“Spooky Action at a Distance”: Chronotopic Entanglement in the Writing of Jay Bernard and Saidiya Hartman

Kennedy Marie Crowder

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Abstract

Albert Einstein famously called the phenomenon quantum entanglement “spooky action at a distance”, referring to quantum particles’ ability to maintain connection despite being separated by vast distances across space and time. Michelle Wright posits that quantum entanglement is a useful paradigm for Black studies precisely because it allows for recognition of distance—dispersion—while simultaneously recognizing a persistent connection that defies linear time and space. Despite the growing number of scholars using quantum mechanics to describe Black reality and artistic creation, there have been precious few references to Black British writing. Further, there is an underutilization of the clearest theoretical bridge between physics and literary analysis: Mikhail Bakhtin’s chronotope.

Responding to these gaps in the field, I examine the literary spacetimes of *Surge* (2019) by Jay Bernard and *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019) by Saidiya Hartman. I consider how both works share a setting in the “theoretical archive of contemporary black existence” (Okoth para. 4, 1) while simultaneously inhabiting vastly different primary localities: New York City and New Cross. Combining Bakhtin’s chronotope with theories from physics of Blackness scholarship and Black cultural studies, I demonstrate how Black (archival) spacetime influences the voice, style, and form of the texts. My decision to use a comparative approach takes seriously the possibility of a narrative interconnection that exists across Black British and African American spacetime; the ways in which the authors converge and diverge with each other renders moments of temporal and spatial symmetry felt across the Black diaspora.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work, and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this or any other University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

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Note on my request

Throughout this thesis, I will ask you, my reader, to *pause here*. I will ask you, my reader, to stop reading and wait. This is as much to remind myself as to remind you that my topic orbits Black death and banal violence. In these moments, if you are religious, please offer a prayer before continuing. If you are not religious, please offer a moment of silence or a moment of sound or a moment of dance or a moment of art before continuing. Give something. This will make the reading process longer but that too is intentional. Wait. Consider with me in those paused moments all that literature and research and reading cannot do, so that we can continue without reservation or false pretence.

Thank you.

Introduction

> I cannot make a case for my attitude in physics which you would consider at all reasonable. […] I cannot seriously believe in it because the theory cannot be reconciled with the idea that physics should represent a reality in time and space, free from spooky action at a distance.
>
> (Albert Einstein, *The Born-Einstein Letters: correspondence between Albert Einstein and Max and Hedwig Born from 1916–1955, with commentaries by Max Born* 158)

In a letter written to Max Born on March 3, 1947, Albert Einstein lamented a recent development in physics. Before quantum mechanics, physics presented a universe where objects are locally real, meaning they are only influenced by their immediate surroundings and have definitive properties even when not being observed (Berkovitz section 3.3). This tracks with the human experience. If my sister screams in 2016, I do not flinch from the noise in 2024. Because of a phenomenon known as quantum entanglement, science now knows the building blocks of our universe behave differently. When particles are generated or interact in a specific way, they become entangled, such that the state of one particle is dependent upon the other. Stranger still, when the state of one of those particles is measured or observed, the other particle will instantaneously collapse into a correlated state even if the particles have been separated across vast distances of space and time (Einstein et al. 777-780; Duarte 31-32). Not only does locality collapse—the particles are affected by something outside of their immediate surroundings, an object in a different time and space—but realism too crumbles—there is no definitive state when the particle is not being measured. The individual particles are no longer operating independently and instead remain inextricably bound together irrespective of physical distance (Clavin). For Einstein, this "spooky action at a distance" was disturbing and perplexing; he could not "seriously believe in it" despite admitting that the statistical evidence of the phenomenon was sound (Einstein 158).

In contrast to his disturbance, a growing number of Black cultural scholars have found resonance in the "spookiness" of post-Einsteinian physics. This subfield

can be loosely termed physics of Blackness, a term borrowed from Michelle Wright's 2015 book of the same name. Though not a clearly defined field, physics of Blackness sets itself apart from broader Black cultural studies through its explicit borrowing of concepts from quantum mechanics, astrophysics, and string theory. Take, for instance, the following passage from Wright's 2019 article "Diaspora and Entanglement":

> While applying a successful experiment in quantum physics to Africana studies may seem farfetched, in fact it seems all the more apt: after all, those who decry any meaningful connection between Africans and Black diasporans often point to distance and time—the diaspora is simply too far away and too long disconnected, they argue, for there to be any truly authentic ties. […] The example given to me by my student Brenton Boyd strikes me as quite salient here: the queer Jamaican Londoners from the documentary Out and Bad who gather to dance to dancehall and deliberately ignore the phobic, violent lyrics. There they are, also dancing, also doing Blackness, connected but not in the same space as their counterparts in Jamaica, tied though not unified. (219, 220)

Wright first establishes a cultural necessity for relying on quantum mechanics by pointing out how spatio-temporal separation is used to undermine the possibility of "meaningful connection" across the Black diaspora. She then posits that quantum entanglement is a useful paradigm to Black studies precisely because it allows for recognition of distance and dispersion while simultaneously acknowledging a persistent connection: tied though not unified. While the unique historical and cultural context remains, Wright presents Blackness as "an entanglement of equal relations", where all members of the diaspora come to influence the state of each other (Wright "Diaspora and Entanglement" 223). Just as entangled systems form complex webs of influences across space and time, or spacetime, so too are their embodied invisible forces connecting the disparate geographies that make-up the Black diaspora.[1]

Through Wright's framework, time, space, reality, and racialization are all inter-dependent upon and influence each other. Blackness can thus be re-negotiated

[1] Spacetime as used throughout this thesis refers to the concept in quantum mechanics that space and time are a combined four-dimensional continuum: space makes up the first three dimensions and time makes up the fourth. Events are moments in spacetime defined by the three-dimensional location in space plus the position in time (See: P. L. Galison's "Minkowski's Space-Time: From Visual Thinking to the Absolute World").

as a product of spacetime, 'a "when" and "where"' rather than a what, and that spacetime itself is changed in the wake of racialization (Hua). I use wake here in reference to Christina *Sharpe's In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016), one part of a triptych mediation on the afterlives of slavery. Building off the work of Saidiya Hartman, Hortense Spillers, and Dionne Brand, Sharpe considers the multiple meanings of the word "wake" (the trail of water left behind a slave ship, a vigil for the dead, to be woke), explaining that "to be in the wake is to occupy and to be occupied by the continuous and changing present of slavery's as yet unresolved unfolding" (13–14). Wake work is both theory and praxis, mournful and celebratory. Pulling from literary, visual, and performance materials, Sharpe describes wake work as "plotting, mapping, and collecting the archives of everyday Black immanent and imminent death […]" (13). Of particular relevance to Sharpe's engagement is archives and archival spaces, specifically how archives (dis)remember Black subjects. In the introduction to *In the Wake*, Sharpe writes "Black scholars of slavery get wedged in the partial truths of the archives while trying to make sense of their silences, absences, and modes of dis/appearance" (12). As I discuss at length in the first chapter of this thesis, Sharpe is referring to a well-documented experience within Black cultural studies of trying to locate Black subjectivity and Black aliveness within archival materials and instead encountering excess records of death, violence, or simply nothing at all. Saidiya Hartman laments as much in her 2008 article "Venus in Two Acts":

> how does one recuperate lives entangled with and impossible to differentiate from the terrible utterances that condemned them to death, the account books that identified them as units of value, the invoices that claimed them as property, and the banal chronicles that stripped them of human features? (3)

Sharpe's recuperative method is *autotheory*, a literary and artistic tradition fusing autobiography, critical theory, philosophy, and memoir together. Through transgressing existing disciplinary boundaries, the form "reveals[s] the entanglement of research and creation" and "the tenuousness of maintaining illusory separations between art and life, theory and practice, work and the self" (Fournier *Autotheory* 2). As Lauren Gabrielle Fournier argues, autotheory allows Sharpe to "engage lived experience, individually but also collectively and culturally, as theory" ("Thinking as Care" 57). The result is a work that centres Black subjectivity by interrogating "how

we imagine ways of knowing that past, in excess of the fictions of the archive […] [and] the ways we recognize the many manifestations of that fiction and that excess, that past not yet past, in the present" (Sharpe 13). Time does not move from past to present to future but rather loops like a circle, the past haunting the present. The spacetime logics of her critical approach is therefore anti-classical or nonlinear. Spooky. Christine Okoth's review of *In the Wake* creates further connection to entanglement spacetime by remarking on the style and experimental structure of the monograph: by "combining visual, literary, and theoretical archives […] [Sharpe] moves gracefully between vastly disparate geographical and cultural sites to reconstruct a theoretical archive of contemporary Black existence" (para. 4, 1). Thus, though Sharpe does not employ a physics vocabulary as Wright does, she is nevertheless engaging in the similar premises that Black geographies are entangled with each other, that racialization has done something undoubtedly peculiar to space and time, and that archives—theoretical and material—are central locations for Black thought (Okoth para. 5, 1).[2] Literature functions as a form of wake work not by attempting to correct or fill those archival silences; indeed, wake work as literature "depict[s] aesthetically the impossibility of such resolutions" (Sharpe 14).

It is the impossibility of resolving archival dismemory and the endurance of an entangled Black experience rendered through language that connects the poetry and prose of Jay Bernard and Saidiya Hartman. Both authors work in a mode I term *archive writing*, literature that is produced from within and in response to the archive and thus is a product of the complicated time-space configurations, or *chronotopes*, that happen in archival spaces. Chronotope is a term coined by Russian philosopher and literary critics Mikhail Bakhtin in his 1937 essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Towards a Historical Poetics". Bakhtin borrows from Einstein's Theory of Relativity, "almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely)', to read time and space as inseparable and interconnected cultural forces 'that are

[2] When I say Black geographies, I refer to "Black spatial knowledge, negotiations, and resistances" that happen within "geographies of domination—colonialism, slavery, imperialism, racial sexual displacement […]" (Hawthorne 4). For an overview of Black Geographies as a discipline, see Camilla Hawthorne's "Black matters are spatial matters: Black geographies for the twenty-first century" (2019). There will be more discussion of Black Geographies in Chapter 1.

artistically represented in literature" (84).[3] In sum, because different cultural context breeds different conceptions of space and time, differences in the plot and setting of literary genres can be distinguished through their spacetime representations.

The purpose of this thesis is to consider shared spacetime in Black literature: a Black archival chronotope. The instable and nonlinear character of Black spacetime, I will show, is intensified through the genre of archive writing, where a breakdown of past/present binaries is even more concretely apart of the context of the work. I aim to respond to Wright's call to read the Black diaspora as an entanglement of equal relations by taking seriously the implications of spooky action at a distance on how Black subjects work within and write through a theoretical archive of contemporary Black existence, an embodied archive of Black being, and . In this Introduction, I will first provide a review of relevant theories from physics of Blackness scholarship. I will then discuss how Bakthin's chronotope has been related to Black literature previously and identify the novelty of my engagement, before concluding with an outline of the thesis structure.

The Concept of Spacetime in Black Cultural Studies

The use of astrophysics in Black feminist scholarship dates back to the 1980s with significant reliance on the metaphor or "trope" of a black hole (Baker 144-145).[4] This is due in large part to Evelynn Hammonds' foundational 1994 article "Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality" that was recently commemorated in a special issue of *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*. Black holes are areas of spacetime in which, due to a collapsing star, an immense amount of mass is packed down into a tiny volume. The process creates a gravity so intense that an object would have to move faster than the speed of light to escape it, and since nothing can, anything that happens inside the black hole cannot be seen: no

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[3] Bakhtin credits Einstein for inventing spacetime, as most people do, but that is historically inaccurate. Herman Minkowski first proposed a four-dimensional spacetime continuum. In fact, Einstein was initially skeptical of the validity of Minkowski's theories until he realized that his own theories of special and general relativity only work in spacetime. See: *The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein, Volume 6: The Berlin Years: Writings, 1914-1917* p. 146 and *Space and Time: Minkowski's Papers on Relativity,* trans. by Fritz Lewertoff and Vesselin Petkov (2012) p. 1-4, 21.

[4] For more on black holes as a trope with reference to Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) and *Black Boy* (1945), see chapter 3 in Houston A. Baker's *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (1984). Though Baker himself is not working within the Black feminist tradition, his framing of black holes as "trope" helps shape how I formulate my own reading of the physical elements in Black literature.

reflections, no emissions (Schultz 285-297). Afro-Caribbean literature scholar Petal Samuel argues that because black holes are "a cosmic phenomenon that queers time, space, and even the laws of physics" Black feminist scholars and writers can use the image provocatively "to think anew about racialized gender, sexuality, citizenship, and ontology" (134). Responding to how Michele Wallace relates the perceived invisibility of black holes to the "incommensurability" of black feminist creativity, Hammonds uses black holes to think analogously about how Black female sexuality is "almost universally described […] as an absence" within queer theory and gender studies (Wallace 218; Hammonds 131).[5] To do this, she considers two problems posed by black holes: how do you locate a black hole, and what is it like inside? Hammonds first notes that a black hole only appears to be "a void, an empty place in space"; in actuality, they are "dense and full" localities that effect the objects around them and contain *something* even if contemporary science cannot definitively say what that is (Hammonds 139). As such,

> the identification of a black hole requires the use of sensitive detectors of energy and distortion. In the case of black female sexualities, this implies that we need to develop reading strategies that allow us to make visible the distorting and productive effects these sexualities produce in relation to more visible sexualities. (Hammonds 139)

Hammonds analogy is fulfilling not because she definitively answers how scholars should engage Black female queer representation but because it shifts critical attention to articulation: what is blackness *doing* at the intersection of queer and woman? How does the immense gravity of these intersections bend spacetime? *What is happening inside a black hole?* To answer these questions, Hammonds argues, Black feminist scholars must use "a different geometry" (Hammonds 139).[6]

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[5] Important to note that Wallace defines Black feminist creativity in her essay "Variation on Negation and the Heresy of Black Female Creativity" (1989) as *all* black female creative production. She assumes that such work is "inherently critical of current oppressive and represses political, economic, and social arrangements affecting not just black woman but black people as a whole" (215).

[6] Kerr geometry is the geometry of empty spacetime that rotates around a black hole's event horizon. Spacetime around blackholes functions peculiarly, described by theoretical cosmologist Chanda Prescod-Weinstein thus: "the spatial coordinate becomes *timelike* and the time coordinate becomes *spacelike*. This means that the coordinate that is mapping the flow of time begins to behave like space, and the coordinate that is mapping out space in its three directions begins to behave like time. This has serious physical consequences: beyond the boundary of the event horizon, all sense of time is lost and one can only move forward in space toward the singularity at the center of the black hole. This is to say that time has lost all sense of directionality inside the black hole. Far from a void, as Hammonds notes, black holes are "complex geometric phenomena" (Prescod-Weinstein 197). For

I recognize that Hammonds is writing about queer theory and its limits for the Black female sexual subject and therefore her use of black holes is narrowly focused. At the same time, I find at the heart of her engagement three central tenets: 1) even when disavowed and unrecognized, Black subjects have profound influence on their spatio-temporal surroundings; 2) the weirdness of spacetime is resonant with Blackness; and 3) spacetime distortions present a useful theoretical approach to reading Blackness because it implicitly challenges, to use Shoniqua Roach's words, "the limits of what is and what might be known, seen, felt, and discoursed" (7). Therefore, despite the narrowness of Hammonds original engagement, black (w)holes articulate the full allure of post-Einsteinian physics for Black cultural scholars. I therefore position these tenets as the epistemological bedrock of physics of Blackness scholarship.

A second common motif in writing on Black temporalities is stolen/stealing time. Michael Hanchard names "time appropriation, seizing another's time and making it one's own" to describe how the 1960s Black Nationalists and civil rights movements sought to form a new Black temporality through the "annihilation of racialized time" (265-266). Over two decades later, Tao Leigh Goffe argues in her 2022 article "Stolen Life, Stolen Time: Black Temporality, Speculation, and Racial Capitalism" that speculative modes of storytelling by Afro-futurists authors unravel and "steal away" colonial time by "refusing to labour within the limits of history" (110). Both authors deploy an oppositional framework, where Black subjects "remake", "steal", "reclaim", or "annihilate" colonial, Western temporalities.[7] For Rasheedah Phillips, of the Philadelphia-based collective Black Quantum Futurisms (BQF), colonization requires a conquering of space and time, "the temporal domain of the future" (Phillips para. 1). In order to create a future for an empire, colonizing powers must re-create a pre-colonial past that fits within the colonial imagination. Thus, controlling history through facticity becomes crucial:

> Facticity means a thing can only take on the feature of being a fact, of being real, of being truth or a part of reality when it has been pinpointed to the linear timeline and assigned a date. […] The nature of the two primary Freedom Days that the U.S. recognizes — January 1 and June 19th — as a historical

more on black hole geometry as an imperative, see Prescod-Weinstein's "The Cosmos is a Black Aesthetic" (2024).

[7] See also Barbar T. Christian's "Response to 'Black Women's Texts'" (1988).

> fact marking a 'freedom' date for enslaved Black people, and the idea that on either day they became liberated demonstrates the fallacy of facticity. It is the evidence of time being out of sync with liberation of Black people on the Western timeline, where time is measured by observing facts. (para. 9)

Phillips roots her critique in historical reference to the way clocks were tools "as essential to colonization as the ship" (Phillips para. 2). Creating a unified empire requires a unified measure of time and a standardized reading of history; these historical narratives and timelines are products of the colonizing power's understanding of its colonies' past, present, and future rather than the colonized own experience of time and space.[8] Facticity, a facet of colonial spacetime, thus positions whiteness as a defining characteristic of temporal authority.

Michelle Wright offers further context to the physics of facticity within her seminal monograph *Physics of Blackness: Beyond Middle Passage Epistemology* (2015). Wright looks at how absolute time and absolute space—two concepts foundational to Newton's general system of philosophy and theology—influences how Black Studies and, more broadly, the entirety of "Western imagination" perceives all knowledge as linearly progressive (40). Absolute time and space are concepts part of Isaac Newton's "General Scholium", an essay included in the *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (commonly known as *Principia*) (1687). The concepts are summarized by philosopher Robert Rynasiewicz as follows:

> Absolute, true, and mathematical time, from its own nature, passes equably without relation to anything external, and thus without reference to any change or way of measuring of time (e.g., the hour, day, month, or year).
>
> Absolute, true, and mathematical space remains similar and immovable without relation to anything external. […] Relative spaces are measures of absolute space defined with reference to some system of bodies or another, and thus a relative space may, and likely will, be in motion. (2)

Essentially, Newtonian physics argues that time and space are both universal or fundamental absolute truths that persists irrespective of relative time, or how a person or other object may experience time. Time is always moving forward and with it absolute space is too pushed forward—linear spacetime (Wright *Physics of*

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[8] See Giordano Nanni's *The Colonisation of Time: Ritual, Routine, and Resistance in the British Empire* (2012), especially chapters one and four, for a more thorough reading on how time allowed Europeans to cast themselves as modern subjects as opposed to the African subject, the "primitive, superstitious Other" (Nanni 125).

Blackness 39, 40). Black Studies is not immune to this desire for linear progress narratives, what Wright terms "Middle Passage epistemology", a narrative that charts the origin of Black history from our forced dislocation from Africa through the Door of No Return, proceeds through the scattering of Black people across the Atlantic, and finally arrives at the development of Black music, art, literature, cultural traditions, academic achievements, and political victories following abolition and post-reconstruction (Wright *Physics of Blackness* 43).

Wright locates the problem with such a narrative in how Enlightenment era philosophers applied the idea of time and space moving uniformly to their conceptualization of human history, using a linear progressive narrative to assess the development of other civilizations. This is a what I call a *narrative absolute spacetime*, distinguished from the mathematical/physical spacetime that Newton and his contemporaries would be applying in classical science by the importance of imagination, myths, legends, stories, and historicity in shaping the conception of linearity.[9] Narrative absolute spacetime uses language and imagination to create a violent force out of time that de-historicizes and regresses Black life. For example, Hegel's *The Philosophy of History* (1837) names Africa—yes, the entire continent of Africa—as "Unhistorical […] only as on the threshold of the World's History" (99). Temporally and spatially, Africa and its people are positioned as outside of the progress of human history and thus a perversion of absolute time.[10] Further, Africa is outside of absolute space—which is framed within human history as the world itself—because of its "failure" to progress linearly as Europe has. European geography is positioned through narrative absolute spacetime as fundamentally

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[9] In reference to chapter five of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, "The Fact of Blackness", in which he understands the white gaze as a mode of formulating the Black subject in contrast to whiteness. Upon encountering the white gaze for the first time, the Black Man feels himself unmade then remade within the white imaginary: "I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors […] I was battered down by toms-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: 'Sho' good eatin'" (112).

[10] The first chapter of Achille Mbembe's book *Out of the Dark Night* (2021) also refers to Hegelian mythology, writing that 'the apocalyptic view of Africa's future […] [has] colonized Africa's imagination of the world and the world's imagination of Africa' (7-8). Mbembe's turn to the scientific is "planetary" rather than quantum mechanical, where planetary is meant to invoke both the biophysical reality of Earth and the objects of human invention. Nevertheless, there is a physical thrust to this engagement when he defines planetary as an *entanglement* between these two registers (Nils and Mbembe). His references to theoretical physicist and feminist scholar Karen Barad further solidify *Out of the Dark Night* as a piece of physics of Blackness scholarship.

different to Africa in terms of development: "[Africans] exist in a land of childhood', Hegel continues, "[…] and wrapped in the dark mantle of night" (174-175). "Childhood" implies an early stage of life, so that though African culture and Africa's people have existed for thousands of years, they are reduced to infants in the western imaginary. What's more, "the dark mantle of night", metaphorical language that expresses the phenomenological signifiers of Blackness, is associated with spatiotemporal immaturity. Thus, in trying to create a narrative of Black linear progress, Middle Passage Epistemology replicates the spatiotemporal logics that justify the creation of race, and consequently, Black enslavement and dehumanization. It validates the originating narratives of de-historicised and spatially marginalized blackness. Ultimately, colonial spacetime logic influences the narrative production of history for racialized people and has obvious implications on how history is recorded and preserved.

Of chief relevance to this thesis is the interplay between colonial spacetime and stolen/black (w)hole/entangled spacetime that happens within the archive. Black writers who choose to engage with archival spaces and materials must confront the dominance of facticity in their approach, exposing the lapses, absences, and gaps necessary to create colonial fact. Additionally, recalling Wright's diaspora of entanglement, it connects what might initially be considered isolated geographic incidents into a broader collective history. Crucially, this does not suggest a same history for all members of the diaspora nor attempt to map an unproductive sameness over expressions of Blackness and Black thought. Instead, I argue that considering archive writing chronotopally reveals a reverberating literary tradition germinating from a diasporically resonant language around space, time, and reality.

Michelle Wright does refer to Black Britishness in the first chapter of *Physics of Blackness* by way of contrasting the autobiographies of Mary Seacole, Mary Prince, and Olaudah Equiano. She writes:

> The titles of these autobiographies themselves indicate the dominant spacetimes each author uses: Equiano and Douglass with 'narrative,' Prince with 'history,' and Seacole with 'adventures'—the latter suggesting that the textual structure will foreground a series of moments rather than a chronology along which events are causes or effects of one another. (45)

Seacole stands out amongst these other Black British figures for being particularly "ungraphable" within a Middle Passage Epistemology because she "barely intersects with slavery except as an outraged observer" and muddies notions of origin in her embrace of a Creole identity (Wright 45, 47).[11] What other insights into spacetime disruption might be unearthed with a more sustained investigation into the voice, style, structure, and other literary characteristics of Black British texts? It is my position that the lack of Black Britishness within this field of inquiry results in conceptualizations of spacetime that are dominated by one side of the Atlantic. This raises the question if Black Britishness is shaped by the same atemporal/nonlinear spacetime that is discussed in relation to Canada, America, and the Caribbean, or if perhaps Black Britishness is occupying its *own* spacetime. Or—in true quantum fashion—is it Schrödinger's spacetime: both distinct and the same at once?

In addition to Wright's diaspora of entanglement, my concept of a Black archival chronotope builds off Paul Gilroy's chronotope of the slave ship as put forward in his book *The Black Atlantic* (1993). As Gilroy states:

> I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organising symbol for this enterprise and as my starting point. The image of the ship – a living microcultural, micro-political system in motion – is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons […] Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts […] (4)

For Gilroy, because "[d]iaspora identifies a relational network, characteristically produced by forced dispersal and reluctant scattering", inhabiting the space of Black diaspora means inhabiting a space of fluidity rather than a singular home space (Gilroy "Diaspora" 207). The slave ship as chronotope is another form of wake work, and both are part of a vocabulary for describing what Gilroy observes is a modernity in conflict with national identity and borders. He clarifies:

> Like a number of other key concepts that have been deployed to do parallel work - hybrid, border, creolization, *mestizaje* and even locality - it has a disputed currency in contemporary political life as part of a new vocabulary, a vocabulary that registers the constitutive potency of space, spatiality, distance, travel and itinerancy in human sciences that had been premised upon time, temporality, fixity, rootedness and the sedentary. (207)

[11] See Édouard Glissant's "Cross Cultural Poetics" (1981).

Here, Gilroy raises the central claim that Black diasporic space is one of hybridity and fluidity, predicated on *movement* through space rather than rootedness in a singular space. I do not wield the Black archival chronotope as an *instead* to the slave ship chronotope but rather as a *what else*. I therefore continue the turn to spacetime and physics in the Black feminist tradition that emerged in parallel—not in contest—to the aquatic paradigm. I am particularly attuned to Samuel's argument that the turn to physics is not utilized "in order to generate a dominant paradigm for describing Blackness—one that either competes or collaborates with oceanic paradigms like the Black Atlantic—but as a stimulus […]" (134).

Chapter Previews and Thesis Aims

Chronotope theory, enriched with theories from quantum mechanics and physics of Blackness scholarship, enables me to consider in what ways the archive generates a shared perceptions of space and time for African Americans and Black Britons and relate Black British and African American literature without collapsing the differences between the two. A singular investigation of Black British writing that applies physics of Blackness scholarship would be useful in parsing nonclassical representations of time and space from a Black British perspective. However, my decision to use a comparative approach takes seriously the possibility of a narrative interconnection that exists through a diaspora of entanglement. Furthermore, the concept of an entanglement of equal relations allows me to give due consideration to where the authors maintain generic and personal differences. Bernard's *Surge* (2019) is a work of poetry and Hartman writes what could arguably—and loosely—be defined as historical fiction. Bernard is a Black British poet and artist from London, and Hartman is an African American historian. The ways in which the authors converge and diverge with each other, I will argue, mimics moments of temporal and spatial symmetry felt across the Black Atlantic—the spooky action at a distance that animates Black cultural production. Thus, a comparative analysis that considers archive writing across the British and American localities highlights how Black Britishness shows up in African American culture and history, and where the Americas linger in Black British consciousness.

Chapter 1 will serve as further methodological scaffolding for the literary analysis that will happen in Chapters 2 and 3. In the first section, I define archives as chronotopic using theories from Bakhtin, Sina Steglich, and Kristina Wirtz, before defining archive writing within Amaka Okechukwu's tradition of Black Archival Practice. I then turn to Bernard's essays, manifestos, and interviews on archives, applying ideas presented in the first section to Bernard's experience of archives as embodied geography.

Chapter 2 turns to Jay Bernard's poetry collection *Surge*, created during their research at the George Padmore Institute working with archival materials from the New Cross Fire. I first contextualize *Surge* historically and literarily by reviewing a history of London arson attacks targeted against Black localities and the creative responses to such acts of violence. I then turn my attention to the voice, style, and form of the poems to address how Bernard expresses Britain as a geography in superposition. Both the tragedy of the fire itself and the damning mystery that lingers in its wake shape Black Britons relationship to London and the temporal present. I describe Bernard's genre of poetry as duppy writing, duppy being a Jamaican Patois word for ghost or spirit. I read several poems from the collection with a focus on the implications of placing duppies within the geography of Great Britain and how Bernard writes the ways duppies experience space, time, and reality.

Finally, in the third chapter, I discuss Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Radical Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals* (2019). I first look at the creation and use of critical fabulation in Hartman's essay 'Venus in Two Acts' (2008) to establish an under-recognized connection between this genre and Great Britain, which I will serve to elucidate why Hartman—a historian—must create somewhat fictional stories about her archival subjects. I then examine the voice and style of several of *Wayward Lives'* vignettes, relating Hartman's close narration to Bernard's experience of 'haunting' the archive.

Chapter 1 Archive Writing Against the "Ideal Chronotopos"

1.1 Chronotope Theory: Genres and Motifs

Since I relate the two authors analysed for this study through the mode of "archive writing", this first chapter will explain how I am reading the archive as setting and extend the discussion of the Black experience in archival spaces begun in the Introduction. Setting is usually defined as the temporal and spatial environment of a text. This can be fictional like the Shire of *Lord of the Rings* or based on a real place/time like 1981 New Cross, London in *Surge.* This definition is expanded by Henry Burrowes Lathrop to include "all the circumstances, material and immaterial, which surround the action and determine the conditions under which it takes place" (Lathrop 198; quoted in Rhode 18). Bakhtin's chronotope positions time and space as coordinates for narrative action where literature forms the fourth-dimension through which to make aesthetically tangible the lived experience of spacetime for any given subject. It was why, as he argues, certain genres appear at certain points in literary history; the spacetime of the novel reflects the spacetime of what we might call "real life".

There are a few notable applications of chronotope theory to Black literature; however, these engagements are predominantly done with African American literature and thus obviously privilege an American cultural context. Maria Holmgren Troy's analysis of Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, written by herself* (1861) calls on Lloyd Pratt's classification of *Incidents* as an "African American life narrative" that represents "multiple temporalities" of the early national and antebellum United States (Pratt 23, quoted in Troy 19). Such identification, Troy argues, makes time a defining characteristic of the construction of the text as a series of incidents:

> Although linear temporal movement permeates Linda's narration of her life and the text references countless temporal designations […] the word 'incidents' in the title indicates a disrupted, fragmentary experience, one that cannot be represented as a steady progression through linear calendar time. (19-20)

At the same time, *Incidents* is not so neatly defined as one genre; Troy identifies multiple different chronotopes within the text, emphasizing Bakhtin's own perspective

that "[w]ithin the limits of a single work and within the total literary output of a single author we may notice a number of different chronotopes and complex interactions among them […]" (252). Leigh Anne Duck similarly identifies two chronotopes—the self and the folkloric—within Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). The interplay between the two, Duck argues, should be contextualized within Hurston's anthropological work which "began to promote modernization in African-Caribbean contexts" (277). Though *Their Eyes* can be initially read as "relatively allotemporal, existing outside the time of the nation and its economy", Hurston also shows how southern African American communities embrace capitalistic, bourgeoise modernist values (Duck 278). For example, protagonist Janie Crawford's grandmother values "property and class differentiation" over Janie's own folkloric desires to complete "a great journey to the horizons in search of people" (Duck 278; Hurston 172-173, quoted in Duck 280). Janie is frustrated by her second husband Joe Starks not only in his allegiance to presenting himself as a man of higher class, but that his wife's behaviour must fit within that construction. He thus encourages Janie to avoid "the mess uh commonness", to become "classed off" and inaccessible to her neighbours (Hurston 77, 169, quoted in Duck 282, 280). Worse yet, these neighbours too begin to lean on modernist values in their relationships to one another: "other Eatonvillians refuse to 'come kiss and be kissed'" (Duck 279). Janie's isolation at the end of the novel develops a chronotope of the self in which folkloric pleasures supersede social status and can be experienced privately instead of communally. These scholars, amongst others, elucidates the utility of chronotope theory in analysing the spacetimes of African American literature; however, like much of physics of Blackness scholarship, the geographic focus of such work is most dominantly focussed on African American writing.[12] The scholars themselves are similarly situated.

It is worth parsing here the two ways that Bakhtin treats literary chronotopes: as genre and as motif. In the first mode, the chronotope is a method of organizing

[12] Further reading on the chronotopes of African American literature can be found in Rebecca Evans "Geomemory and Genre Friction: Infrastructural Violence and Plantation Afterlives in Contemporary African American Novels" (2021) and András Tarnóc's "The Slave Ship as the Chronotope of the Black Atlantic: Interaction between Space and Time as Reflected in the Antebellum Slave Narrative" (2022).

and understanding a given text where a spacetime context produces specific genres. For example, Greek Romances or "the adventure novel of ordeal", all have a "remarkably similar" plot/narrative structure: a boy and a girl meet unexpectedly, fall in love, and are delayed from marrying one another through several obstacles and separations, until, at last, the novel ends happily with marriage (Bakhtin 86-88). The action of the novel is entirely within the first meeting and final marriage of the two characters. In the disruption between, their love is wholly unchanged:

> The gap, the pause, the hiatus that appears between these two strictly adjacent biographical moments and in which, as it were, the entire novel is constructed is not contained in the biographical time-sequence, it lies outside biographical time; it changes nothing in the life of the heroes, and introduces nothing into their life. It is, precisely, an extratemporal hiatus between two moments of biographical time. (Bakhtin 89-90).

Thus, Greek Romances are distinguished by the "adventure-time" through which the characters experience the action of the novel; every plot point outside of initial meeting and marriage are "time-sequences that are neither historical, quotidian, biographical, nor even biological and maturational" (Bakhtin 90). Whereas a genre chronotope is a singular, macroscopic feature, there can be several chronotopic motifs that help constitute it. These motifs with each other and are connected to particular spaces, situations, and states of being. For example, the motif of the road ("the open road") is a "place of wandering, of new departures, turning points, collisions, separations, meetings, escapes and endings" ("Chronotopic Cartographies"). As the protagonist journeys on the road, time elapses in a stable relation and parallels a "path of life", the protagonist more metaphorical, internal journey (Bakhtin 120). Therefore, in narratives with the road motif, "the unity of time and space markers is exhibited with exceptional precision and clarity" (Bakhtin 98).

For the purposes of this thesis, I frame the Black archival chronotope through the first generic classification. In each text, however, there are chronotopic motifs that inform its spacetime logics, and thus those too will be explored in the analysis performed in Chapters 2 and 3. In this chapter, I offer the necessary background on the chronotopic quality of archives by considering how Black people engage with archival materials and how this engagement shapes the creation of archive writing.

1.2 Defining Black Archival Practice

Though Bakhtin only ever describes chronotopes in prose, scholars have since adopted the concept in other areas of the humanities, including history and archival practice. In 2022, *The Black Scholar* released a two-part special issue on Black archival practice, introduced by Tonia Sutherland and Zakiya Collier. The goal of the issue is to examine how 'Black archives employ various configurations of time and space to imagine conditions of possibility for Black life and Black lives" (Sutherland and Collier "Promise and Possibility" 1). I locate in "configurations of time and space" an initial theoretical bridge to chronotopes as many Bakhtinian scholars frame chronotopes this way despite Bakhtin himself never using the phrase.[13] Kristina Wirtz highlights Bakhtin's own description of chronotopes as a 'historical poetics' (Bakhtin 84, quoted in Wirtz 344). She argues that the subjective experience of relational time and space "shape[s] our *experience* and thus subjective *feel* for history and place […] [O]ur historical imagination emerges through dialogical interactions across multiple chronotopes" (344). This follows in the vein of Stuart Hall's assertion that archives "always stand in an active dialogic to the questions which the present puts to the past" (92). For Wirtz, history itself is a chronotopic subject because a narratively exchanged understanding of history is shaped by a given time and space. This aligns with Sina Steglich's framing of the archive as an "ideal chronotopos" (Steglich 245):

> the archive is not just a heterotopic place where documents and files of diverse temporal origins are stored and ordered; rather, it is a place where a unique, nationally integrating time is constructed based on the documents contained within it. The act of reading and transcribing documents that originate in past times brings them into the sociocultural context of the present. […] [T]he practices of publishing and exhibiting archival documents offer insights into a future that is conceptualized as a linear and progressive extension of the past and the present. As such, the archive can be understood (in Foucault's terms) as an 'other' place of time, as an ideal 'chronotopos' that represents the contemporary need to renaturalize and homogenize the fragmented time. (244-245)

[13] In *Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope* (2010), the first research collection dedicated exclusively to chronotope theory, Bemong and Borghart describe chronotopes as "spatio-temporal configurations in literary worlds", while Beaton in a later part of the volume similarly says chronotopes are "configurations of time and space that define 'reality'" (Bemong and Borghart 4; Beaton 62). More generally, articles using chronotopes tend to rely on the "space-time configuration" description or otherwise use words like "relations" or "relationality", perhaps to link chronotopes more explicitly to Einstein's theory of relativity.

The collation of past, present, and future that happens within the archive is thus problematic for its homogenizing force, reducing complex histories into a cohesive national timeline, both linear and progressive. Reading Wirtz and Steglich with Wright and Phillips, I understand historicity as specific spacetime configurations that are made material in the "ideal chronotopos" of the archive. Those with social and institutional power determine what should and should not be archived, which in turn affords historical legitimacy to some narratives and effectively erases other (Trouillot 1-5, 52). In sum, the ideal archive is simultaneously influenced by and a constructor of a *narrative absolute spacetime*—a linearly progressive and nationally homogenous historical imagination.

This chronotope, however, is not "ideal" for the Black historical subject. As addressed first in the Introduction, Black scholars are often disappointed in archival research not only because of the lack of materials that preserves a Black subjectivity but also for the excess records of Black death. If the archive is riddled with silence and violence, what strategies must Black archivists use to approach these materials? The method proposed by Amaka Okechukwu is "Black Archival Practice", which she describes as follows:

> I understand it beyond the professional work of describing, arranging, and cataloguing materials about Black existence or by Black people. Rather, I think about an ethic of care and recovery that exceeds the boundaries of formal archives and archiving, and because of this, sometimes looks like research, curating, storytelling, and art-making, and is nurtured collectively. […] [It] includes naming what hides in plain sight, excavating and recovering what lies below the surface, and offering this to the public through storytelling and curation. Through this process, a story may claim a history of survival and resistance to oppression, and preserve and pass down this history as a means to fortify the collective, contributing to community persistence. (27)

Black Archival Practice has three main goals: first, to account for the unconventional modes of memory and preservation undertaken by Black people in the absence of access to traditional archives; second, to locate within the records we do have untold and erased histories; and third, to acknowledge the debt all archival research on Black life owes to the Black community itself by giving those "excavated" histories to "the public through storytelling and curation". Archive writing achieves all three of these objectives by inviting an "undisciplined" approach to Black history, creating something "in excess of the fictions of the archive" (Sharpe 13).

One of the most famous pieces of African American literature is a work of archive writing: Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Beloved* (1987). She was inspired to write the novel while compiling *The Black Book* (1974), a "museum captured in book form" and "a welcome reminder of the power, generosity and complexity of Black archival work" (Afriware Books; Gyarkye). *The Black Book* is a massive compilation of newspaper clippings, photographs, film stills, posters, ads, sheet music, and other rare documents all meant to create a rich tapestry of Black life from enslavement to modern day. If we consider, as Ellen Gruber Garvey does, that scrapbooks can too function as archives, then *The Black Book* itself is a very intentional archival project and a (Garvey 207-228). One of these newspaper clippings Morrison came across during the compiling process describes the case of Margaret "Peggy" Garner, an enslaved woman whose trial for theft of property was discussed in an 1856 newspaper article titled "A Visit to the Slave Mother Who Killed Her Child" (Singh; "Toni Morrison" 06:59-09:23). Garner and her family escaped from a plantation on foot across the frozen Ohio River in 1856 but were traced by slave catchers. Rather than allow her children to return to slavery, Garner tried desperately to kill all her children and herself; she succeeded only for her two-year-old daughter.[14] Morrison's goal in writing a fictional story inspired by Garner, in which the slain infant continues haunting her mother's home, is an attempt to contend with a history that Morrison believes cannot be confronted without imagination. She says as much in a speech given after *Beloved*'s publication:

> The embrace of history and fiction is what I was concerned with—or rather, the effort to disentangle the grip of history, while remaining in its palm, so to speak. […] What I needed was imagination to shore up the facts, the data, to not be overwhelmed by it. Imagination that personalized information, made it intimate, but didn't offer itself as a substitute. ("Toni Morrison" 02:58-3:11, 06:20-06:45)

The nucleus of the story is the archival snippet: the recoverable facts and information of Garner's crime, the violence racialization brought to her life, how that violence foreclosed her child's life and came to define hers. But simultaneously, it is Morrison's imagination that works to reconstitute Garner's humanity and to ponder over the horror of having to kill her own child. As both a compiler of archival

[14] Pause here.

materials and prose author, Morrison understands that the imaginative work of telling Black stories this way is a crucial part of knowledge formation. It is not articulation against fact but articulation in service to facts that must be fleshed through interpretative care.

A similar reading of imagination in relation to archives is undertaken by London-based Black feminist writer Lola Olufemi. In *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise* (2021), a hybrid critical/creative book, she argues against reliance on and reproduction of "narrative consistency", posing instead to reintroduce the "creative innocence" that, according to Stuart Hall, ends in the moment of the archive (Hall 89). She explains:

> The archive, with its shadows and gaps, is a colonial invention in narrative consistency. I want to loosen my attachment to the facts of any given historical encounter, like a deep inhale; I want to feel how the cold air changes the shape of my lungs. What if, like a map, the archive is not a record of the past or an arrangement of physical space, but, as Mogel and Bhagat write, *a topography of procedures*? That is, a continuous, fickle, evolving set of processes that eschews definition, or concreteness, or knowing. What if we do not need to know the past to *know* the past, or, indeed, to feel it? (29-30)

Narrative consistency resonates closely with what I have been calling narrative absolute spacetime. Indeed, Olufemi's stance against "colonial invention" is at the heart of physics of Blackness scholarship (Wright and Phillips most notably), and *Experiments* plainly considers how we understand the movement of time. For example, in the short story titled 'She Kept Making Yesterday Tomorrow', Fanta, a young Black professor, begins experiencing temporal warps and leaps while working in the archive library:

> The temporal leap was only possible when Fanta took seriously that archival objects could tell us something about ourselves. It came from a place deep inside; a desire to know what had passed. The photograph, the poster, the pamphlet were all evidence of struggle, yes, but they also contained a trance-inducing ability to reconfigure liberatory desires. […] It felt akin to being sliced right down the middle; a smooth dissolving of the material that made up the body. Skin and bones sucked themselves into knots; her body became a wave, a polyphonic reverberation. Fanta was touching what they called **HISTORY**. There was nothing prefigurative about the events she witnessed. She moved two degrees to the right and saw revolt; to her left the inner workings of the commune were laid bare. (123-124)

Like Morrison, Olufemi's story suggests a disentangling from history ("I want to loosen my attachment to facts") that nevertheless remains cradled in its palm through embodiment ("a smooth dissolving of the material that made up the body"). This is a story against **HISTORY** as a finished project. Olufemi heightens the tangibility of this **HISTORY** by having her character *feel* archival materials, which in turn generates a more human and embodied reading of the Black past as it endures in the present. From these two illustrative examples, we can thus begin to see the kind of nonlinear spacetime configurations that compose the Black archival chronotope. Archive writing from a black subjectivity thus addresses the questions: 1) How does the archive/archives intercede in Black life and thought? 2) What does a disentangled yet cradling history feel like for the Black subject? And 3) How does it affect Black peoples' relationship to space and time? The following section approaches these questions through a close engagement with Bernard's previous essays, manifestos, and interviews on their relationship to archives.

1.3 "Locations that made me make sense"

Bernard does not approach any writing on archives without first discussing their geographic relationship to London. In a lyrical essay included in the second edition of the *New Daughters of Africa* anthology (2020) titled "I resist the urge to destroy my own records by reflecting on archives, how I use them, and what they have meant to me", Bernard builds a lively image of the archive as a Black British and queer holding space. They first reject the idea of archives needing to be exclusionary spaces, declaring that "[they are] interested in the act of archiving, in the poetics of archives, but […] not interested in any vision—creative or political—that derives value from locking people out" (751). As the essay progresses, they then relate archival space and their own poetics of archives to Blackness and queerness, a move generated from entwining their sense of self with the spaces they inhabit. Such localities, in addition to archives, include neighbourhoods and disappearing queer meeting hubs across London (751, 753). Bernard further explains:

> I used to be a bit of a psychogeography. All criticism considered, I used to like the term, the ideas, and made a zine for a short time called *Psychogeography for the Modern Black Woman.* I equated my gender with the city around me. I was not simply a woman but a specific knot of places, perceptions, possibilities. It detailed my walks around London and mentioned bookshops,

> squats and other places I used to go—Silver Moon, Index, Kennington Books, New Beacon—locations that made me make sense. Only one of those, New Beacon, still exists. (751)

Psychogeography, both a theory and a practice, was coined in 1955 by French theorist and filmmaker Guy Debord. Defined as "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals", psychogeographers walk or "drift" through cities to develop a relationship with the landscape otherwise unobserved by less attentive commuters due to their busy hurrying from one location to another (Debord). Additionally, Bernard suggests a co-constitutive relationship between the self and the space—an entanglement of equal relations—for as much as Bernard considers themself a "knot of places", the space they inhabit is too transformed by the in/action of its populace ("Only one of those, New Beacon, still exists").

Bernard's investment in the production of space from a Black queer position evokes theories from Black Geographies, "a field that not only critiques the erasure of Blackness within the whiteness and coloniality of geographical thought, but also centres Black spatial thought and agency" according to British professor of human geography Patricia Noxolo (1232). Noxolo further claims that "Black people are always making place and taking up space, theorising it as we live it, whilst always at the same time being erased from documented spatial knowledge and from the ownership of place", in reference to Katherine McKittrick's reading of Black geographies as *demonic* (1234). McKittrick is heavily influenced by Sylvia Wynter's "Beyond Miranda's Meanings" (1990). Within this after/word, Wynter argues that race troubles all readings of gender, using Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as a point of departure. Through racialization, not only is the character Caliban rendered a "subordinated 'irrational' and 'savage' native", but "Caliban's Woman", a "physiognomically complementary mate", becomes a nonexistence and undesired figure (Wynter 358, 360).

> For nowhere in Shakespeare's play, and in its system of image-making, one which would be foundational to the emergence of the first form of a secular world system, our present Western world system, does Caliban's mate appear as an alternative sexual-erotic model of desire; as an alternative source of an alternative system of meanings. Rather there, on the New World island, as the only woman, Miranda and her mode of physiognomic being, defined by the

> philogenically "idealized" features of straight hair and thin lips, is canonized as the "rational" object of desire. (360)

From here, Wynter asserts that Caliban's Woman inhabits a "demonic ground", a location that is "outside of our present governing systems of meaning, or theory/ontology" (356). There is, of course, the supernatural or religious implications of the word, but Wynter is instead making a socio-humanistic parallel to a "'demonic model' posited by physicists[15] who seek to conceive of a vantage point outside of the space-time orientation of the humuncular observer" (364). She thus names the "insufficiency of all existing theoretical interpretative models to 'voice' the hitherto silenced ground of the experience of 'native' Caribbean women and Black American women as the ground of Caliban's woman" (363).

For McKittrick, the idea of an "absented presence" provided by Wynter's utilization of the demonic opens new ways of thinking geographically about

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[15] Both McKittrick and Wynter are vague on exactly what physicists, experiments, or theories they are referencing when they refer to "demonic". There is no direct citation included in Wynter's afterword when they reference demonic models, and McKittrick cites back to Wynter, compounding the ambiguity. So, what exactly is physics demonism? What is the science underscoring Black Geographies? Justine M. Bakker, pointing to Wynter's reference list, identifies Alex Comfort's 1980 article "Demonic and Historical Models in Biology" as the most influential source on Wynter's thinking. Comfort writes: "The term 'demonic models' is coined to refer to logical representations of reality which exclude a space-time oriented observer, like those of Bohm's 'implicate reality' and other derivates of quantum mechanics. […] The overriding argument, for me, is the power of the demonstration in physics that reality-models are metaphors designed to be operated by, and intelligible to, a time-and-place oriented homuncular observer" (206, 208). There is, however, an additional potential physics influence for the demonic as advanced by Sarah Haley in her book *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity* (2016). This is Maxwell's Demon, an 1867 thought experiment proposed by mathematician James Clerk Maxwell that proved the Second Law of Thermodynamics has only statistical certainty (Haley 229, quoted in Bakker). The Law dictates that disorder (known as entropy) always increases or remains constant in any spontaneous process. For example, heat always "transfers energy spontaneously from higher to lower temperature objects, but never spontaneously in the reverse direction" (Urone). The law is also referred to as Time's Arrow because if entropy can only decrease not increase spontaneously, the past is distinct from the present and future through a measure of entropy (e.g., a meal hot out of the oven overtime cools to room temperature). The thought experiment goes as follows: "a demon who could effortlessly 'follow every molecule in its course' would control a 'vessel' that is 'divided into two portions, A and B.' By quickly opening and closing a 'small hole' between A and B, the demon could ensure that faster molecules would pass from A to B and slower molecules from B to A, allowing B to heat up and A to cool down. This would decrease entropy and frustrate the possibility for equilibrium, thus violating the second law" (Bakker, quoting Cannels 54-56). Consider a universe where that meal left cooling on the counter only gets hotter over time. Maxwell's Demon shows that such behaviour—even if statistically unlikely—is not impossible. Therefore, "[i]f Haley's interpretation is correct, embedded in Wynter's 'demonic' would not be simply that the 'demonic ground' opens up the possibility of the unknown, the contingent, the non-deterministic, but also that such models actively disrupt and challenge what we may call hegemonic proceedings" (Bakker). In sum, though Wynter and McKittrick are themselves unspecific on what exact theories are animating the demonic physics of Black Geographies, there is a basis in quantum mechanics for their theorising.

Blackness, or more specifically, how Black geographies exists outside "the bounds of reason" but are nevertheless "not marginal/other to regulatory, classificatory systems, but instead integral to them" (xxv). According to McKittrick, memory work combats the disregard and erasure of Black geographies:

> The site of memory is a powerful black geography because employing it assumes that the story of blackness in the diaspora is actual and possible and that the discursive erasure of black peoples does not eliminate how they have been implicated in the production of space. Reconstructing past interior lives of black people in the diaspora is an important geographic act, which brings to life new ethnicities and different senses of place; by humanizing black subjects who are otherwise bound to the historio-racial schema, it situates the geographies of the black diaspora in a time when this was considered impossible; it allows past and present black geographies to be believable. (34)

Returning to "I resist the urge", Bernard's psychogeography is heavily resonant with the demonic as defined by Wynter and McKittrick, not only in the disappearance of Black queer spaces from the physical present but also in how Bernard's memory works to preserve those spaces through embodiment (i.e. becoming a "knot of places"). Indeed, what is most interesting about Bernard's psychogeography is that they name long-gone spaces as part of the "locations that made [them] make sense." Their drifts through New Cross are not firmly stitched into the present, as much of their journey is spent "imagining black queer people in the seventies, eighties, and nineties on the same bus routes [they] travel now" (Bernard "I resist the urge" 754). In this way, following French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, memory affixes time in space:

> At times we think we know ourselves in time, when all we know is a sequence of fixations in the spaces of the being's stability–a being who does not want to melt away, and who, even in the past, when he sets out in search of things past, wants time to "suspend" its flight. In its countless alveoli space contains compressed time. That is what space is for. (8)

There is resonance here to theories of relativity in physics as utilized by Michelle Wright in her argument against our societal reliance on Newtonian absolute time and space (as addressed in the Introduction). That is, space and time are *relative,* and we come to understand ourselves in relation to the world through memory, the compression rather than progression of time. Taken further, identities and cultures are formulated within this memory, which is why archives can so strongly shape history: they offer a space with which to make compressed memory material. Thus,

much of Bernard's sense of the present and *belonging to* the present is tied to a place-focused past, and with those spaces disappearing, Bernard sees the archives as a site of liveliness:

> In queer spaces we face a deadening of our community in the tragedy that is pinkwashing, horrific racism, misogyny and proud ignorance […] The irony is that this deadening might be remedied by the metaphorical liveliness of archives. I am now finding that this is one of the real sources of spiritual comfort I have. I had never thought I would say those words and desire them: connection, groundedness, structured oneness with everything around you. A quiet place to be haunted. (755)

There are two contrasting images found in Bernard's archival poetics: liveliness and hauntings. Hauntings imply a ghost or something dead remaining where it shouldn't. In contrast to the expected feelings of dread, uncanniness, and terror that are associated with hauntings, Bernard instead frames the archives as an orderly place to willingly experience the ghosts of the past. This is not to say that the events themselves recorded in these archives are peaceful or do not inspire terror; but moreover, there *is* tranquillity in preserving that which is disappearing, finding liveliness in what is presumed inert.

Bernard further identifies archives as lively spaces in an interview with fellow poet Kayo Chingonyi. Interrogating why people record history and to what ends, Bernard claims that "it's because it's always about the present. It's always about how it feels today. What it's like to look back today. That's why I situate [*Surge*] so much in the archives because the archives take on a whole new resonance" (Chingonyi and Bernard). Additionally, in Bernard's manifesto "Stranger in the Archive" (2017), they identify in the harrowing similarities between between the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire and the 1981 New Cross Fire an experience of cyclical time:

> a) There is a mystery at the centre of both stories.
> b) The people who died were not rich enough, in the eyes of the state, to be consequential.
> c) The mystery is not how the fire started or why these people died.
> d) The mystery is why we always find ourselves in the same place, the same moment.
> e) A poet can't deliver justice but they can ask a different kind of question. (para. 1)[16]

[16] Pause here.

Bernard figures the archive in a similar way to how they figure British geography as a whole: a haunted, lively, and queer space that can be and has been transformed by the presence of Black Britons. Additionally, even as the space itself is transformed through the passage of time (i.e. the disappearance of Black queer meeting places throughout London), there is nevertheless a stagnation, which, as Bernard argues, poetry has the means to dissect. Thus, archive writing affords them the ability to acknowledge the presence of the dead—the haunting—through the process of languaging history and to investigate *why* space and time functions this way for Black people.

This idea of the "always present" parallels theories from Michelle Wright, specifically her term "Epiphenomenal Time" (*Physics of Blackness* 4). Epiphenomenal Time is a constructive and phenomenological interpretation of Blackness that is rooted in the "'now' through which the past, present, and future are always interpreted" and "denotes the current moment, a moment that is not directly borne out of another (i.e., causally created)" (4). Rejecting the privileging of historical continuity and direct causality, Epiphenomenal Time defines Blackness through spacetime dialogism or "the intersection of constructs that locate the Black collective in history and in the specific moment in which Blackness is being imagined–the 'now' through which all imaginings of Blackness will be mediated" (*Physics of Blackness* 14; Morresi 109). Or, as Olufemi writes:

> the future is not in front of us, it is
> everywhere simultaneously: multidirectional,
> variant, spontaneous. We only have to *turn*
> *around*. (48)

In the same way generic chronotopes are informed by the dialogism of its motifs, Black archival spacetime is a dialogic, entangled relationship informed by an embodied experience of the past-in-the-present. I therefore identify a direct correlation between Bernard's Black Archival Practice and physics of Blackness scholarship even if Bernard does not make such connection explicit themself. Indeed, I follow Renata Morresi's assertion from an interview with Wright that Epiphenomenal Time "is a challenging way of re-designing history and extremely fruitful for bridging those gaps and oddities in the archive (or what "look like" gaps and oddities) that often concern Black subjects" (109).

What becomes apparent through this discussion of Black Archival Practice is that the archive is not just a singular building or space for Black subjects. Archive as a series of processes, as a space of hauntings, as an embodied geography: all of these different registers exist through nonlinear and unreal experiences of spacetime that enfolds the sense of self into history and geography. Thus, like the Greek Romance, Black archival chronotope defines a literary-artistic representation of archival spacetime, a condensed setting, connecting multiple spaces, places, and times to the distinct moment of here and now. It is entangled as much as it is Epiphenomenal. In the following chapters, I will go on to identify the time-space influences of *Surge* and *Wayward Lives* and name the dialogic motifs that animate Black diasporic spacetime.

Chapter 2 Jay Bernard's *Surge* (2019): Duppies, Fire, and The Observer Paradox

> Fire has implications across multiple scales in time and space, for the heat of fire travels up into the air, down into the earth, and across space and time to influence almost all terrestrial landscapes.
>
> (Francisco Castro Rego, et al. *Fire Science* xvii)

> Many questions emerged not only about memory and history, but about my place in Britain as a queer black person. This opened out into a final sense of coherence: I am from here, I am specific to this place, I am haunted by this history but I also haunt it back.
>
> (Jay Bernard *Surge* 12)

2.1 Deathly Déjà vu

When asked in an interview with Forward Arts Foundation to describe "from first words to final book" the creation of their 2019 poetry collection *Surge,* Jay Bernard remarked simply "It ended where it began, with uncertainty" (Forward Arts Foundation). Uncertainty here refers chiefly to circumstances surrounding the New Cross Fire, a house fire in south-east London. 13 Black teenagers (Rosaline Henry. Patricia Johnson. Humphrey Brown. Gerry Paul Francis. Owen Wesley Thompson. Andrew Gooding. Peter Campbell. Lloyd Hall. Patrick Cummings. Steve Collins. Yvonne Ruddock. Glenton Powell. Paul Ruddock.) were killed while celebrating a birthday party on January 18, 1981, with one further victim, Anthony Berbeck, surviving the fire but later committing suicide.[17] How did the fire start? Was it a racially motivated arsonist attack or a simple accident? More than four decades on, there is still no definitive answer to these questions. Two inquests returned open verdicts and all police investigations have come up inconclusive (Pallister). Deputy Coroner Gerald Butler QC specifically concluded: "While I think it probable [...] that this fire was begun by deliberate application of a flame to the armchair near to the television [...] I cannot be sure of this. The result is this, that in the case of each and every one of the deaths, I must return an open verdict" (Pallister). Clive Bloom's hopelessly vague description of the event included in Violent London (2010)

[17] Pause here.

captures the frustrating uncertainty surrounding the tragedy: “Through a series of circumstances that remain obscure, a fire began which was either deliberately or accidentally started” (Bloom 394). Many of the surviving victims of the fire and their families feel the investigation was haphazard at best, that the effort of the police was not to investigate how this happened but to deny as swiftly as possible that a racist incident took place (Saunders; Shabazz 3:18-3:40; Bernard 10). As such, for the friends and family of the victims, and the broader Black British/Caribbean heritage community, the fire is instead called the New Cross Massacre: “Collectively, we remember the event as the “New Cross massacre”, where there has been no justice for 14 black young people” (Andrews para. 4).

Black Britons have been left with an official record that cannot say for certain if a mass murder occurred on January 18th; and this record exists alongside a local history moored in racial violence emboldened by the rise in Thatcherism and stoked by the National Front, a far-right political party advocating for the total repatriation of “coloured immigrants and their descendants” (McQueen and Rogen 08:02-08:24).[18] Sarah Saunders provides remarks further on the increasing threats of racial violence and destruction to Black communal spaces occurring in the late 1970s:

> in November 1977, a newspaper reported that a National Front meeting had included talk of burning down the Moonshot Club, a youth club in New Cross popular with young Black people. Weeks later, on the 18th December 1977, the Moonshot was destroyed in a firebomb attack and had to be rebuilt. Seven months later, on the 14th July 1978, the Albany in Deptford, a community centre of local anti-racist activity, including “Rock Against Racism” “All Together Now” and ‘Restless natives’ was also gutted by fire. The following day, a note was pushed through the door of the building saying, “GOT YOU”. (Saunders)

Decades later in 2017, there is yet another fire. This time at Grenfell Tower, a high-rise residential building in central London. The tower was named after Field Marshal Lord Grenfell “a colonial officer who served in a series of imperial wars that consolidated British power in Africa and involved the massacre of thousands of

[18] It is worth noting that in the same docuseries George Rhoden makes the claim that the Ku Klux Klan was active during this time. He describes the following incident from when he was 14-15 years old: “One day, we’re having a laugh after school and things like that and I could see a little bit of a flicker of a flame and I saw a small group of people burning a cross. We all looked at each other and think ‘What are they doing?!’ […] And then you saw the guy with the hood […]. That was the Ku Klux Klan. I never proved it, but why would be burning a cross and the guy’s got a hood on? Could just be a little bit of a joke? Don’t know. But it scared the shit out of me” (McQueen and Rogen 09:00-09:36).

Zulus, Xhosa, and Egyptians" (Davies 5). Grieving families and immigrant community members cannot shake the suspicion that maybe concerns from residents about electrical problems wouldn't have been ignored and the housing authority would have decided against using the highly flammable yet cheaper cladding if the building wasn't populated with predominantly BAME (Black, Asian, Middle Eastern) working-class people. There arises an undoubtedly familiar feeling, a nauseating déjà vu. Of the 72 people who died at Grenfell, seven of them were white British or Irish, with the remaining 85% being ethnic minorities.[19] The fire "happened in a pocket of one of the smallest yet richest boroughs in London", Leslie Thomas QC argued during the inquiry, "[…] Yet the community affected was predominantly working-class" (Thomas). The Grenfell Action Group (GAG) for years had complained over the unsafe living conditions in the tower; they wrote just months before the tragedy in a now-deleted blogpost titled "Playing with Fire" that it would take "a catastrophic event" for anyone to care:

> It is a truly terrifying thought but the Grenfell Action Group firmly believe that only a catastrophic event will expose the ineptitude and incompetence of our landlord, the KCTMO, and bring an end to the dangerous living conditions and neglect of health and safety legislation that they inflict upon their tenants and leaseholders. […] Unfortunately, the Grenfell Action Group have reached the conclusion that only an incident that results in serious loss of life of KCTMO residents will allow the external scrutiny to occur that will shine a light on the practices that characterize the malign governance of this non-functioning organization. (Grenfell Action Group, quoted in Davies 585)

As Bernard says in their archive manifesto, there is a mystery at the heart of these tragedies, and it speaks to the profound force of time and space on Black life. The Grenfell Tower Fire does not just happen but is *foretold* to happen, warned against, near perfectly predicted. And despite this, it happens anyway. A group of majority minority people die in a tower named after a man responsible in part for multiple massacres of African people. The tower is poorly constructed to save a little money; Grenfell's commits atrocities on African soil to consolidate wealth for the British empire. The violence seems to endlessly endure.[20]

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[19] See: Garden Court Chambers "Submission on Behalf of the Bereaved Residents and Survivors Represented by Birnberg Pierce, Saunders Law, Duncan Lews, Deighton Pierce Glynn, Russell Cooke, and Saunders Solicitors."

[20] Pause here.

Having researched the archived materials on the New Cross Fire, Bernard knew how the aftermath of Grenfell would unfold:

> After Grenfell, I knew that the media would immediately try to blame someone inside the house for the fire; that the first people to be arrested would be victims/minor players in the events; that there would be a fraught, exclusionary and botched meeting between the authorities and the community; that it would be down to the community to provide the support needed by the victims; that the tension, disgust and betrayal felt by residents and supporters would spill over into large-scale demonstrations, actions and possibly riots that the media would attempt to disconnect from the root problem of injustice. By writing about it, I can help shape history, contribute to the effort of keeping it alive. (Bernard "Stranger in the Archive" para. 3b)

In the space between these tragedies and underneath the weight of names, it becomes clear that Black Britain is a demonic ground, a system and space "hinged on uncertainty and nonlinearity" (McKittrick xxiv). Notable is how fire forges moments of entanglement, a ghastly experience across time and space that connects the Black British subject to past violence. Fires burn down spaces of Black British culture and community repeatedly. Regardless of whether one believes New Cross was a deliberate attack or not, the failure to protect Black Londoners sooner from rampant racist groups that were knowingly active in the area, compounded with the lackluster police investigation, signals an ongoing, systemic violence. What is terrifying about these fires, something that Bernard indicates in the author's note to *Surge*, is not just the lack of closure but the unshakeable suspicion that this lack—this distinctly Black uncertainty—is a choice. An action. An agreement to stare at Black death and shrug.

Bernard considers in *Surge* the nonlinear relation to time engendered through these fires by writing poems from the perspective of the fire's victims. This collective narrative voice shows how these people remain connected—entangled—with the living after death. Bernard extends this entanglement to diasporic Black displacement by calling these spirits *duppies*, a word in Jamaican culture for a ghost or spirit. As explained by Cleonie White, duppies are not bound by linear time. Instead, "[t]hey were time travelers, these *duppies*, who knew all things upon this earth, and were, thus, imbued with the power to shape, and to change the lives of the living" (White 415). Importantly, Bernard does not claim that poetic practice or archive writing can give satisfying answers to questions of memory and history that haunt British locality. They specifically remark that, in the course of writing *Surge* and

researching at the George Padmore Institute, "[m]any questions emerged not only about memory and history, but about my place in Britain as a queer black person" (Bernard *Surge* 12). However, these questions "opened out into a final sense of coherence: I am from here, I am specific to this place, I am haunted by this history but I also haunt it back" (12).

Thus, in this chapter, I examine a selection of poems from *Surge* to show how the entangled spacetime experienced in the wake of Black British fires is literarily represented. I will distinguish Bernard's duppy writing from creative works that respond to the New Cross and Grenfell Fires and identify three main chronotopic motifs: superposition, spaces between, duppy, and looking/looking away.

2.2 Schrödinger's Black, Schrödinger's Duppy

Following the New Cross and Grenfell fires, performers, writers, and other artists across Britain used creative works to respond to the tragedies. Roger Robinson's "The Missing" (2019)—written after Grenfell—is a poem written in a (seemingly) omnipresent third person, in which people inexplicable start to float out of the city. He calls these ghostly people "The Risen". The poem opens by describing members of a church congregation levitating into the sky, then moves outside to witness other random departures. The clearest allusion to Grenfell—other than the dedication—comes in the fourth stanza:

> A hundred people start floating
> from the windows of a tower block;
> from far enough away they could be
> black smoke from spreading flames (Robinson lines 26-29)

By describing how the people rising out of the tower could be mistaken for black smoke, Robinson names how dying in a tragedy blurs a person's individuality, where each victim becomes part of one whole demise. He then humanizes the victims by describing their clothing in the next stanza ("wax-cloth headwraps", "indigo hijabs" and "vintage glasses"), details of character that are lost when looking at mortality statistics (Robinson lines 31-34). The separate "city of the missing" that The Risen inhabit by the end of the poem is a locality away from the "city of the stayed"; it is visually parallel—sky vs. ground—to what remains of London (Robinson lines 38-43). The distance afforded by third-person narration disintegrates by the last line of

the poem, “We, now, the city of the stayed”, a narrative distance that had begun to weaken after the fourth stanza when the black smoke is affirmed to actually be individual people (Robinson line 43). Robinson’s thus employs a first-person perspective to situate the poem within the communities affected by racial violence.

Where Robinson’s city of the missing floats above the city of the stayed, Bernard’s ghostly figures remain here in *superposition*, moving amongst the living. Quantum superposition is a phenomenon in which particles can occupy many different and dichotomous states at once until the moment they are observed or measured; at which instance the superposition collapses and the particle assumes one state. The most well-known (though frequently misunderstood) example is the Schrödinger’s Cat thought experiment. Responding to a paper published by Albert Einstein, Boris Podolsk, and Nathan Rosen (known as the EPR paper), [21] theoretical physicist Erwin Schrödinger created a thought experiment meant to illustrate the incompleteness of quantum mechanical theory. A cat is placed in a steel chamber with a small amount of radioactive material and a Geiger counter, a machine that detects particles of ionizing radiation. If the Geiger counter detects radioactivity, a mechanism is triggered that shatters the flask of poison, which kills the cat. But, if none of the atoms decay and thus release no radioactive particles, no mechanism is triggered, the poison is not released, and the cat lives (Schrödinger 157). The cat’s status as dead or alive is dependent on the decay of the radioactive substance happening at the atomic level; if the cat is behaving in the way subatomic particles do, the cat would remain in a quantum superposition occupying all theoretical existing states—dead *and* alive *and* neither—until the moment the observer opens the box. At which point, the superposition collapses, and the cat occupies only one state—the cat is *either* alive *or* dead. The experiment suggests that the final state of a quantum system is dependent on an observer, what is known as *quantum indeterminacy* or the *observer paradox*. Of course, objects as large as a cat have never been placed in superposition, but Schrödinger’s Cat probes the question of when and how exactly this bizarre behaviour at the microscopic level gives way to

[21] The Einstein-Podolosky-Rosen (EPR) paradox describes quantum entanglement through a thought experiment with two particles (Einstein et. al 777-780). It was two years after publishing this paper that Einstein wrote the letter to Max Born, calling quantum entanglement spooky action at a distance.

the classical behaviour of macroscopic reality. This remains an unanswered question in quantum mechanics to this day.

Superposition within the physics discipline describes objects, but when used metaphorically and heuristically, we might consider how *Surge* represents Britain as a geography in superposition, where a dead past is superimposed with a living, grieving, present. Take, for example, the poem "Duppy", in which a victim of the New Cross Fire watches the Black People's Day of Action which took place on March 2nd, 1981.[22] The spirit speaks:

> No-one will tell me what happened to my body
>
> I see my picture on a sign my name
> as though the march
> were my mother's mantelpiece Lewisham the frame
> every face come in like a cousin
> tall boys carry my empty coffin (Bernard "Duppy" 37-38)

In this monostich, the spirit describes their own disembodiment as a source of confusion. The visual gaps in the text represent the frustrating gap between the enduring presence of the dead through memory—memory here performed through activism, the archived material reprinted on the page preceding the poem, and Bernard's archive writing in general—and the permanent, unchanging reality of death. The march itself is positioned as akin to a home space for the spirit through the simile in the quintet, comparing the image of their face and name on signs in the march to their mother's mantle in Lewisham. The Black People's Day of Action is further connected to home spaces later in the poem when the speaker compares the thickness and loudness of the crowd to carnival:

> Crowd thick as carnival
>
> once on my father's shoulders
> I wished he would grip
> My rattling heart
> as he gripped my calves
> I felt the bass through his head
> and neck

[22] Though British poet Martyn Crucefix and scholar Cathie Kanagavalli Lakshmi Jayakumar-Hazra believe "Duppy" depicts the speaker's own funeral march or memorial service, the flier on the preceding page to the poem advertises the Black People's Day of Action; additionally, the police attack on the march as depicted in the poem is a stronger indication of an activist event rather than a family funeral (Crucefix; Jayakumar-Hazra 383; *Surge* 36, 37-38).

pound my stoch in its basin
the sound
chirping wet English hear
the louder it is the closer we are to home (Bernard “Duppy” 38)

Through sound and symbols, the people marching have created the sensorial texture of home spaces the spirit would have experienced while they were alive. The duppy’s tender reflection on their mother’s mantel and the joy of being held by their father pulsing in the noise of carnival sours as the poem concludes with the mournful reality that remembrance cannot do the impossible: “The crowd passes through me” (39). The fire has still killed 13 people, and there is still no official record why. “Despite these acknowledgements”, Andrea Brady agrees, “the dead are as invisible to their loved ones and supporters as they are to the police—as blank as the gaps between phrases in these poems” (30). Returning to the earlier monostich, the spirits voicelessness represents the difficulty for both the dead and the living to find some reason or sense in these acts of violence and to have their suffering heard and acknowledged by those in power. Nevertheless, Bernard resists notions of separation or distance from these tragedies engendered by a forward progression of time by writing from a ghostly experience of the Black People’s Day of Action. Thus, this poem demonstrates how duppies behave as a chronotopic motif in dialogue with the city in superposition.

Nigerian-British poet and filmmaker Caleb Femi relates superposition to Blackness in his aptly named poem “Schrödinger’s Black” (2020). As a way of thinking through Black personhood in relation to time and space, Femi’s work has interesting ramifications for Bernard’s poetry, which is explicitly uncertain, atemporal, and multivocal. The poem is set during the riots that ensued in the aftermath of Mark Duggan’s murder by police in North London.[23] The narrator watches the news coverage on television, remarking, “They showed Mark Duggan & it was a picture of me even though I wasn’t dead. That’s what it feels like to be Black here: like you’re dead & alive at the same time” (Femi). Interestingly, Femi frames Black superposition through two registers. First is the feeling of being alive and dead at the same time, what I have already addressed through “Duppy”. Though this imperfectly

[23] Pause here.

describes the actual plurality of states an object in superposition can inhabit, it works on a metaphorical register to denote the impossibility of Black existence, inhabiting two paradoxical states at once. Second, the speaker describes feeling like he is all of the Black people on screen. This second register is expressed in the opening stanza:

> What are you looting for? asked the evening News, & the crowd continued looting. I wasn't there,
> but I thought I was – my brazen face live on the nation's screens, half-tucked under a t-shirt
> chucking bricks. (Femi)[24]

Femi's employ of a poetics of physics connotes an embodied spatiotemporal consequence of racialization. He can be both at the riots and not at the riots and dead and alive at once because of his Blackness.

From here opens an even wider geographic superposition which connects Black Britain to the wider diaspora. If racial violence creates spatial interactions that entangle Black Britons to each other such that connections are forged across spacetimes, then Black Britons can be impossibly connected to experiences of similar violence across the Atlantic. In the poem "Window", the speaker is trapped in a housefire (Grenfell or New Cross, it's unclear which) long enough that they "can no longer see a window to jump from" (35). Facing death triggers an impossible memory:

> I remembered the boy, 19, *bound so he could not see*
> *the other two*.
> When we realised it was only we who remained
> he called to us in Creole, "You do not know how to
> die. See how to die."
> As though I had seen the charred yellow soles of his feet myself, as though I had walked him to the stake myself. (34)

Both youths die by fire. Both die Black. The speaker's recollection of the char on the 19-year-old's feet—"As though I had seen the charred yellow soles […] myself"—presents the memory like it came from somewhere or someone else. Such framing introduces the idea of an entangled memory or a diasporic consciousness that connects Black victims of fire to each other across space and time. Both the speaker and the 19-year-old travel across spacetime to spiritually tend to each other. The 19-

[24] This block quote is not indented to preserve as closely as possible the poem's formatting.

year-old arrives when the speaker realizes he cannot escape the house/building and teaches him how to die; in turn, the speaker "follow[s] him through the smoke […] to the gully where he was born" (34). While the speaker is tending to the 19-year-old, a disembodied voice stylized with italics asks questions, such that the poem moves from one speaker to a dialogue between multiple voices/figures:

> I followed him through the smoke as
> though someone had untied his wrists,
> taken him on the back of a donkey
> to the gully where he was born,
> fed him
> *Green bananas?*
> Green bananas until night fell, (34)

Therefore, expanding a poetic tradition that uses voice to humanize victims of racial violence and ambivalence,[25] *Surge* uses duppy writing—entangled and ghostly—to relate such violence to diasporic ruptures in time and space.

Due to the inherently ghostly nature of the text, many scholars and fellow poets have analyzed *Surge* through the lens of haunting/hauntology, paying particular attention to Bernard's choice of voice. Victoria Adukwei Bulley—whose own poetry collection *Quiet* (2022) explores themes of Black interiority—notes Bernard's use of a first-person perspective in most of *Surge*'s poems creates a chorus of voices without overwriting unique subjectivity: "As the reader, we are met throughout with *I, we, my, me, us* and *our* – yet so rarely do these act as a unified lyric voice. Instead, we encounter in these poems a poly-vocal affect, the creation of a multitude of voices emanating from the vastness of black Britain" (Bulley). These voices include the dead victims of the New Cross and Grenfell fires, slaves, and sorrowful members of the Windrush generation, whose perspectives meld with the present voices of the living. If we imagine all these voices speaking from the same space and place—"the vastness of Black Britain"—the reality of Britain is one where the past is the present; the narrative voice troubles notions of a narrative absolute spacetime because there can be no linear progressive movement from these moments of violence if the dead are given voice to linger. Further, by refusing to

[25] I am thinking here of texts addressed in this thesis, such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Roger Robinson's "The Missing", and Caleb Femi's "Schrödinger's Black"; but this also includes Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014), "Notes Toward a Theory of Quantum Blackness" (2016) by Sofia Samatar, and especially LKJ's "New Craas Massahkah" (1984).

record their afterlife as peaceful or spatially separate from the living here and now, Bernard complicates ideas of Black death as confined to a temporal and spatial past; this, consequently, forges linkages to the Americas where Black British history bleeds across the Atlantic. It is not coincidence that the opening poem of *Surge*, "Arrival", begins the collection on the water:

> remember we were brought here from the clear
> waters of our dreams
>
> that we might be named, numbered and forgotten
>
> that we were made visible that we might be looked
> on with contempt
>
> that they gave us their first and last names that we
> might be called wogs (Bernard "Arrival" 13)

Taken together, the chronotopic motifs of duppies and superimposed spaces interact with each other across the literary space of these poems, rendering a nonlinear and compressed spacetime. In contrast to the separation between living and dead as presented in "The Missing", Bernard works to affirm a geography in superposition: Schrödinger's Black Britain.

2.3 "We have transformed this country": Motifs of Looking and Spaces Between

Having established the relevance of Schrödinger's Black to the chronotopic motif of duppies and superposition, the final section of this chapter will turn renewed attention to *quantum indeterminacy* or the *observer paradox.* To reiterate, in Newtonian physics, subatomic particles have definitive properties prior to observation, such as position and momentum; the enduring principle was thus that you could measure these properties to predict a particles' future path through space. The observer paradox is the disturbance on/influence of an object or system by the presence of an observer. Entangled particles exist in a superposition before measurement, existing in multiple contradictory states at once; it is only once an observer measures the particles do they collapse into one state. Importantly, the appearance of classical reality on a macroscopic scale would cease to exist if not for the chaos of subatomic particles. If light, for example, did not violate the laws of classical physics by functioning both as a particle localized in space at a point *and* a

wave that is extended over space (Bohr 580-590), what would light look like? Would it even exist? Or would the Universe be plunged into darkness? The application of quantum mechanics theories to the poems "+" and "-" shows how observation by police officers towards Black subjects performs a broader obscuring look towards blackness that collapses Black Britons into a marginal—and inferior—subject when compared against white Britons. Thus, the ways Black Britons have shaped the British locality—their culture, language, food, and music—can all be sequestered away from a dominating narrative of British History. This explains why Bernard themself, despite living in south-east London all their life, was never taught in schools the names of the children lost in the New Cross Fire or about the Black People's Day of Action. Looking changes reality. If Black people are glanced away from and only seen through an image in a white, Western imaginary, a British narrative absolute spacetime can persist in holding blackness and Black people as unhistorical populations outside of progressive human history.

Take for example the poem "Clearing", which describes a police officer gathering evidence from the New Cross Fire from the perspective of a lingering spirit.

> he holds the bag open, searching
> for a gaze to meet
>
> cold
> thirsts at the bone
>
> he doesn't see me standing there
> he doesn't hear me speak (Bernard 25)

The invisibility the spirit experiences is contrasted within *Surge* by a number of poems that are not about New Cross or Grenfell. These include poems like "Peg", "Ha-my-ca", and "Pride", all of which are focused on topics of identity, queer sensuality, and embodiment. My initial impulse on readings these poems was to consider them separate from the purpose of the whole project; an auxiliary, personal account of queerness and queer space in London that barely relates to the wider themes of archival memory, ghostliness, deathliness. However, including these poems sharpens the superposition of Black British geographies by showcasing the dichotomous experience of Black British spacetime. Since *Surge*'s poems are not arranged in any clear chronological order, the reader jumps between New Cross, to

Windrush, to Grenfell, to pride parades, to Jamaica, and back into the boxes of the George Padmore Institute. The arrangement of the text itself is an entangled locality.

There are also syntactic differences between all these poems which create disparate reading experiences and, consequently, give disparate impressions of where each speaker is located. Take, for example, the differences between "Pride" and the diptych "+" and "-".[26] In "+", Bernard makes use of repetition, creating the sense the speaker—the distraught father (+) of a son who died in the New Cross Massacre (-)—is constantly having to repeat himself. Additionally, dashes are used in lieu of quotation marks and other punctuation. Together, these stylistic choices imply a continuously interrupted and aborted attempt at speech, which Jayakumar-Hazra argues is meant to represent Bernard's findings of contradictory interviews of the victims of the New Cross fire conducted by the police and the New Cross Massacre Action Committee (381). The Action Committee holds that the police approached surviving victims and their families with hostility, and Bernard creates the scene of such an encounter in the opening lines to "+":

> the officer said – oh, it's very common for culprits to go missing – I said my son isn't a culprit, and how dare he imply it – and one of the officers stood up by the windows and looked out – he didn't want to look us full in the eye – he made it clear, he made it clear – from the moment he set foot in the house – the moment he set foot – what he thought of us – (13)

Though the sentences are broken up with dashes, there are no line breaks, and the poem proceeds in one long paragraph, creating the feeling of a stream of consciousness, the father's rumination on what can safely be imagined as the worst day of his life. The only line break in the whole poem is made when the father insists on seeing his son's remains. The decision to break here creates a visual gap between the space in the poem where the son and father are separated from each other and their reunion, a stylistic choice that is repeated in "-" in the same circumstances. "-" also mirrors the father's experience with police distrust and

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[26] In an interview with *Granta Magazine*, Bernard had the following to say about the physical arrangement of "+" and "-" within *Surge*: "Someone asked me whether I meant to place '+' and '–' back to back; the answer is yes, I knew they had to sit beside each other in the collection, but the fact that they are printed on the reverse of each other is an accident of the printing process. Yet it's very fortunate, because I think it's better that you can see one through the other if you hold it up to the light" (*Granta Magazine*). Accounting for this, perhaps mirroring is not the right word to describe "+" and "–". When I hold the book to the light, both the father and son's words overlay each other, their speech becoming visually enmeshed, a materially, textual superposition.

indifference as shown in the son's description of his encounter with the police as his body is moved from the burned house to, presumably, a police precinct:

> – I tried to say it's me, it's me – but they were looking at me so strangely, dad – like he couldn't stand to look at me – couldn't stand the sight of me – Police always looked at me like that (28)[27]

The outrage at the police's assumption of the son's guilt and the father's grief is further amplified in "-" by shifting perspective to the dead son. Both his life and death are haunted by police callousness, the symbol of which is in how the police choose to look at him ("but they were looking at me so strangely, dad […] Police always looked at me like that"). The word *always* adds a devastating sense of constant disavowal that has followed him into death. In a broader sense, the police, as officers of the law and thus agents of the state, are representatives of British authority as a whole; consequently, their unwillingness to look the father and son in the eye alludes to a more structural unwillingness to look directly at the violence committed against Black British people and name such violence as racially motivated. Further, the writing is punctuated with dashes and no line breaks, signifying disjointed/ruptured speech that is nevertheless continuous. Thus, Bernard can show their readers a confusion and fear that persists beyond living locality, following the victims of New Cross into the limbo of death.

In sharp contrast to the subject of "+" and "-", "Pride" is a poem set at a seventeen-year-old speaker's first time at a Pride parade. The poem is written in free verse, with no dashes or slashes to interrupt the lush descriptions of physical intimacy and embodied queerness that the speaker gets to experience through an enmeshment with the parade location itself:

> am I the steaming black street, am I the banner and
> the band, the crush,
> lilting ale, tipsy hug, charged flesh and open eye (62)

The "open eye" experienced at Pride gives the impression that the speaker is being fully recognized, where the parade nurtures a sense of belonging in which they can be observed authentically. The line "our gazes lock on love" further emphasizes the intimacy and care contained in the looks between the Black speaker and the queer

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[27] Pause here.

people surrounding them at pride (Bernard “Pride” 62). Looking does not displace or dehumanize them but rather affirms their belonging both in the space and in their own body. This is quite plainly not the case in “+” or “-”. Those poems represent observation as a look through and away from Black subjects (“couldn’t stand to look at me – couldn’t stand the sight of me”) (“-” 28).

The hope to be found in *Surge* is that Black people have been looking at Britain too. The Black British gaze in London has altered the landscape, creating and re-creating a new locality out of their burned geographies. These geographies are relational and informed by the movement of bodies away and towards each other. “-” concludes with the son begging not to be buried in the ground but rather to be kept between his mum and dad:

> don’t bury me – I can’t stand it – I can barely stand it when the lights go off – and I’m here – and spend the whole night listening for you dad – I want to crawl between mum and you – in your bed, in your sheets dad- that’s the only kind of burying I want – (Bernard 28-29)

In the last lines of “Pride”, the speaker declares that London is not a city but “the dark between two bodies” (63). The statement reverbs in Bernard’s “I resist the urge”: “Britain is black/queer Britain.” The motifs of in-between spaces and looking create define British geography as relational space. In “Pride”, this is intimate, queer space that mimics the bodies that create it. There is freedom in the unknowability and fluidity allowed to flourish in spaces between: a life-giving locality. In “+” and “-”, London becomes the space between living parents and dead sons. The poem “Proof” opens another relational space between British mainland/motherland and her former colonies. The speaker knows their arrival to England has altered their body in some fundamental way, a transformation of state that is once again experienced through observation, this time self-observation in a mirror:

> I was the first to come to England, and when I arrived, I knew –
> I knew – something had happened to me – I knew that what I saw in the mirror had been darkened, differently arranged – when I looked at myself in my new coat and boots I saw – I saw – something like a net that catches death – (Bernard “Proof” 32)

Similar to the syntax of “+” and “-”, the text is punctuated by dashes and repetition (“I knew – I knew”), though is not the same unending paragraph as experienced in the father’s stream of consciousness/rumination in “-”. This uses self-observation to

define how being on British soil alters the perception of their body, presenting clearly how space and time presents a problem for Black subjects. Spatially, the movement from familiar and familial homeland to a so-called motherland has altered how the speaker is able to see themselves and implies—if read with "+" and "-"—a similar change in how they are perceived by other British subjects.[28] There is a temporal consequence to this transformation in the foreclosure of the speaker's future upon arrival to Britain; "a net that catches death" is a *non*future and signals a death that is mournfully lonely precisely because no one is there to witness their death as a tragedy. Notably, the speaker doesn't beg not to die; having accepted the transformation of self that comes with arrival on British soil, they simply wish to die somewhere else in the presence of someone to grieve for them:

> I don't want to die in this country – let me die with my grandmother –
> I want to be rotted by the sun – and I want her shadow to fall along my body –
> And I want to be shaded by her grief (Bernard 33)

Grieving is its own mode of observation, as grief requires someone to see the death of a Black person as a tragedy, a loss, the end of a future rather than the natural conclusion of a life that is futureless. "I don't want to die in this country" or rather "I don't want to die *here*" twins the dead speaker of "-" assertion that "I am here" as he realizes his body will be left in the evidence locker and later buried in the ground rather than returned to the space between his mother and father. "I am here" continues to complicate neat spatial and temporal containers between the dead and the living, the past and the present, such that London becomes itself an atemporal site lived between embodied geographies.

By joining "Pride" with "+", "-"-, and "Proof" in the same poetry collection, Bernard makes *Surge* a mirror image for the relational, indeterminate space happening in London, in which the space between a queer Black British person enjoying the sensual pleasures of pride meets on the same soil as the spirit of a

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[28] Though the poem does not state explicitly where the speaker is from, Bernard writes that the speaker "wants to become an ackee tree", saltfish and ackee being the national dish of Jamaica. More to the point, Bernard's statement in an interview with Heather Marks in *the Guardian* that the poem is written in response to Windrush, in combination with the ackee tree allusion, solidifies my perspective that the speaker is from Jamaica: "For example, *Proof* came out of the Windrush rather than any specific story to do with the New Cross Fire, but that's the point — these things overlap. So, when people come to see the show, they'll see I'm not only talking about the New Cross Fire but that it's a beginning point. I talk about all kinds of things — queerness, race, the body, the city. [*Surge*] is a lot bigger than that" (Marks).

badly burned son. Consequently, Surge artistically renders a landscape where both realities are possible, creating a contradictory but palpable portrait of Blackness that reframes London as a city composed of spaces between, not a stable, unchanging locality. This is why the speaker for the poem “Duppy”, despite being a disembodied spirit and acknowledging that “Every lord called upon every church song sung / every psalm and saying / every aunt chasing duppy / cannot bring us back”, can still declare:

> We have transformed this country
>
> into a likkle dark skin pickney
> boppng for laughs
> at carnival squat him batty
> in rich people petunia
> drop him patty pun dem floor (38)

By way of *Surge*, this chapter has introduced some of the motifs that constitute this iteration of the Black Archival chronotope. I have suggested throughout that superposition, as well as the adjacent concept of the observer paradox, helps explore the literary expression of a Black British experience of compressed spacetime. The following chapter turns to Saidiya Hartman’s *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* to explore if Black contemporary archive writing rooted in a different locality, the United States, maintains similar/parallel spatiotemporal features.

Chapter 3 Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019): Writing from "Nowhere"

> Waywardness articulates the paradox of cramped creation, the entanglement of escape and confinement, flight and captivity.
>
> (Hartman *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* 110)

3.1 "Venus in Two Acts": An Atlantic Prelude to the Wayward

The same year Bernard's *Surge* is published, 3,459 miles away, historian and African American studies scholar Saidiya Hartman publishes her own book of archive writing: *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019). She too narrates scenes of Black life through a "chorus" of voices, though this time the chosen speakers are African American "wayward" women and queer folks living in Harlem and Philadelphia at the turn of the twentieth century. Wayward and waywardness, according to Hartman, "is the untiring practice of trying to live when you were never meant to survive"; for a population of newly freed African Americans, waywardness comes to describe an "experiment" of being, an entirely new mode of being in space and time that comes in the wake of emancipation and mass migration (Hartman *Wayward Lives* 228).

Hartman's genre of choice is *critical fabulation*, a phrase Hartman coins herself in the article "Venus in Two Acts" (2008). The focus of the article is Hartman's initial discovery of Venus, a Black woman killed aboard the slave ship *Recovery*,[29] and her dissatisfaction that *that* is the only information left of Venus' existence.[30] Venus is a heavily weighted name in Black history, which Hartman alludes to in the first paragraph of the article: "Variously named Harriot, Phibba, Sara, Joanna, Rachel, Linda, and Sally, [Venus] is found everywhere in the Atlantic world" (11). Sara here refers to Saartjie Baartman, a South African woman sold into slavery

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[29] Pause here.

[30] Recovery (n.) – a return to a normal state of health, mind, or strength; the action or process of regaining possession or control of something stolen or lost; the process of removing or extracting an energy source or industrial chemical for use, reuse, or waste treatment. I hold each of these definitions when I imagine the path this ship cuts across the Atlantic Ocean.

shortly after her husband was killed by Dutch colonists. Pursuant to a signed contract she could not read, Baartman was forced to travel to England and France in 1810 under the guise of a domestic servant since technically slavery had been abolished in England at this point. In addition to domestic labor, she was given the stage name "Hottentot Venus" and paraded in freak shows and dinner parties as "as a physical and sexual oddity because of the size of her buttocks, hips, and genitalia" (Catanese 47).[31] Hartman first locates Venus as a briefly mentioned girl in the murder trial for John Kimber, the Captain of *Recovery*. The trial is not for Venus herself but rather another enslaved girl that the ship's surgeon testified was "beaten and tortured" by Captain John Kimber.[32] One of the central ideas of this thesis for which has been discussed at length in the Introduction and Chapter 1, is the dichotomy between what we can access of Black life in archives—the material representation of a historical record—and the lived truth of Black life that remained unrecorded, a common anguish for Black Archival Practitioners. For enslaved women, there is a massive erasure of even the barest indications of identity beyond their dehumanized social position:

> One cannot ask, "Who is Venus?" because it would be impossible to answer such a question. There are hundreds of thousands of other girls who share her circumstances and these circumstances have generated few stories. And the stories that exist are not about them, but rather about the violence, excess, mendacity, and reason that seized hold of their lives, transformed them into commodities and corpses, and identified them with names tossed-off as insults and crass jokes. The archive is, in this case, a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body […] (Hartman "Venus in Two Acts" 14)

Thus, according to Hartman, the surplus violence of enslavement renders Venus an amorphous superposition of "thousands of other" dehumanized and murdered Black women. If Hartman were to adhere, as a researcher and historian, to the official record, there is nothing more she can say about Venus; Venus herself is rendered perpetually voiceless.

Confronting the gap between proper historical narrative and her "want to say more than this", Hartman follows in Toni Morrison's archive writing tradition and chooses to "imagine what cannot be verified" ("Venus in Two Acts" 2, 12). She

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[31] Pause here.
[32] Pause here.

creates a story of a friendship between the two murdered girls, despite there being no record of them having any relationship with each other, no documents to prove they ever so much as spoke to one another. Nevertheless, Hartman writes this story—her first piece of critical fabulation—because the only hope of encountering Venus's humanity is to engage in "an impossible writing which attempts to say that which resists being said (since dead girls are unable to speak)" ("Venus in Two Acts" 12). Hartman continues, "It is a history of an unrecoverable past; it is a narrative of what might have been or could have been; it is a history written with and against the archive" (12).

Yael Navaro identifies critical fabulation as one of many "negative methodologies" undertaken by anthropologist and historians to contend with the "black holes" that emerge in trying to "trace mass violence through its aftermaths" (Navaro 162). Remembering the previous discussion of black holes undertaken in the Introduction to this thesis, we recall that black holes are areas of spacetime where the gravity is so immense "nothing, not even light, can escape it" (Curiel "Singularities and Black Holes" sec. 3.1). Navaro uses black holes to denote locations in archival and historical memory of profound absence. When light meets a black holes' event horizon, the theoretical boundary surrounding a black hole where gravity is too strong for anything to escape, the light is pulled to the point at the centre of the black hole. This is called the singularity, and it contains an infinite amount of density and gravity. At which point, spacetime becomes infinitely distorted.[33] For this reason, singularities are considered the end or edge of spacetime itself, a "pathological" phenomenon (Johannsen 3). Using one of the most

[33] This is the general idea of how black holes function, but interestingly there is not one agreed upon definition of what precisely happens in a black hole beyond the event horizon. Firstly, scientists and mathematicians working in different fields—astrophysics, nature astronomy, classical relativity, and quantum gravity to name a few—can theorize "many potentially good answers" to the question that are not at all "consistent with each other" (Curiel "The many definitions of a black hole" 27). Additionally, the event horizon itself troubles classification because of the "pathological" behavior of spacetime that occurs within a black hole's immense gravity: "the idea that nothing can escape the interior of a black hole once it enters makes implicit reference to all future time—the thing can never escape no matter how long it tries. Thus, in order to know the location of the event horizon in spacetime, one must know the entire structure of the spacetime, from start to finish, so to speak, and all the way out to infinity. As a consequence, no local measurements […] can ever determine the location of an event horizon" (Curiel "The many definitions of a black hole" 29; Curiel "Spacetime Singularities" sec. 1). What remains agreed upon is that this pathological distortion *does* happen and that black holes do contain some kind of boundary or horizon; the particularities of the function of that horizon remain hotly contested to this day.

mysterious and frightening systems of our universe to describe archival absence works especially well in defining the ruptures Hartman tries to work through. Critical fabulation is a methodology that at once acknowledges the impossibility of seeing beyond an event horizon and recuperating the lives lost there while simultaneously using narrative and archival engagement to listen to that lost subjectivity, the "black noise" ("Venus in Two Acts" 12).

Hartman's first work of critical fabulation—the "might have been" friendship between the two murdered girls—is dripping in reservation, haltingly and hesitantly rendered. Cumulatively, she only writes two paragraphs of the fictitious story, while the rest of the article focuses on why such stories are necessary and how to responsibly tell those stories without trying to re-write the fact of slavery. *Wayward Lives,* a volume comprised of three books and narrated almost entirely by characters inspired by people she encounters in various archival materials, presents a much more robust engagement with this method. Further differentiation between "Venus in Two Acts" and *Wayward Lives* are the localities of the women of interest—a ship on the open ocean in the late eighteenth century vs. Philadelphia and Harlem at the turn of the twentieth century. These differences in locality cause, at least in part, the differences seen in the quality and quantity of critical fabulation. Of course, critical fabulation is easier to do in *Wayward Lives* and *Surge*: there is simply more in the archive to pull from. The difference between Venus, the victims of the New Cross and Grenfell Fires, and the women and queer historical figures that form the characters of *Wayward Lives* is that Venus was enslaved, and they were not. Her existence in the archive is an addendum to a murder trial for somebody else. Beyond that, she was deemed not fit to be recorded. In comparing Venus to these other works of Black contemporary archive writing, her silence is made all the more oppressive by how much clearer we can see the women who come after her, how Bernard and Hartman's writing allows us to look just a *little* bit closer at the delicate contours of their subjectivity.

Both Bernard and Hartman must exercise a level of "narrative restraint" in these engagements, so that they do not attempt to "fill in the gaps" in stories that cannot be told ("Venus in Two Acts" 12). As stated in the previous chapter, Bernard's poetry cannot—and they do not attempt—to create justice for the families of the

thirteen dead children; likewise, Hartman's critical fabulation serves to *emphasize* not rectify the irreparable damage of the transatlantic slave trade:

> The necessity of recounting Venus's death is overshadowed by the inevitable failure of any attempt to represent her. I think this is a productive tension and one unavoidable in narrating the lives of the subaltern, the dispossessed, and the enslaved. In retelling the story of what happened on board the *Recovery*, I have […] amplified the instability and discrepancy of the archive. (Hartman "Venus in Two Acts" 12)

Bernard's framing of her writing and research as haunting/haunted is the same way Hartman uses the archive and imaginative prose to explore as much as she can of the intimate life of Venus. Venus becomes a ghost in Hartman's scholarly practice whose absence goes on to shape the methodology of *Wayward Lives*. Further credence to the haunting/haunted position of these archivists is Hartman's reference to Octavia Butler's fantasy novel[34] *Kindred* (1979) that appears at the end of "Venus in Two Acts". The novel's main protagonist Dana, an African American woman living in 1976 California, mysteriously travels back in time to a pre-Civil War plantation in Maryland. Though Butler never reveals—and is entirely uninterested—in *how* Dana travels back in time, she comes to believe she is called back to the planation whenever her ancestor, white slave-owner-to-be Rufus, needs her help. Hartman views Dana's inability to save her ancestors from a life of slavery as a "model for a practice"; though not in the same fantastical sense, Hartman's research sends her travelling back in time and, like Dana, she must also accept her position as a ghost, incapable of changing the immutable "entangled relations of violence and domination" (Hartman "Venus in Two Acts" 14). Entanglement here is conceptualized as a violent force of foreclosure. The archive constitutes a second—social—death for Black people because the language history has left for Black people's material conditions under slavery is a "daily record of […] abuses" such that "the unimaginable assumes the guise of everyday practice" (Hartman "Venus in Two Acts" 6).

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[34] Readers often refer to *Kindred* as a science fiction novel, but I defer here to Butler's own identification with fantasy as stated in an interview with Randall Kenan delivered in 1991: "*Kindred* is fantasy. I mean literally, it is fantasy. There is no science in *Kindred* […] Not even the time travel. I don't use a time machine or anything like that. Time travel is just a device for getting the character back to confront where she came from." (see: Kenan, 495-496).

Entanglement becomes more clearly a matter of time and space once we consider how Great Britain's entanglement with the Americas is made glaringly obvious in "Venus in Two Acts": we cannot read anything about Venus without reading about the Great British Empire. The *Recovery* was not built in the Americas. Its port of origin was not in the Americas. It wasn't captained by an American person. And the trial against its captain did not take place in the Americas. Only its cargo of enslaved African people would stay and live on American soil for generations to come. The *Recovery* is a British product, captained and crewed by British people, sailing from the port of Bristol. As such, the birthplace of critical fabulation resides in a moving vessel of British locality—a piece of Britain cutting across the sea. African Americanness (that is, African American history and culture) is bound up in the movement of British people across land and sea, and, crucially, this movement subsequently occludes our ability to locate Black life and subjectivity in an American historical record. The recorded violence kept in medical ledgers and diaries from crewmembers and captains aboard these British ships come to shape the character of African American archival materials such that Hartman, trying to locate a glimpse of Venus's life, is met instead with a void of "black noise—the shrieks, the moans, the nonsense, and the opacity, which are always in excess of legibility and of the law and which hint at and embody aspirations that are wildly utopian […]" (Hartman "Venus in Two Acts" 12). "Venus in Two Acts" thus re-orients Great Britain in relation—in entanglement—with African American localities, the archive being a site of continuous violence begun in the hull of a slave ship and transmuted across space and time. Hartman and Bernard are not writing the same thing or in the same way, but they are engaging in parallel processes by using literary creation to mediate an untimely violence perpetuated against Black people. As Hartman carries critical fabulation into the writing of *Wayward Lives*, the methodology and form of the text retains the British ghost even as her subjects move away from the deathlily hull of *Recovery*.

Branching from this initial signal of a diaspora of entanglement, the following sections will look closely at some of the vignettes that make up the three books of *Wayward Lives*. I consider the chronotpic motifs shared between *Surge* and

Wayward Lives that have been introduced in Chapter 2—spaces in superposition and looking/looking away—while further investigating the importance of movement.

3.2 Movement Control and the City in Superposition

The movement—forced (as through the slave ship) and otherwise (*after* the slave ship as through the Great Migration from south to north in the US and the Windrush generation in the UK)—of Black bodies through space and time appears in both Bernard and Hartman's writing and is a key feature of the Black archival chronotope. I join here cultural theorists Erin Manning's argument raised in *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (2006) that spacetimes are created through bodily movement. She explains as follows:

> There is no body (other than the fabulated body of the state) that can operate separate from the chronotopes it creates and crosses. There can be no separation from the body's marking of an other and the body itself. History is the body. Spacing (*espacement*) is the body […] Touch crosses space and/as the body, calling forth not only a reciprocity but attesting to space-time formed through the movements of these very bodies. (Manning 92-93)

I approach "Venus in Two Acts" as a kind of prologue or precursor to *Wayward Lives*, and the centrality of Black bodily movement to that text need not be restated. However, worth further emphasizing is the reverberations of that movement on African American experience of space and time years after the "end" of slavery in 1865. The restrictions to autonomy and dehumanization as spatial practices—the positioning of Venus's body on the slave ship, in the water, and outside of archival memory—continue into the twentieth century, such that the subjects of *Wayward Lives* must contend repeatedly with an afterlife of slavery. During the twentieth century in the United States, Jim Crow was alive and well, codified into law by the Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* which legalized "separate but equal" segregation of the races.[35] Though there is a commonly held belief that the North

[35] Justice Henry Brown of Michigan delivered the following majority opinion: "We consider the underlying fallacy of the plaintiff's argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it […] The argument also assumes that social prejudice may be overcome by legislation, and that equal rights cannot be secured except by an enforced commingling of the two races […] If the civil and political rights of both races be equal, one cannot be inferior to the other civilly or politically. If one race be inferior to the other socially, the Constitution of the United States cannot put them upon the same plane." (Plessy v Ferguson)

was (and is) less racist than the South (due in part to: the gory spectacle of lynching, of which Black people made up the majority of victims;[36] the notorious cruelty on southern plantations during slavery; and the chain gang prison profit system that disproportionately affected Black people[37]), the colour line persisted everywhere. By the turn of the twentieth century, northern states enforced separate schools, hotels, restaurants, and other public spaces (Baker 117-129). And if nothing else, none of the northern-born justices dissented to the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision.

Consequently, this period in American history is marred by the codified restriction of Black autonomy. Black people attempting to live and move freely were pathologized and criminalized by agents of social order—schoolteachers, employers, white neighbours, landlords, and "respectable" Black people. The Great Migration and the action of *Wayward Lives* occurs against this backdrop of legally and socially enforced restrictions to Black movement. The first section of "Book One: She Makes an Errant Path Through the City" introduces this context through these opening lines:

> You can find her in the group of beautiful thugs and *too fast* girls congregating on the corner and humming the latest rag, or lingering in front of Wanamaker's and gazing lustfully at a pair of fine shoes […] Outsiders call the streets and alleys that comprise her world the slum. For her, it is just the place where she stays. (10)

This introduction to the city serves to highlight how space changes in response to the presence of Black people and their interpersonal relations. Specifically, Black community began forming in Northern urban centres in response to the Great Migration, which in turn causes the space to change around them: a slum to outsiders and "just the place [you] stay" to its inhabitants. The narrator continues: "A whole world is jammed into one short block crowded with black folks shut out from almost every opportunity the city affords, but *still intoxicated with freedom*. The air is alive with the possibilities of assembling, gathering, congregating" (13). Her repeated use of words like "congregating", "lingering", and "gathering" are charged in their evocation of Black assembly, an action criminalized by a series of laws called Black

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[36] See: NAACP "History of Lynching in America."

[37] Georgia profit prisons made an astonishing $354,853.55 in 1907 thanks to their unpaid prisoners (i.e., slaves): "Of 1,011 boys and girls under sixteen, arrested in 1905, 819 were black, but of those given the advantage of the probation system, 50 were white and only 7 coloured. In other words, out of 819 arrests of Negro children only 7 enjoyed the benefit of the probation system" (Baker 50-51).

Codes passed following the end of Reconstruction. These included vagrancy laws that made unemployment, "wandering or strolling about in idleness", or "unlawfully assembling themselves [negroes and mullatoes] together" illegal (Richardson 371; Stewart 2261). The prospect of Black people not working and grouping up with each other severely frightened and disturbed white northern city folks. Hartman represents this fear of Black autonomy astutely towards the end of section one:

> If only they could be prevented from flocking to the city, "if the metropolis could vomit them back down south, the whole matter would adjust." Better for them and for us, the restrictions of the south, than a "seeming liberty which blossoms noxiously into license." Better the fields and the shotgun houses and the dusty towns and the interminable cycle of credit and debt, better this than black anarchy. (17)

Within this vignette, she elucidates how it is not necessarily the movement of the Black body that is troubling, but rather the prospect of African Americans choosing how to move their body: to linger, to move up north, to hang out in the kitchen, in the parlour, in the street, to have sex when and where one pleases, *to choose not to work.* Consequently, assembling and loitering are some of the "experiments" of being that gives *Wayward Lives* its title. These are attempts by Black people, despite legal and social restriction, to create an autonomous life in a society dependent on no Black autonomy. Both Bernard and Hartman are writing after a mass migration of Black people into (conceptualized) white space and thus in turn they both share representations of a city in superposition. With the same logic, the Black archival chronotope is not restrained to a specific *point* in spacetime but rather a plane charted by that movement and played out across different localities.

This fear of Black anarchy connects to Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's discussion of the chaos/order paradigm in relation to Blackness. In her article "Theorizing in a Void': Sublimity, Matter, and Physics in Black Feminist Poetics", they stake the following argument:

> The "Order/ Chaos" opposition has been essential to the autopoiesis, or institution and relatively stable replication, of Man as a dynamic system. Whereas Newtonian mechanics gave rise to the idea of chaos as a consternating external threat to a linear, predictable, and law-like universe, post-Newtonian chaos theory challenged this view by no longer interpreting the two tendencies — order and chaos — as purely oppositional in their origins and effect but rather as interwoven […] Thus chaos is not extrinsic but constitutive to the ordering processes of a system. Yet, according to Wynter,

> black(ened) people are recursively conceived as a chaotic threat encroaching from, and appropriate to, the margins of a "universalist" system of Order. (617)

Understanding anti-Blackness as a structural need in society, a violence that gives the world coherence, is an idea rooted in a school of thought known as Afropessimism. Scholarship from Frank B. Wilderson III, Frantz Fanon, and Hartman herself—though Hartman would contend she is not an Afropessimist—posits that Blackness helps define humanness by supplying a subject that lacks humanity. As explained by Wilderson, Blackness "makes the Human conceptually coherent" because the ontological position of Human is assured of all its "positive attributes" simply by remembering what ontological position contains none of them (Wilderson 40). "[T]o be Human," he argues, "one has simply not to be Black […] There is a structural (which is to say, necessary) antagonism between Blacks and Humans; and this antagonism hinges on violence" (Wilderson 40). In a precursor to the arguments raised in *Physics of Blackness*, Michelle Wright's *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (2004) further crystalizes Wilderson's point by linking the Human/slave binary back to an observational imperative:

> For the West, the image of the Black Other is as vibrant as ever, reminding us that the belief in Black inferiority is the result not of objective observation but instead the need for self-definition. In order to posit itself as civilized, advanced, and superior, Western discourse must endlessly reify Africa and the Black as its binary opposite. (27)

Black people living quotidian lives is perceived as anarchy precisely because social order depends on a Human/slave binary; there would be nothing revolutionary about a Black person lingering to look at nice shoes if not for the fact that it is an audaciously Human thing to do and Black people were not brought to American to *be Human*.[38]

Here, I locate the metaphoric function of the observer paradox within Hartman's oeuvre: maintaining the appearance of disparate geographies. White, linearly progressive, "ordered" spacetime is poised against a Black, unhistorical, chaotic/anarchic spacetime. In the first section of *Wayward Lives*, "The Terrible Beauty of the Slum," Hartman establishes the Black neighbourhoods within the city

[38] See also Hortense Spillers "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book (1987) and John Murillo III "Black (in) Time."

as a geography in superposition *w*ith the following declaration: “It is Africa Town, the Negro quarter, the native zone. […] It is a realm of excess and fabulousness. It is a wretched environment. It is the plantation extended into the city. It is a social laboratory” (15). Importantly, Hartman does not attempt to recast these localities as singularly utopic; the site is *both* plantation *and* social laboratory, fabulous and wretched. As I touched on earlier, the shape of this space is unstable and malleable, able to be recast from a “place you stay” to a “slum” depending on who is perceiving it. Thus, Hartman can speculate that the Black wayward women who arrive in the city are not attempting to “redress slavery’s violence but to address the desires slavery sought to obliterate” (Moore 392).

Hartman returns to the disparate naming of Black city space in the seventh section of “Book 3: Beautiful Experiments.” The vignette is centred on Mabel Hampton, a Black singer and dancer in the Cony Island cabaret who moved from Jersey City to New York “in the Red Summer of 1919”. Mabel experiences firsthand the racial and gendered violence committed against African American woman in the city; nevertheless, it does not hamper her dreams or her willingness to live a “wayward” life in New York. “Despite […] the color line enclosing the city and solidifying the walls of the emerging black ghetto,” Hartman writes, “and the inevitable servitude of domestic work and the intimate violence of hurtful things done behind closed door, Mabel Hampton still imagined that she could live a beautiful life” (141). After her first lesbian lover—the much older Gladys—breaks her heart, she finds a new lover in Ruth, “a handsome white woman” well-connected to New York’s best and wealthiest entertainers, politicians, and athletes (*Wayward Lives* 150). Ruth’s circle is queer, lavish, and racially desegregated, populated by such figures as Gladys Bentley and A’lelia Walker. Mabel discovers a new world of pleasure and intimacy through the private parties and clubs Ruth brings Mabel to:

> [T]he choked breath of orgasm shattered the boundaries of the self, effaced the lines of social division, unmade men and women. The utter dissolution of the bounded, discrete self was the gift. The gay rebels and the gender queers savored the lush refuge; welcomed the opportunity to jettison propriety. Guests mingled across the divide of class and race, strangers became intimates , an English aristocrat fell in love with a Negro actress. The opening and the possibility for the era seemed clear and palpable to Mabel in a lovely room filled with folks of all persuasions and proclivities lying about on velvet pillows. (152)

Ruth and Mabel together disregard the colour line and heteropatriarchal rules of intimacy by taking many lovers: “white women, black women, bisexual women, and what she called true lesbians” (150). Further, Hartman-as-narrator is sure to point out that Ruth is “comfortable with colored folks and introduced Mabel to many black women who also loved women” (150). Through acts of transgressive intimacy, the possibility of living freely is glimpsed in the temporary “dissolution” of her body. Recalling Manning’s argument that the body contains society and history, moving towards queer, racially different people (an “other”) through physical intimacy (both sex and nightclub dance) forms new spacetimes. I would argue this not only imagining what it would it be like to live freely while constrained by social ordering, but truly arriving “unmade” and “unbound” to a location where bodies *can* and *do* move freely towards each other. Hartman thus presents a queer locality in a bodily movement space created in the instances where Mabel can move beyond the confines of racial/gendered binaries and—even better—rupture the very potential to be ordered by shedding the “body” that contains that loaded history.

The image is almost utopic.

3.3 But Hartman is not writing about utopia

Before this beautiful scene, Hartman is sure to remind her readers that the city remains as a geography in superposition, in which racial difference still impacts how Ruth looks at and names Black space.

> “You want to go slumming?” Ruth asked. Sure, Mabel said. Slumming wasn’t a word she and her colored friends used to describe their quest for pleasure uptown and their encounters with Negroes, even if the black folks they met were rich or educated or accomplished. Mabel didn’t give a damn either way, so long as it was fun. (150-151)

The Black people Ruth is acquainted with are “educated” and “accomplished” people, many of whom are wealthy socialites just like her. And still, Ruth’s whiteness shapes her observation of the city against all other logics, such that she continues to call her movement through that space as a white woman “slumming.” Through her use of language, Hartman contends with the painful reality that even in localities that allow for the expression of new and transgressive spacetimes, race remains as a social signifier and contours white sight. The observer paradox functions chronotopally to denote how whiteness persistently, stubbornly, collapses the

superposition of the fabulous slum. Importantly, Hartman can contend with how that collapse impacts the ways in which the Negro quarter and its inhabitants are archived. Hartman describes the affective experience of encountering the archived pictures of the slum: "These photographs never grasped the beautiful struggle to survive, glimpsed the alternative modes of life, or illuminated the mutual aid and communal wealth of the slum. [They] documented only ugliness" (23). There is a contention brewing here between who has the authority to name space, and how the naming of space contributes to its production. There is nothing beautiful in the black ghetto if the white archivist says so, if the white social worker says so, if the white police officer says so. This is especially visible in how Hartman writes about Black social spaces within the home and apartment complexes. The Black life voyeur—journalists, sociologist, police officers, reformists—sees the small size and poverty of Black houses in the urban ghetto and raise a moral panic. The observer cannot see the experimental potential in spaces like the foyer or the fire escape, narrow spaces where Black women "imagine other worlds":

> This black interior space for thought action, for study and vandalism, for love and trouble. The hallway is the pallor for those who manage to live in cramped dark rooms with not enough and air and who see the sunlight only when they step out onto the front stoop. It is ugly and brutalizing and it is where you stay. […] It is as close to a home as you'll get, it is a transient resting place, an impossible refuge. (*Wayward Lives 24*)

By captioning images of Black life with words like "damaged goods" and "one room hazard," the image itself becomes a container for the observers' perception of Black space rather than a visible relic of embodied Black geography. The archivists and social reformers that observe these spaces fail to account for the possibility of dichotomous reality because they are not privy to the sensorial excess of Black neighborhoods as experienced by its inhabitants (*Wayward Lives* 7). In the same way Black women living here are ghettoized, the city itself becomes a ghetto: the subject mirrors the space.

Just as the observer effect causes a cyclical spacetime as experienced by Black Britons in *Surge*, the same principle helps construct a literary spacetime within *Wayward Lives* that mimics the instability of the cityscape as experienced by the African Americans that lived there. If this was only a matter of a difference in perspective, it would not bear talking about; two people seeing something differently

is not much of a novel concept. However, the observer effect frames this difference as a matter of material consequence: the physical character of the city itself is altered by white perception. Moreover, the archive mimics the alteration, as Hartman describes in Book One:

> The interracial slum was razed and mapped into homogeneous zones of absolute difference. […] The captions transform the photographs into moral pictures, amplify the poverty, arrange and classify disorder. *Negro quarter.* The caption seems to replicate the image, to detail what resides within its frame, but instead the caption produces what appears. It subsumes the image to the text. (23)

Images of Black life do not contain their own meaning. Instead, Hartman posits an inverse process in archiving/documenting Black life where the image of the subject is "subsumed" by the image's caption; "the black ghetto is born" not because of the migration and congregation of Black people in urban centres but rather because reformers and sociologists reduced these new Black social worlds to "slum ecology" (Hartman *Wayward Lives* 23). The negro quarter arises from the white imaginary and is projected onto the picture through language (the picture's captions). Frantz Fanon describes a similar attack on his sense of self in "Chapter 5 The Fact of Blackness" in Black Skin, White Masks (1967). The moment he is perceived in the white gaze, he is no longer an individual; whiteness constructs over his personhood a universal Black object such that he becomes responsible "for [his] body, for [his] race, for [his] ancestors" (Fanon 112). Thus, imagery representations of blackness subsume him: "I cannot go to a film without seeing myself. I wait for me. In the interval, just before the film starts, I wait for me. The people in the theater are watching me, examining me, waiting for me. A Negro groom is going to appear" (Fanon 140). Crucially, Fanon names the psychic anguish of racialized encounter as also a locational trauma, in which his ability to be in time and space shatters; he becomes completely "dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other", and in turn the Black subject is segregated and violently oppressed (112-113).

The choral voice as chronotopal feature reflects the ontological entanglement described by Fanon and its ramifications on Black geographies. Writing from a chorus highlights entanglement within the African diaspora, such that the "present" material conditions of the Black subject reflect a temporal past (the archive as "a

mirror of the present"). In *Wayward Lives'* first section "A Note on Method", Hartman describes her process as a "mode of close narration […] which places the voice of narrator and character in inseparable relation, so that the vision, language, and rhythms of the wayward shape and arrange the text" (10). She thus claims the voice of her subjects are not only present in the text but also that her own voice travels into the past such that they become entangled with one another "in inseparable relation". Like Bernard, Hartman's ghostly presence haunts the past just as the past haunts her archival engagement. The challenge for *Wayward Lives* is not a lack of archival material but rather how the perception of the people recorded has influenced *how* the records are written; while yes, there are a plethora of notes on the misbehaviour of Black women during the twentieth century, none of these narratives come from "inside the circle" (Hartman *Wayward Lives* 9). In an interview with journalist and activist Kai Wright discussing the book, Hartman describes how finding the image of a nude Black girl posed on a sofa while researching in the archive was the catalyst for writing *Wayward Lives*. The young Black girl's nudity and namelessness in conjunction with the fact that this image is the only record of her to be found within this archive represents the central issue at the core of Hartman's writing: "the problem of history and its proper subjects" (WNYC 8:54).

> **Hartman:** The book is about this impossible search for this figure and it traces her through the lives of a number of young women and young gender queer folks. […] It is a serial portrait.
> **Wright:** And you said an impossible search because the point is these are people who appear in the archive but only in flashes. […] How does one write an account of a nameless figure? (WNYC 7:51-9:08).

The book then is less about a singular person lost to archival memory but rather "a composite of the human [she] is searching for in the archive" (WYNC 6:54). *Black Nude*'s namelessness evokes the same problems that Venus did on Hartman's first encounter with her. The lack of any subjective details that may give her a unique identity beyond an act of violence—and the photograph *is* violent, what kind of person takes nude photos of prepubescent children?—turns these individuals into signifiers for all the Black women who have suffered in the tradition of anti-Black violence.

> The singular life of this particular girl becomes interwoven with those of other young women who crossed her path, shared her circumstances, danced with her in the chorus, stayed in the room next door in a Harlem tenement, spent

> sixty days together at the workhouse, and made an errant path through the city […] The minor figure yields to the chorus. All the hurt and the promise of the wayward are hers to bear. (Hartman *Wayward Lives* 20)

However, while entanglement still describes for Hartman relations of violence and domination, she turns her attention to a kind of Black and queer entanglement experienced in these cities where the dichotomous realties of slavery and freedom existed at once. Black neighborhoods in Philadelphia and Harlem are subject to a unique temporal and spatial dance. The past organizing logics of the plantation—both temporally and spatially distant from the northern cities—are replicated in urban ghettos as methods of controlling and policing Black people's movement through space; simultaneously, the decision by Black wayward people to move anyway—movement across the colour line, in defiance of gender norms, intimate and leisurely movement of Black bodies into dance halls, congregations, parties—creates utopic pockets of spacetime where a new mode of being is possible and practiced.

Choral voice is not just Hartman's method of writing but also an experience of her characters, being in the chorus. Mabel Hampton's vignette represents this in a scene of her getting ready to perform. Punctuated by a black and white photograph of Black showgirls, Hartman-as-narrator paints the scene:

> In the broken circle of the dance floor, Mabel and her friends readied to get free. That little extra something, that improvisation of becoming together, that call to assembly, that two-step and slide announcing the struggle against an imposed life, that sensual embrace of a body unmarked by stigma and undisciplined by servitude. (144-145)

The desire expressed here to unmark her body foreshadows the release she will experience once she gains access to queer parties after meeting her lover Ruth. In each instance, Mabel is joined with other people, moving with and towards other people, such that her physical body can create a chronotope demarking free space in these instances of movement. The vignette continues:

> On the dance floor, they refused the world that refused them […] The aspiration that fuelled these bodies in motion and enabled assembly connected the chorus line to the bodies hurled on the floor of the cabaret, cruising down Seventh Avenue and grinding away in Harlem flats. (144)

The whole city becomes an entangled geography, such that Mabel's freedom reverberates to all those other Black subjects that too are "readied to get free." A

defining characteristic of the Black chorus then is body movement, such that movement disrupts the history and social ordering contained within a singular Black subject.

There is a transgressive quality in assembling as Black people and moving together that breaks down the social signifiers of difference, both race and gender, due in part to how Black bodies are already marked as "failing" to live up to traditional gender norms because they are predicated on whiteness. According to Hartman, "the failure to comply with or achieve gender norms would define black life; and this 'ungendering' inevitably marked black women (and men) as less than human" (Hartman *Wayward Lives* 91). This is further articulated in the third chapter of Book Two, in which Hartman imagines an autobiographic movie made by Oscar Micheaux, "Mistah Beauty: The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Women", recounting the life of Gladys Bentley: transmasculine, Harlem Cabaret performer, "bulldagger", womanizer, lesbian. Hartman-through-Micheaux begins the movie with Bentley's departure from his family home in Philadelphia and arrival in New York City, Harlem. All the bad manners and temptations of the Black city club scene—alcohol, adultery, debauchery, and women—greet him. In contrast to the kind of documentation performed by social workers and police offers trying to diagnose the problem of blackness, the cinematic portrayal of Cabaret dancing in a Harlem club presents blackness as something robust, alive, "lovely" (*Wayward Lives* 96). Recalling Bernard's psychogeography, 1920s Harlem is a location that makes Bentley make sense: the prohibition of alcohol creates the "illicit space" of the speakeasy, the Great Migration brought waves of Black people from the South to urban centres in the North, and the Harlem Renaissance cements the city as a Black cultural epicentre. Bentley relationship to the space as it is produced by Black relations encourages a wayward expression of gender and movement. Bentley's "deregulated movement" produces new chronotopes out of a geography entangled with displacement (or a geography produced in displacement): spacetimes of possibility. Hartman writes:

> Bentley's life refracted through Micheaux's cinema is the wild, deregulated movement that refuses the color line and flees the enclosure of the ghetto. The bodies in motion, bodies intimate and proximate, recklessly assert what might be, how black folks *might could* live. The slave ship is as central as the

> railroad in the collapse of time and space that produce modernity and black cinema. (96)

Such narration of Bentley's life figures Black queer gender and sexuality as movements through and producers of space; further, such "deregulated movement" crosses and creates chronotopes such that a geographical collapse bridges the Harlem club to the slave ship and the railroad. All three localities are loaded centres of wayward Black life precisely because of their connections to movement. What would happen if Black people could live in the worlds created in dance clubs, could exist beyond observation from the state that polices sexual relationship along codes of race and gender, could become something "ungendered" altogether? On the terrain of his body, Bentley creates a whole universe of uncertainty, "[a] modern surface. An exemplary architecture of black possibility" (*Wayward Lives* 96).

Tragically, to maintain the Newtonian chaos/order paradigm, the ability to answer such questions must be systematically destroyed by any means necessary. Continuing within the film framework, Hartman describes the end of the film as a natural consequence for someone like Bentley who could only ever be cast as a villain; Bentley's lesbianism, performance in suits and trousers (state law would require female performers to apply for a license to wear men's clothing in their acts), vagrant disregard for the colour line (he at one point was married to a white women), and raunchy performances in speakeasies and parties were all punishable offenses in the eyes of observing Western world order. Further, critics like W.E.B. DuBois who cared about the observer's opinion, detested such performances of queer sexual nonconformity by Black people. Thus, Bentley's crimes are "deriving from the marriage plot, from the script of racial uplift, from the ought and should of what a woman was expected to be" (*Wayward Lives* 97). By the end of prohibition, Bentley is dismissed from the King's Terrace club, and the venue is padlocked by police for violating new state laws that require any venue selling alcohol "not to suffer or permit such premises to become disorderly" (Woolner). "Though *disorderly* was not explicitly defined," Cookie Woolner explains, "the State Liquor Authority took this term to imply that the presence of queer patrons, sex workers, gamblers, and other 'undesirables' made a venue disorderly" (Woolner). So comes the film's conclusion:

> the denouement of the film would restore the trampled ideals and imperilled norms of temperance, monogamy, and heterosexuality. […] Bentley trashed the gendered norms and family ideals central to the project of racial uplift—self-regulation, monogamy, fidelity, wedlock, and reproduction—and scoffed at the moralism of the latter-day Victorians, the aristocrats of uplift. Alas, the villain cannot escape the end that awaits him. (*Wayward Lives* 97)

The spaces where Bentley makes sense are foreclosed.[39] Thrust into observation, he surrenders to a collapsed superposition: "the beautiful husband […] assumes the role of a wife, signalling his defeat. It is a last act of self-renunciation" (*Wayward Lives* 97). Despite Bentley's own subjugation of self, his decision to live freely in Harlem during the prohibition era and explore queer sexuality within a Black ungendered body creates a roadmap through the city for other wayward women and queer folks to follow his direction. Hartman, a ghost in the present, cannot change Bentley's life; but, in joining a wayward chorus, Hartman is able to locate within Bentley and those who danced with him the spacetimes too often disregarded in the archive.

The chronotopal features of Black geographies as represented in Hartman and Bernard's writing denotes nonlinear time and entangled, unstable spaces. The choral voice, observer paradox, and Black body movement are literarily represented in *Surge* and *Wayward Lives* differently but nevertheless are in parallel processes such that the Black archival chronotope applies to both despite their disparate localities.

[39] Pause here.

Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated how the chronotopic motifs of Bernard and Hartman's literature portrays the experience of time as living through the theoretical archive of contemporary Black existence. Spacetime metaphors from Black feminist thought and Bakhtin's chronotope theory formed the theoretical glue for which to perform a reading of Black diasporic archive writing rooted in the embodied experience of space and time for Black subjects. Such reading has combined focus on the inherent spacetime complexity underlying archives and the formation of historical narrative, the embodiment of Black geographies, and the "Black hole" ruptures that proliferate within those spaces.

Mine is not the first research project to consider the similarities between Hartman and Bernard. I conclude this thesis by responding to Sarah Lawson Welsh's article "Jay Bernard's Archival Interventions in Black British Poetry" (2022), notable to this thesis for its direct comparison between Hartman and Bernard's archive writing. Lawson finds that

> Saidiya Hartman's reflections on her own writing process […] seem very similar to Bernard's project in *Surge.* […] Despite such similarities, what distinguishes Bernard's poetry from Hartman's writing is its insistence on a black British context and a thoroughly black British (rather than Black Atlantic) aesthetic. (24)

Lawson and I use distinctly different approaches in our reading of Bernard's work, such that Lawson, without pulling from physics of Blackness or the spacetime Black Feminist school of thought, must find the Black Atlantic in opposition to a "distinctly black British" aesthetic. The Black archival chronotope and physics of Blackness scholarship as a whole is a fruitful mode of reading precisely because it rejects the necessity to rely on such rigid boundaries when interpreting Black diasporic literature. As an added methodological perk, it simultaneously considers the specific historical and cultural context of each author such that I avoid collapsing differences between Black Britishness and African Americanness. In my own experience as an African American person studying Blackness at British universities, I am especially attuned to the divergences between these cultures, and perhaps my own turn to spooky action at a distance is animated by a desire to affirm a diasporic language of Blackness.

My hope in using quantum mechanics heuristically and (almost) metaphorically is to push further a tradition already established in Black cultural studies in finding new modes of reading Blackness as a series of space/time relations. There is an as of yet missing physics of Blackness foothold in Black British literary analysis and Black British cultural studies—perhaps due in part to the dominance of Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic paradigm—such that the majority of the secondary scholarship referenced herein has drawn from African American, Black Canadian, and Caribbean writers and researchers. What might a Black British researcher/archive writer notice about Black British spacetime that I, from my American subjectivity, have missed? Moreover, with the Western focus of my analysis, the question also remains if there is truly an entanglement felt across the whole Black diaspora, beyond the Black Atlantic. Future studies of Black archive writing and chronotopic motifs in Black literature may reveal even spookier ties within the language of Blackness.

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