenesis (where this is irreducibly spatiotemporal, a matter of land's durativity as a more-than-human sociality). He writes, "U.S. settler colonialism produces its own temporal formation, with its own particular ways of apprehending time, and the state's policies, mappings, and imperatives generate the frame of reference" (2). Riffing on Wynter, we might say that settler time overrepresents itself as if it were time itself, and this homogenizing "frame of reference" violently incorporates worlds into world. But we can tend otherwise, beyond settler temporality as Rifkin underscores: "What *was* does not provide a set pattern, like a mold, for what *will* or *could be*" (32).

Chapter One. "What is a Witch?" *Tituba*'s Subjunctive Challenge

1. Imani Perry writes that "recent critics generally believe that Tituba was not African, as she is generally represented, but either Indigenous or both Indigenous and African. In any case, she was of a people who were outside of or, at best, ancillary to recognition in the legal regime where they resided" (2018, 27).

2. While my claim is that the novel itself makes this move, my ability to notice that move and think about it as a crucial gesture in the "abolition of Man" (Weheliye 2014) has been made possible by Black feminist theorists like M. Jacqui Alexander (2005), Avery Gordon (1997), Hortense Spillers (2003), and Saidiya Hartman (1997; 2008) whose work has simultaneously analyzed anti-Black grammars of worlding (what I call the indicative) and experimented with "subjunctive" historical thinking in order to "paint as full a picture . . . as possible" of the lives coloniality has violently erased (Hartman 2008, 11).

3. Imani Perry, however, says that "Tituba was ultimately executed" (2018, 28). Rather than take a side in an argument about facts, I note this simply to underscore just how little certainty there is in the indicative archive around Tituba.

4. Martin Savransky writes: "In the wake of the tangled catastrophes of capitalism, colonialism, and extractivism, the mass disqualification of differences through which the modern world was born has radically devasted the conditions of livability of myriad human and more-than-human worlds in this world" (2021, 4).

5. My argument here is congruent with claims put forth in two books, both titled *Naming the Witch*. In James Siegel's book, he argues that "through the concept 'witchcraft,' there is an attempt to assimilate alien power to a cultural system . . . 'Witch,' rather than being an understood concept, then, in given historical circumstances points to a limit on an alterity which cannot be accepted" (2006, 221–22). Kimberly Stratton, exploring witchcraft accusations in ancient Greek, Roman, Christian, and Jewish worlds, notes that "magic functions as a discourse among competing discourses where it sometimes overlaps, supports, undermines, or subverts other discourses" (2007, 17). Moreover, she works by