American Anatomies

Theorizing Race and Gender

Robyn Wiegman

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Taking Refuge: An Introduction

There is really nothing more to say—except why. But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how. —Toni Morrison, The Bluest Eye

In her approach to the story of Pecola Breedlove in The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison’s narrator expresses the kind of apprehension about our ability to explain the social violences of race and gender that haunts this book. For while American Anatomies hopes to provide a compelling argument about the lengthy and often contradictory collusion of race and gender hierarchies in U.S. culture, it likewise invests in how as a response to the difficulties of handling why. Where such difficulties are for the narrator primarily emotional, my hesitations take place on methodological grounds as well. As critical debates about disciplinary study in the past twenty years have stressed, the practices we engage to define and explain social complexities condition whatever conclusions we might reach. Why therefore emerges as the consequence of our narratives of how, and these narratives are neither innocent nor politically disinterested. To take refuge, as this book does, in the contingencies of how is to register these broader anxieties about knowledge, truth, and politics that are currently transforming our disciplinary understandings of and approaches to cultural critique. American Anatomies is thus a book marked by limits: not only the history, politics, and disciplinary limits of race and gender as conceptual categories, but more specifically, the limits of its own theoretical claims to known.

Let me begin, then, with what this study will not do. It will not offer an analysis of the critical currency now accorded to race and gender without reading that analysis as both resistance to and complicity with late-twentieth-century formations of white supremacy and patriarchy. Instead, American Anatomies approaches its critical obsessions as both cultural and disciplinary ones, and while it hopes to contribute to an antiracist and antiseexist critique, I maintain a deep skepticism toward the political and theo
retical assumptions that seem most to motivate me. The political necessity of such skepticism is one of the primary arguments of this book, and it takes place alongside two interrelated sets of concerns: contemporary critical debates about multiculturalism and "difference" on one hand, and the broader reconfiguration of white racial supremacy since segregation's institutional demise on the other. To be part of an intellectual conversation that maps these historical changes is for me, as for others, to become a symptom of the very reconfigurations of which I speak, for in the integrationist terrain of contemporary culture, the post-racist possibility of America is too often figured by the centrality of Anglo-Americans as the heroic agents of racism's decline. This is not to forward an essentialist argument about who can or should speak, but it is to define the cultural contours and controversies that condition as well as limit my own speech.

The shuttling that I have just performed between contemporary critical and U.S. cultural contexts is characteristic of this study's strategy of investigation. It demonstrates most of all my concern with the epistemological frameworks that simultaneously enable and limit how and what we can know—not simply in the present, but in our construction of the past as well. In response to this concern, American Anatomies looks to various aspects of Western knowledge regimes since the late Renaissance as they have contributed to the articulation of race and gender differences. In the transformation from natural history to comparative anatomy, in particular, I trace the way social hierarchies have been rationalized, in both senses of the word, by locating in the body an epistemological framework for justifying inequality. At the same time, I challenge contemporary cultural criticism's continued investment in the epistemology of the body, especially as it comes to be figured in the faulty and politically disabling analogy between "whites" and "women." By pursuing the history of this analogy and its consequences for both nineteenth- and twentieth-century social struggle, I stage what I call a feminist politics of "disloyalty": a disloyalty, that is, to the modern methodologies that often allow us to claim perspectives of political noncomplicity. In the difficulty of extracting our critical gaze from the very relations we hope to expose, why is impossible to handle. But in the how of race and gender, there is still a great deal to be told.

In using the notion of the critical gaze trapped in the frameworks of its own seeing, I have invoked a central concept that underlies this study: visibility. Such an invocation points to the difficulties of methodological perspective and political praxis that I mention above, foregrounding the relations of "sight" and "observation" that adhere to "theory" (the Greek 

\textit{theoria} meaning literally "a looking at") and to the investigative terrain of modern disciplinarity itself. In the equation between theoretical investigation and sight, that sense through which observation as a definitive mode of analysis is both concretized and idealized, we encounter an important cornerstone of modernity, indeed one of its most anxious and contentious epistemological productions. But while vision is the privileged sense of modernity, its ability to establish and guarantee both meaning and truth is repeatedly undermined not only by modernity's own philosophical and representational preoccupations but also by its relationship to technological production and reproduction. Twentieth-century critics have been especially, one could even say obsessively, concerned with vision and visuality precisely because of these insecurities and contradictions, and because contemporary culture is itself definitively premised on visual knowledge regimes. Even a brief catalogue of current titles demonstrates this overarching concern: \textit{Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision, Vision and Textuality, Vision and Visuality, Ways of Seeing, Visible Fictions, Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible," Stolen Glances, Signatures of the Visible, Vision and Difference, and Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision}.

But the relationship between the critic's interest in and skepticism of the primacy of vision and visuality on the one hand and the ascendancy of the visual as contemporary culture's most overwhelming characteristic on the other needs rather careful explication, especially because the popular realm of the visual functions in the twentieth century as a newly configured public sphere. What does it mean, for instance, that the visual apparatuses of photography, film, television, and video (as well as the many offshoots of computer technologies) serve as our primary public domain, our main shared context for the contestations of contemporary cultural politics? And perhaps more important, what does it mean that within these technologies, the body is figured as the primary locus of representation, mediation, and/or interpretation? These questions form the backdrop to the investigations undertaken in this study, where the emphasis on the visual shifts among considerations of epistemologies of vision, the representational ideologies of visual technologies, and the appropriations and significations of the body as the determinative site of visible differences.

Such shifts—from vision to the visual to the visible—point to the various cultural modalities and historical contexts through which issues of race and gender (and their convergences and divergences) will be read. These modalities, understood as \textit{economies} of visibility, are clearly part of the development and deployment of the economic arrangements of capitalism,
but this study hopes to approach the concept of visual economies in more expansive terms. In Western racial discourse, for instance, the production of the African subject as non- or subhuman, as an object and property, arises not simply through the economic necessities of the slave trade, but according to the epistemologies attending vision and their logics of corporeal inscription: making the African "black" reduces the racial meanings attached to flesh to a binary structure of vision, and it is this structure that precedes the disciplinary emergence of the humanities and its methodological pursuits of knowledge and truth. This does not mean that imperialism was not well served by the negative equation between "blackness" and an ontological difference, but that the framework for such an equation must be approached in terms broader and more historically and culturally comprehensive than the slave trade and its necessity for ideological and economic justification. By defining the visual as both an economic system and a representational economy, and by refusing to explain their relationship as a simple correspondence, this study mediates between the complexities of Western racial formations and the specificities of their U.S. figurations.

In addition, I hope to set forth the variety of cultural contexts in which specific racial categories are rendered "real" (and therefore justifiable) through the naturalizing discourses of the body, those discourses that locate difference in a pre-cultural realm where corporeal significations supposedly speak a truth that the body inherently means. But the significations attached to the body—the culturally specific, fetishist—attention to skin, hair, breast, brain size, and skull shape, for instance—are not the predetermined loci of difference, but a deeply problematical and asymmetrical production. To imagine ourselves outside such regimes of corporeal visibility is not only at some level unthinkable but also intolerable to our own conceptions of who and what we "are." In this sense, the economies of visibility that produce the network of meanings attached to bodies (their specific race, gender, ethnic, sexual, and national demarcations) are more than political and hierarchical practices: they are indelibly subjective ones as well. It is precisely this that has given both power and substance to identity politics in the last two hundred years.

More recently, identity politics have come under attack from within some of their most politically effective social formations and resistant organizations. While linked to the postmodern critique of the humanist subject, but in no way reducible to it, the conversation about the limits and possibilities of identity politics moves in a variety of directions. In one, critics consider the ability of contemporary market relations to harness identity categories as a means of expanding capitalism, thereby undermining the utopian dream of identity politics by producing cultural representation where civil rights and black nationalist liberation struggle had pursued and envisioned political representation. In the Bush-Reagan era in particular, we witnessed a deft appropriation of the liberationist demand to make "visible" the subjectivities and histories of the cultural margins, as consumer culture harnessed ethnic, racial, and national specificities for its expanding global purposes. While the visibility garnered here replaces, at the popular level, historical invisibility and the visual apartheid of segregation, this subsequent integrationist representational regime does not demonstrate an advance toward democracy's "inherent" equalities. Rather, this new visibility in popular culture reveals the profound transformations that underlie both the form and structure of contemporary white supremacy. The demise of segregation as a national policy, in short, has entailed a heightened propulsion to diversified consumption. As Stuart Hall laments, "there is always a price of incorporation to be paid when the cutting edge of difference and transgression is blunted into spectacularization" ("What Is This 'Black'...?" 24).

For various cultural critics, the appropriation of identity politics by contemporary capitalism does not mean that identity politics were somehow wrong all along, but that the structure of "the cultural dominant," to quote Hall again, has not remained, even in the past two decades, the same. Its changes are clearly due to the effect and success of identity politics and the social movements that coalesced in the second half of the twentieth century within such an organizing framework. At the same time, the contemporary deployment of the cultural dominant demands a rethinking of the force and function of identity as the primary framework for articulating disempowerment and inequality today, since we now live in a cultural moment of increasingly adept resistance to the insurgencies of identity-based political organization. For this reason, cultural workers of all kinds have been enmeshed in the critical move to deessentialize identity. Such a project involves critiquing the way counter-identity formations may contribute to the naturalization of difference that accompanies modernity by making inherent those properties that signify culturally as markers of difference and subordination. With this work, critics have hoped to intervene in the decontextualized and specular incorporation and absorption of identities that now characterize the popular visual realm. If identities are not metaphysical, timeless categories of being; if they point not to ontologies but to historical specificities and contingencies; if their mappings of bodies and
subjectivities are forms of and not simply resistances to practices of domination — then a politics based on identity must carefully negotiate the risk of reinscribing the logic of the system it hopes to defeat.

This task is, of course, not simple, and it is perhaps a mark of our own tie to oppositional thinking that the turn toward anti-essentialism has been sought by some as a newly found political guarantee. But the work of contemporary political engagement does not end with the critique of identity’s relationship to modernity and its reliance on essentialist, humanist epistemologies — even though it is important, as this study hopes to demonstrate, to begin precisely there. By doing this, we can explore the asymmetry of corporeal identity that underlies the category of citizenship within modernity. Modern citizenship functions as a disproportionate system in which the universalism ascribed to certain bodies (white, male, propertied) is protected and subtended by the infinite particularity assigned to others (black, female, unpropertied). That this system is itself contingent on certain visual relations, where only those particularities associated with the Other are, quite literally, seen, demonstrates the political importance of unveiling, in a variety of registers. Western economies of visibility. Therefore, while cultural workers have critiqued the oversaturated, visual signification attending those bodies particularized by modernity, the critical gaze has also been increasingly attentive to the unmarked and invisible, but no less specific, corporeality that hides beneath the abstraction of universality? These two gestures — challenging the visual scripting of identities while imposing a visibility on the explicit hierarchies of entitlement cloak by the universal — complicate the critical terrain in which identity as a politics might move. For very different reasons, then, identity proves to be dangerous to minority and majority alike.

But these are not the only dangers. The starkly oppositional framework of minority and majority in which I have just situated identity proves problematical, indeed deeply inaccurate, as a way of articulating the complexities of social and subjective positioning. The terms are nothing if not ironic: the very “majority” contained within the category (presumably white, heterosexual, wealthy men) is clearly, overwhelmingly, a global minority, and the minority against which they wield their power is itself the global majority. This irony is also an incongruity, however, since the oppositional framework for articulating power depends on a homogenization of identities into singular figurations, the “straight-white-monied man” becoming the composite, fixed figure for defining social hierarchies. While one does not want to abandon the ability to talk about the cultural hege-

mony of this category, the logic of “majority” reaches an impasse when the social subject cannot be aligned, without contradiction, on one side or the other of the minority-majority divide. Where, for instance, is the straight, black, working-class man or the gay, white, monied woman? As Hall writes, “We are always in negotiation, not with a single set of oppositions that place us always in the same relation to others, but with a series of different positonalities. Each has for us its p-pint of profound subjective identification. And that is the most difficult thing . . . [that these identities] are often dislocating in relation to one another” (“What Is This ‘Black’ . . .?” 31).

The problem of registering and attending to multiplicity, what we might understand as the central issue in contemporary cultural politics, requires new approaches and different kinds of critical thinking about the relationship among power, identity, and social subjectivity. This is especially true as the visual terrain of popular culture increasingly commodifies identities according to the logic of corporeal inscription. But how to do this? How do we encounter a cultural rhetoric about identity that has remained stranded (in political organization as well as the popular imagination) within singular trajectories of social being, trajectories that, while grounding twentieth-century social movements, have also inscribed a variety of new and damaging exclusions? Feminism, as is now well remarked, has repeatedly elided “women” with whiteness, and the civil rights and Black Power movements (as well as contemporary nationalist discourses) operate(d) on often quite explicit masculinizations of the category of race. Contemporary cultural rhetoric attending such exclusions simply wed these identity categories together, writing “blacks and women” as the inclusivist gesture of post-1960s politics. Lost in the systematic reduction is the black woman, whose historical and theoretical presence has quite rightly been pursued in recent years as a way of rethinking the inherently compounded nature of social identity."

But paying attention to the categorical elision of “blacks and women” does not necessarily pose an adequate explanation of the historical and social productions underlying the phrase. It is simply not enough to locate the exclusions of “blacks and women” in the rhetoric and practices of twentieth-century social movements, as if there were literally no feminist or black liberationist discussions of the specificities of black women’s disempowerment and oppression in either this century or the last one. To do so reproduces a monolithic notion of both feminist and African-Americanist political struggle, undercutting the participation and leadership by black women for the past two hundred years. In the process, the notion is tacitly
upheld that feminism has always been white—that black female organizations were not themselves feminist political enterprises. The inability of the phrase "blacks and women" to signify culturally as "black women" must therefore be figured in ways that both historicize and exceed the rhetoric and representation of political struggle in the late twentieth century.

In recognizing that the exclusiveness of "blacks and women" is related but not reducible to twentieth-century social movements organized on their behalf, this study approaches the rhetorical figure of post-1960s inclusion as the symptomatic site for a number of cultural excavations of the specificities of race and gender. Most simply, I ask: What constitutes the historical convergence of "blacks and women," not just as an affirmative action couple in the contemporary era, but within the broader philosophical and cultural discourses of modernity? Precisely how have "blacks and women" become wedded in the cultural symbolic as our primary figure for the complicated relationships of race and gender? What underwrites the sense that each posits something which the other cannot possibly be? What relations of analogy and differentiation subend this metaphoric "wedding"? And what critical frameworks might begin to undo the standoff of these categories, undermining the ease with which "blacks and women" can be posed as exclusive, almost oppositional singularities? In short, how do we articulate the historical and contextual productions of "blacks and women"? These questions and their circulation within issues of public culture, modernity, visibility, identity, and political movement serve as the motivating foci for this inquiry, and it is toward their unraveling that the conversations about race and gender in this text, collectively and often elliptically, move.

How

Part 1 of this book, "Economies of Visibility," concerns the epistemology of the visual that underlies both race and gender: that process of corporeal inscription that defines each as a binary, wholly visible affair. In particular, I interrogate the status of the body as the primary readable "text" and question the formations of identities and individualization inaugurated there. Central to this analysis is a deterritorialization of the binary figuration of black/white that shapes not only the very concept of race in the United States but my discourse here as well. Such a deterritorialization entails examining the history, function, and structure of visibility that underwrites the binary formation, producing the epistemology of perception that simultaneously equates the racial body with a perceptible blackness, while de-
sify the contexts in which we claim and explore their meanings. I want, in short, to post their epistemological, corporeal, and visual modernity.

Rather than beginning this study in the midst of the contemporary condensation of race and gender into "blacks and women," however, chapter 1, "Visual Modernity," focuses on the emergence of race as a corporeal inscription by reading it in the context of the economy of the visual that attends modernity. Here, the skepticism in various trajectories of postmodern critical theory toward the primacy of vision in Western culture will be useful to trace the historical contours of race's discursive production and its increasing imbrication with sexual difference. In particular, Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*, which focuses on the transformations underwriting Western organizations of knowledge since the Renaissance, offers a preliminary framework for reading the economies of visibility that have crafted, in a variety of contradictory ways, the historical production of race. Through the Foucauldian framework, "race" emerges as the effect of specific organizations of Western knowledge in which scientific and aesthetic approaches to vision, as well as philosophical delineations of (dis)embodiment, assume prominent roles. By disentangling race from the security of a natural reading of skin and placing it squarely within the broad contours of Western knowledge regimes, this chapter demonstrates how the powerful materiality of race is structured by our historically shifting understandings of perception and cultural representation, from the first appearance of the English on African shores to the logic of observation that rationalizes the human sciences and spawns the anatomical and political analogies between race and gender to which Americans are the most immediate heirs.

To begin in this way is to foreground a specific narrative mapping of race and gender, one that purposely does not locate the why of social inequality in the primacy of sexual difference as the originary form on which other modes of hierarchy, including race, have been founded. As a counter to various feminist assumptions and methodological practices in which race becomes the additive to gender, this study reads figurations of sexual difference as they emerge within scientific debates about race in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In chapter 2, "Sexing the Difference," gender is linked to modernity and the disciplinary shifts it encodes at the same time that the contemporary collaboration "blacks and women" is read as taking shape within the legacy and epistemology established by scientific discourses of racial measurement. Contrary to feminist assumptions about the transhistorical primacy of gender, race within *this* discursive nexus founds the paradigmatic production of gender, thus generating a series of analogies and differentiations between Africans and women that characterize feminist abolitionist discourse in that century and the race/gender axis of difference in the twentieth century as well.

To argue that the relationship between race and gender is not transhistorically the same—is not a "natural" reading of bodies in their obvious and unchanging visual differentiations—demonstrates that differences are contextual and contingent productions. This means that the nexus of race and gender that emerges from the rise of race science and its obsession with delineations of "being" cannot become paradigmatic for other productions of difference or even for other configurations of race and gender. Feminism's political need for an explanatory mechanism that can read the complexities and contradictions of social hierarchy cannot be satisfied in such a singular or overarching way. Indeed, even the differences we think we know are bound to a variety of often conflicting discursive and institutional contexts for their construction. A compelling example of this, and one that I explore in the context of sexing racial differences, can be found in early African-American writing where sexual difference actually functions as a rhetorical means for rescuing the slave from the prisonhouse of epidermal inferiority. In the conflict between scientific and popular constructions of the African-(American) as a species beneath "man" and the political struggle for enfranchisement and human status, the claim to sexual difference—to be a "man" or "woman"—works to define and invoke a social subjectivity (and hence psychic inferiority) previously denied the slave. Abolitionist discourse, feminist and nonfeminist, routinely stressed the gendered aspects of enslavement, marking a similarity or sameness among all social subjects that strategically placed the slave on the side of humanity. The slave's rhetorical claim to enfranchisement can thus be read as hinging, in part, on sexual difference.

The implications for contemporary feminist theory of this kind of formation of race and gender are numerous, and it is one of the tasks of this study to forge a broad reconsideration of such terrain. What does it mean that for African-American female and male slaves the possibilities of escaping the category of the inhuman took shape under a bizarrely liberating figuration of gendered subjectivity—that to be female or to be male provided a rhetorical possibility for entering the determinations of modern social subjectivity? For a feminism schooled in the assumption that sexual differences are the foundation of women's disempowerment and oppression, the challenge of this possibility is far reaching. After all, the Anglophobic feminist
tradition often traces its contemporary identity to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, where the argument for liberation is articulated in the context of the impossible strictures of femininity that attend modern political theory and social organization. While one does not want to undermine the necessity of that critique, it is no small irony how significant the category of gender Wollstonecraft already occupied could be. This is not to say that gender was solely a liberating category for the African-American woman, as the asymmetry of patriarchal gender relations clearly worked to encode specific kinds of abuse and violence toward the female slave whose body became the commodified technology of the slave economy's reproduction. But to move from a perceived and legalized inhumanity—a chattel—to those categories of human identity defined by gender is not in this context a simple or singular defeat.

And what of the black male? This is the question that guides the transition into part 2 of this book, "The Ends of 'Man,'" where my disloyalty to one of second-wave feminism's central tenets takes central stage. Here I provide an extended reading of the contradictions that attend the black male's social positioning and, with it, the limitations of feminist theory's conception of the masculine (and of patriarchy) as well. Such an approach shifts the methodological framework of feminist research by demonstrating that gender works to adjudicate the relations of domination and subordination not just between men and women, but among men themselves. Chapter 3, "The Anatomy of Lynching," explores the contradiction that resides within all patriarchal relations: that empowerment based on maleness is not automatically conferred but can be, and frequently is, quite violently deferred. In the case of the black male, who occupies an empowered "masculine" and disempowered "racial" positioning, this deferral has often taken the form of explicit feminizations in the disciplinary activity of castration that has accompanied lynching. By looking more closely at this terrain of violence and desire, where white men repeatedly touch and discuss the penis they so determinedly destroy, I approach a variety of theoretical impasses now attending feminist thought. For in reading multiplicity and heterogeneity at the reportedly deessentialized (but always female) body and finding unity and homogeneity at the (un)theorized (but always male) body, feminist theory has both guaranteed the primacy of gender and discussed its complexities in very narrow terms.

By approaching gendered subjectivity as a complicated, even paradoxical project for the African-American who is negotiating the various racist representational and institutional regimes of white supremacy, and by enter-

taining what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men* has compellingly shown—that feminism can speak to and learn from examinations of relationships among men—the middle part of this book moves to the question of the masculine in order to reconfigure feminism's political interventions into and theorizations of race and gender difference. For some readers, any focus away from the feminine will be read as a negation of current investigations of women. Nevertheless, I want to pay attention to the way the discourse of sexual difference defines, constructs, enforces, and negotiates hierarchies within the masculine, that locus most often left unattended by feminist interrogation. How else, for instance, might we read the two most prominent and contradictory images attending the African-American male unless we situate these within the paradoxes of race and gender: the feminized, bumbling black "coon" on the one hand (Sambo, Tambo, Uncle Remus, and Jim Crow) and the hypermasculinized black male rapist on the other (Willie Horton, Bigger Thomas, and Gus from *Birth of a Nation*)?

That these images emerge in concert with a burgeoning consumer culture in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries demonstrates the link between the cultural rhetoric of the black male and the oversaturation of the visual that increasingly comes to dominate the popular realm; but the shift to the black male as rapist as the narrative around which the practice of lynching becomes racialized at the end of the nineteenth century points as well toward a reinvigoration of the disciplinary structures of white supremacy. Here lynching must be viewed in its performative, specular dimension, as a disciplinary activity that communalizes white power while territorializing the black body and its movement through social space. Where Foucault makes a distinction between the spectacle of public torture and execution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the strategies of surveillance that increasingly accompany the production of subjects in the nineteenth, lynching proves to be an interesting link between the two. Because the terror of the white lynch mob arises from both its function as a panoptic mode of surveillance and its materialization of violence in public displays of torture and castration, the black subject is disciplined in two powerful ways: by the threat of always being seen and by the specular scene.

We might understand the panoptic and corporeal violence of lynching and castration as a disciplinary practice linked historically to the political and economic reorganizations that accompanied Reconstruction, when the antebellum figure of the male slave as docile, passive Uncle Tom failed to subdue the anxieties posed by the new conditions attending Emancipation. The legal enfranchisement of the black male slave made more urgent the
prevailing threat to white masculine supremacy always underling images of African-American males: their ability to enter the cultural symbolic as men, with all the rights and privileges that their new status as bearers of a "black" patrhythmic might grant. No longer tied to a slave economy that alternatively wrote them as the feminine or the savage inhuman, the black male emerged in popular discourses during Reconstruction as the mythic embodiment of phallic (and hence masculine) potentiality as the black rapist. This representational narrative, which cast the white man as the defender of white female sexuality, translated the economic crisis wrought by the transformation from slavery to freedom into sexual and gendered terms. By offering the dominant culture a very powerful means through which not only black men but the entire black population could be disciplined as innately—if no longer legally—inferior, the myth of the black man as rapist became, as Richard Wright would later depict, that "death before death came" (Native Son 228).

It is significant that this death was often wrought through violences tied to the discursive delineations of sexual difference, where the phallic lack characteristic of the feminine was quite literally imposed onto the black male through the frequent accompaniment of castration with lynching. Such attempts to deny the black male the primary sign of power in patriarchal culture demonstrate the fact that the black male is precisely not a woman. If his lack must be corporeally achieved, his threat to white masculine power arises from the frightening possibility of a masculine sameness and not simply from a fear of racial difference. This potential masculine sameness governs the black male's contradictory position in the cultural symbolic and underlies the various representational attempts to align him with the feminine. As Richard Dyer writes, "the treatment of black men . . . constantly puts them in 'feminine' positions, that is, places them structurally . . . in the same positions as women typically occupy" (Heavenly Bodies 116–117). To enforce passivity where the possibility of masculine activity resides "permits the fantasy of power over them to be exercised . . . justifying[] their subordination ideologically" and averting as well the possibilities of change (116). In aligning representations of black men with the constructed position of women, dominant discourses routinely neutralized black male images, exchanging potential claims for patriarchal inclusion for a structurally passive or literally castrated realm of sexual objectification and denigration.

Of course, there are important distinctions between castration and symbolic emasculation, regardless of the extent to which the threat underlying each is a product of the tension between patriarchy and white racial supremacy. And yet, it was precisely the elision between material and symbolic feminization that underwrote a great deal of Black Power rhetoric in the 1960s and 1970s, begetting the turn in popular culture toward images of a powerfully masculine black male. While the Superfly and Shaft figures of the 1970s are hardly without their own linkage to stereotypes and reinvigorated racisms, their successors in the popular imagination—the black male as the integral double in male bonding narratives—proves a crucial ideological shift in the broader transformation from segregation to integration. Where the post–Civil War period hypermasculinizes the black male through the image of the overly endowed black male rapist, the post–World War II Reconstruction period of the twentieth century offers a struggling, but soon-to-be (if not already) integrated masculine figure. This shift occupies my attention in chapter 4, "Bonds of (In)Difference," since the 1980s witnessed an unprecedented proliferation of interracial "buddy" movies. These films simultaneously assent to and resist Black Power analogies between masculinity and equality by defying the legacy of emasculation that attends black male representation, while recasting white masculinity as a disempowered and embattled marginality itself. In an ironic twist, incorporation of the black male into the reign of the visual that characterizes commodity culture becomes a mechanism through which the history of racism among men is revised and denied. The very demands for representational inclusion and for a repertoire of images that resist the stereotypes of enslavement become, in the post–civil rights era, what Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien wryly call "positive images with a neo-conservative vengeance" ("Introduction" 2).17

By foregrounding popular culture's appropriation of the political demands and rhetorics of identity politics, chapter 4 establishes the historical context for rethinking the strategies of critical reading adopted in the postsegregation era by Americanists and feminists alike. In part 3, "White Mythologies," I explore the broad scope of the problem of paradigms that attends contemporary critical discussion of race and gender. These chapters examine two specific reiterations of the nostalgia for an interracial sameness that anchors itself in gender and thereby threatens to reiterate the popular contemporary formula of "blacks and women." Chapter 5, "Canonical Architecture," reads Leslie Fiedler's 1960 interpretation of interracial configurations in the context of contemporary bonding narratives before turning to recent rereadings of Fiedler and the male bond from an emergent gay studies perspective. Where Fiedler's earliest formulation of an interracial
male bonding tradition in American literature linked the "negro and the homosexual"—figuring homosexuality in the process as arrested psychosexual development—contemporary critics such as Robert K. Martin and Joseph A. Boone work to retrieve the antihomophobic and antipatriarchal possibilities that attend the mythic scene of bonded men. But like feminism's own illusory sisterhood, this retrieval, no matter how bound up with utopian investments, has dire consequences for the minoritized male, whose position in the integrationist narrative of contemporary criticism inadvertently stages a reinvigoration of the racial supremacy of the white male. At the same time, the domain of literary production is overwritten by an equation between "America" as a symbolic founding and paternal rights and practices themselves.

That these effects can be read in part as an inversion of one of feminism's most repeated rhetorics, sisterhood, demonstrates how feminism has itself been tied to an integrationist ethos which likewise carries, as in the popular realm, its own narrative of historical transcendence. The contemporary turn toward the specificities of monolithic Woman—her race, class, sexual, and national demarcations—has been assumed, after all, to post feminism's historical complicities, but it is precisely in this gesture toward the methodological fix that feminism misrecognizes the complex anxieties that might in political terms more generatively motivate it. By challenging this continued faith in methodology as a political guarantee, chapter 6, "The Alchemy of Disloyalty," undoes the logic of this study's own analytical trajectory, refusing all gestures of categorical retrieval by staging a host of theoretical disloyalties. In this context, the "black woman," so elided by the categorical logics of "blacks and women," does not emerge as my study's ultimate destination, as such an arrival would threaten to reinsert in the corporeal identities that adhere to modern disciplinarity. Instead, the final chapter both meditates on the way feminists currently shape the history of feminism within (or against) the contestatory relations of race and gender and sketches in broader detail the implications of the conversation about methodology and politics that this study has engaged.

Taken together, the final two chapters move the book toward a reflection on contemporary critical theory as both a political vision and a utopic hope in which the desire to transcend the contingencies of historical perspective are alternatively confronted and disavowed. For those loyal to feminism's historical dream of transcendence—of the possibility of a political discourse wholly unanchored from complicity with dominant epistemologies, visualities, or social relations—such a reading of culture will no doubt lack the ingredients so often necessary to the continuation of political belief. But by drawing on a broad array of cultural discourses through which to pursue a discussion of the categorical constructs of race and gender, this study simultaneously ponders the limits of our current thinking about difference on one hand, while questioning the assumptions that captivate our intellectual inquiry and wed us to methodology as our political guarantee on the other. This means that while I demonstrate how categorical unities and monoliths are themselves part of a particular history in which vision, visuality, and modernity play crucial roles, I cannot assume that my engagement in an antiracist feminist critique does not also betray my greatest sincerities. Such a betrayal, it seems to me, is both the risk and the inevitability of existing within the anxieties of discipline that simultaneously shape and deform our cultural critique.
plicities of its quest for the paradigmatic guarantee means reading it as simultaneously driven and constituted by its own historically shifting inabilities. Every destination, in other words, becomes inadequate with our arrival, just as the historic shape of our arrival transforms the destination into an emblem of our own contingent historicity. From this perspective, the contemporary emphasis on analyzing “women” across a range of social positions cannot be assumed to be, in political terms, a final response to the way the category of woman has itself functioned as a kind of discipline, within feminism and outside it. While its necessity may be self-evident in the contexts of power and privilege that currently configure hierarchical relations among women, the categorical extension—the move from gender to race, sexuality, class, nationality, age, and so on as the means for apprehending differences among women—finally relies on a more detailed taxonomy as the methodological guarantee for interpreting the multiple, overdetermined, and contradictory practices of social hierarchy.

In a similar way, the analytic framework of race and gender cannot fulfill the political desire to render the historical force of the violence and injustices of the social relations in whose name these categories are asked to speak, and this is true not only in Stowe’s case, but in my own. To recognize this failure is not to discount the political project that I have staged here, nor is it to abandon feminism to the impoverished contours of contemporary politics or to disregard the urgency of the conversation about “difference” and disempowerment altogether. It is to posit, indeed to emphasize, that feminism’s political difference—which is, one wants to hope, a crucial difference after all—lies not in its object of study or its categorical recreations, not in its heroic self-fashioning or in its affirmative noncomplicities, most certainly not in its utopic claims to transcendent, truth-saying methodologies. Feminism’s political difference lies instead in plotting within and against its shifting, historically wrought disloyalties. To take refuge here where answers are always most incomplete—in the how that can never reveal the why it methodologically seeks—means, in the context of this study, suspending any gesture of arrival at its end.

Notes

Taking Refuge: An Introduction

1. Various thinkers working in the poststructuralist tradition have explored how the disciplinary structure of knowledge is itself one of the contingencies that condition any claim to know. In Discipline and Punish, Michel Foucault discusses disciplinarity in two registers: as a host of increasingly specified practices that discipline the body in the school, the military, and the penitentiary, and as the disciplines of knowledge known as the human and social sciences. For Foucault, these registers are linked in the broad transformation of the Western episteme from the classical age (the Enlightenment) to the modern, and pivot around the rise of the human being as the new object of “his” own investigation. In chapter 1, I will discuss these epistemic divisions more fully, especially in the context of understanding their relationship to race and gender as corporate technologies. Also see Foucault’s The Order of Things and The Birth of the Clinic. For a critical assessment of the implications of Foucault’s conversation about disciplinarity on contemporary organizations of knowledge, see Jonathan Arac, ed., After Foucault.

It should be noted that Foucault’s critiques of methodology and the disciplinary organization of both knowledge and the social body are not without their own methodological investments, assumptions, and practices. For critical discussion of Foucault’s own methodological entrapment, see Nancy Fraser, Unruly Practices 17–66; Jurgen Habermas, “Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present,” “The Critique of Reason as an Unmasking of the Human Sciences,” and “Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power”; Rosemary Hennessy, Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse 38–46; David Couzens Hoy, “Introduction” and “Power, Repression, Progress”; Richard Rorty, “Foucault and Epistemology”; G. S. Rousseau, “Foucault and Enlightenment”; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”; Charles Taylor, “Foucault on Freedom and Truth”; and Michael Walzer, “The Politics of Michel Foucault.” For a broader introduction to the way poststructuralist theorists have affected questions of disciplinary study, see Robert Young’s White Mythologies.

2. In this and other ways, American Anatomies evinces an affinity to the critical
project currently being outlined as “cultural studies.” Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler describe this emerging field of transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary study as engaging the “new politics of difference”—of gender, race, class, nationality, sexuality—in ways once anathema to the traditional disciplines. Hence, critical focus turns to gender and sexuality, nationhood and national identity, colonialism and postcolonialism, race and ethnicity, popular culture and its audiences, science and ecology, identity politics, pedagogy, the politics of aesthetics, cultural institutions, the politics of disciplinarity, discourse and textuality, history, and global culture in a postmodern age. (“Cultural Studies” 1)

While I am unconvinced that understanding the postmodern as an “age” is ultimately useful, the refusal of cultural studies practitioners to codify the field through traditional routes—by fashioning a distinct methodology and a discrete object (or objects) of analysis—might be read as distinctively postmodern. For conversations about cultural studies and its challenge to traditional disciplinarity, see Patrick Brantlinger, *Crusoe’s Footprints*; Simon During, ed., *The Cultural Studies Reader*; Lawrence Grossberg, “History, Politics and Postmodernism”; Stuart Hall, “Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies” and “The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis of the Humanities”; Angela McRobbie, “New Times in Cultural Studies”; Cary Nelson, “Always Already Cultural Studies”; Graeme Turner, *British Cultural Studies*; and Raymond Williams, “The Future of Cultural Studies.” On feminism’s relationship to this field, see Sarah Franklin, Celia Lury, and Jackie Stacey, eds., *Off-Centre*. 3.

In the objectivist and rationalist modes of knowing that have attended modernity, investigative method has often served to guarantee the equation between knowledge and truth, and it is this reliance on methodological objectivity that has linked the panoply of investigative sites that form the academic disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, from literary study, history, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and biology to the “hard” or natural sciences such as physics and mathematics. In such a linkage, the fundamental crisis underlying modernity—the end of both political and theological sovereignty—can be brought under control, so the hope goes, by a new system. Indeed, the very quest for order and subjective mastery that accompanies the emergence of “man” as the-being-who-knows and the-being-to-be-known demonstrates the anxiety that the disciplinary practices of modernity hope to allay. But we would be wrong to assume, as contemporary critics often do, that in the context of such anxiety, modernity is the final or transcendent achievement of an epistemological or methodological security. Instead, it is more useful to understand modernity as the desire to replace epistemological anxieties wrought by vast changes in Western cultures (political, economic, aesthetic, and technological) with systems and methods invested with the power to guarantee both truth and transcendence. Such an understanding allows us to approach contemporary de-

bates within and about disciplinary knowledges, often culled under the broad heading “the postmodern,” as part of modernity’s own disciplinary anxieties.

In saying this, I am understanding the relationship between the modern and the postmodern not in terms of historical lineage, aesthetic formulations, or economic systems, but as a tension and struggle within Western productions of knowledge that have in fact marked modernity since its unofficial rumbles in the late Renaissance. But postmodernity, as Jean-François Lyotard says in *The Postmodern Condition*, is not the sequential successor to modernity “is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant” (79). Postmodernity, then, as Diane Elam glosses, “is a re-writing of modernity, which has already been active within modernity for a long time” (Romancing the Postmodern 9). It is, if I can be allowed the irony of a schematic definition, the anxiety within modernity that surrounds both the ability of the subject to know and the articulation of the object as fully knowable. By refusing to share with the modern the hope that this anxiety can be anything other than the condition and limit of all knowledge, the postmodern precedes the modern, rereading the excesses of unknowability and contingency that modernity strives to expel from its theoretical frame.

In “Postmodernism as Pseudohistory,” Craig Calhoun argues similarly, though for different political and theoretical reasons. He says, “The apparent historicity of the opposition of modern to postmodern obscures the extent to which this debate is the latest working out of tensions basic to the whole modern era” (92). See also, Wendy Brown, “Feminist Histories, Postmodern Exposures”; Judith Butler, “Contingent Foundations”; Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard*; and Lyotard’s “Re-writing Modernity.”

4. See, in order, David Michael Levin, ed.; Bill Readings and Stephen Melville, eds.; Hal Foster, ed.; John Berger; John Ellis; Linda Williams; Tessa Boffin and Jean Fraser, eds.; Fredric Jameson; Griselda Pollock; and Martin Jay.


6. The mass commercialization accompanying the authorization of Martin Luther
King Jr.’s birthday as a national holiday in 1987 is a case in point, as even McDonald’s used his image to align itself with the same community it has so masterfully exploited as a low-wage employment pool. In the circulation of King as a specular embodiment of “American” culture, the national holiday was disarticulated from its historical struggle for political representation and attached instead to the commodity aesthetic, signifying the fulfillment of one leader’s famous dream regardless of the very real loosening of black political and economic power witnessed during that decade. In this translation of racial identity politics into consumable specularity, “blackness” becomes both a market commodity and a commodified market—a strategy that results not only in the greater representational inclusion of African-Americans in U.S. film, television, literature, and critical theory but also in the material disparity between acts of representation and of the social “real.” See Angela Y. Davis’s take on the absorption of black politics into commodity culture in the 1980s and 1990s in “Black Nationalism” and Michael Eric Dyson’s reading of race and contemporary popular culture in Reflecting Black. For an archival history, see Jan Nederveen Pieterse, White on Black, and Sieglinde Lemke’s critique of Pieterse in “White on White.”

7. See especially Hazel Carby, Reconstructing Womanhood; Teresa de Lauretis, “The Essence of the Triangle or, Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously”; Diana Fuss, Essentially Speaking; Elspeth Probyn, Technologizing the Self”; Denise Riley, “Am I That Name?”; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “In a Word”; and Elizabeth Weed, “Introduction: Terms of Reference.”

8. This means, for instance, that the cultural determinations of both whiteness and masculinity have become specific categories of analysis, though it must be remarked that masculinity as a critical problem still extends, in both volume and theoretical articulation, that of whiteness. For a sense of the terrain of the new masculinity studies, see Harry Brod, ed., The Making of Masculinities; Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford, eds., Male Order; Jeff Hearn and David Morgan, eds., Men, Masculinities and Social Theory; Michael Kaufman, ed., Beyond Patriarchy; Michael S. Kimmel, ed., Changing Men; and Jonathan Rutherford, Men’s Silences. On the relationship between masculinity studies and feminism, see Caroline Ramazanoglu, “What Can You Do with a Man?” and Robyn Wiegman, “Feminism and Its Malecontents.”

9. Contemporary scholarship on the black woman is too extensive to list comprehensively, but the following played a crucial role in the critical reclamation: Roseann P. Bell, Bettye J. Parker, and Beverly Guy-Shetttall, eds., Sturdy Black Bridges; Lorraine Bethel and Barbara Smith, eds., Conditions; Toni Cade, ed., The Black Woman; Barbara Christian, Black Women Novelists; Angela Y. Davis, Women, Race, and Class; Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter; bell hooks, Ain’t I a Woman and Feminist Theory; Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds., All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave; Joyce Ladner, Tomorrow’s Tomorrow; Gerda Lerner, ed., Black

Women in White America; and Michele Wallace, Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman.

10. The proliferation of black women’s historical projects provides a variety of case studies for rethinking the breadth and strength of a feminist tradition within black women’s political organizing in the United States. Such investigations pressure the very meaning of feminism, both in terms of its political activities and theoretical conversations. As Deborah McDowell discusses in “Transferences”:

The belief that feminism and whiteness form a homogeneous unity has long persisted, along with the equally persistent directive to feminist theorists to “account” in their discourses for the experiences of women of color. The unexamined assumption that white feminist discourse bears a special responsibility to women of color helps to maintain the perception that feminism equates with whiteness. (52)

In rethinking this assumption, feminists will have to consider the way we have defined both feminist consciousness and political commitment as coterminous with issues narrowly posited as being “about women.” See also Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race.”

11. Deterritorialization of the binary structure of race can take several routes, from turning to other figurations of race to tackling the binary from within its own discursive and political logic. While I am taking the latter approach in this study, such an analysis of race by no means precludes the former. On a comparative note, see Thomas E. Skidmore, Black into White.

12. In thinking about the way that white supremacy pivots on the binary construction of race, it is significant how threatening “multiculturalism”—as an emblem of both educational reform and the rapidly changing U.S. demographic—has become in recent years. As the overt target of conservative attacks on “political correctness” in academia, multiculturalism has the potential to expose the mythology of race as a binary and hence to rethink the hegemony of “whiteness” as a social (and political) majority. In “Questions of Multiculturalism,” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Sneja Gunew debate the political consequences of multicultural discourses. See also Henry Giroux, “Post-Colonial Ruptures and Democratic Possibilities”; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “On Race and Voice”, and Christopher Newfield, “What Was Political Correctness?”

13. Martin Jay’s “In the Empire of the Gaze,” begins by establishing Foucault’s work in the context of twentieth-century French antivisual discourse, demonstrating the preoccupation by a number of intellectuals with questions of vision and visuality, from George Bataille and Jean-Paul Sartre to Christian Metz, Luce Irigaray, Louis Althusser, and Emmanuel Levinas. One might add to the list Guy DeBord, whose Society of the Spectacle underscores the significance of the
visual in commodity culture and presents a vastly different understanding of the concept of spectacle developed by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. In his voluminous consideration of vision, *Downcast Eyes*, Jay devotes a chapter to the relationship between Foucault and DeBord (381-434).

Various critics have begun to turn away from the question of the visual to explore the epistemological underpinnings of other senses. See in particular, Nancy Love, “Politics and Voice(s)”; Emily Martin, “Science and Women’s Bodies”; Lee Clark Mitchell, “Face, Race, and Disfiguration in Stephen Crane’s *The Monster*”; and Mohanty, “On Race and Voice.”

14. Anglo-American feminist theoretical accounts of the overlay of patriarchy, capitalism, and white supremacy, in particular, often suffer from an eagerness to systematize and linearize the emergence of various forms of cultural oppressions. For instance, Gerda Lerner’s *The Creation of Patriarchy*—while offering an important intervention into feminist assumptions of patriarchal formations as transhistorical—maintains that the articulation of gender is the primary or originary structure of difference on which other forms are subsequently inscribed. She posits not only that “[t]he oppression of women antedates slavery and makes it possible” but that “[b]y subordinating women of their own group and later captive women, men learned the symbolic power of sexual control over men and elaborated the symbolic language in which to express dominance” (27, 80). While we may recognize the ability of a discourse of sexual difference to articulate relations that seem, at their most surface level, to exclude women (class and race differences among men, for instance), the linear historical narrative of an originary cultural difference of gender onto which all other systems have been mapped may obscure rather than illuminate the complex overlay of patriarchy, capitalism, and white supremacy. Most crucially, as my discussion here suggests, the relationship between specific discourses of difference varies according to their articulatory locus and needs to be deciphered within and not simply across those domains. Both Sandra G. Harding (*The Science Question in Feminism*) and Elizabeth V. Spelman (*Inessential Woman*) try to counter this tendency in Anglo-American feminist thought by offering frameworks for examining race and gender that do not posit linear development. For a very insightful discussion of these issues, see Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, “Discriminations.”

15. While my focus on race arises from its epistemological connection to modern notions of humanity and citizenry, I am not making a claim that race science is either the most important or the only discursive context for reading the emergence of race and gender hierarchies. See Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* for a quite different way of reading the relationship between race and modernity.


17. With the circulation of these positive images, certain seemingly representative identities gain a visibility in U.S. culture, but the social hierarchies of race and gender are not dislodged, no matter how effectively rearticulated they may be by a new rhetoric of social equality. Those who achieve greater access to the benefits of a materialist culture—women and people of color who enter the middle classes as emblems of this social equality—are the token representatives of the new order, often the same people who view their successes as individually motivated and not the products of a culture negotiating internal dissent. The fallacy of a liberating cultural pluralism is evident everywhere: in the decline of black enrollment in colleges across the nation, the increase in nonwhite poverty and unemployment, the loss of social welfare programs for the poor, the burgeoning numbers of the homeless, the growing membership of white supremacist groups, and the increasing inaccessibility of health care, including abortion, for women.

But the strength and cultural attractiveness of the belief in a transcendent America is not simply that it veils the material relations at work in contemporary culture, allowing us the easy assumption that democracy has finally been achieved, but that through this posture the discourses of dissent, particularly those of black power and feminism, can be rendered obsolete, no longer pertinent to the needs of our society. As Allan Bloom asserts in *The Closing of the American Mind*, “[t]here is very little ideology or militant feminism in most of the women [in college today], because they do not need it . . . the battle here has been won” (107); and of black studies programs, he writes, “[they] largely failed because what was serious in them did not interest the students, and the rest was unprofitable hokum” (95). The myth that feminist and black discourses have been incorporated into the U.S. cultural consciousness as a belief in innate equality becomes, ironically, the vehicle for discarding the very discourses that struggled against the barriers of segregation and sexism. In this way, the reconstruction project of the contemporary era can have its cake, the satisfying belief in egalitarian achievement, and eat it too, cannibalizing the voices of dissent in a massive recuperation of the twentieth century’s most radical period of social challenge.

1 Visual Modernity

1. Colette Guillaumin’s “Race and Nature” offers a useful explication of the contradictions that attend Western formations of race. As she says, race is simultaneously “an aggregate of somatic and physiological characteristics” and “an aggregate of social characteristics that express a group” (55). It is inscribed as both a social and a natural taxonomy and hence its ideological basis is conceptually inconsistent, but nonetheless consistently strong.

2. Race, in short, must be scripted and most importantly incessantly performed.