Introduction

The Future's Queer Histories

Futurity Now and Then

We are living in the future. At least, we often say we are. A Google search for the phrase at any point in the 2010s would bring up technologies that exist in the present, from wearable computers to 3D printing. The act of internet searching itself invokes the runaway pace of technological change; futuristic technologies from a few years ago look dated and old-fashioned now. And the projected social futures of dystopian fiction have become everyday touchstones for current political events and ongoing technocultural transformations alike. What do we gain and what do we lose when we call our present the future? What does the language of futurity make possible, what does it exclude, and what are the histories that have brought us to this point? And what happens to the futures we have imagined once they have been superseded by real-world events? This book asks what it has meant to conjure alternative futures, including no-futures, from the standpoint of a potentially apocalyptic present. Recognizing that our present moment, the second decade of the twenty-first century, is not the only one that has experienced an obsession with futurity, it delves into the archive of futures that have been imagined and that failed to come to pass, identifying a queer tradition of critical speculation in the twentieth century that continues to make itself felt in the twenty-first.

Searching online for "the future" brings up not only real-world technologies and political thinkpieces but also the iconic spaceships and flying saucers of popular science fiction. Narratives of possible futures have given us languages through which to understand our present. But the discourse of "the" future has never been a singular one. Living in the future for some may mean that the twentieth century's technological utopias

are playing out in continual wireless connectivity and media availability. For others, it means laboring to build that future amid violent, dystopian realities. In the language of capital, the future is a matter of financial speculation: traders gamble on possibilities for the sake of profit, rarely attending to other long-term consequences. Meanwhile, the spectacle of speculative destruction converges intimately with the unpredictable yet repetitive events of catastrophic climate change; science fiction imagery becomes indistinguishable from news reports. The end of the world as we know it seems continually imminent. Yet we live in the debris of many ended worlds, whose inhabitants continue to live on.

The history of the imagined future has been written before. Scholars have shown how the idea of the future was central to the creation and maintenance of imperial domination and technological modernity, shaping the tropes of what we now call "science fiction" as it arose in the United Kingdom and United States.[1] *Old Futures* focuses on works that counter these narratives even as they are part of them—the possible and impossible futures speculated by and for oppressed populations and deviant individuals, who have been marked as futureless or simply left out by dominant imaginaries. Feminist science fiction, Afrofuturism, and new media studies are three areas in which futurist imaginaries have been extensively studied; this book participates in the scholarly conversations in all three fields even as it pursues an idiosyncratic archive for each. The texts and moments I explore bring marginalized futures into conversation with the radical reconceptualizations of temporality offered by recent scholarship in queer studies. My goal is to better understand the social, political, and cultural forces we invoke when we practice the art of living in the future, of imagining the consequences of the present as we seek to change it. Grappling with the dense futurities of the present and the past, the project adds new dimensions to the scholarly frames of queer theory, to studies of temporality in narrative and media, and to existing critical discourses on speculative narrative genres and the publics that surround them.

The cultural politics of the imagined future follow some familiar trajectories. Humanity's continuation seems to demand the privileging of heterosexual procreation; technological capital seems to define the possibility of advancing toward a desirable technoscientific future, leaving those who cannot access it behind in the past. Movements against racial and imperial domination also rely on a future toward which adherents can work, even as scholars in postcolonial and black studies have highlighted the influence of empire on ideas of historical time.[2] Queer temporal theory has insisted on a nonlinear approach to the production and reproduction of futures. It asks what worlds are made and what pleasures found when time is not a relentless onslaught of future generations angled toward progress, degeneration, or some combination of the two. Scholarship on queer temporality has highlighted ways in which political and social orientations to futurity often reproduce conservative norms, suggesting backwardness or ephemerality as alternative formations.[3] Yet the narrative act of imagining the future has received little concern in queer scholarship. Meanwhile, in the most influential literary and cultural studies of the speculative genres, the gendered and sexualized underpinnings of futurity itself remain relatively uncomplicated.[4] In recent years, scholarly attention to the radical potentialities of imagined futures and speculative or science fictions has been growing exponentially. Throughout its gestation, this book has been in conversation with thinkers both inside and outside the academy who are attending to the politics of speculation.[5] Its major contributions to that conversation are twofold: to think through the queer cultural politics of speculative narrative with a breadth and depth not yet attempted; and to offer a historical grounding to show one possible genealogy for the act of queer world-making through speculative imagining. *Old Futures: Speculative Fiction and Queer Possibility* is simultaneously a partial shadow history of speculative fictions, centering on oppositional and marginal works that tend to appear as footnotes at most in genre histories and taxonomies, and an intervention in contemporary queer theories of temporality and futurity.

Since the publication of Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* well over a decade ago, something of a consensus on the relationship between queerness and the future has emerged. Queer time signifies breaking with straight and narrow paths toward the future laid out for the reproductive family, the law-abiding citizen, the believer in markets. Instead it lingers or refuses, flashing up in moments of ephemeral utopia or doubling back to reanimate the pleasurable and/or painful past. Queer theory offers creative and fertile ways to think about time. Yet so far it has rarely considered the possibility that vital queer

alternatives may lie at the end of linearly projected, even reproductive, futurist imaginaries. What if, instead of a queer present reshaping the ways we relate to past and future, turning to the futures imagined in the past can lead us to queer the present?

At the same time as the fashion for *no future* arose in queer theory, narratives of apocalyptic conditions in a world pushed seemingly to its end by speculative capital and environmental destruction have become dominant in transatlantic cultural commentary, leading both to technological solutionism and to expressions of the abandonment of hope.[6] *Old Futures* turns to often-forgotten insights and narratives to find approaches that take up the future as a transformative possibility without either idealizing or demonizing the past. The queer possibilities invoked are not always hopeful, desirable, or even livable. To open up a future for speculative contemplation is not the same as to demand it be brought into reality. But old futures cast unexpected light into the present. If we attend to them closely enough, we might find that queer futures' histories underwrite our present efforts to imagine possibilities for the future, to enact transformations in the present, and to think critically about time.

This introduction unpacks what is at stake in my identification of a queer cultural politics for speculative fiction, in terms of both queer studies' relationship to the speculative and scholarship on science fiction as a genre. It also explicates the archive that I have brought together, whose three sections each address one queered formation of speculative futurity. Centering on feminist utopian/dystopian reproductive futures, on futures of racialized gender as imagined in black science fiction, and on images of speculative possibility that queer the temporalities of moving-image media, *Old Futures* gathers an archive of feminists, queers, and people of color who insist that the future can and must deviate from dominant narratives of global annihilation or highly restrictive hopes for redemption. By broadening the ways we think about speculation in the mode of the political, I seek to better account for the roles of gender, race, and sexuality in the production and destruction of futures both real and imagined.

In the epigraph, I cite a famous remark from William Gibson, the science fiction writer whose coinage of the term *cyberspace* has immortalized him in media history: "The future is already here, it just isn't evenly distributed."[7] The project of this book is to ask what imagined futures mean

for those *away from whom* futurity is distributed: oppressed populations and deviant individuals, who are denied access to the future by dominant imaginaries, but who work against oppression by dreaming of new possibility. Each chapter chronicles some of the myriad means by which uneven distributions of discursive and material futures takes place: through eugenics, utopia, empire, fascism, dystopia, race, capitalism, femininity, masculinity, and many kinds of queerness, reproduction, and sex. In each case, I try to show what we can learn from negotiations and transformations enacted by speculative fictions' engagements with and critiques of the future's discursive creation—to highlight cultural producers' efforts to imaginatively redistribute the future.

A Brief History of Queer Time

The history of queer scholarship is a history of futures. As a politicized anti-discipline growing out of a longer history of gay and lesbian studies, queer theory emerged in the early 1990s from the convergence of activist energies with the US academy at what Janet Halley and Andrew Parker describe as "the riveting nexus of the feminist sex wars with the crescendo—which at the time we did not know would diminish—in AIDS-related death among United States gay men."[8] Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, and other instigators wrote criticism and theory that was motivated by a compulsion to change the world in such a way that gay people's futures would no longer be curtailed, whether through death from AIDS or via the policing and delegitimization of deviant desires. Their work built on Michel Foucault's epistemological histories, which had foregrounded the intersections of gender and desire with power and ideology—showing the imbrication of power and resistance yet also opening spaces for a future when those relationships could look different than they had in the past.[9] Queer theory and activism pushed against structures that seemed immutable, insisting on the contingent past and unpredictable future of masculinity, femininity, kinship, and desire. How could attempts to envisage possibilities outside heteronormative structures not involve a certain futurity? There is a powerful speculative element in the move from deconstructing existing binaries to visualizing—one might even say fictionalizing—how the world might be changed by those binaries' subversion or destruction.

In one of the first uses of the phrase "queer theory," in 1992, Teresa de Lauretis asks whether "our theory could construct another discursive horizon, another way of living the racial and the sexual."[10] A queer future is held up as hopeful prospect at the end of 1990's *Gender Trouble*, too, when Butler writes that "if identities were no longer fixed . . . a new configuration of politics would surely emerge from the ruins of the old."[11] Queer theorizing has been, in Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's 1995 description, "radically anticipatory, trying to bring a world into being."[12] Radical queer politics has been seen as a potential way out of the normativities imposed by the capitalist, neoliberal political economy of dominant Western (particularly American) culture. Queer theory began as a way to imaginatively activate new or emergent ways of life through intellectual work, through writing or teaching as well as philosophizing. Even as queer studies becomes part of academic disciplinarity, this speculative intensity has continued. Donald E. Hall's 2003 primer in queer theory, for example, explicitly invites its undergraduate readers to become queer critics, joining "a volunteer organisation devoted to working very hard to queer our *future*."[13]

The queer worlds and new horizons to which early queer theorists allude tend to be located in subcultural ways of living, buried in the insufficiently documented past or between the lines of existing texts. Yet recurrent theoretical emphasis on the *newness* of queer perspectives suggests—as José Muñoz would later make explicit—that the queerest space and time was viewed as one that had not yet come into being. Figurative futures in queer scholarship have invariably been *invoked*, but rarely imagined in the literally representational terms I explore. To precisely name what a queer future might look like would seem to go against queerness's refusal of binding normative constraints, tying things down to an overly predictable future. I argue throughout the book that this is not, or at least not simply, the case.

Propositions like Hall's suggest that an ahistorical future will remain perpetually ripe for queering. But the actual political future that US-based queer activists had a hand in creating did not resemble early queer scholarship's implicit utopias. Instead, a politics of what Lisa Duggan named in 2003 as "homonormativity" emerged, and the most privileged of those formerly excluded from heteronormative life—often well-off, white gay men—consolidated "a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in

domesticity and consumption."[14] Same-sex marriage activism, in which working towards equality becomes synonymous with participating in the couple form and politicizing the consumption of wedding-related commodities, has become a primary signifier of homonormativity.

At the same time, critics of queer theory's relative lack of attention to class and race were calling for an understanding of queer possibility untethered from genealogies of gay assimilation. In a field-defining 1997 essay, Cathy Cohen argues that the "transformational" potential of queer politics could be realized only through a "radical intersectional left analysis" that would attend closely to the ways that "heteronormativity interacts with institutional racism, patriarchy, and class assimilation" and acknowledge that racialized heteronormativity is oppressive to more than just individuals who hold LGBTQ identifications.[15] Even as liberal gay and lesbian activists have succeeded in campaigns for marriage, military inclusion, and hate crimes legislation, radical thinkers and activists refuse to be satisfied with a politics based on assimilation into conservative nationalist timelines, restrictive racialized gender norms, and the reproductive family home.[16] They focus instead on queerer possibilities, such as the social and political transformations required to challenge the continuing curtailment of marginalized queer and trans people's futures. In his 2011 book *Normal Life*, Dean Spade describes a radical transgender politics as necessitating "a shared imagination of a world without imprisonment, colonialism, immigration enforcement, sexual violence, or wealth disparity."[17]

In his *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005), Jack Halberstam writes that queerness should be considered less as a question of gender's interface with desire and more as the site of "strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices" that open up "queer relationships to time and space."[18] From this branch of queer politics has emerged a definition of queerness as a site where the lines between past and future created by heteronormative structures of social and biological reproduction can be diverted or broken off. In this context, the proposition of a queer future requires new ways of thinking about temporality itself.

Perhaps the single most influential work on queer time has been Edelman's flamboyantly argued *No Future* (2004). *Old Futures* came into being as a search for alternatives to the relationships between queerness and

futurity that have come to seem like common sense in the wake of Edelman's work, and I engage with specific elements of his critique in some depth as part of the "History of No Future" that I trace in part 1. Arguing that to be queer is to oppose futurity, Edelman coined the term *reproductive futurism* to describe the overwhelming tendency for political value to be defined in terms of a future *for the children*. He insists that the power of queer critique inheres in its opposition to this narrative and therefore to politics as such. Working within Lacanian theory to create a psychoanalytic response to the assimilation of queer difference into conventional modes of familial time, Edelman insists that invocations of a better social reality for future generations are inextricably entangled with a straight ideology that narrows the terms of debate to those that ensure the protection of a symbolically innocent "Child" and the dream of a clean, new future it symbolizes.[19] Political futures are "kid stuff"; forward-looking temporalities are by definition part of a normative model that grinds out the same social relations over and over again while pretending to advocate progressive change and obscure the horrifying fact that "the future is mere repetition and just as lethal as the past."[20] There is little room for speculative futures of queer possibility when queers are assigned to embody the "death drive" that unmakes subjectivity, the "grave" that "gapes from within . . . reality's gossamer web" and exposes its fragility and falsehood.[21] The oppositions between queerness, negativity, and futurity are never as straightforward as Edelman lets them appear, however. Among the old futures of feminist and queer speculative fiction I explore in this book, there are moments in which the anti-futurist negativity he names as queer is used for multiple political ends.

My work rebounds from Edelman's to attempt an intersectional understanding of queer anti-futurism by broadening and deepening the archive of futures on which an analysis of reproductive futurism can draw, attending particularly to the articulation of fictional futures with nation, empire, race, and gender. One way that I do this is to think intensely about reproduction itself. In a rare discussion of gendered embodiment that takes place in a footnote, Edelman argues that queer anti-futurism is most often embodied by male figures because of "a gender bias that continues to view women as 'naturally' bound more closely to sociality, reproduction, and domesticating emotion."[22] This gendering of futurity and sociality, to which Edelman briefly alludes, will be a

consistent theme throughout *Old Futures*, especially though not exclusively in part 1, which focuses on the reproductive politics of feminist speculation. The historical and political presence of reproductivity shapes the gender politics of the future: if children are the future, someone must bear and parent them, and the significance of that biological and social reproduction cannot be written off as a byproduct of patriarchy.

Feminist theory has long challenged women's relegation to a reproductive position subordinate to men's productivity. Shulamith Firestone's 1970 polemic *The Dialectic of Sex* is an important example: not only does Firestone call for the abolition of gestation and its replacement with cybernetic wombs, but she also insists that childhood itself is an oppressive dystopian structure that ought to be abolished. Childhood for Firestone is the imposition of adult fantasies of innocence on individuals who should be acknowledged for their existence, not only for their potential.[23] When Firestone talks about reproduction, she is as much concerned with the perpetuation of means of production and ways of life through reproductive labor, as understood in the Marxist sense, as she is with baby-making. She insists that the only way to reproduce a future that would not continually oppress women would be to separate the former from the latter senses of the term. And, because "the heart of woman's oppression is her child-bearing and child-rearing role," biological reproduction must be ended in order to stop women being dehumanized by their role as incubators for the future of the human race.[24] Few feminists have seriously contemplated demands as revolutionary as Firestone's call to abolish children and mothers, but they have often imagined what it might mean to reconfigure the gendered politics of reproduction.[25] Queer scholarship and activism, by contrast, has tended either to elide feminist critiques of reproductive labor or to take them as a given, moving immediately to the ways reproduction can be resisted and alternative temporalities and futurities explored. Queer worlds seem self-evidently not to include reproductive futures. Yet reproduction and heterofuturity are not always easily equated.

This book devotes considerable space to recounting historical aspects of the critique of reproductive futurism and developing new ways to think reproduction and futurity together without, hopefully, submitting to the clichés of a singular reproductive futurism. My arguments assume and assert that same-sex orientations and queer political critiques do

not straightforwardly map onto one another, and that this disjuncture is not purely a product of the homonormative present but extends into the past. I consider the imaginative production of multiple reproductive futurisms at specific historical moments and ask how they are differentiated by gender, desire, colonialism, capitalism, nation, and race. What looks normative and oppressive through one lens may appear differently through another, and we will better understand the complexities of queer political possibility in the present if we angle our analysis through multiplex frames. In devoting a substantial part of this queer studies project to the cultural workings of reproductive bodies, I hope to show that it is necessary to pay attention to the deviances within what appears normative, as well as the normativities within what is, ostensibly, utterly queer. I look at the historical reproduction of bodies, races, nations, and social relations in white British feminist utopias (chapter 1), in white English women writers' uses of futuristic fiction to engage with European fascism (chapter 2), and in African American figurations of reproductive futurisms that insist on the differential meanings of sex and reproduction across racial lines (chapter 3). In each case, "the future of the race" and the idea of "no future" or "the end of the world" are central fictional tropes that I unpack to show their exposition of historical contradictions and deviances and their resonances with queer thinking in the present.

The idea of queerness as oppositional to futurity emerged in critical response to queer theory's more utopian emphases on hope and transformation, and to assumptions that sexual and political radicalism could naturally align to create fabulous avant-garde socialities. From a different angle, other queer theorists of time have emphasized the pull of the past on the present. In *Feeling Backward* (2007), Heather Love writes that "advances such as gay marriage and increasing media visibility of well-heeled gays and lesbians threaten to obscure the continuing denigration and dismissal of queer existence," and draws on fictional depictions of queer subjects in the past whose self-articulation demands that they be seen as more than "the abject multitude against whose experience we define our own liberation."[26] Love insists that to let go of the past's problems and discomforts in the hope of a better future is to give up on the misfit elements that have most shaped the meanings of queer existence. She challenges the optimism of future-focused thinking as well as its temporal flow. Elizabeth Freeman's 2011 *Time Binds* begins

with a brief personal narrative that resonates with Love's work. Freeman writes that she once "thought the point of queer was to be always ahead of actually existing social possibilities," but now accepts that "the point may be to trail behind actually existing social possibilities: to be interested in the tail end of things, willing to be bathed in the fading light of whatever has been declared useless."[27] Among the useless things she cites, with their "ways of living aslant to dominant forms of object-choice, coupledom, family, marriage, sociability, and self-preservation," are "embarrassing utopias," the futuristic emissions of outdated modes of being.[28] Many of the oldest futures I discuss feel embarrassing to approach if we are looking for historical precursors for radical queer thought. Freeman's and Love's generosity toward the uncomfortable, ugly, and often violent past is a necessary tool for entering into what I argue is a necessary engagement with these works, without obscuring either problems or potentialities.

Time is not only a linear movement from past into present and on to the future, although this progressive or developmental model is predominant in much speculative fiction. It is also lived in the rhythms of the body. Freeman coins the term "chrononormativity" to talk about the bodily rhythms of normative time. Drawing from Dana Luciano's writings on "chronobiopolitics," she describes the way that temporal norms embed the rhythms of economic production into the body, shaping individuals' lives into forms that enable them to participate in dominant histories and socialities. Chrononormativity is "the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity"; through it, "institutional forces come to feel like somatic facts," as "manipulations of time convert historically specific regimes of asymmetrical power into seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and routines, which in turn organize the value and meaning of time."[29] The somatic and embodied aspects of temporality and futurity that chrononormativity describes come especially to the fore in part 3, where I engage the technological reproduction of imagined futures as experienced in the bodily tempos and routines produced by our interaction with the analog and digital screens on which imagined futures are displayed.

Chrononormativity weaves all who can follow its tempo into the fabric of dominant culture, making them part of the production and reproduction of social life and of capital. It leaves out or leaves behind

those who are out of step, who cannot keep up—often due to poverty, disability, race, or sexuality. To think against chrononormativity is to acknowledge that "within the lost moments of official history, queer time generates a discontinuous history of its own," which is best told through the erotic entanglements of past, present and future.[30] Freeman shows how dominant cultures exert power by naturalizing the temporal narratives they impose, leaving those who cannot or will not follow their schedules in a limbo of asynchrony. The official time line she describes is based on a state-recognized life narrative that follows marriage with reproduction and the creation of nuclear families to engage with capital as good producers and consumers. These privatized reproductive futures converge toward an ever-expanding future, a colonizing global modernity in which alternative modes of being will have been wiped out. Old futures are the traces that remain to show that the official narrative is never the whole story.

Chrononormativity and chronobiopolitics also mark the ways that gender and sexuality are racialized and classed. Thinking race, coloniality, and capital along with gender and sexuality is necessary to thinking queerly about histories, futures, and histories of futures, as will be evident in each formation of futurity analyzed in the book. Queers are most easily identified as those who evade the "straight" timelines of normalized heterosexual, reproductive life narratives. But matters of race, location, gender, and economics also affect the straightness of those timelines. Sara Ahmed unpacks this idea in the spatialized version of queerness she develops in *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), where to be queer is to deviate from the expected social and structural "line." Focusing on the "orientation" in "sexual orientation," she insists that queer deviations can produce their own coercive directions:

> If the compulsion to deviate from the straight line was to become "a line" in queer politics, then this itself could have a straightening effect. . . . Not all queers can be "out" in their deviation. For queers of other colors, being "out" already means something different, given that what is "out and about" is oriented around whiteness.[31]

Ahmed reminds us to "avoid assuming that 'deviation' is always on the side of the progressive."[32] Even as this book seeks to highlight the speculative production of queer possibility, it remains attentive to the co-production of possibilities and impossibilities along lines that histories of empire, race, nation, and global capitalism set in place.[33]

We are queered by more than the directions of our sexual desires. It is possible to deviate along one angle while holding the line and enforcing it for others in a different direction. Cohen, Roderick Ferguson, and other queer of color critics have highlighted the simultaneous exclusion of nonheteronormative subjects from the radical narratives of racial futures produced by movements against white supremacy, while race- and class-specific exclusions from heteronormativity (named by Cohen as "punks," "bulldaggers," and "welfare queens," and figured by Ferguson as the black drag queen sex worker) are illegible to mainstream queer politics.[34] Siobhan Somerville shows in *Queering the Color Line* (2000) that racial and gendered deviances have been co-produced in American history through the commingling of anti-black racism and gender normativity. Sexually deviant white bodies have been imagined as racially other and bodies of color marked as sexually deviant, with both understood to be out of time with relation to dominant culture.[35] Valerie Rohy writes about the shared "anachronism" of black and queer subjects in US discourse, where they have been mutually implicated in the white supremacist, heteronormative, eugenic ideal that the best future would come from "assigning both homosexuality and blackness to the place of the past."[36] Black and queer temporalities would seem to differ in that to be heir to slavery is to have had one's native sense of time ripped away, to have been forced into the past as other to European modernity alongside though not identically to other colonized and racialized populations, while to commit to a politics of queerness implies a rejection of the temporality foisted upon one—whether that is defiantly to refuse any futurity at all or to take on a form of subjectivity that can be fully realized only in the future. But these modes are neither separate nor separable, as I discuss in part 2, which is dedicated to the futures that arise at the intersection of black and queer speculative thought.

Kara Keeling uses Marx's invocation of "poetry from the future" to assert that the *when* of those lost to imperial and reproductive timelines could have its own rhythms, worlds, and poetries, though these may not be available to the scholarly seeker whose institutional perch is always to

some degree contained by normative time.[37] This book seeks to understand how speculative fiction writers, media producers, and audiences have depicted and transformed these dynamics.

The Cultural Politics of Speculative Fiction

The practice of imagining the future has been polished to a fine art in the genre and cultural field of science fiction, in which debates over terms and categories are fierce and ongoing. Many scholars have been invested in erecting clear boundaries between science fiction, speculative fiction, and fantasy. In the 1970s, Darko Suvin (whose work I discuss further in chapter 4) defined science fiction through a structuralist notion of cognitive estrangement, in which both the estranging act of thinking things otherwise and the use of a cognitive, rational practice to do so were necessary for a text to be worthy of the formal designation.[38] Fredric Jameson stringently distinguishes science fiction from fantasy, arguing that science fiction maintains a rigorous material focus while fantasy, as "the other side of the coin," speculates with a greater and more idealistic freedom.[39] Roger Luckhurst writes that science fiction is a fictional engagement with "Mechanism," by which he means the permeation of technology into everyday life. He asserts that the conception of time that allows the future to be a primary focus of speculative cultural production is "associated with modernity" in the way it "orients perceptions towards the future rather than the past or the cyclical sense of time ascribed to traditional societies."[40] This connection with technological modernity has also been central to genre analyses of science fiction film, where it filters through Susan Sontag's 1965 contrast between the "intellectual workout" provided by science fiction novels and the "sensuous elaboration" of films (discussed further in chapter 5).[41] In a popular guidebook to science fiction film published in 2009, Steven Jay Schneider asserts that "cinema itself is science fiction" because its technologies and special effects make the impossible seem possible.[42] Spectacular visions of advancement, disaster, and adventure on a planetary or galactic scale showcase cinematic technology, seducing audiences to pay for what Garrett Stewart described in 1985 as "the fictional or fictive science of the cinema itself, the future feats it may achieve scanned in line with the technical feat that conceives them right now and before our eyes."[43]

All these definitions highlight important cultural and historical realities. Yet they also limit the extent of the cultural politics that the genre can be seen to engage. Feminized concerns about gender, sexuality, and emotional life are likely to slip into the margins, to be viewed as insufficiently cognitive, materialist, technological, or spectacular. Works that are about the future yet not overtly concerned with technological modernity (like Katharine Burdekin's 1937 *Swastika Night*, a key text in chapter 2) or that speculate visually without the aid of special effects (like the films I discuss in chapter 5) may not seem to count as science fiction at all.

The search for a taxonomy of science fiction invariably overlaps with Damon Knight's 1967 assertion that genre is defined by the communities who gather around it, so that "science fiction is what we point to when we say 'science fiction.'"[44] Concerned with an orientation toward futurity that crosses many genre lines, I prefer not to make such definitional gestures of my own, even as I engage queered visions of fictional futures that demonstrate the multiplicity of spaces and times within the Anglo-American modern period from which the genealogy of science fiction emerged. I have settled on "speculative fiction" as a term that is roomier, more evocative, and also more specific. This book centers on the act of *speculation*: of imagining things otherwise than they are, and of creating stories from that impulse. Understanding the terminologies and taxonomies of science fiction to refer to specific cultures and moments that have produced particular kinds of speculative narrative, I draw upon them as appropriate within individual chapters.

As a literary and media genre, science fiction has entered the archive of critical cultural theory in some well-defined ways. Politically engaged science fiction, utopia, and dystopia have often provided fictional evidence for Marxist theoretical models, as in Jameson's use of the left-leaning speculative tradition to develop his theory of capitalism, utopia, and social change, or Carl Freedman's assertion that "of all genres, science fiction is . . . the one most devoted to the historical concreteness and historical self-reflectiveness of critical theory."[45] Since the 1980s, feminist theorists have drawn on the well-developed, intertextual literature and culture of feminist science fiction to help them demonstrate the cross-fertilization between fiction and social movements.[46] Feminist science and technology studies has also long seen speculative

and science fiction as a vital theoretical force, viewing it as creating fictional worlds where feminist ideologies can play out in greater complexity than theoretical writing will allow, or opening literary and visual spaces within which new formations of gendered technological embodiment can be imagined. Donna Haraway's 1991 "Cyborg Manifesto," whose influential theory of technocultural subjectivity is built in part from analyses of Anne McCaffrey's 1961 "The Ship Who Sang" and Joanna Russ's 1975 *The Female Man*, is a powerful example of how speculative fiction and speculative theory can converge.[47] While feminist science fiction studies has been centered more on literature than on media, it has also had much to say about the sensuous elaborations of gendered embodiment that science fiction films invoke, uncovering the possibilities for reconfiguring gender and sexuality in the reproductive weirdness of the *Alien* movies or in the technological performances of *The Matrix*.[48] This book does not engage in great depth with the texts and contexts most discussed by feminist science fiction studies scholars, but it stands on their shoulders as it reaches for less well-trodden sites of speculative gender and sexuality.

Sustained scholarly engagement with the interrelationships between queer theory and science fiction studies has been surprisingly rare, given the speculative force of queer theory and activism and the highly active queer world-making that takes place both in science fiction and fantasy writing and in its active fan cultures (the latter of which I discuss in the second wormhole and chapter 6). Literary science fiction's tendency to concern itself with changing societies' effects on subjectivities resonates strongly with queer critics' articulations of nonheteronormative time and space, as Wendy Pearson's important 1999 article "Alien Cryptographies: The View From Queer" demonstrates. The 2008 anthology *Queer Universes: Sexualities in Science Fiction* showcases the predominant conversations between queer studies and science fiction that have shaped queer science fiction studies as a small disciplinary subfield. In these essays, science fiction is articulated as a form of utopian writing that makes the queer future imaginable;[49] as a signifier of sexual subjectification through technology;[50] and as a politicized co-producer of queer realities.[51] If queer theory deconstructs binary logics of identity and imagines how the world might be changed by their subversion or destruction in collaboration with activist political and sexual practice,

here it naturally seems to converge with science fiction's imaginative production of sometimes-utopian futurities. This queer science fiction theory occupies the temporality of a promise, in which science fiction will offer an endpoint to queer theory's anticipatory trajectories. But the relationship between queerness, science fiction, and futurity is far from self-evident, for one of the things that both queer theory and fictional speculation can do is question the structures around which we base our valuations of what progress signifies, who benefits from which forms of demand for social change, and what it means to "have" a future or be denied one. The convergence of queerness and science fiction requires that neither one be defined in advance. The expansive, emergent language of the speculative fosters such radical openness.

The choice of "speculative fiction" to refer to cultural production that imagines futures calls forth significant critiques. Science fiction writer Samuel R. Delany stated in a 1990 interview that "'speculative fiction' was a term that had a currency for about three years—from 1966 through 1969," when it "meant anything that was experimental, anything that was science-fictional, or anything that was fantastic" and "was a conjunctive, inclusive term, which encompassed everything in all three areas—before it began to signify only experimental works that included science fiction elements, and eventually became a term used by non-science-fiction-oriented academic literature scholars, who used it to legitimate the science fiction that they liked."[52] Is "speculative fiction" simply a name used to increase intellectual capital by papering over the pop-culture connotations of science fiction? It is true that I initially settled on "speculative" over "science" fiction in some part because I hoped that it might encourage those not already enamored of the genre to pick up the book. Yet the cultural landscape, popular and otherwise, has changed greatly since 1990 and even more since 1966–1969. These days, "speculative fiction" is widely accepted in scholarly and fannish circles alike as a capacious term that "covers practically the entire fantastic end of the sliding scale of realistic vs fantastic," including "science fiction, fantasy, alternate history, and everything in between."[53] And, while the scientific and technological elements of traditional science fiction narratives are praised by some members of science fiction fan communities, these are often the most socially and politically conservative elements, while science fiction publishers and organizations who encourage queer, feminist, and

decolonial narratives draw from broader definitions.[54] It is true that the majority of the works on which this book focuses could be categorized as science fiction according to many of the definitions cited above. Yet my elaborations of the cultural logics of speculative fiction could as easily be drawn from other fields and genres, and I hope that this project will prove to have relevance in contexts well beyond genre studies.

The speculative fiction whose cultural politics and queer possibilities *Old Futures* explores is a varied mode of cultural and critical production. I am interested in one particular practice within it: the process by which cultural producers reconfigure their historical present in order to speculate about what a possible future might be like. Those futures may be (and are) optimistic, pessimistic, and/or critical of the concept of linear progressive time. The practice of speculating futures not only is enacted in fiction but also forms an approach to the world at large—hence my assertion in the previous pages that queer theory is itself often a practice of speculative fiction.

As I discuss above, queer scholarship does more than contribute to envisioning and activating possibilities for living queer lives in the future; it unpacks the significance of sexual norms and deviations to cultural constructions of futurity itself. Speculative and science fiction have rarely been associated with the currents in queer theorizing that emphasize queerness as countering assimilationist, normalizing politics through emphases on refusals, debasements, and impossibilities (although I will make such an association in chapter 2 and revisit it in chapter 5). They seem to have little to do with the genealogy of antisocial or negative queer theory that is most vividly associated with Leo Bersani's work on the value of *un*making rather than creating coherent selves and worlds.[55] A fictional representation of an alternative future does feature as an exemplary text in Edelman's *No Future*; I discuss his use of P. D. James's 1992 *The Children of Men* further in the wormhole that links parts 1 and 2. In his infinitely more hopeful 1999 book *Disidentifications*, Jose Muñoz writes movingly of Osa Hidalgo's 1996 short speculative film *Marginal Eyes*, which seeks to "imagine the future" as "a queer world as brown as it is bent."[56] Yet, making the same move Edelman does in the service of a quite different argument, the rest of his book moves away from this speculative representation of a literal future in order to root his queer temporality of performance firmly in the present. Muñoz's stellar 2009 book on queer futurity, *Cruising Utopia*, does not mention speculative cultural production at all.

It is not difficult to understand why speculative and science fiction futures seem antithetical to queer understandings of temporality that question the self-evident value of progress. Linear, literal articulations of utopian visions, dystopian fears, and futuristic extrapolations are inextricably entangled with the reproduction of racialized heteronormativity, with spatial and cultural colonization, and—especially in science fiction film's emphasis on special effects—with capital's fetishization of commodified newness. Science fiction's frequent voyages of interstellar discovery trace their lineage to early modern narratives of European encounters with "alien" indigenous peoples, as John Rieder demonstrates.[57] The notion of traveling into space, colonizing what *Star Trek* called the "final frontier," has often served conservative national political interests. And the genre's focus on technological innovation has fostered a dynamic in which, as Kodwo Eshun writes, "Science fiction is now a research and development department within a futures industry that dreams of the prediction and control of tomorrow."[58] This is sometimes literally true, as in the case of technologists' use of what Brian David Johnson of Intel Corporation calls "science fiction prototypes," fictions "based on real science and technology" that are used "explicitly as a step or input in the development process" in order to "imagine and envision the future."[59] Speculative imaginaries and science-fictional representations can both lead capitalist and colonial temporalities to appear inevitable.

But just as some speculative fictions may be prototypes for the prediction of a future more or less like the present, others may preemptively imagine its collapse or transformation. Space travel has been imagined not only as a continuation of settler colonialism but as the opening of a space where black, indigenous, and other colonized people could create worlds that would not leave the earth behind so much as reimagine the possibility of relating to it.[60] Science fiction prototyping could describe the imaginative work of speculating political possibility as much as marketable commodities.[61] The cultural politics of speculative fiction are never not gendered and never not racial, any more than they can be independent of national and socioeconomic location. This is no less true for queer and feminist theory. But while futuristic fictions are reliant on

the violent and gendered progress narratives of technological modernity, capitalism and colonization, they are not coextensive with them. Linear models of temporality give fictions of imagined futures shape and structure; yet an extrapolative orientation toward alternative futurities can also demonstrate the complex and contradictory ways such modes can be employed.

Constituted by and constitutive of scientific dynamics built with assumptions that Western European man signified the most advanced, most adult, and most human of subjects, fictional futures have also provided experimental sites for working out other ways of being. As a scan through literary anthologies devoted to science fiction's queer,[62] feminist,[63] postcolonial,[64] and indigenous[65] versions will show, speculative fiction has cherished uses for those whose embodiments situate them at a deviant angle to techno-utopian futurities. Modernist discourses of technological development are never sufficient to understand the speculative practices of creators committed to envisioning futures for the nonproductive and nonreproductive, queer bodies, and bodies of color that colonizing and developmental discourses relegate to a "savage" and genocidally obliterated past. Fictional speculation often opens up alternative potentialities only to close them down into futures that are all too predictable according to dominant logics. A central argument throughout this book is that the failures of speculative fictions' radical possibilities do not invalidate their meaning, their interest, or their capacity to make a difference.

Futures imagined through engagements with history's structural exclusions tell us much both about dominant ways of thinking about time and about how we might create alternatives. Speculative imaginings that have not been encoded into the everyday realities of the science fiction present help to demonstrate that the future need not be closed down into familiar, straight lines. The lingering presences and possibilities of past futures open possibilities for thinking and living the present in different, deviant ways. If a forward-oriented narrative of historical development signifies the time of capitalism and colonialism, then the time of the colonized, excluded, and othered is most frequently to be found in the past.[66] The temporalities of ghosts, the supernatural, and myth are those that discourses of European Enlightenment seek to associate with childhood, alterity, unseriousness, times gone by. Bliss Cua Lim

writes about how the cinematic fantastic "translates" between what Walter Benjamin called homogeneous, empty time and other temporalities that are supposed to have been wiped out but that surface as ghosts;[67] Avery Gordon's sociology of haunting similarly describes the perpetuation of the past in the present and the impossibility of ever leaving it behind.[68] The old futures this project follows suggest that technological, scientific, and reproductive futurisms can exceed the homogenization of time. Appearing in modes both desirable and discomfiting, these are futures for sexual, gendered, racialized ways of being that dominant temporal politics have tried and failed to eradicate. They deviate both from the conventional timelines of familial norms and from the successes and failures associated with life under capitalism.

During the time between this project's beginnings and its completion, the logics and politics of speculative fiction have become more central to the worlds of critical theory. This has not so much changed the relationship between theory and genre studies as it has begun to suggest new ways of thinking *speculation*, a term that applies to finance capital as much as to possibilities and alternatives.[69] Speculative theory is work that grapples with the dense futurity of the present, altering concepts of reality even as the real itself is continually cast into question. In 2012, Jayna Brown and I gathered a dossier for *Social Text*'s online *Periscope* on a theme of "Speculative Life." Our introduction expresses this mode:

> To speculate, the act of speculation, is also to play, to invent, to engage in the practice of imagining. And, as Ernst Bloch said, it may be in our imaginative worlds that we catch glimpses of utopian possibility beyond our present paradigm. At a moment when so many have been struggling to enact alternatives to the depressing world produced by Wall Street's speculative failures, we need to practice imagining now more than ever.[70]

Speculation in this modality is both the prospect of temporal elsewheres and a logic that enforces capitalism's here and now, through the dominance of financial speculation.

Speculative critique, as Brown and I articulated it and as I seek to extend here, embraces the potentiality of utopias, forward-looking

timelines, and possibilities of radically different and better elsewheres. It also acknowledges the embeddedness of such imagination in the often dismal logics of the present's inequalities. This structure underlies the queer possibility inherent in the cultural politics of speculative fiction, which provides tools for vernacular theorizing about the politics of the future. In their production of alternatives and deviations from and/or within predetermined progress narratives, returning to the possibilities embedded in old futures may allow such narratives to be occupied differently. Old futures insist that we acknowledge the extent to which temporal norms are not easy to repudiate; they force us to linger over processes of articulating what other ways of being in the world, anti-futurist lives, or non-normative temporalities might feel like.

In writing scholarship that seeks to be in dialogue with its political, cultural, or technological moment, it is difficult to resist the pressures, the inspirations and disappointments, of trying to keep up with a rapidly moving target. One begins a project focused on what is happening *now*, galvanized by the possible futures it portends, then finds that social and technological shifts have rendered one's insights out of date before the first draft of writing is completed. This book's emphasis on *old* futures offers, I hope, a way to sidestep such anxieties, lingering instead with the futures of the past and their effects in multiple presents. Attending to old futures might suggest some ways to redistribute the future in the present.

A Map of the Book

When I began to conceptualize a project that would conjoin queer critique and radical speculative fiction, I imagined I would find myself awash in worlds of marvelously desirable sexual and social possibilities, where space, time, economics, gender, race, and ability would be brought into new queer forms. This has occasionally been the case, but more often I have found myself recounting the limitations of works that aim to escape but are inevitably determined by the cultural conditions out of which they emerge, following the same logics of assimilation that have brought queer critique face to face with its own imperialisms and normativities. Certainly, queer sex is far from absent in speculative fiction, within the science fiction canon and elsewhere. But, as Candas Jane Dorsey writes in a 2009 essay, most of the time "queer isn't queer enough in sf."[71] As I have come to realize, this may not be the end of the world.

If queer science fiction and queer speculative theory seem to be located at a permanently receding utopian horizon, there is still much to learn from the conditions of possibility for coming closer to that horizon and slipping away from it. Rather than wading through the margins of the contemporary to assemble an archive that would reflect the way I wanted to think of queer worlds being built, I found myself on a quest to understand where such an archive of possibilities might emerge from—and why it does not materialize as often as some of us might wish. This led me to construct an archive of my own that works to supplement the most widespread genealogies of queer theory and science fiction studies, by looking to speculative creativity produced in the margins of times and places where dominant futures were being constructed through colonial, capitalist, white supremacist, heteronormative temporalities. This book brings together works whose interconnection is rarely acknowledged: white feminist utopias and dystopias of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; Afrofuturist narratives that turn the dehumanization of black lives into visions of transformation; and queer artistic adoptions and appropriations of science fiction media. In each case I explore how queer possibilities are constructed and deconstructed through speculative narrative, through extrapolative projections from the present and the past, and through excesses and margins that invite affective engagements with alternative temporalities.

Old Futures is structured in three parts, each addressing one particular convergence of political economy, theoretical framework, and narrative form that has given rise to a formation of speculative futurity. Two shorter sections, named "Wormholes" in homage to the science fiction genre trope of a time-space distortion that connects distant locations, draw in more recent examples to highlight continuing resonances of the old futures under discussion. Throughout the book, I draw on my archive of old futures to craft an alternative discourse around what Edelman named *reproductive futurism*. In queer studies, this has been a concept whose role is consistently that of an object of critique, a thing to be avoided, even when Edelman's arguments are rejected. In contrast, I argue that there are many reproductive futurisms, often in conflict and contradiction with one another: reproductive Afrofuturisms, futurisms

of technological and biotechnological reproduction, futurisms that reproduce political activism, queer reproductive futurisms that are not simply a matter of new populations stepping onto a singular normative path.

Although this book is invested in resisting and challenging the logics of progressive and developmental time, it also acknowledges the impossibility of letting go of them entirely. And it invests in a progression of its own, spiraling gradually from imagined futures that do queer work within the bends and twists of normative temporalities—often reproducing them even while calling them into question—toward the production of futures out of time that take the raw material of dominant futurities and transport it to entirely different affective terrain. The book itself is a speculative work in many ways, often reaching out from interpretation and analysis to imagine, or at least gesture toward, alternate possibilities. I do not assume that readers will have encountered all or even any of the texts I discuss—even the best known are not routinely read or viewed outside of specialized audiences. Because I am interested in the theoretical and cultural work done by details of the worlds these texts create, a certain amount of summary is unavoidable. While I have tried not to include more than is necessary to make my arguments, I hope that some readers will find moments of pleasure in the moments of description, as I experienced pleasure in writing them.

In common with many of the works I engage, I follow a largely linear path while at the same time unfolding webs of entangled arguments. Though the book is intended as a cohesive monograph, its breadth and scope mean that readers will often be interested only in particular sections. Bearing this in mind, chapters and parts are written with the intention that they may be read separately as well as together, though references to the many connections among different texts and arguments encourage readers to pick up the book as a whole. I also aim to offer sufficient direction, in the form of footnotes and citations, so that readers will be able to pick up and pursue strands that particularly interest them. The structure is broadly chronological and thematic but also proceeds through associative logics that are unpacked at length in the final chapter, where I discuss my practice of video remix and the effect it has had on my critical methodology. This approach resonates with Yên Lê Espiritu's methodology of "critical juxtaposing": the "bringing together

of seemingly different and disconnected events, communities, histories" such that, rather than viewing different elements as "already-constituted and discrete entities," we come to appreciate "that they are fluid rather than static and need to be understood in relation to each other and within the context of a flexible field of political discourses."[72]

In part 1, "A History of No Future: Feminism, Eugenics, and Reproductive Imaginaries," I argue that "no future" is a more capacious notion than Edelman has allowed, and that it need not necessarily be defined against the reproductive. Indeed, the notion of no future often becomes meaningful through various ideas of reproductivity (apportioning it to some, denying it to others). "No future" is also itself a concept that must be and has been reproduced. I historicize the idea of "no future" through both utopian and dystopian imaginaries: utopia as a vision of perfection that is also an end, and dystopia as a negative imaginary that participates in the creation of worlds. Chapter 1, "Utopian Interventions to the Reproduction of Empire," engages the work of marginal middle-class women writers in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain. Situated at the heart of a metropole whose outward expansion had slowed or stopped, they used speculative fiction to reckon with what it meant to be charged with reproducing Englishness, empire, and the notion of a white race. Feminists have reclaimed, and later disavowed, the racially purist utopias of white American feminists Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Mary Bradley Lane; their transatlantic contemporaries also have much to tell us about how feminist politics of reproduction and gendered embodiment function at the intersection of gender, sexuality, and race with mechanisms of white supremacy and state power. Chapter 2, "Dystopian Impulses, Feminist Negativity, and the Fascism of the Baby's Face," extends this analysis to show how feminist dystopian fiction of the 1920s and 1930s enacts the speculative production of futurelessness—which signifies not just an undesirable world for some, but the notion that the future could end altogether.

I sought out archives of early twentieth-century feminist speculation because I hoped to find imagined futures that would predict the radically, critically queer speculative projects of the more recent past. In the history of feminist speculation, I did not find works that severed the connection between white feminist politics and the reproduction of empire. But I did find narratives in which ambiguously utopian and dystopian gender

politics intersect with imperial speculation in complicated and disturbing ways. In the work of Elizabeth Burgoyne Corbett and Susan Ertz, whose ambiguous utopias feature in the first chapter, and of Charlotte Haldane and Katharine Burdekin, whose dystopias are the subject of the second, genres of feminist debate, romance, and scientific speculation intersect to create visions of gendered futures that undermine and reproduce imperial dominance at the same time. Their articulations of anxieties surrounding the reproduction of the human race persist in the ways national futures are projected and reproduced in later media and fiction. In the first wormhole, I use a speculative engagement with Alfonso Cuarón's 2006 film *Children of Men* to highlight the insights that the previous chapters' archive of old futures can bring to questions of racialization, sexuality, and reproduction in contemporary transnational popular culture.

Crossing the Atlantic into part 2, "A Now that Can Breed Futures: Queerness and Pleasure in Black Science Fiction" offers a different set of perspectives on reproduction. Here I turn to histories of African diasporic speculation that have received significant media attention in the past few years and have been termed *Afrofuturism*, which Ytasha Womack describes as "the world of black sci-fi and fantasy culture."[73] Building on Afrofuturism's focus on black diasporic speculative imagining as a way of creating futures for those rendered futureless by global white supremacy, I focus on the figuration of gender and queerness in black imagined futures as they have interfaced with the genre frameworks of science fiction narrative—including the persistence of reproductive Afrofuturisms that have sometimes overlapped with eugenic discourses. Chapter 3, "Afrofuturist Entanglements of Gender, Eugenics, and Queer Possibility," introduces pleasure as a central term, tracing figurations of black women's sexual futures that emerge from narrative foreclosures in W. E. B. Du Bois's "The Comet" (1920) and following their trail into Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* (1991) and Octavia E. Butler's *Fledgling* (2005), which demand we think reproductive futures outside the logics of heteronormativity and white supremacy. Chapter 4, "Science Fiction Worlding and Speculative Sex," extends my analysis of queered and gendered black futurities to the realm of racialized queer masculinity. Linking the discourse of "world-making" developed in utopian theories of queer performance with the idea of "world-building" common in science fiction theory, I analyze Samuel R. Delany's science fiction iterations of 1970s and 1980s public sex cultures, which use genre tropes to initiate a process for reimagining sexual and racial temporalities in response to both the histories of enslavement and the beginning of the AIDS epidemic.

The second wormhole, "Try This at Home: Networked Public Sexual Fantasy," connects the chapters on black queer science fiction with the media cultures the last part of the book analyzes by exploring sexual fantasy as a speculative world-making practice. This short, somewhat personal chapter reads a particularly queer and sexy scene from the science fiction TV show *Sense8* (2015–2018) to map correspondences between the depictions of gendered spectatorship in Delany's writings about male public sex cultures and the mostly female fan communities whose erotic fiction-writing practices form a speculative kind of sexual public.

In part 3: "It's the Future, but It Looks like the Present: Queer Speculations on Media Time," I turn to the cultural and technological reproduction of speculative futures in audiovisual form. Chapter 5, "Queer Deviations from the Future on Screen," argues that the popular understanding of science fiction film as the genre of spectacular special effects has obscured the work done by queer speculative independent films that map a politicized imagined future onto the people and locations of a present whose shifting temporal location refuses progressive teleologies. I engage Derek Jarman's 1978 *Jubilee* and Lizzie Borden's 1983 *Born in Flames* as old futures whose narratives, aesthetics, and structures have sprouted unforeseen resonances in emerging political landscapes of the late 2010s. Sharing an intense focus on media and communication, the films offer contrasting strategies for building futures out of a present moment saturated with representations of the end of the world. Finally, chapter 6, "How to Remix the Future," moves from futures depicted on screen to the audiences who take them up and respond to them, connecting my research on speculative fictions' histories with grassroots cultures of video remix that have flourished in the digital age. Focusing on the critical and creative practices of science fiction television fans, I draw on an artistic community of which I am a member in order to complicate the promise of digital media as the democratization of media production. The chapter centers on the affective and political temporalities of fan-made music videos that reimagine the racialized

and gendered economies of digital media production and consumption, with the most extended analysis pertaining to the television series *Battlestar Galactica* (2003–2009). I discuss my own video remix practice as a way to incorporate the insights of this form into scholarly production, coming full circle to reflect on the practice of remix as a methodological force in the composition of this book. *Old Futures* ends with a short epilogue that considers how the role of speculative futures in political discourse and popular culture have shifted over the period of research and writing, from approximately 2007 to 2017.

This book does not, and does not seek to, exhaust all possible iterations of old futures and their queer politics. As I have developed its analyses of transatlantic futurities in and immediately after the twentieth century, I have contemplated many other archives of old futures whose analysis I can only hope others might take up, joining the scholars and artists already engaged in the labor of speculative transformation and critique. The work of Grace Dillon on indigenous futurisms; of Aimee Bahng on transnational Asian futures and speculative capital; of Curtis Marez on the "farm worker futurism" of migrant laborers in California; of micha cárdenas on trans of color futures; of André Carrington on speculative blackness; of Shelley Streeby on speculative archives; and of Alison Kafer on disability and futurity—these are just a few possible approaches in a transdisciplinary network engaged in the production and critique of critical speculative world-making.[74] The future and its queer potentialities mean differently across each of these contexts, and it is my aspiration that the work done here will add possibilities to the already multiple ways of seeing, analyzing, and enacting speculative futures, old and new.

A line from Delany's *Dhalgren* animates the project's frame: "*It is not that I have no future. Rather it fragments on the insubstantial and indistinct ephemera of now.*"[75] The speaker, a queer, working-class, half-Native poet living with mental illness, knows that living without a future is not an uncommon mode of being. Delany's protagonist is among those who fail to inherit. Yet "*it is not that [he has] no future.*" The double negative insists that futurity is not denied so much as dissipated among moments of joy, pain, sex, love, oppression, and resistance—whether in the immediate present or a stubbornly persisting past. Through processes similar to the logics of remix I explore in the final chapter, insubstantial and

indistinct moments reconfigure themselves into new kinds of possibilities and impossibilities—as Delany's line does, repeated multiple times in slightly different form both in his novel and in this book. The future need not be figured as a straight line, but neither must any lines that may form be repudiated for the sake of implicit present potentialities. *Old Futures: Speculative Fiction and Queer Possibility* takes this insight as its starting point.

3

Afrofuturist Entanglements of Gender, Eugenics, and Queer Possibility

Breeding (Afro)Futures

In her 1978 poem "A Litany for Survival," Audre Lorde gives voice to a conversation about possibilities and impossibilities often drowned out by dominant futurologies.

> for those of us who cannot indulge
> the passing dreams of choice
> who love in doorways coming and going
> in the hours between dawns
> looking inward and outward
> at once before and after
> seeking a now that can breed
> futures
> like bread in our children's mouths
> so their dreams will not reflect
> the death of ours:
>
> For those of us
> who were imprinted with fear
> like a faint line in the center of our foreheads
> learning to be afraid with our mother's milk
> for by this weapon
> the illusion of some safety to be found
> the heavy-footed hoped to silence us
> For all of us
> this instance and this triumph
> We were never meant to survive.[1]

Her words articulate the power that discursive articulations of possible futures can have when immediate, personal futures are profoundly uncertain. Calling on those who "were never meant to survive," Lorde invokes the historical and present struggles of black diasporic subjects who are heirs to the social death of slavery: laborers who created the edifices of modernity but would not be permitted to live in them.[2] The "we" of the poem is made up of bodies who will not or cannot be disciplined as proper subjects for the progressive futures encouraged by liberal individualist politics. Yet, even as Lorde's poem gives voice to the everyday experience of exclusion, it insists that to be made an object in this way is also to resist.[3]

To speak as one "never meant to survive" is to acknowledge yet shrug off the figurative weight of structural futurelessness. The precarity of this status forces Lorde's speaker to perceive space and time beyond their linear surfaces: "looking inward and outward / at once before and after," because they are denied the privilege that lets futures seem foreseeable. "The illusion of some safety to be found" is too likely to be a trap—to restrict possibilities even as it seems to open them up. Yet the poem refuses to conflate oppression and misery. All this risk becomes worthwhile due to the pleasures that happen while out of dominant time and space: "in the hours between dawns," "in doorways coming and going." Without a program or a set of predictions, in the allusive language of poetry, Lorde envisages the "now" of oppression and pleasure converging to bring forth futures in all directions. Here, the imagined future is not only a far-off image that casts its light into the present and the past and limits what we can see there. It is also a resource out of which dreams and worlds can be built. And that resource has meant most for those whose access to material resources in the present has been most limited.

Speculative fictions by radical people of color have grown in popularity in recent years among readers who see them as hopeful articulations of radical political possibility.[4] The possibility of alternate futures matters urgently at a moment in US history when movements galvanized by the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner have forced dominant culture to attend to the fact that, despite liberal allegations of progress toward multicultural diversity, racialization in general and blackness in particular continue to define who is meant and not meant to survive.[5] Sharing Lorde's commitment to the notion that imagined

futures are central to the work of survival, part 2 looks to old futures that predate—sometimes contradicting, sometimes inspiring, always queering—the upsurge of interest in race and speculation in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

Black American cultural producers, reckoning with histories of exclusion from a dominating dream, have long labored to imagine queer kinds of futures for race and gender. In the twentieth century, their visions have accompanied the emerging dominance of the United States as a global and imperial power, calling attention to and widening the cracks in exceptionalist visions of the US state as founded on and exporting freedom.[6] Building on my analyses of gender and eugenics in white feminist futurisms, this chapter traces how discourses of technological and reproductive futurity have been adapted, adopted, and resignified in fictional visions of black futures, beginning in 1920 with W. E. B. Du Bois and stopping in 2005 with Octavia E. Butler.

Lorde uses the language of procreation to describe how possible futures emerge from the present when she hopes for "a now that can breed / futures." "Breeding," more often than not, has been a word used to animalize human reproduction, whether in queers' desultory references to heterosexuals or in owners' views of enslaved women as less than human, capable of being "bred" like livestock. The word links back to histories of eugenics considered in part 1, wherein desirable racializations for the future of humanity were imagined to be planned and predicted by "breeding" in and out particular strains of deviance, ability, and gender. Lorde, however, reclaims and reframes the notion of "breeding" to conjure a reproductive futurity that would not mean only the recreation of heteronormative, white-centered families and the exclusion of othered bodies. Her futures will not be for children and childishness at the expense of adults, but will keep the "dreams" of ancestors constant in existences to come. These are futures that matter as much for their power in the present as for the concrete ways they may or may not be brought into being—yet the futures they invoke and create are real.[7] The way Lorde invokes "breeding," transforming it from a term antithetical to queerness and offensive to blackness into a nexus of hope and possibility for the black, queer, feminist subjectivity she articulates, guides me through the complexes of race, reproduction, sexuality, and pleasure that I consider in this chapter.

In fellowship with Alexis Pauline Gumbs's project to interweave the "two rhetorically impossible claims "'Black maternity' and 'queer intergenerationality'" and to perpetuate their co-creation of a "rival model of production, interrupting a developmental timeline with the possibility for a radically transformed society," this chapter engages the reproductive practices by which black cultural producers have labored to imagine futures different from and challenging to the "now" in which they spoke.[8] I focus on how speculative fiction, racialized reproduction, and queer possibility converge around the processes that *breed* futures, and how these connections underlie the emergence in the 2000s of a canon of literary black science fiction. The idea of "breeding," with all its problematic entanglements, has continually been invoked in speculative imaginings of black futures. Part 1 explored how imagined futures functioned as interventions into the dominant order for cultural producers (white, middle-class, British women) whose positions within dominant futurity were assured, if marginal. This chapter details some disruptions and continuities to the eugenic narratives that appear when we contemplate how futurity has operated as a resource for those who, in Lorde's words, "were never meant to survive."

This aspect of the cultural politics of speculative fiction has been most widely explored, in the past two decades, under the sign of Afrofuturism, which has emphasized the particular relationship that Afro-diasporic subjects (often but not exclusively black Americans) have to history and futurity. The term is generally attributed to a 1994 interview Mark Dery carried out with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose, in which Dery asked whether "a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history" can "imagine possible futures."[9] Dery has been justifiably critiqued for the sometimes disingenuous framing of his article, which opens with a question—"Why do so few African Americans write science fiction?"—whose premise relies on a reductive interpretation of speculative narrative genres.[10] Yet the framework of Afrofuturism has flourished and expanded as both a popular and a scholarly movement, taken up by African diasporic thinkers, musicians, writers, and filmmakers to describe the vitality of speculative futures created in opposition to official, colonial, normatively white timelines.[11]

Afrofuturist theorizing deals with music, everyday uses of technology by black people, and a wide range of works of speculative fiction, ranging from Sun Ra's aural vistas of Egyptian space travel to Robin Kelley's invocation of surrealism as the heart of the "emancipation of thought" that black political radicalisms demand.[12] Alternative figurations of time and space come together, growing transformative politics from the memory of racialized horror or, as in Rasheedah Phillips's concept of "Black Quantum Futurism," calling forth the overlap between ancient African temporal theory and quantum physics in order to "seize upon a vision of a future and collapse it into your existing reality."[13] Drawing from many modes other than narrative, Afrofuturistic thought often figures disruptions to the dominant time line as rhythmic rather than directional. An exemplary moment is the passage in Ralph Ellison's 1951 *Invisible Man* where the protagonist listens to jazz and finds that the invisibility of racial exclusion allows him aural access to "those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead."[14]

Afrofuturistic analyses call forth cross-time touches and nonteleological histories that resonate with evocations of queer temporality. As Lorde's linkage of wayward modalities of "love" with the "fear" of racial oppression demonstrates, when positionalities of blackness and queerness converge, being forced outside the regulations and protections of dominant temporality can open up alternative futures, worlds, selves, and relationalities. Kara Keeling describes both blackness and queerness as sites of unpredictability and risk within the capitalist markets that compete to sell foreseeable futures.[15] Within the logic of capitalism, we are used to thinking about the future as a resource—one that is bought and sold to the highest bidder, as in the case of futures markets where investments in possibility are bought and sold; or one that is about to run out, as with the ecological futurity that is transmuted into capital by carbon trading. In capitalism's mobilization of the logics of heteronormativity, children become the ultimate site of futurity, to be saved, saved up for, given expensive commodities, and idealized at the expense of adult needs, pleasures, and desires. At the same time, racialization and colonization render marked populations, regardless of their sexuality, family status, or age, as queer and deny them access to normative frameworks of futurity.[16]

Lorde's "futures / like bread in our children's mouths / so their dreams will not reflect / the death of ours" insist that futurity can be a different

kind of resource—a nonpredictive mode of possibility that keeps oppressed people going in a world where, hostile as it may be, adult pleasures and children's interests need not be at odds. Yet I do want to home in on the *predictive* narratives in which those who were never meant to survive engage—the concrete and rationalized attempts to imagine futures different than oppressive presents. To what extent might these futures participate in the logics of capitalism, risk, and the reproduction of oppressive social norms? Many of the literary texts claimed for the emergent canon of Afrofuturism are entangled with techno-futurist temporalities of science fiction and gendered systems of reproductive futurism. It is these works that I contemplate in this chapter.

I begin by historicizing black futurity, looking in some detail at one of the earliest texts claimed for Afrofuturism: W. E. B. Du Bois's 1920 "The Comet," which carries out an intense critique of the racial and colonial politics of modernity while producing a literal, melodramatic vision of what "breeding" a future to challenge racism could mean. I show how reproductive futurism and eugenic discourse operate to underline Du Bois's critiques of racialized temporality, moving from the general themes he employs to the way they play out in the barely visible figure of a black mother in the background of the story. What kind of future can she breed, and what would a narrative of black futurity look like from her perspective?

In the last section of this chapter, I explore the ways that Jewelle Gomez and Octavia Butler join science fiction futures with vampire mythology to create a speculative breeding ground for Afrofuturist visions and queer futurities, bringing forth eternal life from histories that were "meant to be" dead ends. By providing a mode of reproduction that is not (hetero)sexual and does not revolve around children, the convergence of vampire stories with science fiction futures allows Butler and Gomez to do queer and decolonial work with received discourses of black female futurity, reconfiguring the history and future of racialization by imagining how it would look according to a different set of norms. Altering the meanings of birth, death, and consumption through their re-production of a figure commonly associated with whiteness and wealth, Octavia Butler's last and queerest protagonist—the black vampire child, Shori—and Jewelle Gomez's eternal lesbian-feminist vampire, Gilda, stretch reproductive time and unbalance history by refusing the double binds of racialized and gendered reproductivity.

Modernity, Science Fiction, and Black Futurity

As a genre, science fiction has tended to look very white. This is true both of the historical demographics of its self-proclaimed writers and fans and of the cultural politics that underlie its dominant themes.[17] Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. describes science fiction as an outgrowth of the temporality of European Enlightenment thought and the technological developments of modernity: it is "an expression of the political-cultural transformation that originated in European imperialism and was inspired by the ideal of a single global technological regime."[18] The imperial projects of the Enlightenment and the transformations that followed were, as Denise Ferreira da Silva shows, reliant on the production of blackness as a constitutive outside.[19] If the timelines that structure futuristic fiction map an Enlightenment vision of history onto the past, present, and future of the globe, according to a colonial taxonomy of human development that places male, Western European whiteness in the privileged position, then stepping forward in this timeline may be less than appealing for those who are not its official subjects. Yet the act of speculating a future has never been restricted to those for whom the future seems to be created. Paul Gilroy's influential work on the black Atlantic describes the longstanding presence of a transatlantic Afro-modernity that challenges the racism and nationalism of Anglo-American narratives about modernity's technological and social forward march.[20] Gilroy insists on black peoples' material understanding of a modernity that relied on their labor but excluded them from subjectivity. For the descendants of black people enslaved in the Americas, seeking a future in spite of being denied one has long been a matter of life and death.

In her influential 2000 anthology *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora*, Sheree R. Thomas brings together the discourses of science fiction, Afrofuturism, and the black critique of modernity to argue for the consistent presence of black speculation in the twentieth century. Her introduction figures black writing as an unrecognized shaping force—like the "dark matter" physicists know is there because of its effects but cannot perceive directly—in the history of modernity and of literary futures.[21] She argues that the established genre of science fiction in literature, film, and television has been a vital resource for black people thinking about their individual and collective

futures in the twentieth century. This has been true, Thomas implies, even though the practice of projecting futures out of the present and imagining them to be inevitable has given power to the temporalities of modernity and empire. Gregory Rutledge makes this part of Thomas's argument explicit, writing that "Africans and their descendants have been marked as the primitive for centuries" and therefore objectified within "a protracted science fiction, or insidious fantasy"—in other words, white modernity—"against which the slave narratives were some of the first counter-briefs."[22] In a critical contribution to *Dark Matter*, novelist Walter Mosley draws from this context to insist that for black Americans who have been "cut off from their African ancestry by the scythe of slavery and from an American heritage by being excluded from history . . . science fiction offers an alternative where that which deviates from the norm is the norm."[23]

These accounts of Afrofuturism as an alternate history and future for science fiction let us see how a genre often associated with political or spectacular extrapolations from the large-scale changes of modernity can also be crucial to re-envisioning and changing the "norms" that govern racialized power structures. In relating science fiction to racial history, Mosley finds that imagining other futures is a way to suggest that the failures of the present and the past need not be permanent ones. Black uses of science fiction tropes emerge less as extrapolations asking where scientific and technological teleologies might lead, and more as meditations on what the possibility of such extrapolation might mean. Counter-futures must continually be imagined without the colonizing mindset that a singular future could overtake every incipient possibility. But to what extent is it possible to rewrite the hegemonic futurisms that operate to produce and maintain the uneven, unequal world as we know it?

Among the earliest works included in the *Dark Matter* anthology is Du Bois's "The Comet," which was originally published in *Darkwater* (1920), a collection of his fiction, nonfiction, and poetry.[24] Thomas uses Du Bois, a perhaps surprising addition to the roster of science fiction writers, to add weight and depth to her construction of a genealogy of "black writers . . . offering distinctive speculative visions of the world."[25] The distinctive speculative vision of "The Comet" transferred smoothly from *Darkwater* to *Dark Matter* thanks to its activation of tropes that would become intensely familiar to aficionados of twentieth-century science fiction. The story's focus on the production and reproduction of black futurity make it foundational both to Afrofuturism's retroactive canon and to the history of critical futurism this book explores. "The Comet" draws an African diasporic critique of colonial modernity together with interventions into US discourses of racialized gender, interracial coupling, eugenics, and miscegenation.

The story's premise is a catastrophic one: New York has passed through the tail of a comet that emits deadly asphyxiating gas. Only those breathing air away from the surface of the earth are saved, and for them it seems as if the entire world has been destroyed. Our protagonist is Jim, a young black bank messenger sent by his employers on an errand into the "fetid slime" of the bank's underground "lower vaults," where he escapes the destruction of the city.[26] Eventually, he meets another survivor, a young white woman named Julia who had been developing photographs in a darkroom when the comet hit. After confronting racial prejudice and despair, the two of them prepare to come together—ready to breed a new, post-racial humanity in the ruins of the old world. Their consummation of an interracial future for the human race is aborted, however, when Julia's father and fiancé arrive. Jim narrowly escapes lynching. As he leaves to return to his marginal position, a black woman who seems to be his wife emerges, holding the corpse of their child.

Like many European writers at this historical moment, Du Bois draws on the experience of the First World War to present apocalyptic violence as a cataclysmic break in forward-looking temporalities of progress and modernity. But, unlike the white European writers I discuss in part 1, he places the cataclysm into the context of the long-lasting trauma and apocalyptic loss brought upon people of color by the colonization and enslavement that underwrote white modernity.[27] In "The Souls of White Folk," which also appeared in *Darkwater*, Du Bois connected the violence of the First World War in Europe with the oppression to which Europeans had not ceased to subject those of African descent: "As we saw the dead dimly through rifts of battle-smoke and heard faintly the cursings and accusations of blood brothers, we darker men said: this is not Europe gone mad; this is not aberration nor insanity; this is Europe; this seeming Terrible is the real soul of white culture."[28] The killing fields of the First World War here turn into the violence of empire brought home.

"The Comet" imagines a similar fate for white America through a fictional vision of New York's destruction. The comet's passage transforms a "human river" of New York working people into the "stillness of death," where "a hundred men and women and children" are "crushed and twisted and jammed . . . like refuse in a can."[29] They resemble those felled by the guns of the Western Front. But Du Bois's consciousness of black history demands we also see the transformation of people into "refuse" on which slavery depended.[30] The trail of bodies outside the New York bank remind us that slavery is the apocalypse whose legacy keeps global capitalism in motion, providing bodies whose labor creates value while their lives are held cheap.[31]

Jim's position in the New York of "The Comet" is that of a life that can easily be spared. He is sent into the vault because the danger to a "more valuable" white man would not be worth the risk.[32] As Amy Kaplan writes, "In his descent into the bowels of the earth, the black working man from Harlem evokes the work of colonial laborers and links them to the financial center of New York."[33] His race denies him access to the accumulation of resources through which the bank that employs him will capitalize on the future. Banned from access to full humanity, Jim is "outside the world," and so the world's end—talk of whose imminence he overhears from white people who address him directly only to assign him a task—does not end him.[34]

Du Bois suggests that although black futurity has not been considered a good investment, its capacity to survive in the face of outrageous risk may lead it to inherit the earth. And so Jim sets out to capitalize on the death of the white future in order to repair damages caused by the white past's ownership of him and his. He roams the ruins of New York, sole participant in a post-human future, satisfying his hunger on the high-class cookery of "ghost-haunted halls" that "yesterday, would not have served [him]."[35] Alone in the world, Jim can at least taste the fruits of the labor that he, standing in for masses of transnational colonized workers, represents. Holding out the future to a black living subject in the midst of death, Du Bois transforms white modernity's relentless insistence on forward motion into a death march, turning the experience of historical apocalypse into a source of strength and bringing about a transcendent culmination of black history through Jim's ascension to effective ownership of the city.[36]

After the destruction of the world as he knew it, the consolidation of black futurity requires that Jim be provided with descendants. Du Bois invokes a utopian act of interracial heterosexual intercourse to set that future in motion. Jim will, the story implies, move from standing outside the world to creating a new world through sexual congress with Julia, on whose white female body a new breed of interracial reproductive futurism will be engendered. In this narrative move, "The Comet" works simultaneously with and against the official timelines of modernity, combining its radical critique of white culture not only with Jim's pleasure in finally enjoying that culture's advantages but also with a glorification of reproductive heterosexuality.[37]

Julia's devotion to a maternal future enables Jim to experience an empowered masculinity that contains a connection to his racial history: "She looked upon the man beside her and forgot all else but his manhood—his sorrow and sacrifice. She saw him glorified. . . . In fascinated silence the man gazed at the heavens. . . . The shackles seemed to rattle and fall from his soul. Up from the crass and crushing and cringing of his caste leapt the lone majesty of kings long dead. He arose within the shadows, tall, straight, and stern, with power in his eyes and ghostly sceptres hovering to his grasp."[38] Du Bois refigures the racial past here so that, instead of being defined by literal and figurative "shackles," Jim will contain African majesty in his status as the new Adam, no longer forced into the "crass and crushing and cringing" place we saw him take up at the story's beginning. Through transcendent union with the white woman, his "sceptre" of phallic patriarchy will be "ghostly" no more.

Gazing toward Jim, Julia sees herself in turn as "primal woman; mighty mother of all men to come and Bride of Life."[39] Without the surround of a society to enforce them, race- and class-based divisions fall away so that Jim is "no longer a thing apart, a creature below, a strange outcast of another clime and blood, but her Brother Humanity incarnate . . . great All-Father of the race to be."[40] Having grieved and accepted the end of the world, here the white woman embraces her position as transcendental breeder, last and first woman in the "race to be." This conception of a post-racial state, in which humanity will no longer be granted to whites at the expense of colonized and racialized people because racial politics will have been bred out, relies on the inscription of "primal" gender divisions through which the future can be reproduced. Like the

imperial mothers of the feminist utopian fictions I analyzed in chapter 1, this white woman understands herself to be the source material from which a new and better future will emerge. Out of her body will come the personification of an improved human race.

The utopian future Du Bois evokes in "The Comet" is an unashamedly eugenic one—biologically shaping the races that could inherit the earth by claiming Jim and Julia as the fittest survivors—for all that it does not participate in the white supremacy that has categorized most eugenic projects. As part 1 has shown, a white future and a heteronormative future were often close to the same thing in the ideas about improving the human race that trafficked through both popular and scientific discourses in the wake of Francis Galton. For sexual reformists and feminist birth control advocates, as well as the architects of American immigration law, desirable reproducers were primarily those who would bring America's racial mix closer to a universal whiteness.[41] However, as Daylanne English demonstrates in her work on eugenic discourses in the Harlem Renaissance, eugenic calls for "interventions in individual reproductive lives in the name of collective (racial or national) progress" were "not necessarily accompanied by a platform of white supremacy, or, for that matter, even racial purity."[42] African American projects for racial uplift and improvement have also followed the strategy of encouraging better breeding, leveraging heterosexual intercourse to improve the material and social conditions of black Americans rather than to maintain a white supremacist status quo. In addition to "The Comet," Du Bois's 1928 novel *Dark Princess* also highlights "racial uplift through selective breeding."[43] In that novel, a half-Indian, half-African American baby is declared by "'The Great Central Committee of Yellow, Black, and Brown' . . . to be the 'Messenger and Messiah to all the Darker Worlds!'"[44] Like Jim, this boy is set to inherit the earth when the reign of whiteness fails.

"The Comet" proposes interracial hetero-futurity as a potential eugenic utopia made possible by the literal destruction of a racially unequal world. But Jim and Julia's vision of glorious prospects for a new racial future does not hold; the arresting power of the racial present intervenes. As the exalted couple moves toward consummation, they are interrupted by the real world in the body of Julia's fiancé and father, wealthy white men who have the real power to control Julia's

reproductive capacities and define a eugenic national future. It turns out that the comet has not destroyed the world at all; it has destroyed only New York, and the world rushes in. Jim, his life threatened by the white men's terror of miscegenation, steps "outside the world" again, "shrinking" as he goes.[45] Interracial heterosexuality cannot conquer racism after all.

When a black woman appears at the end of "The Comet," we might expect a suggestion that Du Bois's real eugenic hope for a post-apocalyptic future lies in intraracial heterosexuality, in a baby uncontaminated by whiteness's corruption. Yet the mother of Jim's child does not lead him back behind the veil to repopulate Harlem as a site of hopeful pan-African futurity. Instead, she appears alongside death: "A woman mounted to the platform and looked about, shading her eyes. She was brown, small, and toil-worn, and in one hand lay the corpse of a dark baby. The crowd parted and her eyes fell on the colored man; with a cry she tottered toward him."[46] From a queer speculative perspective, the most important figures in the story are this tragic couple, mother and child. The dead baby is a visceral reminder that, even in the face of overpowering reproductive rhetorics, *breeding* for some is productive of death rather than birth. The genderless small body stands as evidence for the damage that the history of racial slavery has done to the future of blackness.

Jim's wife also demonstrates how the vision of post-racial, post-apocalyptic futurity that Jim and Julia experience—foreclosed though it may be—blinds both them and us with its light. For this woman has somehow survived without the transportational resources held by Julia's family, and therefore Jim and Julia were not the only New Yorkers who made it through the comet's transit. Du Bois does not offer us an explanation of this woman's survival. Did she get out of New York? Was she, too, underground? How did she slip through the gaps though her baby did not? Has a lifetime of oppression taught her secret ways to keep breathing in a poison atmosphere? The woman appears in the story as little more than a holder for her dead baby, proof that Jim's community will forgive him for wanting to father a new humanity with Julia. But even as this woman—who was never meant to survive, but who did—fails as a signifier for reproductive or eugenic futures, we can ask what meanings she carries in and of herself. If we look for the future as she might have imagined it, what might we find?

Motherless Futures, Futureless Mothers

"The Comet" gives Jim and his community two apparent options: an elevated future of post-racial reproductivity that looks disturbingly similar to colonial eugenic logics, or no future at all. Either way lies the end of the black cultural identity Du Bois fought to elevate and preserve. The survival of Jim's wife is the only moment in the story that allows a future to be imagined outside of that binary. In "The Damnation of Women," which also appeared in *Darkwater*, Du Bois invoked the reality of figures like hers, writing that he saw "more of future promise in the betrayed girl-mothers of the black belt than in the childless wives of the white North" and sought to ward off "[black] race suicide . . . by honoring motherhood" even outside marriage.[47] The mention of "race suicide" hearkens to Theodore Roosevelt's 1905 proclamation that the "willful sterility" of white women was endangering the glorious future of the white American race, leaving the nation susceptible both to queer nonreproductivity and to women of color's excessive production of nonwhite children.[48] Yet Du Bois reminds us that the association of properly heterosexual, marital reproductive behavior with a racially desirable future is not exclusive to whiteness. That the "honor" of marital motherhood might not be the path any black woman would prefer seems to have been an impossibility for him, since its voluntary avoidance is associated with white femininity and since only the "betrayed" would be mothers without marriage.

The negativity of the future Jim's wife and her baby represent undermines these hopeful representations of an African American reproductive future. She shares race and origin with Jim, her husband, but—inescapably attached to a baby that did not make it—she cannot capitalize on the empty world as Jim, for a brief moment, did. Jim's wife seems worthy of "honor," since she has done her duty to keep the black race going. But she is nevertheless betrayed by Jim's romance with post-racial heterofuturity. No thought of her arises in the hyperbolic internal monologue he is given as he rises above his ancestry to make the future with Julia. The racial dead end that Jim's wife and her baby embody suggests a different sort of "racial suicide." Its metaphoric negativity implies a critique of Jim's misplaced virility, his seduction by the prospect of inheriting a future structured by whiteness and shaped like an empire.

I come to this understanding of "The Comet" through black feminist writings about reproduction. Black feminist thought identifies the extent to which racialized exclusion from futurity has been lived in gender-specific ways and demonstrates why an Afrofuturism that does not adequately account for gendered and sexual difference is likely to breed heteropatriarchal futures. Anne Stavney writes that Du Bois and other black male writers of the Harlem Renaissance advocated for racial renewal by using the image of "the black mother" as a "symbol for primacy and rebirth" that would connect "the past" of "racial and geographical origins" with "the future in terms of coming generations."[49] "The Comet" depicts that narrative as a failure, but nevertheless relies on it. Stavney also remarks that such figurative uses of black maternity "rarely attend to the actual social and economic conditions encountered by most black women of their era."[50] Women's writings of the Harlem Renaissance, which address racial futurity as a matter of personal realism rather than extrapolative possibility, narrate those social and economic conditions and their consequences. In Nella Larsen's 1928 *Quicksand*, Helga Crane grasps after futurity of and for herself and ends up beaten down by the demands of others—whether they be exoticizing, insisting on a respectability that precludes desire, or keeping her in her place through religion. Becoming reproductive is for Helga an experience of sinking, an admission of or capitulation to the fact that she can have no autonomous future, that she can have only a kind of death. Neither breeding a eugenic future of upwardly mobile racial eugenics nor giving herself over to reproduction can save her.[51]

Hortense Spillers explicates this double bind by tracing the operations of racial gendering to the discursive structures of slavery, which framed black women not as people but as laboring commodities with the capacity to breed. Spillers shows how slavery's "ungendering" of "female flesh" has been and continues to be enacted as exclusion from the normative gender of the (white) nuclear family.[52] Using the grammar of psychoanalysis to show how African American women have been positioned in a negative relationship to femininity, Spillers demonstrates that the psychoanalytic language of subjectivity is undone when it is forced to describe a material history in which people were not only inscribed into the dominant social order in abject positions, but denied access to that social order's definitions of human subjectivity altogether. They are not

meant to survive within that story, even while the story would not and could not exist without their presence and their labor. As Spillers puts it: "My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented."[53]

To understand reproductive temporalities in the wake of slavery requires recognition of the intolerable dynamics by which black women's refusal to survive has, at times, been the only way to lay claim to a future not owned by someone else. Toni Morrison's 1988 *Beloved*, which draws from the story of Margaret Garner, who killed her daughter rather than let her endure slavery, has become a literary touchstone for the ways histories of slavery haunt. A mother separates the reproduction of the social relations that dehumanize her from the reproduction of her child, resisting by giving in to the lack of value placed on her body; refusing to breed a future for slavery is the only possible route to freedom she can perceive. Morrison tells us that *Beloved*'s is "not a story to pass on," because too many ghosts and too many pasts might render the present unlivable or unrecognizable.[54] For scholars working with this ghostly paradigm, that unrecognizability and its potential to change the present are essential. In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon transfigures Morrison's haunting prose into sociology and writes that the reader/scholar's task will be "to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a countermemory, for the future."[55] Gordon's book seeks to call back a future from the past that has made so many futures impossible; she does this through the operations of haunting and countermemory, with "the future" a marker of the things that must be done if the past can still be honored.

Following Lorde's invocation of the "now that can breed / futures," I take the futural gesture as a starting point. The remainder of this chapter focuses on the futures imagined and lived when countermemories arrive not only through reckoning with death and its after effects, but by cheating it when stories are passed on, futures are bred, and somehow something other than a recapitulation of preexisting social relations is created, even if just for a while. I have used Du Bois's 1920 story to lay out some of the norms and complexities of racially gendered futurity. To bring forth the mother and baby's potential to deviate from that narrative requires moving into her future—to dreams of different presents, alternate narratives, and a step out of the temporality of periodization. When

might the time for such out-of-sync figures be, given their resistance to the convergence of straight reproductive and historicist temporalities?

The *when* of Jim's wife is not the secure insistence of maternal origin and futurity that both Julia and white feminist utopians at the turn of the twentieth century set forth. As Kara Keeling writes, "From within the logics of reproductive futurity and colonial reality, a black future looks like no future at all."[56] But, in an important intervention into studies of queer temporality that do not account for the dimension of race, Keeling also insists that the absence of futurity can be a starting point as well as an ending. Drawing on Franz Fanon's work, she connects the impossibility of incorporating blackness into the United States' white, heteronormative national time to the time and space of colonization, working within a transnational Afrofuturist paradigm to figure black political (im)possibility as decolonial futurity. Being without a future in this sense is not just a position of exclusion but also a point from which radical disruptions can be enacted. And the forces that corrode and disrupt time, so that the meanings of futurity and humanity themselves are brought into question, are as important as the concrete visions of better possibilities that activism for material improvements in the condition of oppressed people might bring about. The figure of the queer in Lee Edelman's work and Franz Fanon's image of the native as a "corrosive element" within colonialism are the two points from which Keeling triangulates this disruption.[57] Du Bois's childless black mother brings reproductivity into the conversation. If futures are not bred through modes that ensure the predictability of a straight time tied to the accumulation of resources gained through exploitation, they must have some other relationship to reproduction. What might that relationship be?

In the final section of this chapter, I answer this question by turning to works that breed black futures in Lorde's sense by severing the commonsense connection between heterosexuality and reproduction, replacing the logics of genealogical blood lines with deviant visions and building new kinds of pleasures. Black feminist speculative fictions offer some answers to the question Alex Weheliye, building on the foundation laid by Spillers, asks in his 2014 book *Habeas Viscus*: "What different modalities of the human come to light if we do not take the liberal humanist figure of Man as the master-subject but focus on how humanity has been imagined and lived by those subjects excluded from his domain?"[58] The

imaginaries to which I now turn engage gendered dehumanization not by seeking a return to the human or a future for it, but by extending metaphoric nonhumanity into imaginative fiction and laying claim to the possibility of antihumanist pleasures alongside nonheterosexually reproductive sexualities and temporalities.

Deviant Blood Lines: Queer Black Feminist Modes of Reproduction

From a straight perspective, the importance of sexual pleasure to reproductive futurity is straightforward. Pleasure is useful but marginal: its presence within social relations encourages them to keep going, whether through sexual reproduction or the pleasures of consumption that make life within capitalism fun. By making physically enjoyable the sex acts that will lead to the production of new human beings, the commonsense logic goes, sexual pleasure has evolved to keep the human future going (in a straight line). By the same token, the absence of pleasure from many reproductive sexual acts, the possibility of reproduction that does not commence with hetero sex, and the spending of sexual pleasure in nonreproductive directions are marginal, irrelevant deviations—footnotes in the biology textbook of life.

For the reproduction of queer futures, however, pleasure is never just an alibi. Nonstraight modes of being perpetuate themselves by affinity rather than biology: queers reproduce our cultures and identities by recruiting, drawing in people who will come to recognize and name something emergent within themselves. Although the perpetuation of queerness relies on somebody doing the biological work of reproduction that will result in new potentially queer youth, queer sexual and nonsexual pleasures in and of themselves are what create relationalities and communities. For women and femmes of color especially, Juana María Rodríguez writes, the capacity to consider "pleasure both important and possible constitutes a refusal of all that has been used to define us as damaged and unworthy, perverse and undesirable."[59] Elizabeth Freeman writes that "queers survive through the ability to invent or seize pleasurable relations between bodies" and that "we do so . . . across time."[60] In the hands of cultural producers committed to the politics of survival against the odds, this connection of survival to pleasure—where "pleasurable relations between bodies" are what makes life possible—sets forth new common senses and new relationships to time, race, and reproduction.

Jewelle Gomez and Octavia E. Butler have turned queerly pleasurable relationships between racialized bodies into transformative reimaginings of gender, race, history, and futurity. Their decolonial uses of vampire mythology in black feminist speculative fiction repurpose the gendered figures whose histories and connotations I trace in the first half of this chapter. In complex and sometimes ambiguous ways that cannot be accounted for by a straightforward narrative of reclamation, they create alternative visions of racialized reproductive temporality. Butler and Gomez write at different moments, in different contexts; I engage them together to draw attention to the interconnections in their joint creation of vampiric reproductive futurisms.[61] *The Gilda Stories* (1991) and *Fledging* (2005) map out alternative relationships between production and reproduction, routed explicitly through pleasure in ways that challenge not only the common tropes of vampire mythology and science fiction but also the AIDS-related associations that link queer sharings of bodily fluids with the reproduction of viruses that carry death. As a figure in white queer studies, the vampire has often signified the opposite of reproduction and futurity: speculative figures of the bloodsucking undead have stood for seductively predatory figures of gay men and lesbians who endanger the reproduction of white, heteronormative family and home.[62] Reimagined through a queer black feminism in which to claim and defend family and home in a world where survival cannot be guaranteed is often itself a radical act, the affordances of the vampire offer a speculative mode in which reproductive and desiring bodies live on after death. Twisting the connections between blackness and technologies of futurity, between consumption and exploitation and reproduction, Gomez and Butler reconfigure the meanings of racialized gender and sexuality both in the American color line and amid contexts of globalized labor and histories of colonization.

Vampires have long been used as metaphors for a capitalist mode of production that perpetuates itself by appropriating the life-force of those it exploits. The undead who suck blood to prolong unlife signify fear, desire and exploitation. In 1867, Karl Marx wrote of the deadly monstrosity of capital's "vampire thirst for the living blood of labour" in an analogy that has been enthusiastically taken up ever since.[63] Donna

Haraway writes that "the vampire" in culture has become inseparable from "the marauding figure of unnaturally breeding capital, which permeates every whole being and sucks it dry in the lusty production and vastly unequal accumulation of wealth."[64] In a recent account of contemporary global capital by Kalindi Vora, the vampiric is barely a metaphor at all. She points out that biological and communication technology advances have "opened up the human body and subject as a greatly expanded site for annexation, harvest, dispossession, and production" and allowed not just the products of labor but life itself, in forms that include surrogate pregnancy and organ donation as well as life-sustaining reproductive labor, to flow from the poor to the rich.[65] Like the alluring vampires of fiction and film, vampire capital seduces; its beneficiaries accumulate wealth by siphoning life forces from people and places made tender by histories of enslavement, settler colonialism, and racialized and gendered exploitation.

The metaphor of capital as vampire reminds us that human resources are not renewable. Gomez and Butler's works highlight unresolved contradictions in the ways that race, gender, and sexuality are lived amid circuits of capital, labor, and what Vora calls "vital energy"; they glimmer with more and less desirable prospects for utopia and change.[66] The changed meanings of reproduction, consumption, and pleasure in these queer of color vampire stories also shift what the future stands for. In the classic vampire/capital analogy, the future is a commodity that is highly in demand; the vampire's immortality is maintained by a constant supply of blood, just as capital's demand for incessant growth requires ongoing exploitation and expropriation. Gomez and Butler alter the terms, connecting their vampires to ecological models of consumption without exploitation. They transform the future from an ever-receding goal into a comfortable place to live. Instead of accumulation and expansion carried forth at the cost of life for all those who do not profit from it, human blood and labor appear as renewable resources, re-produced through a transmission of blood that signifies not genetic transfer but an exchange of pleasure. These vampires refuse to alienate the blood they take from the people it belongs to. Vampiric exchange instead transforms and reframes, without seeking to wholly avoid, frameworks of predation, objectification, and exploitation. Immortality shifts its metaphorical significance: no longer standing for an access to

futurity for some that will always come at a cost to others, it now marks the possibility for survival in the face of overwhelming odds.

In each novel, vampire immortality and reproductive consumption mediate between African American women's histories and presents, pointing toward new futures that emerge over the course of the narratives. Published in 1991, *The Gilda Stories* situates Gomez's eponymous vampire in US black history, narrating vignettes that begin during slavery and end with a dystopian future reminiscent of Du Bois's post-comet landscape. Gomez works within an explicitly lesbian subcultural and political framework, describing the character of Gilda as embodying "a feminist perspective that [challenges] the traditional narratives about women of color and about lesbians."[67] Building a model of black and indigenous vampire futurism that owes much to Audre Lorde's writings on the erotic as a source of power and connection for women of color, she creates a larger canvas on which to engage the utopian prospects of a 1980s lesbian feminism that has often been dismissed by later queer theorists.[68]

Gomez cites Octavia E. Butler, whose novels of the 1980s and 1990s made her by far the best known black woman writer of science fiction and who was also a powerful speculative critic of US and global politics, as one of *The Gilda Stories*' greatest influences.[69] Butler's work often emphasizes the impossibility of getting away from gendered biologies of reproduction, where black women's bodies bear the weight of reproducing futures to which they rarely uncomplicatedly consent. Nisi Shawl writes that Butler saw *Fledgling* (2005), which would be the last book she published before her sudden death in 2006, as an "escapist fantasy" less embedded in social and political critique than many of her other works.[70] Yet the novel has much to say about racialized and gendered pasts, presents, and futures. It crafts a narrative of biological speculation on the scale of a single character's body—a mutation of vampire mythology that is also a queer rendition of racialized reproduction. In her version of the vampire, Butler invokes an alternative reproductive futurity whose structures draw from troubling histories of genetics and eugenics as well as colonial metaphors in ways that complicate Gomez's utopian tendencies.

Both novels open with scenes of bloodletting that are emblematic of the refigured futures to come, reversing the gendered and racialized power relations to which black women are subjected. Vulnerable figures—a young runaway slave girl, a child injured to the point of

death—show their teeth and set alternative narratives in motion. When *Gilda* begins, it is 1850 in Louisiana. An unnamed "Girl," who will later become the vampire named Gilda, has escaped from slavery and is hiding in a cellar. A white man comes upon her hiding place and tries to rape her, and the book's first blood is spilled:

> He bent forward on his knees, stiff for conquest, already counting the bounty fee. . . . He started to enter her, but before his hand finished pulling her open, while it still tingled with the softness of her insides, she entered him with her heart which was now a wood-handled knife. . . . She felt the blood draining from him, comfortably warm against her now cool skin.
>
> It was like the first time her mother had been able to give her a real bath . . . a cleansing. . . . Looking down at the blood soaking her shirt and trousers she felt no disgust. It was the blood signaling the death of a beast and her continued life.[71]

Gomez portrays Gilda/Girl's death-blow in shockingly intimate terms. As her body is violated, it transforms into a weapon, the knife of her heart a necessary means to claiming what the slaveholder would alienate from her. He expects her to be nothing but "bounty," a personal "conquest" to match the cultural one he believes has already been completed with the theft of indigenous land and the enslavement of Gilda/Girl's people to work on it. But she turns back to "enter" him instead and prove the resilience of the objectified—even finding a sensual and reassuring pleasure in the violence, which rekindles a maternal connection slavery has broken for her. His blood flows over her, restoring the life energy he and his have expropriated and setting the conditions of possibility for her future and the world the novel will create.

Traditional vampires instrumentalize human lives as means to their own perpetuation, killing with indiscriminate ease. Where Dracula and his successors figure as sexual predators consuming feminized bodies, Gomez's victims bite back as she "turns the structures of racism, sexism, homophobia, and antisemitism in classical vampire narratives against themselves."[72] It is not the vampire but the human rapist who uses others for his own ends and the larger purpose of "conquest." Gilda/Girl identifies him immediately as one of "those whom her mother had sworn were not fully human," who "suck up the world and don't taste

it."[73] Looking to consume and sell off a black female body he cannot perceive as unconsenting, he is an avatar for intersecting systems of white supremacy, patriarchy, and capital. His is the vampirism of voracious consumption and colonial expansion that created a world that makes reproduction a terrifying double bind for those who are not meant to survive as human subjects. Bathing in this man's blood is a rebirth for the Girl: a "cleansing" that enables her "continued life" into the future of peaceful immortality she will eventually gain by leaving the human behind when she becomes Gilda. Neither the girl nor the vampire are innocent of death and violence. But Gomez creates a utopian bloodlust from the ways in which, having known dehumanization and rebellion, Gilda will come to show a respect for those whose life force she consumes beyond anything this man could attain. As a vampire, her feedings will not kill but bring pleasure.

Butler's *Fledgling* also opens with its protagonist's consumption of another's life force, but this scene is far more difficult to read as empowerment. The narrator, unnamed as yet, awakes amnesiac in darkness and pain. All she knows is hunger, and she satiates it:

> I heard something coming toward me, something large and noisy, some animal. . . . It came to me like a tame thing, and I lay almost out of control, trembling and gasping, and thinking only, food! . . . It touched my wrist, my face, my throat . . . making noises of its own. . . . I seized the animal . . . tasted its blood, smelled its terror. I tore at its throat with my teeth until it collapsed. Then, at last, I fed, gorged myself on the fresh meat that I needed.[74]

Soon enough we learn that the "animal" she killed was a member of Shori's extended family who came to rescue her from the wreckage of her home after its destruction by white supremacist vampires. For the first chapters, though, all we know of Shori is her appearance—that of a young black girl—her hunger, and the power this hunger lends to her determination to survive, no matter the cost. After her meal, the child-like figure is rescued by a white man in a car, whereupon she latches on to his neck and feasts. She seems to be bleeding him dry, but we learn that this connection—sexual like all vampire loves, and in this case offering a cross-age desire that is disarmingly queer for the grown

man who finds in it an irresistible pleasure—has initiated a symbiotic relationship that will extend his life as well as hers.

Butler's vampires, who call themselves the Ina, are not undead or immortal but a long-lived parasitic species who exist in "mutualistic symbiosis" with the humans whose blood they drink.[75] They are vampires imagined through scientific rather than supernatural speculation. Their bite is potent because Ina saliva contains a "powerful hypnotic drug" that renders human "symbionts" "highly suggestible and deeply attached to the source of the substance."[76] In exchange for an addiction whose termination would end their lives, symbionts receive intense sexual pleasure when they are fed on; they grow "healthier, stronger, and harder to kill," and their lives "lengthen by several decades."[77] The Ina need their symbionts to live, the humans come to need their Ina, and yet humans are always more vulnerable.

Butler's Ina are slippery beings to read metaphorically. On the one hand, they colonize human territories and relationships, offering a pleasure to which symbionts cannot not consent. They make biological the seductions of assimilation to power. But just as Butler refuses to turn away from the darker sides of pleasure, she also bathes her readers in its possibilities, showing the joys of Ina life and leaving us to wonder whether it might not have advantages over human autonomy. Butler's exchanges of blood confuse easy correspondences of capital, eugenics, gender, and race. Their speculative intervention is best understood in the context of US racial and colonial histories that *Fledgling* does not address directly but that Gomez's *Gilda Stories* map out.

The Gilda Stories follows its vampires across two centuries, crafting a subaltern American history and future that brings to the fore those ostensibly rendered futureless by white supremacy and settler colonialism. Black feminist history is joined with indigenous knowledge. Gilda grows into vampire longevity alongside her Lakota lover, Bird, and they share their people's oral histories as they recall the "rhythm of life without bondage."[78] Bird invites Gilda into what Scott Lauria Morgensen calls "the queer temporality of Native modernity, wherein tradition is precisely not primordial but an articulation of memory and survival with life in a settler colonial situation."[79] It may have begun as an imported European mythos, but for Gomez, vampire longevity becomes a method for maintaining connections and collectivities among

black and indigenous people in and beyond the United States, enabling both to know that, as Andrea Smith writes, "we lived differently before" colonization and enslavement and therefore "can live differently in the future."[80] Although taking blood invokes the logics of empire and capital for many of their peers, Gilda and Bird's vampirism always participates in a politics of collective struggle against racist domination, where their primary commitments are not to vampire kind but to networks of solidarity. Bird travels across the Americas to connect with indigenous peoples, "pulling together the strands of knowledge about her nation" to become a "living history."[81] Meanwhile, Gilda searches for a "link" to her people in "each new place" she lives, tying herself to black communities and taking on human obligations in a beauty parlor, at a women's church group, and amid black radical political and artistic movements.[82] Gomez takes the dead European conceit of eternal vampiric life and invests it with a temporal significance that emerges from different traditions, using the stretched-out life narratives of immortality to breed futures for communities whose past has been lost or stolen.

White patriarchal capitalist and queer of color decolonial vampires alike require blood on which to feed. Gomez imagines that act of consumption as a sharing of pleasure that reproduces interdependence rather than, or at least in addition to, exploitation. Gilda's vampire progenitor, a white woman hundreds of years old, tells her that "the real dream," the most important purpose for blood-sharing immortals, is "to make a world."[83] Gilda's stories tell how she made her own version of that world, structured by her need for queer love and racial community. Her queerness is, as Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley writes, an activation of pleasure relations between those who were never meant to survive. "A praxis of resistance," it is the need or desire "to love your own kind when your own kind is supposed to cease to exist."[84] This is the queer possibility that Gomez's vampirism speculatively activates: subjects who are supposed to be erased instead love others who are racialized and gendered as they are, who were not meant to survive either. Acts of pleasure flow between the consumer and consumed who are linked through race, community, sexuality, and desire. The speculative embodiment of vampire immortality makes the queer gesture endure for more than a moment, more than a memory.

Butler's version of vampire mythology is less utopian than Gomez's in its intervention into gendered and racialized futurity. Where the vampires

of *The Gilda Stories* are embedded in racial and colonial histories by way of their human origins and affiliations, those in *Fledgling* are depicted as a separate species independent of and parasitic on *homo sapiens*. Like most vampires, the Ina are whiter than white, their pallor linked to their inability to tolerate sunlight. Race comes into play through constructed difference: *Fledgling*'s protagonist, Shori, is protected from the sun by dark skin she was given by genetic manipulation carried out in cooperation between her white Ina mothers and black human mother. Shori is a successful "experiment," an embodied possibility for a vampire future of color.[85] She provides a technological intervention of African humanity into this science fiction version of moribund European vampirism. By crafting Shori's blackness with reproductive technology, her mothers invent blackness *as* futurity, breeding it into their line in order to help them survive. That genealogy is not without its disturbing connections, for Shori is aged fifty-three in the early twenty-first century and is described as having been born shortly after her family left Europe.[86] Her vampire and human mothers were, we must assume, beginning their genetic research amid the genocidal triumphs of the 1930s and 1940s.[87] The symbiotic connection between these white and black, vampire and human women is underwritten by the trauma of racial and colonial histories.

Since she is the product of experimental breeding, Shori's breeders expect to breed her in return. In other words, the Ina plan for their much-heralded black future to be heterosexually reproduced once Shori—still a child by Ina reckoning—is old enough to "mate" with a group of brothers whose scent she finds irresistible.[88] Butler's linkage of vampire futurity to queer sexual pleasure seems here to fall back within the fold of straight reproduction. Yet, given the larger historical and structural context that marks blackness as an impediment to survival, the association of black life with the possibility of expanded futures in her vision of vampire eugenics is enough to render even this straight-seeming future queer. Shori's vampire family claim repeatedly that "human racism meant nothing to the Ina because human races meant nothing to them," but *Fledgling* insists that this is not and cannot ever be the case by embedding a critique of the racist discourse of colorblindness in its speculative premise.[89] Horrified at the interracial and interspecies miscegenation that produced Shori, several Ina plot to kill her and all who were involved in her creation; the novel's climax is a

legal battle in which she challenges their racism and wins her own right to exist as a being neither fully Ina nor fully human.[90] Like Gilda and Bird in *The Gilda Stories*, Shori is more aware of her connections to the human than are her vampire peers because of her racial status. She sees race where her fellows refuse to recognize it, which means that she perceives human difference and the power relationships that structure it in ways her colorblind family cannot. For both Gomez and Butler, racially othered vampire figures blur boundaries between vampire and human, suggesting the possibility of a more or less utopian vampire politics that would be more concerned with collective longevity than with deathly consumption.

The Gilda Stories ends with an expansive projected future in which Gomez demonstrates the opposition between her version of vampirism and the bloodsucking accumulation and alienation into which it could all too easily be transformed. Amid a dystopian, apocalyptic earth of 2050, where excessive exploitation has brought the United States to a shadow of its former imperial might, "the existence of the Vampire" becomes widely known.[91] As "Hunters" are sent out to capture those who can give eternal life to the rich, the vampires have become the victims, and Gilda runs from men she recognizes as "essentially the same" as the bounty hunter who tried to rape her as a child.[92] In this dystopian future—which would not look amiss on primetime TV, twenty-five years after its publication—the vampires' life force becomes one more extractable resource, eaten up like the land, labor, and energy of every other oppressed and exploited population. The resistance to domination that Gilda and her people embodied could, it seems, function only in hiding, in the interstices of all-too-powerful social systems. And yet the vampire utopia is not entirely conquered. Even as she runs from those who persecute her, desperate to avoid becoming a part of vampire capital, Gilda brings hope to a suicidal woman by inviting her into her family and into the living history of African American consciousness that she represents. And, as the book comes to a close, Gilda and Bird meet at the ruins of Macchu Picchu. There, they resolve to continue living in the world where they and those like them have "lost land" and to bring it what life they can in the form of "stories and dancing again."[93] Gomez shows how the subaltern past can create a new kind of future when it is kept alive, even as it is continually faced with literal and figurative death.

Vampires constitute a kind of time travel, bringing the past into the present and signifying the oxymoronic prospect of an unchanging future. The prevalence of aristocrats and American Civil War veterans among the vampires of popular culture is a telling sign of the kind of memory they most often exist to perpetuate. Gomez's and Butler's vampire fictions transform the conventional and very white imagery of bloodsucking aristocrats, together with science fiction themes of possible futures and genetically modified organisms, into a breeding ground for queer reproductive possibilities. *The Gilda Stories* makes black and indigenous lesbian feminist relationality into an anticapitalist strategy for building a new world in the shell of the old; *Fledgling* gives us Shori, the embodiment of a eugenically bred future, who takes things into her own hands to fight racism and exploitation and create the world anew. Through immortal vampire sex and queer bloodsucking children, both novels create timelines that mingle the old and the new, while refusing to be coopted in the service of a future that will look just like the past. These timelines are not without their problems, for Gomez's lesbian feminism does at times slip toward nostalgic idealization of a lost indigenous world, and Butler continues to portray heterosexuality as an inevitable biological imperative. Their works are critical engagements with straight, capitalist, colonial temporalities, not negations of them. Their queered futures begin to be realized only when we read them with one another, alongside the histories they reframe, and through the nonlinear understanding of temporality that Lorde's poetry evokes.

* * *

I opened this chapter with Audre Lorde's poetic inscription of "a now that can breed futures." I have followed it through several more prosaic representations of what a black future bred out of the inequalities, complicities, and failures of assorted *nows* might look like. Of course, my own analysis emerges from a present itself bred out of the pasts these texts engaged. From images of Europe's apocalyptic wastelands during World War I and the consciousness of colonization and commodification, Du Bois bred a heteronormative future of post-racial, eugenic humanity that collapsed when punctured by the sharp image of a black reproductivity that was not meant to survive. Today, the post-racial future that was an ironic utopian dream for Du Bois has become a piece of increasingly

threadbare nationalist propaganda. That a single heterosexual coupling cannot breed a shiny new future on its own was an obvious if not necessarily desirable conclusion for Du Bois, but it has often operated as a form of predictive common sense in US political culture. Tavia Nyong'o accounts for this narrative in the introduction to his 2009 history of American discourses of race amalgamation. He discusses how, in the stories told about President Barack Obama's interracial origins, "the long history of sex across the color line—a history utterly commingled with the history of Africans in America . . . was magically transmogrified into a simple story of redemption in which a single marriage across the color line redeemed a history of slavery."[94] Heteronormative reproductive futurism, inflected by a racial discourse that pretends to invoke history while obscuring its persistence in the present, is the narrative into which, from 2008–2016, the United States was somehow expected to buy as the price for an inspirational black first family.

In the first celebratory moments in the administration of a US president who was black, technologically enabled, and a science fiction fan, it seemed imaginable that the future forming the normative horizon of American politics might have become, in some ways, Afrofuturistic.[95] Yet the politically radical, transnational, anticapitalist content of Afrofuturistic imaginaries on which this chapter has focused remained resolutely marginal throughout the Obama era. After its end, to capture those imaginaries' ever-greater urgency requires an alliance with the world-making collectivities of Gomez's and Butler's queer vampire kin. If the face of American empire does not look as exclusively white as it once did, it is more important than ever to pay close attention to the radical critical uses to which racialized narratives of futurity have been put in the distant and not so distant past, and to pay attention to the futures dreamed up by those for whom economic and cultural precarity are nothing new. This is why we need to engage Afrofuturistic, queer, and feminist counterdiscourses through as many modes as possible—to understand how reproduction, futurity, and consumption need not always be put together in the same predictable ways.

The vampire narratives from which Gomez and Butler breed their queer feminist Afrofuturisms contain just a few possibilities for such deviant relationships between past, present, and future. There are many others. One, addressed in an earlier version of this chapter, is Butler's

1979 *Kindred*, which relies on heterosexual reproduction to power a narrative in which a black woman in the 1970s, married to a white man, goes back in time to ensure the occurrence of the interracial rape that will conceive her great-great-great-grandmother. Overdetermined, this ostensibly straight narrative catches on itself, bending backward into negative spirals and forward toward rhythms of possibility. In *Kindred*, Butler confronts us with the persistent logic of normative time, insisting that the logics of reproductive futurism are not easy to leave behind—yet *not easy* does not mean *not possible*. The circular temporal narrative *Kindred* employs is, in the end, very close to the science fiction conventions of time travel in which the logics of linear temporality are questioned only in order to set them more powerfully in place.[96] Butler's later work in *Fledgling* gives a stronger sense of how we might think the future queerly while doing justice to the historical intersections of race and reproduction and their power in the present, especially when put together with the queer activist project of Jewelle Gomez's lesbian vampire feminism of color. Both demonstrate that heteronormativity is not the only way to breed a future.

If the survival of Du Bois's anonymous black woman is unrecognizable within the tragically straight racial temporality of "The Comet," Butler and Gomez uncover some of the deviating lines we might follow in order to give her a future. And if factual and fictional historical depictions of black women's negotiation of reproduction and sexuality show how often they have been excluded from official timelines that were nevertheless erected on their backs, the extended life narratives of Gilda and Shori, and their empowered and queer relationship to reproduction, remind us of the persistent presence of the past within the future. In the larger scope of this book, these stories provide a middle ground between on the one hand, works that turn conventional reproductivities and temporalities against themselves, demonstrating the complications and ambiguities within seemingly straight temporalities, and on the other, the revolutionary temporalities of queer of color hope and desire that I go on to discuss in the next chapter. If Gomez and Butler imagine queer pleasure as a means to the end of a newly conceived biological economics, the black queer theorist and cultural producer I turn to next—Samuel R. Delany—engages pleasure as an end in itself, transforming its impulses and flows into queer speculative politics.

4

Science Fiction Worlding and Speculative Sex

Samuel R. Delany and the Queer Futures of Black Gay History

Samuel R. Delany, the prolific black gay writer of speculative fiction, memoir, literary pornography, and queer theory, planted a seed that would become this book with a recurrent phrase in his 1974 novel *Dhalgren*:

> It is not that I have no past. Rather, it continually fragments on the terrible and vivid ephemera of now.[1]
>
> *It is not that I have no future. Rather it continually fragments on the insubstantial and indistinct ephemera of now.*[2]
>
> It is not that I have no future. Rather it continually fragments on the insubstantial and indistinct ephemera of then.[3]

The speaker in these passages calls attention to twists and deviations in experiential and historical time. When humanity's continuation demands the privileging of heterosexual procreation, and when access to technological capital defines the possibility of advancing toward a livable future, certain individuals and populations are often rendered futureless. A queer, working-class man of color with a history of mental illness, Delany's protagonist is denied access to futurity by multiple intersecting axes of oppression. Yet "*it is not that [he has] no future.*" Each double negative highlights an instability that characterizes many of the old futures this book explores: What does it mean to refuse the oversimplifications of pure negativity, without taking up positivist visions of development and progress? To lose access to the past is to be denied a future. Yet this speaker has neither no past *nor* no future. Instead, he lives within the queerness of the present and its terrible, vivid, insubstantial, indistinct