MATTHEW OMELSKY

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FOR MY FATHER,
PAUL OMELSKY

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An amalgamation of experiences and influences have brought me to this point. First hearing the sound of Wes Montgomery's guitar in a friend's living room. Studying Ewe music with Kobla Ladzekpo. Intro to Pan-Africanism with Michael Dash. Studying photography with Lyle Ashton Harris and working in his New York studio. Teaching primary school in Guadeloupe. Studying Wolof and learning to play the *xalam* in Dakar. Almost a decade of graduate school got me to channel these disparate threads into focused work, without sacrificing my love of it all and my commitment to the fields to which I'm privileged and humbled to offer this book as a contribution.

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INTRODUCTION
BLACK BEYONDNESS

THREE SCENES AND AN OPENING

Against an entirely white background, holding a black balloon with his outstretched hand, a young man rises. His nude body, turned to the side, is silhouetted in black. Toes pointing, chest leaning, he's tilted in flight. He gazes down as he moves up and outward, surveying what he's leaving behind. Another young man, standing below, gazes up at the rising one, reaching out to touch the flying figure's other hand, like he's sending him off. This image from *The Moment You Doubt Whether You Can Fly, You Cease Forever to Be Able to Do It* (2014), an installation by American artist Shikeith, features, at least at first sight, two young men. The contours of the silhouetted figures, though, are unmistakably similar. Could it be a sequence, a movement, of just one? Could it be that the figure standing on the ground is the young man only a moment earlier in time, prior to his flight, in advance of the balloon's lift, imagining himself rising away to new life? He has to imagine, the title suggests. He has to believe. What if this is a visual representation of one young man's anticipatory desire, his imagined movement in time, from moment to moment? A map of the trajectory of his longing for the moment when he's at last unburdened of this world?[1]

Eight minutes and forty-six seconds. The amount of time it took for breath to vanish from George Floyd's body. The elapsed time that ignited Minneapolis, setting America on fire. But it wasn't only cities in the United States that burned in the spring and summer of 2020, while COVID-19 raged. Across the world, people protested for black lives outside US embassies, they burned American flags, they blocked traffic and lay down in the streets for those nearly nine minutes. These protests across the world were in solidarity with the Movement for Black Lives, certainly, but most were infused with the local and the immediate, with the refusal of state violence against their own black lives. Anderson Arboleda in Bogota, Collins Khosa in Johannesburg, thirteen-year-old Yassin Moyo in Nairobi: all killed by either the police or the military during pandemic lockdowns, their deaths pouring people into the streets. In Paris the death of Floyd renewed mass demonstrations against Adama Traoré's 2016 death by asphyxiation in police custody, sparking what many at the time referred to as "Ferguson in Paris." And all of this was cut across by calls to decolonize public spaces. The replacement that July of a 125-year-old statue in Bristol, England, of slave trader Edward Colston, which had been toppled and thrown into the River Avon by protesters, with *A Surge of Power*, a black resin statue of protester Jen Reid, poised with her fist raised to the sky, remains a searing symbol of the global moment.

It all called, and continues to call, for something more. As Barnor Hesse and Juliet Hooker suggest, "Globally, black protest movements originating from local concerns are responding in different ways to the inability of liberal democracy to deliver robust racial justice and inviolable equal rights, drawing attention to the unfinished project of decolonization and the unrelenting dehumanization of black lives resulting from the precarity induced by global white supremacy (however much the latter may have morphed)."[2] The resurgence of protests in recent years, at least in part, points to alternative pathways, visions not aimed at reforming institutions or correcting democratic processes but at the necessity of other worlds, of new life. In this resurgence is the suggestion that perhaps that "project" will remain unfinished for too long or will always be unfinished. That global capital may very well require the imperfections of liberal democracy that keep black lives subjected. That democracy requires the disposability of black life as "the ground we walk on."[3] What these protests signal is an alternative capacity to desire that's immanent to global black cultures. A desire to imagine "a world beyond the coercive technologies" of everyday existence.[4] One that "strives in pursuit of the sublime, struggling to repeat the unrepeatable, to present the unpresentable."[5] A desire in excess of the

failed promises of justice and equality espoused by post-Enlightenment liberal societies. A black politics that searches for freedom and belonging beyond the law, beyond the state, in some cases even beyond this world.

Fugitive Time charts this utopian impulse as a theory of the experience of time: memories and anticipations, woundings and desires, culturally and historically marked. Through the lens of time as it manifests in the imagination—time as it passes from moment to moment—this study traces the embodied sensations and coursing thoughts that accompany one's anticipated passage from subjection to freedom. It's in the phenomenal outward vision and the subtle desire for transcendence animating Shikeith's *The Moment You Doubt Whether You Can Fly*. It's in the blink of an eye that separates the one figure's dream of flight and the other's seeming enactment of that dream. What I call "fugitive time" names the phenomenon in which one imagines what it might feel like to be free of the violence that has consumed blackness throughout the world for centuries. The *anticipation* of the outside of subjection is paramount, but the recurring *haunting* of violence as it bleeds into present consciousness remains fundamental, constituting the moment from which one flees. To be clear, this is not a theory of futurity or linear progress. Fugitive time's utopia lies in the anticipated moment when pain has at last vanished from the body, whenever and wherever that may come, bringing with it a new form of being and being-in-the-world. As in all utopias, however, that moment of absolute release is elusive. If one does seem to touch on it, it quickly recedes. Instead, fugitive time is about sustaining the idea of the chase as a social gathering, the shared ecstasy of perpetually imagining in advance that moment of unburdening. As in Shikeith's image, keeping an eye and a hand on the black balloon that just might lead, in that next moment, to new life.

In this book, aesthetics is how we see and witness fugitive time, as this introduction's priming "scenes"—each revealing different valences and formations—demonstrate. The book attends to descriptive anticipation and desire in aesthetic works, how fugitive time manifests at the level of deliberately articulated ideas. But I'm also fundamentally concerned with the myriad ways fugitive consciousness is registered in narrative structure, in metaphor, in cinematic editing, in sonic texture, in physical objects and materials. To use the term Caroline Levine borrows from design theory, aesthetic form takes on "affordances": "the potential uses or actions latent in materials and designs." "Glass affords transparency and brittleness," she suggests. "Enclosures afford containment and security," whereas "the sonnet, brief and condensed, best affords a single idea or experience."

Affordance broadens the idea of form so that we might ask "what potentialities lie latent—though not always obvious—in aesthetic and social arrangements" and how such arrangements "organize experience."[6] Rather than just describe time consciousness, the aesthetic works in this book *afford* time consciousness. By this I mean that their materials, designs, and structures provide additional ways of perceiving the subtle movements of memory and anticipation. Fugitive time's indexing in montage editing, in tense and mood, in one musical instrument's sound set against that of another, surrounds and complements those deliberate ideas of anticipated embodied escape expressed in a song or a film, together evincing layers of kinetic movements, sedimentations of fugitive dreaming. Cultural expression archives and maps these simultaneous temporal vectors, providing a multidimensional lens into black cultures and experiences from around the world. Through the confluence of form and description, aesthetic works make fugitive time consciousness perceivable.

These layers are in the simultaneously singular and double figure in Shikeith's image, the way—at the touching of hands—the one form rises and becomes the next, black starkly set against white, as if the young man is picturing his body lifting through an ethereal passageway toward another world. It's also in this wall stencil's placement in the larger installation—in the affordances of the soil scattered on the floor, the sculpture of a prostrate man, the sound of a female voice singing "Over the Rainbow." "I found a symbolic significance," Shikeith said in one interview, "in working with what I refer to as these mutable, underground, and fugitive substances and forms such as dirt, spills, and blue light."[7] This idea of fugitive form and substance is central to Shikeith's larger excavation of the interior lives and spaces of black queer masculinity, and central to the way I attend to fugitive time in this book.

The other fundamental feature of *Fugitive Time* is its geographic scope. This is a resoundingly global black project, not one limited to North America or even the Western Hemisphere. Perhaps the most evident connection among the circum-Atlantic geographies of this book—from Africa to the Caribbean to North America to Europe—is their common structural subjection that extends back centuries to the first Portuguese sea expeditions to the West African coast. What Frank Wilderson calls "blackened life" is a global historical structure that continues to organize the world today.[8] It's a constellation of interconnected, systemic subjections that has mutated across time and space: from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century African captivity, to the slave castles of Elmina and Gorée, to the plantations across the Americas, to the European partition and colonization of the African

continent, to the restructured violence of Jim Crow, to economic structural adjustment and postcolonial autocracy, to the transcontinental migrations of West Indians and Africans to the global North, to the New Jim Crow of mass incarceration, to the ongoing quotidian antiblack and xenophobic violence on the streets of Brussels, Johannesburg, and Rochester. These subjugations are varied, to be sure. But they all extend from that "natal alienation."[9] They all pivot back, however indirectly, to that originary designation as an object in the world.

As evident as these interrelations of subjection may be, however, the principal connection among this book's geographies has more to do with the cultural responses to that violence—that which gets generated through the desire to be free. "The bridge between the people of Gwolu and me," Saidiya Hartman proposes in *Lose Your Mother* (2006), "wasn't what we had suffered or what we had endured but the aspirations that fueled flight and the yearning for freedom."[10] Likewise for Achille Mbembe, the African diaspora, inclusive of the African continent, is organized around the recognition of "a life that must at all costs be pulled out of the dungeon and . . . healed."[11] The idea of diaspora that organizes this project centers on the global circulation of cultures, languages, and discourses produced from these aspirations to be free and healed—understanding this circulation as structured by a network of "practices," as Brent Hayes Edwards puts it, which produce not only "new and unforeseen alliances on a global stage" but also "unavoidable misapprehensions and misreadings, persistent blindnesses and solipsisms . . . a failure to translate even a basic grammar of blackness."[12] The diaspora of this project, in other words, is always contingent, in search of intimacies and alliances among people of African descent, but always marked by difference.

Fugitive Time is allied with inspiring work that frames black life and diaspora as globally differentiated, where the African continent is not just a historical source but a diverse, vital, and coeval contributor to diasporic circulations and belongings. I'm thinking of Tsitsi Jaji's notion of "stereomodernism," a method of reading and listening to cultural production from across the global diaspora that accounts for difference but operates within a relational logic of pan-African solidarity.[13] I also have in mind Keguro Macharia's practice of reading "across geohistories, across difference, toward freedom." Macharia conceives of the black diaspora as constituted by a "multiplicity of sense-apprehensions" that he names "frottage," which includes notions of "recognition, disorientation, compassion, pity, disgust, condescension, lust, titillation, arousal, and exhaustion," altogether composing a desire to "create new ways to imagine and be with one another."[14]

Examining works from Martinique, Zimbabwe, Senegal, Britain, and the United States—ranging from fiction and poetry to music, film, and multimedia installation—*Fugitive Time* builds on and forges new lines of inquiry in this field, showing how this distinct experience of time remains, since the late eighteenth-century slave narrative, a dominant and recurring form of utopian time consciousness in global black cultural production.

II

> The novel ends in midair. With Verlia "weightless," her body having "fallen away," "just a line, an electric current." Leaping from the cliff, toward the sea, "she's in some other place already, less tortuous, less fleshy." Set between Toronto and an unnamed Caribbean island, shuttling between the mid- and late twentieth century, Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996) features a figure who's ahead of herself in her flight, occupying in advance that elsewhere in her mind. Feeling the weight fall from her body, electricity surging through her, as if she's already there and then. Taking flight from the history that haunts blackness, from the heteronormative world that demonizes queer desire, from the suffocations of capital. Most of all, from memory, from the body. She's leaping to her death, but also to her ecstasy, to her release. And this isn't just a final moment. Brand's nonlinear plotting constantly cycles around Verlia's leap and the pain she flees, like a vortex that climbs and accumulates until it bursts out over the cliff. Meditations on insomnia, on loneliness, on "lifting a load but you don't know what that load is" accrue. Persistent mentions of "riding out to sea" in her mind, dreams that she "multiplied into pieces and flew away," prefigure her leap beyond this world.[15]

The concept of fugitive time emerges from the intersection of the study of time consciousness in European continental thought and theories of fugitivity in black studies. These latter theories broadly postulate the ways people of African descent have historically responded to their subjugation by evading the very societal structures that have rendered black life unlivable. In my framing, fugitivity is a refusal to acknowledge the interpella-

tion that negates black being. It enacts "a duty to appose the oppressor, to refrain from the performance of the labor of the negative, to avoid the economy of objectification and standing against, to run away from the snares of recognition."[16] It means, in essence, fleeing the iconic scene in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* a split second before the child can utter the words "Look, a Negro!" Thinking alongside Fred Moten, it means escaping that encounter altogether, leaving the child breathless and the fugitive figure vanished, off to a world all their own. Fugitivity is a movement that runs in and out of the confines, fleeing the forces of surveillance and control as an ecstatic social gathering, collectively refusing what's been refused to it.

Importantly, in the poems, music, images, and films I've collected in this book, fugitivity's active planning and movement are not the form of agency that has become overwrought in studies in the humanities of subaltern groups countering a hegemonic force.[17] As the Senegalese multidisciplinary artist Issa Samb insists of his own politics and practice, "To contest is not to refuse, it's a form of acceptance," a way of assenting to another's terms. Samb, whose sprawling work I examine in chapter 4, instead opts to "detach," refusing "all forms of existing society."[18] In the various artworks studied in this book, however, I want to be clear that fugitivity—this refusal to engage—is not in itself freedom. It is, more precisely, *not yet* freedom. But it's an insistent imminence. Perhaps something more akin to what Rinaldo Walcott calls "proto-freedom," an almost liberation that evinces a rhythm "difficult to capture, often glimpsed," yet is too often "violently interdicted."[19] There's something in this world that blocks black freedom, that tethers it to unfreedom despite that glimpse. Fugitivity's stealth leans toward freedom, but, as Darieck Scott cautions on the question of agency, with indeterminacy and contingency, where power is always "provisional and to some degree slippery and suggestive."[20] Slipperiness and suggestiveness, we might say, facilitate the operations of eyeing for an opening.

With this contingency in mind, fugitivity names a movement of the physical body, but it also suggests a form of consciousness that corresponds to the myriad desires that signal an as yet unrealized freedom. Fugitive consciousness is integral to the way that Jared Sexton, for instance, characterizes black captivity as "open to an outside about which it will not know anything and about which it cannot stop thinking, a nervous system always in pursuit of the fugitive movement it cannot afford to lose and cannot live without."[21] Hartman likewise describes this frame of mind as a collective "dream of an elsewhere," a ceaseless set of imaginative operations.[22] Ultimately, the broad idea of fugitivity that animates this book aligns with

Neal Roberts's notion of marronage as the "liminal and transitional social space" that separates unfreedom and freedom.[23] But in this project, that transitional space is not just social. It's temporal, affective, ontological. It's saturated with desire for the outside of unfreedom. The elusive other side of fugitivity promises transcendence for black life, even if it always remains just that: a promise.

Fugitive Time builds on the work of Hartman, Moten, Roberts, and others by theorizing fugitivity not just as a structure of consciousness, but of *time* consciousness. This book proposes a way of conceiving of time within this strain of black studies thought by drawing on what's often referred to as "phenomenological time," the study of the human perception of time as a constantly ebbing and flowing system of memories and anticipations. Dating to St. Augustine's eleventh-century *Confessions*, it's an approach that attends to the ways the mind registers the passing of time from moment to moment, and how this expansive system of anticipations and memories contributes to one's sense of being and being-in-the-world. This phenomenological analytic is central to Martin Heidegger's construction of *Dasein* in *Being and Time* (1927), as well as Paul Ricoeur's influential work on narrative and fiction in the three volumes of *Time and Narrative* (1984, 1985, 1988). But it was Edmund Husserl's conception of the "ever expanding now," notably in his turn-of-the-century lectures assembled in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (1928), that renewed interest in this philosophical method. The example Husserl returns to again and again is the human perception of a musical melody: one's recognition not just of the moment of a tone's articulation (the now point) but also of the simultaneous perception of that tone's continual recession into the past (memory) and the coming of a new articulation (anticipation).[24] But *Fugitive Time* escapes this work, as it were, on this question of the human—what Sylvia Wynter would call Husserl and Heidegger's formulation of the colonial "ethnoclass mode of being human, Man," and its overrepresentation as that of the human species *tout court*.[25] Where these thinkers sought to uncover a universal humanness through phenomenology, *Fugitive Time* zooms in on the memories and anticipations stitched into aesthetic works to uncover a culturally and historical distinct conception of time. The project presents not a monolithic temporality, but one of multitudes, examining how disparate African diasporic cultures produce their own versions of this phenomenological fugitive time.

One of the foundational ideas to emerge from these studies in phenomenology—another, no doubt, in need of amendment—is Ernst

Bloch's notion of "anticipatory consciousness." In the first volume of *The Principle of Hope* (1954), he describes the temporal "poles" of time consciousness as the "darkness" of the lived moment and one's openness to the "outside." The immediacy of "the now," he suggests, is a moment of enclosure. The now is the point from which the human least comprehends experience: it "burrows in itself and cannot feel itself." But in the phenomenal flow of time—specifically the moments just after and just before the now moment—the prior or coming "now" becomes legible as experience: "Only what is just coming up or what has just passed has the distance which the beam of growing consciousness needs to illuminate it." Intuition nevertheless rises from the blindness of the now and the points of illumination phenomenologically surrounding it. "What is driving in the Now at the same time continually surges forward," he maintains. The surge is a kind of outward searching, an "urging, wishing, doing."[26]

For Bloch and the writers and artists studied in this book, "wishing" does critical work in the creation of utopian desire in the surge of openness: "For 'wishing' eagerly looks forward to an imagined idea in which the desire causes what is its own to be pictured." The content of this "wish image" is created in advance, extending, "in an anticipatory way, existing material into the future possibilities of being different and better." The known, or "existing material," is transformed through this act of anticipation, becoming an image of the ideal as the object of desire. Bloch goes on to suggest that the drive that pushes this hopeful work of the imagination emerges from the body: "The drive-instinct belongs to the economy of the individual body and is only employed in so far as it belongs to it, in so far as the body does its own business, fleeing from what damages it, searching for what preserves it."[27] The body, for him, is the driving source point of utopian desire.

The structures of fugitive time that I isolate in the work of Sun Ra, No-Violet Bulawayo, and others also begin with the materiality of the body. The surge toward an otherwise existence is initiated in the body's phenomenological flight from trauma, "fleeing from what damages it," as Bloch says, "searching for what preserves it." If, more pointedly, for Daphne Brooks, nineteenth-century black precarious life meant that "there was no (safe) place for black bodies in America," then the desire for some kind of freedom, utopian or not, must necessarily emerge from the materiality of the black body, in the *desire* for a "(safe) place" to care for the black body, and, along with that (safe) place, a desire for a certain *sensation* in the body.[28] And just as Brooks subtly though significantly pluralizes "black bodies," it's a feeling that must be sought in sociality, in a collective sense of belonging

among kindred bodies. It's this collective desire for the sensation of release in the body—of painlessness, to be precise—that is the aim and freedom object of fugitive time, however elusive, even impossible, that this may be to achieve. Indeed, at times in the texts I examine, some of the fugitive figures appear to desire something short of absolute painlessness, indicating even a willingness to inhabit a degree of wounding if some kind of temporary relief can be felt alongside others. It's important to read these texts as they are, and I try in each case to do so. But I contend that even in these instances, absolute painlessness remains the ultimate utopian object structuring the horizon of desire. In most instances, as in Toni Morrison's early novels, such a desire for the soothing of pain appears in subtle moments surrounded by a larger and clear impulse to escape wounding altogether. I argue that these must be read alongside and through that deeper impulse. When a willingness to accommodate pain is articulated in the works I examine, perhaps in search of a degree of transient relief, it is, in other words, a signpost of an undercurrent utopian desire for absolution. Read alongside that deeper structure, they tell us that this world is not enough. That the vanishing of embodied pain has to be pursued.

Whatever the degree of desired release in question, however, we need to consider something more specific than the body that Bloch privileges. Indeed, what makes this book's aesthetic forms fugitive, and distinctly black, is the way violence has historically been registered on the flesh as an irreparable, inescapable wound. The wounded flesh, in Hortense Spillers's influential formulation, is the "zero degree of conceptualization" of black trauma, the "seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship's hold, fallen, or 'escaped' overboard."[29] If such "originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation continue to ground the dominant symbolic activity across the *longue durée*," then black life needs to be understood as always already marked by that mutilation insofar as that marking simultaneously *generates* its escapist energy yet *remains* constitutive of blackness.[30] It's this haunting of the wound that generates the anticipatory consciousness of fugitive time, its outward-oriented lunging toward release. From this enfleshed position, fugitive time begins its stealth in the phenomenal flow of time, in the anticipation of the immediate moment when that ultimate ease might at last wash over the flesh.[31]

This confluence structures Verlia's outward lunge in Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here*, and the thoughts, memories, and histories woven into the novel's narrative time that lead up to it. Shaping who she is and impelling her flight out to sea are the accumulations: her persistent inability

to sleep, her alienation in Toronto, the heaviness of home in the West Indies: "Call it what we want—colonialism, imperialism—it's a fucking life sentence. . . . You can't catch five fucking minutes of sleep without it, you can't drink a beer, some fucking breeze passes over your lips smelling of molasses, you can't even fuck, some pain shows up and you weep like a fucking ocean."[32] For Verlia to dream of being weightless, an electric current soaring through the air, is to imagine the other side of this encompassing pain. The wish image of what it might be like to feel "less fleshy" drives her into the beyond, over that West Indian cliff, in search of escape from a wound that may never vanish. For decades, the celebrated Trinidadian Canadian writer's poetry and prose have served as a kind of black critical practice that mines these liminal spaces of diaspora, between belonging and nonbelonging, the sayable and the unsayable, history and memory, desire and interdiction. Across the range of her work, Brand gives voice to what it means to inhabit and care for black flesh.

Given the double bind of escapist desire and inescapable wounding—of imagined flight that never fully or permanently escapes the hold—that anchors this theory of time, I see it running in and through contemporary debates on black life and ontology. It speaks to the "optimism" that inflects the work of Fred Moten, Tina Campt, Jayna Brown, Ashon Crawley, and others, which emphasizes the social and visionary potentialities of blackness, even as they excavate historical constructions of nonbeing. Moten insists that "celebration is the essence of black thought, the animation of black operations, which are, in the first instance, our undercommon, underground, submarine sociality."[33] But the project also dialogues with Afropessimist strains of thought—the idea of black life as "impossibly lived death," as "lived in, as, under, and despite Black death."[34] The line separating these pessimist and optimist positions, as I see it, often blurs, and *Fugitive Time* wades in and moves through that blurriness. For example, insofar as blackness, for Frank Wilderson—Afropessimism's foremost thinker—is the product of centuries of "gratuitous violence" that will never be fully escaped, rendering black life "nonrelational" and "fungible," he acknowledges his own "fantasies of flight," and describes what he calls "gratuitous freedom" as a kind of utopian horizon. An ultimately unattainable site beyond the world of black subjection that effectively constitutes the utopian object of fugitive time: "The Slave needs freedom from the Human race, freedom from the world."[35]

However, Afropessimism does put pressure on the possibilities and limits of fugitivity. In his introduction to a special issue of *Critical Sociology*, Sexton contends that the enduring antiblackness of our world means that

"there is no such thing as a *fugitive* slave," that "*there is no outside*." This is because, as he aptly frames it, fugitivity—that deferred, not-yet freedom, "spanning the split difference between grievance and grief, remedy and loss, hope and resignation"—relies on "an outside, however improbable or impossible, as the space of possibility, of movement, of life."[36] That "outside," Sexton maintains, drawing on Fanon, is bound up in the problematic of colonialism and its "imaginary topography." Any vision of that outside, in other words, is created by and inextricable from what constitutes black unfreedom. As sound as this reasoning is, the black radical imaginations presented in *Fugitive Time* believe in the possibility of the outside and the otherwise. They create images of it, aesthetic architectures to house it and tend to it. Sexton's position, in a way, intersects with Fredric Jameson's argument about utopian desire—that "all possible images of Utopia . . . will always be ideological and distorted by a point of view which cannot be corrected or even accounted for." The point of a utopian image, then, including each one studied in this book, is not in its predictive value but in its "critical negativity": "Its function lies not in itself, but in its capability radically to negate its alternative."[37] The imaginings studied in these pages do that work of negation. They don't realize that ultimate release. They don't achieve that "outside" of freedom and absolution. Instead, the wishes and longings of their images cut away, again and again, at the sedimentations of antiblackness. They unravel this world, one thread at a time, so that that outside, "however improbable or impossible," might at any moment come into view. In the end this book sits as much with pessimism as optimism. I side with Tavia Nyong'o's refusal of sides, his call for "a black studies that pulls away from the decisionism and false binarism of life *or* death, pessimism *or* optimism," seeking instead what he calls a "disjunctive synthesis."[38] This is a project that moves in, out, and to the side of this larger confluence of thought in search of new strains and vectors.

Joining these larger conversations, *Fugitive Time* presents a distinct way of thinking about time in global black studies. To date, the dominant mode of theorizing time in African and African diaspora studies has been a philosophy of history approach that emphasizes nonlinearity and nonprogressivity. Most of these critiques associate linear temporalities—which continue to structure normative, late capitalist conceptions of time—with Kant, Hegel, and other Enlightenment thinkers who conceived of history as a singular universal development, progressing toward an open future. Linearity, the widely held black studies critique maintains, presumes a hegemonically white and colonial conception of the human, positioning

Europeanness at the forefront, with all others occupying a historically lagging position. Fugitive time as a concept is allied with these frameworks and critiques, including Jayna Brown's salient claim that "the concept of the future is often fettered by notions of progress."[39] Prominent among these is Ian Baucom's framing of the history of Atlantic modernity around the 1781 massacre of 133 enslaved Africans aboard the *Zong*. In *Specters of the Atlantic* (2005), he argues that the deaths of these women and men, and the insurance claims placed on their lives, initiated a historical temporality of "nonsynchronous contemporaneity" in which the hyperspeculative financialization that marked that late eighteenth-century moment is reasserted a century later, intensifying and haunting in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[40] Also influential is Achille Mbembe's nonlinear "time of entanglement" in the wake of formal colonialism, broadly addressing the African continent. "As an age," he writes in *On the Postcolony* (2001), "the postcolony encloses multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelop one another: *entanglement*."[41] Instead of conceiving of time principally in increments of years, decades, and centuries like these and other studies, the phenomenological approach I undertake in *Fugitive Time* opens up a new kind of telescopic lens into the inconspicuous markings, woundings, and desires of the body, affording a magnified, microscale view into the relationship between embodied violence and desired freedom in global African diasporic cultures. In the vast majority of instances, I see fugitive time not just complementing these expansive historical theorizations but also working from within them, seeking out the minutiae of desire, memory, and sensation that lie below the surface of the encompassing arc of *longues durées*.

Some of these established black studies approaches to time, I should note, do take on phenomenological valences. Certainly there's the almost undulating confluence of *durées* implied in Mbembe's entanglement. There's also a kind of fluid movement between experiential and historical time in David Scott's examination in *Omens of Adversity* (2014), through the lens of the Grenada Revolution, of the aftermaths of postsocialist and postcolonial political catastrophe.[42] Among the more prominent of these fluid temporal frameworks, though, is Michelle Wright's concept of "epiphenomenal time." Drawing from quantum physics, Wright characterizes this temporality as a processual now: "The present and future are not discrete moments but rather are conflated into the one moment that is the now." Rather than the "middle passage epistemology" that's based on a linear progress narrative, she contends, blackness in her view is best apprehended through the idea

that "no moment one experiences depends directly on a previous moment in order to come into being." *Fugitive Time*'s divergence from Wright's *Physics of Blackness* (2015) centers on this primary claim that the encompassing temporality emerging from the historical experience of the transatlantic slave trade is necessarily linear and progressive, and that it largely excludes certain black experiences and identities (namely children, women, as well as LGBTQ and non-US black experience). Habiba Ibrahim's *Black Age* (2021) and Kara Keeling's *Queer Times, Black Futures* (2019) are just two of the recent and fresh perspectives on a nonlinear, ruptural philosophy of history fundamentally structured by the violence of the transatlantic trade. Moreover, the phenomenological approach in *Fugitive Time* is oriented around the ebb and flow of time consciousness as it manifests in the human imagination, in contrast to Wright's epiphenomenal now, which she associates with the physics concept of entropy, "the movement of molecules from 'low' entropy (order) to 'high' entropy (disorder)."[43] By focusing on how memory and anticipation unevenly punctuate one's perception of their embodiedness in the world, this book reveals an unpredictable, nonlinear, and indeed inclusive structure of time that was inaugurated not just by the middle passage but by colonial modernity more broadly.

My conception of fugitive time also bears the marks of recent influential black studies investigations into otherwise dreams and worlds. There's a kinship, for instance, between this study and Brown's *Black Utopias*, where she examines practices of "black alter-world-making" and "radical longing" for unknowable worlds in the thought and experience of nineteenth-century black women mystics, in the music of Alice Coltrane and Sun Ra, and in the speculative worlds of Octavia Butler.[44] Just as resonant is Anthony Reed's study of "new thought and new imaginings" of a liberated future in black experimental writing in *Freedom Time* (2016), including what he identifies as Nathaniel Mackey's "utopian musicality," the "insistent 'ecstatic elsewhere'" in the poet's prose and verse.[45] And certainly the influence of Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019) resounds throughout these pages, a text in which she creatively speculates upon the images and stories of black women in early twentieth-century America and their "experiments in living otherwise," in "creating possibility in the space of enclosure."[46] *Fugitive Time* likewise unravels otherwise dreams and otherwise worlds, but in a global black frame, not exclusively in the US context like these remarkable studies. This project also carves out new lines of inquiry in black utopian thought and experience in its focus on that microscale of otherwise desire.[47]

As in many of these studies on time and the otherwise, the question of space in this book's larger conceptualization of time needs to be addressed. As much as possible, I try to draw out the shape of time consciousness distinct to each artwork. In some cases, such as in my final chapter, where I consider Darling's desire to migrate to the United States in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, we find something akin to Bakhtin's "chronotope," where, in literary-aesthetic works, "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole."[48] In Bulawayo's novel, the Black Audio Film Collective's essay films, and other works studied here, we even find allusions to and representations of ships—the chronotopic "cultural and political units" through which Paul Gilroy influentially reframes modernity by way of the history of the black Atlantic.[49] Especially in the works in the coming chapters that foreground migratory movement, fugitive time signals a desire for a kind of space-time—a time and space of release, where that space is to some degree legible and discernible. For most of the works I examine, though, that anticipated object of escape is unmappable: the darkly lit, nondiegetic queer scenes in Reece Auguiste and Black Audio's *Twilight City*; the seemingly directionless, soaring flight of the dove that closes Aimé Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*; the sounds of the mbira that swirl through and around Mazvita in Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name*, bringing her to the threshold of transcendence. Indeed, the desired utopian object toward which the fugitive figure flees in Shikeith's *The Moment You Doubt Whether You Can Fly* seems more ethereal than a concrete space. In these many instances, the freedom object of fugitive time may not be identifiably spatialized, but it's always material insofar as the body, and the coursing of sensation, are material. As Bakhtin suggests, "Time thickens, takes on flesh."[50] This book is grounded in the matter of the flesh, and indeed in the space that the flesh occupies, however placeless that embodied presence may be imagined to be. Regardless of whether the object of utopian desire is mappable, it's my contention that a phenomenological structure of time—some configuration of that ever-fluctuating relation between memory and anticipation—is the primary valence of utopian yearning in the disparate texts assembled in this book. And of these two temporal orientations, anticipation is the single most distinguishing feature of fugitive time: the imagined idea of living in advance of the devastating present, driven by a desire for release that might, at any moment, transform the body, inaugurating some kind of previously unknowable life. After all, fugitive time is a "desire called utopia": before it's a mapping, it's a feeling, a wish, a set of outward imaginative operations.[51]

Ultimately, fugitive time is many things at once. It's an *experience of time* insofar as it attends to that phenomenal coursing from moment to moment. It's a *theory of black embodied experience* to the extent that this micro-lens of time is indexed in and on the body—or, more precisely, that Spillersian valence of the flesh. It's a *theory of anticipation* in that this experience of time is registered in the mind as both a recognition of embodied violation, but also as a proleptic inhabitation of the seemingly imminent moment in time when pain will be lifted from the flesh. Other than in chapter 1, where I detail the operations of prolepsis in narrative fiction, I use the term much as Michelle Stephens and Sandra Stephens conceptually frame the video installation *People Revisited* (2013) by Sandra Stephens: "It's as if this male figure . . . knows where he is going before he gets there, has already moved himself there mentally before his body actually arrives to join him."[52] Prolepsis in this book refers to the sense of imaginatively and affectively leaping out toward another time and another mode of being-in-the-world *before* that moment, that outside, has been properly lived. Proleptic thought is inherently excessive, it's exorbitant. Finally, fugitive time is a *theory of utopia* because the desire for that feeling of release in the body, that freedom object, never altogether arrives. And when it seems to, it quickly vanishes like a mirage. I call fugitive time a "desire" because of its persistent not-yet-ness, because of the way the term captures the sense of longing for a kind of impossible freedom. Ultimately, the function of fugitive time, played out in myriad ways in this study's aesthetic archive, is both to cut away continually at the ideologies of an antiblack world and to sustain that excessive collective dream, to live in advance of this world, to inhabit that anticipatory desire for release as a life force in itself.

III

Dream Science, we're told, "obliterates distance as well as time." The thought of a single word delivers the mind, and perhaps the body, away to some untraceable beyond. This is how Arta—purchased "for no small sum in the country of the blacks"—reduces "the time beneath [her] master to almost nothing," and how she escapes bondage. Vanishing, apparently, into thin air. Sofia Samatar's speculative story "An Account of the Land of Witches" is written in a kind of opaque, fugitive code, its meticulous language somehow evading the grasp of rational thought at every turn. In the story, Sagal Said, a twenty-first-

century scholar, has set out to decipher the baffling, unverifiable account and its accompanying "lexicon," both of which were written on papyrus and found in a ninth-century BCE grave in Sudan. She pores over the lexicon, the key to the map, "each word translatable" into a cryptic dream of otherwise possibility: "Pomegranate: Dusk. The rattling of dry leaves. Winter, black bile, a cloister, a tooth"; "Fog: A walled city. The cry of a miracle vendor. Home." In search of the mythical Land of Witches, Sagal is somewhere in East Africa, and a state of emergency has just been announced: "Nobody gets out now. The borders are closed." Fearing for her life, she dreams of pomegranates: "'Dusk,' I screamed. 'The rattling of dry leaves. . . . I tasted blood. Lightning. The door opened." She vanishes.[53]

I imagine the three "scenes" in this introduction as something like contrapuntal animations, interstitial reverberations, showing, before stepping into the fullness of the coming chapters, how this idea of fugitive time emerges from aesthetic form. From the texts themselves. I've also meant for them to gesture to the geographies of fugitive time. Moving from North America to the Caribbean to Northeast Africa, these vignettes signal the sprawl of this book, the multitude of life encompassed by this experience of time. Samatar's "Land of Witches" is distinct among the three in its speculative mode, in its account of a racialized slavery that may or may not have a historical analogue, in its rather indeterminate setting across Somalia, Sudan, and ancient Nubia. That it may not have a historical grounding makes it no less illustrative of fugitive time—indeed, the story, it could be argued, perhaps speaks more to its twenty-first-century moment of production than its fictionalized ancient past, conversing more with the (re) imaginative potentialities of speculative history, of conjuring new ways of escaping subjection that might give a moment of pause, or breath, in our own moment when black death has become all too spectacular, all too viral, all too repeatable. All the texts examined in *Fugitive Time* express some desire to vanish like Arta and Sagal do: a wish to will oneself away to some (un) mappable place and time. The Somali American writer simply literalizes this will to create escapist pathways, to disappear magically from the scene of violence, using the opacity of Dream Science to achieve, it seems, what most of the writers and artists in this book can only point to and long for.

But we don't actually know where Arta has vanished. She might, like the other fugitive figures in this study, still be searching for the outside, wandering through the Horn of Africa, along the Nile, and beyond, in search of that true beyond. From her World Fantasy Award–winning novel *A Stranger in Olondria* (2013) to other stories like "Cities of Emerald, Deserts of Gold" (2017), some form of flight, of dreaming, of stealing away to other worlds, pervades Samatar's radically imaginative speculative fictions.[54]

Part of my intention in assembling this introduction's three vignettes is also to signal the way this study cuts across many of the constructions, whether implicit or explicit, that often sever the continent historically and culturally from the diaspora in Europe and the Americas. Built into the book's organizing logic, in other words, are undercurrent historical and political threads that hold together Africa and the broader diaspora in sustained relation, however muted or underacknowledged those threads may be. For instance, while the "New World" plantation might be considered the paradigmatic historical ground from which the analytic of fugitivity emerged, there were plantations across colonial Africa where the line between slave labor and forced labor was at best ambiguous well into the twentieth century, from Portuguese-held São Tomé and Príncipe to British Kenya to French Congo-Brazzaville.[55] And across the continent, colonial ideologies produced their own structures of racialization—notions of white supremacy set against a kind of colonial "blackening" of indigenous peoples—that were very much conversant with (though certainly not equivalent to) many of the racialized schemas in the Americas imposed by those very same European colonial powers. Such colonial formations of racialized subjection on the continent undoubtedly have their vestiges in our own day, as the fourth chapter of this book signals with Issa Samb's response to Nicolas Sarkozy's 2007 speech in Dakar, where the then president of France insisted that "Africa's challenge is to enter to a greater extent into History . . . to realize that the golden age that Africa is always recalling will not return because it never existed."[56] Yet another grounding current in this book is that such common markings in the eyes of the world have produced kindred population movements across the global diaspora: African-descended peoples searching for better lives, fleeing violence and socioeconomic devastation. I take up these latter intersections most notably in migrations from the West Indies to England in the mid-twentieth century, and from Zimbabwe to the United States in the early 2000s. *Fugitive Time*, in short, is built on a constellation of connective nodes—cultural, geographic, historical—some of which rise to the surface of this text, whereas others lie

just below. To use the term *connective* is not to suggest sameness or symmetry, but relation, proximity, intersecting flows, and (under)currents. In the aggregate of the book's chapters, these nodes reveal a constant relational dynamic between the continent and the reaches of diaspora, an insistent tending to consonance and dissonance on multiple sides of the Atlantic.

Put another way, as I've suggested, *Fugitive Time* is a structure without a center. Africa is neither the periphery nor solely a historical source point, but a critical node of global circulation and relation, "part of the syncretic, modern diaspora world."[57] And neither is this exclusively an Americanist project. *Fugitive Time* frames fugitivity as a transnational form of black thought and experience, as the desire to flee the confines not just of the nineteenth-century southern plantation or the contemporary American carceral state, but also of colonial and postcolonial regimes that have suppressed black life globally. To think fugitivity in Zimbabwe and Martinique, for instance, beyond the site of fugitivity's theoretical invention in American black studies, reveals diverse vernacularizations of fugitive thought shaped by southern African practices of prophecy and divination, and Caribbean historical practices of marronage. Fugitivity and its attendant time consciousness, I contend, cannot be fully grasped outside this global frame. The questions of autochthony, land, and ancestral belonging found in southern African iterations of fugitive thought need to be read alongside the errantry and rootlessness of North American and West Indian formations. We need to see the queerness in black British fugitivity to gain a sense of queer fugitivity more broadly, including, perhaps unexpectedly, in the work of Aimé Césaire. Only by seeing the varied ways that sexual violence shapes fugitive consciousness across diasporic geographies in the work of Yvonne Vera and Toni Morrison can we fully comprehend fugitivity as a global formation.

GENEALOGIES

This book's framing and construction also raise the question of antecedents—the representations and modes of thought that precede this study's focus. For the former, we could point back to a number of locations, such as the fugitive sensibilities in early African American fiction, be it Pauline Hopkins's *Of One Blood* (1902–1903) or Martin Delany's *Blake* (1859–1862). But fugitive time's earliest recorded representations are in antebellum cultural production, notably slave narratives by Olaudah Equiano,

Harriet Jacobs, Frederick Douglass, and others. In particular, Equiano's 1789 *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* holds a foundational place among the aesthetic works studied in this book. As a sailor who traveled throughout the eighteenth-century world, Equiano traces several of the principal geographies that ground *Fugitive Time*'s framing of global black life: he was born and captured in West Africa, and he lived and sailed throughout the West Indies, the United States, and Britain, eventually settling in Britain following his manumission. Regardless of whether the initial section of his narrative is fact or fiction, Equiano's first-person account of the middle passage remains a stunning product of the eighteenth-century black imagination.[58] It's one that is filled, however veiled, with a fugitive consciousness that continues to resonate in global black cultural production.

The ship, Equiano evocatively shows, is where his subjection, his nonbeing, is instantiated. Brought down to the hold, he encounters "the galling of the chains," "pestilential conditions," "air unfit for respiration," nearly suffocating. Although on a number of occasions he recalls "wishing" for the "relief" of death, there's a fleeting and arresting moment when he speaks of something more than simply a death wish: permitted above deck because of his poor physical condition, he remembers, "often did I think of the inhabitants of the deep much more happy than myself. I envied them the freedom they enjoyed, and as often wished I could change my condition for theirs."[59] Certainly, there's a literalist reading of this statement, in which the author longs for the closure of death. But beneath this veil is a suggestion of an alternative capacity to desire. A desire for an opening to an unimaginable, impossible afterlife. Equiano's "mind and imagination [are] given to water," Jonathan Howard suggests of this remarkable passage, to "freedom on a blue planet."[60] We might think of it as a utopian social gathering of the "inhabitants of the deep," less of an afterlife than an *alter*life. Although his object of desire is spatialized in the sea, Equiano uses that Blochian "wish" to express a temporal structure of anticipation, an imaginative lunging in excess of the now so that he might experience, in advance, even if momentarily, that feeling of bodily release among those in the water. At the level of form, this anticipation is notably presented in the past tense (he "wished," he "envied")—the retrospective narrative perspective creating a kind of temporal switchback that gains momentum as it cuts into memory's past and turns around to drive that phenomenal pathway toward anticipated release. If, for Spillers, the middle passage represents a kind of "thrown[ness] into the midst of a figurative darkness," a darkness

that renders the captive "culturally unmade" as an object of exchange, then we might think of Equiano's desire for the deep as a longing to escape into that nothingness, into that cultural unmaking, a desire to search for what might lie in that uncharted darkness. And just as Spillers identifies the captive's oceanic nothingness and nowhereness as "a wild and unclaimed richness of possibility," so perhaps did Equiano see some kind of potentiality in those waters, in their sociality, in their refuge from a devastating world.[61]

Significantly, Equiano doesn't just proleptically lunge toward an alternative site of freedom but toward another "condition," as he puts it, another order of (aquatic) being. In his desire for another ontological inhabitation we find Equiano inaugurating a kind of *longue durée* of envisaging release and reimagined black life in the sea. Indeed, his "wish" is perhaps not far removed from the speculative theory that accompanies the liner notes of a techno album called *The Quest* released some two centuries later by James Stinson and Gerald Donald of the iconic Detroit-based duo Drexciya:

> During the greatest holocaust the world has ever known, pregnant America-bound African slaves were thrown overboard by the thousands during labor for being sick and disruptive cargo. Is it possible that they could have given birth at sea to babies that never needed air? Recent experiments have shown mice able to breathe liquid oxygen. Even more shocking and conclusive was a recent instance of a premature infant saved from certain death by breathing liquid oxygen through its undeveloped lungs. These facts combined with reported sightings of Gillmen and swamp monsters in the coastal swamps of the South-Eastern United States make the slave trade theory startlingly feasible. Are Drexciyans water breathing, aquatically mutated descendants of those unfortunate victims of human greed?[62]

Perhaps Equiano desired to be a "gillman" *avant la lettre*, an "aquatically mutated" being of a new world, populated by those who had refused, or had been expelled, from this one. Drexciya's myth brings a science fiction conceit to Equiano's fleeting middle passage wish, his desire to adapt and live otherwise.[63] But in a way his desire for the deep isn't that far from science fact, given that "the atoms of those people who were thrown overboard are out there in the ocean even today." As Christina Sharpe puts it, in the sea the "residence time" of sodium, and therefore human blood, is 260 million years: "We, Black people, exist in the residence time of the wake, a time in which 'everything is now.'"[64] There is indeed an enduring black inhabitation of those waters, black life changed, restructured, perpetually becoming something else. Perhaps Equiano saw sociality and endless possibilities

in the deep time of those millions of years. Perhaps he saw black life shaping a new world one breath of liquid oxygen at a time.

The other type of antecedent I want to address is the discursive: not just descriptive accounts of historical fugitive escape, but the deliberate work to engender fugitivity as a body of thought, even in cases where it's not named as such. Fred Moten, La Marr Jurelle Bruce, Lindsey Green-Simms, Keguro Macharia, Saidiya Hartman, and others may be at the vanguard of a renewal in global black theory, but important preceding work by theorists such as Sylvia Wynter, Cedric Robinson, and Nathaniel Mackey opened up fugitivity as a discourse, and one with the potential to be deepened and repositioned, shaped and reshaped.[65] In lieu of an archaeology of fugitive thought, which could fill a book in itself, I want to sit with the antecedent text that has had perhaps the most influence on my conception of fugitive time and its component parts. Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) has been instrumental to my framing of black ontology, nonlinear time, and the desire for a certain kind of excessive freedom. Most fundamental is his conceptualization of alienation and nonbeing. These categories, he suggests, are wrought through an oppositional structure, through the European construction of black abjection and inferiority. This is enacted in the speech act referenced earlier—"Look, a Negro!"—that transforms black life into a thing, a "nonexistence."[66] "I took myself far off from my own presence, very far, constituting myself an object," Fanon explains. "What else could it be for me but a dismemberment, a wrenching, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood?"[67] This imposition of "nonbeing" becomes internalized, sutured into the psyche, but it also engenders a kind of physiological change in the body, as if parts have been excised, leaving phantom limbs of a former wholeness. This objecthood is what Equiano is transformed into when he encounters the "pestilential conditions" of the ship's hold. Fanon's nonbeing names that inaugural condition that has echoed and reverberated across geographies and centuries, seeping into the different aesthetic works studied in this book as the ontological position from which to escape. Like Darling in *We Need New Names,* a novel set between Zimbabwe and the United States in the 2000s, some of the fugitive figures in these chapters are indeed quite historically and experientially removed from Fanon's theoretical framing. But I contend that a certain degree of physical and psychic nonbeing is experienced by these figures, even if residually. They live in the wake of slavery and colonialism, the twin centuries-long operations of white supremacy that continue to bleed into everyday life, both spectacularly and insidiously. However non-

being's guise may appear to have changed, their black lives are haunted by an inheritance of being transformed into objects.

In *Fugitive Time*'s framing, this is just one half of the dialectic of captivity and prolepsis that constitutes Fanon's well-known "zone of nonbeing": that "extraordinarily sterile and arid region," that "essentially bare rail [*rampe*] where an authentic emergence [*surgissement*] can be born." If *Black Skin* is a treatise on alienation, it's just as much one on *dis*alienation: the process of moving toward the point at which the "black man can free himself of the arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial situation," "expelling that feeling of inferiority."[68] This expulsion, Fanon insists, emerges from this zone of pathologized blackness, a paradoxical, volatile (non)ontological site within which Roberts aptly identifies an incipient "hope" and potential "flight."[69] I would add, too, a certain capacity to think, feel, and *desire*. Indeed for a *surgissement*—a surging, an emergence—to come into being, there must be outward vision.

Stepping back to a wider scope, the anticolonial philosopher grounds *Black Skin* in both a sense of ontological transformation but also a particular temporality. The two, indeed, are inextricable. Fugitive time, transposed into his terms, corresponds to the temporal and affective movement from alienation to disalienation, from nonbeing to being. More precisely, it's the *anticipation* of disalienation: for Fanon, any movement toward disalienation requires a shift in consciousness, an *idea* of the site toward which one moves. That "bare rail" of "emergence" in the zone of nonbeing is where this thinking-in-advance takes place. But the desired disalienated ontology, as Sylvia Wynter, Zakiyyah Jackson, and others remind us, is decidedly not that of the (European) liberal subject. Fanon's reconceptualization of the category of the human—and indeed one of his most important contributions to the larger idea of fugitive time—lies in his use of a distinct verb: *dépasser* ("to exceed," "to go beyond"): "I am a part of Being, insofar as I go beyond [*dépasse*] it."[70] There's a fugitive excess to this *dépasser,* as I read it, a lunging toward contingency and a new form of ontology, signaling that Fanon's human is not the human of liberal humanism. As in Equiano's narrative, anything short of this beyond point, for Fanon, would remain within the ontology of colonial alienation. I want to suggest that the (im/possible) parahuman ontology of Equiano's oceanic beings, like the utopian visions of the artists studied in this book, lies in this beyond space.

Just as salient is Fanon's use of *dépasser* to signal a departure from linear, historicist conceptions of time. Historicism is that progressivist European framework for understanding the passage of time as a single

world-historical development. Nineteenth-century Europe, V. Y. Mudimbe explains, conceived of Africans as frozen in evolutionary time: "They were defined as 'archaic' or 'primitive' human beings, insofar as they were supposed to represent very ancient social and cultural organizations which had been present in Europe thousands of years earlier." And so, too, we find the concomitant developmentalist binary logics imposed by colonialism, like traditional and modern, primitive and civilized.[71] However, Fanon's text works to extricate black life from these subjecting logics: "It is by going beyond [*en dépassant*] the historical and instrumental given that I initiate the cycle of my freedom" ["*que j'introduis le cycle de ma liberté*"].[72] In refusing the past's determination of the present, he pushes against that colonial, progressive conception of time—one that's critical to my framing of fugitive time not as futural but open, multi-vectored, leaning toward the (ever-deferred) moment, wherever and whenever it may be, when (historical and experienced) pain vanishes from the body. Nonlinearity is built into Fanon's use of the noun *cycle*, which *Le Robert* defines not as a unidirectional movement or return but "a sequence of constantly renewing phenomena." What's more, when Fanon argues that "the past can in no way guide me in the present," and when he questions "Am I going to ask the contemporary white man to take responsibility for the slave ships of the 17th century?" he enacts a break in the progressive movement of historicist time, an "escape [from] the normal teleological form of [history's] writing," as David Marriott puts it, from "everything that imprisons the capacity for infinite realization . . . [and] the ceaseless work of invention."[73] Fanon's break, in other words, pushes against the linear, imperialist understanding of time that instantiates and reinforces the nonbeing of blackness, that encloses black life in a determinate future of continued subjection. His break instead signals an escape route from the reactionary feedback loops of centuries of violence. He cuts into that predetermined teleology, searching for an opening to the outside.[74] Fanon's cut in the fabric of historicist time, I contend, is much like Equiano's cut when he longs to join the inhabitants of the deep: to live outside history, to find his own experience of time, his own being and becoming.

The final piece of Fanon's text that resonates throughout this book centers on his conception of liberation. When Fanon claims that this *dépasser* "initiates the cycle of my freedom," it seems clear that this *liberté* is fundamentally different from the normative conception of liberation that, in the wake of legal emancipation and decolonization across the world, has only served to reinforce and redistribute black violation. Hartman and

Sharpe have shown that "slavery was transformed rather than annulled" in the postbellum American South and that in twenty-first-century America, "the means and modes of Black subjection may have changed, but the fact and structure of that subjection remain."[75] Natasha Lightfoot's work similarly lays bare the nonevent of emancipation in Antigua and across the nineteenth-century British Empire, how legal "freedom" for the formerly enslaved was constituted by racialized distrust, exclusion, coercion, poverty—an ongoing "state of siege"—despite individuals' constant maneuverings to eke out the possibilities of self-determination.[76] And from the perspective of the continent, searching for the "quantitative and qualitative difference" between colonialism and independence, Mbembe incisively asks: "Have we really entered another period, or do we find the same theater, the same mimetic acting, with different actors and spectators, but with the same convulsions and the same insult?"[77] These accounts only reinforce the reading of Fanon's *liberté* as a kind of *beyond-freedom*, a structure of release that's lived, or perhaps only dreamed of, outside the "protracted subjection" of nominal freedom and independence.[78]

The temporal movement of Fanon's *dépasser*, that cycle of constantly renewing vectors, as I read it, is fueled by a desire for an elusive, uncharted freedom: a seemingly unattainable object that nonetheless remains vitally necessary to imagine as the moment, felt in the body, toward which one steals away. This is the unreachable, unimaginable, but necessary freedom that distinguishes utopian thought, including the version I call fugitive time. Brown reminds us that "utopia remains always unfinished," "just beyond the horizon," operating as a "continual reaching forward."[79] Fugitive time is a phenomenal anticipation of the unknown, a paradoxical lunging toward decolonization "as the impossible and unanticipatable content that will shatter its expression, rendering that expression suddenly unrecognizable and incomprehensible."[80] I read the implied threshold that opens, or cuts, out toward Fanon's beyond-freedom as a kind of utopian reconfiguration of "the tear in the world" that Brand attributes to the slave's passage through the Door of No Return: "that place where our ancestors departed one world for another." Like that first step into nonbeing, for Fanon the cut into the beyond is "a rupture in history, a rupture in the quality of being . . . , also a physical rupture, a rupture of geography."[81] But for him, and for Equiano and the artists featured in this book, it's a rupture that gives way to a third world—not the originary ancestral world, not the world of black disposability, but the world of black beyondness. The unanticipatable world of relief that, impossibly, must be dreamed in advance.

This genealogy of the black beyond only scratches the surface, of course. It's meant to give some substance to a body of thought that often feels confined to American studies and to recent black studies thought. Implicitly and explicitly, Fanon and Equiano are threaded throughout this project, as are myriad other forerunning thinkers and practitioners of black fugitivity, such as Nehanda, the nineteenth-century Zimbabwean anticolonial prophet and spirit medium with whom I begin the final chapter. Together they assemble a kind of critical ancestral chorus, a collective conjuring that has made the ideas in this book possible. As Macharia reminds us, "To think about the politics of desire beyond the white supremacist order requires the Fanonian leap of invention, a speculative leap that imagines different configurations of desire and pleasure and livability."[82] This study carries forward and extends the beyond-desire articulated by those who came before and those creating new pathways for fugitive thought today. It seeks out that leap of invention in black art forms from across the world, in the subtler, phenomenal currents of time and desire.

CHAPTERS AND ARCHIVES

Fugitive Time, in a way, is an exercise in curation, a practice of assembling and presenting a series of objects and archives so that we might bear witness to something that we perhaps would not see in the absence of that assemblage. It's about seeing "what happens in the space of understanding work together," as Thelma Golden describes her curatorial practice.[83] It's about selecting aesthetic objects that are somehow representative of a larger pulse, each object shedding light on the others, revealing different creases of this dominant and recurring imaginative mode in global black cultural expression. What should also be clear is that the objects in this book are not the only representations of fugitive time. They merely gesture to a constellation that no single study could possibly address comprehensively. And that gesture in this book requires a certain capaciousness, a sprawling gathering of cultural geographies, historical moments, intellectual disciplines, aesthetic forms, languages, and politics. Each of these chapters has its own archive, its own curated collection not just of writing and artwork but of disciplinary material—literary studies, political economy, black feminist theory, history, ethnomusicology, and beyond—that grounds those creative expressions in the cultures, historical moments, and aesthetic genealogies from which they emerged. I see in my method

something like what Susan Buck-Morss undertakes in *Dreamworld and Catastrophe* (2000), where she presents "a series of constellations constructed out of historical facts, theoretical speculations, and visual images," "crossing boundaries between discursive terrains usually kept apart" to reveal "new lines of sight" and speak to a larger global construction.[84] *Fugitive Time* likewise presents a set of constellations and meticulous speculations built to expose new ways of seeing and thinking time, aesthetics, and thought in African diasporic cultures from across the world. These are not insular constellations but ones that constantly signal fugitive time's infinite archive, its infinite vernacularizations. This is indeed how I would frame this book's primary field, global black cultural studies. As I assemble it here, it's an open set: a field of traversal, intersectionality, and boundlessness, a field that follows black life to the farthest reaches of the world and beyond.

A number of considerations have gone into the construction of this capaciousness—the selection of artists and objects, but also the arrangement of this book as a whole. In part, my aim has been to put fresh readings of canonical writers such as Toni Morrison and Aimé Césaire in conversation with lesser-known artists, such as Issa Samb, Wifredo Lam, and NoViolet Bulawayo, who, in my view, demand more critical space and attention in black studies. Each chapter also offers a distinct configuration of media and genres. Chapters 2 and 4 put two artists working in different media in direct conversation, allowing for a distinct iteration of fugitive time to emerge from their confluence. By contrast, chapters 1 and 3 dive into two works by a single novelist (Morrison) and film collective (Black Audio) to trace the through-lines of fugitive time across a body of work. The final chapter remixes the curatorial strategy to show how a feminist formation of fugitive time evolves over time, across writers and texts, and ultimately beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. The inclusion of different media and genres, as I've said, is designed to show not just how fugitive time manifests descriptively in aesthetic works but also how this experience of time is sutured into their layered formal architectures, providing an expansive, multidimensional optic. Finally, there are, of course, the geographic considerations. Moving across the Caribbean, North America, Africa, and Europe, most chapters in fact toggle between multiple diasporic sites in these regions—for instance, France, Cuba, Haiti, but primarily Martinique in chapter 2; Senegal and the United States in the fourth chapter; Dominica but mostly Britain in the third chapter. The different cultural geographies of this project serve as signposts, signaling not comprehensiveness but that infinite sprawl, gesturing to where else we might find this dominant

and recurring form of time consciousness in global African diasporic cultural production.

In the opening chapter, "Toni Morrison's Anachronic Ease," I begin not with the earliest produced work in this study but with the work that speaks to the earliest historical moment. Starting with Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and *Sula* (1973), *Fugitive Time* opens during the period of chattel slavery and its aftermath, grounding this book from the start in America's nonevent of emancipation and how that putative threshold shaped the Nobel laureate's distinct vision of desired embodied release. In this chapter I lay out a set of key concepts that inform the rest of the book, focusing on narrative form and how a desire for bodily release subtly moves throughout a system of narrative flashbacks and anticipations. The dozen times Toni Morrison uses the word *easefulness* in her early works, I contend, provides a key to the utopian map of *Sula* and *Beloved*, a set of guidelines for finding the myriad *intimations* of desired (rel)ease in these iconic works. The ecstatic version of this desire in Morrison's fiction, what I call "otherwise ease," corresponds to an ultimate assurance of release, safety, and peace in one's body and being-in-the-world: a state that always lies in that anticipated moment just prior to the now, such as Sethe's desire in *Beloved* to escape with her children "through the veil," "outside this place, where they would be safe." I show how Morrison disperses this desired state throughout a layered network of narrative prolepses and analepses, putting "ease" constantly on the run, revealing itself in the most unexpected corners of memory and anticipation only to move back below the text's surface and reemerge soon after. Stitched into the author's switchbacks of narrative anachronism is a constant pursuance of an easeful, transcendent body that's unable to extricate itself unequivocally from violence. Together, both novels span just over a century of the black American experience, from *Beloved*'s account of plantation life in 1850s Kentucky to the final chapter of *Sula*, set in 1960s Ohio, revealing a historical arc of this Morrisonian search for release.

In chapter 2, "Aimé Césaire, Wifredo Lam, and the Aesthetics of Surging Life," three sketches drawn by the Cuban painter Wifredo Lam usher us into the shape of fugitive time in Aimé Césaire's négritude epic *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. Produced for the 1943 Cuban translation of Césaire's original 1939 *Notebook*, these drawings—which to date have only been cursorily examined in relation to the poem—allow us to appraise anew a canonical text written amid the incipient rise of fascism in Europe and increasing anticolonial demonstrations throughout the colonized world. I contend that Lam's surrealist, multispecies figurations, rather than being

mere illustrations, expand and deepen the images and drama of the poem while bringing to the fore its inconspicuous temporalities of wounding and desire. In particular, the sketches bring to life the poem's sprawling phenomenological image of the wounded black body: the way this body registers, on the one hand, deepening layers of historical violence through a pervasive discourse of "scarring" and "blistering," and on the other, a fugitive anticipation of a new form of being through ubiquitous language of growth, hunger, and outward movement. Through the interplay of the visual and the poetic, of surrealist image and surrealist metaphor, we gain a visceral sense of how utopian desire emerges from the body in the *Notebook* and how the poem's sense of becoming surges toward a kind of ontological transcendence. I argue that the structure of utopia found through this inter-animation is less about the desire to be entirely rid of wounding than the desire to reimagine the wound, to allow trauma to become generative in the poem's ecstatic projection toward disalienation.

Turning to fugitive time's appearance in cinema, chapter 3, "Black Audio's Archival Flight," examines the experimental essay films of Britain's celebrated Black Audio Film Collective, established in London in 1982 by a group of university students of West African and West Indian descent. Black Audio's early films sought to chronicle how memory, place, and identity marked the fault lines of what it meant to be black in the age of Thatcherism. At first glance, *Handsworth Songs* (1986) and *Twilight City* (1989) present two adjacent moments in the history of black British subjection: the former centering on the 1985 black uprisings in the Handsworth neighborhood of Birmingham and the latter providing an exposition of black precarious life in the "New London" of late-1980s financialization and development. However, both use archival footage from throughout the twentieth century to capture a historical sense of the coalitional blackness that encompassed people of African, Caribbean, and South Asian descent in 1980s Britain. And both capture the insurgent fugitive sensibility and time consciousness of this blackness. This chapter examines the myriad bodies that seek escape from the sprawling history of black subjugation in these two films—including *Handsworth*'s repeated footage of a black youth evading riot police—as well as the ways this desire for escape is sutured into their filmic architectures. Using archival newsreel footage, ambient electronic music, voice-over narration, and other features, Black Audio cinematically locates an ephemeral beyond-world of release in *Handsworth*'s dialectical "third space" of montage and in *Twilight*'s nondiegetic reenactments of queer photographs by the Nigerian British photographer Rotimi Fani-Kayode.

Chapter 4, "Sun Ra, Issa Samb, and the Drapetomaniacal Avant-Garde," shifts our attention to the work of two interdisciplinary artists: the American poet and free jazz musician Sun Ra and the Senegalese sculptor, poet, and performance artist Issa Samb. I begin with the speculative mental illness "drapetomania," first proposed in 1851 by the physician Samuel Cartwright as a pseudoscientific explanation for the propensity of enslaved Africans to escape captivity. Samb and Ra, I argue, transformed this cornerstone of nineteenth-century scientific racism into an insurgent fugitive aesthetics: their avant-garde practices served as escape routes from a world in crisis, yet their practices were widely deemed incoherent madness in their time. The chapter studies how their work envisaged an otherworldly embodied refuge in aesthetic and political opacity. For them, seeming indecipherability aided their trenchant critiques of the world around them and their refusal of the mid-twentieth-century forces subjecting people of African descent across the world. Ra's intergalactic verse, sound, and visual aesthetics represented a flight from the turmoil of racism and violence in 1960s and 1970s America, whereas Samb's ephemeral sculptures and anticapitalist poetics marked a flight from the devastating effects of structural adjustment in 1970s and 1980s Senegal as well as Léopold Senghor's politicization of négritude. Assembling an archive that spans poems, sound recordings, cell phone videos, liner notes, films, multimedia installations, and polemic essays, I take up a kind of kaleidoscopic study of these two influential artists, investigating how from disparate locations of the global diaspora they used opacity to imagine in advance new worlds and new forms of being in times of crisis. This chapter, notably, is methodologically distinct from the others. Whereas the book's other chapters are largely concerned with a single cultural geography, contributing to an aggregate sense of global diasporic temporality built across the project as a whole, chapter 4 asks how a more direct and immediate juxtaposition of disparate African diasporic spaces might deepen our understanding of fugitive time. Such a method demands explicit and sustained attention to diasporic relationality: a sense of the convergent and divergent histories, politics, and aesthetic forms that allow for such a global conversation to be generative of something greater than its component parts. The chapter asks what an imagined back-and-forth between Ra and Samb allows us to see that we might not otherwise.

"Yvonne Vera, NoViolet Bulawayo, and the Imminence of Dreaming Air," the book's final chapter, returns to the novel to trace a history of Zimbabwean women conjuring flight. My starting point is the 1898 execution of the prophet and spirit medium Nehanda, who is said to have departed from

her body before the British could place the noose around her neck, which in turn galvanized the nation's First Chimurenga against settler colonial rule. The chapter considers the literary and historical afterlives of Nehanda's fugitive time consciousness in Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name* (1994) and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013), novels that feature women longing to shed their bodies and minds of alienation. Vera places her novel in the late 1970s during Zimbabwe's Second Chimurenga, at the precipice of national independence, while Bulawayo sets this desire for transformation in the 2000s, charting a young woman's flight from her collapsing country to the United States. Like the legend of Nehanda, these works establish a national allegorical desire for release from violence and precariousness. In doing so they reimagine a historically prescribed nationalism, showing how women can have a constitutive voice, how nation can be forged in diaspora, how one's sense of ancestral belonging can evolve. Indeed, ancestrality is central to Vera and Bulawayo's articulations of fugitive time: divination, fetish objects, ancestral land, and the transcendent sounds of the mbira propel their protagonists' minds toward release. Like the different formations of fugitive time in this book, what we find in these works is not a sustained utopian release but an inhabitation of the anticipatory consciousness of escape as a vital life force.

In its broadest considerations, *Fugitive Time* shows how film, literature, music, and other art forms archive the ways that time has been imagined and embodied by the colonized, the enslaved, and their descendants. What the archive assembled here tells us is that this desire is sprawlingly global, enduring, and ceaseless. It collectively registers the "anticipatory illumination," as Bloch calls it, characteristic of utopian aesthetics, "standing on the horizon of the real," evading the snares of capture, laying the groundwork for otherwise worlds.[85] In these works we find that anticipatory illumination in the lower frequencies, in the subtler currents of time, in the inconspicuous ways that art forms register the flow from moment to moment in and on the body, turning the body into a coded map of phenomenal surges, breathless threads of possibility. The set of conceptual tools that I call fugitive time is what this book offers the field of global black studies, providing a way of understanding time beyond—or indeed, *inside of*—the history of philosophy approach predominant in black critical thought today. My hope is also that the varied archive I've assembled signals the seemingly endless archive of black aesthetics in which these conceptual tools are similarly legible—in works by Hannah Crafts, Phaswane Mpe, Nalo Hopkinson, Sandra Brewster, the Otolith Group, Abderrahmane Sissako, Mark Bradford,

Fatou Diome, and on: in any work that somehow illuminates the anticipatory machinations of escape, the way such schemings of the mind race toward an impossible release in the body. Also pivotal is the way that this book's archive and conceptual apparatus aims to extend our understanding of how Africa and the reaches of diaspora are not at all separate cultural and historical spheres, but a singular, heavingly heterogeneous relational entanglement comprising infinite coeval nodes since at least the fifteenth century. Across the global sprawl of this project, fugitivity is decidedly not yet freedom. But the sounds, sculptures, and poetics that anchor these pages bespeak an incessant not-yet-ness, a constant search for an undevastated world. Fugitive time names this social life in prolepsis, this ecstasy of the wretched of the Earth dreaming of an imminently afungible world.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION. BLACK BEYONDNESS

1 Shikeith, *The Moment You Doubt Whether You Can Fly*.
2 Hesse and Hooker, "Introduction," 448.
3 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 7.
4 Spillers, "Idea of Black Culture," 25.
5 Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 38.
6 Levine, *Forms*, 6–10.
7 Soldi, "Q&A: Shikeith."
8 Wilderson, "Grammar & Ghosts," 122.
9 Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 5.
10 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 234.
11 Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 26.
12 Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 5.
13 Jaji, *Africa in Stereo*, 12–14.
14 Macharia, *Frottage*, 53, 5, 7. Carole Boyce Davies's conception of diaspora in *Black Women, Writing and Identity*, which "assumes expansiveness and elsewhereness," has also been formative in assembling *Fugitive Time*, as has the global diasporic frame that Samantha Pinto devises in her examination of black women writers and formal innovation in *Difficult Diasporas*. Another is Xavier Livermon's conception of diaspora in *Kwaito Bodies* as shaped by spaces of "(mis)recognition . . . [and] friction that may exist between Black people in Afrodiasporic spaces while also insisting that such friction can be productive spaces of affinity" (31–32). However, I should mention that the notion of diaspora I cultivate in this project doesn't align with all. Whereas I find much of Neil Roberts's *Freedom as Marronage* insightful, for instance, especially the conceptual kinship he sees between fugitivity and marronage, I find less productive his understanding of diaspora as only "able to describe flight either unidirectionally or . . . flight and return over time in a boomerang trajectory" (11). Instead, for me and a range of thinkers, diaspora is a constellation of connective nodes that are always shifting and contingent; it's a network that spans the globe, with movements, desires, and

vectors that move in any which way, creating belonging anywhere and everywhere, practicing solidarity across difference. It's less a movement from a single natal site than a constellation of ongoing extensions, additions, and adaptations, where all cultural geographies are coeval.

15 Brand, *In Another Place*, 126, 169, 243, 246, 247.

16 Moten, *Universal Machine*, 180.

17 The approaches I have in mind here include the founding generation of thinkers in postcolonial theory, a field that emerged in the 1980s and concentrated on identifying subaltern opposition. As Timothy Brennan puts it, "With unfeigned militancy, [postcolonial] theory set about codifying forms of resistance that explicitly precluded Marxist contributions to anti-colonial independence, not simply as the by-product of its search for fresh paradigms, but as a central and self-defining *telos*" ("Subaltern Stakes"). In a similar vein is Walter Johnson's critique of the New Social History, which in part was built on a rigid notion of "agency" as opposition in studies of slavery, effectively evacuating any consideration of the everyday, of the "longing and hope and sadness and anger" that shaped an enslaved community's perception and experience of the world ("On Agency," 116, 188). And related to this is the distinct way in which black life in America has exclusively come to be seen as publicly expressive, resistant, and oppositional. This is a larger claim that Kevin Quashie pursues in *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, where he argues that "resistance . . . is the dominant framework for reading black culture" (11). Such a view, he suggests, occludes readings and apprehensions of black interiority, the "inner reservoir of thoughts, feelings, desires, fears, ambitions that shape a human self" (21).

18 Samb, "Life Has Long Legs."

19 Walcott et al., "Diaspora, Humanism and the Global Project of Black Freedom."

20 Scott, *Extravagant Abjection*, 24.

21 Sexton, "Social Life of Social Death," 9–10.

22 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 234.

23 Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage*, 4.

24 Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, 11–14.

25 Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," 313.

26 Bloch, *Principle of Hope*, 287–89.

27 Bloch, *Principle of Hope*, 40, 144, 49.

28 Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 67.

29 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 206.

30 Sexton, "Unbearable Blackness," 168.

31 I should note from the outset that I don't maintain throughout *Fugitive Time* Spillers's distinction between the "flesh" and the "body" as "captive and liberated subject-positions." In many cases, the works I study in

this book refer to the "body" with a similar valence as Spillers's "flesh," so I've chosen to do the same. When I evoke the body in these chapters, I'm evoking that woundedness that Spillers ascribes to black flesh, although where "flesh" does manifest in a work, I try to make that Spillersian valence evident.

32 Brand, *In Another Place*, 215.

33 Moten, *Universal Machine*, 197.

34 Marriott, "The X of Sacrifice"; Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 21.

35 Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, xi, 141.

36 Sexton, "'The Curtain of the Sky,'" 16.

37 Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 171, 175.

38 Nyong'o, *Afro-fabulations*, 101.

39 Brown, *Black Utopias*, 158.

40 Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic*, 30–31.

41 Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 14–16. Though far from a comprehensive list, other nonlinear accounts of historical time in black studies, many of which appear as a component of a monograph rather than the focus of an entire study, include the following: Keguro Macharia's diasporic "wrinkled time . . . calibrated by the whip" (*Frottage*, 92); the subjecting forces and the emancipatory potentialities of what Habiba Ibrahim calls "black age" (*Black Age*, 3–4, 29–30); M. Jacqui Alexander's "palimpsestic" time (*Pedagogies of Crossing*, 190–92); Tejumola Olaniyan's "atavistic time" of the "postcolonial African condition," largely an effect of the perpetual crisis of the postcolonial state (*Arrest the Music!*, 67, 70); Darieck Scott's Fanonian notion of "interarticulated temporality" (*Extravagant Abjection*, 71–77); Kara Keeling's queer, errant, and unpredictable "black futures" (*Queer Times, Black Futures*, 19, 32); Tavia Nyong'o's "tenseless time," which is built into his larger theory of "Afro-fabulation" (*Afro-fabulations*, 5–11, 21–24); the notion of "penal time" that Nicole Fleetwood isolates in the experiences and art practices of incarcerated people (*Marking Time*, 37–42); Jennifer Wenzel's "prophetic memory" in the South African context and beyond (*Bulletproof*, 125–29); Alexander Weheliye's historical time "as a series of cross-currents and discontinuities" (*Phonographies*, 80–82); Ayo Coly's "postcolonial hauntology," which appears "in the form of the hold of the colonial past on postcolonial discourses of the African female body" (*Postcolonial Hauntologies*, 2); Rinaldo Walcott's "time of long emancipation," where black life and potential freedoms "erupt" through the linearity of modernity (*Long Emancipation*, 3); and Amber Musser's discussion of Fanon, Freud, and the "atemporality of the becoming-biological of black bodies" (*Sensational Flesh*, 103–7).

42 See Scott, *Omens of Adversity*, 1–29. La Marr Bruce's notion of "madtime" as a "feeling [of] time [that] coincides with the spasms of and rhythms of madness," especially as it relates to music, is another generative

framework of black time that moves between the experiential and the historical. See Bruce, *How to Go Mad*, 204–7.

43 Wright, *Physics of Blackness*, 16, 41–44.

44 Brown, *Black Utopias*, 12–16.

45 Reed, *Freedom Time*, 170–77.

46 Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, 33.

47 Reed makes clear that *Freedom Time* "does not offer a new conception of time." His assiduous attention to the otherwise as it's registered in poetic form, however, has deeply influenced my own reading practice. Beyond the recent work of Brown, Reed, and Hartman, other studies of black utopian thought and otherwise desire have shaped this book. Among them is Ashon Crawley's study of the aesthetics of Blackpentacostalism, such as shouting, whooping, and speaking in tongues, and how they're subtended by a desire to disrupt post-Enlightenment epistemologies and to create otherwise possibility (*Blackpentacostal Breath*, 8–9). And though firmly within the frame of what Paul Gilroy would call the "politics of fulfillment," despite his invocation of utopia, Felwine Sarr's vision of African futures in *Afrotopia*, calling for a "civilizational shift" in refusing the temporal, cultural, and economic models of the global North, serves as critical ground that *Fugitive Time* stands on as it seeks to place utopian desire in relation across African, European, Caribbean, and North American cultural geographies. And there are, of course, the earlier articulations of black utopian desire that this project is no less shaped by. Gilroy's notion of the "politics of transfiguration" in *The Black Atlantic*, which I gesture to at the opening of this introduction and unpack further in chapter 4, is foundational, as is Saidiya Hartman's study in *Scenes of Subjection* of the "desires and longings that exceed the frame of civil rights and political emancipation" in nineteenth-century black America (13).

48 Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 84.

49 Bulawayo, *We Need New Names*, 17.

50 Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 84.

51 See Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*.

52 Stephens and Stephens, "Embodied/Disembodied," 262.

53 Samatar, "Account of the Land of Witches," 148, 149, 152, 159, 161–63.

54 As with many studies, I could have taken up innumerable directions in this book in terms of the curation of aesthetic objects. One of the more obvious of these is speculative aesthetics—artists such as Samatar, Octavia Butler, Nalo Hopkinson, and Wangechi Mutu. However, I would argue that the speculative mode saturates the vast majority of the works I examine in the coming chapters, even if most don't fit the normative definitions of science fiction and fantasy. Sun Ra—with his interstellar ambitions and his standing as an early forerunner of Afrofuturism—

as well as Morrison's *Beloved*—indisputably a work of supernatural horror—are the most "speculative" artists and works taken up here. But Ra's vision of escape into the cosmos isn't far removed from Issa Samb's visions of other worlds in stones, or Plum's anticipation of the "bright hole of sleep" in *Sula*. These are improbable visions, searchings for otherwise worlds and existences. Another way of framing this project is that it traces the speculative in what most would consider the nonspeculative. This book troubles that distinction, showing how a desire for reimagined worlds and bodies doesn't just lie in works set on distant planets or in alternative pasts.

55 See Higgs, *Chocolate Islands*; and Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.

56 Smith, *Senegal Abroad*, 20.

57 Pinto, *Difficult Diasporas*, 166.

58 The now well-known correction of Equiano's nativity arose from Vincent Carretta's late-1990s discovery of a baptismal record and a ship muster list that indicate Equiano may have been born in South Carolina—which, if true, would render his accounts of West Africa and the middle passage fabrications, effectively falsifying a voice that served at the time to "validate much of the evidence conventionally cited in abolitionist discourse" ("Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa?," 98). Although rigorous defenses by Catherine Acholonu, Paul Lovejoy, and others have been mounted in favor of his African nativity, my interest has less to do with the text's veracity and more in what its early sections engender. See Acholonu, "The Home of Olaudah Equiano"; and Lovejoy, "Autobiography and Memory."

59 Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*, 40–41.

60 Howard, "Swim Your Ground," 17.

61 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 215. In addition to antecedent representations of fugitive time, I want to note the actual forms of time consciousness that likely came before. If fugitive time—whether represented in creative expression or present in one's consciousness—was inaugurated by the fifteenth-century conjuncture of capitalism, captivity, and passage that brought millions to the Americas and buried millions at sea, then the time consciousness that came before (we can of course only speculate) was not one, but many: a multitude of ways of conceiving of the movement of time itself, corresponding to the myriad cosmologies—systems of belief and knowledge production—among the ethnic groups living on the continent prior to Portuguese sub-Saharan arrival. One of the more influential of these indigenous modalities is the cyclical concept of time in Yoruba metaphysics brought to prominence most notably by Wole Soyinka in *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) and *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976). In the latter

he explains how the Yoruba conception of "life, present life, contains within it manifestations of the ancestral, the living and the unborn": "All are vitally within the intimations and affectiveness of life" (144). Although we can't be certain precisely what constituted this particular cosmological structure in, say, the ninth century, time consciousness was likely radically altered for the uncountable Yoruba who for more than a month were chained to the holds of ships and taken across the sea, even if those individuals and their descendants retained a certain belief in that expansive cyclical structure. What's more, this ruptured consciousness likely had a rippling effect of profound psychic loss on those left behind in West Africa and their descendants. And the same logic stands, I would argue, for those groups whose cosmologies were disrupted not by the slave trade but by the violence and ideologies of European (settler) colonialism, like those of the Kamba and the Kikuyu of East Africa that John Mbiti examines in *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), which, like Yoruba metaphysics, are so clearly distinct from European chronological accountings and Judeo-Christian eschatology.

62 Drexciya, *The Quest*, Submerge (3), 1997, compact disc, liner notes.

63 In the last two decades, but especially the most recent, Drexciya's aquatic myth has been taken up by a host of black artists, scholars, and creative intellectuals, providing their own extensions and samplings of this submarine utopian sociality. A few include Ellen Gallagher's "Watery Ecstatic" series (2001–); clipping's "The Deep" (2017); the Otolith Group's "Hydra Decapita" (2010); Kevin Young's *The Grey Album* (2012); Katherine McKittrick's *Dear Science and Other Stories* (2021); Akosua Adoma Owusu's *Drexciya* (2010); Nettrice Gaskins's "Deep Sea Dwellers: Drexciya and the Sonic Third Space" (2016); and Sherwin Ovid's "Breath between Ledgers Measured" (2020). See the Broad, "Watery Ecstatic Series: Ellen Gallagher," accessed October 18, 2022; clipping, "The Deep," accessed October 18, 2022; the Otolith Group, "Hydra Decapita," accessed October 18, 2022; Young, *Grey Album*; McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*; Owusu, *Drexciya*, accessed October 18, 2022; Gaskins, "Deep Sea Dwellers"; and Goldfinch Gallery, "Sherwin Ovid," accessed October 18, 2022.

64 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 40–41.

65 See, for instance, Sylvia Wynter's framing of the "alternative thrust" of marronage in her essays "One Love" (1972) and "Beyond the Word of Man" (1989). In *Black Marxism* (1983), Cedric Robinson also gives voice to various formations of fugitivity and fugitive consciousness, including prophecy. See Robinson's reading of Nongqawuse's 1856 prophecy on southern Africa's eastern Cape that, as he puts it, "continues to evade Western comprehension" (166, 168). As for Nathaniel Mackey, fugitivity as a kind of ecstatically (and often musically) lived experience appears

throughout his poetry, prose, and critical theory. See, for example, "Cante Moro" and "Bedouin Hornbook."

66 Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 88, 112. Although I consult Markmann's English translation of *Black Skin, White Masks* as a reference throughout this book, citations refer to the original French of Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs*. The portions of the text excerpted are my own translations, which in many cases are similar to Markmann's. I use my own to take advantage of the plasticity of the French so that we might consider the array of possible meanings of a given term that might alter, or add layers to, how one reads a certain passage. For the reference translation, see Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*.

67 Fanon, *Peau noire*, 91.

68 Fanon, 6, 24, 42.

69 Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage*, 118–19.

70 Fanon, *Peau noire*, 186.

71 Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 107, 4, 20. See also Johannes Fabian's influential and related "denial of coevalness" in *Time and the Other*, 31–32. For more on the historicist framing of historical time, see Reinhart Koselleck's *Futures Past* (2004). For a more broadly postcolonial analysis of this temporality and its countercurrents, see Simon Gikandi, "Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality."

72 Fanon, *Peau noire*, 187.

73 Fanon, 182, 186; Marriott, "Inventions of Existence," 46.

74 Critically, though, this refusal doesn't eclipse the possibility of the traumatic past shaping that temporal movement in a constitutive way. Fanon's disavowal of the past speaks to the *conscious* effort to distance oneself from past events, not necessarily those *unconscious* hauntings of past violence, shame, and abjection that unevenly seep into the everyday, as Françoise Vergès suggests, constituting the ways in which time is lived as anticipation (*Monsters and Revolutionaries*, 4–15).

75 Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 6; Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 12.

76 Lightfoot, *Troubling Freedom*, 3–8, 230–31.

77 Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 237.

78 Lightfoot, *Troubling Freedom*, 8. In addition to these thinkers, the idea of the nonevent of emancipation and decolonization bears out across a wide range of recent work in global black studies: Walcott explicitly frames this globally in the first lines of *The Long Emancipation* (1); Livermon addresses the "political compromise" that "fosters and perpetuates" inequality specifically in post-apartheid South Africa (*Kwaito Bodies*, 3); concurring with Hartman, Jackson refers to this nonevent in the United States as "a reorganization of a structure of violence" (*Becoming Human*, 28); and this idea is at the heart of Coly's centering of the African female body in her notion of "postcolonial hauntology," where "a

postcolonial African present [is] haunted by colonial specters" (*Postcolonial Hauntologies*, 28).

79 Brown, *Black Utopias*, 16.

80 Keeling, *Witch's Flight*, 37.

81 Brand, *Map to the Door of No Return*, 4, 5.

82 Macharia, *Frottage*, 51–52.

83 The Greene Space at WNYC & WQXR, "Black Icons of Art," accessed October 7, 2019.

84 Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, 97.

85 Bloch, *Utopian Function of Art and Literature*, 73.

CHAPTER 1. TONI MORRISON'S ANACHRONIC EASE

1 Morrison, *Beloved*, 103.

2 Morrison, *Bluest Eye*, 124, 139.

3 Morrison, *Beloved*, 66.

4 Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," 55–58.

5 Morrison, *Beloved*, 4, 101.

6 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, xv, 242.

7 McKay, "An Interview with Toni Morrison," 145.

8 Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 63, 77.

9 The majority of instances in which I use the term *prolepsis* in this chapter pertain to the particular operations of *narrative* prolepsis that Genette lays out and that appear in Morrison's fiction.

10 Morrison, *Beloved*, 101 (my emphasis).

11 I should note that Morrison is not the only black American writer to express such a desire in her work. We might think of the moment in James Baldwin's 1953 novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* when a young John Grimes looks out over the New York skyline, proclaiming, "To hurl away, for a moment of ease, the glories of eternity!" (32). Or, perhaps even more resonant with the utopian valence in Morrison's fiction, the visionary healer figure Minnie Ransom in Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* (1980): "Eyes wide open to the swing from expand to contract, dissolve congeal, release restrict, foot tapping, throat throbbing in song to the ebb and flow of renewal, she would welcome them healed into her arms" (48). In Ransom we find a kindred figure to Baby Suggs, in her capacity to initiate an ecstatically excessive physiological and affective renewal in another that courses throughout the body.

12 Alexander, *Black Interior*, 5.

13 On this question of the interior, my selection of *Sula* and *Beloved* has to do with the degree of interiority we find in Morrison's novels. Works like