

commons, an *a*subjectivity that is not about the enclosed self but the open, vulnerable, available, enfolded organism.

Black Study is the affirmation of and belief in blackness, though belief is radically under assault, coded through and attacked as “the religious.” One need only read contemporary philosophical work of the “New Atheist” movement—Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens as two examples—for the ways belief becomes racialized, and how that racialization is part of, not distinct from, a general antiblackness sentiment.³² Characterized by Harris as the most virulent and dangerous strain of belief, one wonders at his interarticulation of Islam and otherness that seems to animate Harris’s thought. It is not simply that belief is a problem, but belief that is accompanied with overt, explicit aesthetic practices—wearing *hijab*, praying five times a day eastward—that makes of such belief a general antagonism, a general threat. I opine that the general antagonism and threat of belief is because belief, when borne out through certain aesthetic behaviors, is considered to be blackness itself. *Whiteness* is considered the absence of such purportedly primitivist behaviors, and thus, a lack of belief that moves the flesh.³³ As such, *Blackpentecostal Breath* considers the aesthetics of belief, the performative behaviors and gestures that accompany collective modes of intellection and knowledge of divine, otherworldly worlds. I invoke Harris and Hitchens not just to serve as straw men but to consider the ways belief *as* practice of sociality comes under assault for certain groups. I am intrigued by the ways Islam is cast in the New Atheist movement as a modality of thought and practice that is most violent, and it seemed to me, this is asserted because of the public practice of belief, the way belief is worn on the flesh (in the case of the khimar, niqab, burka, and hijab, as examples). Such belief is worn—like the racialization of the flesh—and such wearing produces a crisis in the meaning of belief as practice. We might call this wearing of *belief in the flesh*—“in” here indexing both *internal* to and *the state or condition of* the flesh. This belief is not unlike the aesthetic practices of Blackpentecostalism I elaborate. What remains to be done in future work, work I hope this writing will prompt, are ways to think the relation between Islam and Christianity grounded in the flesh, black flesh, a certain move and movement, a certain vibration toward liberation. The distinction between belief and practice is one interrogation *Blackpentecostal Breath* stages.

In “On the Jewish Question,” Karl Marx interrogates Bruno Bauer’s idea that integration into German society for Jews depended upon

forced relinquishment of their relationship to Jewishness—the cultural and historical performative practices of religiosity.³⁴ Usually figured as antireligious, Marx indeed otherwise and famously claimed that religion and opiates were co-constitutive for masses. However, in “On the Jewish Question,” which queries the possibilities for Jewishness, Marx demonstrates how relinquishment to gain freedom and citizenship—what he calls “political emancipation”—is a ruse. Giving up cultural and historical performative practices does not produce abolition but another set of strictures and bondage. In another register and key, we can say that one gains political emancipation through aversion, embarrassment, and abandonment over practice, over *belief in the flesh*, and this political emancipation is the condition that occasions the theological-philosophical production of “the body.” The body, here then, is a coherence, a stable entity that can be entered into something like civil society. But perhaps what is needed is an excess to, an exorbitance of, political emancipation. *Belief in the flesh* will get us there. In *Blackpentecostal Breath*, I try to think about not only the generalizability of Marx’s analysis to consider the ways in which black flesh are denigrated, but how Blackpentecostal aesthetics rise to the occasion of, and overcome, the denigration of and aversion for blackness.

I utilize the portmanteau ~~Blackpentecostalism~~ because I consider both blackness and Pentecostalness to be forces in the world that do not belong to any group, that are only insofar as they are given away. Both are transformational energies that are carried in the flesh, and I think the two concepts together, each as constitutive of the other. If blackness is the tradition of resistance that inheres objects,³⁵ and if Pentecostalness is the capacity for otherwise beginnings ongoingly,³⁶ Blackpentecostalism is the capaciousness of otherwise resistance that rises to, while emerging from, the occasion of its genesis. I use the term theological-philosophical throughout the text and do so because I think the two *together* constitute a worldview, a way to think about blackness and attendant fleshly practices and performances. I hone in on and interrogate the ways theology and philosophy are sometimes thought as distinct from the other rather than are co-constituted. I hope for it to become clear that the ways blackness is conceived in western theology and philosophy is through averting blackness, black flesh, through an ongoing antagonistic relation to it. I also use the couplet *atheological-aphilosophical* to name the intimate relationship of the collective intellectual project that is Blackpentecostalism for thinking

about “god talk” as well as concepts of being, morality, knowledge, and law. But like the resolve that is the aspiration of knowledge in theology and philosophy, as da Silva noted above, I am interested in the otherwise than theology and philosophy that is no less intensely concerned with these various ideas. And the object of Blackpentecostalism, of Black Study, what Black Study tries to produce and analyze, is a collective possibility for belief in otherwise worlds, one that is a creative critique of the one(s) in which we exist. That otherwise can be constituted in our now moment does not mean that otherwise worlds are utopic. It means that otherwise is possible and after such an analytics, after such an interrogation into the ways otherwise performs itself into being, we are charged with producing otherwise in the cause of justice. But we cannot rest with having been the otherwise but must be capacious and unfolding, open and committed to equity.

In Chapter 1, “Breath,” I construct the theory of tradition embedded in the performance and transference of breath as the necessary physiological and spiritual force that is the constitutive element of Blackpentecostal performative production. As breath is the vivifying force enlivening and quickening flesh, this chapter sets the theoretical groundwork and structure for thinking the *atheological-aphilosophical* concept. Breath is a reminder of the connection with divinity and Jean-Christophe Bailly writes about how the “slightest breath” is the sign of irrepressible life.³⁷ To consider the aesthetics of breathing, I first analyze “whooping” practices of three Blackpentecostal women preachers to illustrate the performance of intentional breathing practices. Then, I turn to Pneumatology—the study of *pneuma*, the Greek word for “breath”—as pneumatology is about the relation of spirit to flesh. However, most pneumatological writings repress the concept of breath itself in ways similar, I argue, to how black flesh as Blackpentecostalism is repressed in pneumatological writings. Chapter 1 extrapolates a “blackness pneumatology,” an *atheology-aphilosophy* of breathing that informs Blackpentecostal aesthetic cultural production, as a poetics and a form of life. Analyzing lynching practices between 1880 and 1930, I argue that Blackpentecostal whooping during preaching and praying responds to the eclipsing of black breath through aesthetic breathing. Ida B. Wells-Barnett and her antilynching campaign shows up in this chapter. I want to demonstrate the ways the Blackpentecostal intellectual practice of critique finds its way in, infuses, and produces the critique that Wells-Barnett staged throughout her career.

"Shouting," the second chapter, is primarily an analysis of Immanuel Kant's Enlightenment anthropological thought as well as a staging to consider the relation between Enlightenment and the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Chapter 2 defines what I term the "choreographic itinerary and protocol," a series of placements and arrangements for how blackness was cognized, creating the concept of racial-religious difference. This choreographic is different from what I call the choreosonic, a portmanteau underscoring the fact that choreography and sonicity—movement and sound—are inextricably linked and have to be thought together. "Shouting" as a Blackpentecostal practice undoes the distinction between movement and sound. In this chapter, I analyze the "choreo" of the choreosonic, illuminating how both predestination theology animating the Great Awakening revivals, as well as Enlightenment philosophy were the theological-philosophical conditions of emergence for thinking time and space without blackness that not only instantiates subjectivity but marks the dividing line between white bodies and the complex modes of fleshly disembodiment that are called blackness. A case study in aversion as a concept, this chapter argues that there is movement-sound, a vibration, a choreosonics of *atheological-aphilosophical* thought that exceeds normative theological-philosophical figurations, found in performance of moving flesh—that which exists before the abstraction of spatial and temporal coherence. Moving flesh speaks back and against problematic conceptions of blackness. I thus analyze the tradition of Blackpentecostal dancing flesh through interrelations among Afro-Arabic Islamic *saut*, nineteenth-century Ring Shout, and twentieth-century Blackpentecostal "shouting."

In Chapter 3, "Noise," I analyze the *sonic* in choreosonic performances of the *atheology-aphilosophy* of blackness aestheticized by a specific kind of singing and praise noise heard during two particular moments of the Blackpentecostal church service—that is, Testimony and Tarrying. These songs and sounds offer sharp criticism of the given world, a political economy that is foundationally built on exploitation and abstraction, exploitation and alienation. An attention to the songs and sounds, as ephemera, is urgent for thinking about the ways Blackpentecostalism manifests before the 1906 Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, how the sonic resources of resistance in Blackpentecostalism are found in varied contexts, some seemingly secular and others purportedly only sacred. Offered in the chapter is a critique of *historical being*, of the concept of history. Three Jennys—an enslaved woman,

Jenny von Westphalen (Marx), and Jenny Evans Moore (Seymour)—ground the chapter, using the “sonic” aspect of the choreosonic as a critique of racial capitalism and its abuses. Listening to the sound of singing during Testimony Service and praise noise during Tarrying makes the *atheological-aphilosophical* antiphonal resistance to aversion and embarrassment audible. Embarrassment—an affective response produced through a submission to respectability politics—is the concept untangled in this chapter that the three Jennys refuse. Rather than embarrassment, they each utilize the politics of avoidance, an *atheological-aphilosophical* intellectual performative practice. Such refusal of embarrassment is against historical being.

In the fourth chapter, “Tongues,” I write about how, at the turn of the twentieth-century, a crucial debate emerged amongst the nascent Blackpentecostal movement: Was speaking in tongues *glossolalia*, “heavenly language,” or *xenolalia*, speaking a language that the individual has not learned? What was the breath doing in the flesh and how was that aestheticized breath registered in this community? More, how is the distinction between *glossolalia* and *xenolalia* grounded in abandonment? Rather than leaving behind the aesthetic spiritual practice, Blackpentecostals employed speaking in tongues with reckless abandon. I argue that these are two minuscule but inassimilable concepts are each grounded in particular conceptions of personhood. The debate about *glossolalia* and *xenolalia* elucidates concerns about capacities to speak for oneself or for another, and to speak to another. Moreover, the debate was also about the possibility of converting an Other—someone in India, for example—without the need to cognize in the language, thought, and mental aptitude of the Other. This debate about performative distinction is the grounds for a Blackpentecostal critique of the liberal subject. And this distinction between *glossolalia* and *xenolalia*, it turns out, buttresses different approaches to the study of black life as well as divergent approaches to approaching objects of study in institutions like the university. In the chapter, we also listen in on the Fisk Jubilee Singers to consider the ways the distinction between *glossolalia* and *xenolalia* indexes a way to think the social life of blackness, its vibration, its sounding, its translation, its interpretation. Such interpretations have often happened in the university. All this to consider how knowledge is produced and transformed in the setting of the university, how these institutional settings often require a reduction of black sound, of blackness, of Blackpentecostal aesthetic practice.

V

In *Blackpentecostal Breath*, I demonstrate how categorical distinction is a problem of modern thought. Elaborated, alongside the untangling of categorical distinction, are the ways the invention of racialization is a fundamental, foundational aspect of the maintenance of that project. Categorical distinction as a means to organize knowledge is a certain epistemological constraint that bears down on us from the outside since such organizing presumes the possibility of the finding and continuance of pure difference. Thought theological, thought philosophical, is, then, racial thought, racist thought. Categorically distinct modalities of thinking the world cannot help but be subsumed under the thinking of racialization. Categorically distinct modalities of thinking the world produces the serrations of racialization, this thinking cuts thought, divides it. Such operations happen through aversive logics. But the gift of aversive logic—insofar as there might be one—is that what remains intact is the thing so averted, even if the thing so averted is averted through violence, brutality, horror. There is something that remains, exceeds, is uncapturable and that because of the refusal of sustained engagement. *Blackpentecostal Breath* considers aesthetic practices of Blackpentecostalism—whooping, shouting, noise-making, and tongues speech—to interrogate the ways distinction is produced. And that because each aesthetic practice was only distinguished in order to highlight the ways such distinctions were predicated upon the literal evacuation of breath, *black pneuma*, the slightest breath of living. Such distinctions, in other words, are illusory because each practice is grounded in the flesh, in the breath flesh takes in and expels, is grounded in otherwise modes of existence. The varied aesthetic practices cannot be considered as a stand-alone but part of a social world, an ecology of intense mood and feeling, the practice of otherwise epistemologies against the constraints of western modernity. Looking toward the horizon after setting categorical distinction in relief, we will be able to ask: What does it mean to be black, to exist in blackness, when the categorical distinction as an imperative modality of thought itself has been interrogated? What does blackness have to do, to say, to be if the primary organizing logic of flesh has been disrupted, if racialization is no longer operable as a strategy of containment? The task of this book is to get us to the horizon.

SO I HAD to think about it, and it hit me. Before encountering Hortense Spillers's "vestibularity," before Fred Moten's "in the break," before Nahum Chandler's "otherwise," before Denise Ferreira da Silva's "ethical crisis," it was the radically inclusive Pentecostal ministerial work that my friend Kendal Brown was doing that prompted me to really think about the concept of otherwise possibilities. I asked him years ago—because I was frustrated that queer folks wouldn't just attend queer affirming churches rather than those spaces that deemed them sinful—what was the point of having queer affirming churches if people won't leave. And he said to me the point wasn't to have everyone leave their spaces through brute force, to cause them to leave spaces where they are in order to be in affirming spaces against their will. Rather, the point of the work was to create the space of possibility, to create the affirming spaces, and to let folks know that an alternative exists if they so choose to join with it. And that idea has remained with me so many years later. Alternatives exist—already—against the normative modes under which we endure. If we so choose to join up with the alternative, all the better. The work is to make apparent the fact of the resonance of alternatives, to let folks know that we are here engaging in otherwise work. And that is a beautiful thing.