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Making a Way out of No Way

Black Cyberculture and the Black Technocultural Matrix

Take up the challenge posed by Pursell: to look more at context and im-pact than at actors and objects. In this case, answering his deceptively simple questions—What do [technologies] do? What do they mean?—led me to acknowledge the presence of race.

—Carolyn de la Peña (2010, p. 931)

Black life . . . is irreducibly social.

—Fred Moten (2013, p. 739)

Throughout this book, I have framed Black online identity and Black digital practice as Black cyberculture, an awkwardly named construct incorporating *cyberspace* (itself a dated term) and *technoculture*. As mentioned earlier, technoculture can be understood as the relations between, and politics of, culture and technology. Dinerstein (2006) argues that "technology is the American mythos" (p. 570). When defined this way, however, *technoculture* often tricks upon the racial identity of whiteness, and white racial ideology and technological beliefs become the norm. That obviously won't do! Black technology users are not white (even if they are Western), so it becomes necessary to interrogate how Black people make sense of their existence as users and as sub-jects within advanced technological artifacts, services, and platforms. This final chapter is that catechism, firmly placing Black folk at the center of information and communication technology use. I offer this interrogation not as a summary of the previous chapters but as a prov-ocation for those who are interested in centering Blackness as digital practice.

Reorienting technoculture to incorporate Blackness invites an inquiry into the possibilities of Blackness as technology—not Black bodies (been there, done that) but Blackness as technology—in the same way that Blackness often stands in for the best of American entertainment and culture. I am not arguing for minstrelsy and blackface here, to be clear, even though those representations of Blackness are as American as apple pie. Nor am I suggesting that Blackness is a nonserious use of technology; indeed, technology use for Blacks often occurs from the margins of society, where survival, joy, and resistance intertwine uncomfortably in the everyday. Chun (2013) contends that race-as-technology "posits a comparative equality or substitutability—but not identity—between the two" (p. 8). Chun goes on to probe how whiteness incorporates science and technology to build technologies and institutions of race—a helpful formulation for antiblackness and technology but not as necessary here. Instead, I would like to begin from the introduction's discussion of "technology as text" to build out from the possibilities of Black thought into a concept of Black technoculture. From there, I will discuss Afrofuturism as an analytic for Black technology use and time and Black technoculture. Finally, I close with a foray into a libidinal framework of Black technoculture.

Technologies as Cultural Texts

My argument here centers on the digital's networked and distributive capacity for banal, everyday Black information and computer technology (ICT) practices, but others have argued similarly for artistic and technical artifacts (Fouché, 2006; Ebo, 1998; McGahan, 2013; Weheliye, 2002). "Technology as text" has multiple postulations for distributed Blackness and for Black technoculture:

- code (interface and practices)
- the digitally distributed content generated by and mediated by that code
- signifyin' and other cultural discourses of Black digital practitioners

The first two are instrumental and organizational; think of the possibilities for art and discourse that were introduced by Grandmaster Flash's innovative technique of scratching records as part of a musical

performance. The last marks the generative relationship between the first two, revivifying the noncommunicability of Blackness into a mediation for the production of Black life and thought. From this perspective, code, digital discourse, and language-as-culture can (and do) constitute racial identity. Adding technological mediations of discourse (Herring, 2001) allows one to examine computer-mediated communication and digital practice as racial identity as well.

It is vital, however, to *not* incorporate the digital's technocultural alienation (drawing on whiteness's Manichaean separation of mind and body; Dyer, 1997) into my formulation of online Blackness. I wrote the previous sentence long before I read Wilderson (2010), but his words advance my claim: "As an accumulated and fungible object, rather than an exploited and alienated subject, the Black is openly vulnerable to the whims of the world and so is his or her cultural 'production'" (p. 56). Here Wilderson states that because Black folk have no legible stature in the West as political agents, they have no inalienable rights to Black cultural production. Thus Blackness (in online spaces and elsewhere) is immediately captured by Western culture, leaving little possibility for emancipation from that framework. I agree: while I recognize possibilities for emancipation through radical and decolonizing digital practices, my pressing concern for Black technoculture is to make manifest the vitality and joy of Black uses of ICTs. While these libidinal impulses may become commodified or surveilled, they are paraontological—that is, the embodied cognition they express preexists the platforms on which they are published, visible, and deemed appropriate for consumption. The digital mediates culture—in this case Blackness, but otherwise typically white Western—in ways that allow for sociality despite commodification. The next section reviews other researchers' takes on Black technological practice, which I then extend to specifically examine digital practice.

Thinking through Blackness and Technoculture

Rayvon Fouché's (2006) concept of Black vernacular technological creativity (BVTC) offers additional touch points for conceptualizing Black technoculture. Fouché writes that technology as material oppression is not the only way to analyze Black experiences with tech (p. 641).

Anticipating many of the claims made throughout this text, he defines BVTC as "innovative engagements with technology based on Black aesthetics" (p. 641). By asking how Black folk see, view, feel, understand, and interact with technology from their own perspective, BVTC offers a praxis-based, three-point perspective on Black technoculture:

> *Redeployment* is the process by which the material and symbolic power of technology is reinterpreted but maintains its traditional use and physical form, as with blues musicians extending the perceived capability of a guitar without altering it.
>
> *Reconception* is the active redefinition of a technology that transgresses that technology's designed function and dominant meaning, as in using a police scanner to observe police activities.
>
> *Re-creation* is the redesign and production of a new material artifact after an existing form or function has been rejected, as in the case of DJs and turntablists developing new equipment (p. 642)

BVTC is ontologically compelling thanks to Fouché's avoidance of the dichotomy of arguing for Black technological use as either appropriate or inappropriate. Instead, he conceptualizes it as a relationship among Blackness, American racial ideology, and the technologies themselves. Fouché also takes up the vernacular—a concern I share—as the generative source of Black cultural production.

My Black cyberculture concept diverges here from BVTC. While Fouché (2006) describes BVTC as being informed by a Black vernacular aesthetic that includes, but is not limited to, the production or performance of music, dance, literature, visual art, and sport (p. 641), I have chosen to redirect my focus on the vernacular to linguistic performance, enactment, and discourse, particularly as computer-mediated communication expresses an engagement with the everyday in virtual spaces through digital practice. My approach differs from examining performances of "black-informed expressive or aesthetic representations of technology" (Fouché, 2006, p. 642) and from the "technology of stylization" that BVTC addresses. The Black banal and the everyday may occasionally rise to the level of art or politics, but its value lies in the unalloyed libidinal expressions of joy and catharsis that arise from interactions with others and institutions.

I also differ from Fouché (2006) in my conceptualization of the materiality of interfaces and interface practices. Fouché points out that BVTC engages with material artifacts; his elements of reconception and recreation prioritize Black technologists' capacity to have hands-on access to their chosen technologies—something that is much more difficult to achieve with digital services and practices.[1] While there have been Black digital initiatives encouraging users to gain coding or design literacies (most significantly, BlackPlanet), digital environments are typically less amenable to the types of agentive technical virtuosity Fouché outlines.

Black folks' lack of material (and financial) control over digital infrastructure can be visualized within the evergreen complaints of Black social media mavens. Many, like April Reign (@reignofapril), creator of #OscarsSoWhite, and Cashawn Thompson (@thepbg), creator of the viral catchphrase and hashtag #BlackGirlMagic, have agitated to be fairly compensated for the pithy content they generate, which is often repurposed into corporate and nonprofit marketing campaigns for lifestyle, media, and consumer brands. Social media content distribution rights are typically retained by the service; these power users have little control over their virtuosic social media practice. Like other social networking services, Twitter's (n.d.) terms of service note, "Such additional uses by Twitter, or other companies, organizations or individuals, may be made with no compensation paid to you with respect to the Content that you submit, post, transmit or otherwise make available through the Services."

The plight of these Black women social media creatives is summed up in Fouché's (2006) observation that Black technological practice is dismissed as "cleverness" rather than as sustained, creative engagements with the institutions and strategies of technology. Black digital practitioners and auteurs with far less reach than Ms. Reign or Mrs. Thompson are even more susceptible to this dismissal; they also labor under the restrictions of unavailable content, uninteresting interfaces, and unaffordable (in terms of time, attention, and economics) service. These obstacles have been tangentially addressed by the continued falling prices (if not costs to the end user) of ICTs as well as increased access to digital services (e.g., blogging platforms, smartphone videography). Black digital practitioners can thus enact their cultural identity in the interstitial spaces of commercial platforms, where they seek the communal

presence of others like them in the racialized institutional and technological "desert of the real" (Baudrillard, 1981).

Thus to understand deficit narratives of Black technology use, one must consider Black exclusion from the capitalist economies of social media. However, limiting inquiry to the inequity (and iniquity) of the mainstream reception of Black creativity offers Black digital practice limited space or opportunity to flourish. Instead, it can be better appreciated through an analysis of the material and symbolic character of digital technologies. Such an analysis prioritizes an inquiry into the libidinal, virtual, and communicative aspects of everyday Black digital practice. For many scholars, Afrofuturism has been such an inquiry.

Afrofuturism and the Black Postpresent

As a framework for Blackness and technology Afrofuturism has rightfully been praised as an alternative path to analyzing Black technoculture. In truth, Alondra Nelson's groundbreaking special issue on Afrofuturism in *Social Text* provides the theoretical impetus for this manuscript. Nelson describes Afrofuturism as "African American voices with other stories to tell about culture, technology, and things to come" (2002, p. 8); this work owes a great debt to that formulation. Like many second-wave race and digital researchers, I resonate with Nelson's frustrations with Blackness's oppositional place in technocultural narratives of "progress"—or as she writes, "Forecasts of a utopian (to some) race-free future and pronouncements of the dystopian digital divide [as] the predominant discourses of blackness and technology in the public sphere" (p. 1).

Eshun (2003) uses Afrofuturism to analyze three partially intersecting spheres: mathematical simulations, informal descriptions, and "the articulation of futures within the everyday forms of the mainstream of Black vernacular expression" (p. 293). The last is valuable to this research, but Eshun's reliance on the Middle Passage as the foundational moment of Black alienation—"the constitutive trauma of slavery" (p. 299)—leaves me wondering how Black joy and pleasure can be understood in digital practice, leading to my incorporation of libidinal economy for this analysis.

In writing on Black feminisms of the future, Morris (2016) argues, "People of the African diaspora are continuously creating culture and radically transforming visions of the future. . . . These visions are necessarily transgressive and sub verse in relation to dominant discourse" (p. 33). She cogently ties together Black feminism and Afrofuturism, but her claims still draw heavily on themes of resistance and on reimagining Black bodies as agents of the future. Morris graciously allows for Afrofuturistic possibilities that are not moralizing or utopian, but her argument inevitably returns to "progress" as a feature of Afrofuturist epistemology. In this, Morris inadvertently privileges the desires of Black respectability proponents—in this case, through futurist artworks and artists. That position is not compatible with the aims of this book.

Similarly, Yaszek (2006) extends Nelson's formulation of Afrofuturism to define it as "not just reclaiming the history of the past, but about reclaiming the history of the future as well" (p. 47). This is a compelling position on Blackness and technology, but it also falls prey to utopian sentiments. Like Morris, Yaszek moves through art and literature to unpack Black cultural engagements with futures and technologies that are unintended for Black use, arguing that Black alienation is exacerbated rather than alleviated. The utopian angle arises when Yaszek suggests that Black disruptions of technological futures are "harbinger[s] of a new and more promising alien future" (p. 48). The possibilities of navigating the present moment of Blackness and technoculture seem distant from these pronouncements of future Blackness.

If it is not already clear from my analysis of the above works, I am not a champion of Afrofuturism-the-analytic. In the introduction to this work, I glibly proclaimed that Afrofuturism was unsuited for analyzing Black digital practice despite its utopian aims for the recovery of Black aesthetics, paired with a transgressive, resistive politics. For example, Afrofuturists are often virtuous even in (or perhaps because of) their weirdness. Consider Sun Ra, George Clinton, and Janelle Monae; Octavia Butler and Samuel Delaney; or Kool Keith, ATLien-era OutKast, and DJ Spooky. These artists' willingness to imagine a technologized, futurist Blackness through music is laudable, but they do not speak to existing in the present. While upon reflection my claim seems dismissive, I do not mean to refute Afrofuturism-the-project.

Instead, I resonate with Stallings's (2013) writings on the Black ratchet imagination. Stallings describes "failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming" (p. 136) as the ratchet's performance of the failure to uplift. Stallings's deft explanation of postwar imagination and antiwar activities provides generative power for the evaluations of Black digital practice throughout this manuscript. It is simply not futurist enough for Black thought to progress along the lines of Western technoculture. Instead, the digital has afforded online articulations of the explicit, the sensual, and the precarity of Black culture, similar to how hip-hop artists in the late 1990s and early 2000s celebrated "corporeal orature" (Defrantz, cited in Stallings, 2013, p. 138).

This chapter also takes up Alexander Weheliye's laments about the "literal and virtual whiteness of cyber theory" (2002, p. 21) in his criminally underutilized Afrofuturist essay "Feenin." His examination of Black cultural engagement with information technologies begins with a critique of the "white liberal subject in techno-informational disguise"—an aim with which I wholly sympathize. Weheliye's reading of Sylvia Wynter is especially generative for this text. He notes that Black culture denaturalizes "the human as a universal formation while at the same time laying claim to it" (p. 27). This figuration translates clearly to the digital enactment of Blackness. Indeed, Weheliye conjures the separation of Blackness from Black bodies by arguing that Black musical genres make their virtuality central to their texts: "Black subjectivity appears as the antithesis to the Enlightenment subject by virtue of not only having a body but by being the body" (p. 28). Where Weheliye is concerned with aural technologies and their capacity for Afrodiasporic politico-cultural formations, his assertions in "Feenin'" anticipated my direct engagement with computer-mediated communication, such as social media, digital practices, and online discourses.

Throughout this book, I have been careful to take heed of Nelson's (2002) admonition to those using Afrofuturism as a frame. She states that researchers must pay attention to "how selves are differently situated both within and outside of this network" without limiting Black digital identity to the "technical construction of selves over a distributed network" (p. 4). I find, however, that the literary and artistic objects analyzed to argue for the futurism of Afrofuturism warrant a technocultural

respectability premised primarily upon the high-culture activities of sur-realists, artists, and the politically resistive. I admit that my critique of Afrofuturism (but not its proponents!) could be seen as unfair; literature, the arts, and the academy are durable artifacts that capture and dissemi-nate visions that differ from the dreary everyday. There have been few methods that encapsulate how average folk argue for themselves and their own futures—but the digital is one such method and space. Thus this text's interest in the banality of Black Twitter and other spaces where ratchet digital practice is enacted reinvests futurity into present uses of the digital rather than in possible Black cyborg or Black magical futures. In other words, Blackness is neither posthuman nor interested in being so.

Blackness, Technoculture, and Kairos

Whereas Afrofuturism seems preoccupied with reimagining a future history of Blackness and technology, Black cyberculture is better argued for as the "postpresent"—particularly as it is constructed and contested through Black cultural digital spaces and practice. By *postpresent*, I mean that Black folk in digital spaces are constantly engaged with the moment, or kairos. I am tricking off[2] of theories of postmodernity, postracialism, and information technophilia here—not to interrogate the increasing precarity of labor or the spread of surveillance and commoditization but to present how Black digital practice invests energies into *being*, a celebration of the now that incorporates past iniquities and future imag-inings. This position is particularly indebted to Afro-optimism; Moten (2013) argues that Black thought is thought itself.

Black kairos is simultaneously racial performance or enactment, dis-cursive invention, and appropriate, timely engagement within a com-municative and cultural context. Although my use of this concept draws on my analysis of digital and communication technologies, I am careful not to limit Black kairos to digital practice. One way—for many, the only way—to understand Black kairos in the American context (e.g., ra-cial ideology) is through the frame of respectability, as discussed earlier. Another limited possibility for viewing Black kairos through a political-economic lens, where Black digital activity can only be understood through its commodification, capacity for surveillance, and economic potential. From that perspective, however, libidinal tensions of control

and coercion are still deemed to be the only aspects worthy of examination, while the erotic and kairotic properties of Blackness are elided. For this reason, my gaze remains riveted to moments of Black pleasure and catharsis. The preceding chapters have expanded on Black performance and invention, but the concepts of time and engagement deserve attention as well.

Timeliness (or the lack thereof) is a significant aspect of Black discursive identity. The concept of "colored people time" describes a joyous disregard for modernity and labor capitalism—for example, the aphorism "I might be late, but I'm always on time." As I deploy it here, kairos refers to the immediacy afforded to Black discourse by network protocols, communal structures, and the instantaneity and archival capacities of information networks. Similarly, while considering the rhetorical canon of delivery as an essential element of the art of digital communication, Porter (2009) notes that distribution and circulation, access, and interaction have been undervalued elements of print culture since the invention of the printing press.

The temporality of Black kairos is apparent in the riposte and swagger of face-to-face interactions, but historically, it has been much less visible in ICTs. While television and radio featured performances of Black kairos, everyday Blacks could only interact with these mediums at a remove (e.g., telephone call-ins). The internet—especially the introduction of bulletin-board systems and other discourse-oriented modalities—offered an ever-growing cross section of participants to create their own mediated discourse styles and mechanisms. Early on, computer-mediated communication researchers studied the synchronous and asynchronous aspects of time on digital discourses, but they often left unexamined nontechnical cultural understandings of time and discourse. Even as more researchers examined Black online communities with the rise of Web 2.0, only a few prescient scholars (Banks, 2006; Byrne, 2007) interpellated Black discourse traditions with digital discourse communities. It is only in the last few years—as social media has supplanted the World Wide Web as our communicative infrastructure—that investigators have started to understand cultural discourses as constitutive of digital practice.

For example, "showing the receipts" is one Black postpresent discursive digital practice that situates past transgressive behavior (often

recorded in the form of digitized documents, but occasionally in visual or multimedia testimony) in the now (usually via social media) to be "read" as evidence in the moment. Similarly, one can see the Black postpresent within Black feminist, womanist, and queer Twitter's digital mobilization to agitate against perceived unjust phenomena and people, also known as "callout culture." Because of callout culture's desire for debate and its willingness to affront, it is derided by white feminists and technologists and color-blind internet pundits. The callout, originally a practice of Black women signifyin', has occasionally been mistaken for Twitter's "mob mentality," but it is qualitatively different: it is often a critique of systemic inequality rather than an attack against specific, individualistic transgressions. Kairos should not be construed as being limited to Black Twitter, however. It is equally in place on the Black "Gram,"[3] in threaded commenting communities such as Very Smart Brothers, or in the forums on Nappturality. While kairos is an important piece in the puzzle that is Black technoculture, I should perhaps revisit and expand on what I mean by (Western) technoculture before going deeper into conceptualizing Black technoculture.

Technoculture, or Race as Technology

At the beginning of this chapter, I referred to Dinerstein's (2006) contention that technology is the American mythos. Mosco (2005) writes that one of the primary sources of a myth's power is elasticity, which has a dual meaning for digital Blackness. First, the digital enacts virtuality through simulation. This is an expansion of the virtuality afforded by older information technologies (e.g., the telegraph, electricity, radio, television, telephones, and even the computer). The digital's elasticity resides in its capacity to simulate multiple possible virtual spaces through code, multimedia, and computational power. Moreover, the varied meanings digital practitioners ascribe to such virtual spaces afford even identical instances of code (e.g., subreddits, blogs, and PHP bulletin boards) the elasticity necessary to identify those spaces as heterogeneous in content yet similar in design. Second, and more important, the mythic elasticity of technoculture is denied to nonwhites and women. In Western ideology, the elasticity of being becomes fixity when nonwhites enter the picture; Africans and indigenous folk are "primitive," whereas Asians

are "spiritual" (Eglash, 2002). This consideration becomes even more complex when one considers that whiteness is limned but not bounded by its aversion to, denial of, and love of Blackness. Thus the elasticity of technocultural myth is always already enframed by whiteness's interpretive flexibility.

Mosco (2005) adds that cyberspace-as-myth "transcends the banal, day-to-day worlds of time, space and politics" (p. 13), but this perspective is less than a stone's throw away from many Enlightenment philosophies of man and society that were conceived during the era of European slavery. Our understandings of time, space, and sociality are never exempt from libidinal or mythic beliefs about them; they are inescapably informed by them. My research on Black experiences in digital spaces contradicts Mosco's mythic claim; indeed, distributed Blackness is articulated through pathos about everyday life, centered on embodiment, and mediated by the digital. Furthermore, the 2016 US presidential election revealed how social media beliefs mediate everyday whiteness, from liberal and conservative white fragility on Twitter (i.e., "snowflakes"), to racist screeds on Gab, to libertarian individualism on Reddit.

I should note that there is significant overlap between beliefs about the computer and beliefs about the digital and internet, but there are also key distinctions. For example, consider a computer without an internet connection and one with an internet connection. The former contains and allows for the creation of virtual, immersive spaces, simulations, and multimedia. The latter includes those features (e.g., MMORPGs like World of Warcraft) but expands the virtual space to include social and relational connections between other computers and other computer users. Fundamentally, a standalone computer is an isolated imaginary; sharing the content or code generated therein can be done but is not inherent to the artifact. The networked computer, however, has sociality built into it. This last aspect is foundational to the concept of distributed Blackness—that is, Black sociality has been digitally networked and computationally mediated.

Glitching the Matrix

Stepping away from myth, let us consider technoculture as the interweaving of technology, culture, self, and identity. Dinerstein (2006)

offers a compelling matrix of six elements that underpin Western technoculture:

1. Whiteness
2. Masculinity
3. Religion
4. Progress
5. Modernity
6. The future

While he does not describe them as libidinal, these elements certainly evoke libidinal tensions that influence how technology is understood in the West. Dinerstein's arguments for technoculture are not the first—the linkage among the West, religion, and technology has been explored by David Nye (1996), Leo Marx (2000), and James Carey (1984)—but he makes his signal contribution to technocultural theory by assigning a racial valence (whiteness) to American and Western technical identity. Dinerstein finds that technology is both the rationale for and the artifact of European and Euro-American imperialism and modernity, bolstering his claim that technology as an abstract concept functions as a white mythology (2006, p. 570).

Though I have cited, alluded to, and shouted out Dinerstein's (2006) matrix at every presentation and in most of my publications, I have not always clearly positioned it to either interrogate information and communication technologies or unpack the relationship among Blackness, Black bodies, technology, and technoculture. As an intermediate step, then, let us consider the immanence of Dinerstein's matrix aspects in the digital, networked space I am arguing for as distributed Blackness. The matrix works with technology as an abstract concept in order to tease out the libidinal tensions that are ordinarily unseen; Dinerstein eventually dials in on biotechnology as encapsulating his matrix. Similarly, this text limits "technology" not only to the digital—which is certainly a nebulous concept—but, more specifically, to information technologies used for communication, such as the computer and the internet. While these two artifacts have been mediatized, I draw directly from computer-mediated communication and social informatics research instead of solely from media and new media theories.

Three aspects of Dinerstein's (2006) matrix are relatively uncomplicated to map onto the digital. *Religion*, for information and communication technologies, draws on the technological sublime (Nye, 1996; Carey, 1984). It works as a paean to the spiritual power of information and the digital as a balm for social ills. Rather than putting faith in the works of a supreme being, religion recenters technology as a source of ineffable blessings *and* ills—either a digital utopia where speech is free and virtual spaces are democratic or a hellscape of incivility, terroristic acts, and violations of the informational self. Religion also is a grounding for the digital's links to transcendence; where the body is rendered in 1s and 0s while eschewing the bonds of material existence. *The future* can be understood as whiteness's (and the West's) quest for omniscience, where informational control over bodies (surveillance) and the material world (networks and datafication) is directly linked to spiritual, economic, and political gain. Information technologies are always seen as futuristic, drawing as they do on beliefs about control of the spirit and on the abstract reason of mathematics. *Progress* is closely tied to the future, as it is measured by the increase, reliance on, and deployment of computational solutions to social problems.

The informational capacity of *modernity* arguably originated before the Industrial Age with the advent of written culture (Giddens, 1984; Ong, 1982), but I refer to industrial modernity here: the command of space and time through networked communication, which in the process reworks relationships between the self, commerce, institutions, and technology. For example, consider the plantation. While it is relatively simple to consider it as an agricultural institution, the plantation depended on webs of trade, the datafication of the enslaved body (Reynolds, 2018), imperialist state policies of conquest and communication, and renegotiations of the state's and the individual's relationship to Black bodies. Modernity's contribution to the mythology of information and communication technologies, then, differs little from its contribution to technoculture overall: reflexivity.

By *reflexivity*, I mean that modernity's mythic capacity depends on our awareness of and reflection on how our lives differ from premodern (or even recent) social and cultural conditions. In this, modernity is deeply tied to progress and the future, further cementing the role of technology as the "spirit" of the West. I agree with Giddens and Pierson's

(1998) argument that through modernity, trust and risk have supplanted belief and fate (p. 102) as the predominant ways in which we informationalize our relationships with others and the world. Trust and risk, in Western technoculture, depend on our valorization of rationality, the scientific method, and logic as the most appropriate avenues to understand the world and our place in it. This becomes increasingly clear upon reading public and academic paeans to algorithms and big data, which are promoted as being trustworthy precisely because of their informational and computational capacities to model "reality" without bias. As is becoming increasingly clear, however, neither algorithms nor big data sufficiently model or account for the cultural qualities that are inherent to their design, leading to ethical and moral problems.

In keeping with the intersectional tendencies of this text, it is important to consider Dinerstein's technocultural categories of *whiteness* and *masculinity* as a set of relationships rather than as separate categories. Try a thought experiment: How do you visualize technology's relationship with white women? With Asian men? With indigenous folk of any gender? Masculinity, whiteness, and technoculture are coconstitutive—so much so that it is difficult to visualize any other group in relation. When we reveal whiteness and masculinity within frameworks of technocultural belief, we can see the libidinal energies that power our modern institutions, technologies, and infrastructure.

As mentioned previously, *whiteness* lends technoculture an interpretive flexibility—a quality that is magnified by ICTs. De la Peña (2010) notes that race is an "epistemology at play in all technological production and consumption" (p. 923), so interpretive flexibility, as whiteness, denotes the capacity to be simultaneously understood as individual and everyone—as the universal representation of humanity. Consider yesterday's web browser, ubiquitously placed on every PC desktop while harboring an infinite variety of web content. More recently, look to today's premium smartphones and tablets: they are "smart" precisely because of their interpretive flexibility. The entire screen fills to focus on one app and one app only despite an operating system that offers instant access to all other apps as well as the entire internet. Even still, mobile devices are considered less capable than today's desktop-class devices (including laptops), which embody interpretive flexibility in a frame of productivity

and efficiency through their presentation and containment of multiple apps in one screen.

Masculinity, meanwhile, must be identified as heterosexuality and as sexual energy, especially given recent revelations about sexual harassment in the tech industry (e.g., the #MeToo movement). Dyer (1997) is especially helpful in this regard, writing, "White men are seen as divided, with more powerful sex drives but also a greater will power. The sexual dramas of white men have to do with not being able to resist the drives or with struggling to master them. . . . Dark desires are part of the story of whiteness, but as what the whiteness of whiteness has to struggle against. Thus it is that the whiteness of white men resides in the tragic quality of their giving way to darkness and the heroism of their channeling or resisting it" (pp. 27–28). As gender, as sexuality, and as a battle for control over sexual energies, masculinity affords technoculture a rationalist, imperialist, and spiritual asceticism that whiteness deploys to justify its control over others who are perceived to possess none of those qualities.

The question remains: How has white masculinity become associated with ICTs? Consider the archetype of the typical computer user: a white male who carefully manages his finances and appetites (how else to explain the fact that he is middle class?). Then consider the archetype of the expert computer user (e.g., the hacker or the coder), who is in (perhaps entirely too much so) control of his sexual energies, often white, often male. Look at the composition of technology firms, many of which are nearly entirely white; consider also how many of those firms—and the venture capitalists who fund them—come under fire for sexual harassment and assault claims.

To enhance the Western technocultural matrix, antiblackness must be incorporated as the seventh node of the matrix. Doing so allows for the libidinal tensions powering chattel slavery and racial capitalism to be clearly understood as technocultural artifacts and ideological mainstays rather than as the supposedly repellent activities of individuals. This approach is responsive to de la Peña's (2006) note that discussions of technology tend to avoid "white privilege or an investment in inequalities of knowledge or access" to assess its application across generic contexts that happen to be white. By building on Afro-optimism and connecting

it to Black pathos as an epistemological framework, distributed Blackness explicitly acknowledges that the political economy of racism, mediated by ICTs, is driven by the libidinal energies of antiblackness and necropolitics, and yet—and yet—Black folk persist. It becomes clear, then, that the libidinal qualities of Western technoculture *must* be revisited and revised, but not destroyed, to account for Black culture and digital practice.

The Black Technocultural Matrix (under Construction)

What is the mythos of Black technoculture? It clearly cannot just be limited to antiracism. As I have said throughout this text, racism is not the sole defining characteristic of Black identity. Neither can Black technoculture be confined to middle-class aspirations of achieving the franchise. I also hold tightly to the belief that social justice activism should not be the epitome of Black digital practice; online activism is simply the most visible and "appropriate" manifestation of online Blackness *to the mainstream*.

Unfortunately, Dinerstein's powerful arguments about technology's abstracted materialism of whiteness as a justification for dominance over humankind and the natural world (2006, p. 570) leaves little space to vivify Blackness and technology. It is especially useful to examine Orlando Patterson's (1982) concept of "social death" to understand the West's structural relationship to Blackness. Western technologies—eugenics, phrenology, social science, criminal law, and segregation—have been deployed to construct Blackness as social death, and these arrangements reify technoculture as "how to do things *to*" Black bodies and Blackness.

Wilderson (2010) accounts for technocultural libidinal energies toward Black bodies within Western arts and aesthetics, naming this phenomenon *antiblackness*. The concept has become increasingly popular among those who consider Blackness and modernity, as it accounts for how Black bodies (and Blackness itself) are constructed under and throughout Western culture. Antiblackness sees Blackness as a noncommunicable structural position in society—one that is incapable of being alienated. But in theorizing Blackness as articulated through the digital, I cannot uncritically frame Black bodies in digital spaces as social death. This is in no small measure because of the digital's communicative

infrastructure—in particular, the various forms of interactivity enabled by computer-mediated communication. Moreover, the hashtag (and its sibling, the trending topic algorithm) has revealed Black sociality to such an extent that it can no longer be overlooked. I can and must acknowledge that ICTs have a "dark side" (how terrible that I cannot free myself from that metaphor!) and that those inimical artifacts and practices are often explicitly designed to achieve a particular goal: the diminishment—if not outright destruction—of nonwhites. Less clear (at least to me) are the productive qualities of antiblackness when it is applied to the digital—that is, how should we understand Black digital practice as productive, life-giving online behavior?

The "vivification" of Blackness and technology in the previous paragraphs was no accident; as I mentioned, I am an adherent of Afro-optimism. This school of thought's leading proponent, Fred Moten (2013), explicitly engages "social death," calling it the "burial ground of the subject," to provide a funereal context for Black thought—*funereal* in the sense that funerals are for the living: they are as much celebrations of life as they are recognitions of life's end. In this burial ground, Blackness is where political agency is sublimated, submerged, and enshrouded by the reality of having to live every day with death looming on the horizon. Moten's counterargument, which I find utterly compelling, is that Black life is irreducibly social (p. 739) even as it is lived in the aforementioned cemetery. The power of Moten's claim is libidinal: Black life is *lived* in the social, "which is, in any case, where and what blackness chooses to stay" (p. 741). Moten calls this "the condition of the possibility of Black thought" and names it *celebration*. For Moten, *subject* references the rational, transcendental, self-possessed being who is capable of political action—in other words, white modernity—a position that is easily transferable to this discussion of whiteness and technoculture.

Here, then, is my reconfiguration of the technocultural matrix for Blackness, with the ultimate goal of unpacking the beliefs that underpin Black (American) digital practice. Here are my suggested categories for the Black technocultural matrix:

1. Blackness
2. Intersectionality
3. America

4. Invention/style
5. Modernity
6. The future

The Black technocultural matrix neither supplants the Western techno-cultural version nor propounds the same ideologies of dominance and control over nonwhite bodies. Instead, I am theorizing a Black cultural relationship with technology, drawing on the Black experience in the West—an experience that is shaped by relationships with whiteness and with technology from a social and political subject position.

Blackness

> I have never felt more American than when we all hate on this muther-fucker [*sic*] together.
>
> —Dave Chappelle (2018)

My first matrix category conceives of Blackness—rather than the Black body—as an element of Black technoculture. In this unfiltered, patriotic expression, Chappelle exemplifies one of the defining characteristics of Black existence in the United States: dark, humorous critique. It evokes Black interiority, references antiblack racism, and even suggests political engagement—all from a libidinal perspective. *Blackness*, for this matrix, stands for the metaphysical and critical valences[4] of Black cultural identity, revolving around subjectivity and cultural production. My phrasing does not ignore the political and ideological aspects of Black identity but instead highlights the libidinal elements that drive those aspects of Blackness's relationship with technology. I phrase it thusly to incorporate the ratchet and the banal, qualities that are often disregarded in analyses of technology and studies of Black culture.

To return to the digital: a theory of Black cyberculture is necessary to examine how information and communication technologies afford Blackness a differently circumscribed space to luxuriate and grow—never free from white racial ideology but no longer materially coerced by it. This possibility exists *because* of the disembodiment enabled by virtuality—that is, when participating in an online space, Blackness lives as an existential "here" (Yancy, 2005) that is largely unrestricted

by the fixity and pejorative reduction of the Black body that occurs offline. Online, "I am not only a point of view, but I am also a point that is viewed" (Gordon, cited in Yancy, 2005). The possibilities for communicating, performing, and apprehending Blackness in digital practice and spaces diminish the theoretical power of antiblackness. Correspondingly, arguments that Blackness is a point of noncommunicability, or social death, lose power when they are confronted with the technical and cultural visibility of Black Twitter practice and hashtags. This formulation responds but is not beholden to whiteness as the default identity of technoculture, or whiteness's ontological and axiological (e.g., the nature of existence and the philosophy of ethics and values) formulation. For example, whiteness draws on the separation of mind and body (Dyer, 1997); dominance over each is the hallmark of white superiority. In return, Dinerstein argues that whiteness's control over the Black body has led to the *colonization* of Euro-American bodies by Black music, dance, kinesthetics, and speech (2006, p. 590).

In my reformulation, Blackness reintegrates the mind and body, returning authorial control and intent over those aspects of Blackness to Black culture. The matrix quality of Blackness, then, is the communitarian enactment of intentionality across cultural aspects of Black culture. As Moten (2013) says, "Blackness is . . . irreducibly social" (p. 739). Thus Blackness in this matrix highlights how pathos—in addition to logos, or rationality—structures the Black American understanding of the world that they find themselves in. Pathos begins with the joy of embodied Black existence; it is at once a response to the effects of modernity and white supremacy on the Black psyche and a politics of the erotic engaging with "honest bodies that like to also *fuck*" (Morgan, 2015, p. 40; emphasis original). Whereas whiteness gains power from obscuring its internal differences, Blackness recognizes what makes Black folk different.

I am aware that this definition does not directly acknowledge the Middle Passage, white supremacy, or slavery as overwhelming influences on Black identity. While racism is an inexhaustible fountain of energy for whiteness, it is only part of how Blackness navigates the world. I do not deny these events' and ideologies' effects on Blackness, but their omission is meant to direct the focus to a celebration of Black life.

Intersectionality

Where masculinity is the gendered and sexual aspect of the Western technocultural matrix, *intersectionality* represents the interweaving of Blackness with multiple facets of identity, including the digital. Incorporating intersectionality signals a freeing of Blackness from the carceral fixity of the Western technocultural matrix. In discussing this element of my matrix, I recognize the brilliant Black feminists who have produced a theoretical concept for analyzing the complexity of Blackness, gender, and sexuality. While Black women theorists originally crafted intersectionality to investigate the intersecting systems of oppression affecting Black women (Collins, 2002; Crenshaw, 1990), I am here referring to intersectionality as a theory of differentiation (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Levine-Rasky, 2011) involving social position and positioning. Brah and Phoenix (2004) argue that intersectionality, when defined by differentiation, emphasizes the "social relations, experience, subjectivity, and identity" found at the intersection of emotional and psychic dynamics as well as those of socioeconomic, political, and cultural differences (p. 83). Differentiation, then, refers to how groups define, negotiate, and challenge their positions, transforming identity from an object to a process (Levine-Rasky, 2011, p. 243). That this definition bears a resemblance to Omi and Winant's (1994) racial formation theory is no accident; both are structural perspectives on the salience of racial identity in modernity. Omi and Winant refer to racial formation projects as the tension between social structure and representation, whereas Brah and Phoenix focus on the meaning-making relationships between identities based on access to symbolic and material resources.

What does intersectionality mean for Black technoculture? My primary motivation for incorporating this concept is that Black people must constantly confront context collapse in nearly every setting in Western racial ideology—that is, their racial identity overlaps and interweaves with whatever other identity they may be inhabiting at the moment, but rarely in a manner that benefits them. Nominating intersectionality to the matrix of Black technoculture is an epistemological, methodological, and empirical imperative. From a methodological perspective, analyses of Blackness and technology should approach the standards of historical materialism; researchers *must* incorporate historical, economic, cultural,

and political context, thus transforming their analysis from static observations of "Black folk doing tech" to more dynamic investigations of Black folks' relationships and positionality with technology. Doing so allows one to drill down into how tech and culture mutually constitute raced, gendered, sexual, economic, and other axes of social organization. For example, researchers who wish to study Black women's natural hair culture should take into account the aesthetic, historical, and political relationships among Black hair, older technologies, colorism in the Black community, women's bodies, patriarchy, entrepreneurship, heterosexuality, and Western culture. These interactions must be acknowledged while examining how YouTube, blogs, and online bulletin boards mediate practitioners, professionals, and a deeply engaged commenting community to build out digital spaces.

From an epistemological perspective, narratives that recount the experiences of understudied, subordinated people represent valid and reliable empirical data from which to glean patterns of use, discrimination, and belief structures. Much of the research on race and technology relies on historical archives, which are narratives of a particular type—often institutional, only occasionally personal. Historians of technology and race compellingly argue that archival sources of technology design and use rarely discuss race at all, much less feature source material from or about Black inventors, users, or practitioners. Thus intersectionality's emphasis on narratives of affected, subordinated populations as agentive data—particularly with respect to the archival capacities of digital and online media—offers researchers the unparalleled opportunity to access reflexive, banal, and political accounts of Black digital practitioners, in their own voices. This is doubly important because research on Black technology use often falls prey to technocultural deficit narratives or the aims of respectability politics instead of focusing on the everyday experiences of the Black digital.

I am aware of Black feminist scholars' arguments about other disciplines appropriating and diminishing intersectionality by applying it outside of its original generative context: Black women and the matrix of oppression. Black women could never be removed from the analyses offered here; instead, I hope to encompass and complicate Blackness across all genders and sexualities. This is not an #AllLivesMatter demurral; instead, my formulation is in line with my desire to diminish

the carcerality of Western technoculture when theorizing Blackness. I use a key element of Black feminist standpoint theory—embodied cognition—to highlight how practices that are designed to valorize or demonize Black bodies can be understood as technological (see also Chun, 2011).

While some could view this application as a utopian initiative—Black transcendence, as it were—I mean to redirect intersectionality's original intent of analyzing oppression. My approach here is similar to my rationale for not allowing racism to overdetermine Black identity: oppression is not the only way to understand the contributions of intersectional identities to digital and technological practice. This move also allows me to disempower respectability as an ideological benchmark for appropriate Black practice—a benchmark that is responsible for demonizing Black women's "inappropriate" behavior on- and offline. The Black technocultural matrix thus accounts for how masculinity has come to be associated with technological prowess while encouraging analyses of Black women's technological use as only partially shaped by masculinity (as opposed to being read as "resistant" to masculinist ideals).

America*: The State and the Spirit

Where the Western technocultural matrix employs *religion* and *progress* as matrix elements, I have replaced them with *America* as both state and spirit. Before I expand on the conundrum of including America in a Black technocultural matrix, let me briefly explain why I replaced these two qualities with a reference to a problematic nation-state. Dinerstein (2006) argues that a number of factors contributed to technology's displacement of Christianity as the religion of white Western culture. Rather than viewing the universe as a creation of an ineffable, unknowable force, Western inventors from the Age of Enlightenment forward believed that their creations were uncovering the "ultimate structural principles of the universe" (p. 577). These beliefs energized European colonial and imperial endeavors as well as American narratives of the frontier. The latter centered on a "second creation" thanks to American command of agricultural and military technologies, dispossessing the "first creation" of Native American claims to the "undeveloped"

land. Dinerstein continues by noting that American claims to natural resources discovered within frontier lands also drew on religious concepts; *Manifest Destiny* is a technocultural phrase denoting "the technological transformation of an 'untouched' space" (p. 578), which Americans used to justify their right to a particular geography. Through technological command, whiteness becomes the first "body" to properly use a space.

Black culture, in its guise as Black bodies and thus as one of the technologies used to domesticate the American frontier, cannot and should not make similar claims for technology as religion. This is not to say that African or African-descended populations elsewhere have not invested spiritual energies in technology; there is, however, enough evidence globally that simply investing Black resources in Western technologies often leads to rack and ruin. Returning to Baraka's (1971) thoughts about how Blackness would inform technology design and use, I argue that technology in Black technoculture is not an extension of control over the world but rather an affordance for social joy and inventive creativity.

Similarly, Black cultural beliefs in technology as "progress" must also be viewed with a suspicious eye—even those developed by Black people for Black people. For example, McMillan Cottom (2017) points out the perils that minorities and working-class people face when they assume that educational technologies, such as for-profit universities and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), will improve their lives. These predatory institutions are erected primarily to enrich investors, not to educate those who can't afford traditional higher education. In chapter 2, I showed how Black folk are properly suspicious of technologies—even when they are designed for and by them—because they are concerned about being segregated or left behind. These worries are markedly different from those aired by white users of the same tech.

Why, then, is *America* an appropriate choice for the Black technocultural matrix? America as an ideal, as an institution, and as a set of racialized practices is *the* matrix for Blackness. Blackness is ineffably American—that is, it is well suited as a technological ideal for Black technoculture because America-the-nation created Blackness in order to survive and thrive. Morrison (1993) calls this "American Africanism"; American ideals inform Black community beliefs in equality, democracy,

and fairness even as Black folk experience daily life leavened by the understanding that the American telos of progress depends on antiblackness. Baldwin ([1950] 1985) is best at describing this conundrum, writing about the difference between the African and the American:

> The American Negro cannot explain to the African what surely seems in himself to be a want of manliness, of racial pride, a maudlin ability to forgive. It is difficult to make clear that he is not seeking to forfeit his birthright as a Black man, but that, on the contrary, it is precisely this birthright which he is struggling to recognize and make articulate. Perhaps it now occurs to him that in this need to establish himself in relation to his past he is most American, that this depthless alienation from oneself and one's people is, in sum, the American experience. (p. 39)

This last sentence is a direct callout to Du Bois's concept of double consciousness and as such fits neatly into my argument for Blackness and technoculture. As mentioned earlier, my case for racial identity rests on the dialectic between in-group and out-group, where both groups recognize that the in-group has certain beliefs, speech, and practices. I contend that racial identity is also a national identity, an assertion that many readers will doubtlessly find obvious. But the American of African descent is, as Baldwin notes, different from the Frenchwoman of African descent in that their respective national ideals shape their relationship to the state nearly as much as their relationship with whiteness.

Black folk in America are often as enthralled by the promises of technology as any other American; however, where the West dreams of domination, Black folk dream of liberation. Black folk are also deeply aware—and thus skeptical—of the effects of Western technologies on their bodies and spirit, living as they do in areas that are zoned for toxic waste disposal, in the wake of airborne pollution and waterborne chemical effluent, or even in broadband "deserts" that have been abandoned by telecoms and the US government. As both Baldwin and Du Bois poignantly note, alienation is the birthright of the American but is always embodied by Black folk. Cyberculture researchers focusing on alienation and online identity, as Kali Tal argued back in 1996, should have always been looking to Du Bois and Black folk.

Finally, you may have noticed that *America* is followed by an asterisk. I denote it as such to signal that the United States is but one context for diasporic Blackness. For example, Brah and Phoenix (2004) note that women of African descent in the United Kingdom face similar colonial- and imperialist-bred racism from whites. They also might have more recent, viable connections with a natal country of origin, whereas many Black Americans have no clue. Similarly, people of African origin in Central and South America will have differing experiences as *mestizaje* as well as with the different (post)colonial racial regimes they grew up in. Thus this matrix is implicitly designed—like critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA)—to be open to a multitude of diasporic Black experiences.

Invention/Style

The matrix element *invention/style* comes directly from my Black Twitter research, but I firmly believe that invention is as essential to Black technoculture as it is to Black culture's influence in the Americas overall. Black aesthetics are intensely libidinal and performative, drawing as they do on Black sociality and the communitarian ethos of Blackness in America. These qualities also distinguish Black technological practice from Western technological practice—that is, for Black technoculture, utility and efficiency are *not* the ultimate aims. While there are indeed Black inventors, such as Sarah Goode, Granville Woods, and Mildred Kenner, who developed countless practical inventions, there are also Black artists and technologists, such as Madame CJ Walker, Grandmaster Flash, and Grand Wizard Theodore, who developed aesthetic innovations.

There is a close analog between libidinal Black technoculture and Black music genres. In describing the blues, Walcott (1972) explains that the genre is "a struggle to order that space into a distinctive and comprehensive style, a style all the more distinctive for its unstinting generosity of spirit and unfailing faithfulness to the complexities of human experience; and comprehensive because it is the product of a vision that accommodates a tragicomic sensibility" (p. 10). If this sounds nothing like the rationalistic and imperialist aims of Western and American racial ideology, that is no accident. The blues are in dialogue with Western aims not as resistance or accommodation but as relation.

Walcott continues by arguing for the blues as an insistence of the formal possibilities that are inherent in style itself. I make a similar argument for Black rapprochement with technology—that is, the expression of style in Black digital practice "embodies, abstracts, expresses and symbolizes a sense of life" (Walcott, 1972, p. 11). I return to Walcott's words because he defines *style* so much better than I could: style is "to inhabit so completely the space one *does* have, and to inhabit it so individually, that one does not need to go outward toward the corridor of time to discover possibility. For one has found it, in one's own depths" (p. 11; emphasis original). This perspective is deeply akin to that evoked in discussions about Black identity held earlier in this text. That is, the fixed perception of self that has been inflicted on Black folk by Western technoculture, or the "hail," is a record of what one should be and has been under that regime. Identity, however, is what one does after the hail. My argument is that style and invention are crucial components of Black identity; they are how Black folk negotiate the informational and institutional regimes of antiblackness.

Modernity

For Black technoculture, *modernity* is precisely the informational, capitalistic, and institutional regime of antiblackness. Surveillance and sousveillance, digital redlining (Gilliard & Culik, 2016), access to education, even voting rights are all positioned in ways that limit—if not directly injure—Black folk on the way to reifying whiteness. Respectability is a chilling example of Black aspirations to modernity in its well-intentioned paeans of hygiene, control, and assimilation. In doing so, respectability proponents extol a thinly veiled Western white argument for what Blackness should be rather than what it could be. Feagin (2013) writes, "Racial oppression and its rationalizing frame have long been central to modern Western societies, to the present day" (p. 7). Unfortunately, for Blackness there is no escaping modernity, as it is the defining frame of Western society, and its transformative effects have reshaped much of the world in the West's image. There is no return to the folkways lauded by Du Bois or to the pan-Africanism espoused by Asante, and there is no escape to postmodernity's promises of decentering global powers and bringing the margin to prominence.

In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy (1993) also inveighs against utopian conceptions of Blackness and modernity, arguing instead that Blackness is a counterculture for modernity. For Gilroy, the inescapability of slavery calls the entire project of modernity into question—that is, Black progress from slaves to citizens reproduces the unity of ethics and politics (which I contend for as the reassertion of pathos over logos and as intersectionality) as folk knowledge. This position refutes modernity's insistence that ontology, axiology, and aesthetics belong to distinct knowledge domains—a position privileging whiteness's Cartesian/Christian insistence on the separation of mind and body. For example, where modernity and capitalism insist that work is emancipatory and agentive, Black folk have long understood that work only signifies servitude, misery, and subordination (p. 40). Instead, Gilroy argues, Black modernity should be understood as a "vernacular variety of unhappy consciousness" (p. 58); this fits neatly into my reasoning for Black pathos as the epistemological standpoint of a libidinal economic perspective on technology. Gilroy's grounds for Blackness and modernity gain additional salience when they are read against Giddens and Pierson's (1998) contention that late modernity has transformed our world into a space where emotional communication is crucial to sustaining relationships inside and outside of marriage (p. 119).

I agree with Gilroy's (1993) assertion, however, that analyses of Black modernity "require attention to formal attributes of expressive culture and distinctive moral basis" (p. 36). This claim presages Fouché's (2006) argument for vernacular technological creativity while adding a political and civic valence. In addition, Gilroy's description of Black modernity as non-European syncopation rings true for the evaluations of Black technoculture in this text. Associating Black modernity with expressive culture, Gilroy adds,

> The particular aesthetic which the continuity of expressive culture preserves derives not from dispassionate and rational evaluation of the artistic object but from an inescapably subjective contemplation of the mimetic functions of artistic performance in the processes of struggles towards emancipation, citizenship, and eventually autonomy [emphasis mine]. Subjectivity . . . may be grounded in communication, but this form of interaction is not an equivalent and idealized exchange be-

tween equal citizens who reciprocate their regard for each other in grammatically unified speech . . . there is no grammatical unity of speech to mediate communicative reason on the plantation. (1993, p. 57)

My arguments for the libidinal economy of Black technoculture lead me to supplement Gilroy's claims—first, by pointing out that the same expressive creativeness and subjectivity he identifies in Black music can be located in the performance and textuality of Black digital and social media practice. Second, while political motives may drive expressive culture, libidinal energies power those political moments. That is, Gilroy's "mimetic functions of artistic performance" are libidinal moments that are expressed as relations and mediated by technology.

The Future

My argument for *the future* for Black technoculture seems dishonest based on my earlier dismissal of Afrofuturism's sentiments, but "a time which is not this time but not time past" is an unwieldy phrasing. Remember, however, my claim for the *postpresent* as the temporal context for understanding how kairos and discourse build out Black discursive perspective—outside of and linked to the moment but also referring obliquely to the past and the present.

From that position, I take a linguistic approach to this matrix element—namely, that features of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) provide evidence for Black technocultural perspectives on time, modernity, and technology. The three forms I discuss briefly here bolster my claim for Black technoculture as a postpresent rather than as an Afrofuturistic technological belief system. The three grammatical features that AAVE speakers use to denote time (Rickford, 1999) are as follows:

1. The invariant *be*
2. The stressed *bin*
3. The phrase *fixin' to*

I chose linguistic forms rather than slang terms because while slang changes quickly—especially for AAVE—grammar and pronunciation are systematic features of language that persist much longer over

time. These linguistic features are also class related—that is, they are much more frequently spoken by less-affluent, less-educated Black folk. However, as Spears (1998) notes, while AAVE might not be spoken by all segments of the Black community, it is commonly understood. There are often only a few generations of class differentiation in Black communities, and many who cannot or will not use these forms at work or in certain social settings will still be in contact with family and community members who use them on a daily basis. Because there is a shared understanding of these AAVE features, I am comfortable in claiming that they represent the banal, everyday speech of the community without being pejorative or assuming that Blacks are a "low class undifferentiated mass" (Du Bois, 1940). As Rickford (1999) notes, skilled AAVE speakers use these features, distinctive words, and rhetorical styles to "inform, persuade, attract, praise, celebrate, chastise, entertain, educate, get over, set apart, mark identity, reflect, refute, brag, and do all the things for which human beings use language" (p. 12).

The invariant or habitual *be* references future, conditional, or habitual or extended phenomena that are still occurring—for example, "They be on Twitter all day." It differs from standard English *be*, which only indicates that someone has done something in a particular tense. *Been*, in its unstressed form, is closely linked to the standard English forms *has been* and *have been*, but *bin* is very different. The increased emphasis marks an action or state that happened a long time ago, or in "remote time," but is in effect up to the moment of speech (Rickford & Rickford, 2000). *Bin* cannot be used with adverbial phrases marking time. *Bin* also has a performative aspect; in some cases, it may be used deceptively to indicate history with a phenomenon or object. A second performative aspect, where *been* is performed with *had*, *coulda*, or *shoulda*, marks a period that remains in effect until a time earlier than the moment of speech. Finally, *fixin' to*, which is often spoken as *finna* or *finsta*, references events that are about to happen in the immediate future.

These linguistic features indicate that Black technoculture has a different relationship with time than white Western technoculture. Western modernity prizes punctuality and efficiency; networked communication and computational platforms, even as they collapse space and time for their users, are still deeply reliant on timeliness as a means of synchronizing activities for institutional and commercial purposes. Black

culture, on the other hand, can be understood as having a more flexible relationship with both the past and the postpresent, where time is relative to participation. Both *bin* and *fixin' to* indicate an elasticity of time up to a certain moment, whereas the habitual *be* indicates a timelessness to human activity.

I relate these to technoculture through Gilroy's (1993) assessment of Blackness as a counterculture of modernity. While Black culture is often in dire need of political and moral reassurance that the present is not the future, the linguistic features of AAVE indicate a comfort and willingness to live in an elastic now or, as I argued earlier, a postpresent that is not quite the future but a moment to be present within.

Coda: Research into the Black Digital

Early in the Web 2.0 era, Keith Obadike (n.d.) set up an eBay auction to sell off his Blackness as performance art. Using the platform's capacities to list the features of the "product," Obadike offered a list of situations and contexts in which his Blackness could be (and should not be) used by the purchaser. Some highlights include the following:

- This Blackness may be used to augment the blackness of those already black, especially for purposes of playing "blacker-than-thou."
- The Seller does not recommend that this Blackness be used while demanding fairness.
- The Seller does not recommend that this Blackness be used while demanding.

Although eBay quickly pulled down the auction (there were only twelve bids), Obadike's use of the e-commerce platform is one of the more notable examples of Blackness being deployed to give definition and clarity to the digital and to online spaces. While assumptions have been made that Obadike was solely auctioning off his racial and cultural identity to white folk, it is entirely feasible that he was also offering his racial authenticity to Black folk who found themselves at odds with their natal community's concept of Black identity. As such, his auction should be understood as an artifact of digital double consciousness.

While writing this text, I have consciously bounded my inquiry into cultural digital practice by focusing on Black American culture without comparing it to other diaspora cultures or to whiteness. While the public's consciousness of Black digital practice has certainly evolved since 2001, when Obadike's auction was posted, the ethos and ideals of Black technoculture have never received enough (any) attention. At best, when agitating for social or political change, Black online resistance and activism are deemed the markers of "appropriate" digital practice, but those occasions are few. This lack of serious attention is due to cultural beliefs about Black Americans as deviant versions of white Americans—a perception that has only been slightly[5] adjusted by the political and cultural prowess of Black digital practice on Twitter, Vine, YouTube, and other social media services. It's far too easy to believe, after deprecating race as a factor in internet and digital practice, that Black Americans are just Americans with less "civilized" or "sophisticated" online information needs, uses, and behaviors.

This book's concluding argument for theorizing Black technoculture, then, is meant as a corrective to deficit models of—or research into—Black digital practice. My articulation of this vision of Black technoculture is an offering to those who are interested in portraying Black digital practice from a more generous perspective as well. Black technocultural theory is a generative model one can use to ground explanations of what Black folk do in online spaces. By eschewing modernist perspectives on digital practice (e.g., brand, labor, and resistance), I offer a nuanced, comprehensive viewpoint into why Black folk use digital technologies in everyday situations. My emphasis on the everyday is intentional; I am not seeking to valorize those who are already powerful or notable in the networks that I study. While their moves are emulated or commodified, they are not definitive of the Black communities using digital media every day.

I would like to play out this succinct conclusion by returning to CTDA once more. CTDA has been invaluable in aiding my conceptualization of a Black techno- and cybercultural matrix. As a discourse analysis and interpretive method, CTDA prioritizes the belief systems of marginalized and underrepresented groups' conceptions of self with respect to their technology use. Du Bois wrote in *Dusk of Dawn*, "Lions have no

historians"—an allegorical claim describing how even an apex predator has no real defense to justify its existence, certainly not against its extermination for the "benefit" of a modern society seeking to claim its territory for agriculture, industry, and exploitation. Here Du Bois offers a compelling argument to recenter Black technology use from the lion's perspective rather than from the hunter's. Black folk have long been subjected to academic and intellectual justifications for their inferiority—from Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln denying the Negro basic humanity to Oscar Lewis and Daniel Patrick Moynihan arguing that Black folk have a "culture of poverty"—even as they embody and fight for the American ideals of equality and justice that are denied to them by modernity. In my extensive reading of science and technology studies, as well as information science, library science, and information studies, I found entire texts (and disciplines) full of unexamined whiteness. Thus my research stream and this book have emerged from this perspective, where the standpoint of the culture under examination should be the reference point for inquiry.

This should not be taken as a recommendation to employ CTDA as a method, however. There are a plethora of excellent approaches— qualitative and quantitative—for analyzing digital artifacts, users, and practices. What I suggest instead for new media and internet researchers who wish to examine digital practice by nonmainstream users is to take advantage of CTDA's conceptual framework—that is, the directive to find and employ reflexive and philosophical accounts written *by* the folk using the technology under examination. Moreover, this advice is directed toward scholars of mainstream ICT users. Imagine how much more powerful internet studies would be if researchers were explicit about the whiteness of the online communities they study? If nothing else, the coders and engineers of Silicon Valley could be disabused of the notion that they are creating applications and software for "everyone" rather than for themselves. I won't hold my breath for that, however.