Humans Involved
Lurking in the Lines of Posthumanist Flight

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Native/Indigenous studies and Black studies have both sustained a unique, rigorous, and supple interrogation of the stakes of identity, particularly as they relate to how the state—and its everyday practices of Native genocide and anti-Black racism—has the power to confer the identity of the human onto some bodies while denying access to this identity to Black and Native/Indigenous peoples. The distinguishing ethical concerns and dilemmas of both Native/Indigenous decolonization and Black abolition inevitably alter and destabilize the ground on which discussions about identity and specifically the human unfold. How these political and intellectual projects change the terms of the debate and discussion about identity and the human are invaluable to the project of critical ethnic studies.

Scholars in the fields of critical ethnic, Black, and Native studies who welcome the charge of decolonization and abolition in the corporate university often labor to push back against and expose the limitations of the “epistemic turns” or “epistemic revolutions of Europe” that Sylvia Wynter so deftly tracks in her voluminous body of work. Scholars committed to the politics of Black abolitionist work and Native decolonization must often assume postures of suspicion—“misanthropy”—and sometimes must outright refuse Western thought’s arrogant universalist assumptions, commonsense tautologies, and professed reforms to the category of the human; due to these ways, they often experience a great deal of hostility and violence. When decolonial and Black abolitionist thought has to contend with Western or European continental theory, specifically its critical theories of progressive (liberal) social change, one often encounters an epistemic crisis or what scholar Frank Wilderson refers to as an antagonism.¹

Forced to wrestle with antagonisms that often require Native/Indigenous and Black death, the scholar committed to decolonization and abolition in

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the university seminar space often has to refuse necropolitical epistemological systems, which structure white liberal humanist ways of thinking and imagining the world. This kind of labor and violent confrontation in the classroom on a repeated basis can transform one's educational and professional experience into one rife with stress, anxiety, and unease.

More specifically, I have watched graduate students of color experience this kind of stress, anxiety, and unease as they confront the pressure to “take up” more contemporary impulses within Western “critical theory” to move “beyond the human” or toward the posthuman. One task of this article is to attend to the ways that Black and Indigenous academics, as well as Black and Native studies scholars, are expected to perform a commitment to a Deleuzian brand of posthumanist and nonrepresentational theory as proof that they are critical and postmodern scholars and disciplinary formations. Lately, I have heard questions posed to Black and Native scholars and activists who theorize the work of movements like Black Lives Matter, Idle No More, and other work addressing Black and Indigenous death to explain what relationship this (survival-based) work has to “identity,” “the subject,” or “the human.” More specifically, the questions are posed as ones that assume that these movements reify one or all of the above categories. Additionally, the inquiries are accompanied by an expectation that the person(s) and the movements will disavow all claims to identity, subjecthood, and the desire for humanity.

What kinds of hostilities, assumptions, and misrecognitions lurk in inquiries such as the following: “Is Black Lives Matter a humanist movement?” “Does BLM reify the notion and idea of the human?” “When will Native studies transcend or get beyond the subject or the human?” Because emerging scholars in the academy often contend with these hostile inquiries in the seminar space, while teaching, at conferences and in other spaces of academe, a change in comportment, tone, affect, and ways of being in the academy also needs to accompany the modes of conceptual and theoretical resistance within Black and Native studies. This article is as interested in the postures, affective states (skepticism), and stubborn practices of insubordination such as refusal that frustrate forward movement and business-as-usual in the academy. Specifically, this article tracks how Native feminist refusal and Black feminist suspicion respond to Deleuzian theory.

Native feminist politics of decolonial refusal and Black feminist abolitionist politics of skepticism informed by a misandry and misanthropic distrust of and animus toward the (over)representation of man/men as the human diverge from the polite, communicative acts of the public sphere,
much like the politics of the “feminist killjoy.” Through this article, I deploy the term “feminist” both ambivalently and strategically to mark and distinguish the scholarly tradition created by Black and Native women, queer, trans, and other people marginalized within these respective communities and their anticolonial and abolitionist movements. Until a more useful and legible term emerges, I will use “feminist” to mark the practices of refusal and skepticism (misandry/misanthropy) as ones that largely exist outside more masculinist traditions within Indigenous/Native studies and Black studies. “Decolonial refusal” and “abolitionist skepticism” depart from the kinds of masculinist anticolonial traditions that attempt to reason Native/Black man to White Man within humanist logic in at least two significant ways. First, neither participate in the communicative acts of the humanist public sphere from within the terms of the debate. Further, they do not play by the rules. Specifically, the Native and Black “feminist” politics discussed throughout launch a critique of both the logic of the discussion about the human and identity as well as the mode of communication. In fact, practices of refusal and skepticism interrupt and flout codes of civil and collegial discursive protocol to focus on and illumine the violence that structures the posthumanist discourse.

Attending to the comportment, tone, and intensity of an engagement is just as important as focusing on its content. The particular manner in which Black and Native feminists push back against violence is important. The force, break with decorum, and style in which Black and Native feminists confront discursive violence can change the nature of future encounters. Given that Black women who confront the logics of “nonrepresentational theory” are really confronting genocide and the white, whimsical disavowal of Black and Native negation on the way to subjectlessness, it is understandable that there is an equally discordant response. Refusal and skepticism are modes of engagement that are uncooperative and force an impasse in a discursive exchange.

This article tracks how traditions of “decolonial refusal” and “abolitionist skepticism” that emerge from Native/Indigenous and Black studies expose the limits and violence of contemporary nonidentitarian and nonrepresentational impulses within white “critical” theory. Further, this article asks whether Western forms of nonrepresentational (subjectless and nonidentitarian) theory can truly transcend the human through self-critique, self-abnegation, and masochism alone. External pressure, specifically the kind of pressure that “decolonial refusal” and “abolitionist skepticism” as forms of
resistance that enact outright rejection of or view “posthumanist” attempts with a “hermeneutics of suspicion,” is needed in order to truly address the recurrent problem of the violence of the human in continental theory. While this article does not directly stake a claim in embracing or rejecting identity per se, it does take up the category of the human. Because the category of the human is modified by identity in ways that position certain people (white, male, able-bodied) within greater or lesser proximity to humanness, identity is already taken up in this discussion. Conversations about the human are very much tethered to conversations about identity. In the final section, the article will explore how Black and Native/Indigenous absorption into the category of the human would disfigure the category of the human beyond recognition.

Engaging how forms of Native decolonization and Black abolition scrutinize the violently exclusive means in which the human has been written and conceived is generative because it sets some workable terms of engagement for interrogating Western and mainstream claims to and disavowals of identity. Rather than answer how Native decolonization and Black abolition construe the human or identity, the article examines how Native and Black feminists use refusal and misandry to question the very systems, institutions, and order of knowledge that secure humanity as an exclusive experience and bound identity in violent ways. I consider the practices and postures of refusal assumed by Native/Indigenous scholars such as Audra Simpson, Eve Tuck, Jodi Byrd, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith to be particularly instructive for exposing the violence of ostensibly nonrepresentational Deleuzoguattarian rhizomes and lines of flight. While reparative readings and “working with what is productive” about Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s work is certainly a part of the Native feminist scholarly tradition, this article focuses on the underexamined ways that Native feminists refuse to entertain certain logics and foundations that actually structure Deleuzoguattarian thought.

Further, I discuss “decolonial refusal” in relation to how Black scholars like Sylvia Wynter, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, and Amber Jamilla Musser work within a Black feminist tradition animated by a kind of skepticism or suspicion capable of ferreting out the trace of the white liberal human within (self-)professed subjectless, futureless, and nonrepresentational white theoretical traditions. In other words, in the work of Sylvia Wynter, one senses a general suspicion and deep distrust of the ability of Western theory—specifically its attempt at self-critique and self-correction in the name of
justice for humanity—to revise its cognitive orders to work itself out of its current “closed system,” which reproduces exclusion and structural oppositions based on the negation of the other. Wynter’s study of decolonial theory and its elaboration of autopoiesis informs her understanding of how the human and its overrepresentation as man emerges. Recognizing that humans (of various genres) write themselves through a “self-perpetuating and self-referencing closed belief system” that often prevents them from seeing or noticing “the process of recursion,” Wynter works to expose these blind spots. Wynter understands that one of the limitations of Western liberal thought is that it cannot see itself in the process of writing itself. I observe a similar kind of cynicism about the way the academic left invokes “posthumanism” in the work of Jackson and Musser. Musser in particular questions the capacity of queer theories to turn to sensations like masochism within the field of affect studies to overcome the subject. Further, Jackson’s and Musser’s work is skeptical that white transcendence can happen on its own terms or rely solely on its own processes of self-critique and self-correction. I read Jackson’s and Musser’s work as distrustful of the ability for “posthumanism” to be accountable to Black and Indigenous peoples or for affect theory on its own to not replicate and reinforce the subjugation of the other as it moves toward self-annihilation. Both the human and the posthuman are causes for suspicion within Black studies.

Like Wynter, the field of Black studies has consistently made the liberal human an object of study and scrutiny, particularly the nefarious manner in which it violently produces Black existence as other than and at times nonhuman. Wynter’s empirical method of tracking the internal epistemic crises and revolutions of Europe from the outside has functioned as a model for one way that Black studies can unfurl a critique of the human as well as Western modes of thought. I use the terms “misanthropy” and “misandry” in this article to evoke how Black studies has remained attentive to, wary about, and deeply distrustful of the human condition, humankind, and the human-as-man/men in the case of Black “feminists.” Both Black studies’ distrust of the “human” and Black feminism’s distrust of humanism in its version as man/men (which at times seeks to incorporate Black men) relentlessly scrutinize how the category of the human and in this case the “posthuman” reproduce Black death. I link misandry (skepticism of humankind-as-man) to the kind of skepticism and “hermeneutics of suspicion” that Black feminist scholars like Wynter, Jackson, and Musser at times apply to their reading and engagement with revisions to or expansions of the category of the human, posthuman discourses, and nonrepresentational theory.
In this article, I connect discursive performance of skepticism to embodied and affective responses I have witnessed in the academy that challenge the sanctioned modes of protocol, politesse, and decorum in the university. For example, Wynter assumes a critically disinterested posture as she gazes empirically on and examines intra-European epistemic shifts over time. Paget Henry has described Wynter as an anthropologist of the Occident, as Europe becomes an object of study rather than the center of thought and humanity. Throughout the body of Wynter’s work, she seems to be more interested in drawing our attention to the capacity of European orders of knowledge to shift over time—or their fragility—than in celebrating the progress that European systems of knowledge have claimed to make. Wynter’s tracking is just a tracking and not a celebration of the progress narrative that Western civilization tells about itself and its capacity to define, refine, and recognize new kinds of humanity over time. This comportment of critical disinterest is often read as an affront to the codes and customs of scholarly discourse and dialogue in the academic community, particularly when it is in response to the white thinkers of the Western cannon.

Decolonial refusal and abolitionist skepticism respond to how perverse and reprehensible it is to ask Indigenous and Black people who cannot seem to escape death to move beyond the human or the desire to be human. In fact, Black and Indigenous people have never been fully folded into the category of the human. As Zakiyyah Iman Jackson has argued,

It has largely gone unnoticed by posthumanists that their queries into ontology often find their homologous (even anticipatory) appearance in decolonial philosophies that confront slavery and colonialism’s inextricability from the Enlightenment humanism they are trying to displace. Perhaps this foresight on the part of decolonial theory is rather unsurprising considering that exigencies of race have crucially anticipated and shaped discourses governing the non-human (animal, technology, object, and plant).

A crucial point that Jackson emphasizes is that Black and Indigenous studies, particularly decolonial studies, has already grappled with and anticipated the late twentieth-century impulses inspired by Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman to annihilate the self and jettison the future. Indigenous and Black “sex” (as activity, reproduction, pleasure, world-building, and not-human sexuality) are already subsumed by death. For some reason, white critical theory cannot seem to fathom that self-annihilation is something white people need to figure out by themselves. In other words, “they can have that.”
ON REFUSAL

Within Native feminist theorizing, ethnographic refusal can be traced to Audra Simpson’s 2007 article, “On Ethnographic Refusal.” In this seminal work, Simpson reflects on and gains inspiration from the tradition of refusal practiced by the people of Kahnawake. Simpson shares that Kahnawake refusals are at the core and spirit of her own ethnographic and ethical practices of refusal.

I was interested in the larger picture, in the discursive, material and moral territory that was simultaneously historical and contemporary (this “national” space) and the ways in which Kahnawake:non, the “people of Kahnawake,” had refused the authority of the state at almost every turn. The ways in which their formation of the initial membership code (now replaced by a lineage code and board of elders to implement the code and determine cases) was refused; the ways in which their interactions with border guards at the international boundary line were predicated upon a refusal; how refusal worked in everyday encounters to enunciate repeatedly to ourselves and to outsiders that “this is who we are, this is who you are, these are my rights.”

Because Simpson was concerned with applying the political and everyday modes of Kahnawake refusal, she attended to the “collective limit” established by her and her Kahnawake participants. The collective limit was relationally and ethically determined by what was shared but more importantly by what was not shared. Simpson’s ability to discern the collective limit could only be achieved through a form of relational knowledge production that regards and cares for the other.

Simpson recounts how one of her participants forced her to recognize a collective limit. Approaching and then arriving at the limit, Simpson experiences the following:

And although I pushed him, hoping that there might be something explicit said from the space of his exclusion—or more explicit than he gave me—it was enough that he said what he said. “Enough” is certainly enough. “Enough,” I realised, was when I reached the limit of my own return and our collective arrival. Can I do this and still come home; what am I revealing here and why? Where will this get us? Who benefits from this and why? And “enough” was when they shut down (or told me to turn off the...
recorded), or told me outright funny things like “nobody seems to know”—when everybody does know and talks about it all the time. Dominion then has to be exercised over these representations, and that was determined when enough was said. The ethnographic limit then, was reached not just when it would cause harm (or extreme discomfort)—the limit was arrived at when the representation would bite all of us and compromise the representational territory that we have gained for ourselves in the past 100 years.17

Extending her discussion of ethnographic refusal beyond the bounds of ethnographic concerns, Simpson also ponders whether this enactment of refusal can be applied to theoretical work. Simpson outright poses a question: “What is theoretically generative about these refusals?”18 The question that Simpson asks in 2007 is clarified by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang in the 2014 essay “R- Words: Refusing Research.” Arguing that modes of refusal extended into the theoretical and methodological terrains of knowledge production are productive and necessary, Tuck and Yang state:

For the purposes of our discussion, the most important insight to draw from Simpson’s article is her emphasis that refusals are not subtractive, but are theoretically generative, expansive. Refusal is not just a “no,” but a redirection to ideas otherwise unacknowledged or unquestioned. Unlike a settler colonial configuration of knowledge that is petulantly exasperated and resentful of limits, a methodology of refusal regards limits on knowledge as productive, as indeed a good thing.19

In line with Simpson’s intervention, Tuck and Yang posit that “refusal itself could be developed into both method and theory.”20 For Tuck and Yang, a generative practice of refusal and a decolonial and abolitionist tradition is making Western thought “turn back upon itself as settler colonial knowledge, as opposed to universal, liberal, or neutral knowledge without horizon.”21 In fact, the coauthors suggest “making the settler colonial metanarrative the object of . . . research.”22 What this move effectively does is question the uninterrogated assumptions and exposes the violent particularities of the metanarrative. Scrutiny as a practice of refusal also slows down or perhaps halts the momentum of the machinery that allows, as Tuck and Yang argue, “knowledge to facilitate interdictions on Indigenous and Black life.”23

Taking a cue from Simpson and Tuck and Yang, I turn to Tuck’s 2010 critique of Deleuze’s notion of “desire” as an example of the theoretical practice of refusal, which Simpson wonders about and which Tuck and
Yang elaborated on in 2014. Eve Tuck’s 2010 article “Breaking Up with Deleuze” refuses Deleuze’s understanding and imposition of his definition of desire for Native studies and Native resurgence in particular. Tuck refuses the Deleuzoguattarian nomadic due to its totalizing moves and specifically its evasion and refusal of Native and alternative notions of refusal that emerge from Native struggles for survival. For Tuck, paying attention to “the continuity of ancestors,” or genealogies, in Native and in all modes of knowledge production is imperative. For Indigenous and Native studies, it reverses the erasure enacted by continental European and settler-colonial theory, which uses a tradition of ongoing genocide to annihilate Native thinkers and subsequently their epistemologies and theories. Prior to Byrd’s indictment of Deleuzoguattarian laudatory accounts of America’s terrain of “Indians without Ancestry,” Tuck reroutes us back to ancestral and genealogical thinking as a way of asserting Indigenous presence and its epistemological systems and traditions, devoid of Cartesian boundary-making impulses and desires. Tuck’s work also prepares us in 2010 for the critique that Byrd levies in 2011, which exposes the traditions, roots, and genealogies of Western poststructuralist theory. Such theory created the conditions of possibility and emergence for Deleuzoguattarian genocidal forms of rhizomatic and nonrepresentational thought. Black Caribbean feminist Michelle V. Rowley argues we need to especially attend to a theory’s “politics and conditions of emergence.” In other words, we need to consider on whose backs or through whose blood a theory developed and then circulated while hiding its own violence.

Jodi Byrd in particular attends to the colonialist, genocidal, and therefore humanist impulses of the rhizome in her book Transit of Empire. What is particularly instructive is the way that Byrd operationalizes her critique of Deleuze and Guattari’s first chapter, “Rhizome,” in their tome A Thousand Plateaus. Byrd’s deconstruction, or picking apart, of the poststructuralist and nonsubject- and nonobject-related Deleuzoguattarian rhizomatics are a masterful (and frankly thuggish and rude) demonstration of refusing to adapt or “repair” colonial epistemologies and geographies. Byrd’s refusal is a moment that further helps one distinguish between the works of postcolonial and decolonial studies.

Byrd performs an outright refusal that short circuits the colonial and postcolonial comportments of politesse, which allow genocidal Western thought to continue uninterrupted. Byrd’s interrogation of the “colonial nostalgia” latent in poststructural and nonrepresentational forms of thought like Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome is an explicit example of how the violence
of white nonrepresentational theory creates an immediate space of impasse for Indigenous, decolonial, Black, and abolitionist intellectual traditions. As Byrd argues, the Deleuzian and Guattarian rhizome assumes its errant, un-traceable, and de/reterritorializing path through Native genocide. The rhizome obtains its metaphorical and theoretical elasticity from the discursive genocide of Indigenous peoples. The territory of maneuver or ground that the rhizome gains its bearing on is unwittingly or perhaps indifferently anchored in the disavowal of the Indigenous ancestral claims, history, presence, and ongoing relationship with the land in North America. Deleuze and Guattari covet the free-range and bloody movements in the West, described as a land of “Indians without Ancestry” primarily because they do not have to contend with the presence of Indigenous peoples and their prior relationships (ancestors) to the land and space through which they move and clear as nomads. There are no existing people to which Deleuze and Guattari have to be accountable. Therefore, their own and others’ self-actualizing, free-form whiteness can proceed unimpeded. The rhizomatic West—terra nullius—is without a people, history, or a cosmology to navigate.

Byrd’s reading of Deleuze and Guattari’s reproduction or transit of the “Indian” in their book A Thousand Plateaus limns some of the methods in which colonialism and modes of conquest are enacted on behalf of the self-actualization of white subjects who produce nonrepresentational theory. In fact, Byrd argues that the “Indian is the ontological prior through which poststructuralism functions.” Byrd traces the appearance or deployment of the Indian as a simulation or “present absent” in Jacques Derrida’s and then Deleuze and Guattari’s work, which creates space for the white subject and the unending frontier. Byrd also argues that nonrepresentational theory heralded as a liberatory path beyond the subject is colonialist. Byrd indicts Deleuze and Guattari’s use of Leslie Fiedler’s work in order to invoke the American West and the Indian as exceptional cases that inspire rhizomatic movement through the notion of an ever-receding frontier. It is colonialist on (at least) two accounts: in its need to render the Indian already and inevitably (ontologically) dead as “it” has no ancestors or living community to whom one needs to be accountable; and in its invocation of the vanishing “Indian,” which opens up the possibility of an “ever-receding frontier” and inspiration for the metaphor of the rhizome. This logic and mode of conquistador thought undergirds the Deleuzian and Guattarian ethos of experimental and rhizomatic lines of flight. Their nonrepresentational theory of lines of flight are only possible as a form of white self-actualizing posthumanism due to the death of Indigenous peoples and their
excision from the Earth/land. White posthumanism and its flows and lines of flight are made possible through Native death.

Because of this, Byrd haltingly stops the reader’s momentum as she critiques Deleuzoguattarian and poststructuralist tendencies that often emerge in postcolonial work. Rather than allow the preemptive rejoinder that white and some postcolonial scholars use, such as “I know that theorist X did not consider race or was racist, but he enables us to do XYZ with his work,” Byrd instead cuts off Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatics at the path. As Byrd anticipates that following Deleuze and Guattari will end in genocide, she allows the reader the time and space to let this reality sink in and consider a different route than the normative impulse and course of action that is to repair Deleuze and Guattari’s work. Byrd’s work slows us down and brings us to a point of impasse and a resting place where one can slow down, stop, and make a choice to stay put or move forward with the dismissive, whimsical, white conceit that tolerates Native death. Byrd’s refusal allows the reader to feel the violent puncture of the nonrepresentational gash that it tries to disavow. Byrd gives her reader the space and time to say, “Yes, I understand your attempt to evade signification and thus representation but it is not compelling enough for me to overlook the reality that it requires Native genocide.” The way that Byrd’s and others’ decolonial work brings these kinds of tensions and violence to a head enables us to make other kinds of analytic and conceptual choices. The reader is allowed to think and then say, “If this line of thought requires Indigenous death, why even venture down it? What could one possibly repair or salvage of it?”

PARSING OUT THE “POST” FROM THE “DE” OF COLONIALITY

Byrd’s work, which is often postcolonial and has cited Jasbir Puar’s appropriation of Deleuze and Guattari as an example, seeks out opportunities to repair and reclaim Western modes of critique such as feminism, queer, and nonrepresentational theories. Postcolonial work (as well as white settler-colonial studies) often goes along with the linearity and temporality of white equivocations that attempt to excuse how the feminist, the queer (nonsubject), and Deleuzoguattarian lines of connectivity function as parasitic forms of situated knowledge and epistemes. This kind of acquiescence makes the epistemic revolutions internal to white European humanity possible and seem natural as they dehumanize and kill Indigenous and Black people. Byrd’s indictment of Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatics refuses and cuts
off the colonial and postcolonial equivocations, sanitization of affects, and speed and pace of the rhizomatic and nomadic line.

As an example of how the protocols, codes of conduct, and politesse of postcolonial “business as usual” unfold in the university, I reflect on my encounters as a student and now professor in the graduate classroom, reading scholarly texts, listening, and taking part in scholarly critique and the collegial repartee that occurs at academic conferences. Within these scenarios, I have observed the decorum of supposedly “engaged and rigorous” critique proceed in the following ways. Often postcolonial interventions into colonial or critical theory travel through phases, stages of progression, and levels of engagement with continental philosophy. First, in order to demonstrate your scholarly due diligence, capacity for rigor, and abstraction, you must learn and rehearse the origins of and become fluent in the language, idioms, and grammar of Deleuze and Guattari or whichever white scholar is in fashion. Second, you must figuratively inhabit and empathize with the white scholar’s very personal and particular existential and ethical questions (even if you cannot relate to her particular kind of situatedness or experience). It is often in graduate seminars where you have been asked—and we have been trained as faculty—to have you think about what it must have been like to be Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, or Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in the moment in which they lived. Imagine the trials and tribulations of being a European bourgeois male maverick in the academy and civil society. In other words, you must internalize and perform this worldview as if it applies to you. After you internalize and perform, the third thing that you are allowed but by no means required to do is list the problems with this theory or worldview. Once you have identified the problems, even irreconcilable ones, you are encouraged to make an intervention or slight adjustment to the discourse or theory by asserting that you will now put Indigenous or Black life at the center of this body of thought. The challenge or intervention usually reads as “what if we put Native or Black studies at the center of Deleuzoguattarian thought?”

Although we may become disillusioned with and challenge a metanarrative, we are rarely encouraged to do what Eve Tuck does when she “Break[s] Up with Deleuze.” We are often prevented from getting to this stage of exasperation or justified disgust because we are not allowed to stop, look at, and more importantly feel the violence of Western turns in critical theory. Because of academic respectability politics that impose a kind of bourgeois politesse on all “communicative acts,” be they in person or in writing, it is impolite and more importantly irrational to be rendered devastated,
enraged, mute, or immobile by the violent terms on which continental theory proceeds. One must tolerate that Deleuzoguattarian rhizomatic movements require Indigenous genocide. In fact, it is a necessary evil in order for the West to model the kind of unfettered nomadic movement that Deleuze and Guattari privilege. The neoliberal temporality of productivity also requires that scholars keep moving unaffected in the midst of the violence. In fact, one is required to work through and repair or do damage control for Deleuze and Guattari. This is what a “good scholar” does: puts Black or Native studies at the center of rhizomes rather than contesting the very terms in which lines of flight become epistemic entities. But how do we perform or act otherwise in the face of this kind of violence?

I am not arguing that academics should not read Deleuze and Guattari. As scholars committed to decolonial thought, we should read their work and understand how genocide and colonialism flow through it. However, we can read without becoming seduced and attached to the work. I turn again to the writings of Black and Native feminists as an example of what this critical disinterest and refusal might look like.32 As Simpson and Tuck and Yang argue, refusal can reroute one set of concerns and questions and redirect them toward other pursuits. Better yet, disenchantment and pessimism can compel one to perceive or think about new questions. Refusal and misandry can move you out of the circuit that the corporate university imposes on critical thinking: know, internalize, perform, disagree, and then center yourself.

If Byrd’s refusal is a first-order engagement and argument, then Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s interrogation of the spatial vocabularies of the human and colonialism is a second-order analysis and practice of refusal, one that reroutes us and makes us ask new questions. As Smith has argued in her classic work Decolonizing Methodologies, “there is a very specific spatial vocabulary of colonialism which can be assembled around three concepts: (1) the line, (2) the centre, and (3) the outside.”33 The Deleuzian and Guattarian line of flight then also emerges from the colonial spatial imaginings of the colonizer. Within Western ideas and philosophical conceptions of temporality and spatiality, like Deleuze and Guattari’s line, time and space have been categorized and imagined as entities that can be measured. In Smith’s account, “Space came to be seen as consisting of lines which were either parallel or elliptical.”34 Rather than escaping the reterritorializing capture of colonial and state power, Deleuzian and Guattarian “lines of flight” coalesce with the line’s emergence as a way to map “territory, to survey land, to establish boundaries, and mark the limits of colonial power.”35 While not
intended to mark boundaries or colonize Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the line of flight, rhizomatic and violent movements to produce a land of Indigenous peoples without ancestors continues rather than ruptures colonial violence. As Deleuze and Guattari attempt to move away from an “I” or “a subject,” through the use of nonrepresentational and nomadic “lines of flight,” they successfully resurrect the human through the geo-epistemology of the “line.”

Within humanist cognitive frames, lines emerge in response to chaos. The line, which seeks to separate “order” from “chaos,” falls into formation with what Sylvia Wynter identifies as “the structural oppositions” that order humanist thought. Even the “line of flight” establishes a linear/nonlinear structural opposition that demarcates the “order” of the invisible white “self” in opposition to the “chaotic” realm of the dead Indigenous and Black “nonbeing.” The line in all of its Deleuzian and Guattarian “molar, molecular, and nomadic” iterations is a humanist geospatial and epistemic configuration. The molar lines that make smooth space do so through the clearing of Indigenous peoples (clear to smooth) in order to produce a colonial grid of order. Deleuze and Guattari even fret over the potential susceptibility of the molecular (a more supple and ambiguous line not so prone to segmentation and rigidity) and the liberatory line of flight to become susceptible to the pull of the state. In A Thousand Plateaus, one can sense the anxiety they have about the molecular and nomadic line of flight.

There is one last problem, the most anguishing one, concerning the dangers specific to each line. There is not much to say about the danger confronting the first [molar line], for the chances are slim that its rigidification will fail. There is not much to say about the ambiguity of the second [molecular line]. But why is the line of flight, even aside from the danger it runs of reverting to one of the other two lines, imbued with such singular despair in spite of its message of joy, as if at the very moment things are coming to a resolution its undertaking were threatened by something reaching down to its core, by a death, a demolition?

The “something” that is reaching down and can be found in its core are the very traces of the human. Humanist secular thought that emerged from the fifteenth-century conquest and enslavement of Native and Black peoples produced the geometry of the line. The line is a way or an episteme used by the human to distinguish self from the other and produce the very structural oppositions that Sylvia Wynter names as essential to the human and
its various genres. Smith’s deconstruction of the geo-epistemologies of “the center, the line,” and the “outside” poses questions and prods Western critical theory in ways that Western theory has yet to do itself, particularly about its subjectless and more specifically nonrepresentational moves.

In addition to Wynter’s structural oppositions, it is also productive to think about how Wynter’s “beyond” has us contend with the underlying epistemes that make the human possible. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson’s engagement with Wynter’s “beyond” also interrogates the call to transcend the human. In a recent *GLQ* roundtable discussion titled “Queer Inhumanisms,” Jackson asks what it means when Black life is asked to make this transcendent move. Finally, I more carefully consider the work of Amber Jamilla Musser, who makes room for Deleuze and Guattari’s influence while being skeptical of and drawing attention to the specific ways that affect, sensation, and other nonrepresentational theories end up hailing and producing subjects even as they try and avoid systems of representation.

**GETTING ON AND BEYOND**

Throughout Sylvia Wynter’s body of work, particularly the portion that Greg Thomas calls the “beyond” work, Wynter attends to the epistemic, aesthetic, performative, and moral technologies such as structural oppositions, which are needed in order to write the human as an exclusive mode of being. Sylvia Wynter is concerned with getting rid of the epistemic systems and orders of knowledge (e.g., biological determinism, economic rationalization, performances, and epistemes) that make the very emergence of exclusionary categories like the human possible. Without getting rid of these systems or artifacts, even if the category of the human is eliminated from language, it will be replaced with something else as long as biological determinism, economic rationalization, oppositions, and lines continue to order and govern thought. The problem with the human is its scaffolding, not the category itself. The emergence of the human and specifically the overrepresentation of the human as man depends on the continual reproduction of and sometimes destruction of oppositional frames—in order to replace a structural oppositional with another. Wynter contends that “all founding oppositions . . . express the fact that humans as organized orders not only struggle against the opposing “chaos,” but have need of it as well, not only destroying but also continually creating it.” Over the course of Wynter’s work, there is a protracted discussion about the usefulness of the opposition “order/chaos” as a primary ordering force, which has persisted throughout
time yet makes adjustments to what it posits as abject difference or the cha-
otic outside of man at any given moment.

Within the secular human’s mode of man, the ordered self, culture, or “we” needs the chaotic, not-us, or them in the Negro and the Indian in order to know itself as culture—Logos, Reason—and therefore as human. The human as man, in its ordered, rational, gendered, sexed, European, bourgeois form, needs chaos in order to secure a self, even as what is human changes. While the human as man may become elastic and more diverse (as proletariat and woman), it still requires an outside. It still requires chaos, even if those who were previously a part of the realm of chaos enter into the zone of order. It is within this lineated orbit of chaos and order that even nonrepresentational poststructuralist theories retain the trace of the human as a narrow ordering line of the self (even in subjectless guise). The line is but one geo-epistemology of white posthumanist thought. The Deleuzo-guattarian “lines of flight,” even as a nomadic line though supposedly not attached to a self or a subject, carry the specter and trace of the human in the ordering and disciplining colonial lines of flight of conquest. As Wynter argues, there are often reversals of the order and hierarchies of structural oppositions; the reversals fail to actually overcome and annihilate the need and desire for structural opposition as an actual order of knowledge.42 While “natural man” may prevail over ecclesiastical, clerical, or theological man, natural or rational man still needs to create himself as the center or norm in relation to those who lack rationality and reason (the Black and Native). Similarly, poststructuralist theory may prevail over structuralist narratives that center the self or the “I”; however, the impulse to kill and create the Indian without ancestors alongside crafting a new self-annihilating post-
humanist subject is still part of the order of knowledge of structural opposition. The selfless, subjectless, posthuman still persists as the realm of life because of the annihilation of Indigenous and Black life.

Within critical theories, Black and Native people are rendered structur-
alist (or modernist and dead) as white self-actualizing subjects disguise themselves as rhizomatic movements that transcend representation and the human. Epistemes such as the line segregate the chaotic realm of death (Black and Native) from the poststructuralist realm of life (white trans-
cendence) through structural opposition marked with blood. The line is a humanist geo-form and geo-episteme, which makes the kinds of segmen-
tation that structural oppositions are based on possible.43 Humans must perceive and come to some social or human agreement that lines even exist in the social (cultural) and natural world. Even in Deleuze and Guattari’s
ideal scenario in which lines are drawn and (re)drawn again outside the state’s mandates, someone (as a subject) must still render them as an outside to something.

Poststructuralist traditions that attempt to transcend identity actually function as a ruse of subjectlessness. In fact, queer subjectlessness and non-representational rhizomes are an expression of a posthumanism that resuscitates normative subjects through the death of Black and Indigenous peoples. Continental theory has not typically had the stomach for sustaining an investigation of the kind of unspeakable violence that enabled the Marxist worker, queer, and affective subjectless discourses (one can only strive for subjectlessness if you possess it) to exist. The erasure of the (white) body-as-subject-as-ontology has been more effective in covering the bloody trail of white/human-self-actualization than it has been at successfully offering a way around and beyond the entrapments of liberal humanism. According to Amber Jamilla Musser, even in its postidentitarian and subjectless modes, continental theories’ transgressive moves (affective, sensational, masochistic) tend to reinstantiate the white male (sometimes queer) subject that it hopes to overcome. While not throwing away affect theory in _Sensational Flesh_, Musser scrutinizes white queer theory’s moves toward subjectless, futureless, and masochism as gestures that actually recover and reify a subject (often white male gay) as they seek to annihilate the subject.

Because of this, Musser refuses to read sensations like masochism in an exceptional vein. She explains, “I seek to reinvigorate these other ways of reading masochism, particularly because reading it as exceptional reifies norms of whiteness and masculinity and suppresses other modes of reading power, agency, and experience.” As Musser suspects, those who claim a radical subjectless must do so through the abjection of others. Men who claim masochism must become like (or reify) the position of the feminine-as-debased other without a self in order to then occupy this position of subjectlessness. A fixing of an abject position through the (female, Black, Indigenous) body of the other must occur; then, an evacuation of the other’s body must take place in order for the embalming of or supplanting of the body with the white normative male figure. While Musser does not entirely refuse Deleuze and Guattari’s nonrepresentational gesture, she does practice a kind of detached and suspicious read of the forms of violence that can be enacted in white moves beyond the human. Musser treats queer theories’ evangelists of loss and futurelessness, Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman, as non-exceptional and even potentially dangerous to subjects who inhabit the abject spaces that white bourgeois men try to occupy. In the 2015 _GLQ_ roundtable
discussion titled “Queer Inhumanisms,” Zakiyyah Iman Jackson reiterated the suspicion that posthumanism is a ruse for white human ascendancy. Similar to Musser, Jackson knows that there is often a subject lurking within the bowels or lines of nonrepresentational discourse. Jackson indicts posthumanist calls to move to the “beyond” for reproducing a false and dishon-est European transcendentalism.

Thus a call for movement in the direction of the “beyond,” issued in a manner that suggests that this call is without location, and therefore with the appearance of incognizance regarding its situated claims and internal limits, returns us to a Eurocentric transcendentalism long challenged.46

Jackson argues that a call for movement beyond always happens from a very specific place. The posthumanist’s horn often blows from a place situated securely within the folds of humanity. This is a very different place than the space of nonbeing from which Black and Indigenous peoples moan, sing, or speak. Native feminist refusal and Black feminist abolitionist skepticism function as intervening comportments, dispositions, and modes of critique that expose the violent and unself-conscious ways that Western theory attempts to move beyond the human through the annihilation of the Other.

Because the crafting of the human is a process of relations, specifically the relations of negation, then moving beyond the violence of the human is also a relational process. Transcendence is a relational process of accountability. White subjects cannot transcend identity (e.g., whiteness, queerness), the subject (self-writing and autonomy), or the human (self-actualization) without ending Native genocide and anti-Black racism. Identities, subjects, and the human as they are currently configured come into formation through processes of negation. If there is no plan to enable Black and Indigenous life, then there is no transcending the violence of the human. The scholarship of Native/Indigenous and Black feminists force continental theory to come outside itself and gaze on the way even the various attempts of nonrepresentational theory to annihilate the self actually end up reinventing the subject and the human through new forms of violent invention. This article argues that both refusal and skepticism can work in tandem and interrupt the performance of white innocence through less-than-effective attempts to evade representation that jettison the garb of the human without abolishing the need for Black and Indigenous death.47

So what of Black and Native stakes in identity? If the primary concern for Black and Native studies is to interrogate and then destroy the structures
and lineaments that make the human-as-man possible, then Black and Native people do not necessarily seek to inhabit the space of the human or identity as they currently exist. For example, if Black Lives Matter (BLM) is asking to be absorbed into the category of the human, then BLM’s version of the human does not yet exist. Further, if Black lives were to be absorbed into the category of the human, the social order and the scaffolding that upends and holds together the human would collapse. For example, if Black Lives Matter (as a variety of local chapters with their own unique politics) is actually making an appeal to be included within humanity—as an intelligible identity of the living—the request is also accompanied by a demand for the abolition of the police.

In addition to the BLM movement and its various local chapters, the Black Youth Project, the Trayvon Martin Organizing Committee, and other voices of Black revolt are emerging from within and outside the movement and are calling for the abolition of the police state. If the human is to exist in Black form, then the police state must wither away. Reflecting on the Rodney King case and the initials N.H.I., Wynter effectively illustrates how the police state has the power to confer the identity of “human” or “no human.” If the goal of Black activists to abolish the police is achieved, the police state would no longer have the power to decide who was or who was not human.

Further, if Native people were to be fully incorporated into the category of the human, then the United States would cease to exist. The nation-state (United States) that gives the “absolute” human (white “Americans”) exclusive claims to the category of the human would have to be demolished. When the United States, as the practice of genocide itself, ceases to exist, then Native/Indigenous peoples can exist and identify as human. Rather than quibbling about “identity” itself, practices of Native refusal and decolonization and Black “skepticism/pessimism” and abolition argue that the U.S. police state can no longer determine the conditions of possibility for being considered human. Critical ethnic studies can continue to look to Black and Native resistance against state-sanctioned killing and genocide as the praxis and theory that shift the terms of contemporary discussions and contestations over identity.

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This article initially emerged as a talk titled “Of Decolonial Refusal and Abolitionist Misandry,” which I delivered to the Colloquium on Indigeneity and Native American Studies (CINAS) at Northwestern University in May 2016. As CINAS is primarily a convening of and community for graduate students, the context offered an opportunity to address the challenges faced by “academics and scholars in training” who endeavor to take up Native decolonization and Black abolitionism (in its various forms) in graduate programs. In its current iteration as an article, this piece of writing extends its efforts to all scholars who have committed themselves to doing decolonial and abolitionist work within spaces in the university, particularly in spaces where nonidentitarian and posthuman “turns” have worked to direct conversations within critical theory away from discussions of racial violence.

1. Frank Wilderson III, Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010). Wilderson defines the experience of the suffering of Black people as one of accumulation and fungibility and a part of the experience of Indigenous people—in the context of political economy—of one of genocide. These two experiences are antagonisms that are irreconcilable without the collapse of civil society as we know it. Black fungibility and Native genocide are unlike and therefore not reducible to the kinds of conditional conflicts that white people (settlers) experience through exploitation (i.e., of the wage worker) and the suffering that ensues.

2. I heard an audience member ask Rinaldo Walcott this question, after Walcott’s talk titled “Funk: A Black Note on the Human,” at Georgia State University in October 2015.

3. See Andrea Smith, “Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism,” GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies 16, nos. 1–2 (2010): 41–68. The field of queer theory, which advances a subjectless discourse through a “No Futures” ethos coined by Lee Edelman, mistakenly advocates this No Futures ethos as a universal posture that even Native studies should take up. Andrea Smith argues that Native peoples, particularly the Native child, are already queer subjects as they are always already targeted for extermination.

4. I use “misandry” (hatred of men) and “misanthropic” (distrust or deep skepticism about humankind or humanity) to illustrate how Sylvia Wynter and other Black scholars attend to the ways that the human—and investments in the human—and its revised forms or genres of the human as woman/feminist still reproduce violent exclusions that make the death of Black and Native people viable and inevitable. In other words, neither men nor women (as humans) can absorb Black females/males/children/LGBT and trans people into their collective folds. Both the hatred of “misandry” and the distrust and pessimism of “misanthropy” are appropriate methods to describe the inflection of the critique levied by Wynter and the other Black scholars examined in this article.

Wynter warns Black women in the United States and the Caribbean that they need not uncritically embrace womanism as a political position, which can effectively oppose the elisions, racism, and false universalism of white feminism. “Feminism” as well as “womanism” are bounded and exclusive terms that do not effectively throw the category of the human into continual flux.

6. See the critiques of the anticolonial tradition within Caribbean philosophy articulated by Shona Jackson in her book Creole Indigeneity (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012). Jackson argues that anticolonial Caribbean masculinist philosophy tends to argue from inside the logic of Western philosophy in order to counter it. For instance, in a valorization of the laborer as human and inheritor of the nation-state, Caribbean philosophy tends to reproduce the Hegelian telos of labor as a humanizing agent for the slave, which inadvertently makes the slave a subordinate human and effectively erases the ostensibly “nonlaboring” humanity of Indigenous peoples in the Anglophone Caribbean.

7. See the work of Black feminists such as Susana M. Morris, author of Close Kin and Distant Relatives: The Paradox of Respectability in Black Women's Literature (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), as well as womanist theologians who appropriate the phrase “hermeneutics of suspicion” as coined by Paul Ricoeur to describe the reading and interpretive practices of Black woman who are distrustful of traditional tropes about heteronormativity or conventional ways of thinking about what is natural and normal. Further, in Morris’s case, as well as within the tradition of Black women of faith and theologians, canonical and biblical texts are interpreted through a lens that acknowledges white supremacy and misogyny, and critically challenges racism and sexism (or kyriarchy in Morris’s case). Within Black feminist and womanist traditions, it is a position that can recognize the limitations of text and that refuses to accept the doctrine, theories, or message of an ideology wholesale.

8. I thank one of the reviewers, who reminded me that Native feminist thought’s engagement with continental theory, specifically the work of Deleuze and Guattari, can be likened more to “constellations” as it takes up Deleuzoguattarian thought rather than a single point that always departs from a place of refusal.


13. This is a colloquialism or form of vernacular often used by Blacks and People of Color to express that they disagree with something and more specifically reject an idea and will leave that to the people whom it concerns to deal with.
14. Simpson’s ethnographic work specifically focuses on the Kahnawake Mohawk who reside in a reservation in the territory is now referred to as southwest Quebec.


16. Ibid., 77.

17. Ibid., 78.

18. Ibid.


20. Ibid., 242.

21. Ibid., 243.

22. Ibid., 244.

23. Ibid., 244.


25. See Michelle V. Rowley, “The Idea of Ancestry: Of Feminist Genealogies and Many Other Things,” in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, 3rd ed., ed. Carole R. McCann and Syeung Kyung Kim (New York: Routledge, 2013), 810–81, where Rowley argues that transnational feminisms need to attend to how the white feminist wave as a metaphor and theory emerges, disciplines are thought, and more importantly how “its wins” are gained through the exploitation and suffering of women from the Global South. Rowley describes this work as attending to the “politics and conditions of emergence” of feminist metaphors and theories.


30. Whenever I have witnessed someone deploy this caveat/rejoinder, I have also observed that the tone in which the speaker delivers it is usually a whimsical, self-effacing timbre of “oops, this is embarrassing but let’s move on.” The cadence of his speech often becomes quickened and the statement is usually made as an aside, with no attempt to fully engage the violence embedded in this moment of white edification and ascendency.

31. I return to the work of Shona Jackson in *Creole Indigeneity* and her critique of the Caribbean anticolonial masculinist appropriation of G. W. F. Hegel—the master’s tools—which dehumanizes both Black and Indigenous peoples in the Caribbean. Further, I cite the work of (white) settler-colonial studies that appears in the first volume of the journal *Settler Colonial Studies*, where one finds several references to Michel Foucault’s force and influence within the fields of colonial and settler-colonial studies. For example, contributing scholars to the journal such as
Edward Cavanaugh and Scott Lauria Morgensen rely heavily on Foucauldian frames. Edward Cavanaugh’s review of new literature in the field of settler-colonial studies calls the use of Foucault familiar and expected. Remarking on Libby Porter’s book *Unlearning the Colonial Cultures of Planning*, Cavanaugh states, “Using a familiar mix of Foucauldian and postcolonial theory, Porter argues that the discourse and practice of planning has created a hierarchisation of space that traps indigenous subjectivities (and is hence antithetical to Indigenous sovereignty and autonomy).”

Edward Cavanaugh, “Review Essay: Discussing Settler Colonialism’s Spatial Cultures,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 162. Scott Lauria Morgensen’s groundbreaking work has consistently argued that “settler colonialism is exemplary of the processes of biopower theorized by Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault.” Scott Morgensen, “The Biopolitics of Settler Colonialism: Right Here, Right Now,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 52. The correctives and modes of critique in these cases always take the course of an internal or intra-European recursive feedback loop, which relies on its own logic or tautologies.

32. In addition to the examples from the authors I cite, I would also like to acknowledge the often unnoticed or noticed and perhaps resented methods that students, particularly women of color, use in the classroom to refuse the tacit acceptance of violence embedded within the tradition of white critical theory. For example, white male students in my graduate feminist theories class often perform a kind of exuberance and joy when the course finally gets to Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*. Conversely, many women of color in the class feel a sense of dread. Rather than explain this dread as a response to the difficulty and rigor of the text, I am apt to believe that on an affective level, the resistance to their work could stem from the way death stalks the work. Whether my resistant students know or understand it or not, I imagine that somewhere in the gut they might be wondering, “Why must I become attached to something that murders?” Further, many of my women and queer of color students astutely ask how this is useful. This question takes into consideration the tenor in which Deleuze wrote and hoped that people would hear and receive his work. In 1972, in a discussion with Foucault, Deleuze urged that theory is “always local and related to a limited field.” Theories are particular things that emerge from specific milieus and circumstances. Further, Deleuze argues that “a theory is like a box of tools. It has nothing to do with the signifier. It must be useful. It must function. And not for itself. If no one uses it, beginning with the theoretician himself (who ceases then to be a theoretician), the theory is worthless or the moment is inappropriate. We don’t revise a theory, but construct new ones; we have no choice but to make others.” Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, “Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze” (1972), http://libcom.org/library/intellectuals-power-a-conversation-between-michel-foucault-and-gilles-deleuze. This is rigorous and worthwhile work that is rarely performed. It often requires that one first ask the question, how is this relevant and helpful to me? Most of the time answering this question will require additional reading that includes biographies of the theorist as well as other kinds of supplemental reading.

34. Ibid., 51.
35. Ibid., 53.
42. Ibid.
43. Even if Deleuze and Guattari’s line is molecular and perhaps not segregating, separating, or dividing, it is bringing things together into categories, orders, taxonomies of chaos, and order as it sutures and gathers matter.
47. In this article, I am largely concerned with the moments in which Black and Native studies are in dialogue with one another. There is no attempt to force more specifically; I am interested in an ethical dialogue that does not reproduce the shortfalls of the coalition work of the past, which relies on the construction of false analogies between Black and Native ontological positions, political identities, or political projects. While short of calling this intellectual work “coalitional politics,” it does gesture toward a path forward and an investment in a practice called “critical ethnic studies.”
48. I am continually surprised by the assumption that Black Lives Matter (BLM) is invested in a renewed form of identity politics. This misrecognition was particularly striking for me when pressure was being exerted on BLM to endorse a presidential candidate. Electoral politics and its performance of partisanship and “left/right” poles are fundamentally staged as a rivalry between bounded identities defending their respective ideologies. BLM was being forced to decide between white American identities like feminists (the Hillary Clinton camp) or socialists (the Bernie Sanders camp). In this instance, Black Lives Matter refused to endorse or subscribe to the identities that members of the white left—often professed critics of identity politics—tried to impose on them.