

Bodily Trespass: An Ecology of the Fantastic in Twentieth-Century

African American Literature

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Bodily Trespass situates the fantastic as a discourse of spatial production in twentieth-century black American literature. Eruptions of the fantastic in realist and surrealist narratives index and ameliorate the spatial constriction that informs black American subjectivity from the Middle Passage up through to the contemporary carceral state. The black fantastic is a narrative response to a spatial crisis that is corporeal and ontological. As a literary mode, in the Todorovian sense, the fantastic identifies the real as a production of the “unreal” and calls attention to ideological and institutional apparatuses that sustain the dominant order. Taking Pauline Hopkins’ turn of the twentieth-century serial *Of One Blood, Or, The Hidden Self* as a point of departure, this project examines the fantastic as a discourse of Pan-Africanism during a period Farah Griffin describes as the “nadir” of post-emancipation black life. Hopkins reaches outside of U.S. borders suturing Ethiopia to America in order to fashion a new and “rival” black geography that challenges the eradication of black legal, civic, and social space.

In the postwar years, the production of imaginative space extends to the task of recording and refuting the racial discourse that articulates urbanity. Chester Himes’ *The Real Cool Killers*, Ann Petry’s *The Street*, and Gwendolyn Brooks’ *Maud Martha* depict racially encoded urban geographies as corporeally informed psychosocial “interfaces.” These novels identify cartographic locution as a strategy for spatial occupation and psychic rehabilitation. James Baldwin’s “Sonny’s Blues” and Ralph Ellison’s “The King of the Bingo Game” locate in the sonic a blueprint for refashioning the space of the modern metropolis according to a logic of interiority. Baldwin and Ellison identify the

fantastic as a discourse of aurality that alters the texture of space by channeling what I call “scalar consciousness,” a heightened awareness of the ways in which one might manipulate scale in the service of spatial production. Meditations on belonging, displays of corporeal violence, discourses of Africanity, and the identification of the aural as a pathway for liberation illustrate, in all these works, the black fantastic’s rootedness in spatial production, subject formation, and resistance to a dehumanizing social order.

Dedication

To Atlaw and Admas--
who taught me to look inside

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Introduction—Theorizing the Black Fantastic

“Metaphors. Like what they used in poetry and stuff. The stuff folks dreamed up when they was making a fantasy, while what she was talking about was real. As real as them young hands in front of her.” (*Mama Day* 294)

“The cause, in the most of cases, that induces the negro to run away from service, is as much a disease of the mind as any other species of mental alienation, and more curable, as a general rule.” (Samuel Cartwright 332)

Bodily Trespass: An Ecology of the Fantastic is a study of the intersections among the body, community, and text in the fiction of twentieth-century black American writers. By the “fantastic,” I mean a literary mode in the Todorovian sense that vacillates between the orders of the real and the surreal (25).¹ The black fantastic is a narrative response to a spatial crisis that has its origins in the bodily and psychic deprivations of the Middle Passage (Christol 164, 167).² The fantastic is a strategy for the production of space and an affirmation of black humanity that mediates the corporeal and ontological effects of social death. The inaugural experience of New world Africans—no longer African and not yet American—trapped within the “metaphysical spaces of the white imaginary” is marked by spatial constriction at a variety of scales (Spillers 67, Morrison 163). The reproduction of social relations requires spatial articulation that adheres to the mandates of the dominant order. By the same token, to deny a people the space to live--the space to be--is to extinguish their humanity--to circumscribe them in a borderland between the living and the dead.³ What we see in black fiction is a response to this

¹ Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*

² It is a crisis that echoes today in the mass incarceration of youth of color. See Lois Wacquant’s ““Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh.”

³ Bonnie J. Barthold, author of *Black Time* refers to this as a “No Man’s Land” (43).

negation and a fierce insistence on the “immanence” of black subjectivity.⁴ *Bodily Trespass* argues that the black fantastic is a discourse of spatial production--a means of recording the trauma of spatial deprivation and an ameliorative gesture that serves as the condition of possibility for the "progressive transformation of those conditions" (Calhoun 40, Christol 164-66). In thinking through the fantastic, and its relationship to black American cultural production, one discovers the centrality of what I term *scalar consciousness*.⁵ The preservation of black ontology requires a keen awareness of the ways in which one might manipulate scale in the service of spatial production. Scalar consciousness highlights the importance of spatial trespass--at the corporeal, domestic, urban, and internationalist nodes--to the restructuring of social relations.

Textual worlds give us access to places we would not otherwise have access to. The fantastic as a discursive mode draws our attention to the production of the social real and to the possibility of enacting the unreal. The three modalities I identify in this dissertation—the fantastic as a discourse of black internationalism, the fantastic as a discourse of urbanity, and the fantastic as a discourse of aurality—represent efforts by

⁴ Manthia Diawara uses this term, in *In Search of Africa*, as a signifier of “blacks’ inability to escape a stereotypical identity” (254). I use it in a similar sense, but to opposite ends—as illustrative of the resilience of black subjects.

⁵ I use the term “scalar” in a manner that references critical geographer Neil Smith’s conception of “jump[ing] scales” (60). Smith identifies scalar manipulation as key to social and political transgression. “Scale,” he notes, “is the criterion of difference not between places so much as between different *kinds* of places” (64 emphasis added). Scalar consciousness, then, maximizes the transgressive potential of spatial occupation by transforming social relations that inform the production of space.

In physics, “scalar” signifies a “quantity, such as mass, length, or speed, whose only property is magnitude” (*American Heritage Science Dictionary*). Scalar quantities are directionless. In their capacity to stand in for a discrete quantity and infinitude at one and the same time, scalars evoke the fantastic.

black authors to document the ontological and corporeal effects of a repressive social schema. The fantastic is a way for black authors to represent the human toll of living in a racist society even while attending to the escapist desires of their reading public. The appearance of the fantastic in otherwise realist texts allows for a critique of those conditions that are the consequence of a system that devalues black life, and a counter-critique that questions the validity of a social order in which such events take place (Christol 168). The fantastic, I contend, is the only narrative mode capable of achieving these aims in a synergistic fashion and it is why a vast majority of twentieth-century black fiction contains such elements.

The black fantastic, then, is a critical intervention that closely resembles the framework of Du Boisian “double consciousness” (2). Double consciousness alludes to the psychic alienation that accompanies the overdetermined nature of black corporeality. When he writes of “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body,” Du Bois identifies the fantastic qualities of black corporeality and the ways in which the interiority of black subjects is obscured by the racialized inscription of the body (2). In much the same way that the “veil” preserves the privacy of the subject *and* heightens the possibility of misrecognition, the fantastic calls attention to the reproduction of the social order and flirts with the possibility of doing away with that order even if it may mean the destruction of the (collective) self. Black writers, in a similar fashion, have faced and continue to face a unique challenge--the conflation of the black body and the black text and the connected task of proving black humanity (Holloway 7, Reid-Pharr 12). Yet there is no real attempt by the vast majority of black writers to evade either the black body, or the burden of bearing witness to societal

attempts to subjugate that body, and this is because it is in the defiance of racialized representations of corporeality that one locates a protocol for the production of space.

This project is an outgrowth of my fascination with the reductive nature of twenty-first century representations of black corporeality. Blackness, it seems to me, is fantastic in its metonymic and regenerative discursive capacities. Tropes of blackness are called upon to do the work of securing boundaries, articulating space, and consolidating national interests. The fantastic has always been present—in, as Du Bois notes, the power of the spirituals; in the pages of authentication that precede nineteenth-century slave narratives conjoining the declaration of black humanity to the affirming white gaze; in stereotypical discourse that insists on the worthlessness of black subjects all the while extracting profit from black bodies; and in the aural register of realist twentieth-century black texts. I am interested in uncovering the fantastic’s narrative function in black fiction, in exploring what spaces it opens up for radical political and ontological work. The fantastic appears in a wide swath of black American literature that harbors a commitment to effecting social change. It reflects, in other words, the paradox of using the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house.⁶ As I conducted my research, I came to realize it is impossible to identify a distinct genre of black American fantastic literature and that to do so would be to cut against the grain of this narrative mode.

Tzvetan Todorov’s seminal work, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, situates the fantastic as a literary mode that hovers somewhere in between the real and the surreal. The fantastic, as opposed to fantasy more broadly—a

⁶ Audre Lorde famously wrote that the “master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house;” the fantastic is a way for black authors to chip at the foundation bit by bit (*Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* 112).

modality Todorov associates with the “marvellous”—is characterized by a confusion on the part of the reader as to how to interpret textual events (44, 158). Todorov writes that this “hesitation” is sometimes replicated, within the narrative frame itself, by the protagonist’s befuddlement as to whether events belong to the order of the natural or supernatural (33). Critics like Rosemary Jackson and Neil Cornwell use the term “fantastic” as shorthand for fantasy finding little structural or thematic difference between the modes. All agree, however, that the fantastic addresses the “unseen” and “unheard”—what Sharon Holland describes as the “experience of being marginal to the historical record of a culture that refuses to recognize difference as its own creation” (Jackson 4, Christol 170, Holland 1).⁷ Cornwell, however, introduces the element of time, observing that there is “a striking extension, to the point of elasticity, of what might be called the chronotope of the fantastic” such that, “[t]ime and space may dissolve altogether under certain transcendental conditions” (69). The fantastic, then, disturbs the separation “between [the] real and [the] unreal” and sheds light on what it means to occupy the liminal space in betwixt (Todorov 167). The fantastic “posits the majority of a text as belonging to reality--or, more specifically, as provoked by reality, like a name given to a pre-existing thing” (Todorov 168). Yet, “by the hesitation it engenders, the fantastic questions precisely the existence of an irreducible opposition between real and unreal” (Todorov 167). So while on the one hand the fantastic works to preserve the social order by identifying this realm as the “real” against which fantastic events must be

⁷ Holland writes that, “[Toni] Morrison uses the “fantastic” to comment on the experience of being marginal to the historical record of a culture that refuses to recognize difference as its own creation” (*Raising the Dead* 1).

measured; on the other hand, it blurs the distinction between the real and the imaginary by suggesting that both positions may be maintained at once. We return again to “hesitation” because it is in this spatiotemporal matrix that the condition of possibility for the rearticulation of the social order emerges.

I take Robert Reid-Pharr’s nod to the *black* fantastic in *Conjugal Union: The Body, the House, and the Black American* as my point of departure. Reid-Pharr uses the term “black fantastic” to describe the tangled corporeal politics of black American subjectivity and citizenship in Martin Delany’s *Blake, or the Huts of America* (120).⁸ I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge a great debt to Helene’s Christol’s, largely overlooked essay, “The African American Concept of the Fantastic as Middle Passage.” Christol argues that the fantastic in black American literature excavates a link to Africa and establishes alternative temporal, cultural, and psychic frames for understanding the present (169-171). It is, Reid-Pharr, however, who isolates the “black fantastic” as a critical area of study. In uncovering a foundational link between the black body, black domesticity, and black subjectivity in the fiction of nineteenth-century black authors, Reid-Pharr discovers a discourse of the fantastic that threatens to undo what these authors labor towards (121). The black fantastic emerges, over and through the abject figure of the slave, in a violent and sadistic encounter (between master and slave) in *Blake*. Reid-Pharr’s exegesis of Delany’s text reveals the complexity of an audiovisual dynamic that grounds white subjectivity in the corporeal debasement of the black slave.⁹ It is the

⁸ *Blake* was published serially in *The Anglo-African Magazine* in 1859.

⁹ An audiovisual dynamic that is inherently spatial due to the sonic’s capacity to rearticulate corporeal and physical spaces. The slave child’s psychic and corporeal

master's ability to control the performative capacity of the slave—to make the slave's body “sing to the tune of the whip”—that transforms the black body into a “prosthetic” and forecloses the possibility of black subjectivity (Reid-Pharr 119-20). The corporeal and psychic politics Delany lays bare – the usurpation of the slave’s body and being as the master’s “prosthetic”—can be described, to borrow from Saidiya Hartman, as confirmation of the “elasticity of blackness,” or what she describes even more bluntly in the same work as the “fungibility of the commodity” (Hartman 25, 21; Reid-Pharr 119). The slave’s torture and death illustrate the entangled nature of the “politics of pleasure:” the spectacle of the black body, the power dynamics that subtend black cultural expression, and finally the simulation of pleasure—all of which pivot on the “consumption” of the slave’s body and psyche as a means of generating surplus value for the master (Hartman 23).¹⁰

The whip is the tie that binds the corporeal forms of master and slave (Reid-Pharr 119). Symbolic of white power and emblematic of the codependent nature of master/slave relations, the whip is the “joint” that fuses the two together. Reid-Pharr writes that the “whip works ... to establish a black fantastic through access to a real black body. [Thus] the torture of the [slave] allows a release of a *language of the body* that

anguish necessitate the production of “new sounds”—utterances that as Glissant observes exist outside the parameters of digestible speech.

¹⁰ Saidiya Hartman writes that, "The absolute dominion of the master, predicated on the annexation of the captive body and its standing as the "sign and surrogate" of the master's body, yielded to an economy of bodies, yoked and harnessed, through the exercise of autonomy, self-interest, and consent"(*Scenes of Subjection* 120).

exists absolutely apart from the efforts of the white slavers” (120 italics added).¹¹ In the space of that terror-filled moment there lies a possibility of escape through transcendence, some other frequency in which the slave’s cries reverberate and “a revaluation or reconstruction of value, one disruptive of the oppositions of ... spirit and matter” (Moten 14). Reid-Pharr observes that “the [slave’s] abjection leads us toward a fantastic world [and that] Delany’s deployment of spectacular violence works ... as a means by which to make way for a new logic of subjectivity” (121). So it is the physical degradation and psychic terror endured by the black subject that produce the “black fantastic,” and it is in the process of evading an appropriative commingling with the master that a new mode of subjectivity is instantiated. This is a double move of sorts: violence whether it is discursive or material, traps the black subject in place, and it is through the act of rejecting this entrapment, that the “black fantastic” organically emerges.

Richard Iton uses the term “black fantastic” to describe counter cultural projects, “minor-key sensibilities generated from the experiences of the underground, the vagabond, and those constituencies marked as deviant” (*In Search of the Black Fantastic* 16). The “black fantastic” can refer to a state of mind, a radical political gesture, or simply a way of being that usurps the moral order of the dominant society. The notion of

¹¹ Earlier in the chapter, Reid-Pharr close reads another scene in which the white planter enjoys a cigar produced by slaves. The man is reminded that the cigar passes through “black fingers ... before it enter[s] your white lips” (*Blake* cited in Reid-Pharr 119). Reid-Pharr observes that the cigar is a “prosthetic” linking white consumer and black producer. The master, according to Reid-Pharr must imbibe the slave’s productivity in order to feel whole. I apply this reading to the whip. Here too the object functions as a prosthesis occluding the neat separation between bodies and uncovering the surrogate capacities of black performativity.

minor-key sensibilities evokes Ralph Ellison's maxim of alternative frequencies, other registers in which cries of anguish and jubilation can be heard.¹² Iton's definition is expansive. The black fantastic, he writes is "a pleonasm ... a double descriptive: [as] separately and in tandem blackness and the fantastic work to disrupt bodily imperialisms" (920). Iton's "black fantastic" lacks the specificity of Reid-Pharr's construct. The former is interested in the semiotics of blackness and uses the term as a broad signifier for the "informal politics that nurture resistance movements" (4). The utility of the black fantastic is, for Iton, its holistic quality. As an umbrella term it highlights the many absurdities of contemporary culture. The black fantastic exposes the "absence of space within language" and in doing so opens up new social spaces for resistance (Iton 287).

The fantastic, I suggest, is a strategy for the recuperation of space. It is at this juncture that I depart from the foundational work of Reid-Pharr, and Iton's more recent work, by foregrounding the *production of space*. Reid-Pharr is interested in the "borderland subject"—that being who troubles the distinction between the human and the inhuman and, in so doing, the validity of racial categorizations (121). The black fantastic for him resides in the tension between the abstract significations of black corporeality and a notion of black citizenship that lies in the historicity of the diasporic black experience (121, 130). For Iton, the black fantastic is a leitmotif—a lens with which to explore topics as varied as Hurricane Katrina and the efficacy of black political figures. Where Reid-Pharr is interested in the black fantastic as a mode of subjectivity, Iton is compelled by

¹² "Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead" (*Invisible Man* 8).

the fantastic as social space. The black fantastic, my research indicates, reflects a synchronicity that takes violence as its point of departure merging the auditory, the corporeal, the visual, and the tactile according to a counter hegemonic logic (Reid-Pharr 121, Iton 16). The negation of subjectivity is the condition of possibility for the emergence of the fantastic. In other words, what makes the fantastic *-fantastic*—is its emplacement as a space and condition of excess—an excess that stands in as a marker of deprivation.¹³

The fantastic emerges in black literature as a response to the ongoing and persistent absurdities of racial discourse. This discourse cannot be easily dismissed because it catalogues the very real corporeal dangers the black subject faces. The fantastic addresses simultaneously the psychic horrors of spatial deprivation, the corporeal toll this anguish exacts, and the peril those subjects who resist their containment face. Spatial deprivation is most acutely felt in the black subject's "corporeal malediction"-- that alienation of self from body that occurs in the aftermath of the racist encounter (Fanon 112). In "The Fact of Blackness," Fanon writes of the native's realization that in the eyes of the colonizer he is a cipher--accountable for his history, his race, and corporeality at one and the same time:

[I]t was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person. In the train I was given not one but two, three places ... *I existed*

¹³ The link between the negation of black subjectivity and the birth of the fantastic lies in the black body's dual capacity to signify nothingness and plenitude at one and the same time. This is to say that the negation of black subjectivity is a precondition for the extraction of profit from the black subject's labor and that, further, there is something inherently fantastic about this. See, for example, Achille Mbembe's "Aesthetics of Superfluity."

triply: I occupied space [...] I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors ... On that day, completely *dislocated*... I took myself further off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an *amputation, an excision*, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood. (112 italics added)

What the white European sees when he glances at the native is not—according to Fanon—the subject before him, but instead a reflection of his deepest desires and most profound fears.¹⁴ Fanon deconstructs the psychology of objectification (111-112).¹⁵ At its root, the production of the native as object pivots on the violence of the colonizer’s gaze—a glance that has the ability to not only freeze, but dismember the native caught in its frame.¹⁶ Psychic trauma leads to spatial dislocation as the native having discovered by virtue of the other’s gaze that he is not who he thinks he is, or where he thinks he is, begins to wonder if he exists at all. The native in Fanon’s construct finds himself trapped and completely unmoored. He is imprisoned in this dislocation and experiences crisis on multiple levels. His condition is reinforced by the train (a metaphor for the racist

¹⁴ Homi Bhabha describes this dialectic of “desire and derision” as the central underpinning of stereotypical discourse (*The Location of Culture* 67). Frantz Fanon and James Baldwin, too, have written extensively on this.

¹⁵ Fantasies of corporeal destruction appear in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, Dambudzo Marechera’s *The House of Hunger*, Calixthe Beyala’s *Your Name Shall Be Tanga*, and Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Many African writers explore the psychic (after)effects of colonization by flirting with fantasies of the body’s destruction.

¹⁶ “Violence stands against the body in order to enact a *fantastic universe*, a world outside the world ... on the other hand, it works to maintain prior social distinctions, particularly distinctions between bodies” (Reid-Pharr 114 emphasis added)

superstructure), which traps him in place even as it speeds towards its destination. The native discovers, according to Fanon, that in multiplicity there is absence: “I existed triply: I occupied space ... [but] I was ... completely dislocated” (112). This is to say that the occupation of space is dependent upon a fragmentation—a splitting apart of the self that negates the corporeal frame. The violence and surreality of the awakening Fanon describes severs the normative relationship between body and the psyche. Time stands still, as the native alienated from his very being, resists this misrecognition by moving further and further away from the violated and defamed body. It is at once a silencing—an effort to mute the shrieking body—and conversely, a reclamation of space through embrace of the plenitude of one’s being. If “the subject flounders ... in the exploded multiplicity of its states,” it is because this state of confusion serves as the condition of possibility for the “movement toward non-signification ... towards the non-thetic, to all that is opposed to dominant signifying practice” (Jackson 176-77). In his effort to account for his body, his race, and his ancestors, to rein in his corporeality--or at least stop it from giving off so many signs, the native moves out of his body, attempting to cure his “corporeal malediction” by destroying that body (Fanon 112).¹⁷

If, “New-World, diasporic flight marked a theft of the body,” asserting one’s autonomy by taking ownership over the body marks the move from object to subject status (Spillers 67). A claim for the “space” of the body instantiates a black subjectivity that exercises the right to move the body in order to expand the scope of spatial access.

¹⁷ As the black subject moves towards a liberation that contains as its condition of possibility the prospect of annihilation, the white subject too becomes unmoored.

This maneuver is not only an expressive act of freedom, but also a crucial act of spatial articulation—what critical geographer Neil Smith terms “jump[ing] scales:”

Political liberation requires spatial access... open[ing] new spaces of interaction...convert[ing] spaces of exclusion into the known, the made, the constructed...redefin[ing] the scale of everyday life... These all hinge on [the] reinscription of geographical scale ... [These practices] expand the scale of self-centered control and at the same time contract the scale of official control. They promise not just the production of space in the abstract, but the concrete *production and reproduction of geographical scale* as a political strategy of resistance ... [This enables subaltern peoples] ... to organize the production and reproduction of daily life. (Smith 60)

Smith makes three critical points: first, we have to understand space as modulated by scale; second, since “political liberation requires spatial access,” making a claim for a space can mean redefining already existing spaces; and lastly to “jump scales” is not only to appropriate, but to *author* space. The rearticulation of scale according to the model Smith proposes can also manifest through manipulation of the temporal. Subjects facing spatial constriction learn to “move without moving ... without [that is] *perceptibly moving*” by manipulating time (Baker 837).¹⁸

The fantastic is a way of making space out of no space—of redefining corporeal, linguistic, racial, and national boundaries that inform identity. The nested nature of these

¹⁸ The argument that Houston Baker makes regarding Trueblood in *Invisible Man* (“To Move without Moving: An Analysis of Creativity and Commerce in Ralph Ellison's Trueblood Episode”).

spatial frames--body, home, city, nation--highlights the transformative potential of disruptions that occur at any or all of these nodes (60, 66). “Jump[ing] scales” “allows [black Americans] to dissolve spatial boundaries that are largely imposed from above and that contain rather than facilitate [the] production and reproduction of everyday life” (Smith 58-60). To rearticulate scale is, “to resist oppression and exploitation ... over a wider geographical field” (Smith 60). Autonomy over the body, or engaging in the type of resistance that limits the body's functionality to dominant order, represents meaningful transgression (Smith 66). We return always to the body in crisis, to a body that cannot control its surplus significations, and to a body that flirts with the possibility of liberation through annihilation. Corporeality is the most effective medium for the production of racial difference and the articulation of space. Scalar consciousness helps us to understand how these two—race and space-- cohere and in what ways they are “mutually constitutive” of bodily forms (Grosz 108).

1.1 Topologies of Resistance: Dysaesthetic Slaves and Rival Geographies

Dysaesthesia Aethiopica makes its first appearance in the Southern planters journal, *De Bow's Review*, in 1836. In a three part series, entitled “Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race,” Southern physician and race theorist Dr. Samuel Cartwright offered slaveholders advice for dealing with unproductive and runaway slaves.¹⁹ Cartwright, known for his vociferous advocacy of the biological roots of racial difference, cautioned against misdiagnosing such behavior as willful. The doctor identified two illnesses peculiar to slaves-Drapetomania and Dysaesthesia Aethiopica—

¹⁹ “Dysaesthesia Aethiopica, or Hebetude of Mind and Obtuse Sensibility of Body—A Disease Peculiar to Negroes—Called by Overseers, “Rascality” (390).

both a consequence of the distinct psychological and physiological make-up of the negro.²⁰ “Drapetomania, or the disease causing negroes to run away,” he wrote, “is as much a disease of the mind as any other species of mental alienation” (332). Dysaesthesia Aethiopica was a more complex illness characterized by “hebetude of mind and obtuse sensibility of body”--so extreme that, “[i]n some cases, anaesthesiae, would be a more suitable name for it” (390, 393). Cartwright’s writings are extraordinary artifacts because they reveal what sort of labor it required to sustain the ideological apparatus of slavery. Proslavery thinkers needed to not only criminalize, but also *pathologize* slave resistance in order to preserve the authority of the plantation system.²¹ The dysaesthetic slave lingers in the gap that opens up between the fantastic as subjectivity and the fantastic as a mode of social space inscribing in the process a powerful narrative of resistance.

Dysaesthesia Aethiopica, in defamiliarizing the slave’s social and physical environment, rearticulates the space of the enslaved at multiple scales. The “disease,” “locks up the understanding, blunts the sensations, and chains the mind” (Cartwright 336). The dysaesthetic slave is neglectful of property, impervious to punishment, and exhibits a near catatonia that places him or her out of the reach of the overseer. In the

²⁰ Cartwright insisted, for example, that servitude was ordained by biblical prophecy and inscribed into “the anatomical conformation of [the negro’s] knees ... more flexed or bent than any other kind of man” (332).

²¹ Plantation discourse facilitated the eradication of space through the elision of geographical markers—in the minds of planters Haiti was no different from Liberia or Brazil—so that we see the homogenization of cultural difference in the service of a totalizing narrative that facilitates the reproduction of a white supremacist social order. Taking this into account, the hemispheric focus of Delany’s *Blake* can be viewed as a necessary response to the expansive nature of white supremacist discourse.

following passage Cartwright describes in some detail the slave's senselessness, disrespect of private property, and lack of affect:²²

From the careless movements of the individuals affected with the complaint, they are apt to do much mischief, which *appears as if intentional*, but is mostly owing to the stupidity of mind and insensibility of the nerves induced by the disease.

Thus, they break, waste and destroy everything they handle ... paying no attention to the *rights of property* ... They wander about at night ... They slight their work ... They raise disturbances with their overseers ... without cause or motive, and seem to be insensible to pain when subjected to punishment. (391 italics added)

The forms of resistance Cartwright catalogues--destruction of property (sometimes in the form of suicidal tendencies), lack of productivity, and a general unresponsiveness allude to a subject that evades bodily restriction by disengaging the world at hand.²³ "Checking out" is a strategy for psychic preservation or a willful abdication of the corporeal form in anticipation of the afterlife. For the purposes of this chapter, such individualized insurrection reveals the nested nature of space. The slave's "misuse" of his body restructures the social relations that govern the production of plantation space.

Cartwright's diagnosis of this disease--his refusal to impart to slaves the agency it

²² Cartwright also inexplicably observes that dysaesthesia is more prevalent among free than enslaved negroes. Without benevolent whites to look after their interests free blacks, are likely to fall prey to indolence, lack of hygiene, and intemperance; "the disease," he notes, "is the natural offspring of negro liberty" (392). Thus the diagnosis of dysaesthesia has a twofold purpose: to pathologize slave resistance--because the very existence of such acts of rebellion proved the inhumane nature of the institution of slavery, and to further Cartwright's scientific theories about biological differences between the races that rested on moral, intellectual, and physiological inferiorities of blacks.

²³ "If the mind does not occupy a certain space, but the body does, is that space then fully occupied by the subject" (Varzi 130)?

required to resist, reveals how crucial control over the slave's psyche was to the antebellum society. It further indicates the importance of scalar consciousness to the reproduction of spaces of resistance.

The identification of dysaesthesia as a combined psychological and physiological disorder can be viewed as part of a larger ideological and spatial project of racial formation. Stephanie Camp writes that “bondpeople created a “rival geography”—alternative ways of knowing and using plantation and southern space” (7). Historians and literary critics have documented black women's transformation of their bodies into sites of resistance during slavery primarily by compromising their exchange value, limiting their productivity, or even killing their offspring.²⁴ These writers acknowledge that control over black bodies and black mobility was central to the reproduction of the antebellum social order (7). While this may seem self-evident--of course chattel slavery was principally about the exploitation of bodies in the service of profit—it suggests that medical racism, in so far as it reinscribed the bodies of the enslaved, was linked to the production of plantation space and the eradication of “black space.”²⁵ I use the term “black space” in a manner akin to Camp's “rival geography” (7). Black spaces can be

²⁴ The medical experiments Dr. J. Marion Sims performed on slaves have been well documented. Among the more horrifying cases are gynecological experiments carried out on slave women without anesthesia. One slave, Anarcha, is described as having undergone thirty operations during a five-year period (*Doctoring the South* 63-5). Slave women's bodies labored in the fields, in the laboratory, in domestic spaces and in their reproductive capacity—to increase the master's profit.

²⁵ In using scientific nomenclature to first label and then regulate the slave's behavior, Cartwright inscribes difference onto the black body: “[Dysaesthesia] differs from every other species of mental disease, as it is accompanied with physical signs or lesions of the body discoverable to the medical observer” (391).

read as corporeal, psychic, and physical sites that offer sanctuary. These spaces can be textual and imaginative and it is at this point that they intersect with the fantastic. The dysaesthetic label robbed slaves a second time of their bodies; it stripped them of agency and validated the barbaric treatment they were subject to.²⁶

The dysaesthetic subject is a fantastic subject because s/he is not constrained by the laws of corporeality or the presumed synchronicity between mind and body that facilitates locomotion. To the extent that the slave obfuscates her productivity and negates her commercial exchange value, she is successful in producing worth for self.²⁷ Subjectivity that (counter intuitively) emerges through the denial of self is paradigmatic of the black fantastic. Like Melville's Bartleby who insists that he would "prefer not to," the dysaesthetic slave transforms her body into a "rival geography" in a gesture of participatory refusal (Camp 7).²⁸ The black fantastic emerges through the intimate and sadistic relations between master and slave (Reid-Pharr 114). These relations are not only wholly racialized, but the principle conduit through which racial categories are produced and racial boundaries maintained (Reid-Pharr 13; 92-93).²⁹ The black fantastic, then, is a

²⁶ "Dysaesthesia, a hebetude of sensation of both mind and body, prevails to so great an extent, that when the unfortunate individual is subjected to punishment, he neither feels pain of any consequence nor shows any unusual resentment" (Cartwright 393).

²⁷ Achille Mbembe defines "superfluity" as a state marked by "the obfuscation of any exchange or use value that labor might have" ("Aesthetics of Superfluity" 374-5).

²⁸ "[T]he very frantic and engaged activity of constructing a new order," Zizek writes, "is sustained by an underlying "I would prefer not to" which forever reverberates in it ... the new [order] ... does not negate its founding gesture ... it merely *gives body* to this negativity" (*The Parallax View* 382).

²⁹ In a similar vein, the dysaesthetic slave manipulates plantation time.

historical intervention that occurs *outside* of time (Gillman 40, 201). The master, like Cartwright is under the misapprehension that the slave's fantastic qualities are under his absolute control. Doctor, Master, and overseer are unaware of what can be unleashed--namely, a "logic of subjectivity" that is not bound by the corporeal form of the slave (Reid-Pharr 121).³⁰ The pain inflicted on the slave drives him out of his mind, but this "escape" is dependent upon his ability to register, and in registering, to move beyond, a physiologically driven response to pain (Reid-Pharr 120-121). It is the body's response to suffering that serves as the condition of possibility for the production of a "new language of the body" and a new "logic of subjectivity" (120-121). Suffering identifies the supernatural as a sort of hyper-reality shuttling the abject figure back and forth between the orders of the real and surreal, the object and the subject. Dysaesthesia, is a psychospacial condition that keeps the slave in limbo, in a temporal continuum, where everything and nothing is possible because by the very existence of such a space the governing logic of the dominant order has been subverted.³¹

Resistance was pathologized by medical practitioners, like Cartwright, to maintain a corporeal and psychic distance between blacks and whites. The slave's lack of sense and inability *to sense*—that is to interact with the environment in a "rational" way--

³⁰ "Passing" into the afterlife marks the dangers of corporeal transcendentalism. Freedom of the subject that rests on the annihilation or mutilation of the corporeal form is provisional at best.

³¹ Cartwright goes so far as to describe the slave as an automaton, a mechanized object that would seemingly move beyond humanistic logic in his or her sheer "queer[ness]" -- we are talking not of bestial qualities, but speculative ones that place the slave in that in-between borderland (Reid-Pharr 119). To be free, then, is to be fantastic, to exist outside the bounds of rational thought, and to possess a body that does not conform to a normative corporeal logic.

become conflated in Cartwright's definition.³² That Cartwright and his contemporaries could write unabashedly of the slave's wanton disregard for private property as a psychological disorder, without taking into account the slave's status as private property, is striking and speaks to the fantastic nature of racial discourse. Of course, this oversight is deliberate. Cartwright cannot entertain the possibility that the slave—a commodity himself--resists his subjugation by deliberately placing himself outside the system of exchange. The slave's "consciou[s] unaware[ness]" exposes the absurdities of a social economic and psychic system that relies on the traffic in human flesh for coherence (Varzi 126).³³ This "checking out" is a way of claiming the space of the body and the recesses of mind.³⁴ Cartwright's diagnoses of dysaesthesia and his proposed curative regimen are striking in their disavowal of, and dependence on, the synchronous

³² "Dysaesthesia, a hebetude of sensation of both mind and body, prevails to so great an extent, that when the unfortunate individual is subjected to punishment, he neither feels pain of any consequence nor shows any unusual resentment" (Cartwright 393).

³³ Cartwright in divesting the slave of any semblance of autonomy works to preserve the "master's omnipotence:" "[t]here is no premeditated mischief... the [dysaesthetic] mind is too torpid ... to be aroused by angry passions to deeds of daring" (Hartman 120, Cartwright 393). The slave by "checking out" conceals active resistance as lethargy. In writing about revolutionary Tehran, cultural anthropologist, Roxanne Varzi describes the cognitive and visual exercises Iranian youth engage in to make the city more accessible. Iranian youth shutter their minds to avoid participation in spaces that encroach upon their freedom (Varzi 125-6). Such strategies of avoidance amount to "secondary use" or repurposing of space according to a logic of alterity (Varzi 123).

³⁴ Despite his persistent disavowal of black agency, Cartwright prescribes a torturous and humiliating physical regimen designed to beat the slave's body and mind into submission: "The best means to stimulate the skin is, first, to have the patient well washed with warm water and soap; then, to anoint it all over with oil, and to slap the oil in with a broad leather strap; then to put the patient to some hard kind of work in the open air and sunshine ... in the morning, oiled, slapped, and put to work as before" (Cartwright 333).

functioning of the slave's body and mind. He argues that, "there is both mind and sensibility, but both seem difficult to reach" (390). The language evokes a spatialized understanding of the relationship between master and slave--"difficult to reach"—and alludes to a psychic distance that opens up between the two.³⁵ The dysaesthetic slave, then, has placed himself out of bounds, outside the purview of the master's logic and this violation of the social order extends to a rupture of the economic logic of the plantocracy.

Cartwright creates a pathological figure that blurs the distinction between the black fantastic as discourse and the black fantastic as subject. The dysaesthetic slave in absorbing the functions of the fantastic at both registers illustrates how space can be recuperated through the manipulation of scale. The slave's transgressions expose the unjust nature of spatial relations—relations that work to produce black objects and white subjects. Cartwright's compelling need to write the slave's resistance out of the official record paradoxically inscribes it with even more ferocity. The act of erasure is a gesture of inscription that in its absurdity threatens to undo the ideological framework of the dominant order.³⁶ The relationship between dysaesthesia and the black fantastic rests on the ways in which as a narrative mode the latter channels the rupture between mind and body into the production of space. Whether the dysaesthetic slave is feigning insensibility or not, he or she exhibits immunity to extreme physical duress and psychological torture. Dysaesthesia, like the black fantastic, opens up a space for utilizing a metric of corporeal

³⁵ The conversion of the disease to social practice is evident in "pedestrian speech acts" during Jim Crow (de Certeau 97). Blacks Americans were required to step off of sidewalks or cross the street in order to grant whites unimpeded access to the "public" spaces of the city.

³⁶ The transmutation of resistance into pathology reveals the fantastic capacities of discourse on race.

valuation that exists apart from the law of the master. To understand the body as a spatial modality, then, is to foreground the “imbricated relationship” between body and environment and to insist on corporeal trespass as a mode of restructuring social relations (Grosz 108; Smith 66). It is this impulse of bodily transgression as spatial articulation that black authors seize upon, over and over again, from the nineteenth up through the twenty-first centuries.

Bodily Trespass comes to terms with the various ways in which the fantastic emerges in the fiction of twentieth-century black American writers. I identify three principle categories: the fantastic as a discourse of black internationalism at the fin de siècle and up through the interwar years, the fantastic as a discourse of urbanity in the wake of the Great Migration, and finally the fantastic as a discourse of aurality. This final iteration resists temporal classification and can be found in nineteenth as well as twenty-first century texts by African American writers.

Chapter Two, “Embodied Politics: Pan-Africanism in Pauline Hopkins’ *Of One Blood*” examines the fantastic as a discourse of black internationalism in Pauline Hopkins’s turn of the century serial *Of One Blood, Or, the Hidden Self*. Hopkins’ novel transvalues the black body by proving the authenticity of corporeal and metaphysical links to Africa. *Of One Blood* argues on the one hand for the instability of racial categorizations—it is impossible to determine who is white or black on the basis of appearance, and on the other for the authenticity of bloodlines. It is the protagonist, Reuel’s, discovery of his “real” ancestry—a corporeal knowledge inscribed into markings on his flesh—that rights familial and geopolitical wrongs. Reuel’s embrace of his blackness and assumption of his rightful monarchial identity triggers a chain of events

that rearranges the family tree, heralds the beginning of a fight against the colonization of Africa, and identifies the borders of the nation state as themselves discourses of the fantastic. Hopkins weaves a domestic romance about passing into a transatlantic adventure replete with walled cities, hidden treasures, and African bloodlines. The story of a melancholic young doctor searching for his place in a society unaware of his racial identity, morphs into a political, historical, and cultural tract on Africa and African America.

Of One Blood was published in serial format between 1902 and 1903 in *The Colored American Magazine* shortly after Henry Sylvester Williams organized the first Pan-African Conference (Carby xlv). Hopkins's turn toward Africa is a response to domestic political turmoil that attends simultaneously to the local and the global (Carby xxxii, xlv). The backlash against Reconstruction and the ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* heralded a return to a social and civic framework that resembled the antebellum South (Carby xxxii).³⁷ Angela Davis has written of the rollback of black American rights in the wake of Reconstruction. This period she notes is marked by the consolidation of racist ideology at home and abroad (117). The close of the nineteenth century, then, saw the annihilation—of black American civic, social and lived space—and the expansion of American influence in the Western hemisphere (Davis 117). The production of national space(s) relied on a racialized notion of manifest destiny that called for the subordination of foreign peoples of color and the containment of black Americans. Always prescient,

³⁷ See Hazel Carby's introduction to the Schomburg edition of Hopkins's Magazine Novels.

Hopkins foresaw that the European conquest of Africa was linked to black American struggles for rights and recognition.³⁸

Chapter Three, “The Black Fantastic and the Black Metropolis,” explores representations of the city in Chester Himes’s *The Real Cool Killers*, Ann Petry’s *The Street* and Gwendolyn Brooks’s *Maud Martha*. The postwar city in these writers’ works functions as a heterotopic space that holds out a promise of liberation while imprisoning black residents. Taking a cue from Elizabeth Grosz and Farah Jasmine Griffin, I argue that the power relations embedded in the northern city’s architectural grid transform body and metropolis into a racialized organism—what Grosz terms an interface (108). The notion of the city as a place of moral degradation and spiritual alienation has a long critical tradition, but for black Americans in the early twentieth century, the northern city stood as a symbol of freedom.³⁹ The North was perceived as a place of economic and social mobility in which black people would be free from the racial terrors of the South. The tension between the city as haven or hell, and this chapter focuses primarily on Harlem, is a recurring one in early to mid-twentieth century black literature. Paul Laurence Dunbar, for example, recreates the city as a toxic space that ruins the moral fiber of naïve Southern migrants.⁴⁰ Rudolph Fisher characterizes the city as a place where greed and graft trump racial loyalty. Nella Larsen’s Harlem Renaissance novel, *Passing*,

³⁸ Extant letters reveal the force with which Hopkins fought to preserve *The Colored American*’s internationalist focus—something she felt was essential to its intellectual integrity and political efficacy. See *Daughter of the Revolution: The Major Nonfiction Works of Pauline E. Hopkins*.

³⁹ See Robert Parks and George Simmel.

⁴⁰ See Charles Scruggs *Sweet Home: Invisible Cities in the Afro-American Novel*.

depicts the melancholic lives of the black elite—a different sort of narrative of the city's ills, but one that nevertheless points out the failings of urbanity. Iterations of the fantastic appear, then, in the city's heterotopic qualities.

Petry's *The Street* continues in this vein, following the trials and tribulations of Lutie, a single mother who wants nothing more than to secure for her son a stable and safe home environment. Lutie is obsessed with the material construction of home. She fantasizes about pristine kitchens and white picket fences contrasting these with her drab, cramped, and windowless apartment. Petry's novel is a realist text. It does not like Himes's detective series toy with surrealist depictions of violence or anthropomorphize the built environment of the city. But *The Street* does interrogate in very interesting ways the relationship between a marginalized corporeality and the spatial and temporal construction of the urban. Lutie is consistently and persistently vexed by her body's significations—by her powerlessness in the wake of others' misrecognitions. When she finally snaps it is because the city has closed in on her, offering her no choice but to escape by cathecting her “surplus corporeality” on to some other (Berlant 112). Lutie's Harlem materializes through fantastic corporeal imagery: the obese and scarred Mrs. Hedges, the mouse-like Min, and the phantasmagoric Junto. Urbanity destabilizes black subjects, informing ontology and deforming corporeality. To conceive of the fantastic as a discourse of urbanity is to consider the ways in which representations of the city reflect, and subvert, dominant and countercultural narratives of citizenship. Thus, the fantastic in Petry's text emerges around the paradox of valuation and raced subjectivity.

The black metropolis in Chester Himes and Ann Petry's novels is a city under siege. The boundaries of this “city within a city” are both real and imagined. Lutie is

invisible when she moves beyond Harlem's borders. Himes's Harlem is so spatially restrictive that as readers we never move beyond its edges. Readers are told that Himes's detectives, Coffin Ed Johnson and Gravedigger Jones, but Himes does not create this space for us in the text. It is inaccessible, and perhaps uninteresting, to Himes' intended first readers—a white French audience. I propose that conflicting representations of urbanity in the fiction of twentieth-century black writers are linked to the imbricated nature of spatial articulation and discourse on race. Race is itself a *discourse of space*. This is to say that the production of black bodies and the negation of black subjectivity is a strategy for the recuperation and preservation of white political and cultural spaces. So that the claustrophobic nature of Himes's Harlem and the profound disillusion that accompanies his black characters' inability to fully occupy the spaces of the city are re-iterations of the "corporeal malediction" Fanon writes of. Positioning the fantastic as a discourse of urbanity facilitates the production of the body/city interface (Grosz) and opens up the possibility of overriding harmful significations of black corporeality.

Chapter Four, "Clearing a Space to Listen: The Aural as a Discourse of the Fantastic," explores the relationship between the sonic, the corporeal, and the spatial. The texts I examine in this chapter situate the aural as a pathway for liberation that alters the texture of space. In "Sonny's Blues" music helps Sonny escape the constricting space of the ghetto. The sonic provides salvation and a recalibration of the spaces of Harlem according to the logic of a public and political interiority. Sound makes space out of no space. In Ralph Ellison's "The King of the Bingo Game," the scream functions as a metonym of the fantastic, transforming the public space of a movie theatre into a haunting spectacle of racial terror and corporeal destruction. Ellison and Baldwin

represent in these two short works the transvaluation of the corporeal form that emerges in on the one hand the destruction and annihilation of the body, and on the other the mooring of the body in a more coherent and historicized racial logic. Baldwin's text suggests that it is impossible to leave the past behind and, more important, that to attempt to do so is to commit a certain kind of familial violence—one that can be mapped onto the racial community and the nation. Both Baldwin and Ellison are deeply concerned with the spatial articulation of the city and the ways in which subjectivity is informed by the built environment and the power relations that subtend it.

Whereas "The King of the Bingo Game" is a dystopian rumination on the fallacy of the American Dream, "Sonny's Blues" is a narrative of reconciliation--a metaphor for the national responsibility to bear witness to black suffering. Baldwin's is a redemptive narrative that locates in the disarticulation of scale, the possibility of truly inhabiting the physical spaces of the city and the psychic spaces of the self. While there is no dearth of criticism on "Sonny's Blues" in relation to music, religion, and race, the aural and spatial registers of Baldwin's work, taken together, have been under theorized. I observe that the transmutation of the aural into a discourse of the spatial excavates the fantastic qualities of Baldwin's otherwise very realist narrative. The sonic and performative registers become narrative devices through which Baldwin probes interiority and calls for the desegregation of urban space. Harlem residents, in Baldwin's work, find their marginalized social positions reflected in their physical surroundings: in bleak buildings that look out on devastated courtyards, windows that cannot fool tenants into "making space out of no space," and overcrowded streets. The only respite comes in the form of music-an aural palliative that has the ability to freeze time and transform bodies

subordinating the “racist episteme” of the visual to the regenerative capacity of the sonic (Butler 17).

I propose in this final chapter that the black fantastic facilitates the production of new and regenerative cultural spaces while calling attention to the conditions created by racially repressive policies. Baldwin’s “Sonny’s Blues,” for example, laments the soul killing capacity of a racially circumscribed social order that devalues black life. At the same time, the narrative locates –within the spatially productive capacity of the sonic— the possibilities that emerge when one learns how to listen on alternative registers. In Ralph Ellison’s “The King of the Bingo Game” the protagonist’s scream stages a historical intervention that ruptures the space of the movie theatre in such a way that the past exacts a material toll on the corporeal form of the subject—in the present. As the lights go out at the story’s end we are not certain if the King of the Bingo Game has “left time for eternity,” or if we are trapped within the spaces of his feverish and dystopian imagination (Delany 68). The aural as a discourse of the fantastic foregrounds the relationship between performativity, spectatorship, and subjectivity by obscuring, on the one hand, and refashioning, on the other, the black body.

The fantastic in literature of the black diaspora is linked to the production of space because deprivations rooted in racial inequality are spatial in nature.⁴¹ In Hopkins’s *Of One Blood*, Himes’s *The Real Cool Killers*, and Ellison’s “The King of the Bingo Game,” characters struggle to come to terms with the inadequacies of the social order. In each instance, these figures look outward for some salvation that will transform their personal

⁴¹ If the fantastic is a narrative response to a spatial crisis, it is a means of redressing an originary and recurring violation.

circumstances and expand the playing field they have access to. Reuel, for example, in Hopkins's novel takes part in an African expedition to improve his financial circumstance and during this trip learns the truth about his identity. The experience transforms his provincial worldview into a black internationalist perspective that symbolizes Hopkins's cure for a black American public facing a regressive post-Reconstruction social, political, and legal landscape (Carby xxxii, xlvi). The black teenagers at the center of Himes's *The Real Cool Killers* disguise themselves as an Arab gang—"The Real Cool Moslems"—in order to gain greater access to the spaces of Harlem. The disguises afford the youth anonymity and reference the geopolitical context of their resistance. Alienated Harlem youth, the novel suggests, live in "occupied territory" like their Algerian counterparts. Ellison's *King of the Bingo Game*, down and out on his luck, sits in a darkened movie theatre awaiting the chance to take a spin at a wheel of fortune. The nested nature of the spatial planes he inhabits—he is a second-class citizen in a nation that has not granted him a birth certificate; he is an unemployed Southern migrant in a northern city; he is trapped within the space of the movie theatre where his fate hangs in the balance, and he is constrained by his physiological needs—illustrates the centrality of scale to struggles for liberation (Smith 60). The social apparatus that leaves the man jobless, penniless, and hungry is a rigged game that like the spinning bingo wheel ultimately leads to his destruction. That Hopkins, Himes, and Ellison utilize elements of the fantastic in their works in order to register and deflect the realities of a racist social schema speaks to the "promiscuous" nature of this literary mode.⁴² The black fantastic, moves beyond genre,

⁴² Brent Hayes Edwards describes diaspora as a "promiscuous[s]" discourse in his essay "The Uses of Diaspora" (45). The fantastic, too, refuses to be contained.

attesting to an authorial impulse to liberate the black subject by reconfiguring the spatial plane he inhabits.

1.2 Contemporary Implications

Judith Butler writes that, “[t]he visual ... is itself a racial formation, an episteme, hegemonic and forceful” (“Endangered/Engendering” 17). The difficulty of moving beyond a visual field constructed and maintained by stereotypical discourse is one of the central crises of double consciousness. The “fact of blackness,” that is the psychic toll and corporeal danger of “spectragraphia, solicits a black fantastic subjectivity (Fanon 109, Wallace 30). The black body’s peril illustrates the prohibitive nature of social relations—relations that delimit the urban, internationalist, and civic spaces the black subject has access to. Thus in the twenty first century we are deluged with “magical Negroes” in the White House, and in celluloid, pirates--the latest (and transnational) iteration of the gangbanger--and meditations on birthright citizenship.⁴³ The dramatic expansion of the public sphere in cyberspace means the development of new chronotopes of race. Racist, not merely racialized, discourse is fantastic in the paradox of its ubiquity and invisibility. Twenty-first century technologies of race require a constant rehearsal of visual, discursive and even aural signifiers rooted within and around the body. Black

⁴³ Matthew Hughley defines the "magical negro" as a "stock character ... who possesses supernatural or magical powers. These powers are used to save and transform ... broken whites (almost exclusively white men) into competent, successful and content people within the context of the American myth of redemption and salvation" (544). While Hughes’ analysis is centered on filmic iterations of the “magical negro,” it is possible to extend this metaphor to historical and (contemporary) political figures.

bodies seem always to do too much or too little.⁴⁴ Black athletic prowess we are told comes naturally. Black bodies clustered together strip the subjects who possess them of their humanity (Iton 287). In the wake of Hurricane Katrina conservative radio personalities lambasted black New Orleans residents for their "laziness," framing socioeconomic deprivation and governmental negligence as a personal and moral failing.⁴⁵ Black bodies in this instance were accused of underperformance and the victims of Katrina blamed for their lack of mobility. Discourse on crime replicates this same formula. Black victims of police brutality are often described in mainstream journalistic accounts as possessing bodies capable of superhuman feats that necessitate the use of excessive force. Black subjects with bullet holes in their backs are said to have pivoted in the air and drawn upon officers, wriggled out of handcuffs in the backs of police cars to self-inflict gunshot wounds, or dashed towards police—knife in hand, kamikaze style--

⁴⁴ I term this the "Goldilocks Syndrome"—the black subject, and media representations of Barack Obama illustrate this quite well, is always in danger of stepping over an unstated boundary, always in some way "queer." When approval is granted to black political figures, entertainers, or athletes, it is often exaggerated and soon afterwards swiftly revoked. Mainstream cultural narratives, even those that do not directly address black subjects, take hold by utilizing the hypersymbolic capacity of the black body. As "[Paul] Gilroy writes: "The growing dominance of specularity ... contributes a special force to representations of the exemplary racial body arrested in the gaze of desiring and identifying subjects. Misrecognized, objectified and verified, these images have become the storehouses of racial alterity now that the production of subjectivity operates through different sensory and technological mechanisms" (65)'" (Gilroy qtd. in Dubey 102).

⁴⁵ "Boortz: "[P]rimary blame" for Katrina goes to "worthless parasites who lived in New Orleans"(*Media Matters for America* February 01, 2008).

"Limbaugh fill-in Jason Lewis: "Real Americans" think that Katrina victims were "a bunch of whiners down there"' (*Media Matters for America* February 02, 2009).

recently termed “suicide by cop.”⁴⁶

Pathologizing slave resistance has morphed today into a peculiar diagnosis of “excited delirium”— an explanation that has been used to counter allegations of police brutality.⁴⁷ Subjects afflicted with excited delirium exhibit superhuman strength and incapacity to reason. The arrestee’s fantastic strength and irrationality mandates, according to some, the use of excessive force. This modern iteration of “dysaesthesia aethiopica” suggests, like its progenitor, that certain populations have different physiological and psychological make-ups. Because there are a disproportionate number of black males in the penal system, any conversation about criminality is always subtextually (and many times overtly) racialized. The linkages between “excited delirium” and “dysaesthesia aethiopica” support Lois Wacquant’s observation that the prison industrial complex is the modern day version of the plantation system (42-44). It is striking that similar ideological apparatuses are required to facilitate the social reproduction of these orders. “Excited delirium” maps the body’s purported interior irregularities onto the raced and gendered face of the criminal “monstrum”.⁴⁸ The classification of this “disorder” hinges on the unstated assumption that there is something fantastic about the corporeal and psychic composition of those who commit crimes—

⁴⁶ See for example: Parent, R B. “Suicide by Cop: Victim-Precipitated Homicide.” *Police Chief* 65.10 (1998): 111 to 114 and Baker, Al. “3 Cases of ‘Suicide by Cop’? Circumstances Are Murky.” *New York Times*, April 14, 2009.

⁴⁷ See Ross, D. L. "Factors Associated with Excited Delirium Deaths in Police Custody" in *Modern Pathology* (1998) and Mash, D. C., et al. "Brain Biomarkers for Identifying Excited Delirium as a Cause of Sudden Death" in *Forensic Science International* (2009).

⁴⁸ Wacquant uses the term “monstrum” to describe the far-reaching and phantasmagoric qualities of the black urban criminal in the white American imaginary ("Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh" 56).

some intrinsic otherness that evades normative discourse. The codification of difference, through pseudoscientific nomenclature, identifies in the phantasmagoric qualities of the criminal a protocol for spatial articulation.

The correlation between spatiality and subjectivity is borne out in everyday and not just fictional life.⁴⁹ Architectural design is very much concerned with the possibility of inducing desired behaviors, or as de Certeau puts it, the way “space is practiced.”⁵⁰ The “semiotics of space” is a language of inclusion and exclusion.⁵¹ While there may no longer be signs that designate “colored” or “whites only” spaces, these strictures lie concealed in protocols of design, surveillance, and accessibility.⁵² If the efficacy of power is locatable, as Foucault suggests, in its invisibility, the social mores that inform the articulation of space in our cities reveal the powerful grip stereotypical discourse has on our psyches (*Discipline and Punish* 200). The “moral panics” of criminality and the constant barrage of visual stimuli—in print, on television, and on the Internet—merge in the figure of an always raced urban phantom (Hall 3, Wacquant page 56). This figure evacuates the black subject of any specificity and informs, through its symbolic effects,

⁴⁹ For a fictional example see Rufus in James Baldwin’s *Another Country*. When Rufus plunges over the railing of the George Washington Bridge the violent nature of his passing is in some sense a release. His suicide is a scream deferred, a cry of anguish so deep and permanent it shatters for all eternity his corporeal frame. Descent into madness, then, is a way of registering the psychic effects of inhabiting a defamed corporeality. Hemmed in by life, Rufus soars to his death defying and reifying his spatial constriction at one and the same time.

⁵⁰ De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. Print.

⁵¹ Davis, Mike. *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. London; New York: Verso, 1990. Print.

⁵² *Ibid.*

public policy on crime, urban planning, and governmental expenditure (Wacquant 58-60). Racialized discourse, like the criminal “monstruum,” is governed by a fantastic logic that rests on the present absence of the black population. Rather than correcting this incongruence, the black fantastic lingers in the gap created by the disjuncture between rhetoric and reality. The phenomenology of blackness, as it is constructed through a popular discourse that relies on the fixity of the black population with regard to social status and physical emplacement, creates a destabilized subjectivity – a figure, that, like Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, is slightly “off-beat” (Gillman 40). We see here the many forms of resistance embedded in this phrase – an irrational subject, a subject out of sync, and a subject that in stepping outside of the frame expands the scope and scale of his spatial access. To be slightly off beat, then, is to serve as both the keeper of time and the author of space. It is this possibility that the black fantastic brings into focus.

Embodied Politics: Pan-Africanism in Pauline Hopkins' *Of One Blood*

“The history of black people has been a history of movement—real and imagined.”
(Robin D.G. Kelley *Freedom Dreams* 16)

“He who is reluctant to recognize me opposes me. In a savage struggle I am willing to accept convulsions of death, invincible dissolution, but also the possibility of the impossible.” (Fanon *Black Skin White Masks* 218)

The migratory impulses of black folk speak, paradoxically, to a desire for rootedness. This “history of movement” is a geographical narrative of the quest for freedom, one that conjoins spatial articulation to subject formation (Kelley 16).¹ To “move without moving” is to reorganize psychic space in the service of increased mobility as Houston Baker has written (837). By transforming, for example, a place of pleasure into a space for political resistance, or by concealing a radical act in the guise of tomfoolery, black subjects reorganize social spaces that would otherwise be carceral (Baker 829). Such radical gestures resist the delimiting aspect of racialized landscapes by opening up new spaces for psychic, social, or physical habitation. The reclamation of space “without that is, perceptibly moving,” revolves around the negotiation of corporeal politics (Baker 837). But it is impossible to separate corporeal from social, cultural, or political space because the battle for citizenship rights has historically been, for black Americans, centered on the sovereignty of the body. The dangers inherent in the production and reproduction of viable black cultural spaces—social, physical, and psychic spaces black people can *fully* inhabit--signify an ontological and spatial crisis. Thus, the history of movement Kelley references is a journey both “real and imagined” to

¹ See also Farah Jamine Griffin's *Who Set You Flowin?*

locate a place where one can *just be*. And it is fiction that provides a safe means of exploring these possibilities (16).

Early twentieth-century African American fiction explores the disjunction between the Reconstruction era promise of equality and everyday reality lamenting, in particular, the North's failure to guarantee safety to black Americans in the face of increasing Southern racial hostility.² The fiction of the period engages the question of freedom by examining whether or not it is possible for blacks to experience full citizenship on American soil. Authors like Pauline Hopkins and Charles Chesnutt wrote cautionary tales about racial prejudice; their texts intimated the failure of whites to check their prejudices and act for the greater good would result in the destruction of both races. This chapter explores the fantastic as a discourse of black internationalism in Pauline Hopkins's turn of the century serial *Of One Blood, Or, the Hidden Self*. The fantastic emerges in Hopkins' work as a means of transfiguring the black body and radicalizing black subjectivity. By conflating corporeal and natural landscapes, the black fantastic reorients geography suturing Africa to the North American continent. The novel coaxes the reader's attention away from a nationalist to a Pan-Africanist frame disrupting, in the process, social relations that pivot on the eradication of black civic space and the prohibition of black mobility.

The restriction of black mobility has historically been central to the production of a (white) national identity. Nineteenth century intellectuals like Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush and Thomas Jefferson were obsessed with maintaining the "purity" of the

² Hazel Carby describes "political apathy in the North" as one of the main reasons Hopkins felt compelled to write *Of One Blood* (xxxii).

body politic (Takaki 15). Franklin wrote of the need to preserve the “lovely white,” while Jefferson advocated repatriation to Africa because he was so fearful of black participation in the social and civic life of the American republic (Takaki 14, 45). Anxiety over the participation of blacks in the public sphere served as a mandate for the policing of black bodies. Jim Crow practices illustrate the interrelationship between spatial formation and the production –and reproduction—of racial difference. Legal segregation in the South inscribed race onto the landscape, while de facto segregation in the North inscribed it onto the built environment of urban ghettos and into the psyches of the black population (Yu 50). Thus, the black body as social construct is produced and reproduced through the power relations that undergird racialized mappings of geographical and cultural spaces.³ The “imbricated relationship” between spatial environment and subject formation highlights the radical aspect of efforts to reclaim space (Grosz 105). Such acts are important not just because they expand the scale and scope of daily life, but due to the ways in which they inaugurate a new subject (Smith 65-67).⁴

Neurologist Oliver Sacks writes that synchronicity between mind and body lies at the root of all knowledge.⁵ This is how the world makes sense to us, how it is “that we feel our bodies as proper to us, as our “property,” as our own” (Sacks 43).

³ Though this dissertation does not directly address it, the construction of the black body through technological mediums insures a steady stream of “psychic assaults” for black Internet users.

⁴ Fanon has written about this in the context of the colony: the native quarters are dark, filthy, and cramped. In this spatial environment, the native learns his “place.” The containment is psychic, spiritual, and spatial and is as much about the production of a native subject as it is about the allocation of space within the colony.

⁵ Neurologist, psychiatrist, and author of *The Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales*.

“Proprioception” is another term for this mind-body connection, or as Fanon would have it: “[the] slow composition of myself as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world” (*Black Skin, White Masks* 111). The disruption of proprioception is akin to a feeling of bodilessness, of rootlessness. It can also in the antebellum or carceral contexts reflect a lack of ownership over the body. If the “unquestionability of the body, its certainty, is ... the start and basis of *all* knowledge and certainty,” corporeal disalienation opens up pathways for new systems of knowledge production (Sacks 44). The rupture of the seamless connection between the brain and the body— that is, of the unconscious maneuvers that ground our sense of self-- is a fantastic predicament.⁶ Proprioception marks a cataclysmic crisis that lays the groundwork for a new understanding of what it means to be human.

As an ontological condition, the fantastic is “the experience of “being” marginal to the historical record of a culture that refuses to recognize difference as its own creation” (Holland 1). The black body’s central role in the production of national space occurs via the exclusion of black subjects from the public sphere.⁷ The specter of the black presence, even when black bodies are physically absent, affects the practice of everyday white life. The black body, then, functions as a *mode of social space*: an “empty vessel vulnerable to the projection of others’ feelings, ideas, desires, and values” (Hartman 21). To be denied access to the social spaces of civic society even while

⁶ How else to describe the condition of being estranged from one’s own body?

⁷ Note that the exclusion of black bodies from public spaces is not equivalent to the erasure of blackness. The specter of the black presence disrupts any possibility of a sanctified “white” space. Thus, the prohibition of the black body locates blackness as a precondition for the constitution of whiteness. See Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark*.

grounding such space for some others is an uncanny predicament. It suggests sanctuary is elusive since one suffers from a “spectragraphic” crisis—invisible and hypervisible at one and the same time (Waligora-Davis 31, Wallace 30). The difficulty of *locating* sanctuary “in both the sense of an idea and a space [...] exposes the psychosocial, spatial, and political dimensions of [the black body]” (Waligora-Davis 7 italics added). Social spaces are critical sites of struggle and difficulty in accessing them proof of marginalized status. So, in order to actualize the full potential of “a space of freedom that [may also be] a space of captivity,” black authors articulate new “language[s] of the body” (Hartman 9, Reid-Pharr 120). The transformation of space so that sanctuary is realizable through psychic habitation, and freedom is always and already there, is a key component of black fantastic texts.⁸ In such works, multiplicity conceals a strategy for spatial metamorphosis that pivots on the slippage between the production and articulation of space.

The quest for sanctuary is meant to ameliorate the condition of “unhomeliness” that haunts marginalized subjects (Bhabha 10). Unhomeness is a peculiar condition of placelessness that marks a life on the periphery—peripatetic, forever out of sync.⁹ The possibilities for transvaluing subjectivity while residing in this liminal space are many. In fact, Bhabha suggests, the closer we come to recognizing the provisional and constructed

⁸ Realizable in the sense that sanctuary functions, in these texts, as a mode of interiority.

⁹ The *Invisible Man* describes this condition quite perfectly: “Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead” (Ellison 8). See also Susan Gillman’s *Blood Talk* (40).

nature of our identities the closer we come to freedom.¹⁰ Bhabha asks us to consider “how subjects are formed “in-between” or in *excess* of, the sum of “parts” of difference,” and Hopkins’s novel anticipates these modern concerns (Bhabha 2, italics added). The multiple and “hidden selves” of the protagonists are a way of coming to terms with the subaltern status of black people in the wake of emancipation. Hopkins is hyperconscious of the mythic nature of black corporeality and yet she cannot resist locating, within the “immanence” of the body, a governing logic of subjectivity (Diawara 239, 254).¹¹ *Of One Blood* suggests that even if the black body may not be “real” per se, the effects of inhabiting such corporeality in a racialized world are. Indeed, any project to transvalue black subjectivity, and this is one of Hopkins’s main textual concerns, must grapple with the real and symbolic effects of black corporeality. For in insisting on black humanity one is caught in the double bind of arguing for the sanctity of the black body *and* the dissolution of raced corporeality.

Hopkins did not shy away from expressing her political beliefs in literary form. The fictional works selected for publication in *The Colored American Magazine* were fables, tragic tales of black lives ruined by the refusal of white society to acknowledge black humanity. These often brief stories worked to blur the boundary between the real and the imaginary and attested to the horrific and “hallucinatory” nature of black life at

¹⁰ Camp, Stephanie M. H. *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. Print.

¹¹ Manthia Diawara defines “the trap of racial immanence” as “exclusion from all social roles not conventionally associated with blackness” (*In Search of Africa* 239).

the turn of the century (Sundquist 248).¹² The seemingly random nature of the acts of violence perpetrated against blacks by whites, the powerlessness of the community to aid those in need, and the blind eye former allies in the North now turned to southern injustices amounted to an extraordinary psychic assault (Carby xxxii). *The Colored American* sought to educate and consolidate a black reading public, and just as importantly, to provide a safe mode of escape from the harsh realities of everyday life (Carby xxxii). In the wake of enormous setbacks (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, the rise of the Klan, repeal of Reconstruction era reforms) the publication sought to ameliorate the black public's anxieties, foster collective action, and celebrate black achievement (Carby xxxii).¹³ The magazine bore witness to the terrible events taking place, events ignored by mainstream white presses, and provided a forum within which to engage what it meant to be black at the turn of the century.¹⁴

2.1 Occultism and Mysticism: Hopkins' Pre-Pan Africanism

Of One Blood, authored and published by Hopkins in *The Colored American*, in serial format--between 1902 and 1903--interrogates subjectivity, racial identity, and historiography. Hopkins's work locates the future of black America in a walled and hidden Ethiopian city. The kingdom of Meroe exists outside of space and time, filled with riches and awaiting the return of its prodigal son. Hopkins's work tackles the geopolitical

¹² Eric Sundquist refers to the "hallucinatory character of the Jim Crow laws" (248). [...] in the process creating out of "blood" a metaphor that signified race but that also pointed to a physical phenomenon that could remain utterly invisible (248-249).

¹³ See also Sundquist's discussion of *Plessy v. Ferguson* on pages 227-228.

¹⁴ *The Colored American* took a comprehensive approach to black life, situating domestic struggles within a global context.

implications of American race relations, probing the interrelationship between racial formation and spatial articulation. The novel is split into two parts. Half the action takes place in a New England town while the other half takes place in Ethiopia. Reuel Briggs a young doctor, passing for white, takes part in an African expedition to secure the necessary funds to marry his betrothed. During this trip Reuel learns the shocking truth about his racial, familial, and national identity. The novel deconstructs the presumed distance between Africa and America suggesting that the ties that bind black Americans to their “true homeland” are deeper and more rewarding than previously assumed. *Of One Blood* indicates that the production of race in postbellum America, and post-Berlin Africa, informs the construction of domestic, national and international borders. In a sleight of hand, Hopkins uses the trope of mysticism to tackle controversial questions around identity, citizenship and racial intimacy.

Fascination with the occult is visible in her earliest fictional contribution to *The Colored American*. In May 1900, two years prior to the publication of *Of One Blood*, Hopkins authored a short story titled the “The Mystery Within Us.” It is a strange and racially neutral tale about a young medical student who experiences a visitation that changes his life. Facing financial ruin and academic failure the young man resolves to kill himself. As he raises a poisonous cocktail to his lips he finds his movement suddenly arrested and his body taken over by the spirit of a deceased mentor who, in a Faustian maneuver, promises him success and wealth. The ghost imparts to the young doctor medical discoveries that bring him riches and fame in exchange for the temporary occupation of his body. This early concern with mysticism, phenomenology, and extra-corporeality in a narrative devoid of racial markers suggests Hopkins was experimenting

with narrative forms that would allow her to probe the relationship between body and psyche.

Seven months later Hopkins published, another short story, “Talma Gordon.” This work takes the concerns around subjectivity, identity and legacy that surface in “The Mystery Within Us” and adds a racial element. Talma, a light skinned black woman who can pass for white, is involved in a deep family tragedy of murder, disinheritance and betrayal that spans the United States, Europe and the Caribbean. Interestingly, it is Talma’s white husband who narrates the story relaying his wife’s familial history to a rapt audience at the Canterbury Club of Boston. That Hopkins selected a white male protagonist to deliver a parable of racial tolerance to a fictional audience of whites is not startling; however, that she usurps Talma’s voice, making her experience legible to the reader *only* through her husband’s lens speaks volumes about the racial and gender protocols of truth-telling.¹⁵ Taken together, “The Mystery Within Us” and “Talma Gordon” rehearse in short story format many of the same themes Hopkins addresses in *Of One Blood*. Though “The Mystery Within Us” sidelines the racial question, it subtextually references “double consciousness” by highlighting the multiplicity of subjectivity (Du Bois 2). It would seem that Hopkins’ preoccupation with mysticism and the occult reflects a desire to transcend the delimiting aspects of race through fiction and a deep ambivalence about the fantastic qualities of the black body.¹⁶

¹⁵Even in publications geared towards black Americans, white authentication was very often a financial necessity or publication protocol.

¹⁶“The Mystery Within Us” and “Talma Gordon, foreground many of the ontological questions Hopkins resolves through her Pan-Africanist focus in *Of One Blood*. See Hazel

Sandwiched between historical accounts of black life in antiquity and editorials about the horrors of lynching, “The Mystery Within Us” lacks the sharp political focus of other contributions to the journal. From its inception, *The Colored American* had a clear mission: uplift of the Negro through publication of a wide variety of scholarship on the race that would not otherwise see the light of day (Carby xxxi-xxxii).¹⁷ The magazine’s editors sought submissions from all disciplines, and while perusing *The Colored American* today one is struck by the eclectic nature of its content. Determined to present as broad a slice of black life as possible, the publishers wound up including a hodgepodge of material: news stories, editorial essays, serial and short fiction, as well as historical and sociological articles. It is perhaps because racial logic in the postbellum era was both nonsensical and carceral that Hopkins found in the fantastic a useful plot device. In all of her writings—serials, short stories, and nonfiction—Hopkins grapples with the spiritual, the metaphysical, and the corporeal. By tying occultism to double consciousness Hopkins surreptitiously challenges black “expendability.”¹⁸ Thus, the multiplicity of identity is offered up as a salve to the reductive nature of racial stereotypes. Hopkins was deeply

Carby’s foreword in the Schomburg edition and Eric Sundquist’s *To Wake the Nation* for analysis of the influence of William James on Hopkins’ work.

¹⁷ The masthead of the inaugural May 1900 issue reads: "Recognizing an immediate need of a Race Journal, otherwise than our current local periodicals, we have organized a Company, to be known as the Colored Co-operative Publishing Company... [The purpose] is the introduction of a monthly magazine of merit into every Negro family, which shall be a credit to the present and future generations. This magazine shall be devoted to the higher culture of Religion, Literature, Science, Music and Art of the Negro, universally. Acting as a stimulus to old and young, the old to higher achievements, the young to emulate their example."

¹⁸Mbembe, Achille. “Aesthetics of Superfluity.” *Public Culture* 16.3 (2004): 373-405.

concerned with the massive toll the racial contradictions of a segregated society took on black and white psyches. Beneath the fallacy of epidermal constructions of race lay mental devastation and the economic consequences of disinheritance. The cost, her fiction suggests, of disinheriting the black population will fall heavily on the shoulders of whites (Carby xlvi). But most interesting to me is the delicate line Hopkins tows. How in a manner that seems to undercut the coherence of her narrative, she is drawn to corporeal transcendentalism *and* to discourses that affirm the legitimacy of the black body. Is it possible, her fiction asks, to transcend the body? And if so, does this prove a lie racial stereotypes grounded in the overdetermined nature of black corporeality? Finally, does the possibility of casting the body aside offer salvation from racial discrimination?¹⁹

As seen in “The Mystery Within Us” and “Talma Gordon,” Hopkins needs her protagonists to wear the cloak of white male privilege – to in essence be “bodiless” in order to work through metaphysical questions around the nature of being (Carby xxxix).²⁰ I’ve already written that Hopkins’s fascination with multiplicity—our “hidden selves” is a way of coming to terms with the experience of double consciousness that characterizes African American life. Hopkins wants to strip everything away and explore, through

¹⁹ In casting the body aside, one presumably relinquishes the link to Africa (Reid-Pharr 130).

²⁰ Robyn Wiegman writes that, "it was the repression of the specific racial and gender markers of privileged identity-of whiteness and maleness-that characterized the figure "American citizen" and inaugurated its rhetorical definition as an inclusive social body. In this constitution of the citizen as a disembodied entity, bound not to physical delineations but to national ones, the white male was (and continues to be) "freed" from the corporeality that might otherwise impede his insertion into the larger body of national identity" (*American Anatomies* 94).

fiction, what makes us who we are –to find irrespective of race the common thread that ties all humanity together. But the narrative is vexed by the limitations of this approach with regard to ensuring the safety of black Americans. Existential questions could not guarantee the sanctity of black life, stop lynching, or insure equality. For this reason, Hopkins is simultaneously drawn toward, and resistant to, a philosophy that rests on the representational nature of corporeality. *Of One Blood* moves beyond late nineteenth century racial logic, transvaluing the black body and insisting on the unreliability of phenotypical markers as indicators of blackness. At the same time, the text’s Pan-Africanist ideology and its emphasis on bodily truths—truths that are reinforced by the written hand—reveal a discomfort with leaving the body behind. Ultimately Hopkins looks to Africa and to an ancestral connection that depends on the coherence of the black body. The text resolves this dilemma by identifying black civilization as the origin of all humanity. Thus, in a circular logic blackness is both inconsequential as a racial philosophy and foundational historically since we are actually all black (Carby xlvi).²¹ Hopkins turns toward Ethiopia, in a final liberatory gesture because the ideology of Ethiopianism, in identifying Abyssinia as the “cradle of [black] civilization,” mounts a geopolitical response to racial terror that reclaims lived and imaginative space (Kelley 20). This narrative reconstruction of “home” remedies the spatial constriction that characterizes the black American experience and forces persons like Reuel to pass for white.

²¹ Carby writes that, “*Of One Blood* is a climax to Hopkins’s consistent concern with the questions of inheritance and heritage” (xlvi).

For Hopkins, the “veil” reflected the peculiar condition of black American citizenship, but also an opportunity for black progress on a global scale.²² By harnessing Ethiopianism to anti-expansionist sentiment, *Of One Blood* makes a case for keeping African riches in black hands. The serial promotes the notion of a black American vanguard predestined to bring glory to Africa and its diaspora. The walled and hidden city of Meroe challenges the notion of black “expendability” used by the imperial powers to justify their excursions into Africa. Black labor was necessary for the consolidation of white wealth domestically and abroad. In this aspect, as Achille Mbembe notes, black bodies were simultaneously “indispensable” and “expendable” – lacking use value and possessed of a quantifiable rate of exchange (374-5, 380-2).²³ The transvaluation of black corporeality that we see in Hopkins’s fiction is a direct assault on the social death that characterized black life at the turn of the century. The fantastic, opens up a textual space for the reorientation of geographies and a new (global) conception of black citizenship. If racial repression was characterized by the “annihilation of space by law,” *Of One Blood* takes on the opposite challenge: the production of space through narrative.²⁴

Bhabha writes that stereotypical discourse “is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always “in place”, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated” (66). If, as I argue, Hopkins’ work achieves

²² Hopkins uses the term “veil,” in both the DuBoisian sense—to reference the color line— and in relation to the occult.

²³ Mbembe, Achille. “Aesthetics of Superfluity.” *Public Culture* 16.3 (2004): 373-405. Print.

²⁴ Taken from the title of Don Mitchell’s essay, “The Annihilation of Space by Law: The Roots and Implications of Anti-Homeless Laws in the United States.”

the production of space, racist discourse has the opposite effect—the delimitation of the spatial field the subject inhabits. The circumscription of blackness as the antithesis of all that is free, white, and good (“free, white, and 21!”) takes on particular urgency in the aftermath of emancipation.²⁵ Eric Foner has written about the role visual representation played in codifying the post-Reconstruction Jim Crow landscape.²⁶ Black intellectual inferiority, licentious, criminality, and indolence were rehearsed in a variety of mediums. New technology was critical in disseminating cultural “truths” about freedmen and women. Films like D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* constructed a visible “moral panic” about white/black proxemics and fostered the growth of the Klan as a political force in the South (Hall 3, Lefebvre 56). In order to keep black Americans in “their place” psychically, spiritually, politically and spatially, these truths needed to be rehearsed, revisited and reaffirmed on a continual basis.

It is in this toxic social environment that Hopkins began work on *Of One Blood*. Her narrative is an intervention at a moment of acute historical crisis for African Americans: the repeal of the Civil Rights amendments, the birth of the Klan and the attendant collapse of Reconstruction era reforms, as well as the passage of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (Carby xxxii). Hopkins sought to undo this cultural damage in her myriad contributions to *The Colored American*. As the paper’s editor, she was careful to select

²⁵ This phrase appears in *Plum Bun*, Jesse Fauset’s Harlem Renaissance novel about racial passing.

²⁶ *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction*.

stories that offered a global perspective on black civilization.²⁷ This diverse pallet served to combat reductive representations of blackness that proliferated in popular culture and mainstream presses. The cultural maneuvers by which race is produced and reproduced are ritualistic in their specificity. The metaphors used to describe racial discourse are spatial in nature. Such discourse is “always in place,” yet perpetually in motion. Like the urban ghetto, or the Jim Crow landscape, language itself functions as an “ethnoracial enclosure” (Wacquant 49). The fantastic as a narrative destination provides a way out of this prison by reordering a delimiting system of signs (Jackson 90). Hopkins’ novel upends a social order that relies on the meticulous classification of bodies as either white or black by revealing that these signifiers are neither stable nor fixed.

2.2 Plessy and the Poetics of the Fantastic

In May of 1896, *The New York Times* published a brief mention of the decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Situated towards the end of a narrow column entitled “Federal Courts,” the ruling merited three meager lines: “Homer Adolph Plessy v. J. H. Ferguson, Judge, &c—In error to the Supreme Court of Louisiana. Judgment affirmed, with costs.”²⁸ From the marginal ink devoted to a ruling that would shape American life for the better half of the century, one can presume that there was little interest in

²⁷ Hazel Carby notes that *The Colored American* “define[d] as well as create[d] a black magazine reading public” (xxxiii).

²⁸ Appears in the May 19, 1896 issue of *The New York Times* under the headline “Federal Courts” (p.3).

interrogating issues of racial equality in mainstream Northern white presses.²⁹ In stark contrast, the inaugural issue of *The Colored American Magazine* included several pieces (fiction and non-fiction) that bore witness to the atrocities and absurdities of *Jim Crow*. If the nondescript nature of the *Times* announcement highlights the imperiled status of black Americans at the close of the nineteenth century, it also calls attention to the black press's unique role in making African American suffering visible and actionable.

Of One Blood reverses the logic of the Court's ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (Sundquist 572).³⁰ The ruling affirmed race as a hematological, not merely an epidermal, truth.³¹ In order to preserve the narrative of white supremacy as the dominant racial logic in North and South, the majority found that black ancestry no matter how far removed made one ineligible for the privileges of whiteness. The "hidden logic" of Homer Plessy's racial identity lay in his bloodline, not in the coloration of his epidermis. The assignation of the label "Negro" devalued, the Court acknowledged, his personhood, but, since this devaluation rested on the "truth" of his racial identity, there was no wrong to rectify. Thus, the Court "creat[ed] out of "blood" a metaphor that signified race but that

²⁹ Interestingly, coverage of the 1896 Italian-Ethiopian conflict (Battle of Adowa) was substantial. There are many conclusions to be drawn from the fact that this international affair generated more local coverage than domestic racial conflicts.

³⁰ Sundquist writes that *Of One Blood* represents "a way out of the bondage not just of racism but of blood itself... an inversion of one-drop legal ideology" (571-572). Hopkins, then, uses "the supernatural to exempt the text from the action of the law, and thereby to transgress that law"(Todorov 159).

³¹ *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896), ""That petitioner was a citizen of the United States and a resident of the state of Louisiana, of mixed descent, in the proportion of seven-eighths Caucasian and one-eighth African blood; that the mixture of colored blood was *not discernible* in him, and that he was entitled to every recognition, right, privilege, and immunity secured to the citizens of the United States of the white race by its constitution and laws" (*FindLaw* emphasis added).

also pointed to a physical phenomenon that could remain utterly invisible” (Sundquist 249). Plessy established whiteness as a form of property with a monetary and a social exchange value and rubber stamped close to a century of institutionalized segregation (Harris 1749). If the demarcation of the Southern landscape into “black” and “white” spaces reflected the “mutually constitutive” relations between the body and its environment so to did it affect the assignation of value (Grosz page 108); Segregation was about the production and maintenance of a racialized landscape that relied on the interrelationship between body and built environment for coherence (Grosz 108, Yu 50). Sociologists, historians, and literary theorists have carefully documented the ways in which power relations are woven into the articulation of the built environment.³² Hopkins sidesteps this tangled web by setting the bulk of her narrative in East Africa, in a city that is impenetrable to outsiders. By setting the main action of the text in Meroe, Hopkins subverts the sociolegal apparatus of Jim Crow and the ideological apparatus of the European colonial system. *Of One Blood*, in other words, reverses the contradiction of “visible admixture” *Plessy* codifies by melding together corporeal and geographical landscapes.

Valuation is linked, then, to the ways in which space is practiced.³³ Camp’s notion of the “rival geography,” as a provisional zone of resistance, is useful for understanding the function of the fantastic in Hopkins’s text (5). Very often the desire to inhabit a space of one’s own is realized through the manipulation of time. Slaves, Camp writes, would “play hooky,” transforming the woods surrounding the plantation into a place of refuge

³² See Robert Park, Michel Foucault, and Henri Lefebvre.

³³ See Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

and, at least for a short time, into a space of rest. Those who employed such tactics new full well this respite was fleeting and that upon their return punishment would be severe. But the benefits outweighed the risks and, in doing so, reveal a great deal about the foundational link between having a space where one can “just be” and viable subjectivity. Carving out a space, in which they could do as they pleased, enabled slaves to assert their humanity. By depriving marginalized groups of space, dominant forces seek de facto or de jure elimination of the presence of such populations. What this indicates is that the compelling need to claim, or reclaim, space is an act of psychic, corporeal, and ontological survival.

For the purposes of this chapter, Camp’s research encourages interrogation of the correlation between the spatial and the temporal as a mode of resistance. Faced with a delimited amount of space, slaves manipulated time in order to “[re]organize the production and reproduction of daily life” (Smith 60). The process Camp describes, then, is very similar to the role literature plays in expanding the imaginary by making new places accessible and by blurring the boundary between self and other. The “fantastic,” particularly in black fiction, functions as a sort of rival geography—a narrative space that evades normative ways of understanding time. The fantastic text refuses to be contained by the conditions of its production and insists upon the fluid relationship between past, present and future (Christol 168,172).³⁴

³⁴ Susan Gillman writes that, “Hopkins intensifies the sense of the interpolated tales as intrusions, erupting from the past into the present and interrupting or even preventing the forward movement of the narrative” (40). “Racial thinking at the turn of the century,” she notes, “produced specific conceptions of time and time consciousness” (201).

2.2.1 Defying A Racial Schema

Fanon describes corporeal malediction as the psychic toll of the deforming white gaze. Trapped under the ocular spell, the native finds himself disintegrating. Neutralizing the violence of the colonizer's gaze, a gaze that has the ability to dismember the native, necessitates a splitting apart of the self. Fanon writes that to be free of this psychic anvil one must be prepared for an "amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spatters [his] whole body with black blood" (112). Corporeal malediction symbolizes the manifestation of psychic trauma as *spatial dislocation* within the territorial confines of the body. If one reads the body as a metaphor for the nation this psychophysical ailment is a corollary to second-class citizenship. The body that belongs to the marginalized subject lacks proper representation in the body politic. Corporeality is both symptom and sign. It is an indication of the subject's lack of social worth and a priori justification for his or her ill treatment by the state. "Visibility," as Foucault observes, "functions a trap" (*Discipline and Punish* 200). A body that cannot be concealed is a body that belongs to a subject without power. To be bodiless and still under the protection of the state is to claim the power of the ruling class. The colonial gaze transforms the black subject from one who is "seen" into a "scene" (Pratt 120). The gaze circumscribes the native, reconfiguring the space of his body into a zone of entrapment.

Fanon believes that the native's reciprocal glance is futile—"the black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man" (110). The construction of the native as placeholder for the colonizer's deepest fears and desires has been well documented by a number of cultural scholars. What remains to be examined is the role the destruction of the native body plays in a variety of postcolonial and anti-racist fiction. Faced with the

native and/or black body's "hyper-corporeality"—an excess that indemnifies the not-quite-human status of the abject—a number of writers choose to destroy the body in order to liberate the subject (112). Discarding the unwanted body can take many forms: inhabiting the body of another, transcending the limitations of one's corporeality through, what Berlant terms, "xenophilia," annihilating the body, or constructing a new body (111). The newly fractured self, just barely held together, may lack the coherence of the earlier version. But in this altered capacity the native discovers new possibilities for freedom in the multiplicity of identity.

The dual capacity of the native to function as both signified and signifier is critical to the profit structure of the colonial apparatus. "For racism to acquire such power," Mbembe writes, "profit and delirium had to be so closely connected so as to trigger the vertiginous capacity of the native to be both a thing and a metonym of something else" ("Aesthetics of Superfluity" 382). The native's "superfluity"—that corporeal excess which classifies him as both more than object and less than human—reflects the multitudinous nature of his character. The instability of his position carries with it the risk of negation: in occupying many spaces he may find that in diffusion there is absence. This "invisibility," however, is productive because it is also a mechanism for the transvaluation of subjectivity. I note in the introduction to this work that Reid-Pharr identifies the fantastic qualities of the black body as confirmation of the slave's occupation of a provisional space articulated by the border between human and inhuman. He observes that the black body's abjection opens up the possibility, through performance, of escaping to some higher plane (119-122). Fantasy then is not only about freedom, but also about securing corporeal autonomy for the black subject. It is about

rupturing the tie that binds black and white and insures the black subject's "thingification" (Cesaire 42, Reid-Pharr 112-113).³⁵

2.2.2 Intra-racial Color Hierarchies and the Problem of Surplus Corporeality

The Colored American took a holistic approach to black life in order to shape black public opinion. Many of the contradictions that surface in Hopkins's work are replicated in nonfiction contributions to the journal. Hopkins's fetishization of whiteness, an anglophilia that runs counter to the black nationalism that structures the text, is difficult to overlook. Hazel Carby notes that, "the idealization of black beauty in the novel is contradictory and retains classically European pretensions" (xlvi). Like the advertisements for skin bleaching crème and hair straightener that are found in the magazine's back pages, Hopkins' susceptibility to the aesthetic conventions of whiteness reveals the insidiousness of racial rhetoric. Even a publication like the *Colored American* that pledged its pages to the uplift of the race could not move beyond harmful racial dynamics that privilege lightness within the black community. The colorism that structures Hopkins's text must be examined in relation to the novel's publication in serial format. A successful serial anticipates the psychic needs and desires of its audience.³⁶ This is why, as Rosemary Jackson argues, fantasies often work to preserve the social order by sublimating dangerous desires within the space of the text (174-5). But reading

³⁵ Maurice Wallace, in his discussion of Frederick Douglass's battle with the overseer Covey depicted in the *Narrative*, suggests that there is a psychosexual component to "thingification" (91).

³⁶ Rosemary Jackson notes that, "[Fantasy] can tell of, manifest or show desire ... or it can expel desire when this desire is a disturbing element which threatens cultural order and continuity ... In many cases fantastic literature fulfills both functions at once" (4).

Of One Blood as a text saturated by colorism is simplistic. Hopkins' narrative reclaims the standards of white beauty for the black body in order to deconstruct definitions of white and black—to show they have little meaning by focusing on those “black” bodies that can pass for white. Unfortunately this impulse ends up reproducing the same harmful racial dynamics the journal aimed to subvert and it leads Hopkins to cast the black elite, on whom the salvation of the race depends, as phenotypically “white.”

There are two unmistakably black characters in Hopkins' s novel: Jim Titus and old Aunt Hannah. Hannah is Reuel and Dianthe's grandmother and holds the key to the narrative. At the end of *Of One Blood* she is repatriated to Africa alongside Reuel. Jim Titus accompanies Reuel on his African expedition. He has been sent on by Aubrey Livingston (ostensibly to assist Reuel) and instead spies on, intercepts his correspondence, and tries to kill him. Titus's traitorous behavior signs his death warrant, but it is the manner in which he dies not the fact of his death that is so striking. Titus's violent death--he is crushed to smithereens--marks the passing of the text's most prominent “black” character. “The most potent refutation of the Black American's status as native subject,” as Reid-Pharr observes, “is enacted at the difficult juncture at which bodies are articulated through language” (127). This is to say that the measure of dignity the black body is afforded, in circumstances of duress, indicates the black subject's worth to the social schema. Titus is eaten alive by a powerful serpent. In the throes of his death he repents to Reuel. The “terrible scream” he releases when he is trapped in the monster's jaw shatters spatiotemporal boundaries.

Titus's scream penetrates the boundary between the real and the mystic. The force of his yell shatters normative modes of understanding space and time, a topic I take up in

the final chapter of this dissertation (Barrett 225). Reuel's somnambulism is forever ruptured by an "experience so vivid that reason could not control his feelings" (591).

Reuel started out of a fitful slumber by the sound of that *terrible scream*. He sprang to his feet and listened. He heard not a sound; all was silence within the palace [...] Reuel advanced into the room. The hole in the floor was securely closed, and on the divans lay Charlie Vance, white and unconscious, and Jim Titus *crushed almost to a jelly* but still alive [...] "The black man will die," Ai said. (591-592 italics added)

The sound awakens a visceral response within Reuel, one that links the sonic, the psychic, and the corporeal in the ghostly presence of his long deceased mother Mira. The sonic, in other words, is a form of cognitive mapping that rewrites space by transforming "solid wall[s] ... present[ing] no hope of entrance ... [into] yawning space[s]" (Hopkins 591). The scream summons Mira, serving as an aural link between the natural and supernatural. Mira's presence, in turn, allows for the rearticulation of space—hers is a visual recoding of the built environment.³⁷ In much the same way that the literary fantastic is a narrative response to a spatial crisis, the scream represents a demarcation of space. But while it may harbor a regenerative possibility for Reuel, the primordial scream marks the end of Jim Titus's life.

Jim Titus meets a brutal and undignified end—an outsized punishment for the greed he has exhibited throughout the novel, but it is Hopkins's emphasis on his blackness that highlights the novel's troubling intraracial politics. Titus's corporeal annihilation stamps out his blackness. Jim is described as "black of skin" and "crisp of hair" in contrast to Reuel, Dianthe, and Aubrey whose light coloring obscures their racial

³⁷ Reuel has a vision of Mira seated at a desk, writing. He can make out, just barely, the traces of her words.

identity (585).³⁸ Ai, Reuel's Ethiopian advisor, remarks disinterestedly that "the black man will die" when the two happen on the scene (592). The Ethiopian's phraseology creates a linguistic chasm between himself, Reuel, and "the black man." Ai's words set Jim apart from the racial group. The "black man" is othered while the black who can pass for white, the white (Charlie Vance), and the orientalized African join together in solidarity. It is troubling that there is no room for Titus in the glorious New World Order Ai and Reuel seek to instantiate. He is expendable. So much so, that his violent death, outside of its function as a plot device, warrants little attention in the narrative.

Titus is castigated by Reuel as "a Negro of the old regime"--one who unthinkingly accepts a servile position in relation to whites (511). His obsolescence reveals the contradictory nature of the narrative's racial logic while the violence of his passing mirrors his imperiled social status. He is afforded dignity neither in life nor death, and the spectacular nature of his passing indicates there is more at work than mere plot machinations. The politics of Titus's dismemberment is a legacy of the corporeal relations of chattel slavery, of an economy that pivots on the sacrificial capacity of black flesh. The symbolic violence of Titus's black body slowly and agonizingly crushed--the reader is forced to contemplate his corporeal form--while the interracial party looks on lingers long after the episode's conclusion. Titus's "surplus corporeality" negates his subjectivity and marks him for death (Berlant 112). The public nature of his passing strips him of humanity turning his death through the "dissimulation of suffering [into] ... spectacle" (Hartman 22). The narrative's colorist logic privileges Reuel and Dianthe for

³⁸ The colorism that subtends such racial protocol is replicated in descriptions of Candace, the queen of Meroe, "a superb statue of bronze ... [with] long jet black hair ... [and] a delicate nose with quivering nostrils" (568-9).

their white coloring while punishing Titus for his blackness. Despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that *Of One Blood* is preoccupied with the “problem” of black corporeality, the text reproduces the dominant racial logic by cathecting the surplus corporeality of the novel’s protagonists onto Titus’s unmistakably black body. The Manichean aesthetics that subtend this logic are surprising in a work governed by overt anti-racist and pan-Africanist philosophies. The same “surplus morality” that colonialist literature generates through stereotypical representations of native subjects is at work in this context (JanMohamed 103). Titus’s “moral inferiority” absolves Reuel of the sin of passing and “increase[s], by contrast, the store of his [Reuel’s] own moral superiority” (JanMohamed 103). Surplus corporeality as it articulates blackness is transmuted into *surplus mortality*.

Titus’s unmanliness –“Be a man, Jim,” Charlie Vance tells him—and greed transform him into a minstrel like figure (586). Titus is the stereotypical, bumbling and shiftless Negro that appears in a variety of early twentieth century popular mediums. If Hopkins traffics in such stereotypes, it is to transpose the surplus mortality of the black figure that can pass for white onto the corporeal form of the black subject that cannot. The exercise deracinates Reuel even while authenticating his blackness. Hopkins’s flirtation with stereotypical discourse speaks to the slippages around black nationalist ideologies that ground a conception of blackness in as Fanon would say an epidermal condition. If conversely one grounds philosophies of black redemption in historical and genealogical schemas, we are forced to revisit the interrelationship between the production of the black body in the white American imaginary and regimes of racial terror. Hopkins’ writing of Jim Titus out of the narrative combined with the labor he performs in death, his bodily injuries after all are a catalyst for disclosure of familial

truths, links the “elasticity of blackness” to the surplus mortality of the black body (Hartman 25). Even within an intraracial, and anti-colonial context, it becomes necessary to “slip on blackness in order to interrogate the self in the other’s guise “ (Hartman 25). Titus hangs on long enough to deliver the truth to Reuel about his ancestry. We see here the correlation between blackness and the fantastic: the plenitude of Titus’s body enables corporeal feats that defy conventional logic. Titus is expelled from the racial family, and in a twinned gesture, Dianthe and Reuel are ensconced firmly within it.

Hopkins sought to remind her readers that far from being marginal, black people were foundational to the development of Western civilization. At the turn of the century, the revelation that the origins of Greek civilization could be traced to ancient Egypt, and by extension Africa was nothing short of fantastic. Hopkins uses the fantastic as a narrative device to highlight the centrality, if not the primacy, of black history, culture, and civilization. *Of One Blood* argues that the foundations of Western civilization can be located in East Africa. But Hopkins’s vision of Ethiopia is both orientalized and anachronistic. It would seem that in order to endow her narrative with a certain kind of cultural currency, Hopkins adheres to a colorism that correlates class with skin color. Aunt Hannah’s symbolic importance and minor narrative presence affirms this elitist thinking. Hannah, an ex-slave, who lives in a secluded cabin on the Livingston estate, is an archetypal mammy figure who holds the truth about the family—and the nation’s—origins and, in doing so, serves as a marker of authenticity. Hannah’s “homecoming” to Meroe solidifies the bond between “modern Ethiopians” (African Americans) and African Ethiopians who now assume a servile position in relation to King Ergamenes (Reuel).

In lieu of an emphasis on bloodlines, Hopkins uses the metaphor of the lotus lily marking to transvalue the black mother's womb. The birthmark by tying Reuel and Dianthe to Mira and Aunt Hannah reverses the logic of the one-drop rule (Sundquist 571-572). To prove to Dianthe that she is her grandmother Hannah "display[s] to the terrified girl the perfect semblance of a lily cut, as it were, in shining ebony. "Did each of Mira's children have this mark?" [Dianthe asks]"Yes, honey; all of one blood!"(606-07). The lotus lily birthmark is a visual symbol of Reuel's blackness stamped onto his otherwise "white" body.³⁹ Rather than consigning him to second-class citizenship this racial coding serves as proof of royal lineage. Reuel's "one drop" is not a mark of degradation, but instead a sign literal and symbolic of his greater social worth. Hopkins disrupts a system of signs that devalues black personhood by transforming a logic that views black female corporeality as the "passage between humanity and nonhumanity [and] the *articulation* of that passage" into a practice of diaspora (Holland 43 italics added). The dominant racial logic at the close of the nineteenth century constructed any marker of blackness as proof of devalued personhood. Hopkins subverts this by grounding a Pan-Africanist worldview in the fantastic nature of the black body's plenitude.

2.3 The Fecund African Landscape

Mary Louise Pratt has described the discursive patterns colonialist writers use to manufacture distance between themselves and the native subjects they study. The

³⁹ The symbolism of the lotus lily, traditionally equated with whiteness and innocence, stamped in "shining ebony" on the flesh of visibly, and non-visibly, black characters, evokes the centrality of blackness to constructions of whiteness. The true innocents, Hopkins text suggests, are the black disenfranchised who as a consequence of their skin color and/or bloodline cannot claim their birthright. The lotus lily is after all Egyptian in origin; Hopkins' use of this metaphor, then, is an assertion of the African roots of Western civilization, and by extension, Americanness.

resulting dialectic of intimacy and estrangement crystallizes the native's fantastic qualities. The colonial writer knows all there is to know about the native whose phantasmagoric qualities are forever inscribed onto his body, into the landscape, and in print. "The people to be othered," Pratt writes, "are homogenized into a collective "they" [...] This abstracted "he"/"they" is the subject of verbs in a *timeless present* tense, which characterizes anything "he" is or does, not as a particular historical event, but as an instance of a pre-given custom or trait" (120 italics added). Reuel's perception of the African landscape and the Ethiopians he encounters resembles the white colonial gaze. The Ethiopians are homogenized and though they possess an infinite wisdom--another primitivistic stereotype--seem frozen in the past. Reuel's arrival propels Meroe into the twentieth century, an intervention that is all the more striking because of the "timeless present" the Ethiopians inhabit. In their blind adherence to faith and destiny, the Ethiopians lack agency. Reuel is a catalyst for technological, societal, and cultural change and interestingly is more capable of realizing the land's potential than its native inhabitants. By orientalizing Ethiopia, Hopkins inadvertently strips its inhabitants of their humanity. The region and its people function as a blank canvas for the enactment of an American centered notion of "black globality" (Bain 940).

Reuel's expedition to Africa, a journey that exposes him to his "hidden self," establishes his corporeal connection to the continent. Geography *is* for Reuel--fate.⁴⁰

Reuel's lineage is written into his body annihilating, on the one hand, the geographical

⁴⁰ In his essay, "Remembering Richard Wright," Ralph Ellison cites "Heraclitus' axiom "Geography Is Fate" in order to foreground the relationship between geography and the construction of black subjectivity (*Going to the Territory* 198).

distance between Africa and America and affirming, on the other, the validity of narratives of racial origin. Hopkins's work attests that such genealogical truths retain visual markers. The birthmark that inscribes Reuel's identity into his skin and his psyche articulates the space of his body as a "spatiotemporal continuum" (Christol 166-7). Reuel is the hidden link that ties the African American populace at the turn of the century to the historical legacy of Ethiopian antiquity. But the lotus lily birthmark also serves another purpose. While it is a narrative device that as Carby notes enables Hopkins to peel back the layers of her characters and expose the hidden selves beneath, the birthmark also reflects Hopkins's profound desire to transvalue black corporeality (Carby xxxviii). Transvaluation is not only about the black body's dignity, but also the *disarticulation of its plenitude*. It represents the rupture of a system of signs that entraps the black body within a cyclical prison: "thing," "metonym," and then "thing" again (Mbembe 382).⁴¹ Hopkins locates the "truth" about black corporeality and racial categorizations in the flower shaped insignia on Reuel, Dianthe, Aubrey, and Hannah's chests. In a reversal of Jim Crow logic, Reuel's blackness moves him further up the social ladder. The lotus lily birthmark "blackens him up" even while redefining what it means to be black. The racial topography Hopkins constructs in response to the black subject's surplus mortality cathects the plenitude of the black New World body onto the African landscape.

Fredric Jameson writes that, "The imagining of Utopia is constitutively related to the possibility of establishing some *spatial closure* ... for the establishment of some pure and positive utopian space" (155). The linkage Jameson identifies between utopian

⁴¹ See Rosemary Jackson's discussion of fragmentation and non-signification in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (176-77).

imaginaries and spatiality sheds light on the relationship between surplus mortality and the African landscape. The utopian city of Meroe is “porous” and walled at the same time. The city is hidden to most outsiders. The entrance is revealed only to a chosen few. The natural landscape and the built environment inform and form in many ways the subjectivities of the region’s inhabitants. Time stands still so that Reuel can gain access to Meroe. This is in fact the condition of possibility for the representation of Ethiopia within the space of the text.

Reuel’s initial assessment of the land is both sweeping and detailed, and it is indicative of his special relationship to the region. As a native son he possesses a keen visual acuity, as an American he is adeptly suited to the task of assigning value:

The character of the country improved as they neared the interior. Reuel noticed this was at variance with the European idea respecting Central Africa, which brands these regions as howling wildernesses or an uninhabitable country. He found the landscape most beautiful, the imaginary dessert “blossomed like the rose,” and the “waste sandy valleys” and “thirsty wilds,” which had been assigned to this location became, on close inspection, a gorgeous scene, decorated with Nature’s most cheering garniture, teeming with choice specimens of vegetable and animal life, and refreshed by innumerable streams, branches of the rivers, not a few of which were of sufficient magnitude for navigation and commerce. But Reuel remembered the loathsome desert that stood in grim determination guarding the entrance to this paradise against all intrusion, and with *an American’s practical common sense*, bewailed this *waste* of material. (565 italics added)

The fecundity of the African landscape is reinforced by the choice of language. The natural environs are virginal and sensual “blossom[ing] like the rose,” the vegetation “thirsty.” The landscape is feminized and eroticized in Reuel’s description and there is an overall sense of excess, of an insatiable topography that defies spatial containment. The plenitude of the physical environment mimics the excesses of black corporeality. Body

and geography are conjoined in a dialectic of “superfluity.”⁴² This is to say that the “economy of bodies” in *Of One Blood* is directly linked to Africa’s ability to generate wealth (Walters 620). The reproductive capacity of the physical environs—the rich nature of raw materials and the aesthetic value of the natural landscape—parallel the fecundity of the black maternal figure (Mira). Thus rather than rejecting a corporeal economy rooted in the material relations of the plantocracy, the text advocates harnessing the reproductive capacity of black bodies and black land in order to generate surplus value.

Reuel’s penetrating gaze marks the land as ripe. He notes that the labels “assigned” to the region by European interlopers are inaccurate; the landscape is legible to him in a different, and more authentic, way. But his is also a colonial gaze: he scans the land noting its profitability and bemoans the indigenous population’s lack of productivity—all that “waste of material” (565). His may not be a racialized gaze, but it is a capitalist one. Unlike the European colonizer, Reuel is capable of seeing and *assigning* value to a region that has been deemed superfluous. His schema of valuation is synchronous with the natural environment’s intrinsic worth. This “uninhabitable” region will, given the proper cultivation, produce a surplus that has both an exchange and a use value. A similar dynamic around valuation emerges in George Schuyler’s *Black Empire* serials.⁴³ Here also we have an African American vanguard with a unique skill set that allows for the exploitation of African landscape (and labor) in the service of the diaspora. Reuel like Schuyler’s Dr. Belsidus has a certain kinship with the “natives,” but is not one of them. Reuel occupies a third space, and it is his “American common sense” that

⁴² See Mbembe’s “Aesthetics of Superfluity.”

⁴³ Published in *The Pittsburgh Courier* between November 1936 and April 1938.

enables him to see the land's potential. This ambivalence around nationality is not resolved at the work's end and points again towards Du Bois's theory of "double consciousness." Even though "Reuel cursed with a mighty curse the bond that bound him to the white race of his native land," it is not possible to sever this bond completely (594). Neither does it seem a favorable course of action. This is, as Brent Edwards notes, a textual occurrence that demands closer observation because it runs counter to expressly stated aims (*The Practice of Diaspora* 32). In this instance of diasporic practice we see a hesitation to renounce American identity. What the text instead advocates is an embrace of "racial globality" that is foregrounded in a keen sense of Americanness (Bain 940). The rhetoric conceals a desire for full and equal inclusion in the American body politic within a black (inter)nationalist guise.

Reevaluation of black geographies and black corporeality is a hallmark of the black fantastic text. The impenetrability of the landscape to those who are not indigenous to the region—Reuel observes that a "loathsome desert" forecloses access—evokes the utopian qualities of this "paradise." Like the beautiful Candace, "virgin queen [of Meroe] who awaits the coming of Ergamenes to inaugurate a dynasty of kings," the territory Reuel discovers is an untapped resource outside the system of exchange (561). Candace is priceless, but oddly interchangeable. Every fifteen years the reigning queen selects a new Candace from the pool of virgins that reside in the inner city (561). The hidden nature of these riches, and the fact that Reuel alone possesses the key to unlocking them, disrupts the prevailing economy of blackness. Rather than a blackness that has as Lindon Barrett writes, a double relation to value, we see a topology of blackness that is grounded in use

—and not exchange-value.⁴⁴ Hopkins sought to make Africa, and particularly Ethiopia, legible to her audience. By providing a counternarrative to the colonialist and racist representations of the continent, and in many instances using the white characters in the text to affirm this knowledge, she deliberately blurs the line between fiction and reality. Hopkins harnesses the fantastic in order to reread the black body and the Ethiopian landscape disrupting, in the process, a debasing schema of valuation (Barrett 220).

2.4 A Practice of Diaspora

A fantastic narrative mode allows Hopkins to disseminate black internationalist discourse in an easily digestible format. This technique is replicated thirty-years later by George Schuyler in *Black Empire* and suggests a symbiotic relationship between the black fantastic and Pan-Africanist ideology. But it is the publication of Hopkins' *Of One Blood* and Schuyler's *Black Empire*, in black presses, that links the production of space and the *disarticulation of scale* to the condition of the text's production and consumption. Hopkins and Schuyler sought to radicalize their readership by offering a “fictional response” to a domestic racial crisis mirrored, in both cases, by conflict between Ethiopia and the West (Carby xlv). The authors saw a unique opportunity to galvanize their readership, increase their subscription rolls, and redirect black American anxiety. Hopkins, Schuyler (and Du Bois in *Dark Princess*) were engaged, as Brent Edwards puts it, in a “practice of diaspora.” Edwards observes that it is in the spaces of “disarticulation,” those places where textual or cultural narratives fall short, that diaspora is practiced. He terms this “decalage”—a process of interrupted motility that,

⁴⁴ Barrett, Lindon. *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

paradoxically, makes movement possible (15). "The joint," he writes, "is a curious place, as it is both the point of separation ... and the point of linkage ... [and] decalage in providing a model for what resists or escapes translation ... alludes to this strange "two-ness" of the joint" (15). We return again to "two-ness," that doubling which is at the center of any discourse on blackness. The dual nature of the joint and the split consciousness of the African American subject point to new ways of understanding, first, the role of the fantastic in African American literature and, second, the interrelationship between fantasy and pan-Africanism.

Edwards argues that, "[diasporic projects/identities] can never be definitive: they are always *prosthetic*. In this sense ... disarticulation ... must be considered a necessary haunting" (14). Places in the text where the narrative fails to cohere, or where the author appears to be doing "too much," are significant. These sites reveal something about the reading public's fears and desires. They contain "the outlines of some deeper and vaster narrative moment in which [black people] ... anxiously interrogate their fate, and explore it with hope or dread" (Jameson 148). Examining the historical context of the serial's production and consumption can excavate this moment. For Hopkins, the moment of crisis reflects the irony of expanded American influence in the Western hemisphere and the annihilation of racially egalitarian spaces at home (Davis 117). For George Schuyler, it is a period marked by the instability of global military turmoil and the hypocrisy of fighting against European fascism while facing second-class citizenship at home. Insofar as a "narrative crisis is about the reinsertion of time into space," these diasporic "effects" are about the production of space through the manipulation of time (Kenyon 172). Like "decalage," the fantastic is a narrative response to a spatial crisis that pivots on the

suturing of asynchronous temporalities (Edwards 15). Hopkins' aim is the "altering [of] existing spatial morphologies as a means of emancipating time" and the converse—the altering of existing temporal protocols as a means of emancipating space (Lefebvre 49). *Of One Blood*, then, creates its own geography by *disabling time*.

The production of a new geography is linked to the texture of the narrative landscape and the surplus corporeality of the black subject. The suturing of body to landscape allows for the reformulation of black corporeality and black identity according to a racial logic that looks beyond the nation state. The social and biological reproductive capacity of the African state "defamiliarize[s] and restructure[s]" the temporality of the "present" in *Of One Blood* (Jameson 151). By alienating the reader from the everyday and the ordinary, the fantastic creates psychic space for the reexamination of the present. As a discourse of black internationalism, the fantastic makes Africa legible and available to the African American reading public. The walled city of Meroe exists outside of Western time. It is curiously anachronistic, a self-contained civilization that possesses both the material riches of antiquity and a futuristic potential. Shielded from the intrusions of the Western world, the Ethiopians Reuel encounters in Meroe are oblivious to the meaning of blackness outside the borders of their state. Reuel fills them in, giving "in minutest detail the story of the Negro, reciting with dramatic effect, the history of the wrongs endured by the modern Ethiopian" (560).⁴⁵ The shuttling back and forth between these two temporal frameworks—the "real time" of the narrative and the timelessness that

⁴⁵ At times it becomes difficult for the text to maintain a distinction between the Ethiopians who reside in the walled kingdom and the Ethiopians who live in the New World (African Americans). Hopkins resolves this by referring to African Americans as "modern Ethiopians" (Hopkins 560, Gillman 35).

characterizes Ethiopian antiquity and futurology, produces spatiotemporal gaps that account for Dianthe's trances and Reuel's mesmeric vision. The "black time" of the text is the "occult" temporality of black internationalism that refuses distinction between past, present, and future (Gillman 201).⁴⁶

Dianthe, Reuel's fiancé—and we learn by the narrative's end his sister, experiences powerful trances that resemble a semi-comatose state. These episodes have amnesiac aftereffects and can be read as a desire to escape the trappings of "hyperembodiment" (Berlant 114). Whereas the ability to conceal the body functions as a marker of white male privilege, the black female suffers from an excess of body (Berlant 114). Berlant describes this as "a peculiar dialectic between embodiment and abstraction" that posits certain subjects as possessing illegitimate claims to citizenship (112). Dianthe's spells facilitate her passing from this world into the next and neutralize her racial identity.⁴⁷ Interestingly it is musicality that helps her to retrieve her heritage. Dianthe's singing draws an auditory map of her racial history. The tactility of the aural, its ability to rupture normative modes of understanding space and time, links Dianthe to

⁴⁶ A Reference to Bonnie J. Barthold's *Black Time*. See also Christol (168-9).

⁴⁷ It is interesting to note that this sort of corporeal experience is a recurring theme in twentieth-century African American fiction. Sometimes the corporeal burden of blackness becomes too much for the subject to bear and s/he "checks out" by losing consciousness. By way of example, see Richard Wright's *The Long Dream* and Fishbelly Tucker's ubiquitous fainting spells, Morrison's *Beloved*, Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills*, and Octavia Butler's *Fledgling*.

both her past and her future (225).⁴⁸ “Fainting,” gives her “relief from the body she has” and from the heavy weight of ancestral knowledge (Berlant 111).

Dianthe’s “veiled existence,” an occlusion that is conjoined to her vocal talents, is symbolic of the extent to which she has been kept in the dark about her identity, her family tree, and black history. The realization that she can “see much clearly, much dimly ... the powers and influences behind the Veil, and yet I cannot name them,” indicates her proximity to, and distance from, this past (475). Dianthe cannot name what it is that ails her but she can feel it, and this “dis-ease” manifests in her amnesiac nighttime strolls.⁴⁹ Dianthe's vocal performances transfer this dis-ease to her listeners, but in a manner that thrills. Her haunting voice penetrates the psyches of the white audience. Singing is an act of transference that for a fleeting moment turns the burden of the nation’s complex racial history into a shared one. The audience is titillated and horrified, calling our attention as readers to the politics of racial performance.⁵⁰ It is proximity to an unadulterated blackness--coming as it does from a safe remove --that renders the choir's performance of the spirituals so extraordinary for the white audience.

The old abolitionists in the vast audience felt the blood leave their faces beneath the stress of emotion [...] There fell a voice upon the listening ear, in celestial showers of silver that passed all conceptions, all comparisons, all dreams; a voice

⁴⁸ I take this topic up in some detail in the final chapter of this dissertation when discussing the fantastic as a discourse of aurality in James Baldwin’s and Ralph Ellison's short works. As a discourse of black internationalism the fantastic may, but does not always necessarily, smuggle along with it an aural component.

⁴⁹ Ellison’s *Invisible Man* reminds us that, “there are few things in the world as dangerous as sleepwalkers” (8). In somnambulism, there is resistance.

⁵⁰ See Daphne Brooks' *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom* for an extended treatment of this topic.

beyond belief—a great soprano of unimaginable beauty, soaring heavenward in mighty intervals [...] Some of the women in the audience wept; there was the distinct echo of a sob in the deathly quiet which gave tribute to the power of genius. Spell-bound they sat beneath the outpoured anguish of a suffering soul. All the horror, the degradation from which a race had been delivered were in the pleading strains of the singer's voice. It strained the senses almost beyond endurance. (455 italics added)

The shared cultural intimacy that racism sought to deny is placed up front and center. At the same time there is something unseemly, even parasitic, in the nature of this exchange. The toll this performance takes on Dianthe is massive. Later in the evening she is found wandering in the woods behind the Livingston estate. By the morning, she is in a catatonic state that mimics death.

The conclusion of *Of One Blood* is abrupt—Dianthe and Aubrey Livingstone both perish.⁵¹ Reuel returns to rule Meroe as King Ergamenes with old Aunt Hannah in tow. The spirit of Mira, the reader is told, has finally been laid to rest.⁵² After drinking the poison she concocted for Aubrey, Dianthe begins a slow descent into death. Her departure from the material world is physically painful but spiritually cathartic. The final sound she utters is “a wild scream of joy,” that captures perfectly the imbricated nature of terror and desire (616). Dianthe's death is a homecoming. The “pageantry” that surrounds her final moments is an elegiac testimony to the tragic nature of her life—a life that has

⁵¹ The former imbibes poison and the latter commits suicide. In a complicated incestuous twist it is revealed that all three (Reuel, Dianthe, Aubrey) are Mira's children. Both men, then, have been lusting after their sister. Reuel because he has been away on his African expedition has not had a chance to consummate this relationship and is free from taint. Dianthe and Aubrey, however, must die.

⁵² Mira's traces and Dianthe's singing voice are linked. Mother and daughter engage in a collaborative act of storytelling across time. Achille Mbembe refers to this cross-temporality as “contemporaneity” in *On the Postcolony* (5).

been fated by the sins of white forefathers. She expires to the accompaniment of a full orchestra that is orgiastic in its power:

“Louder it grew, first in low and wailing notes, then swelling, pealing through arch and corridor in mighty diapson, until the very notes of different instruments rang out as from a vast orchestra ... the muffled drum with awful beat precise, the rolling kettle and the crashing cymbals, kept time to sounds like tramping of a vast but viewless army. Nearer they came. The dull, deep beat of failing feet—in the hall—up the stairs. Louder it came and louder. Louder and yet more loud the music swelled to thunder! The *unseen mass* must have been the *disembodied* souls of every age since Time began ... It was the welcome of ancient Ethiopia to her dying daughter of the royal line.” (614-615 italics added).⁵³

The phantasmagoric music invades the Livingston estate, the village, Dianthe’s soul, and in its final throes bridges the spatiotemporal gap between Dianthe and her ancestors. As it reaches a crescendo and dissipates into the corridors of her mind, the music brings to life the “unseen mass[es]” and “disembodied souls” that perished in the transatlantic slave trade” (Hopkins 615, Christol 167). The music is layered, the pervasive nature of its force—it is heard everywhere and has been present throughout Time immemorial—embodies both a certain moral rectitude and a punitive capacity. The music is already inside Dianthe. Now that she has been empowered with the knowledge of her familial history, Dianthe can channel the anthropomorphized power of musicality to claim her place in “ancient Ethiopia [as the] dying daughter of the royal line” (615). If, as Fred Moten writes, the chain of signifiers that links speech to scream to sound conceals a narrative of origins, Dianthe’s “wild scream of joy,” Jim Titus’s anguished cries of pain, and Mira’s apparition, “distur[b] a radical separation of time and space, a separation aim[ed] at plenary designations of presence and absence” (Moten 22, Hopkins 616,

⁵³ “[I]n its close and staggering overpopulation, the present moment ... becomes spatial” (Barett 215).

Barrett 221,). The scream is the “antinomian third moment of a dialectic seeking to refuse [black subjectivity]” that reveals “an Other acknowledgement of space and time” (Barrett 220, 225). The arability of the sonic, then, conjures ghosts who remake physical and corporeal landscapes according to Pan-Africanist logic.

Dianthe's singing takes her *beyond corporeality* into a mystic, and wholly fantastic space. The move beyond the body calls Dianthe's humanity and mortality into question. If Dianthe's passing paves the way for the birth of a new Pan-Africanist civilization, this is due to the ways in which, in death, she sublimates the corporeal anxieties of a social order informed by miscegenation. Dianthe lives on in the "cosmology" of the black diaspora (Christol 168). Her suffering obliterates the distance between Africa and America and opens up textual space for the resolution of an ontological crisis that is at once domestic and international. I propose that the aftereffects of Dianthe's singing voice resemble in many ways the real life implications of the 1896 Battle of Adowa between Italy and Ethiopia.

In 1885, Africa was carved up by the European powers. Article 34 of the General Act of Berlin delegated spheres of influence, protectorates, and colonies (Rubenson 244, 281-2). Two pieces of the continent remained untouched—Liberia, a colony founded by African American freedmen and women, and the ancient kingdom of Abyssinia. The Abyssinian empire (in its modern day iteration, Ethiopia) has long been a symbol of black liberty. The 1896 war between Italy and Ethiopia originated over the mistranslation of one word in a bilingual treaty. The *Treaty of Uccialli* was signed in 1889 in both Amharic and Italian. It recognized Italy's holdings in Somalia and Sudan, outlining the borders of these regions (Rubenson 243-5). The disagreement stemmed over a short

phrase that had profound ramifications in translation. Teserra Kifetew, a scholar of Ethiopian history, had the following to say about the Ethiopian version of the treaty:

The Amharic text says that the Ethiopian Government "CAN" use Italy's good offices to conduct relations with other governments, but the Italian text, substituting "SHOULD" for "CAN," made it look mandatory for Ethiopia to use Italy's good offices, in effect putting Ethiopia's foreign relations under Italy's control. Upon noticing the discrepancy and Italy's declaration to other European powers that Ethiopia had been made an Italian protectorate by the treaty, Menelik protested and repudiated the treaty, and declared to the world that Ethiopia, a sovereign state, was no protectorate of any other state. The war of words was soon followed by an Italian invasion of northern Ethiopia.⁵⁴

Some scholars believe the Italian emissary deliberately altered the language in the Italian version so it would indicate Emperor Menelek II had agreed to protectorate status (Rubenson 264). Nevertheless, events may not have come to a head in 1896 had Menelek not contacted Queen Victoria about attending her coronation (Rubenson 246).⁵⁵ The British Crown in turn asked the Italian government why, if Ethiopia was under Italian rule, Menelek's correspondence was not passing through Italy. An outraged Menelik demanded a retraction. Italy refused resulting in war and an Italian defeat at Adowa (Rubenson 247-51).

Hopkins found a great deal of symbolic relevance in the Ethiopian victory.⁵⁶ In December 1900, *The Colored American* featured a detailed profile of Emperor Menelik

⁵⁴ Interview with Teserra Kifetew in June 2010.

⁵⁵ See also J.E. Casely Hayford's *Ethiopia Unbound*.

⁵⁶ Of Ethiopian symbolism, Robin D.G. Kelley writes, "Because the Bible, not the specifics of our lineage or heritage, framed most nineteenth-century black conceptions of national destiny, Ethiopia took on greater importance than any other nation or region of Africa ... black people the world over considered it the cradle of civilization" (20). E.U. Essien-Udom, meanwhile, refers to Ethiopia as "a metaphysical black heaven" (*Ethiopia Unbound* xxiv).

II, noting in particular his “ebony black” skin and “great and glorious ancest[ry]” (Hamedoe 153, 149). The article praised Menelik for his victory over Italy, taking enormous pride in “a Negro army, managed and fought by this almost unknown King that humiliated one of the first powers of the world” (151). At the same time, S.E.F.C.C. Hamedoe’s depictions of the emperor and the Ethiopian landscape reflect the ambivalent nature of Ethiopianist ideology. The Ethiopia Hamedoe presents is fetishized—a mythical, powerful and, like Hopkins’s Meroe, decidedly anti-modern state. A place and a people about which, “many travellers have told curious stories ... some parts forbidden, other parts accessible, but [with] people hospitable and valiant” (150). The article makes Ethiopia legible to the audience by using familiar colonialist tropes. The people are noble and the landscape forbidding and mystical.

Mainstream (Anglo) coverage of the 1896 Italian-Ethiopian war, replicates certain aspects of the Hamedoe article. *The New York Times*, for example, presents Menelek as a savage warrior and mystical figure. Headlines in large block print bemoaned “Italy’s Terrible Defeat” emphasizing the wild and mountainous nature of the Ethiopian terrain and the primitivism of its inhabitants.⁵⁷ The conflation between the persona of the Ethiopian emperor and the natural environs is visible in both white and black presses. White presses, however, also warned of a coming black invasion--of the threat that Africans (and implicitly black Americans) posed to civilization. The extensive coverage of the war and its immediate aftermath reflects the scale of the Italian loss. On March 8,

⁵⁷ The March 4, 1896 *New York Times* headline reads: “Italy’s Terrible Defeat: Three Thousand Men Killed, Sixty Guns and All Provisions Lost ... Persistent Rumor of Ministry’s Fall” (p. 5).

The New York Times reported an enraged and humiliated populace had brought Italy's government to its knees. Even the pope weighed in to decry the hubris of generals who exposed Italy to this disgraceful misadventure. Three weeks later another headline described the flight of Italian reservists to France and the forced resignation of the Italian general.⁵⁸ The Ethiopian military victory disrupted the preexisting narrative of white supremacy leaving journalists with a peculiar dilemma: "blacken" Italy or deracinate Menelek and Ethiopia.⁵⁹

The Battle of Adowa resonated deeply with the black American reading public (in the same way Emperor Haile Selassie's defeat thirty years later would capture the attention of the racial community).⁶⁰ Since Ethiopia stood as a symbol of black civilization, the kingdom's military exploits reverberated across the diaspora.⁶¹ The

⁵⁸ March 8, 1896: "Crispi Disclaims Responsibility for the Disaster and the Reserves Refuse to Fight."

An April 19, 1896 article, "Africa and History," noted that, "The [Italian-Ethiopian] battle is a bit of weighty evidence as to a coming change in the struggle between the white and the colored races" (p. 30).

⁵⁹ I am reminded here of what Bhabha terms the "ambivalence" of colonialist discourse—such rhetoric is always and already calling attention to the cracks in its firmament (86).

⁶⁰ One has only to examine the black presses during the critical interwar years to understand the depth of black American psychic investment in Haile Selassie's regime. *The Pittsburgh Courier's* headlines, editorial pages, and weekly columns are filled with news of, and reaction to, the conflict. In a fascinating footnote, Joseph Harris notes that the fervor of sentiment led to hostilities between Harlemites and Italian Americans in New York City (*African-American Reactions to War in Ethiopia, 1936-1941*). In this instance, the conflict reverberated in a very real and measurable sense domestically.

⁶¹ Ethiopia appears in nineteenth century African American literature as a metonym for black civilization. The "Ethiop," is synonymous with both the individual African American subject and the diasporic population. Priscilla Johnson's turn of the century poem, "Ethiopia Lays," for example, calls upon African Americans to "rise in union great

mythology surrounding Ethiopia insured that the region occupied an outsized role in the black New World imaginary. Ethiopianist discourse reorients geography, suturing the African continent to American shores. Narrative in other words produces imaginative, cultural, and territorial space by holding out the promise of a black utopia. Yet even within the context of a utopian framework, the narrative is aware of its limitations. *Of One Blood* concludes with a portentous warning that Ethiopia will soon fall into European hands if readers do not join the mythical Reuel in marrying African American aspirations to those of continental Africans.⁶² That Hopkins and Schuyler chose Ethiopia as the setting for their geopolitical melodramas, in the advent of Italian-Ethiopian military conflicts, is significant. In the introduction to the Schomburg edition of the novel, Hazel Carby observes that the first Pan-African conference convened in London, a few months before *The Colored American Magazine's* inaugural issue (xlv). Given the journal's stated mission to serve as a medium for the "perpetuation of a history of the Negro race" that would spur "the old to higher achievements [and] the young to emulate their example," it was important to the magazine's editors to link the political to the popular. The eclectic nature of *The Colored American's* content speaks to the complex nature of the journal's liberationist project. Where and how to draw the boundaries of the

and strong ... And form a nation of thine own." Johnson's poem uses the term "black brother" and "Ethiop" interchangeably. In calling for black people to found "a nation of thine own," the stanza references a Pan-Africanist notion of black identity.

⁶² "[Reuel] spends his days in teaching his people all that he has learned in years of contact with modern culture. United to Candace, his days glide peacefully by in good works; but the shadows of great sins darken his life, and the memory of past joys is ever with him. He views, too, with serious apprehension, the advance of mighty nations penetrating the dark, mysterious forces of his native land. "Where will it stop?" he sadly questions. "What will the end be?" (621).

black nation, which atrocities to rally around and which victories to highlight, plays out in the careful selection of subject matter. The 1896 Italian-Ethiopian conflict and the First Pan-African Conference that followed supply the historical framework for *Of One Blood*.⁶³ Hopkins's narrative channels the fantastic nature of a black nation's military victory over a European power-- an event marvelous in the potential it harbored to rupture global white supremacist discourse.

The dust up over the *Treaty of Uccialli* is no less fantastic than the fictional exploits of Schuyler's Dr. Belsidus (in the *Black Empire* serials). The mistranslation of the treaty, deliberately or not, reveals the power of narrative. Italy's misstep enters the historical record as an accident of translation. In Chapter One of this dissertation I cite critical geographer Neil Smith who observes that, "political liberation requires spatial access" (60). It is no coincidence that Hopkins's Pan-Africanist text emerges at a crucial historical juncture that saw the annihilation of black political, social and civic space in the United States and the destruction of black cultural space on the African continent. Hopkins's novel is simultaneously a response to the untenable social situation in post-Reconstruction America and an anti-colonial tract that solicits black American psychic investment in the exploitation of Africa. *Of One Blood*, in other words, pivots on the centrality of scale to the production of black subjectivity. Because if as Eric Sunquist writes, the "hidden self" is a metaphor for the metaphysical and genealogical connection black Americans have with Africa, the turning of the inside out obliterates the distance

⁶³ See Sundquist's *To Wake the Nations*.

between self and other and the geographical distance between continents (570).⁶⁴ The fantastic emerges, then, in the uncanny moment when Reuel realizes that his Africanity is stamped into his flesh—not that is in a defamed black corporeality, but in an epidermal inscription that changes forever his relationship to the land of his birth.⁶⁵ The “chronotope” of the black fantastic serves as the condition of possibility for the production of a counternarrative that moves beyond the pages of Hopkins’s serial to reorder the social relations that inform early twentieth-century black American life (Cornwell 69).

2.5 Flight to Freedom: The Virtues of Catharsis

I close with an example of the powerful way in which spatial practices can reorganize the marginalized subject’s relationship to her environment. As I note in the introduction to this dissertation, it is when we acknowledge the body’s centrality to the production of social relations that it becomes possible to transform those relations. It is an act of resistance to move the body according to a corporeal logic that defies the dominant order. Scholars have written about bodily transgression, through performance, during the

⁶⁴ It is important to note that there are several instances in the text when Reuel bridges the gap between Africa and America through his mesmeric vision. His psychic acuity reveals this geographical distance to be a function of the imaginary. Reuel hears Dianthe’s screams across the Atlantic Ocean despite a temporal breach (he is able to look across the ocean and into the past). Reuel’s fantastic vision, the catalyst for which is--like in Delany’s *Blake*—a condition of extreme psychic and corporeal distress, eradicates geographical space in lieu of the production of cultural space.

⁶⁵ See Priscilla Wald’s discussion of the uncanny in *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form*.

tortuous Middle Passage.⁶⁶ Their research shows that dance created a provisional space of solace for the enslaved-one that sought to remedy the barbarism of captivity:

One of the most striking images of the Middle Passage is the tight-packing of the slave ships ... The beginning of African American culture is not to be sought in the image of tight-packing, he [Wilson Harris] argued, but rather in the few moments and marginally *expanded space* on the deck (under the watchful eye of the crew),⁶⁷ where the African captives replicated their physical contortions in dance ... [a] philosophy defined by what Homi Bhabha calls the space in between. (“The Middle Passage between History and Fiction: Introductory Remarks” 7 italics added)⁶⁸

The” tight-packing” of the ships is indeed one of the more horrifying pictorial legacies of the slave trade. The images are haunting, fantastic even, in their inhumanity. The meticulous placement of so many bodies, pressed and layered against one another evokes the role synchronicity played as a stratagem of survival. The images also serve as a reminder that the denial of space marks the transition from subject to object. The fantastic provides an opportunity to revisit and rewrite the logic that equates blackness with spatial

⁶⁶ Of course the captives did not know where they headed or what would happen to them. The conditions under which they were held—extreme corporeal and psychic deprivation, coupled with the memory of loss, framed their understanding of space and time. This boundlessness heightened the significance of corporeal strategies of resistance and spatial production. Such maneuvers remade space on a vast and ontological scale.

⁶⁷ Performance paves the way for a rebirth that defies the normative “optics of race” (Weinbaum 20). In a similar fashion, Maurice Wallace describes the “cool pose” as a strategy for the production of a new body: “The figure who poses ... “once [he feels himself] observed ... instantaneously makes another body for [himself]”” (47).

⁶⁸ *Black Imagination and the Middle Passage* edited by Maria Deidrich, Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Carl Pedersen.

containment. It is a way “to exempt the text from the action of the law, and thereby to transgress that law”(Todorov 159). The legacy of the transatlantic slave trade is visible today in the hundreds of thousands of black bodies warehoused in prisons across the country. It also manifests in more mundane forms—in tactics of avoidance that are a response to driving or walking while black—in the eradication, that is, of social spaces black subjects can safely inhabit. The destruction of space is a mode of insuring the impossibility of social reproduction for the subaltern. In much the same way that the lack of physical space on the ship served as the outward manifestation of the condition of social death, the production of space through dance was as Wilson Harris notes a radical performance of survival. The “physical contortions in dance” allowed the captives to assert a limited corporeal autonomy and illustrate the complex relationship between having a space in which the body—and subject—can just be and social privilege (7).

The captives’ dance is solicited by the slavers and occurs under the purview of the white gaze (7). The spatiovisual dynamic conforms to Pratt’s observation that there is an elision between what is “seen” and the production of “scene” (120). The “fantastic as therapy,” to borrow from Christol, mimics this process (169). The fantastic text is produced under the scope of the dominant society’s gaze. The slavers misread the physical contortions of the enslaved. They are unaware that affording the captives time and space for bodily expression fosters agency. In a similar fashion, the black fantastic narrative disrupts the dominant order while appearing to conform to its standards. The dances of African captives on the deck of the ship may have amused slavers, but they also allowed for cultural continuity (“The Middle Passage between History and Fiction: Introductory Remarks” 7-9). Dance facilitated the reclamation of space through a process

that deliberately blurred the boundary between corporeal and material articulations of space. The “marginally expanded space on deck” is in actuality a *production of space* at multiple scales (7). This is highly significant because it presented, albeit temporarily, the possibility of social reproduction for the enslaved. The dance suspends time by returning the performers to the African continent. In manipulating time it expands corporeal space, cultural space, performative space, and even a nascent political space for those captured. What it does, in sum then, is to produce a public sphere for those whose captivity marked their transformation from autonomous beings to private property. Hopkins’s fantastic serial in the pages of *The Colored American* achieves a similar effect: the expansion of psychic, cultural, and ultimately political space for the black reading public. The journal transformed an act of leisure—one that had always been for African Americans a declaration of humanity—into a political milieu.

Hopkins believed in the “cathartic virtue” of fiction (Carby xlvi). She felt *The Colored American* had a special role to play in the everyday lives of black folk. If silence perpetuates trauma, recounting the traumatic event is a way of rehearsing the horror, of revisiting an unspeakable place and time so that it becomes possible to move forward, to *inhabit time* in a new way (Christol 170). To re-visit trauma through narration is to violate a spatial and temporal protocol that insists on the primacy of the present.⁶⁹ Narration with, as Dori Laub writes, a sympathetic and active listener present—who shares the burden--relieves the victim of trauma from the “contemporaneousness” of the

⁶⁹ Christol conceives of “the supernatural as both a figurative and actual means to achieve reunion with the past, and a way of coming to terms with a collective and personal history that might lead to a different tomorrow” (172).

originary event (Laub 58, Mbembe 5). The abject figure, then, becomes the “archetypal holder of time” rewriting space and recalibrating history (Barthold 23, Christol 172). The black fantastic serial transforms readers into the “empathetic listener[s]” Laub writes of through a ritual of interpellation that negates the spatial and temporal protocols of a white supremacist society (57-8). Given the tangled history of white American consumption of black American cultural production this is no small achievement. The fantastic text evades the “politics of pleasure” that pivot on the “parasitic relation[s]” between white and black (Reid-Pharr page 119, Hartman 21). Under the purview of the dominant society’s gaze, Hopkins’s readers—like the captives on the slave ship— transform textual space into an interior knowledge that in defying “Western conceptions of time and reality” inaugurates a new black political subject (Smith 60, Christol 168).

The Black Metropolis and the Black Fantastic

Rudolph Fisher's short story, "City of Refuge," depicts the fantastic effects of the northern city on the psyche of the southern black migrant. Published in Alain Locke's *New Negro* anthology, Fisher's story captures the awe inducing sights, sounds, and smells of the modern American city.¹ The migrant's sensory acuity grounds the experience of urbanity. Harlem, that spectacular "city within a city" promises a certain freedom from the corporeal restraints of southern racial terror (Du Bois 5). "In Harlem," Fisher's protagonist notes, "black was white. You had rights that could not be denied you; you had privileges, protected by law" (58). By the story's end, King Solomon Gillis discovers he is wrong and that Harlem is no black utopia. Here, as in the South, there are those whose survival depends upon the subjugation of blacks, but in the North such persons often possess black skin. The visual coding of the space of Harlem as a city of refuge—"Negroes at every turn . . . big, lanky Negroes, short, squat Negroes; black ones, brown ones, yellow ones"—is juxtaposed against atonal noises that meld body and city in an asynchronous logic (57). These foreign noises excite and disturb King Solomon Gillis transforming the space of Harlem into an audiovisual landscape.² Gillis thrills in the fear that he will be swallowed up by the mechanized nature of urban life—an automaton among other automatons--"jammed together with other helpless lumps of dirt, swept

¹ See Farah Jasmine Griffin's discussion of Fisher's story in *Who Set You Flowin'?*.

² The cacophony of urban living shocks King Solomon Gillis: "Shuffle of a thousand shoes, clatter of a thousand heels, innumerable echoes. Crackling rifle-shots—no, snapping turnstiles [...] Distant thunder, nearing. The screeching onslaught of the fiery hosts of hell, headlong, breath-taking [...] Heat, oppression, suffocation—eternity" (57).

blindly along for a time, and at last abruptly dumped” (57). In urban “disposability,” there is a perverse freedom that foretells of future dangers.³

In this chapter, I consider the relationship between the black fantastic and the black metropolis. The fantastic, I contend, is a discourse of urbanity that identifies the twinned and competing impulses of the northern (and Midwestern) metropolis. The city is a haven and a hell—a place that holds out the promise of freedom delivering instead economic deprivation and social alienation. The fantastic uncovers the harmful and regenerative aspects of urban living by exploring the relationship between spatial articulation and subject formation. The spatial constriction of the city is counter-intuitively both a function of, and a reprieve from, racist public policy. The texts I examine—Chester Himes’ *The Real Cool Killers*, Ann Petry’s *The Street*, and Gwendolyn Brooks’ *Maud Martha*--record the psychic effects of life in cramped quarters and segregated public spaces. The built environment of Himes’s and Petry’s novels — dilapidated buildings, neglected infrastructure—mirrors the devaluation of black life that is a governing principle of a racially discriminatory social order. Yet these authors, along with Brooks, identify in the symbiotic relationship between the black body and the city a potential for the recalibration of that order. The fantastic indexes the various ways in which the city forms and deforms black subjectivity. Deformation contains the possibility for the construction of a new self, unbound by the strictures of the hegemonic order, and an encoded vision for remaking the city in one’s image.

Brooks, Himes, and Petry identify urbanity as the structuring principle of a

³ Achille Mbembe notes that, “sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not” (“Necropolitics” 27).

particular mode of post-Emancipation black subjectivity. They depict the metropolis as the locus of psychosocial and material constructions of citizenship in the postwar era. Representations of the city in *The Street*, the Harlem Domestic series, and *Maud Martha* are ambivalent, specifically, because the postwar city calls for a new model of black subjectivity—one that acknowledges the dangers of itinerancy.⁴ In the wake of the Great Migration, two critical events occur: first, the social death experienced during slavery resurfaces in an urban modality; and second, the post-Reconstruction juridico-political structure begins to reproduce the black body in the city as a form of social space. The response to the plenitude of black corporeality and the phantasmagoria of black subjectivity is a laying down of roots. This black metropolis is consequentially transformed from a regenerative and redemptive place to a carceral space that “hems in” black migrants. Black authors respond to the collective cultural anxieties emerging out of these new social developments with complex representations of the city. Some portray the city as a phantasmagoric space, others represent it as a dystopic space, and still others describe it as a heterotopic space. In Chester Himes’s detective series, for example, Harlem wavers between a culturally rich space that fosters community and a crime-ridden dystopia. Ann Petry’s urban milieu is a nightmarish place that stifles the bodies and psyches of its inhabitants. While Gwendolyn Brooks’ *Maud Martha*, identifies the metropolis as a condition of possibility for imagining a more inclusive model of sociality.

The first part of the chapter interrogates the meaning of home in the black literary imaginary. Home and mobility are interconnected, and in fact in many black texts

⁴ Himes’s detective novels are also referred to as the Harlem Domestic series.

mobility is a practice of domesticity. Characters *on the move* search for freedom in new places, or find ways to modify existing spaces. Migrants searching for freedom in the North face the hardships of urban living, soon after their arrival, and they find themselves questioning whether the city truly offers greater social or corporeal mobility. Part two of the chapter explores both the Janus-faced nature of the urban environment and strategies for spatial production that empower black subjects and rearticulate the geography of the city. Part three includes close readings of Chester Himes' *The Real Cool Killers*, Ann Petry's *The Street*, and Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha*. Himes's work explores the effects of spatial constriction on identity formation in the raced urban environment, and Petry's novel foregrounds the experience of the black female in the northern city. Brooks' *Maud Martha* in addressing the psychic toll of persistent misrecognition reveals the exquisite pain of recreating the city in one's image.

“City of Refuge” captures the powerful ways in which Harlem resonates in early twentieth century black popular discourse. More important, Fisher's story identifies in the phantasmagoric aspects of the urban milieu liberatory possibilities for black subjects.⁵ This is to say that the fantastic as a discourse of urbanity narrativizes the complexities of black spatial occupation. By the work's end, King Solomon Gillis learns that the visual coding of Harlem as a black space camouflages the inner workings of a white superstructure that relies on black residents to do its bidding. The presence of brown

⁵ In the introduction to St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton's *Black Metropolis*—a two volume study of the history of Chicago and a title from which this work takes its name--Richard Wright notes that he “migrated to Chicago to seek *freedom*, life” (xvii italics added). Wright's is a simple statement that captures in its economical prose the profound link between mobility and the realization of, to borrow from Robin D.G. Kelley, “freedom dreams.”

bodies articulates an urban grid that facilitates the production of space, but does not necessarily offer salvation. This conflation of body and street suggests that Harlem is made legible through the refracted lens of black corporeality and its hyper-symbolic capacity. Narrative representations of Harlem, exploit the black body's propensity towards excess in order to rethink the city. The “facts of blackness,” as Maurice Wallace writes, “exceed the printed page” (796).

Coming to terms with the psychological and social effects of second-class citizenship in the urban environment is a principle theme in literature from the first half of the twentieth-century. Black migrants, who leave the terrors of the South behind for greater economic and social opportunity in the industrialized North, find themselves facing soul killing poverty and deeply entrenched racism.⁶ This racism, Farah Jasmine Griffin notes, is embedded in the articulation of urban space and even in the architectural construction of the built environment. The same power dynamics that inform black/white interactions in the Deep South are visible in the racialized demarcation of urban space. Himes, Petry, and Brooks interrogate spatial constriction by identifying urbanity as a discourse of the black fantastic. The phantasmagoric elements of their works attest to the complex and surreal relationships among the corporeal form, the modern city, and the production of racial discourse.

3.1 Trussed Up Like Gulliver: The Restriction of Black Mobility and the Construction of National Identity

Black American authors have long grappled with what it means to be homeward bound in their fiction. From nineteenth-century slave narratives to more contemporary

⁶ See Griffin's *Who Set You Flowin*, Drake's and Cayton's *Black Metropolis*, and W.E. B. Du Bois' *Philadelphia Negro*.

works like Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist*, or Danielle Evans' "Jellyfish," figurations of home are bound up with the politics of corporeality, mobility, and urbanity. Home looms large in the black imaginary because it is so closely affiliated with autonomy, sanctuary, security, and privacy—rights and privileges historically denied African Americans.⁷ Constructions of home lie at the intersection of social, cultural, political and legal norms that inform the relations between bodies and cities. In considering the relationship between the black fantastic and the metropolis, this chapter identifies raced corporeality as foundational to the production of social space. In so far as articulations of place are deeply interwoven with racial formations, spatiality is a critical tool for drawing distinctions between those persons afforded the full protection of the law and those whose mobility must be curtailed because their presence is perceived as a threat to the dominant order.⁸

Given the contemporary force of these matters, it might not be surprising to learn such practices have a long and ignoble history. As early as the seventeenth century, black codes restricted the mobility of Africans by criminalizing travel without permits, the ownership of property, and public gatherings (Harris 1718). These codes are notable because they isolate skin color as the sole determinant of whether or not one is afforded certain rights and privileges, in effect criminalizing black corporeality *prior to the advent*

⁷ Nineteenth century authors like Martin Delany and William Wells Brown were preoccupied with the construction of an inviolable black domestic space in their fiction. Because autonomy, security, and privacy were denied during slavery, in the wake of Emancipation, the domestic space is a crucial site for the production of racial discourse—it is the interface between the (black) body and the state.

⁸ Urban policing strategies designed to delimit the mobility of young males of color, for example, utilize racial profiling to inscribe new (and racially coded) urban geographies.

of chattel slavery. This critical chronology highlights the deep-seated nature of a national investment in the prohibition of black mobility. More important, it would suggest that spatial articulation (in the American context) has always been conjoined to the black body's "fungibility"— a "corporeal malediction" that reproduces the black body as a form of social space (Hartman 21, Fanon 111). Ralph Ellison has described this phenomenon, in a different context, as producing and constraining a metaphorical "Negro giant, who, lying trussed up like Gulliver, forms the stage and the scene upon which and within which the [whole of American life unfolds]" (*Shadow & Act* 46). Ellison observes that black Americans are necessary to ground American identity through their exclusion from notions of "proper" citizenship, in much the same way that black corporeality facilitates the ritualistic valuation of subjectivity. National identity, it follows, is incubated within and practiced upon the "shackled" body of the black American.

Spatial and psychic habitations are predicated on how the subject deciphers the built environment's semantic codes. The black American, however, faces the peculiar circumstance of possessing a body which functions as a mode of social space. Black authors, in turn, must negotiate the black body's capacity to produce and reproduce social space for some others. In order to resist such cooption and reform national identity, by advocating for social, political, and economic equality, some black writers destroy the black body as a means of destabilizing the social order. The destruction of the black body is an obliteration of its metonymic capacity and the first step towards the production of a new and more egalitarian social system.

To emphasize the annihilation of the body as a strategy for resistance is to invoke scalar consciousness. To the degree that space is modulated by scale, it is possible to

imagine the body, home, city, and nation existing along a spatial continuum. Violating the spatial order at any of these levels of habitation is a serious infraction. Struggles for control over the body are proxy territorial struggles with geopolitical implications. To this end, the hypersymbolic effects of black corporeality are a legacy of the transatlantic slave trade and Jim Crow (Hartman 21). The “bodily theft” that shapes the black New World experience echoes in narratives that situate claiming the space of the body as the first step towards claiming full and equal participation in the body politic (Spillers 67). At the same time, black American literature is haunted by competing claims of itinerancy and sanctuary: whether, that is, to make a claim for space on U.S. soil, or seek redress by moving the body elsewhere.

Saidiya Hartman describes the “gut-wrenching “urge to move experienced by freedmen and women as a response to the paradoxical “non-event of emancipation” (150). To move was to claim one's body as sovereign--separate from the aims and desires of whites and to move *far* was to exercise this right in its totality:

when former slaves received news of their freedom "everybody went wild [...] we was free [...] Nobody took our homes away, but right off colored folks started on the move. They seemed to want to get closer to freedom, so they'd know what it was-like it was a place or a city." [...] Instantiat[ing] being free [meant] the exercise of this nascent mobility. Locomotion was definitive of personal liberty [...] moving about [...] articulated the limits of emancipation and the constrained terms of agency. (150-151 emphasis added)

Many of those who traveled northward found that “freedom” in the black metropolis was fleeting, and that, like Fisher's King Solomon Gillis, their arrival heralded another--and more frenetic--type of incarceration. The pain of itinerancy surfaces in Himes', Brooks', and Petry's works as a persistent melancholia of placelessness. Himes's Harlem is a “city of the homeless” filled with “people [who] had deserted the South because it could never

be considered their home [but] had not found a home in the North [or] in America”
(*Cotton Comes to Harlem* 34-35).⁹

The linkages between urbanity and freedom have been explored in slave narratives, the literature of the Harlem Renaissance, protest literature, and postmodern black fiction for some time now.¹⁰ Indeed, there is a longstanding tradition in black literature of reproducing the city as a space with dual and competing meanings. The metropolis is a sanctuary that in the postbellum era *holds out* the promise of social and economic equity and a carceral space that, by the postwar period, is emblematic of the dominant society’s devaluation of black humanity.¹¹ In both instances, however, representations of the city are organically tied to the politics of black corporeality. The dominant place the city holds in the African American imaginary from the late nineteenth century onward is intricately linked to political and cultural expressions of freedom. If during slavery being northward bound signified moving “closer to freedom,” in late nineteenth and early twentieth century black literature, one begins to see a yearning for

⁹ Brooks tempers, and ultimately overcomes, this pessimism but Himes succumbs to it in spectacular form in the final installment of his detective series, the apocalyptic *Plan B*.

¹⁰ The nineteenth century slave narratives of Linda Brent and Henry Box Brown illustrate how taking control over the territory of one’s body paradoxically requires the surrender of one’s mobility. Box Brown mails himself to freedom in the North, nearly suffocating in the process. Brent conceals herself in her grandmother’s attic for several years. Confining her body within a nearly airtight space is the only means she has of protecting herself from sexual violation. In both instances, Brown and Brent must imprison themselves in order to assert their humanity.

¹¹ Nikhil Pal Singh writes that, "Domestically, the upheavals of wartime labor migrations further entrenched patterns of residential segregation. There was no greater strain on black migrants, and no more intense site of racial conflict, than the *struggle over urban space*, particularly housing. By the early 1940s blacks were already spatially isolated to a degree unprecedented in U.S. history" (106 emphasis added).

the pastoral that stands in contradistinction to the construction of the metropolis as a space of freedom in earlier narratives.¹² Narratives in this vein, recreate the black metropolis as a parasitical environment waiting to swallow whole, naive, Southern migrants who flock to cities in search of increased social and economic mobility. By the early forties, this trend evolves into the protest genre, with the construction of the city in Wright's *Native Son* and Petry's *The Street* as a wholly dystopic space.

Wright's contemporaries, Chester Himes and James Baldwin, are equally concerned with the city's toxic effects on the bodies and psyches of black inhabitants, but their portrayals are much more nuanced. Consider, for example, the way in which Baldwin's short story "Sonny's Blues," constructs performative spaces, and artistic production more generally, as containing regenerative possibilities.¹³ Though echoes of the past's historical traumas reverberate in the cultural productions of the present, such performances provide the best means for healing the collective psyche of the American public. In Baldwin's fiction, the urban social milieu is the only space in which this type of cultural exchange is possible. But it is Himes who more than any other postwar black writer is acutely aware of the black body's designation as social space. Himes's conflation of urban and corporeal landscapes, what in his detective fiction seems to be a symbiotic relationship between black bodies and Harlem's built environment, masks a meticulous strategy to disrupt dominant racial paradigms.

Charles Scruggs' *Sweet Home* examines the dual nature of the city in the fiction of Baldwin, Wright, Ellison and Toni Morrison. Scruggs is interested in the "invisible

¹² See Charles Scruggs' *Sweet Home*.

¹³ I take this topic up in the final chapter of this dissertation.

city,” or rather, the city as interiority. *Sweet Home* identifies the “unhomeliness” of the city as a central trope in the fiction of black writers.¹⁴ The pervading sense of melancholic loss that structures such works signals the futility of the quest for home necessitating a redefinition of the terms “home” and “homelessness.” Scruggs writes that the “novels [he has] been looking at recognize the need to “create a ... home that overcomes placelessness” (223). He finds that Baldwin and Morrison redefine “home” in their fiction as a communal space. This new definition pivots on the understanding that home is not so much about the preservation of the private, but about the embrace of intimacy—about the construction of a (provisional) sanctuary that subverts an oppressive social order. Scruggs, then, seeks a way out of the utopic/dystopic binary that would construct the city as either a place of redemption or a space of exploitation.

Scruggs notes in passing that Michel Foucault’s heterotopic model is useful for thinking through the relationship between black subjectivity and urbanity, but he glosses over what is so unique about the heterotopic construct—the fact that it presents the possibility of conflating corporeal and urban landscapes by refusing the distinction between psychic and physical demarcations of space.¹⁵ Foucault views heterotopias as “counter-sites” (2). Unlike utopias, heterotopias are “real” spaces constituted through the

¹⁴ Bhabha’s “unhomeliness” describes the sense of loss (estrangement) one feels upon the realization that “home” is unfamiliar. This “logic of reversal” is about the suturing of psychic history to political existence and about the location of the public in the private/private in the public (*Location of Culture* 9).

¹⁵ Scruggs writes, “the diversity of invisible cities in the Afro-American novel after the Civil Rights movement can perhaps be described by Michel Foucault’s term *heterotopia*: “the coexistence in an “impossible space” of a “large number of fragmentary possible worlds”” (284).

gravitational pull between the unrealized and the real. Heterotopias, Foucault observes, are like mirrors—the very act of cognitively mapping one’s location in any space, relies on the existence of some other space that orients one’s positionality even as it attests to the unfixed nature of that first location.

The mirror is after all a utopia, since it is a *placeless place*. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that *enables me to see myself there where I am absent*: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror *does exist in reality*, where it exerts a sort of *counteraction* on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, *I come back toward myself*; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: *it makes the place that I occupy at the moment when I look myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal.* (3 italics added)

I quote the passage in some length because the language itself reveals the unstable nature of this discourse. Where the utopia is a "placeless place," the heterotopia "exist[s] in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction" on the occupation of space (Foucault 3). So it is the dual nature of the heterotopia, its classification in the order of the real and the supranatural, that designates it as a boundless place and as a location with specific coordinates that can be mapped. The heterotopia fixes the subject in a given location, but in the very act of circumscribing his locale unmoors him from that psychospacial orientation. It is utopian and dystopian; here, everywhere, and nowhere; real and surreal all at the same time. In order to perceive (and to perceive is to gain access to) the heterotopic space, the black literary subject must reside in a virtual space of social death. To read the black metropolis as a heterotopic city is to embrace its paradox as a carceral

and redemptive space. The heterotopic city and subject evoke a present absence, a ghostly life on the margins in a space that is brutally real with respect to the psychic and physical well-being of inhabitants, and unreal in so far as the suffering that takes place in this zone is invisible to those on the outside whose lived experience very much depends on “conscious unawareness” of the daily horrors taking place *over there* (Varzi 126).¹⁶

3.2 “It’s the Skin We In:” Chester Himes’ Marginal Men

As early as 1915, sociologist Robert Park suggested we view the city as a living organism with a “moral as well as a physical organization” (578). Park was interested in the human ecology of cities: the ways in which cities are produced by their inhabitants, and in turn, the manner in which the subjectivities of urban dwellers are informed and deformed by their environment. Though Park stopped short of defining the city as “a state of mind,” he did view it as a “psychophysical mechanism,” what Elizabeth Grosz some eighty years late describes as the “mutually constitutive relations” between bodies and cities (Park 578; Grosz 108). Grosz proposes that bodies and cities are inextricably intertwined, that they constitute one organism. Though she is primarily concerned with gender constructs, Grosz's insights provide a radical opportunity for rethinking the relations between raced bodies and urban built environments. If the city is the “milieu in which corporeality is socially, sexually, [racially] and discursively produced,” such production takes place through the subject's navigation of the urban environment (Grosz 104). The process by which subjects cognitively map the space they inhabit is the same process that produces and reproduces their corporeality.

¹⁶ Spatial demarcations “define both a scene (where something takes place) and an *obscene* area to which everything that can not or may not happen on the scene is relegated” (Lefebvre 36).

Park believed that "some people who come to the city ... remain "marginal men"" (Scruggs 52). These urban subjects "occup[y] a space between two worlds" (Scruggs 52). To inhabit a "marginal" subject position is, according to Park, to possess double consciousness. It is to live within the offbeat, or "in the break" (Moten).¹⁷ Park's "marginal men" suffer a psychic ailment that impairs urban habitation. Yet as Ellison's *Invisible Man* teaches us, it is possible to live off the grid and experience psychic and corporeal freedom.¹⁸ The marginal subject, then, in straddling two worlds operates from a position of strength. In order to deconstruct the relationship between corporeality, urbanity, and subjectivity in the postwar fiction of black writers, it is necessary take into account the dense social, psychic, and economic ecosystem of the black metropolis. In the following section, I consider Chester Himes' badass black detectives, Coffin Ed Johnson and Gravedigger Jones, finding in their relationship to Harlem, its inhabitants, and one another a trace, of the fantastic.

The title of this section of the chapter, "It's the Skin We In," is taken from John Jackson's compelling ethnography of a rapidly gentrifying 1990s Harlem. *Harlemworld*, a rich inquiry into the relationship between race and place, deconstructs how people "live" Harlem and questions what that might indicate about the intersectional nature of

¹⁷ Taken from the title of Fred Moten's work: *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*

¹⁸ "The joke, of course," the *Invisible Man* notes, "is that I don't live in Harlem but in a border area. Several years ago before I discovered the advantages of being invisible I went through the routine process of buying their service and paying their outrageous rates...Now, aware of my invisibility, I live rent-free in a building rented strictly to whites, in a section of the basement that was shut off and forgotten during the nineteenth century" (5-6). The *Invisible Man*'s exclusion "in a border area" that is actually an interior location highlights the black subject's centrality to the production of mainstream "whites only" cultural and physical spaces.

identity. Because Harlem has been a privileged site for the production of blackness in an aesthetic and political sense for over a century, Harlem means different things to different people. Jackson's desire to make sense of the lived experience of blackness in, and beyond, the space of Harlem, leads him to excavate the link between the geographical and the psychic.¹⁹ Harlem is boundless and spatially circumscribed; it is both a state of mind—a spatialization of a collective fantasy that reproduces a set of social relations—and an actual place. “Harlemworld” transcends time by invoking Pan Africanist historiography, and reorients geography by redefining political economies of scale. In this framework, Harlem is sutured to the African continent, and the trauma of the Middle Passage is subordinated in a narrative of repatriation—a construction that refers simultaneously to a moment in time and a locative site.²⁰

Harlem's synecdochic function in the black cultural imaginary renders it ripe for a particular kind of ideological work in literature of the black fantastic. The complex nature of Harlem's corporeal, spatial, and racial politics—a broad construction of the black metropolis—explains how black urbanity becomes such a central trope in African American fiction. Many twentieth-century black authors turn to the *fantastic* in order to disentangle the geopolitics of black identity. As a narrative mode, the fantastic in such fiction speaks to the desire, indeed the necessity of, transcending time and space in order

¹⁹ Jackson writes that, “*Harlemworld* is a world that highlights the area's own intertextuality (what might be called, in this instance, its own intergeographicality), predicated on the same recombinant properties of sampling, mixing, and scratching that define the musical genre from which I've pilfered the term ... [Harlemworld is] a singularly multiplicitous location seen by so many people as so much more than the literal place itself” (10).

²⁰ In this respect, “Harlemworld” functions much like Hopkins's fictionalized Pan-Africanism.

to transvalue black subjectivity—to access “universal, pre-social, discursive modes” that disrupt a signifying system grounded in the “elasticity” of blackness (Reid-Pharr 120, Hartman 21). Yet, the desire to transvalue the black body and inaugurate the black subject sometimes grounds the project of liberation in the rehabilitation of the defamed and distressed black body. Such projects insist on the black body’s difference as the basis for autonomy and rely upon its blackness—that “biological caesura” which polices the border between the human and the not-quite human—for coherence (Mbembe 16-17). It is the dialectical relationship between the black body’s “tendency toward abstraction” and its hyper-corporeality, iterated in the gravitational pull between the real and the surreal, that lies at the heart of literature of the black fantastic (Reid-Pharr 119). Embrace of the “caesura” that would free the black body from the constraints of the dominant order and disrupt the coercive relations that allow for the siphoning of the black subject’s productivity, signals the *disintegration* of the black body. In moving “beyond blackness” the subject at one and the same time reifies his/her humanity and moves beyond the human into the order of the supernatural. Since the black fantastic emerges in a space of pure excess that is outside the purview of --but initiated by--the master/slave dialectic, it evades the “material relations of chattel slavery” that Hartman writes govern black cultural production (21). For Himes, especially, this sleight of hand is significant.

**“But this is Harlem ... Nobody knows all the connections here!”
-Gravedigger Jones**

Himes made no secret of his contempt for the white American literary establishment. In one of his final interviews, he declared the Harlem detective series his most significant contribution to world literature. “I have been brainwashed into thinking

otherwise by American book reviewers,” he noted angrily, but “I know now and have always known [that] was a mistake [these books] contain the best of my writing and the best of my thinking and I am willing to stake my reputation on them” (Margolies 166). Himes’s detective series, and indeed his public persona, occupy a peculiar place in the American canon. Generally ignored in genealogical constructions of hardboiled detective fiction, Himes is most often acknowledged in African American literary studies for his protest fiction.²¹ His detective works, then, straddle two seemingly disparate fields. The ten-part series featuring detectives Coffin Ed Johnson and Gravedigger Jones depicts Harlem as a corrupt and complex ecosystem specifically designed to destroy black lives. Himes’ Harlem is a phantasmagoric space governed by an inverted Manichean aesthetic (Diawara 527). One in which the most horrific events occur under the glare of bright white spotlights.

The series, which concludes with the posthumous and apocalyptic Plan B, embraces absurdity as an aesthetic and ethical imperative. Absurdity is for Himes an ontological condition provoked by racism: “Racism introduces absurdity into the human condition. Not only does [it] express the absurdity of the racists, but it generates absurdity in the victims. And the absurdity of the victims intensifies the absurdity of the racists, ad infinitum” (*My Life of Absurdity* 1). Absurdity interpellates whites and blacks parasitically reproducing itself. In Himes’s detective fiction, it is both a narrative mode and a logic of subjectivity. Himes’s aesthetic—his use of hyperbole, grotesque imagery,

²¹ It should be noted that Himes appropriates a genre with white supremacist roots, and rearticulates its central themes, in the service of an anti-racist project. See Sean McCann’s *Gumshoe America* for background on the white supremacist roots of the hardboiled tradition. The earliest short stories appeared in *Black Mask* magazine alongside a widely popular Klan forum (40).

and cinematic representations of the Harlem landscape—is a function of his intricate understanding of the correlation between spatial environment and subject formation. The fantasmatic Harlem landscapes he maps are interwoven with the bodies and psyches of Harlem residents precisely because he seeks to not only instantiate a new logic of black subjectivity, but also disrupt the devaluation of black corporeality.

Himes sees race hatred as so deeply entrenched in the national psyche it pervades all aspects of life. This scarification of the body politic is made legible through, and on, the bodies of black Americans.²² Like *Gravediggers*'s “cotton dry” voice and *Coffin Ed*'s “twitching” facial scar, traces of these quotidian horrors lie noticeably dormant throughout the Harlem landscape. Himes manipulates the hardboiled genre by cloaking protocols of race that guide much of his earlier protest writing in tragicomic displays of murder, mayhem, and sexual sadism. This violence marks a radical black poetics that hinges on the disintegration of the black body. In a Fanonian maneuver, Himes depicts bodies arrested in motion moments before they splinter apart in spectacularly gory fashion. Harlem residents find themselves paralyzed by a racist episteme that fixes them in a “dye” until they “burst apart [so] the fragments [can be] put together by another self” (Fanon 109).

The surreal, spectacular, and specular nature of Himes' Harlem reflects frustration, sadness, and hatred of an irredeemably corrupt social order. This Harlem is a space of pure excess that places Harlem's residents under constant surveillance and facilitates their unchecked brutality at the hands of white businessmen, white law enforcement, and sometimes Digger and Ed. The law, in this milieu, is the symbolic arm

²² This, of course, is what Ellison suggests with his metaphorical Gulliver.

of a juridico-political system that subjugates Harlemites at every turn, but nevertheless provides occasional opportunities for resistance. Harlem residents who subvert the panoptic gaze of white law enforcement do so by inscribing “hospitable” geographies in the space of the ghetto. “Space,” as Stephanie Camp reminds us, “matter[s]” (6). Black residents who evade policing structures, that would otherwise confine them, do so through intimate and careful navigation of Harlem’s topography. These Harlemites bleed into Harlem’s built environment in chameleon-like fashion melding their bodies with the urban infrastructure and manipulating social and economic systems that devalue them. Camp’s declaration that spatial organization is critical to defining social relations, that it can in fact subvert or maintain the dominant order, is critical to understanding the function of the ghetto in Himes’s detective novels (6-7).

Himes’s fiction illustrates a vision of a North “profoundly invested in black and white uses of space,” a place where “street’s . . . were the North’s lynch mobs” (Camp 6, Petry 323). The cramped quarters of the ghetto, the brutality of the police, and the daily psychic devastation black people in Harlem suffer are a design, not a byproduct, of the system, Himes argues. Even the city’s infrastructure is imbricated in the brutalization of Harlemites suggesting that the buildings themselves, not just the structures of law and public policy that declare black residents corporeally disorderly, are complicit in the *deformation* of black residents. But Himes rejects a discourse that forms “blackness” from white depravity and “redeems [it] from the [noir] genre by recasting the relation between light and dark as a metaphor for making Black people and their cultures visible” (Diawara 527). In a manner that resembles Richard Iton's identification of the black fantastic as "pleonasm," Manthia Diawara posits blackness in Himes’s fiction as a kind of

(re)enforced invisibility (920). Blackness is both symptom and symbol of the denial of black personhood, of the maintenance of a social structure that is predicated upon the “indispensability” of black labor and the “expendability” of black bodies (Mbembe 374). Yet racism sharpens the visual acuity of Harlem residents and facilitates the use of double consciousness as a strategy for spatial articulation. By way of example, *The Real Cool Killers*, the second installment in Himes’s detective series, disrupts the dynamics of spectatorship that transform black subjects into objects.

The Real Cool Killers opens with patrons of the Dew Drop Inn dancing to the beat of a “loud licking rhythm blasted from the jukebox with enough heat to melt bones” (5). In the packed bar, the bodily contortions of Harlem residents effectively subvert their containment in the space of the ghetto:

A woman leapt from her seat in a booth as though the music had stuck her full of tacks. She was a lean black woman clad in a pink jersey dress and red silk stockings. [The woman] pulled up her dress and began doing a shake dance as though trying to throw off the tacks one by one. (5)

Joe McDuff’s “Dink’s Blues” plays on the jukebox--an ode to the painful reality of living in a racially circumscribed social order.²³ The dancers movements, however, undercut the fatalistic lyrics. Their corporeal gestures affirm the truth of the song while locating in its rhythms a possibility for freedom. The dancers conceal “tactics of resistance” in the performance of pleasure, transforming the physical space of the bar in a manner that extends to the streets outside the Dew Drop Inn (Camp 6). Resistance includes

²³ “I’me gwine down to de river,
Set down on de ground.
If de blues overtake me,
I’ll jump overboard and drown” (5).

camouflaging subversion as acquiescence, or feigning disinterest when one is hyperaware. These tactics cognitively remap the social and physical spaces of the city and undercut the authority of the dominant order.

The black dancers in the Dew Drop Inn are not alone. There is a white interloper in their midst—Galen, a Greek “King Cola” salesman who, we later learn, trolls Harlem for young black girls. In a reversal of the dynamics of late nineteenth and early 20th century race riots, Galen is chased through the streets of Harlem by a black mob, and shot to death in front of a crowd of onlookers. Himes inverts a racialized corporeal logic that is linked to dynamics of empowerment that construct Harlem as a place of deprivation for black subjects and a space of (illicit) pleasure for whites. Galen dies because he is denied the privilege of covering up the traces of his (white) body in the (black) space of Harlem. As he runs for his life, he is depicted by Himes as a manifestation of racist white America in *red, white, and blue*:

People up ahead crowded into the doorways to see what was happening. They saw a big *white* man with wild *blue* eyes and a stubble of *red* tie which made him look as though his throat were cut, being chased by a slim black man with a big blue pistol ...spectators stretched out in a ragged line. (10 italics added)

Galen’s “hypervisibility,” his stark whiteness in the midst of all that blackness, serves as a marker of both his socioeconomic power and corporeal vulnerability. If as Berlant writes, “the white, male body is the relay to legitimation, but even more than that, the power to suppress that body, to cover its tracks and traces, is the sign of real authority,” Galen finds that he inhabits a space in which the ground rules have been inverted (Berlant

113). “All of you folks are confusing me with *someone else*,” he cries as the black mob chases him down the street (Himes 9 emphasis added).²⁴

Galen soon realizes that his corporeality renders him acutely vulnerable. But this newfound knowledge comes too late, and the crowd’s chase ends in a phantasmagoric shoot out that strips him of all dignity:

[Galen] leaped high and sideways away from the incoming car. His arms and legs flew out in a grotesque silhouette [...] Sonny came abreast of the Arabs and shot at the leaping white man while he was still in the air [...] the big white man [...] landed face down and in a spread eagled posture [...] all of them stood in the stark white light, swaying and rocking and doubling over with laughter. (11)

In creating a spectacle for his readers, Himes demystifies whiteness and destabilizes its privileged position through caricature. The corporeal economics on display disenfranchises the white subject by stripping whiteness of its invisibility and re-embodiment of the white male subject. Himes’s transvaluation of black subjectivity rests on a *reconfiguration* of the use and exchange-values of black and white bodies, and it is a reassessment of value that pivots on an “ideology of violence” (Denning 165).²⁵ As critic Wendy Walters notes, “[i]n the racial economy of 1959 one dead black ass does not equal one dead white ass” (620).²⁶ The presence of blacks at the scene of this very public display of white corporeal vulnerability threatens the hegemonic social order. If Galen

²⁴ Since Galen cannot cast off his “surplus corporeality,” (his) whiteness is stripped of its social capital (Berlant 112).

²⁵ Michael Denning argues that, “[v]iolence ... in Himes signifies nothing but its own arbitrariness, its random intrusion on everyday life. And as such it becomes comic” (162). I disagree; Himes surreptitiously conceals the degeneration of whites from subject to object within the familiar framework of black on black, and white on black, violence (162).

²⁶ The same holds true, I would argue, in the racial economy of 2011.

has been figuratively lynched, those Harlem spectators who bear witness to his death are complicit. Himes means for us to understand Galen's death as a public execution. The black crowd's transformation from onlookers to agents registers the fracture of the dominant order—this is when, as Fanon observes, decolonization begins (*Wretched of the Earth* 36).

Spectatorship is bound up with the cognitive processes that map the spaces we inhabit. One learns, for example, that “conscious unaware[ness]” is a strategy for resistance (Varzi 126). By “tak[ing] a certain space and incorporat[ing] it, [it] becomes possible] to avoid ... participating fully in a space that is undesirable” (Varzi 126). Indeed, many Harlemites function as “somnabulists,” choosing to remain silent or willfully blind in order to announce their personhood (Varzi 126). If the problem facing the postmodern subject and apotheosized by urban architecture is the inability to map oneself cognitively or to fix a psychic and spatial location in the epoch of transnational capital, this poses a different set of problems for the raced subject.²⁷ The urban raced subject faces the opposite conundrum—a failure of “cartographic cognition” that is ultimately fatal. This is after all the burden of double consciousness: the ability of the hegemonic social structure to fix the raced subject in his/her “place” in a sort of “freeze frame” that immobilizes. In the absence of political power and the capital necessary to move the body, resistance takes the form of remaking the spaces one has access to. Corporeal transgression, as a strategy for the transvaluation of black subjectivity, necessitates the construction and occupation of social spaces of alterity that are housed within dominant articulations of place. The ability to turn off—that is, the refusal to

²⁷ See Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*

occupy a particular space--is a rejection of the “law as habit” and a mapping of new terrain. It is an instantiation of self through negation in a peculiar and fantastical double move (Varzi 113).

When Fanon writes in *Black Skin, White Masks* of being “sealed into that crushing objecthood” he is referring to “a chronic system of inscribed misrecognition [that transforms the black subject into a] virtual image” (Fanon 109; Wallace 30-31).

Spectragraphia is literary critic Maurice Wallace’s recapitulation of Fanon’s “corporeal malediction” with an added emphasis on the political economy of the visual. Where Fanon is interested in redeeming the integrity of the black body, Wallace begins from the standpoint of the body as “representational reality” (Bhabha 119). Chester Himes’s characters lie somewhere in between these two notions: the body as “representational reality” and the misrecognized body that must be redeemed. In Himes’s detective fiction, this liminal zone is articulated through a playful schematization of the border between the real and the surreal. The black body is absolutely “real” *and* “unreal”—so real it must be obliterated in order to be resurrected, and so unreal it is indistinguishable, with an Ellisonian invisibility, from the Harlem cityscape:

No one can visualize what [Harlem] is like who hasn’t seen it. First, none of the residents has gone away on vacation, either to the seashore or the mountains, as is the case with most other New Yorkers. In fact, none of the residents has ever dreamed of going away during his vacation in even the wildest flights of his imagination. A few daring souls might go out to Coney Island, but most of these will be of the younger generation. For the most part the residents just sit in their squalor and swelter. *There is no relief.* Outside is the same as inside, nighttime is the same as daytime. All the energy is steamed from the *sweating, stinking bodies*, and the will to move or do something about it, if there were anything to be done, is evaporated from the brain. (Himes 48-49 italics added)

In this passage from *Plan B*, Himes links the imaginary to the “corporeal exertion” black subjects endure (Grosz 108). The subjugation of Harlemites is in equal parts psychic and physical. Himes goes to great lengths to detail the wasted expenditure of black bodies: buckets of sweat and rivers of blood commingle with the city’s crumbling infrastructure. The destruction of the urban infrastructure is a labor of love. The violence will pave the way, Himes argues, through his fiction, for a new social order. But the price the black population will pay for this new world order is incalculably high. It is on the literal and figurative bodies of blacks that this drama will play out. Ironically, Himes’s vision of Harlem as a polluted space that must be destroyed *inside and out*—in order to pave the way for a new ontology essentially parallels a white supremacist discourse that offers the urban as always and already a site of disorder that has been effectively and essentially *contaminated* by blackness.²⁸

Himes’s black subjects lack the resources necessary to secure relief and they lack the capacity to imagine another mode of existence. In *Plan B*, unlike the other novels in the domestic series that precede it, there is no redemptive possibility concealed within the space of Harlem. The solace that Harlem’s cultural production has to offer—the healing power of black music, for example, (or even spaces like the Dew Drop Inn) has no place in this work. In *Plan B*, the lived experience of blackness exacts a fully destructive psychic and physiological toll. Harlem residents, packed into a hostile and delimiting environment, find their corporeal maledictions oozing from every pore of their “sweating,

²⁸ Some critics are troubled by this discourse. Denning, for example, suggests that Himes “often seems to be walking on the brink of a sort of violent minstrel show ... The effect of the reduction of people to objects in Himes’ violence ... is a comic absurdity. But one of the difficulties with comedy is its basis in socially constructed ... stereotypes” (165).

stinking bodies” (48). Himes’s imagery here is a sensual assault that invigorates a black tactility. The entrapment of black bodies within the space of Harlem, the absence, and indeed, impossibility of psychic or corporeal relief from this death by slow suffocation is a function of the inability to dream of escape, or to imagine a life outside of, and away from, this place. These bodies are frozen in space and time, “the will to move” having been severed from the subjects that inhabit them (Himes 49). They are zombies who linger as they seemingly anticipate the inevitable implosion that will set them free.

Grosz’s notion of “corporeal exertion” is key here because it captures that what is at stake in Himes’s body politics is an erotics of dismemberment that is coterminous with a desire to upend the social order—to rip it apart brick by brick, as well as limb for limb (108). Himes’s fiction illustrates how in order to rescue the black body and cure the black subject’s corporeal malediction, it is necessary to dismember both body and metropolis. Death is an excess that profoundly alters the corporeal economy that produces spaces like Harlem.²⁹ In passing, these bodies defy their containment in an extra-legal space and “state of exception” (Mbembe 12-13). The body parts scattered throughout the urban landscape rupture a symbolic economy that attempts to “disappear” black subjects in the space of the ghetto. If in life, Harlem’s residents find themselves packed together, in death they find their flesh scattered and subsequently embedded within, the urban landscape. Destruction is the process by which, counter-intuitively, the scope of spatial

²⁹ I identify this in Chapter Two as a surplus mortality.

mobility increases.³⁰ This atypical form of burial is according to Himes--and Fanon—an invocation of personhood, the paving of the way for the birth of a new species of man:³¹

the grotesque body ... is a body in the act of *becoming*. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and *creates another body* ... it outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body [and] conceives a new, second body ... the grotesque ignores the impenetrable surface that closes and limits the body as a separate and *completed phenomenon* ... grotesque imagery constructs what we might call a double body ... in which the life of one body is *born from the death* of the preceding, older one. (Bakhtin 317-318 italics added)

Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque body as an unfinished body "in the act of becoming" suggests that Himes is concerned with not only the transvaluation of black corporeality, but also the resurrection of a new-old black body.

Cotton Comes to Harlem, one of the final installments in the Harlem domestic series is perhaps the best known of Himes's detective novels. *Cotton* satirizes Pan-Africanist sentiment all the while lamenting the perennial displacement of black Americans. The "Back to Africa" movement, led by confidence man Reverend Deke O'Malley, is juxtaposed against southern planter Colonel Calhoun's "Back to the Southland" movement. At the heart of the matter is the question of black labor power. Southern whites need blacks to till the land and so Calhoun and his cronies hatch a scheme to lure black migrants back below the Mason Dixon line. As in all Himes's detective works there are many twists and turns. Camouflaged identities, myriad disguises, and complex interrelationships warn readers of the dangers inherent in

³⁰ The surplus mortality of Himes's characters transforms Harlem into an embodied and corporeal space.

³¹ "Decolonization never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. It transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors; with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights on them ... [It] is the veritable creation of new men" (*Wretched of the Earth* 36).

narratives of authenticity. No one—save Coffin Ed Johnson and Gravedigger Jones—is “real” in *Cotton*, and the detectives too play a circumscribed role. To the extent that there is any sense of a just and moral order in Himes’s Harlem it is facilitated by Digger and Ed. The detectives’ ability to blend in with the people and to speak the language of both the criminals and the law places them in a powerful—if provisional—space.³² *Cotton* brings to mind George Schuyler’s 1926 satirical novel *Black No More*. Both works lampoon racial mythologies that in promising black Americans salvation pool the wool over their eyes. Himes’s work suggests that fealty to Black Nationalist ideologies reflects a collective cultural blindness fueled by a desire to lay claim to land as one’s own.

The informal economy of Harlem is, like the black and white crooks in *Cotton*, parasitical. It feeds on young black lives leaving a trail of confidence men, prostitutes, and thugs in its wake. Gravedigger and Coffin Ed sift through this vast network meting punishment where it is needed and offering respite when it is warranted. Himes casts them, at least until *Plan B*, as Harlem’s moral authority. In offering readers a fantastic glimpse into Harlem’s criminal underworld, he links black brutality to larger societal forces. Neil Smith writes that making a claim for a space can be just as important as occupying that space (60). The discursive act is itself a trespass against established borders. *Cotton*, then, in critiquing the spatial constriction of Harlemites facilitates the production of cultural space. I propose that the novel exposes the linkages between the exploitation of black labor power and the articulation of urban geographies (“Aesthetics of Superfluity” 386). The twentieth century city is according to this logic produced and reproduced by discourses of urbanity that rely on racial demarcations. Digger and Ed

³² We do not learn how provisional until the pair meets their demise in *Plan B*.

move skillfully, if at times brutally, through this complex web. They bear witness to structural inequalities that trap Harlemites in place and afford them as symbols of the law a measure of mobility. Digger and Ed are keenly attuned to the precarious nature of their social position. The minute they are no longer of use to “the Man” they will be disposed of. As black detectives they are necessary in the short term to keep the peace in Harlem and herein lies the paradox of their position—by doing their jobs well they facilitate the status quo and insure the preservation of a parasitical social system.

As a narrative mode, the black fantastic attends to the possibilities and prohibitions of urban life. The ecological structure of Himes’s Harlem is a dense network of overlapping public and private spaces. Places like the Dew Drop Inn are multipurpose sites that conceal points of entry and exit depending upon one’s subject position. I have written earlier that Himes adapts the hardboiled format—a white male genre apotheosized by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler—to black radical purposes. The fantastic aspects of the Harlem detective series replicate the peculiar nature of Himes’s task and the complex corporeal and racial politics that led him to abandon the land of his birth. Himes was charged with bringing Harlem to life for a white French reading public that fetishized black American cultural production.³³ The Harlem series

³³ The politics of the production of Himes’s hardboiled fiction is complex since he was a willing participant in a particular kind of commodification of blackness for his French readership. Himes wrote the detective series at the urging of Marcel Duhamel because he was strapped for cash. Even though the domestic series morphed into a body of work he was to claim as his greatest achievement, there remains something unsettling about Himes’s exploitation of blackness. But just as Galen can neither access “Dink’s Blues,” nor fully inhabit the space of the Dew Drop Inn, Himes does not allow the French reading public full entrée into his textual world. In revealing, for example, that the young street-gang, the “Real Cool Moslems,” is a group of black teens Himes challenges his French readers to consider the commonalities between the Black Americans they lionized and the

reflects and satirizes this interest. The abstractions of black corporeality are emphasized to the point that persons serve as metonyms for body parts. Severed limbs gush like geysers; bodies spring upward in impossible poses freezing in midair before they crash spectacularly. In placing the body's destruction front and center Himes inscribes a corporeal urban geography and insists that it is the black body's excess that makes Harlem legible.

3.3 “And a body's got the right to live!” - Petry's *The Street*

Gwendolyn Brooks's *Maud Martha* and Ann Petry's *The Street* explore the role gender plays in the black female's corporeal malediction. While Petry's text is set in a Harlem very similar to the social milieu Himes depicts—minus that is the element of the fantastic—Brooks's novella is set in Chicago, that other black metropolis, which occupies a Midwestern normalcy—different from the marginally located New York. Where Himes's New York is a collage of fantastically situated bodies, Maud's Chicago is an amalgam of sounds, smells, and sights filtered through a spectacular imagination. The metropolis for Maud is a psychic space that must be carefully navigated. Brooks's city is a place of possibility, a social milieu that fosters a unique form of interiority.

Petry's work, published six years after *Native Son* (and seven years prior to *Maud Martha*), responds to Wright's disinterest in the black female. If racism as a structural and social force works ceaselessly to imprison black subjects within the city's spatial grid, Petry argues that this system is even more noticeably pernicious for black women.

North Africans they demonized. When the “Moslems” strip off their “Arab” guises to reveal the black underneath, Himes makes a political statement about French treatment of Algerians.

Lutie's Harlem, like Bigger's South Side of Chicago, is a suffocating space, a dystopic cauldron that wreaks havoc on the bodies and psyches of its inhabitants. The claustrophobia Lutie feels is contagious; it spreads throughout Harlem, its rate of transmission increasing exponentially as the tension in the novel escalates. The more walled in Lutie feels, the more strenuously she clings to the American Dream, and the more vociferously she channels Benjamin Franklin and American ideals of individualism and self-reliance. Lutie seeks to shed her "surplus corporeality" (Berlant 112). She is aware that bodily concealment is a display of power and that her raced and gendered corporeality marks her as vulnerable (Berlant 113).

The corporeal economy of Petry's text dictates that the only social capital Lutie truly possesses is vested in her physical appearance. Lutie's beauty makes her "valuable," even as it devalues her subjectivity by attaching a sticker price to her person(hood) and inhibiting her access to the spaces of the city. The "street," for Lutie, is a metonym for the racist sociopolitical juridical power structure that keeps her in "place." A microcosm of the ghetto in any American city--the street--is a symbol of the second-class citizenship African Americans are consigned to and a sign of the devaluation of black humanity. But Lutie refuses to accept the street's mandate. The American Dream, she feels, is just as much her birthright as it is that of the white Chandlers or the Pizzinis. Hence her "xenophilia" for Ben Franklin; Lutie's mantra of self-reliance, individualism, and achievement is a presumptive claim for the idealized space of white male privilege (Berlant 111). But on every register, Lutie is acutely aware that she is confined not just to the space of her three-room apartment, or the streets of Harlem, but *within* the space of her body. And it is not until the end of the novel, when she slays Boots Smith, that she

comes to realize the extent to which her body has been denied, “the right to live” (368). At this critical juncture, Lutie finds that she possesses a triple subjectivity, and that she can no longer distinguish between the real and the unreal because her body is “always [and already] tied to a “master” narrative that [s]he never controls” (Reid-Pharr 122).

Lutie’s entrapment in the space of her body contrasts sharply with the freedoms Boots Smith enjoys. The corporeal economy of Harlem is hierarchical and affords black male subjects greater access to the urban landscape than their female counterparts. On their first date, Boots takes Lutie on a nighttime drive on the Henry Hudson Parkway. Lutie marvels at the sleekness of his vehicle, its speed, and its luxury. Watching Boots drive she begins to understand that his “relationship to this swiftly moving car was no ordinary one. He wasn’t just a black man driving a car at a pell-mell pace. He had lost all sense of *time and space* as the car plunged forward into the cold, white night” (157 emphasis added). As they move beyond the borders of Harlem, Lutie observes that Boots seems freer. The fast moving vehicle, the crisp night air, and the wide expanse of road transform his sense of self. She can feel Boots’s excitement—it is palpable-- and she thrills in it *vicariously*, but cannot inhabit it. Lutie cannot know what it would be like to drive that car, to have that sort of mobility at her fingertips.

Petry’s text would seem to suggest, then, that the provisional freedom Boots enjoys is inaccessible to black women who do not ever have the luxury of “leaving the body behind.” Lutie is at a profound remove from the transcendentalism that enables Boots to disregard his corporeality and lose “all sense of time and space” (157). After all, she is in the car precisely because Boots cannot see past her body. In observing that there is something fantastic about Boots’s relationship to his car, Lutie is instinctively aware

that there is something supernatural about a black subject moving beyond time and space, limitless and free.³⁴ The car's mechanized power, Boots' and Lutie's comfort and safety in its interior, and the geographic distance they cover are all constructed in opposition to the "cold, white night"(157).³⁵ For the purposes of this chapter, it is evident that the fantastic possibility of freedom for the black subject is conjoined to articulations of scale. Because what Lutie's description foregrounds is a black ontology that links the production of space to the disavowal of corporeality, one that at the same time acknowledges the provisional and fantastic nature of this outcome.³⁶ The cold white night, a metaphor for the social, legal, and political apparatus Boots cannot control, is penetrable but enveloping. The car "plunge[s] forward" carving out a space for itself in the natural environs, yet this is "a dangerous daring game [...] If they should plunge over into the river ... No one would ever know [...] those craggy hills might suddenly spew mountains of rock down on them and crush them beneath it" (163-4). Lutie fears not just death, but an obliteration of her corporeal form so complete no trace of her will be left behind. Boots and Lutie do not have the power to articulate spatial (or corporeal)

³⁴ Boots' is an effort to defy "mental colonization," to come to terms with a dissonance that can only be understood as rooted in the corporeal maledictions of the black body and a subsequent mind/body dichotomy as a stratagem of survival (Veit-Wild 38).

³⁵ It is also important to note that this episode represents the reverse of Fanon's experience on the train (*Black Skin, White Masks* 112). Where Fanon feels trapped in the moving vehicle under the spell of a white gaze that forces him to occupy "three spaces at once," Lutie and Boots experience freedom in their nested occupations of space—the car, the rapid flight toward an unknown destination, and the vast expanse of the road.

³⁶ Petry's work also exhibits the characteristic ambivalence of the black fantastic text with regard to corporeal annihilation. Lutie flirts with, but cannot commit to the destruction of the black body.

boundaries, and this is reinforced by their lack of destination. *There is nowhere for them to go.*

The episode comes to a close when the couple is pulled over by a white policeman just outside of the Bronx. The officer “peer[s] into the car and Lutie s[ees] a slight stiffening of his face” (165). Gone are the effects of the exhilarating ride that places the couple beyond the reaches of white authority. We see again the ways in which the black female can never move past her corporeal form (Wiegman 94). Lutie serves as a form of currency for Boots: “The cop look[s] at her. “Don’t know that I blame you for being late, Mack,” he sa[ys] suggestively” (166). The space of freedom that opens up for Boots requires, then, if not Lutie’s degradation, at the very least, her objectification.

There are two female characters in Petry’s text, however, that do enjoy a modicum of freedom and they exist at opposite ends of the spectrum. Mrs. Hedges, who runs “the street,” is an ambiguous figure. She manages a brothel for Junto, the white man who runs Harlem. Though she traffics in black female flesh, Mrs. Hedges intercedes in at least one instance on Lutie’s behalf. Min, the building superintendent’s live in companion, is a quiet, mouse-like woman who up until the novel’s end shoulders an enormous amount of psychological and physical abuse.³⁷ When Min poignantly insists that, “a body’s got the right to live,” her substitution of “*a body*” for “person” references the overdetermined nature of black female corporeality (368). Corporeality may be as Bhabha puts it, a “representational reality,” but that does not mean the effects of its inscription are any less potent (Bhabha 119). No one “ever listened when [Min] talked.

³⁷ The Super is a monstrous figure who beats Min, attempts to rape Lutie, and plots to have Lutie’s son Bub arrested for mail fraud.

They issued orders to some point over her head until sometimes she was tempted to look up to see if there was another head on top of her own—a head she had grown without knowing it” (136). The negation the outside world imposes upon Min is reinforced by the psychic and spatial confinement of the basement apartment she shares with the Super. Min tiptoes around the domicile in an attempt to efface her presence. While Lutie’s travails take her around the city and occasionally into its white spaces, Min’s only excursions outside the apartment are to the fortuneteller.³⁸ Leaving aside for the moment the ways in which the supernatural expands the scope of Min’s spatial access, I would like to consider the three women—Mrs. Hedges, Lutie, and Min as existing in a sort of continuum. Mrs. Hedges, the bearer of the monstrous body and the queen of the “street,” finds that the symbolic effects of her corporeality have a monetary exchange value.³⁹ Her monstrosity enables her business acumen. Min meanwhile faces a negation so fierce that she finds herself evacuated of form and questions at times whether or not she really exists. Lutie, however, possesses “too much body” and this places her in constant peril. Lutie’s inability to channel her corporeality towards the achievement of her aims drives her out of her mind, and in the end, renders her corporeal form valueless.

Min’s foregrounding and depersonalization of her corporeality speaks to the ways in which the psychic economy of a segregated society pivots on the “disposability” of

³⁸ The novel proposes that Min’s belief in the occult is no less fantastic than Lutie’s psychic investment in the American Dream. In the end, Lutie’s faith destroys her while Min’s belief sustains her.

³⁹ Mrs. Hedges is grossly disfigured in a fire that nearly kills her. Rather than suffer the “uncontrollable revulsion in the faces of the white people who looked at her” Mrs. Hedges spends most of her time policing the street from her apartment window” (241).

black bodies.⁴⁰ The persistent misrecognition of the body inhibits the right to live. Min's belief in the occult halts and reverses this soul killing process. The supernatural gives her access to another world—a world that makes more sense than the “real” one that consigns her to a life of beatings and neglect. Min's disinvestment from the dominant social order enables her to preserve, like Brooks' Maud, a little bit of self for self. The supernatural gives her the strength to rise up against the Super and take over the space of the apartment.

Space forms and deforms the bodies and psyches of Petry's characters and provides (or forecloses) access to economic networks. The American Dream is symbolized for Lutie by the acquisition of space—a house with a white picket fence, enough room for Bub to play in, and a nice kitchen—all in contrast to the drab and cramped apartment she sees no way out of. By the novel's end, when Lutie suspects she is losing her mind she is overwhelmed by the “annihilation of space” that engulfs her: “She would never get out of this room. She would never, never get out of here” (431).⁴¹ Lutie retreats from a “fantastic world that must be rejected” because she fears the indeterminacy of the border between the real and the imaginary even though this liminal space may hold for her the only possibility of sanctuary (Reid-Pharr 121). Lutie is aware that one misstep can trap her in the “No Man's Land” between these two spheres where

⁴⁰ Mbembe, Achille. “Necropolitics.” *Public Culture* 15.1 (2003): 11-40.

⁴¹ Title taken from the title of Don Mitchell's article, “The Annihilation of Space by Law.”

many Harlem residents lie (Barthold 43).⁴² In fact these persons' occupation of the middle space is necessary to demarcate the places that lie on the other side—places of safety, security, and propriety—the seemingly utopian existence Lutie can see and cannot touch. Lutie is receptive, however, to the fantastic capacities of song. If the black fantastic is to be described as a narrative response to a spatial crisis, its emergence in Petry's work is linked most overtly to the transformative capacity of the sonic, a topic I take up extensively in the final chapter of this dissertation. The musical register calls attention to the production of space through the *disarticulation of place*.⁴³ Lutie while she is singing gains access to another world. The sonic takes her outside of her body, away from the devastating poverty of Harlem, and in the transcendental nature of its effects approaches the sublime.

3.4 “If Only No One Would Look Intruded Upon:” Brooks' Psychosocial Cityscape

Gwendolyn Brooks does not depict the city as a wholly dystopic space. The urban milieu forms Brooks' Maud, rather than deforming her—providing just enough space for her to remake the places she inhabits in her own image. Urbanity allows for the imagining of a new mode of social organization that is predicated on an interiority that is inclusive. Sanctity, Maud realizes, must be cultivated at every scale by excavating the extraordinary in the ordinary, by rejecting the terms of a debate that distributes valuation

⁴² Of course, as Gloria Naylor's *Bailey's Café* illustrates, there are rich possibilities contained in the occupation of this indeterminate space.

⁴³ In a 2009 class lecture, Fred Moten discussed the airshaft in Lutie's apartment as the incubator of a particular kind of subjectivity. This narrow space, he argues, the only space residents crammed in windowless apartments have access to, contains and redistributes the pleasure and pain of hard living. The airshaft has the capacity to blur the distinction between individual, familial, and communal suffering.

along the lines of the haves and the have-nots. A world in which a thing of “ordinary allurements” is deemed as possessing as much intrinsic worth as “a thing of heart-catching beauty” is a world in which everything and everyone is invaluable (1602). If Petry’s Lutie suffers from the feeling that the city is closing in on her, this is because she lacks what Maud exudes from every inch of her being—an intense interiority fueled by a hyperimaginative capacity that compensates for the perpetual misreadings she is subject to in the “evading eye[s]” of others (1649). Maud defies her spatial confinement (in the domestic sphere and in the segregated public spaces of pre-Civil Rights Chicago) through recourse to a psychically engaged fantastic. She reorients the city’s threatening spaces by retreating to a psychic self, fully embracing the safety of an interiority that functions as the antithesis of the hostile social milieu she inhabits.

Maud Martha is ultimately a meditation on belonging and an affirmation of cartographic locution. The reader follows Maud as she grows into adulthood and negotiates the relationship between body and psyche in the public and private spaces of the city. Maud’s observations emerge from a temporal gap that enables her to distance herself from, and report on, events as they occur. She exhibits a split consciousness that Brooks brings to the fore in silent evocative ruminations on the perception of value, the construction of identity, and the accessibility of intellectual, cultural, and familial spaces to a girl like her. Brooks’s novella concludes on a promising note because Maud succeeds in recodifying the public and private spaces she occupies in such a way that they begin to conform to her needs. The beauty and power of Maud’s imagination lies in its boundlessness and, consequently, in its ability to obscure sites of psychic danger and foreground places of sanctuary. Maud’s alterity enables her to see things in ways Belva

Brown, Helen, and Paul (her mother, sister, and husband) do not. As she glides through Chicago's streets cataloguing the persistent misrecognitions of her corporeal form, Maud questions that which others seem content to overlook. Her meditations help to buffer her from the cruelty of a world that locates in her dark brown skin the measure of her inadequate worth. The temporal gap that facilitates Maud's cartographic locution is a means of projecting outward at society the alienation with which the social order would like to circumscribe her.

I propose that Maud's "hesitation" in the face of discriminatory actions ascribes to the Todorovian conception of the fantastic. The moment in which Maud moves outside of herself to contemplate the gendered, classed, and racial implications of her social interactions marks a suspension of time. Maud's "double consciousness" is fantastic in its ability to render meaningless her physical mooring in the place(s) she inhabits. Her ability to "shut off" and evaluate circumstances according to what would be a proto-black feminist code of ethics camouflages in her silences a bodily and psychic resistance to persistent devaluation.⁴⁴ I propose that Maud's quiet observations and her willful lingering in the split nature of her subjectivity chart an individualized cartography of the city. Maud's Chicago is a place where gorillas escape from double-decker buses, "yellow jewels for everyday" flourish in the crevices of cracked concrete, and valuation is measured by potentiality and not the compromised visuality of a racist episteme (Brooks 1602, Butler 17). As she matures, Maud's perception of the city's built environment changes. She scales invisible walls and maneuvers unseen barriers erected by the glances,

⁴⁴ The vignettes that structure Brooks' work, in their open-ended nature, are an invitation to readers to assume ownership over the narrative.

words, or lack thereof, of others. This is to say that Brooks' novella illustrates that space is articulated through the social exchanges and practices that govern use. The phenomenology of space, to borrow from Bachelard, is not fixed but subjective and reflective of the biopolitical strictures that govern the valuation of the bodies that inhabit it ("Aesthetics of Superfluity" 381).

In one of the final vignettes, Maud takes her daughter to see Santa Claus at the mall. Paulette, breathless with anticipation, is rebuffed by Santa who "look[s] vaguely out across the Toy Department . . . unable to see either mother or child" (1648). Brooks does not explicitly mention race. She does not need to. The reader understands that Santa's bodily posture of resistance—"neck turned with hard slowness"—and vacuous expression are a response to the black mother and child in front of him (1648). Maud tries hard to preserve Paulette's innocence pushing her towards Santa despite his cold disinterest. But Paulette is not persuaded and is deeply hurt—"Why didn't Santa Claus like me?" she quietly asks (1649). Maud's desire to shield her daughter from the psychic implications of a white gaze that negates her and her daughter's presence suspends time. She must, on the one hand, assuage her daughter's worry by telling the child that her experience is not grounded in reality and, on the other hand, retaliate against the external threat the gaze poses.

The effect of this vignette, titled "Tree Leaving Trees," is haunting. Paulette and her mother undergo a racial rite of passage—one that reminds Maud of the very public nature of her black female personhood. In order to preserve what should be the inviolable nature of her daughter's childhood she must make a public gesture. The fantastic aspects

of the passage emerge in the careful language Brooks uses to elide the border between the public and private. Coating devastating acts of cruelty in lilting cadence and flowery prose--that is nevertheless exacting—foregrounds the fantastic nature of racialized discourse and racist behavior. To suggest, as Brooks subtly does, that public acts of racism are at their core acts of intimacy is to insist on the resilience of black subjectivity and to call attention to scalar consciousness as a mode of resistance.

Maud's search for "safe spaces" charts a perilous course throughout the city (Griffin 8). In places of commerce, places of leisure, intellectual and domestic spaces Maud is persistently devalued by both blacks and whites.⁴⁵ Maud's inner sanctity protects her from internalizing the outer vision society stamps her with. To counteract that narrative—a social text that equates whiteness or proximity to whiteness with beauty and economic privilege—Maud retreats for a spell and then reemerges. This "escape," because it defies normative protocols of spatial and temporal framing, is fantastic at its core. I propose that the fantastic as a discourse of urbanity in Brooks's novella works to heighten the tactility of imaginative space. The miasmatic haze that buffers Maud's reaction to acts of racism enables her to step outside of the self, in that place, and at that moment in time, in order to reevaluate circumstances according to the logic of a (proto) black feminist register. Maud's cognition articulates a cartography of Chicago that reflects an innate understanding of the raced and gendered superstructure that subtends the production of the urban environment.⁴⁶ As Griffin notes, "sophisticated, fragmented

⁴⁵ Brooks' is careful to show, however, the ways in which intraracial color hierarchies are informed from above.

⁴⁶ Jameson, Frederic. *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*
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Northern power most effectively oppresses the urban dweller on [the psychic] plane ... [by] construct[ing] desire and a means of self-disciplining” (115). The miasmatic haze I refer to above is a deliberate and counterpoised dulling and heightening of the senses so that Maud is acutely attuned to that which she wants to notice and psychically distanced from that which would harm her.⁴⁷

In another vignette, “Love and Gorillas,” a young Maud awakens from a particularly vivid dream in which a gorilla trapped in a cage threatens the passengers on a double-decker bus. The passengers on the lower level flee to the upper deck as the gorilla rattles the bars of his cage.

The gorilla, lying back, his arms under his head, one leg resting casually across the other, watched the people. Then he rose, lumbered over to the door of his cage, peered, clawed at his bars, shook his bars [...]

“Motor trouble!” called the conductor. “Motor trouble! And the gorilla, they think, will escape!”

But why would not the people get off? (1604)

The gorilla’s casual stance—“lying back, his arms under his head”—evokes the possibility that he may be friend and not foe. The bus’s slow approach to the gorilla’s cage, and his outsized form, further suggest a certain inevitability. In the next paragraph, Brooks reveals the source of Maud’s anxiety. Maud’s parents quarreled the evening before and her father stepped out alone for a nighttime walk. Her parents’ fight is conjoined to Maud’s unspoken fear of moving beyond the “safe” and racially circumscribed neighborhood the family resides in. She is too young to know what is it that makes that other Chicago so menacing, but she understands instinctively that that

⁴⁷ “I couldn’t explain my explanation” Maud notes when she resigns from her housekeeping position at the Burns-Coopers’ (1646).

“matter of mystery and hunchedness” is linked to the white faces “East of Cottage Grove” (1604). That “hunchedness” threatens the security of her family, and it is part and parcel of the “loud hate or silent cold” that pushes her parents apart (1604). The violence concealed in the white gaze inscribes a racially encoded geography of the city that is not only accessible to the young child, but takes on new forms in the recesses of her imagination. It is an amorphous threat that is encapsulated, not in the gorilla, but in the crowd’s reaction to the gorilla and in Maud’s inability to assimilate and understand that response. “Love and Gorillas” and “Tree Leaving Trees” bookend Maud’s experiences with racism. The former is Maud’s initiation into the sub and superstructure of a racially informed social schema, the latter her daughter’s.

Maud’s spatial awareness of the streets of Chicago is connected to the sense of an intangible threat. It is a threat she associates with her father’s corporeal vulnerability. She cannot name what it is that frightens her, but intuits that it can be replicated in the built environment of white Chicago. Note that “love and gorillas” closely follows the “description of Maud Martha”—an illustration that constructs Maud’s physicality through the prism of her likes and dislikes (1602).⁴⁸ The radical aspects of Maud’s subjectivity are to be located in a simple metric of self-appraisal. Maud is to be defined by what she values, and that is, her ability to excavate the beauty of the ordinary. It follows, then, that she is equally attuned to the grotesque nature of everyday acts of cruelty. Herein lies the fantastic. It is, in addition to being a spatially ameliorative gesture, a dialectic of the grotesque and the beautiful, of the real and the “unreal.” I

⁴⁸ “She could have liked a lotus, or China asters or the Japanese Iris ... But dandelions were what she chiefly saw ... She liked their demure prettiness second to their everydayness; for in that latter quality she thought she saw a picture of herself” (1602).

contend that it is Maud's sensory acuity—a unique ontology that subordinates the visual to an intuitive schema—that revises dehumanizing racial logic.

The devaluation of black life is captured perfectly in “Spring Landscape: Detail.” This vignette juxtaposes the exuberant bodies of young black children against the neglected urban landscape. It is the built environment covered with signs that read “PLEASE KEEP OFF THE GRASS—NEWLY SEEDED” that is afforded the meager protection of the dominant order. The grass, not the children, is to be cultivated, but the children—much like Paulette before her encounter with Santa Claus—are busy being children:

“Up the street, mixed in the wind, blew the children, and turned the corner onto the brownish-red brick school court. It was wonderful. Bits of pink, of blue, white, yellow, green, purple, brown, black, carried by jerky little stems of brown or yellow or brown-black, blew by the unhandsome gray and decay of the double-apartment buildings, past the little plots of dirt and scanty grass ... Cramp, inhibition, choke—they did not trouble themselves about these.” (1603)

Brooks's passage is beautiful capturing in its hypnotic tone the fragility and potentiality contained within the little brown bodies. The vignette's title invites readers to consider the ways in which the children's presence beautifies the landscape. This is in stark contrast to the barren nature of a built environment that offers irrefutable proof that black neighborhoods, black life, and black bodies are linked in a schema of negative valuation. In order to subvert the reproduction of social relations that devalues blackness, one need only, according to Brooks, recognize the intrinsic worth of those “bits of pink ... white, yellow, green ... carried by jerky little stems” that, if properly cultivated, will not stop in their quest to reshape the world in their own image (1603). *It's that simple.*

3.5 Towards a Solution

What she wanted was to donate to the world a good Maud Martha. That was the offering, the bit of art, that could not come from any other. She would polish and hone that” (Brooks 1607).

The architectural construction of the city reflects very personalized visions of civic life. To the extent that the built environment informs and is constitutive of the power relations that subtend the social order, it is possible to view the city as a mimetic construction of a very public and politicized interiority. This is to say that the “fortress city” is a response to moral panics that fueled white flight in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement (Hall 3).⁴⁹ In a similar vein, contemporary urban renewal projects that have as their primary aim the re-conceptualization of the city as a space of leisure (and high culture) hearken back to earlier visions of the city that link urbanity to privilege, wealth, and consumption.⁵⁰ The 1970s saw a reframing of urban spaces as sites of disorder, degradation, and violence.⁵¹ The city came to stand in for everything the suburbs were not: crime ridden, densely populated, and barren of economic, social, and natural resources. While the outsize influence of constructions of domesticity on the cultural imaginary certainly predates the urban unrest that followed the assassination of Civil Rights leaders, it would seem that figurations of home take on additional cultural valence against the backdrop of black bodies clustered together, first, in non-violent demonstration and then, later, in agonizingly futile resistance to the maintenance of a

⁴⁹ See Mike Davis’ *City of Quartz*.

⁵⁰ See Neil Smith on urban renewal and the “revanchist” city in “Giuliani Time.”

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

racially repressive social order. Watts looms large in the American imaginary, stripped of its immediate context, so that what remains fixed in the national symbolic is an image of black bodies moving in violence. The rupture that follows the assassinations of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and President Kennedy, among others, outlines the stark delineation between black and white memories of the 1960s. To date there has been little societal acknowledgement of the traumatic aftereffects of these killings. So that, to those born in the post 1980s landscape, the assassination of King and both Kennedys is presented in a teleological narrative as the cost born by Americans for the inauguration of an egalitarian “color blind” era.

The fantastic as a discourse of urbanity regulates and articulates the black metropolis. Located at the intersection of the cultural imaginary, cartographies of labor relations, and the far-reaching effects of black corporeality, the fantastic links the production of urban space to the mediation of racial discourse. The fantastic lies in this ability to substitute self for other. That is, in a multiplicity that stands in for a radical and individualized conception of black identity. The black fantastic redresses the spatial constriction of the segregated northern city and the psychic toll of failed freedom dreams. By foregrounding the “body/city interface,” the fantastic reveals the radical possibilities contained in the repurposing of urban space (Grosz 108). The destruction of the black body in Himes’s texts—what I describe as an erotics of dismemberment—serves as a strategy for the reproduction of the city according to a racially neutral logic. Petry’s work, meanwhile, toys with the possibility, difficulty, and desirability of shedding the black female’s “surplus corporeality” (Berlant 112). Lutie teaches us that this is a near-impossible task. Min’s example, however, shows us that occult beliefs are no less

fantastic and definitively more rehabilitative than ascription to economic and social ideals crafted to benefit white, propertied, males.⁵² Brooks's Maud finds a measure of peace by embracing her alterity. Maud lingers in the gap that opens up between cultural misrecognition and an inner sense of self worth. She charts a new urban cartography—one that transforms places of peril into sites of refuge.

Reid-Pharr's notion of an uncontrollable master narrative, which in turn evokes the fantasia of black corporeality, has several implications for my reading of Brooks', Himes', and Petry's texts (122). The "black fantastic" appears in a variety of forms in these works. In Himes it materializes in the phantasmagoric urban landscape—in a literary strategy of corporeal fragmentation that accompanies the destruction of Harlem's infrastructure. In Brooks' work, the fantastic surfaces as a fierce interiority—in Maud's efforts to construct an inviolable psychic space that will enable her to give "to the world a good Maud Martha ... th[at] offering, th[at] bit of art, that could not come from any other" (1607). Petry is most critically concerned with the construction of a viable black female bourgeoisie domesticity—a domesticity, that significantly insists on a homeplace for the black female in the public sphere. The fantastic appears, in Petry's text, in the relationship between the body and the city, in Min's fascination with the occult, and in the sonic register. Soundscapes, like Maud's interiority, harbor regenerative, even fantastic possibilities.⁵³ They provide access to psychic roadmaps that transform chronic

⁵² See Griffin on Lutie's adulation of Ben Franklin in *Who Set You Flowin'?*

⁵³ The cataclysmic force of Lutie's anguish when she learns of Bub's arrest, for example, shatters spatial demarcations: "She leaned further against the wall, seemed almost to sink into it, and started to cry. The hall was full of the sound ... The thin walls echoed and reechoed with it ... her crying came through the flimsy walls, followed [her neighbors]

conditions of placelessness into opportunities to liberate the black body. Unlike Himes, Petry cannot fragment the black female body in order to free it—a clear indication that in so far as black corporeality grounds social space in the urban sphere, the obliteration of the black body signals the disintegration of the social order. Lutie, is not interested in uprooting the social order because she aspires to join the ranks of the ruling class. Brooks, however, embraces dismemberment albeit in a much more genteel form. Maud leaves good little bits of Maud scattered throughout the city. She sutures herself psychically to everything she encounters hoping, in the process, to transform her world. Whereas Petry retreats from “a fantastic world that must be rejected ... because it is a world without substantive black[ness]” Brooks and Himes savor the breakdown of the corporeal order as the first step in the transvaluation of black subjectivity (Reid-Pharr 121). In their fiction, the fragmented subject utilizes scalar consciousness to defy bodily containment and redefine the urban landscape.

through the tight-shut doors. All through the house radios went on full blast in order to drown out this familiar, frightening, unbearable sound ... [but they] couldn't possibly shut it out for it was inside them” (390).

Clearing a Space to Listen: The Aural as a Discourse of the Fantastic

"My efforts to make aural literature--A-U-R-A-L--work because I do hear it. It has to read in silence and that's just one phase of the work but it also has to sound" (*Conversations with Toni Morrison* 230).

"One must really do great violence to language, one must somehow disrupt the comforting beat, in order to be heard" (Baldwin 33).

To read the aural as a discourse of the black fantastic is to recognize the potential it has to rewrite space. When Sonny in James Baldwin's poignant short story tells his brother he "needed to clear a space to listen," this links the question of ontological survival to the spatially productive capacity of the sonic (134). Sonny's "blues" reflect the trauma of psychic alienation, spatial deprivation and "corporeal malediction" (Fanon 111).¹ More important, they suggest the aural harbours a transformative and regenerative potential.² In this chapter I consider the aural as a discourse of the fantastic paying close attention to the ways in which the sonic rearticulates narrative space, corporeal space, and psychic space. To the extent that song, music, and iterative forms of speech enable subjects to evade hegemonic social structures, they foster new and radical formations of self (Moten 14, 251). I examine two postwar short works that identify the scream as a metonym of the fantastic: James Baldwin's widely acclaimed "Sonny's Blues" and Ralph Ellison's lesser known "The King of the Bingo Game." Both stories foreground the

¹ Though early chapters of this dissertation discuss the sonic and the spatial as they relate to the singing voice (Dianthe in Hopkins's *Of One Blood* and Lutie in Petry's *The Street*) "Clearing a Space to Listen" places musicality and performativity in correspondence with subjectivity and citizenship.

² "[T]he fantastic assumes a transgressive manifesting function by ... rediscovering a code that will no longer destroy but create" (Christol 168). See also Reid-Pharr on Du Bois (*Conjugal Union* 130).

importance of the sonic in the ontological construction of the black subject, though they resolve attendant spatial crises in differing ways. Ellison's text ends with the annihilation of his protagonist--in a very public milieu that mirrors the spectacle of lynching--while Baldwin's story concludes with the promise of healing and the affirmation of familial and cultural bonds. In their antithetical endings, Baldwin's and Ellison's works consolidate the competing impulses that govern the black fantastic: transcendentalism through corporeal annihilation and the excavation of a cultural link-- rooted in the experience of blackness--that offers sanctuary. The first half of the chapter examines Turner's narrative and Douglass's speech, while the latter half attends to the fantastic capacities of the aural in Baldwin and Ellison's works.

Nat Turner's (1831) *Confessions* and Frederick Douglass's (1869) speech, "Composite Nation," foreground the functions of the *aural* in twentieth-century black American fiction. Turner's *Confessions*, a white transcription of a black oral account, reveals the "impossibility of reproducing the sonic in the written" (Wallace 808). At the same time, the narrative locates in the gap that opens up between the oral iteration and the written representation a strategy for the production of space. This is to say that what Maurice Wallace identifies as a "disability indexicality"—a "narrative will to sound and visibility" that is not fully realized—opens up through the failed mimetic act a critique of the dominant order (803).³ Turner's narrative illustrates that the social relations that serve as the condition of possibility for a text's production guide, but do not dictate, its

³ "Print, Prosthesis, (Im)personation: Morrison's "Jazz" and the Limits of Literary History." *American Literary History*, 20.4 (2008): 794-806.

consumption.⁴ It is possible to heed the call of, and yet redirect the protocols of, the master.⁵ Turner, in other words, exploits the fantastic effects of black corporeality on the white imaginary in order to magnify the symbolic weight of his actions. If as literary critic Sara Kaplan writes, print “emerges as a prosthetic technology intended to *suture the gap* between the au/oral and the written, presence and absence, human and object,” Turner defies its objectives, lingering in and expanding that gap according to a logic of black subjectivity that emphasizes the fantastic (808 emphasis added).⁶

Where Turner’s narrative brings to the fore the practices of textual production and consumption that discourses of the fantastic seek to undermine, Douglass’s speech unpacks the mechanics of the black fantastic. In linking bodily movement in its most basic sense to national policies on immigration, Douglass highlights the centrality of corporeal trespass to strategies for spatial acquisition. The grammar of “locomotion” reveals the scalar implications of corporeal maneuvering.⁷ For the purposes of this chapter, the powerful effects of Douglass’s oratory, combined with the fact of his escape from slavery, illustrate the conjoined nature of the locomotive, the aural, and the

⁴ Black fantastic texts continually negotiate the divide between acknowledging the restrictions of a racially repressive social order—so as to contain them, and facilitating the production of a system that exists outside of these delimiting parameters.

⁵ Saidiya Hartman asks, “If [...] the dominant performances of blackness are about the spectacle of mastery and the enactment of a willed subjection, then can the instances in which the dominant is used, manipulated, and challenged be read as disruptive or refigured articulations of blackness” (58)?

⁶ Kaplan’s piece is a response to Wallace’s 2008 article, “Print, Prosthesis and (Im)personation.”

⁷ “Locomotion” places corporeality and mobility in a geopolitical context in a manner that anticipates Neil Smith’s articulation of “jump[ing] scales” (60).

corporeal. The aural “expand[s] the scale of self centered control and at the same time contract[s] the scale of official control” (Smith 60). Because it penetrates spaces black subjects would not otherwise have access to, and because it harbours the potential to transform the phenomenology of space, the sonic functions as a discourse of the fantastic. The aural facilitates the “production and reproduction of geographical scale” by subordinating the experiential practices that articulate space to psychic habitations that embrace diachronicity (Smith 60). In ameliorating the psychic anguish caused by spatial deprivation—Douglass, for example, identifies locomotion as a human right--the aural alters the subject’s relationship to the social and physical environs.

If the aural as a discourse of the fantastic resolves a spatial crisis perpetuated by racist rhetoric and policy, a close examination of its register reveals the complexity of its corporeal, spatial, and temporal frames. Baldwin and Ellison locate within aurality a capacity to ameliorate psychologically and physiologically debilitating spatial restrictions. The body is a spatial modality governed by scale and its movements reflect social relations. The plenitude of the black body’s significations places black American writers in the peculiar predicament of subduing (or exploiting) the black body's representational excesses. That is, they find themselves putting a questionable surplus to use in the service of liberation so that the “future [will be] shaped,” as Toni Morrison puts it, “by those who have been pressed to the margins, by those who have been dismissed as irrelevant” (186).⁸ The fantastic is a way of remedying this negation and channels superfluity into reorganization of the social spaces we inhabit. By correcting the

⁸ Morrison, Toni. "The Future of Time: Literature and Diminished Expectations." *What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction*. Ed. Carolyn C. Denard. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008. 170-186.

“absence of space within language,” the black fantastic transforms discourse so that a glimpse of a more egalitarian future becomes visible in the present (Iton page 287). As a literary mode it is productive of space within and outside the world of the text. When Baldwin insists that “one must really do great violence to language ... in order to be heard” and articulates this by using a sonic metaphor—the “disrupt[ion of] the comforting beat”—he excavates the aural register of written discourse (33).⁹ He suggests that the disruption of the system of signification that undergirds language—that makes it decipherable--serves as the condition of possibility for “true listening.” The kind of listening, Sonny’s example reminds us, that keeps one alive.

Baldwin's metaphor transforms the act of reading into a shared responsibility. In giving lifeblood to language, he links the production of narrative to its consumption. The author, he argues, must employ certain tactics in order to rouse the reader. By playing “off key,” writers seduce readers into joining in a production of meaning that runs counter to the official version of events. To be heard, then, is to recode, to have readers join you on the other side of the beat. Morrison brings this sentiment to fruition by insisting on the "A-U-R-A-L" nature of her writing. She tells us that her work "has to *sound*" (230). It would seem that Morrison is interested in the sonic’s capacity to rewrite space and time: “I believe that I am detecting an informed vision based on harrowing experience that nevertheless gestures towards a redemptive future,” she writes, “of the poignancy of inverted time ... of *time itself* living on borrowed time” (185 italics

⁹ “As Much Truth As One Can Bear.” *The Cross Of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*. Ed. Randall Kenan. New York: Pantheon Books, 2010. 28-34.

added).¹⁰ The temporal frame, in other words, in which we reside is as constructed as our identities. If time “itself [is] living on borrowed time,” we are all to some extent living in the margins and any distinction between center and periphery is meaningless. The sonic teaches us to inhabit the present in new ways by linking the “rupture of time” to the disarticulation of deleterious spaces and the production of rehabilitative spaces.¹¹ Music, thus, is ubiquitous in twentieth-century African American literature because it has the potential to undermine the social order by offering sanctuary.

In Ellison’s “The King of the Bingo Game,” the sonic uncovers subtextual spatial concerns that highlight the private and public effects of racism cloaking them within the spectre of performance. The aural register reveals the unstable nature of stark delineations between interiority and lived identity and indicates that racial constructs inform subjectivity and organize social space.¹² By way of its aural, urban, and internationalist iterations, the fantastic enables the transvaluation of people and places through discourse. The fantastic opens up textual and cultural spaces of alterity, enabling “us to cross certain frontiers that are inaccessible so long as we have no recourse to it” (Todorov 158). While it may present in a variety of forms, the fantastic in black fiction is always bound up with the production of space and the politics of place. So that in “Sonny’s Blues” it is within the performative milieu and specifically in the historical

¹⁰ Morrison writes that she “notice[s] the milieu from which this vision rises. It is race inflected, gendered, colonialized, displaced, hunted” (“The Future of Time” 185).

¹¹ I am thinking here of the elasticity of time, to borrow from Cornwell and Hartman, and the ways in which temporal distortion is conjoined to the production of space. Morrison also seems to be suggesting, by way of Benjamin, that the state of exception is the rule.

¹² I borrow the term “racial formation” from Omi and Winant. See *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*.

register of jazz that Baldwin locates a pathway for liberation. Music brings Sonny and his brother closer together. By enabling the narrator to see for the first time the rich (and painful) nature of his familial and cultural past, the sonic transforms his relationship to time and space. This is to say that the aural register in realist black fiction is linked to habitations of space and time and, in Baldwin's work, the transformative potential of the fantastic is realized specifically within the context of performance. The aural penetrates the interiority of Baldwin's subjects transforming inner turmoil into public confession. The obliteration of the distinction between performative and domestic spheres instantiates a more radical black subjectivity: music in "Sonny's Blues," whether it is played at home, in a club, or on the street, transforms not only the ontological condition of the artist, but also the psyches of listeners. By reconfiguring the social relations between subjects and the places they inhabit, the sonic channels interiority in the service of spatial production.

If the fantastic presents opportunities for the production of space according to a logic of alterity, the aural facilitates spatial rearticulation through a dialectic of intimacy and juxtaposition. The aural is a discourse of the fantastic because it is a cartographic response to a spatial crisis and because it ruptures the border between interiority and the public sphere. The aural works on the bodies and psyches of subjects turning the outside in and the inside out (Grosz 104). The sonic, and I use the terms sonic and aural interchangeably, is integral to the experiential practices that inform spatial production. Space becomes place when it is personalized, when it is designated for a particular use. The aural encodes strategies for the utilization of space into the built environment providing behavioural cues and—at times—methods of resistance. The fictional works that serve as the focus of this chapter thematize the psychic and corporeal effects of racial

repression within a spatialized aural frame. The musical register in “Sonny’s Blues” records the violence of a social order that is visible in the conditions under which black people live. Baldwin suggests, however, that history can be overcome if society is willing to atone by bearing witness. Ellison, on the other hand, presents a dystopian milieu in which the black subject is trapped within the spaces of his imagination. The sonic in this narrative registers a discord between rhetoric and reality, between legal discourse that guarantees rights and recognition for black Americans and the actual experience of black life. Ellison synchronizes corporeal and psychic deprivation in such a way that they play out to the tune of a single beat. The aural register weaves in and out of the real and surreal indexing the impossibility of escaping the body—one must attend to its physiological needs—and the joy of evading its significations.

Fred Moten writes that sound that cannot be categorized as having “verbal meaning or conventional musical form” contains a transformative potential even as it blurs the distinction between subjectivity and performativity (6). By way of Edouard Glissant, Moten considers the implications of the shriek: a sound that prefigures and moves beyond speech. The power of the shriek lies in its capacity to undermine the spatial and discursive organization of hegemonic systems. Non-verbal sound calls into question the relations between people and things and even people *as* things (Moten 234).¹³ By placing the subject outside systems of exchange, by rendering him value-less, the shriek (or scream) paradoxically makes him value-full—transforming “superfluity” into surplus value (Moten 14). Moten, however, also writes of “dematerialization ... a

¹³ Moten references “the essential theatricality of blackness [as] the commodity who materially objects beyond any subjunctively posited speech” (234).

transition from the body that operates in excess of the body, the body's eclipse” (Moten 251). The exchange between an ontology that exists apart from the body and the re-valuation of subjectivity defines the protocols of the black fantastic. The “body's eclipse” reveals the “representational” nature of corporeality – the symbolic nature of its construction and the hyperreality of its effects (Moten 251; Bhabha 119). I am interested in the sonic’s reconstruction of the spatial field at a variety of nodes: not just the body, but also the domestic, urban, and cultural spaces the subject inhabits. Moten’s deconstruction of the sonic suggests the appearance of the “scream” in Baldwin and Ellison’s texts should not be taken for granted and that in fact the “meaningless texture of [that] extreme noise” conceals a radical form of discourse (Glissant qtd. in Moten 7).¹⁴

4.1 Solicitude and Amusement:¹⁵ Excavating the Black Fantastic

The black fantastic is textural in its reach to sound, location, and time. This texturology has its antecedents in the sorrow songs. In his narrative, Frederick Douglass describes how bondmen and women’s voices reverberate throughout the plantation reordering the spatial environment through sound:

While on their way [the slaves] would make the dense old woods, for miles around, *reverberate* with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness. They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither *time* nor tune. The thought that came up, came out—if not in the word, in the sound; and as frequently in the one as in the other. They would sometimes sing the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone. Into all of their songs they would

¹⁴ “Din is discourse ... slaves camouflaged the word under the provocative intensity of the scream. It was taken to be nothing but the call of a wild animal. This is how the dispossessed man organized his speech by weaving it into the apparently *meaningless texture of extreme noise*” (Glissant qtd. in Moten 7 italics added).

¹⁵ The title of the chapter I discuss in Martin Delany’s *Blake, or the Huts of America*.

manage to weave something of the Great House Farm. Especially would they do this, when leaving home. (13 emphasis added)

Douglass recounts the extraordinary effect these songs have on the listener in a way that anticipates Du Bois's explication in 1903's *The Souls of Black Folk*. They are a testament to the humanity of slaves and, of course, the inhumanity of chattel slavery. Like Du Bois, Douglass notes that the meaning of the songs is to be found not in words, but in sound—in *tonality*. He regards these songs as an organic production—alluding to an unspoken synchronicity among the slaves, and in a way that is important to this chapter's argument regarding the symbiotic relationship between spatiality and raced subjectivity, indicates their utility as travelogues. The songs register both a lament for the loss of home and pleasure at having been afforded the rare opportunity to move the body. In its most physical sense, sound travels. In its poesis, it alters the texture of space. The sonic crafts a psychic roadmap that uncovers the role of the fantastic in the remaking of space.

The fantastic as a discourse of aurality identifies black ontology and black corporeality as central to the production of space. If the absence of mobility is remedied by the poesis of sound, this is because the sonic enables the suspension of time. In Martin Delaney's *Blake*, a text I identify in Chapter One of this dissertation as the ground zero of the black fantastic, the temporality of the supernatural is excavated as an index of the corporeal. The beating to death of a young slave in Delaney's novel is described by Robert-Reid Pharr as an opportunity for the emergence of the fantastic. The slave is forced to perform in front of a group of white men, each sound he emits prompted by the blows his body receives. The episode, as can be seen in the following excerpt, is as much about the construction of white male subjectivity as it is about the degradation of the

slave:¹⁶

““Now gentleman, look!” said Grayson. “He'll whistle, sing songs, hymns, pray, swear like a trooper, laugh, and cry, all under the same state of feelings.”

With a peculiar swing of the whip, bringing the lash down upon a certain spot on the exposed skin, *the whole person being prepared for the purpose*, the boy commenced to whistle almost like a thrush; another cut changed it to a song, another to a hymn, then a pitiful prayer [...]

Franks stood looking on with unmoved muscles. Armsted stood aside whittling a stick; but when Ballard saw, at every cut the flesh turn open in gashes streaming down with gore ... he involuntarily found his hand with a grasp on the whip, arresting its further application.

“Not quite a southerner yet, Judge, if you can't stand that!” said Franks on seeing him wipe away the tears.”” (*Blake* reproduced in Reid-Pharr 120)¹⁷

Reuben, the young slave child in Delany's work, is the victim of a body that exceeds itself: a body that fulfils the master's desires in order to stop the pain of the lash and a body that acts out emitting “otherworldly” cries that confirm inhumanity. The slave's cries of anguish mark him as something less, and something more, than human while the sonic serves as an “index” of his alterity (Reid-Pharr 121).¹⁸ Thus, what emerges in the destruction of the black corporeal form is the possibility of spiritual liberation, of an ontology that moves beyond the human and into the borderland of the fantastic (Reid-Pharr 121).¹⁹ The “surplus corporeality” of the slave blurs the boundary between fiction

¹⁶ It is significant that one of these men, Ballard, is a Northerner who will be moving to the South. The episode marks his indoctrination into the cultural mores of plantation life.

¹⁷ Emphasis added.

¹⁸ Reid-Pharr notes that, “as the boy whistles, sings, prays, and makes oaths, all under the same state of feelings, he creates an *index of black humanity* that finds its efficacy precisely in the fact that it refuses rationalist modes of thought and expression” (121 italics added).

¹⁹ But Reid-Pharr also notes that the whip in suturing master to slave blurs the distinction between individual white and black corporealities. In this process of conjoining there is a

and reality since it is the violence exacted upon the frail body that captures the reader's attention (Berlant 112).²⁰ The fictional Reuben's excess of body, combined with the very real corporeal vulnerability of Delany and his nineteenth-century black readers, labours to produce the "truth" of the text.²¹

Delany complicates this imbrication of truth and storytelling by alerting his readers in a small footnote to the fact that "this is a true Mississippi scene" (*Blake* 67). By including this notation, the author prevents his readers from attributing the horrors of the episode to fictional license and disturbs their "sentimentality."²² Delaney soon troubles the separation between the real and the fictional even further with the revelation that "poor Reuben, from haemorrhage of the lungs, that evening *left time* for eternity" (Delany 68 italics added). The fleshiness of the scene, Delany's emphasis on the boy's abject corporeality--"thin visage, projecting upper teeth, rather ghastly consumptive look, and emaciated condition"--coupled with the sobering reminder that this is a "true scene" blurs permanently the distinction between the fictional and real worlds, even as the very

"release of a language of the body that exists apart from the efforts of the white slavers" (Reid-Pharr 120). What begins as a performative expression of the "material relations of chattel slavery," then, is transformed into a "black fantastic" that rehearses the twinned and competing impulses that inform black subjectivity: the desire to obliterate the body produced by a deforming racial logic and a fear of the deracinated rootlessness such freedom symbolizes (Hartman 21).

²⁰ I have adjusted Berlant's term so that it reads "surplus corporeality" instead of "surplus body" ("National Brands/National Body: Imitation of Life" 112).

²¹ Delaney's serial was published in a (short lived) black press so it is likely that his intended first readers were black.

²² I am alluding here to Hartman's critique of sentimental literature in *Scenes of Subjection* and the possibility that readerly practices sometimes inhibit political action by cathecting anxieties.

notion that time has been ruptured in Reuben's passing evokes a certain boundlessness that lies at the heart of the black fantastic (67-8). Reuben in leaving "*time* for eternity" escapes the temporally circumscribed space of the plantation, and the equally fraught space of his body, for the spiritual and spatially expansive world of the afterlife (68 italics added).²³

Taking readers out of the text and into the footnotes reminds them that voyeurism has consequences and that they bear an ethical responsibility or risk colluding with abhorrent forces. They find themselves in a predicament mirrored by Delany's fictional Northern gentleman, Ballard, who pleads with the master to abstain from his beating, "tears rolling down his cheeks" (*Blake* 67). The suspension of the beating does not prevent the death of the young slave, though bearing witness to Reuben's torture does make Ballard complicit in his death.²⁴ The diegetic moment is replicated on an extra-textual level, then, by the politics of consumption that govern the relationship between reader and text (4). When the master tells Ballard that he is "not quite a Southerner yet ...

²³ The juxtaposition of time and eternity—which after all signifies *endless time* in some other sphere—evokes Morrison's description of "time itself ... living on borrowed time"—a condition I would argue that is paradigmatic of the black fantastic.

²⁴ The Northerner's presence on the plantation serves as a call for the child's "performance." The master's desire to display his absolute control over his slaves requires the degradation of the child. But this ritual requires an audience and must take place in the presence of another white. The Northerner authenticates the ritual and affirms the master's supremacy. Much like the call and response ritual that solicits and sublimates Aunt Hester's shrieks, the Northerner's pleas for mercy, on behalf of the child, work to instantiate the master's subjectivity (Moten 3-5). At the same time, something escapes the master's control and that is the artistic capacity of the slave. The forced performance sustains the illusion that the master is in control—that the slave's excess can and has been channelled to his purposes. In order to prove this, he is willing to let the slave perish because in so far as the slave child's otherworldliness represents a threat to the ideological apparatus of slavery it also negates his exchange value.

if [he] can't stand that!" Delany arouses in readers an awareness of their complicity in scenes like the one he depicts (*Blake* reproduced in Reid-Pharr 120). Their indignation does not absolve them of a responsibility to act. The notion that a certain overidentification with, and desensitization to, violence inflicted on black bodies perpetuates the "material relations of chattel slavery" has been advanced by Saidiya Hartman (21-22).²⁵ Hartman refers to a sleight of hand that substitutes the white reader's body for that of the slave's (20). Hartman's criticism is profound precisely because the dynamic she uncovers plays a crucial role in the consumption (and valuation) of black American cultural production today. She writes of the "dissimulation of suffering through spectacle"—an outcome Delany tries to mitigate by reminding his audience, within the frame of a fictional narrative, that scenes like this occur routinely in their midst (22). The relationship, then, between the spectacle and reality informs the articulation of the fantastic in black literature.²⁶ If the condition of possibility for the emergence of the fantastic in black American fiction is the absurdity of the social real—absurd in that it reflects a social order rooted in the commodification of black bodies and devaluation of black personhood—then this explains why its parameters are so far reaching. In labouring to make visible an alternative version of reality, one that does not affirm the negation of

²⁵ By drawing the reader's gaze down to the bottom of the page, Delany insists that she contemplate her relationship to the facts on the page and the text in her hands. The asterisk, then, conjures the reader's body asking her to consider her corporeal vulnerability or lack thereof in relation to "true scenes" like the one depicted. In this blurring of the distinction between the real and the fictional, Delaney denies the reader the luxury of escapism. To evade the "politics of pleasure" is to deactivate the "fungibility of the [black] commodity"—it is in this instance a disruption of those reading practices that relieve readers of social responsibility (Hartman 23, 21)

²⁶The spectacle references an embodied hyper-reality.

black sentience, black writers use the fantastic as a narrative mode to excavate the social real.²⁷

Delany's reminder that the scene is rooted in the reality of plantation life erodes the distance between reader and text. It is “an irruption of the inadmissible within the changeless everyday legality”(Callois qtd. in Todorov 25). In obscuring the distinction between fact and fiction Delany chides his readers, reminding them of their acquiescence to a social order in which brutality is the norm. In stark contrast to nineteenth-century slave narratives with their introductory pages of authentication, Delany's text labours to make truth visible in a form that is not circumscribed by white borders. The politics of the production of *Blake* is significant here: *Blake*, like Pauline Hopkins' *Of One Blood*, was published serially in a short-lived black press, *The Anglo African*. As Reid-Pharr has chronicled, Delany saw nascent black literary forms as conjoined to the production and maintenance of autonomous black households, inviolable black bodies, and a racially distinct black American subjectivity (7, 117). Thus, Delany takes a conventional form—the slave narrative—and calls attention to the politics of its production and consumption by toying with the boundaries of genre, and revising it so that it adheres to a black aesthetic in which domestic concerns around black liberation are reframed as international ones. This is to say that the very instance in which Reid-Pharr excavates a black fantastic in Delany's work and, reifies it as an area of critical study, is in *Blake*

²⁷ Helene Christol writes that, “The fantastic is thus a crucial element in challenging existing notions of reality, subverting the visions channelled by dominant cultures and provoking action to change both that vision and reality” (172). See also pages 168-9.

itself a textual moment that lingers in the interstices between the real and the imagined, so that there is a replication within the narrative frame itself.²⁸

It would seem that the relationship between violence, performativity, and the corporeal form of the slave lies at the heart of the black fantastic. The master's pursuit of pleasure requires the debased corporeal form of the slave. It is his usurpation of the slave's body, but from a safe distance, that enacts the sublime—that “reward of enjoying fear by proxy, and of thereby turning a peril into a source of pleasure”(Tandt 5). Delany, as I have written, troubles this process by insisting that Reuben's death represents a “true Mississippi scene” (67). By momentarily pulling his reader out of the text Delany disrupts the possibility “of enjoying fear by proxy” and ruptures the reader's “safe distance.” At the precise moment when sympathetic readers are tempted to place their bodies in Reuben's stead, the author pulls them away from the reenactment of a spectacular scene of suffering--“from the fullness of his soul [the slave child] cried: ”O maussa, I's sick! Please stop a little!” casting up gobs of hemorrhage”—and into the footnotes (67). Undergirding Reid-Pharr's explication of a black fantastic rooted in the transformation of the slave's abject condition, then, is precisely this interplay between the real and the imagined at the authorial level.²⁹ It is the distance between the subject and

²⁸ In other words, the black fantastic emerges at the level of form and content—at the place and time in which the textual world intersects with what Foucault has termed the “real space of Society” (*Of Other Spaces* 3).

²⁹ I draw a distinction here between the interplay of the real and the imagined at the authorial and thematic levels. Delany with his footnote is playing with the boundaries of genre in order to call attention to the politics of the text's production. To insist in a fictional narrative on the verisimilitude of narrative occurrences and to do so on the fictional page itself is to refuse the neat separation between fact and fiction.

the abject that transforms the dreaded into the sublime (Tandt 5).³⁰ In this respect, the phenomenology of the sublime pivots on a “too easy intimacy” that refutes black subjectivity even as it reifies black corporeal vulnerability (Hartman 21).

4.2 Slave Sublime: The Confessions of Nat Turner

"The work of the earliest ostensibly black authors turned, then, upon the necessity of narrativizing-and domesticating-this relationship of community to body, creating in the process an absolute conflation of the black text and the black self" (Reid-Pharr 12).

The parasitical relations between master and slave extend to the production and consumption of black literary forms. Nowhere is this more evident than in the firsthand account of the most infamous slave revolt in American history: Nat Turner's 1831 rebellion. *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, as told to Thomas Gray, illustrates the precise dynamic Delany and other nineteenth-century black intellectuals felt they were up against (Reid-Pharr 7). The document highlights in dramatic form the near impossibility of preserving and reproducing an authentic black voice in the antebellum period. Turner's narrative, and for the purposes of this chapter I will refer to the collaborative text as such, is an astounding document because it reveals so clearly the ambivalent nature of stereotypical discourse (Bhabha 66). Thomas Gray is trapped between his desire to represent Nat Turner's words as faithfully as possible—so that future rebellions may be detected and prevented—and his need to contain the existential threat Turner represents. What results is a document suffused through and through with the “desire and derision” Bhabha so poignantly writes of (67).

³⁰ “Dread constitutes the initial stage of a scenario of emotional ambivalence that leads the subject from terror to delight” (Tandt 5).

Ambivalence, Bhabha notes, is the key mechanism of stereotypical discourse (66-67). In this respect it parallels the Todorovian conception of the fantastic as based on a crucial “hesitation” as to which order—the real or the surreal—textual events belong (31). Turner is cast as a fantastic figure. Gray vacillates between depicting him as a “miscreant,” with delusions of grandeur, and a “fiendish” genius. At more than one point in the narrative Gray refers to Turner as a “gloomy fanatic,” his melancholy presumably suggestive of some genetic flaw (4). Turner’s is a voiceless and a voice-full confession. Though Gray assures readers he “commit[ted] his [Turner’s] statements to writing, and publish[ed] them, with *little or no* variation, from his own words,” it is Gray who authenticates the narrative and makes it legible to a white reading public in such a way that Turner enters the official record conjoined to him (3-4 italics added). Gray cannot allow the transcription of Turner’s narrative to remain intact. The violation of Turner’s textual body—a forceful silencing and copulation—is an act of discursive violence.³¹

The most notable instance of violation occurs when Turner is describing the connection between his *corporeal form* and his destiny: “I was intended for some great purpose, which they had always thought from certain marks on my head and breast,” he notes (7). Gray abruptly intercedes, conjoining his words to Turner’s and discrediting the latter’s claim in a bracketed addendum: “[a parcel of excrescences which I believe are not at all uncommon, particularly among negroes, as I have seen several with the same. In this case he has either cut them off or they have nearly disappeared]” (7). The

³¹ Gray intends for Turner’s narrative to sustain the reproduction of the (antebellum) social order. I argue that the reverse happens: the oral nature of the narrative—that is, the inviolability, on some level, of Turner’s voice preserves the radical nature of his acts and in its echoes heightens their symbolism.

transcription resumes, then, as if it had been never interrupted with Turner's rumination that all who came into contact with him, including his master, noted his exceptional nature. This is the first of several instances in the narrative in which Gray quite literally assumes ownership over the meaning of Turner's words (by overriding their intent) and in which the peculiarities of the text's production are revealed in its formal structure. That the subject in question is the linkage between the slave's body and his ontology is highly significant.³²

Gray hesitates between affirming awe of Turner and cataloguing his inferior traits. He describes Turner as possessed of a chaotic mind “grappl[ing] with things beyond its reach” (4). Yet he inexplicably observes, several pages later, that Turner “possesses an uncommon share of intelligence with a mind capable of attaining any thing” (18). In describing Turner's intellect and strength of character (in the second instance) Gray allows a strain of admiration to seep into his words:

It has been said he was ignorant and cowardly, and that his object was to murder and rob for the purpose of obtaining money to make his escape. It is notorious, that he was never known to have a dollar in his life; to swear an oath, or drink a drop of spirits ... for natural intelligence and quickness of apprehension, [he] is surpassed by few men I have ever seen. (18-19)

The dilemma that Gray faces extends to his implicit and explicit ownership of Turner's words. It is he after all who will make the slave's tale part of the official record. As indicated earlier, Reid-Pharr suggests it is precisely this sort of amalgamation that troubles nineteenth-century black writers such as Delany (Reid-Pharr page 113). Slave

³² The intrusion is so startling that one must reread the passage in order to ascertain it is Gray, and not Turner, speaking. In other instances Gray uses an asterisk and footnote to modify Turner's claims; for example, “*When questioned as to the manner of manufacturing those different articles, he was found well informed on the subject” (9).

narratives, with their introductory affidavits, serve as a metaphor for the “parasitical relationship” between blacks and whites in the antebellum society. If we return to the maxim that “black bodies and books [are] read as a single narrative” it becomes clear that the body-text is the central site for the production of race (Holloway 7, Reid-Pharr 12). Further, it is the articulation of that body's relationship to the space that surrounds it that confirms or disputes the subject's status. Gray interjects his voice most forcefully into Turner's account at the moment when the slave attempts to *transvalue* his corporeal form. It is this threat to the ideological apparatus of slavery that Gray must curtail by disrupting and discrediting the narrative. In refuting Turner's explanation as to the symbolic import of his birthmarks, Gray emphasizes his blackness: Turner is described as “having the *true negro face*, every feature of which is strongly marked,” and later as “fiend-like” and “blood curdl[ing]” (18-19 emphasis added).

One of the more interesting things about Gray's transcription of Turner's account is his attempt to identify the latter as a “fanatic.” The term in its various forms--fanatic, fanaticism--appears several times throughout the narrative.³³ This impulse to categorize Turner as irrational, superstitious and feeble minded--traits commonly prescribed to slaves and those of African descent more generally--falls short in the wake of Gray's bizarre insistence that Turner is disciplined and highly intelligent (18). Fanaticism is of course closely related to fantasy: the two words have similar etymological roots. The fanatic is a “mad person,” one who is “possess[ed] by a deity or demon,” “odd and

³³ Dr. Samuel Cartwright also uses the term liberally in reference to abolitionists—who are described as dangerous persons exhibiting irrational and naive behaviour.

irrational in behavior," "grotesque," and a "visionary."³⁴ The linkages between "fanaticism" and the "fantastic" position Turner as a black fantastic figure. The fanatic is a figure of excess—one whose identity is not constructed according to the logic of the dominant society. Turner's insurrection attests to the relationship between the indeterminate nature of power and the production of spaces of resistance. If, as I reiterate several times throughout this dissertation, the fantastic is a spatialized and racialized discourse, it becomes possible to imagine Turner as both constrained and unfettered by the significations of his corporeal form.³⁵ On one hand, *The Confessions* reveals the ambivalent nature of racist discourse; on the other, the possibilities for transvaluation inherent in the transcendence of racialized corporeality. Turner refers to his corporeal markings as proof of his otherworldliness—they transform his flesh and person in such a way as to negate his exchange value. Turner, in other words, places himself outside the corporeal economy of slavery by insisting that his flesh affirms a predestined role that runs counter to, and outside the purview of, the aims of his master.

Slavery, as Thavolia Glymph and other scholars have noted, was an institution that relied on a forced and one-sided intimacy (67).³⁶ As such it was necessary for whites to convince themselves that not only were blacks better off as slaves, but that they accepted their subjugation as a natural state. Hence the absurd and widely propagated

³⁴ Oxford English Dictionary.

³⁵ A colleague has described this as a disequilibrium/dialectic of flight and compulsion—an ontological and corporeal process that is visible in, for example, contemporary artist Kara Walker's silhouettes.

³⁶ *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008

notion of the plantation as a patriarchal and benevolent institution that fostered the well being of those in captivity. Black will became a tricky thing in this framework because the illusion of black compliance could only be maintained with the assumption that blacks did not desire freedom and that, if given the choice, would prefer to remain in white households. I argue that even in his purportedly exact recapitulation of Turner's confession Gray cannot subvert the protocols of this "too easy intimacy" and that his desire to "slip on the guise of the other" obscures the work he sets out to do (Hartman 21). This false intimacy prevents him from condemning Turner in the absolute way he would like. The articulation of the black fantastic, then, relies on the intimacy and estrangement that structures discourse on race. Turner and Gray are engaged in a perverse duet that ends with the death of one and the emergence as a literary figure of the other. And yet one must also consider that Gray's labour immortalizes Turner, transcribing his account into the historical record and into the cultural memory of the nation. Gray facilitates the reproduction and re-presentation of Turner in the cultural imaginary, in scholarship, and in the space of the text. The symbolic weight Turner holds in the historical record and as a signifier of black radicalism speaks to the ways in which the fantastic functions as a narrative response to a spatial crisis. The aural nature of Turner's text—the echo of his words—grants him an afterlife that proves and disproves the insignificance of his corporeal form. Shackled hand and foot, confined in a small cell, Turner manages nevertheless to appear larger than life to Gray, to strike fear into his soul (18-19).³⁷ Turner resolves the spatial, corporeal, and psychic crisis that slaves faced by

³⁷ "The calm, deliberate composure with which he spoke of his late deeds and intentions, the expression of his fiend-like face when excited by enthusiasm [...] clothed with rags

seizing the spaces of the white imaginary and, it is astonishing, that rather than silencing him Gray unwittingly augments this process.

The Confessions is not just exemplary of the textual, social, and corporeal dynamics that mimic master/slave relations (Reid-Pharr 113). The document is interesting for the purposes of this chapter because it is an oral account that highlights the disjuncture between the oral and the aural—between what is said, what is heard, and how it is represented. When Morrison writes that she needs her work “to sound” she refers to a truth that exists beyond the page--that resonates in the hearts and minds of her readers. She also suggests that the aural register inaugurates a social contract between the author and her audience. Leaving aside for the moment the complex ways in which the black authorial corporeal form is always embedded in the production and consumption of black texts, it is possible to imagine that the oral account usurps the written word and at the moment when it passes from one’s mouth to another’s ear actually joins the two subjects. The aural serves as an interface that has the potential to bind listener and speaker as one entity. I suggest that the peculiarities of Turner and Gray’s conjoined narrative reveal the discomfiting corporeal politics that undergird its production and compel its consumption. This is to say that Gray’s assurance to readers that he recounts Turner’s words with full veracity, that they have not been tampered with, places him in a peculiar position as it forces him—in those places where he interrupts Turner’s account--to suture his words to those of the slave: not just to write, but to speak over and for him. The text, then, much

and covered with chains; yet daring to raise his manacled hands to heaven, with a spirit soaring above the attributes of man; I looked on him and my blood curdled in my veins” (18-19).

like the whip that binds master and slave in Delany's work, stands in for a cultural amalgamation produced through violence (Reid-Pharr 120). It also, and this runs absolutely counter to Gray's intent, obscures the distinction between white and black bodies.

4.2.1 Labour Power and Valuation:

Turner notes that any spare time he had was devoted to the "fertility of my imagination ... [to] making experiments in casting different things in moulds made of earth, in attempting to make paper, gunpowder" (8).³⁸ Turner's description of his activities is authenticated by Gray who in an asterisked footnote confirms that, "When questioned as to the manner of manufacturing those different articles, he [Turner] was found well informed on the subject" (8). I would like to pause here and consider the multiples ways in which Turner's actions resonate with my theorization of the black fantastic. There are three central elements here: time, space, and labour-power. Turner's experiments, his successful "attempt[s] to make" are a way of appropriating his use and exchange value. By labouring, to his own purposes, at a task that runs counter to his master's interests, a task that in fact threatens to take down the institution of slavery, Turner produces wealth for self.³⁹ In that time, he commands his labour power and, in so doing, rearticulates scale (Smith 60). We see, simultaneously, then, the production of space through the manipulation of time and the production of value (Moten 18). The

³⁸ The language Turner uses—"fertility of my imagination"—automatically inaugurates a discourse around psychic economy, around the fecundity of what Gray would call fanaticism and Turner his destiny (8).

³⁹ By this I mean that any task which runs counter to the master's interests by satisfying the slave's desires (or needs) disrupts a system of valuation that pivots on the slave's inability to reap profit from his labour.

slave whose psychology and actions placed him outside the master's domain represented a profound threat to the ideological apparatus of slavery--such persons had to be destroyed and their exchange value negated. So that at the moment and in the space of his experimental production Turner utilizes negation to generate surplus value.

Turner places himself outside of time by noting that in order to tell his story, he "must go back to the days of my infancy, even *before* I was born" (7 emphasis added). Turner's sixth sense, a purported prenatal knowledge, is a rejection of the mandates of his corporeal form. This "other" knowledge is a subversion of Western time and reifies Turner's alterity. Implicit is psychic awareness of the sort Du Bois would define a quarter century later as "double consciousness" (2). Turner's hyperawareness of the way he is perceived by others and the distinction he draws between the "visual acuity" of whites and blacks forges the ocular, psychological, and spatial orientation of "dual vision" to the fantastic. Turner takes great pains to catalogue the discourse others carry on about him within his hearing. The linkage between the aural and the corporeal--I heard and then my flesh confirmed--is significant in relation to its affirmation of Turner's alterity--an alterity Gray tries to deligitmate, but does not dispute (8-9). The relationship between the fantastic and aurality is reinforced by the political economy of the body. This is to say that Turner's corporeal form looms large in the absence of his written hand. The aural trace of his discourse conjures his body.

Turner's fantastic qualities mesmerize and horrify the white man who is charged with relaying his tale. *The Confessions* is a forced collaboration mediated by the social and political imperatives of the plantocracy, and Gray's uncertainty as to how best to re-

present Turner is visible in the text's contradictions, hesitations, and embellishments. Gray, even though he has taken control over Turner's narrative, finds it impossible to deny the latter's willfulness, meticulous planning, and intelligence as to do so is to obscure the threat Turner represents. In fact, Gray goes out of his way to personally affirm these qualities bracketing Turner's words with his own. What emerges in the text under a watchful white gaze, then, is a conception of the slave as subject—as a thinking, reasoning, and vengeful human being willing to act in his own self interest—a fundamental betrayal of the psychic economy of slavery.⁴⁰ This emergence of black subjectivity under the purview of the white gaze is allowable only because Turner faces a certain and public death. It is a provisional circumstance. At the same time, the dynamics of the text's production and consumption suggest that something larger is at work. The effect of the narrative, it seems to me, is the construction of a black fantastic subjectivity that both sustains, and represents a threat to, the social order. Turner's exceptional qualities paradoxically confirm his inhumanity – he is perhaps the original “magical Negro”.⁴¹

Turner's narrative highlights the difficulty of establishing black subjectivity in a social schema where black corporeal integrity is expressly forbidden. The impossibility of isolating Turner's voice—and I refer here to both the veracity of Gray's transcription and the formal structure of the narrative—reveals the corporeal economics of narrative. It is the spectre of Turner's body that haunts Gray, and he returns to it throughout the

⁴⁰ The slave's status as an instrument of labour is a precondition and consequence of his lack of subjectivity.

⁴¹ See references cited in Chapter 1.

course of his transcription to anchor ruminations on Turner's psyche. The Black fantastic opens up the possibility of evading this problematic paradigm by privileging particular readers and/or concealing a text within a text. Gray takes control of Turner's narrative in order to stamp out the possibility of extra-corporeal liberation; he wants to strip any radical potentiality from Turner's account. In identifying those places in the narrative where Gray interrupts Turner's confession to insert his own viewpoint, and by observing how he chooses to do this (the grammatical structures he utilizes), we learn a great deal about the centrality of the black corporeal form to the coherence of the narrative's logic. The black body is formative to the production of textual space, "plantation space," and ideological space (Camp 7). For this reason, Gray cannot allow Turner's body to tell its own tale of predestination, of markings that signify divine purpose and ultimately transvalue flesh. Gray needs to control the multiple significations of Turner's corporeal form because to open up the possibility of some other and more fantastic governing logic is to hint at escape through transcendence.

4.3 The Art of Locomotion: Frederick Douglass' Composite Nation

If Turner's narrative calls attention to the politicized nature of corporeal representation and its connection to "freedom dreams," Frederick Douglass's 1869 speech "Composite Nation" identifies bodily movement as a human right.⁴² Delivered shortly after the passage of the 14th amendment, which codified the birthright citizenship of freedmen, Douglass' speech draws implicit parallels between the plight of former slaves and the exclusionary immigration policies Chinese labourers faced. Douglass

⁴² Taken from the title of Robin D.G. Kelley's book *Freedom Dreams*.

syntactically joins the “right of locomotion” to the “right of migration” in order to argue that there is a universal right to emigrate—one that cannot be separated from the moral sanctity of corporeal autonomy:

There are such things in the world as human rights. They rest upon no conventional foundation, but are external, universal, and indestructible. Among these, is the *right of locomotion*; the right of migration; the right which belongs to no particular race, but belongs alike to all and to all alike. This is the right you assert by staying here, and your fathers asserted by coming here ... I know of no rights of race superior to the rights of humanity, and when there is a supposed conflict between human and national rights, it is safe to go to the side of humanity. (italics added)

The importance of “Composite Nation” lies in the connection Douglass draws between “locomotion” in a very basic sense--the movement of the body--and immigration. The speech sheds light on the relationship between raced corporeality and national identity in the postbellum era. If, as I argue, the fantastic is linked to the phantasmatic nature of black corporeality to, that is, its ability to signify absence and plenitude at one and the same time, it is significant that Douglass links the *production of national space* to the body in motion. The title of the speech reveals Douglass’s primary concern: fostering a racially inclusive sense of national identity—one that does not differentiate between European, African, or Asian origins. By equating “the right of locomotion” with “the right of migration,” Douglass conjoins the politics of corporeal autonomy to racialized nineteenth-century queries around immigration. For freedmen and women the nested nature of these spatial frames was self-evident. Forced migration to the New World meant a loss of corporeal autonomy, and the transition from subject to object, while movement northward in the post-Emancipation era was an expressive act of freedom (Hartman 150). Douglass saw a correlation between the denial of citizenship to Chinese

labourers and the plight of black American workers, and he also observed how crucial these questions would be to the national identity and the national economy.⁴³

Coming just two years after the abolition of slavery, Douglass's notion of an itinerant population that finds its commonality in a non-exclusive claim to the land-- “the right you assert by staying here, and your fathers asserted by coming here”-- has to do with the reinterpretation of geographical scale in the service of a (new) national narrative. Douglass's language is striking: the “right of locomotion,” of mobility on any scale, is equated with the human right to migrate. He advocates for a proto-multiculturalism, a nationalism that rests on racial and ethnic inclusivity. It is significant that Douglas posits emigration (and immigration) as a human right. In speaking to a presumably white and Northern audience, he reminds his listeners that their forefathers' claim to the land is no different from Chinese nationals. It is the articulation of mobility as a fundamental pillar of humanity and the use of the term “locomotion”—a word that calls attention to the corporeal form of the migrant-- that uncovers the relationship between the territory of the nation and the corporeal form of the abject. In advocating for the incorporation of Chinese immigrants into the nineteenth-century national fabric, Douglass looks beyond the borders of the U.S. Constitution to a moral imperative dictated by the framework of human rights. In conjoining the restriction of black mobility (in the wake of Emancipation) to the “Chinese question,” Douglass awakens his listeners to the common roots of these policies.

⁴³ I refer here to planters' efforts to corral black labourers in the South after Emancipation and simultaneous efforts by Northern industrialists to recruit labourers to urban areas.

The term “locomotion” signifies a relationship between the corporeal form, bodily movement, and the legal and social apparatuses that govern the movement of peoples: “Personal liberty consists in the power of loco-motion, of changing situation, or removing one’s person to whatsoever place one’s own inclination may direct; without imprisonment or restraint, unless by due course of law.”⁴⁴ Douglass like all former slaves was profoundly aware of the power of “locomotion” and the ontological effects of being denied this right. Slaves were not allowed autonomy over the course, duration, or direction of their movements. The prohibition of locomotion transformed them into living automatons, into “commodit[ies] who shrieked” (Moten 254).⁴⁵ Locomotion serves as a crucial link in the transition from object to subject, such that in its absence the sonic stands in for bodily movement—linking (and delinking) persons across boundaries that cannot be traversed.⁴⁶ In the wake of Emancipation, and specifically the passage of the 14th amendment which codified birthright citizenship and, at least on paper, brought freedmen and women into the national fold, the desire to move was profound. Exercising liberty meant asserting freedom at multiple scales—the atomized level of bodily movement, movement across state lines, and most importantly movement directed by the current of one’s desires. Douglass’s speech hints at the possibility that the locomotive freedoms black Americans gained, with the passage of the Civil Rights amendments were contingent upon a racially inclusive notion of American identity. Thus, in advocating for

⁴⁴ 1765: W. Blackstone, *Common Laws Eng.*, I., 134.

⁴⁵ “Movement of the body as a whole is termed locomotion” (1872: T.H. Huxley, *Lessons in Elementary Physiology*).

⁴⁶ By way of example, consider my earlier discussion of Douglass’s *Narrative* and songs as travelogues.

Chinese immigration Douglass asserts a proto-multiculturalism at a pivotal moment in American history.

The “mutually constitutive” relations between spatial articulation and subject formation are visible, according to “Composite Nation,” in racist immigration policy. By declaring migration a human right and anatomizing it through an intense focus on bodily movement —“locomotion”—Douglass’s speech makes visible the production and contraction “of space within language” (Iton 287). Douglass uses corporeal imagery to rearticulate the relationship between individual bodies and the body politic. Feminist scholars such as Karen Sanchez Eppler have written that white males enjoy the privilege of disembodiment—of maintaining individual identity even while having the capacity to stand in for the whole.⁴⁷ These critics argue that women and black Americans by virtue of their exclusion from the rights afforded to propertied, white, males by the nation’s founding document are embodied citizens.⁴⁸ When Douglass writes of the right of mobility, using the vernacular of locomotion, he implicitly argues that *all* citizenship is embodied.⁴⁹ For the purposes of this chapter, it is important to recognize that the interface between locomotive freedoms, embodiment, and the production of space articulates a discourse of the fantastic that rests on the capacity of the aural to manipulate scale.

⁴⁷ *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism and the Politics of the Body*

⁴⁸ These categories, of course, are not mutually distinct.

⁴⁹ If we conceive of the body as a spatial modality, it becomes clear that Douglass “jumps scales” in order to embody the white male citizen and deracinate citizens of color (Smith 60).

4.4 The Unlucky Migrant: Ellison's King of the Bingo Game⁵⁰

Ralph Ellison's short story, "The King of the Bingo Game," addresses black migration in the wake of Reconstruction and the correlation between the social organization of labour and the production of racial narratives.⁵¹ Ellison's protagonist grapples with the terror of inhibited locomotion and the surplus mortality that accompanies "hyperembodiment" (Berlant 113). Set in Harlem during the interwar years, Ellison's text utilizes the scream as a leitmotif to highlight the persistent structural inequalities that prevent black Americans from living the "good life."⁵² "The King of the Bingo Game," one of Ellison's lesser known works, is a gripping tale about the price of fantasy. Ellison's eponymous protagonist, a man down on his luck, sits in a darkened movie theatre clutching five tickets awaiting the start of a bingo game. The man is jobless, poverty stricken and hungry. A recent southern migrant with no birth certificate, the King of the Bingo Game is lost in the shuffle of the industrial urban north and hopes to win the jackpot to pay for the medical care of his sweetheart. The man's turn at the wheel, however, comes at the cost of his spiritual and material destruction. Ellison, in this work, uses the disruptive capacity of sound as a narrative device. "The King of the Bingo

⁵⁰ Published in 1944.

⁵¹ Of migration, Hartman writes, "If moving about existed on the border of the unrealized and the imagined, it nonetheless was at odds with the project of socializing black laborers for market relations. In effect, by refusing to stay in their place, the emancipated insisted that freedom was a departure, literally and figuratively, from their former condition" (128).

⁵² Manthia Diawara uses this term in *In Search of Africa* to describe the exclusion of black youth from the public sphere (127). Consumption of material goods, he suggests, is a way in. "The physical mobility of young blacks, which is aimed at removing obstacles to black Americans' pursuit of material wealth and pleasure," Diawara notes, "has been represented in the media as pathological and a menace to society" (239).

Game" begins with a rapid shuttling between the senses. The man hears the gurgling sound of liquor being drained from a bottle as he tries to muffle the noises of his own hunger pangs. The growls of his stomach are triggered by a smell of salted peanuts, a scent that "stab[s] him like a knife" and signifies a profound sense of familial and cultural loss: "Folks down South," he observes, "stuck together ... [but] ask somebody for something up here and they'd think you were *crazy*" (126, 123-4). The sharp smell of the peanuts the protagonist cannot ask for—he is a stranger to the social mores of the urban north—confirm his outsider status and iterate the deferral of gratification that is a recurrent theme in the story. Through a concatenation of images and exclamations, Ellison highlights the linkages between the sensory and the subjective.⁵³ The man's physiological response to his social condition—he is hungry because he cannot get a job, he cannot get a job because he lacks a birth certificate-- is dramatized to the point that it violates the normative synergy between body and mind (Urquhart 217).⁵⁴ I suggest that the interchange between the protagonist's physiological drives and his desires articulates a discourse of the fantastic. If his hunger parallels his exclusion from the dominant order-- he is always left wanting more--his recurring nightmares allude to the psychic and corporeal toll of living in a racist society. I would like to focus on the protagonist's

⁵³ Indeed the olfactory is critical to articulations of place and subjectivity in the text.

⁵⁴ Urquhart analyzes the larger ramifications of the lack of a birth certificate, chiefly that the protagonist lacks "a proper name" and that this places him squarely on the margins of society: "because a birth certificate serves to document a person's origin, the protagonist's lack suggests that he is not merely disenfranchised, but unenfranchised; he has not been given the document which allows him to exist in mainstream American society" (217).

horrific and recurring hallucinations, as the catalyst for their emergence is the possibility of his hunger (in a metaphorical and literal sense) being satiated.

It is the man's abject condition that triggers his hallucinatory episodes. The root of the fantastic in this work is physiological and corporeal even as it is psychological and ontological. The fantastic is an effect of the absurd racial discourse that promises the King of the Bingo Game everything and allows him absolutely nothing, and *it shows*, to borrow from Toni Morrison, in his "propriative" and "corporeal exertion[s]" (Moten 1, Grosz 108). The King of the Bingo Game imagines himself running along tracks as a train bears down on him. His terror is prolonged, and transformed into spectacle, by the bright lights of the oncoming train and the *gaze* of those watching. The lights freeze him in place and in time so that the moment seems to reverberate into eternity:

his mind formed an image of himself running ... down the tracks of the subway ... running desperately *vomit* with people screaming for him to come out but knowing no way of leaving the tracks because to stop would bring the train crushing down upon him and to attempt to leave across the other tracks would mean to run into a hot third rail as high as his waist which threw blue sparks that blinded his eyes until he could hardly see. (134)

The scream anchors the chronotope of the text reminding the reader of the dialectical relationship between the real and the fantastic. The King of the Bingo Game's "screams tore from his very guts. He felt as though the rush of blood to his head would burst out in baseball seams of small red droplets, like a head beaten by police clubs. Bending over he saw a trickle of blood splashing the toe of his shoe" (133). At the moment the surreal threatens to take over the narrative, and these are the instances in which the protagonist doubts his sanity, he is brought back to earth by the demands of his body. It is the aural that links the narrative to the orders of the natural and the supernatural at one and the

same time. The aural as a manifestation of the fantastic has the capacity to rewrite time and space. The scream reminds the protagonist that his trials and tribulations are the same as those of his ancestors, “not only that which would happen now ... but all that had gone before” (128). The aural in the form of the penetrating scream takes the action of the text outside of the delimiting movie theatre stage, out of the North and into the South of his youth. In other words, it ruptures normative articulations of space that insist on the primacy of place to root subjects in particular spatiotemporal coordinates.

The man drifts in and out of consciousness as a movie is projected on the stage (the bingo game will take place after the film screening). Jolted out of his nightmares by his hunger pangs, he contemplates his sanity: ““But I ain’t crazy,” and yet a pinpoint of doubt was focused in his mind as he glanced towards the screen” (124). Looking up at the film, the narrator cannot determine where the celluloid world ends and his begins. The difficulty the man has in distinguishing between the film on the screen and the dreams that haunt him illustrates the precarious nature of the border between the real and surreal. Even before he takes the stage to take his chance at spinning the wheel, and finds himself transformed from spectator to spectacle, the man’s subaltern status threatens to disappear him altogether. The man’s reality has been interpellated into a fantasy he does not control. The sonic transports the man out of the space of the theatre, away from the spell of the film, and into the nightmare of the south where “he was a boy again walking along a railroad trestle ... and hearing the whistle blowing ... and seeing with terror that the train had left the track and was following him right down the middle of the street, and all the white people laughing as he ran screaming” (124). The aural as the keeper of time and space, shuttles the man between past and present obscuring the border between the real

and the surreal. By the story's end, we realize the man and others like him reside in a provisional space informed and deformed by the racialized fantasies of fellow citizens, that is by dreams of advancement that require keeping some others in their place. It is already too late by the time the King of the Bingo Game realizes this -- that he has sutured himself body and soul to a system that relies on his stasis as a mechanism for its social reproduction. The status quo requires his sacrificial flesh and his soul as prosthesis.

Sight, sound, and smell bleed into one another in Ellison's work constructing a phantasmagoric realm that lacks firm boundaries. The hazy and penetrable nature of this "real" world is affirmed by the film's intrusion into the narrator's innermost thoughts. But it is the man's inability to remain rooted in one world or another that marks his deprivation and serves as the condition of possibility for his transvaluation. It is the point of derailment that contains the greatest potential for the sabotage of the dominant order -- the time and place in which the man breaks from reality by wondering what would happen if a "picture got out of hand like that" (125).⁵⁵ This crisis is an opportunity and opens up possibilities for the transformation of those conditions that place subjects on the edge and in the margins. The moment in which the man realizes he cannot engage the film in the same way the others around him do is the moment that marks his irreversible separation from the crowd. His efforts to lose himself in the film *from that point forward* do not work, and he finds his attention drawn instead to the mechanics of the image's projection. The image on the screen, not insignificantly, is that of a white woman, scantily clad, and tied to a bed. The man "look[s] back" focusing his gaze on the space in

⁵⁵ The man's physiological condition -- his hunger -- places him in constant danger of slipping out of his body and of losing consciousness, enabling him to linger at the place where things get out of hand -- the borderland.

which, “the white beam filtered from the projection room above the balcony” (124). He is compelled to locate the origin of the projected image: “It started small and grew large,” he observes, “specks of dust dancing in its whiteness as it reached the screen. It was strange how the beam always landed right on the screen and didn’t mess up and fall somewhere else” (124). The man’s interest in derailment, in things getting out of hand, speaks to the large scale potential for social change contained within shifts in perspective. The man’s inability to constrain his imagination according to the mandates of the dominant order liberates and destroys him. It is when he considers the origin of the projected image—both its fixity and its potential to go haywire—that the black fantastic emerges. The thought of the “picture [getting] out of hand,” prompts a physiological sensation—a shudder that in masking the man’s desire reminds him of his corporeal vulnerability. “Yesterday he’d seen a bedbug on a woman’s neck as they walked out into the bright street. But exploring his thigh through a hole in his pocket he found only goose pimples and old scars” (125).

The bedbug and the film are linked. They suggest that the racialized fantasy that undergirds the American Dream exacts a physical and measurable toll on black bodies and black lives. The sacrifice of black flesh is in fact the condition of possibility for the social reproduction of *that* dream. Thus, the nightmare for some is a precondition for the perpetuation of the fantasy for some others. The man’s awareness of what it would mean for the picture to get out of hand suggests an instinctive knowledge of the ways in which desire—projected fantasies-- are used to keep people in line. The bedbug feeding on the woman’s neck haunts the man, in part, because the woman is unaware. The parasite eats her flesh while she goes about her daily business, and this bloodletting is visible to those

behind her – persons like the man who do not intervene. The bedbug is symbolic of societal forces that prey on impoverished black people. There are two significant points here in relation to the black fantastic: first, the fantastic is a narrative response to a spatial crisis—one that grapples with the hypercentrality of the black body to any discourse around black subjectivity; second, there is always a move away from, and an anchoring within, the corporeal frame.

In Ellison’s story, bodily effects index the eruption of the fantastic. The man experiences hunger pangs and then slips away into the recesses of his mind. He is anchored in the spatiotemporality of the present by the shudder that courses through his body, and yet he drifts off once again into contemplation of the past. It is a feverish dance, the pace intensifying as the narrative progresses such that it becomes difficult to distinguish, by the story’s end, between the real and the imaginary. The man shuttles back and forth between the gritty reality of the body’s physiological demands and the miasmatic surreality of a persistent and recurring nightmare that is racial in origin. The nightmare dissolves into the man’s screams, puncturing again the distinction between the textured world of his dreams and the real world in which, as Todorov puts it, the main action of the text takes place (33). If the scream functions as a metonym of the fantastic it is because in serving as the keeper of time it informs the production of space. The scream commingles terror and pleasure so that in the urgency of the moment –the scream disappears the man’s body, suspends time, and then brings him back to himself.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ The man’s scream penetrates the space of the movie theatre prompting a fellow moviegoer offer him a swig of alcohol: “don’t be making no noise like that, damn!” (125). The scream brings the King of the Bingo Game “back to himself” and alters the

Ellison's text refuses any distinction between the public and the private--between the intimate nature of fantasy and the everyday effects of an equally fantastic public discourse on and around race. The governing logic of "The King of the Bingo Game" is this tension between the real and the surreal. The slippery boundary between the two affirms the difficult nature of a life circumscribed by poverty and racial discrimination. Even the protagonist's dreams are subject to this hegemony. The button the man presses to spin the wheel—a button he cannot let go of—is attached to a long cord that holds out the promise of a better life and instead brings death. The man exists in a dialectical and "mutually constitutive" relationship with the forces that oppress him (Grosz 108). The wire is an umbilical cord (and noose) connecting and constraining him to a system that derives pleasure from the cycle of his birth and destruction. The man's dreams are "white" dreams – and his fantasies of success just like his nightmares of pain and degradation are recurring and always take place under the glare of bright white spotlights.

When the King of the Bingo Game finds himself slipping out of reality for the final time, he feels as if "the whole audience had somehow entered him and was stamping its feet in his stomach and he was unable to throw them out" (133). It is a shocking moment that reveals the synergistic relationship between the reproduction of the social order and the containment of dangerous desires. The man's physical and psychic discomfort references the politics of consumption and production that inform black

social relations that inform the production of space in the movie house. At the same time, the scream's iteration marks the separation between the real and the surreal—between that is the phantasmagoric world of the man's nightmares where his body ceases to exist and the "real" world where physiological demands keep him rooted in his corporeal form. The aural as a discourse of the fantastic, then, counteracts the repression of trauma.

subjectivity (133). His perception that the audience is both screaming at and singing along with him is accompanied by the need to “vomit”—to purge as it were all those gestating within him.⁵⁷ It is a nested and absurdly maternal relationship—the man realizes he does not have room for all those persons inside of him--and references a reproductive capacity gone awry that is mimicked in the echo of his screams.

In its violation of “plenary designations of time and space” the scream blurs the distinction between time in the present and time past (Barrett 221). It insists on the fact that this demarcation is illusory. Like the pangs of hunger that seem to split The King of the Bingo Game’s body in two, or the sweat that runs in torrents down his face, the scream issues a corrective to the powerful fantasies that threaten to take the man “out of himself” and ensconce him firmly in the world of the surreal. These physiological urges serve as a reminder that his subjectivity is formed in relation to his “[bodily] exertion[s]” (Grosz 108). This understanding problematizes any conception of psychic freedom that denies the existence of the body. In insisting that there is no freedom in inhumanity, and that it is not possible to move beyond the corporeal form, Ellison's work circumscribes a logic of the black fantastic that is rooted in and moves beyond the body. I return now to Glissant's description of the shriek as camouflaged speech because it is the man’s absolute alienation from northern social and economic networks that keeps him marooned like those Caribbean runaway slaves. The traumatic nature of the man’s dislocation, a disenfranchisement that by the story's end extends to his corporeal form so

⁵⁷ “Now he faced the raging crowd with defiance, its screams penetrating his eardrums like trumpets shrieking from a jukebox. The vague faces glowing in the bingo lights gave him a sense of himself that he had never known before ... “Live!” he shouted. The audience quieted like the dying of a huge fan. “Live, Laura, baby. I got holt of it now sugar. Live!” He screamed it, tears streaming down his face” (133).

that it becomes a sort of dismemberment, requires an alternative register--the sonic. Ellison thus excavates the aural register of locomotion: the sound and trauma of spatial constriction at multiple scales in the form of the scream.

What I find interesting about "The King of the Bingo Game" is the way in which Ellison utilizes the tactility of the body to root the text in the "real space of Society" (Foucault 3). The "corporeal index" Ellison establishes anchors the multiple frames that structure the text: the space of the body, the space of the movie theatre, the screen on which the film is shown, and the stage from which the bingo game is officiated once the movie ends. If space, as Foucault writes, is realized as a "set of relations," the frenetic nature of Ellison's text has everything to do with the unstable nature of spatial articulation and the fixity of stereotypical discourse (3). The articulation of space in the postwar Northern city is as reliant on racial constructions as the Jim Crow South. Ellison reveals that the "obsession with keeping the Negro in his place" is linked to the production of space in the metropolis and that both in turn rely on the corporeal logic of stereotypical discourse (Ellison 110-111).⁵⁸ To the extent that the "immanence" of the black body obscures the possibility of black ontology, and conversely opens up a space for its emergence in a performative context, the "set of relations" that govern spatial articulation are perpetually in flux (Diawara 254, Foucault 3).⁵⁹ By deploying what I term *scalar*

⁵⁸ Ralph, Ellison. "What America Would Be Like Without Blacks." *Going to the Territory*. New York: Random House, 1986. 104-112.

⁵⁹ "Blackness marks simultaneously both the performance of the object and the performance of humanity" (Moten 2).

consciousness it becomes possible to change the construction of space and in the moment of habitation produce an altogether new place.

In many respects, Ellison's short story satisfies perfectly Todorov's criteria for the literary fantastic: unexplainable events occur that cannot be classified as belonging to the orders of the natural or supernatural producing a "hesitation" in the reader (32-33). It is, further, at the level of sound, in discourses of the aural, that Ellison ruptures most decisively the border between the real and surreal. The scream locates the narrator in his body keeping him locked in his seat in the space of the movie theatre, and later sutured to the bingo wheel on stage. The scream is the interface between the many spatial frames that intersect throughout the narrative. Ellison employs the scream as a metonym of the black fantastic using it to manipulate time in such a way that scalar parameters are constantly in flux. It is this sort of repurposing of the body, a constant movement (a split screen or jump cut) between the deprived corporeal form, the cinematic screen, the confined space of the movie theatre, the stage of the bingo game, and finally the vast space of history that gives the story its frenetic and surreal effect. The shuttling back and forth between the past and the present, the ominous foreshadowing that as the narrative progresses the protagonist's future is closing in on him, and the use of the sonic construct intimacy and distance.

The black fantastic as a literary mode can be defined as a narrative response to a spatial crisis. This crisis, which structures the black American experience from the Middle Passage onwards, manifests in black fiction across a broad range of genres and

historical periods.⁶⁰ This is to say that a persistent and recurring fixation with the black subject's "corporeal malediction" is linked to the legal and social inequities of black life (Fanon 111). The texts that exemplify the black fantastic utilize the body as a proxy for the territory of the nation. "The King of the Bingo Game" is significant because it is an overtly fantastic text that engages the corporeal, psychic, and economic effects of racial inequality in a direct manner. Ellison focuses on the paradox of valuation: the interchangeability and "expendability" of black migrants in the urban North and links the aural to this schema (Mbembe 374, Moten 18).⁶¹ The narrative links the aural to the corporeal and the psychic. By the story's end it is difficult to separate the protagonist's ear shattering screams, and vivid hallucinations, from the deprivations his body suffers. The King of the Bingo Game's repeated and increasingly frenzied screams—shouts that are replicated by the audience in a bizarre call and response once he is on stage, reference an overwhelming desire to be *heard*.⁶² The scream functions, then, as not only a metonym of the fantastic but also a mechanism of the temporal. The dissonance between the urgency of the protagonist's screams, and what he is screaming about—winning a bingo game-- reveals the complexity of the story's temporal logic. The lifelong deprivations the king of the bingo game has suffered will all be worth it if it turns out that he holds the winning

⁶⁰ Christol observes that "the Middle Passage is the first and essential catastrophe, provoking loss of space, culture language" (167).

⁶¹ See Mbembe's "Aesthetics of Superfluity" and Barrett's *Blackness and Value*.

⁶² "Hester's shrieks," Moten writes, "improvise both speech and writing. What they echo and initiate in their response to the oaths-that must be heard as the passionate utterance or call-of the master helps to constitute a questioning ... encounter... Where shriek turns speech turns song...lies the trace of our descent" (21-22).

ticket, if it turns out that a system forged on his flesh will work for him—too—in the end. One of the more poignant aspects of the story is the man's belief against all odds that playing the game according to the rules means he can win. Ellison suggests, and this theme is replicated by the dire nature of Lutie's circumstances in Petry's *The Street*, that the movement North in the wake of Reconstruction is yet another round in a game that has been rigged and for which the black American is woefully unprepared. The man's escape from the spatial and social restrictions of the South are chimeric because they are replicated in a more sinister form in the North, and in the space of the movie theatre, surrounded by members of "his community," the man discovers what these stakes are.⁶³

In *Fantasy: A Literature of Subversion*, Rosemary Jackson writes of the "entropic pull" (73).⁶⁴ This quest for the "zero point"—a zone of stasis that symbolizes nirvana, and more important, a state of "undifferentiation" that precedes the Lacanian mirror stage, references a desire for wholeness (Jackson 72, 88-90). But the journey towards the zero point masquerades as a desire for annihilation—for obliteration, fragmentation, and complete destruction (82-83, 90). The King of the Bingo Game is ecstatic when he realizes the marker will land between the double zeros and that he has won the jackpot; however, the moment of his victory reifies the abject nature of his circumstances. He is

⁶³ Farah Jasmine Griffin discusses the manifestation of white power in the northern city in some detail in *Who Set You Flowin?*.

⁶⁴ Jackson notes that, "The desire for undifferentiation is close to the instinct which Freud defined in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) ... as the most fundamental drive in man: a drive towards a state of inorganicism. This has been crudely termed "a death wish," but it is not a simple desire to cease to be ... [it is] a longing for Nirvana, where all tensions are reduced. This condition he termed a state of entropy, and the desire for undifferentiation he termed an *entropic pull* ... a zero point" (72-3 emphasis added).

restrained by security and struck repeatedly on the head until he blacks out.⁶⁵ The very conditions of possibility for black pleasure, then, are wholly implicated in the surplus mortality of the black subject. The zero point for the king of the bingo game is both the zenith and the nadir and signifies the profound constriction of his mobility. It does not matter that he has moved from the South to the North, or that he has won a turn to spin the wheel; he occupies the same position his ancestors occupied and that his descendants will occupy. If there is any potential for disrupting this new-old narrative, Ellison's work suggests it lies in the aural register and its fantastic capabilities.

4.5 Sonny's Blues: The Scream as a Metonym of the Fantastic⁶⁶

Baldwin too identifies the aural as a discourse of the fantastic, but in a less overt way than Ellison. The sonic in "Sonny's Blues" is linked to the deformation and reformation of subjectivity.⁶⁷ What Baldwin's characters hear, when they hear it, and how they hear it--uncovers the complexity of listening. "I needed to clear a *space* to listen," Sonny says; "Not very many people really *hear* [music]" his brother observes (italics added 134, 137). Left unsaid is the correlation between these two phrases—the interface, that is, between the aural and the spatial. Baldwin's text suggests that the production of space is linked not only to the articulation of sound but also to the auditory acuity of the listener. Sonny's brother laments holding "silence--so long! -when [Sonny]

⁶⁵ "The theatricality of the Negro emerges only in the aftermath of the body's brutal dramatic placement-in short after the body has been made subject to the will of the master" (Hartman 43).

⁶⁶ "[P]eople in general cannot bear very much reality ... they prefer fantasy to a truthful recreation of their experience" ("Mass Culture and the Creative Artist: Some Personal Notes." *Cross of Redemption* 3).

⁶⁷ Published in 1957.

had needed *human speech* to help him” (132 italics added). Sonny is a jazz musician and a recovering heroin addict. His older brother, whose name we never learn, is a schoolteacher. Sonny’s brother makes a promise to their mother before she dies that he will always look out for Sonny. Sonny, however, has his own ideas about how he will escape Harlem’s spatial and psychic constriction and these ideas do not conform to his brother’s ideals. He finds solace in jazz and a multiracial group of downtown friends. The narrative begins with an account of Sonny’s arrest for narcotics possession in a local paper; it concludes with the brothers’ reconciliation in a Greenwich Village bar as Sonny plays publicly for the first time since his release from prison. In the richly layered final pages of the story, Sonny’s brother gradually comes to terms with how painful and rewarding it can be to really listen.

If the sonic as Moten writes, in correcting “ocular-centrism,” enhances rather than retracts the visual field, then perhaps it endows us all with “second-sight” (Moten 235, Du Bois 2). The trace of the aural lingers long after the moment of iteration and, as in “Sonny’s Blues,” rearticulates the psychic space of the subject.⁶⁸ In prefiguring and moving beyond speech, the sonic asks us to listen closely, on some other register, in order to excavate what lies concealed in the myriad public and private expressions of racial protocol.⁶⁹ In “Sonny’s Blues,” it is a sound that echoes throughout the narrative linking the death of the narrator’s daughter in a Harlem tenement, to the murder of his uncle in the Deep South, and the wail of a jazz piano in a dark and crowded Greenwich Village

⁶⁸ Sound in disarticulating (deforming) corporeality reforms subjectivity.

⁶⁹ “The scream is also extra human, unvoiced, or unspoken, not constrained to a vocabulary but limitless and free” (Holloway).

bar. The scream spoken or unspoken affirms the maxim that “Don't nobody want to die, ever”(108). It is the last stand of a subject that refuses to be silenced and who in the moment and at the site of absolute pain moves beyond terror and into the sublime. In Baldwin's work, the scream connects the world of the text to the past and future of black (American) civilization. The scream solidifies and subverts a chain of signification that reifies the corporeal vulnerability of the black subject (Moten 22).⁷⁰ Through its echoes the scream expands the spatial field the subject has access to and troubles the distinction between self and other. The scream as a metonym of the fantastic is a powerful reminder that the past has not been buried and that social relations and spatial articulations are informed by racialized terror.⁷¹

Terror has no real meaning for Sonny's brother until he faces the personal tragedy of his daughter death. When he reads about Sonny's arrest in the newspaper, sometime after little Grace's passing, he feels as if his “guts were going to come spilling out or that [he] was going to choke or scream”(103). It is not until the story's end that he makes a connection between his scream suppressed and Sonny's living “too much” life. But the scream suppressed has an even earlier iteration. After Grace's lifeless body thumps to the floor, Sonny's brother recognizes in his wife's bloodcurdling yell the echo of a scream released in the dead of the night to the sounds of a shattered banjo.⁷² It is a story his

⁷⁰ It can be imagined as a distillation of the fantastic.

⁷¹ Susan Gillman observes that, “Bringing into view the presence of the past in the present (a move that often requires plumbing the paradoxes of a hidden, hypervisibility that eludes full detection) is the means by which to stake a claim on the future” (204).

⁷² Re-presenting the scream and linking it to an authorial gesture, “I may have written Sonny the very day that little Grace was buried ... My trouble made his real” (127).

mother tells him in order to extract a promise that he will always look out for Sonny. Sonny, she says, is just like his father's brother, a man who died young after being struck by a car full of whites on a dark southern road with a guitar in his hands. The death of his uncle seals forever into their family history the price of white pleasure and the dangers of a surplus (black) corporeality:

Your father said he heard his brother scream when the car rolled over him and he heard the wood of that guitar when it give, and he heard them strings go flying, and he heard them white men shouting, and the car kept on a-going and it ain't stopped till this day. And time your father got down the hill, his brother weren't nothing but blood and pulp. (117)

Black death as a consequence of white pleasure is a recurring trope in twentieth-century black American fiction. It usually manifests in relation to a deferred domesticity that in denying the black subject sanctuary affirms the provisional nature of his existence. It would seem that the performance that exposes the black subject to a dominant and dehumanizing white gaze, in that same gesture, seals his fate. What we see in Baldwin's work, then, is a repetition of the scene I discuss earlier in Delany's *Blake*. In both instances, the reader witnesses the dangers of a white appetite for pleasure that requires the sacrifice of black flesh and a correlation between the performative and the abject that facilitates the rearticulation of space.

To the extent that it is possible to locate elements of the fantastic in realist black texts, such as "Sonny's Blues," the sonic is the means through which this occurs. It is in song, music, or performance that the corporeal, aural, and spatial cohere in order to articulate a sense of place. In many of Baldwin's works, the fantastic surfaces in the

performative (and specifically the musical) register becoming one of the primary means by which black subjectivity is either forged or destroyed. Music is for Baldwin an alternative narrative mode that conceals a text within a text. It allows his characters to access their interiority in more in depth ways and to then channel that knowledge for the collective good. Consider the ways in which, in the following passage, Baldwin utilizes the aural to transform the corporeal and psychic conditions of his characters. As Sonny's brother watches a crowd's reaction to a street performance, he begins to understand the power music holds to alter the ontology of listeners:

As the singing filled the air the watching, listening faces underwent a change, the eyes focusing on something within; the music seemed to soothe a poison out of them; and time seemed, nearly, to fall away from the sullen, belligerent, battered faces, as though they were fleeing back to their first condition, while dreaming of their last. (129)

It is in the psychic and cultural spaces made accessible by the healing power of music that the fantastic emerges. As the music “soothe[s] a poison out of them” it changes the corporeality of the listening audience softening their features and returning them to their youth. “Time,” Sonny's brother observes, “seemed nearly to fall away ... as though they were fleeing back to their *first condition*” (129 italics added). This return to the womb, so to speak, enacts the death of the subject—as rebirth. The audience's journey reverses, in metaphorical terms, the Middle Passage. Song relieves the audience of their burdens; music brings them back home. While Baldwin locates, in “Sonny's Blues,” a certain religiosity in music that has the capacity to change the human condition, it is only in the shared cultural space of the black performance that this process takes place. It is at the nexus of the private and the public, the place where one's interiority succumbs to the

crisis of the collective that the text locates a condition of possibility for social transformation.

Baldwin's characters are always on the move, carving out marginal existences in bedrooms, bars and cafes. They are never really free to move around the spaces of the city. If their peripatetic natures mask exclusion from the privileged spaces of the metropolis, the authenticity of Baldwin's protagonists is affirmed by their fugitivity. When Sonny tells his brother that he “needed to clear a space to listen” and describes the horror of being unable to do so, he is giving voice to the sentiment that frames the narrative (134). The racist society in which Sonny, his brother, little Grace, and all those “boys ... living as we'd been living then ... growing up with a rush ... their heads bump[ing] abruptly against the low ceiling of their actual possibilities” live does not affirm the humanity of black youth (104). What the text describes, then, is a crisis precipitated by spatial conditions that suffocate black subjects. The black fantastic in this text, as in Hopkins', Himes', Ellison's and Petry's works, is a response to an acute spatial crisis triggered by racial discourse and racist policy. The power of Sonny's words lies in their simplicity, in their revelation of a deep and powerful suffering that consumes body and spirit. Sonny channels musicality in the service of spatial production and, in revealing the centrality of spatiality to the articulation of a historically grounded aurality, evokes the fantastic. It is Sonny's anguish that gifts his brother with the “second-sight” he has been sorely lacking (Du Bois 2). The journey to the nightclub where Sonny will play is, for his brother, a pilgrimage. “We went to the only nightclub on a short, dark street, downtown,” he notes, “squeez[ing] through the *narrow*, chattering, jam-packed bar to the entrance of the *big room*” (135 emphasis added). Sonny's performance facilitates

his brother's rebirth and this awakening is of necessity painful. It brings the memory of his daughter's death, the retelling of his uncle's murder, and "that long line, of which we knew only Mama and Daddy" into the present (140).

The relationships among spatial articulation, subject formation, and aurality excavate, first, the centrality of the production of race to the articulation of (the space of) the modern metropolis, and, second, the possibility that one may locate at the intersection of the sonic and the temporal a blueprint for scalar consciousness. Sonny speaks of space in an ontological sense: he wants to clear a space where he can just be, or as another one of Baldwin's characters puts it, "I had to get ... to a place where people were too busy with their own lives, their private lives, to make fantasies about mine, to set up walls around mine" (175 "This Morning, This Evening, So Soon"). So while on the one hand Sonny is alluding to psychic space, to an interiority that can act as a safeguard against the prejudices of the outside world, he is also speaking in a very real sense about urban segregation and exclusion from the mainstream spaces of society. Music, and jazz in particular, allows for a remapping of the city; it is through his piano playing that Sonny gains access to predominantly white spaces like Greenwich Village. In the pre-Civil Rights area, access to "mainstream" cultural spaces through performance was quite possibly the only means (outside of servitude) by which one could increase access to the physical space of the city.⁷³ It is difficult for Baldwin's characters to separate the public

⁷³ By space I mean urban space, ontological space, domestic space, and psychic space. It is significant that once his mother dies, Sonny lacks domestic space in a very real sense

from the private because it is in public gestures and collective psychic habitations that interiority is transformed.⁷⁴

If the fantastic as a discourse of aurality exposes the complexity of “black time” in realist works by black American writers, this is because temporality informs the production of space.⁷⁵ The sonic is integral to the production of place, but also to the historicity of the black experience. Sound and song imbricate the public and the private making it difficult to separate the interiority of James Baldwin’s characters from the crisis of the collective. Baldwin is not often thought of in relation to the fantastic. The microscopic focus in his texts on the inner lives of characters grappling with broader, and easily identifiable, social concerns underscores fixity in the narrative protocols of the real. But the fantastic does surface in Baldwin’s work in the performative milieu, and specifically, in relation to both jazz and gospel. Black music brings together and splits apart Baldwin’s protagonists making them aware of the provisional nature of the places and identities they inhabit. In doing so, the fantastic also makes them aware of the transformative capacities they possess—that is, of their ability to rewrite space and radicalize time.

“Sonny’s Blues” articulates a *genealogy of black suffering* that is fantastic in the scale of its reach. This repetition is identified and cathected in the musical register. The

⁷⁴ Michel de Certeau writes that “pedestrian speech acts” transform space into place (97). It is, in other words, the way we utilize space that brings it into being. Baldwin’s characters understand this and move within the margins to inhabit the spaces they *do* have access to in new ways. But it is the transformation of public into private space and vice versa, that has much to tell us about the relationship between spatial articulation and subject formation.

⁷⁵ Taken from the title of Bonnie J. Barthold’s work.

atomization of suffering—Sonny’s exquisite and overwhelming individualized pain—is a condition of mourning for a familial and generational trauma. Music provides the way in and the way out, a journey Baldwin’s work argues, that is necessary for ontological soundness. The story identifies the scream as an aural gesture of spatial occupation that is replicated in the musical frame. The scream in its affirmation of, and response to, trauma relies on the presence of a listener—a subject who, if he does not possess the capacity to ameliorate the event, by his very presence, confirms its reality. Baldwin in his nonfiction works has often spoken of the importance of witnessing, of fiction as a discourse of truth that makes the inadmissible visible and actionable. His protagonists bear witness to deep and individualized suffering that is universal and also racially, sociopolitically, and geographically specific.

The connections Baldwin draws between the space of the ghetto, black subjectivity, and the aural as a regenerative force, have been little examined in criticism of “Sonny’s Blues.” The complexities of the narrative, this project suggests, lie in the nested nature of the various forces that work to subjugate Sonny and other young black men and women. Baldwin’s fiction argues that resistance to a dehumanizing and demoralizing social order, one that relies upon the relationship between spatial articulation and subject formation to negate the ontology of the black subject, must be intimate in nature and far reaching in scope—must, in other words, reflect scalar consciousness. What this requires is a repurposing of the space one inhabits so that in its multifunctionality that milieu transforms the larger space in which it is nested. Sonny discovers that music has the capacity to reconfigure the spatial relations that inform his being and it is this that offers him solace.

Sonny's music is so sublime it transforms him into a spectre. "It wasn't like living with a person at all, it was like living with a sound," his sister-in-law notes, "It was as though Sonny were some sort of god, or monster" (124-5). Sonny's musical prowess renders his body superfluous even as the aural register gives him access to a wider spatial field. Earlier I mentioned a colleague's observation that the black fantastic blurs the distinction between flight and compulsion. Sonny is compelled to perform by a social order that denies him space, and his rearticulation of the spaces that have been made available to him, as well as seizure of those that have not-- is a cry for liberation. If the black fantastic is defined by the spatiotemporal gap that emerges when the body no longer matters—that is, the point at which the subject moves beyond the racially circumscribed body—then it is activated in "Sonny's Blues" through the narrative power of the aural. The sonic is fantastic in its ability to move the action of the text from past to present and to herald in the outside world of the reader the possibility of social transformation. This is to say that the fantastic quality of the aural in "Sonny's Blues" is linked to the unlocking of time. Sound enables a deeper vision, a way of looking inside and past the subject. In "Sonny's Blues," it helps Baldwin's characters identify their commonality by excavating a deeper understanding of what it means to be human. Baldwin's emphasis on guts, rupture, and the turning of the inside out is a nod to the type of suturing that structures healing. The conclusion of the narrative marks the perfect synthesis of sound. Music excavates trauma in order to ameliorate it. The condition of possibility for the transformation of suffering into regenerative power is bearing witness in a communal setting and sharing the burden, Sonny shows, of what it means to be alive. The social and spatial restrictions of the ghetto are soul killing and deliberate – they are

engineered. The numerous scenes that take place beside windows that “fool no one, [because] they aren’t big enough to make space out of no space” suggest that one might instead claim the surround in an aural gesture of spatial articulation (113).

4.6 Tripping the Light Fantastic: What America Would Be Like Without Blacks

In an essay published in 1970, “What America Would Be Like Without Blacks,” Ralph Ellison identifies a desire to be “rid” of black Americans that lurks in the background of the national psyche. This “national pathology,” signifies “a free-floating irrationality” because it relies on a vision of national identity that denies the cultural contributions of black Americans (106).⁷⁶ “What America Would Be Like” identifies the production of race, in its expansive capacity, as a discourse of the fantastic. Blackness, according to Ellison, articulates spatial, linguistic, discursive, and corporeal boundaries (110-11). In observing that the disjuncture between the “meaning of words and reality” is highlighted by the lived experience of black Americanness, Ellison thematizes the conditions under which the black fantastic emerges (111). Black American authors utilize the fantastic as a narrative and thematic mode because the stereotypical discourse that imperils black Americans is fantastic in its construction and real in its effects.

I suggest that rather than “demanding there be a closer correlation between the *meaning of words and reality*,” the black fantastic lingers in that gap between signifier and signified, between the promise of what could be and the reality of what is (Ellison 111 italics added). The black fantastic reinforces the “entropic pull”—that correlation between corporeal breakdown in fiction and the rupture of the “rational ... linguistic

⁷⁶ Ellison writes that, “[m]ost American whites are culturally part Negro American without even realizing it” (108).

order” (Jackson 90). Having identified fantasy as key to the production and dissemination of racial ideology, Ellison uses spatial and corporeal metaphors to describe the social status of black Americans. In writing of the “fantasy of a benign amputation,” of the “severing of a healthy and indispensable member,” he recasts the racist national imaginary in corporeal terms (Ellison 107).⁷⁷ The spectre of the black corporeal form is like a palimpsest, always and already there, present even in discourse that seeks to subvert its meaning. “The presence of black Americans,” Ellison observes, “[has been] use[d] ... as a marker, a symbol of limits” (110). The black American as limb merges with the black American as fault line--as a corporeal, territorial, and psychic borderline breached from the moment of its inception.

The gap Ellison identifies between the rhetoric of national identity and the lived experience of blackness evokes the notion of “black time.” “Black people experience time differently from white people,” Baldwin writes, “because they have been simultaneously deprived of time and fixed in it by the color of their skin” (Barthold 16). Baldwin’s words suggests that black Americans do not have the luxury of leaving the past behind, or of contemplating the future in a historical vacuum. Further, the heavy weight of this knowledge can be psychically and physically dangerous – “I’ve known many people that have gone under” Baldwin tells Studs Terkel.⁷⁸ Black subjectivity pivots, then, on the *polyphonic nature of temporality*--on a fantastic practice of

⁷⁷ Ellison’s metaphor evokes Fanon’s articulation of the native’s “corporeal malediction” as “an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood” (112).

⁷⁸ Recorded in September 1962 on WFMT Radio in Chicago.

diachronicity.⁷⁹ To be deprived of time is both dangerous and liberating; it nearly kills Sonny, but it also brings him back with a deeper and newfound understanding of what it means to be alive.

The politics of time excavates a discourse of the fantastic that uncovers the productive capacity of spatiality. This rearticulation of space is achieved through the suturing of the “real [to the] unreal,” through the construction of a textual world in which distance is defined by time and place remains unrooted to geography (Todorov 167). The production of linguistic space, corporeal space, and urban space is ultimately a manifestation of the production of ontological space. For Baldwin, the psychic [interiority] is expressly linked to the cultural--that is to a deep sense of historicity that holds the key to the future (Christol 172). The notion that the fantastic is as a discourse articulated from within, and in opposition to, the dominant order raises provocative questions about genre and black fiction. The fantastic is a narrative response to a spatial crisis that is “opposed to dominant signifying practice” but remains on some level firmly rooted to the political, social, and cultural concerns of the hegemonic order (Jackson 177). “It had been necessary,” Baldwin observes, “to make the machinery work for our benefit and the *possibility* of its doing so had been, so to speak, built in” (“Princes and Powers” 148 emphasis added). The fantastic makes it possible to critique the social order and proffer a salvific response to racially discriminatory policies and practices that wreak havoc on black bodies and psyches. It registers a profound awareness that a social apparatus built on the fruits of black labor, and the forced exclusion of black subjects, is

⁷⁹ I’ve described this elsewhere as the “chronotope of the [black] fantastic” (Cornwell 69).

like Kara Walker's silhouettes fixed in flight. The condition of possibility for the restructuring of the social order—the suggestion the machine can be manipulated (148)-- is embedded in the reproduction of blackness. The elision of the black subject is impossible because the act of erasure, itself, calls attention to the historical conditions that fuel such desire.

I will close by noting that in this twenty-first century moment spatial and corporeal formations are more hotly contested than ever. The gentrification of American cities is producing a new urban landscape in which the decreased mobility of black subjects is a precondition for the expansion of “public” space. On a juridical level, the Roberts Court has efficiently axed one-by-one the legislative gains of the Civil Rights era. Across the Atlantic, neo-liberal policies facilitate the re-colonization of the African continent. Ninety-year land leases signed under the guise of technological innovation herald, yet again, the theft of natural resources and the exploitation of African labor. The removal of rural Africans from arable farmland as part of urban development policies results in overcrowded populations and diminished resources that parallel the American carceral state. In both instances we see bodies packed together producing through their corraling--and in the worst instances death--profit for some others. Contemporary events thus reiterate the importance of what I term scalar consciousness as a strategy for ontological and material black survival. The authors I discuss in this dissertation exploit the liberatory possibilities embedded in narrative manipulations of scale. Their works linger in the interstitial space that is formed when the state of exception appears more rational than the norm and slyly suggest that this might be the place that matters. “In the

train I was given not one but two, three places [...] I existed triply,” Fanon writes, “I *occupied space*” (112 emphasis added). “Well,” these writers might say, “What of it?”

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Biography

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