COLLECTING RACE: THE ARCHIVAL IMPULSE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY BLACK LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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Collecting Race argues that Black writers in the twentieth century theorized Black archives as new ways of being, understanding, and recording the human. Anticipating the archival turn of the 1980s and 1990s, their work addresses the fundamental incompatibility of archival evidence and racial belonging. It suggests that the pressure exerted by the "ideal subject" on race archives overdetermines the archival impulse, which, ultimately, benefits white supremacy. *Collecting Race* thus troubles the assumption that the absence of a legible archive is necessarily oppressive, and that the presence—or even abundance—of archival knowledge is necessarily resistant. By emphasizing the affective networks in which archives and their subjects traffic, it expands the postcolonial legacy of reading for archival gaps and silences. Likewise, it challenges Derrida's notion of an archive fever that is universally felt. In conversation with critical race studies, affect theory, and the work of Black feminist scholars like Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Wynter, the project argues that archives largely work by and for the overrepresentation of the human as "Man." And yet, as the legacy of seminal

Black archivists and the preponderance of archival representation in the canon of Black literature affirm, Black archives do a different sort of work for a different kind of future.

To highlight Black archives in theory and practice, the dissertation's first two chapters are structured around pairs of writer-archivists. It begins by juxtaposing Arthur A. Schomburg's 1925 rallying cry to dig up the past with *Invisible Man*'s burning briefcase archive. Together they elucidate one of the project's central questions: How do Black subjects negotiate the expectation to collect evidence for their own exclusion? The answer, the project contends, can be found in Black feminist archives, which it explores in more detail in the second chapter that pairs Zora Neale Hurston's work on folklore and Erna Brodber's novel inspired by Hurston, *Louisiana* (1994). Signaling the shift from the pre-archival turn to its post-archival reckoning, Hurston and Brodber theorize Black flesh as a radical repository. Because fleshly knowledge is not the only way to subvert Humanism's epistemological pressures, the project moves in the third chapter to consider David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident* (1981). Bradley's novel demonstrates how speculation works as another way to imagine new sites of collective memory. Elaborating on the tropes of flesh and speculation and finding new genres for archival representation, the project concludes by way of M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* (2008), which marks the transition between Black archives of the twentieth and twenty-first century. *Zong!* announces that the battle for evidence will not be won on land but rather in the waters of a more fluid understanding of blackness and its subjects. *Collecting Race*'s coda "Unmanning the Archive," examines Alexis Pauline Gumbs's *M-Archive* (2018), which disposes of the ideal subject and leaves "Man" to rot in the archives of the apocalypse.

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I can testify that it takes a village to both raise a child and write a dissertation (a particularly big one if you endeavor to do both at once). My village spans oceans and continents and encourages me to keep going when I need it. More important than that though is that they remind me that I am not defined by any of the work I do here—as Cheryl Wall once said— that "this is not your home." Because of this perspective, the experience has been what I wanted it to be—and for that I owe so many the greatest debt. I dedicate the dissertation to Alberto –el amor de mi vida y mi constante apoyo—y a Sebastián—lo mejor de nosotros y mi mayor logro siempre.

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INTRODUCTION
Theorizing Black Archives

In a letter dated June 11, 1945, Zora Neale Hurston petitioned the "Dean of American Negro Artists," W. E. B. Du Bois, for "a cemetery for the illustrious Negro dead." [1] Hoping he would take up the charge, Hurston provides a series of suggestions as to how the project might proceed. Florida, she argues, would be the ideal location for the cemetery as it would provide the site year-round flora. In place of a chapel, she suggests a hall of meeting decorated by Black artists depicting scenes "from our own literature and life. Mythology and all." [2] Perhaps the most complicated of her suggestions involves exhuming "the bones of our dead celebrities to this […] rallying spot that would be for all that we want to accomplish and do."

For those familiar with Alice Walker's story of Hurston's famously unmarked grave, the letter to Du Bois resounds with tragic irony. [3] This is especially true in light of Hurston's vow to: "Let no negro celebrity, no matter what financial condition they might be in at death, lie in inconspicuous forgetfulness. We must assume the responsibility of their graves being known and honored." Despite the fact that she frames this project as a

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[1] Correspondence from Zora Neale Hurston to W. E. B. Du Bois, 11 June 1945, *W. E. B. Du Bois Papers* (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

[2] I heed P. Gabrielle Foreman's call in "A Note on Language" in *Activist Sentiments: Reading Black Women in the Nineteenth Century,* to capitalize Black "to refer to people of African descent as a matter of practice and principle." In that vein, *Collecting Race* also capitalizes Black archives because the term invokes a collecting practice and repository rooted in both the identity and epistemology of blackness. See P. Gabrielle Foreman's *Activist Sentiments: Reading Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Champaign, IL: U of Illinois P, 2009). xv.

[3] See Alice Walker's "Looking for Zora," *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1983).

sort of cemetery, what Hurston advocates for is much more than a site for Black burial. It is a formalized representation of radical ways of remembering and honoring from which new art and life is to emerge—a repository and rallying point for Black belonging.

Du Bois replied to Hurston's letter a month later. He would not pursue the endeavor as "the practical difficulties [were] too great."[4] Dissuading her from taking up the matter with the NAACP, he gives her the name of someone who might be more interested and, with a quick four sentences, sends Hurston on her way. The project, of course, never materialized. There is no beautiful hall of meetings, tree-setting ceremonies, artist's colony, or 100 acres free of "white encroachment" as Hurston so vividly described. All that remains of this powerful vision for a site to honor Black life and death, are two letters. Evidence of a dream deferred, filed away and forgotten, in a box a long way from Florida.

Collecting Race: The Archival Impulse in Twentieth-Century Black Literature and Culture builds upon Hurston's claim at the end of her letter to Du Bois that, "the lack of a tangible thing allows our people to forget and their spirits to evaporate." As a literary history of Black archives that theorizes praxis, this project considers the relationships and reactions to what is framed as the need for a race archive—as both the material repository for a future history and the process by which Black subjects evidence themselves. In addition to contextualizing the disciplinary demands on archives (demands to which Black archives, in particular need respond), *Collecting Race* argues that a more sustained attention needs to be paid to Black writing beyond a dialectical reading that toggles

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[4] Correspondence from W.E.B. Du Bois to Zora Neale Hurston, 11 July 1945, *W. E. B. Du Bois Papers* (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries

between presence and absence or silence and voice.[5] Far from a critique of archives or exhibitions wholesale, this project troubles the binary that assumes that "filling in the gaps" of archival knowledge is always radically resistant. It turns to the work of Black writers and writer-archivists like Arthur Schomburg, Ralph Ellison, Erna Brodber, David Bradley, and M. NourbeSe Philip who navigate concerns similar to those Hurston outlines in her petition—blackness, death, and cultural memory—and articulates a theory of Black archives as repositories that refuse "white encroachment" in all its guises.

The term "archive" has become a semantic catch-all synonymous with a range of terms including, but not limited to, discourse, lexicon, oeuvre, library, collection, or resource.[6] The term's flexibility is the result, at least in part, of the "archival turn."

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[5] See Jean-Christophe Cloutier's, *Shadow Archives: The Lifecycles of African American Literature* (New York: Columbia UP, 2019), for a recent study that also moves beyond the binary I have outlined above.

[6] The entry for the word "archives" in the Glossary for the Society of American Archivists lays out some of the term's broad usages: "in the vernacular, 'archives' is often used to refer to any collection of documents that are old or of historical interest, regardless of how they are organized; in this sense, the term is synonymous with permanent records. […] Within the professional literature, archives are characterized by an organic nature, growing out of the process of creating and receiving records in the course of the routine activities of the creator (its provenance). In this sense, archivists have differentiated archives from artificial collections. Many archivists, especially those in the United States who are influenced by the thinking of Theodore Schellenberg, follow an inclusive definition of archives, which encompasses a wide variety of documents and records. Schellenberg also distinguished between the primary and secondary value of the materials; only materials with secondary value, value beyond their original purpose, could be considered archival. For Schellenberg, archivists appraise records for transfer to the archives on the basis of their secondary, research, evidential, or informational value. Other archivists follow the writing of Hilary Jenkinson, who argues that archives are 'documents which formed part of an official transaction and were preserved for official reference.' […] Because Jenkinson emphasized that records are evidence of transactions, he did not recognize any collections of historical documents as archives, although he noted that collections of personal papers were of value to historians because they complemented archives. 'Manuscript repository' is sometimes used instead of archives to distinguish an organization that collects personal papers from an agency that collects the records of its parent organization. Some United States archivists deprecate

Popularized in the academy during the 1980s and 1990s, the archival turn shifted scholars from thinking about the archive as source to thinking about it as subject. Defined by Ann Laura Stoler as "a rethinking of the materiality and imaginary of collections and what kinds of truth-claims lie in documentation," the archival turn converges with "new work in the history of science" and the critical focus "on history as narrative and history-writing as a charged political act."[7] The important work of highlighting the power dynamics at work (and often made invisible) in archives and the disciplines with which they are embroiled is certainly relevant to the concerns of Black archives; and yet, *Collecting Race* posits, a Black archival turn predates that which has been formalized in the academy. Rather than the last two decades of the twentieth century, Chapter One illustrates how Black archives were navigating and theorizing these same power dynamics at least as early as Arturo A. Schomburg's 1913 essay, "Racial Integrity."

The "archival turn's" relationship to poststructuralism (one of the seminal texts of the "turn" is Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Interpretation* (1995)), has resulted in the term "archive" itself becoming a slippery signifier that, more often than not, obfuscates Black archival practice. *Collecting Race*, however, defines the term in two distinct ways. First, as a noun, archive means "a material repository for a future history." The second definition, borrowed from the Glossary for the Society of American Archivists, uses the term as a verb that means "to transfer the records from the individual

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the use of the form 'archive' (without the final "s") as a noun, but that form is common in other English-speaking countries. However, the noun 'archive' is commonly used to describe collections of backup data in information technology literature. *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*. Society of American Archivists. 2017. s.v. "archive."

[7] Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form," in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton (Cape Town, South Africa, 2002). 86.

or office of creation to a repository authorized to appraise, preserve, and provide access to those records."[8] What sets archives apart from libraries (another sort of repository with which they are often closely affiliated) are the materials that they hold and the ways that these materials are accessed. Whereas libraries are intended as spaces for public use (research, readings, study), archives preserve items integral to the recounting of history. For this reason, to reach archival materials (at least in the conventional sense) one needs to request boxes sometimes weeks ahead of arrival, bring proper identification, secure items in lockers, engage in scrupulous hand washing. Following the ritual of entry, one goes in with wooden pencils and scrap paper in hand to inhale the infamous "dust" of the archive. Testifying to and amplifying the value therein contained—the ceremony renders the archive's materials not just rare, but truly precious.[9]

The temptation with the term "Black archives" is to assume that Black simply acts as a modifier to archives. "Archiving," here, would somehow involve the same process and motivation, except that now a different organizational mechanism, race, would be in play. *Collecting Race* argues that this is not actually the case. Although Black archives are invested in cultural memory, they are not necessarily oriented toward a "future history" as is the case with traditional archives. And when Black archives do end up in "authorized repositories," they challenge both the terms of authority and the terms of

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[8] *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*, s.v. "archive."
[9] The allusion to dust here is in the tradition of Carolyn Steedman's work on archive theory, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*. For her, the dust one inhales in archives "is the opposite thing to Waste, or at least, the opposite principle to Waste. It is about circularity, the impossibility of things disappearing, or going away, or being gone. Nothing can be destroyed." Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2002). 164.

access. The ritual for entry is also radically different, as Black archival materials do not subscribe to normative decisions of value or evidence.

Black archives are fundamentally and profoundly born out of resistance—resistance to the terms of authority, access, and, the overrepresentation of the human as "Man."[10] Jamaican writer, philosopher, and cultural theorist Sylvia Wynter's claims about "Man" as a category defined through structural opposition and what she calls "the space of otherness" provides a useful model for thinking about pervasive knowledge systems and ontological categories. Insofar as "Man" operates as a signifier of exclusion from the category of human, Black archives resist not only resist the process of exclusion from traditional sites and practices of collection but the archive's implicit stakes in collecting for the sake of "Man." They insist, instead, upon new ceremonies and new epistemologies for new ways to be human. Thus, their resistance to future history is ultimately a resistance to the future histories of "Man."

Black archives are not, however, synonymous with counter-archives or anti-archives. Counter- and anti- indicate possible positions Black archives may take.[11] They

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[10] Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/ Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3, (2003): 312. As Sylvia Wynter's radical and capacious genealogy of race elucidates, the overrepresentation of "Man" as human emerges from the Medieval Christian Church's notion of man as sinful (theodical Man). The redeemed/fallen dyad evolves into the Enlightenment's representation of man as rational and political (Man 1), which in the eighteenth century, transmutes into biodical and economical Man (Man 2). Man 2, Wynter argues, defines "our present ethnoclass genre of the human," in opposition to "the peoples of African hereditary descent and the peoples who comprise the damned archipelagoes of the Poor." Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality," 317.

[11] Counter-archives provide resources for histories often occluded by the "main" archive. Unlike anti-archives, which deconstruct the stakes of evidence and the systematization of knowledge that are foundational to an archive, counter-archives recognize evidence as an important epistemological tool. Adelaide Holton's work on Schomburg's Afrodiasporic archive usefully clarifies such designation: "By terming Schomburg's collection a

function as archival modes that are not necessarily implicated in questions of race, despite the fact that they have often been used in critical race and postcolonial studies to bring many issues to the fore. Black archives, as defined here, emerge out of the tension that race creates between subjects and objects. They mark as incongruous the empirical promises of material evidence and the fact of blackness.

Before elaborating on the complex problem space of the Black archive, it is important to recognize the herculean effort that has been necessary to curate the Black experience. Insofar as these endeavors remain plagued by what Michel-Rolph Trouillot identifies as "the silences of the past," much important work remains to be done.[12] And yet, focusing on the ways in which the racialized subjects of the nation negotiate the archive as force, expectation, and resource, highlights problems outside Trouillot's scope. Exploring, therefore, the objects and materials as well as the subjects and their impulses (both individual and collective) to archive reveals how Black archives exceed and transform conventional demands for evidence and belonging.

One way to explore the impulses that undergird accumulation in the name of and for the sake of race is by exploring the archive's "affective economies," which according

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"counter-archive," I do not mean to suggest that its relationship to mainstream archives and historiography in the United States and Europe was one of negation or opposition. Rather, Schomburg's collection has a supplementary relationship to dominant historiographic knowledge, and this is where its power lies." Adalaide Holton, "Decolonizing History: Arthur Schomburg's Afrodiasporic Archive." *The Journal of African American History* 92.2 (2007): 220.

[12] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 26. Recent work includes Houston Baker, Jr.'s "Intuiting Archive: Notes for a Post-Trauma Poetics" *African American Review* 49.1: (Spring 2016); Achille Mbembe "Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive" in a series of public lectures given at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER), (University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg: 2015); Lisa Lowe's *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2015).

to Sara Ahmed is "where feelings do not reside in subjects or objects, but are produced as effects of circulation." [13] Black archives, in particular, negotiate a variety of valuative claims about the objects and materials collected. On the one hand, they reinforce a sense of cultural collectivity. As Arjun Appadurai explains: "In the humanist imagination, the archive is no more than a social tool for the work of collective memory. [It] is usually sacralized as the site of the past of some sort of cultural collectivity (often the nation), which is seen as sacred by definition."[14] On the other hand, one of the dangers of archives, particularly when used in the service of national inclusion (a paradigm elaborated upon in the first chapter), is that they may reproduce a sense of postracial inevitability. Archival inclusion in this case can simultaneously render a silent history "thinkable" while bolstering its subjects' exclusion.[15] Thus it is crucial to examine not only what has been done with Black archives in the hands of the state (the silences produced, the histories misconstrued), but to consider the affective economy that impels the practice in the first place.

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[13] Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text* 79, Vol. 22 no. 2 (Summer 2004): 120.

[14] Arjun Appadurai, "Archive and Aspiration." *Information Is Alive: Art and Theory on Archiving Data.* Ed. Joke Brouwer and Arjen Mulder. (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2003), 14-15.

[15] This may take the form, as Benedict Anderson demonstrates in *Imagined Communities*, of "monumental archeology, increasingly linked to tourism, [which] allowed the state to appear as the guardian of a generalized, but also local, Tradition." Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 2006), 184-185. Likewise, it resonates also with Lowe's examination of citizenship in *Immigrant Acts* where, "being represented as citizen within the political sphere […] the subject is "split off" from the unrepresentable histories of situated embodiment that contradict the abstract forms of citizenship." Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke UP, 1996), 2.

One of the dimensions of that affective economy that this project takes seriously is the assumption that the impulse to archive operates uniformly across borders or races or even within cultural collectives. Jacques Derrida's defining text of the "archival turn," *Archive Fever,* exemplifies this theoretical assumption. Through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis, *Archive Fever* interrogates what motivates subjects to name, and what motivates them to consign—that is, to "coordinate a single corpus, in a system of synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration."[16] Derrida concludes that the death drive motivates these actions, but because its aim (destruction) is at odds with that of the conservation, the subject is stricken with the malady of the text's title, an archive fever. Despite Derrida's elaborate diagnosis, the patient of the fever receives far less critical attention. What emerges instead is a universal subject and, as is typical of claims for universality, the implied febrile subject is undeniably male. *Archive Fever's* examples register patrilineal archival legacies and its concern with bodily technology privileges masculinist engagements with history, memory, and psychoanalysis. For example, the text's guiding metaphor for the body's relationship to the archive is circumcision.

In the same way that *Archive Fever* assumes that men are the subjects stricken with fever, the text's "universal" imperative also renders race peripheral.[17] And yet, I posit in Chapter Two that Derrida's notion of the skin as archival substrate (routed through circumcision in his case), is ripe for a conversation with groundbreaking work on

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[16] Derrida, *Archive Fever,* 3.
[17] In turn, Derrida's close reading of Freud privileges the phallo-centric interpretation of archival desire.

the skin, the body, and the flesh in Black studies.[18] Most notably, in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (1987), Hortense Spillers postulates that, "the undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color."[19] Racialized skin, in other words, provides "evidence" of a particular version of Black being while also masking a blackness that is lived in the flesh.[20] In Derrida's archive fever, evidence remains superficial: figured in the removal of the skin or in proximity to the body (as is the case with the Jewish phylacteries he details). Spillers's interrogation of racialized skin, meanwhile, draws attention to process, procedure, and permanence. What remains metaphor for Derrida, operates for Spillers as a repository and resource for the production of fleshly knowledges. Spillers illuminates, in other words, an archival impulse that is more than skin deep.

For racialized subjects, the archival impulse extends beyond the gathering, validating, and organizing of resources to the interpretation of the materials. Indeed, the

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[18] Tracing a connection between Derrida's examination of Jewish circumcision and the work of black studies scholars on skin as material signifier (e.g. Hortense Spillers, Frantz Fanon, Paul Gilroy, Michelle Stephens), evokes Fanon's correlation in *Black Skin, White Masks* between Judaism and blackness. The approach here, however, is less interested in establishing an equation between the two groups and their respective bodies, than it is in considering how skin functions as an organizing trope and literal black archive. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* [1967]. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 183.

[19] Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* (1987), 67.

[20] According to Weheliye's reading of Spillers, flesh antecedes the body. It "operates as a vestibular gash in the armor of Man, simultaneously a tool of dehumanization and a relational vestibule to alternate ways of being that do not possess the luxury of eliding phenomenology with biology." Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2014), 44.

burden of history is less secondary than it is concomitant with Black archival praxis. This is not, therefore, the archive as "a tear in the fabric of time, an unplanned glimpse offered into an unexpected event [….] The archive was not compiled with an eye toward history."[21] Black archives have neither the luxury nor the imperative of blindness. Instead, they simultaneously resist historical teleology while contending with its erasures.

In addition to its methodological investment in affect theory, archive theory, critical race theory, and feminist critiques of the human, *Collecting Race* examines the historical conditions that undergird Black archives. It attends to how disciplines depend on archival knowledge, and the implications of those relationships in the context of Black archives. The first chapter's examination of the "problem space" of the Black archive leads, therefore, to discussions of Zora Neale Hurston's subversive anthropology, David Bradley's speculative history, M. NourbeSe Philip's submerged legal discourse, before concluding in the coda with Alexis Pauline Gumbs's post-apocalyptic jettisoning of discipline altogether. Commenting on the stakes of particular disciplines for Black archives, *Collecting Race* traces the development of Black archive theory from the twentieth to the twenty-first century. The transition from primarily prose genres as the vehicles for twentieth century theorizations, to a canon of poetic engagements in the twenty-first, is marked throughout by one of the most notable markers of the Black archive—the central pull of the ideal subject.

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[21] Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, Translated by Thomas Scott-Railton. (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2013), 7.

Black Archives and the Ideal Subject

In the spirit of traditional archival practice, Black archives feel the pull to construct an ideal subject. Rooted in Humanist epistemology and the value of evidence as a marker of truth, archives traditionally accumulate in the name of, and for the sake of, "Man."[22] Black archives bear the additional burden of representing the cultural collective and doing so in a way that would foster belonging. The problem, however, is that the notion of an ideal Black subject is rooted in an epistemological paradigm that inherently excludes Black from the category of human. The pressure exerted by the "ideal subject" on race archives, moreover, overdetermines the archival impulse, which, ultimately, benefits white supremacy. Black archive theory that promotes the ideal subject finds itself in a double bind: pursue recognition according to the terms of an epistemological paradigm that renders the ideal subject of all archives as non-black, non-feminine, non-queer, and non-indigenous, "Man."[23]

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[22] As Wynter points out, the development of the overrepresentation of the human as "Man" includes a redefining of its qualities according to the binary, rational/irrational. From the theocentric redeemed/fallen model of "Man," "Man" evolves in the Enlightenment as a reasoning subject with stakes in empirical knowledge and its methodologies.

[23] Emily Ann Parker makes a compelling case for Wynter's approach to "Man" as constructed on the terms of negation and denial. She argues that Wynter expands Fanon's morphology by positing: "a certain Man, constituted by, in terms only more recently emerging for naming Man, cis/white/masculinity/ability/sexuality/class/nationality/geography, is produced by a denial of its own specific bodiment, something that this body hides from itself. It denies its status as a "concrete individual," as "flesh-and-blood" body, precisely by contrasting itself with other bodies and ignoring and silencing those who would depart from this morphology." Emily Ann Parker, "The Human as Double Bind: Sylvia Wynter and the Genre of "Man," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* Vol. 32, No. 3 (2018): 441.

Collecting Race traces the origin of an idea of the ideal subject of the Black archive to the canonical essay of Black archive theory, Arturo A. Schomburg's "The Negro Digs Up His Past" (1925). The fact that such a foundational call for archives and archival inquiry emits from the epicenter of New Negro ideology means that the pull of the ideal subject is especially strong. Insofar as New Negro ideology endeavors to redefine Black subjects and their place in the modern world, New Negro archives collect in the name of an ideal Black subject. They pursue evidence of and for their belonging. One of the results of Black archive theory being so deeply rooted in the soil of New Negro ideology, is that Black archives across the twentieth century contend with what it means to organize archival evidence around a racialized subject and what it means that such evidence is used as a way to figure Black belonging. That is, at least until 2008 when M. NourbeSe Philip's 2008 *Zong!* develops a theory for Black archives on radically new conceptual terrain. Plunging the waters of the Middle Passage rather than the soil of the New Negro, *Zong!* deconstructs the myth of the ideal subject and the overrepresentation of the human as "Man."

For the fullest account of these other ways of being and of recording the human, *Collecting Race* examines Black archives at the level of their collection and their representation.[24] On the one hand, the archives of figures such as Schomburg, Hurston,

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[24] Fred Moten's *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, and Alexander Weheliye's *Habeas Viscus* make compelling arguments about the relationship between other ways of being human and Black studies. As Weheliye posits: "black studies illuminates the essential role that racializing assemblages play in the construction of modern selfhood, works toward the abolition of Man, and advocates the radical reconstruction and decolonization of what it means to be human. In doing so, black studies pursues a politics of global liberation beyond the genocidal shackles of Man." Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 4.

Ellison, and Bradley are interpreted in terms of their own archival practices and methodology. On the other hand, literary representations of Black archives help to provide an account of the impulse that anticipates the practice. Literature leads to questions of genre and, to that point, both fiction (*Invisible Man, Louisiana, The Chaneysville Incident*) and poetry (*Zong!* and *M Archive*) provide clear examples of Black writers using the archive to depict the racializing symbolic order that holds Black bodies captive. Their work models emancipatory formulations of archival knowledge towards a theory for Black archives.

The Black Archival Turn

If the Black archive has an architect, it is Arthur A. Schomburg. His conviction that evidence could, should, and eventually would produce radical change for Black subjects in the US and beyond resonates still. Indeed, for almost 100 years now, African American and Afro-Diasporic studies have responded to Schomburg's 1925 clarion call to "dig up the past." There have been monumental "archeological" efforts and vibrant critical conversations about subjugated histories. As of 2016, there is even a national museum dedicated to the legacy of Black life in this country. (A museum that stores/archives ten times the number of objects it displays). It would seem, that the archive's spade has proven itself a well-worn tool for resistance. Or, has it? Considering how history's repositories systematically fail to supply permanence, much less belonging for its Black subjects, perhaps digging up the "past" can only do so much and only for so many.

Part of the problem is the assumption that "evidence" is what is needed. If only blackness can be historicized or its achievement measured. If only enough material or "facts" are supplied, then surely new futures are imminent. And yet, if "race, racialization, and racial identities" require, as Alexander Weheliye describes, a "constant perpetuation via institutions, discourses, practices, desires, infrastructures, languages, technologies, sciences, economies, dreams, and cultural artifacts, [for] the barring of nonwhite subjects from the category of the human as it is performed in the modern west,"[25] then why do Black subjects archive? Does this practice not solidify their own exclusion? By way of a response, this project examines why Black subjects invest in accruing evidence of their own racialization. It explores the possibilities that open up when imagining the work of Black archives. It posits that while counter-archives may participate and shore up a Humanist imperative to evidence, Black archives illuminate the racializing stakes of evidence.

Archival "digging" (an archeological metaphor that extends from Arthur Schomburg's seminal essay, "The Negro Digs Up His Past" (1925) to Michel Foucault's *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1969)) is itself a normative practice of knowledge production. Archival reliance on evidence marks an epistemological paradigm rooted in humanism. And humanism, as Sylvia Wynter teaches us, brings with it the overrepresentation of the human as "Man" and, in turn, the construction of its structural opposition: the Black subject. To put it another way, the archive's ultimate ideal subject is "Man," and "Man" is precisely the subject position from which black is excluded. What then are Black subjects to do with the practice if it ultimately organizes itself to

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[25] Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus,* 3.

reinforce "Man's" overrepresentation of the human? What does it mean to collect material for your exclusion?

Navigating the tension between validating and verifying, collecting and consigning, writers like Ralph Ellison, David Bradley, Zora Neale Hurston, Erna Brodber, and M. NourbeSe Philip challenge the logic of disposability that otherwise governs traditional archival methodology and its disciplines. Ultimately, their work represents the deconstruction of the ideal subject of the archive, a process that *Collecting Race* argues defines twentieth-century Black archive theory. Each chapter thus looks at how Black writers theorize the affordances and constraints of the archive.

Highlighting both Black archival theory and practice, the dissertation's first two chapters are structured around pairs of writer-archivists. "Shovels, Matches, and Museums, or, The Problem with Archives: Schomburg, Ellison, and the NMAAHC," juxtaposes the foundational text of Black archival theory, Arthur A. Schomburg's essay "The Negro Digs Up His Past" with one of the most canonical novels of African-American literature, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). Despite their different reactions to the archival impulse—Schomburg navigates exclusion through contact and accumulation, while Ellison proffers a rejection of objects—both, nevertheless, underscore the relationship of individual responsibility to a collective history. Placing these two in dialogue also draws attention to the triangulation of collective subject formation, national recognition, and the impulse to archive. A conversation that begins quite nationally situated, however, will turn diasporic almost immediately, particularly when one considers that despite Schomburg's emphasis on the "American Negro" in his essay, his own archival practice is undeniably more global in scope. While

acknowledging the absolutely seminal work that bibliophile and archivist Schomburg has meant to Black archives, the chapter also illuminates the various limitations of traditionally conceived race archives. To Schomburg's call to pick up the spade and dig for the sake of belonging, *Invisible Man* responds with its protagonist setting fire to the briefcase archive he has carried the entire novel, a briefcase replete with documents that objectively certify his existence as a Black man at the mercy of white supremacy. Schomburg and Ellison thus set the stage for the radical alternative approaches to the notion of Black archives in the chapters that follow.

Following the suggestion implicit in Ellison's closing scene of archival violence to probe the rewards of evidence, the second chapter, "Archive Channels: Zora Neale Hurston and Erna Brodber" examines the anthropological legacy of Zora Neale Hurston and the fictional retelling of her work in Erna Brodber's novel *Louisiana* (1994). Both represent the reframing of Black archives outside of a nationalist paradigm. Both also confront the masculinity of the ideal subject, as shared in Schomburg's and Ellison's differing relationships to the Black archival impulse. Hurston and Brodber's Black archives redefine the notion of the race's "ideal subjects." Straddling the pre-archival turn to its post-archival reckoning, Hurston and Brodber theorize Black flesh as radical repository. For as Spillers teaches us, flesh can resist and resist it does, against the evacuated ontology of the ideal subject. What emerges in the wake is fleshly knowledge, an important tool for Black feminist archives in the work to subvert Humanism's epistemological pressures.

"From Fever to Fire: David Bradley's Speculative Archives," the project's third chapter, transitions from the writer-archivist pairs of the first two chapters to single

authors and poets writing after the institutionalization of Black studies. The chapter explores the role of speculative knowledge in David Bradley's 1981 archival novel, *The Chaneysville Incident*. Framed by the reluctant trek home of its protagonist, history professor John Washington, Bradley's novel thematizes the interrogation of historical knowledge, the patrilineal and masculinist paradigm to which the Black archive has traditionally been subject, and the pressures of the "ideal subject" to evidence a particular brand of national inclusion. Challenging, once again, the traditional temporality of the archive, Bradley presents us with Black archives motivated by a different relationship to death and its drives. As the novel illustrates, the disciplinary tools John so carefully deploys throughout the text prove counterproductive to the revelation of the past he seeks. Instead the epistemological epiphany comes to the protagonist only after he has freed himself from interpretive pressure and accepted an archive that reimagines the "facts" of blackness. In his surrender to imagination and, I propose, an anti-Humanism inherent in Black archives, John's archive fever breaks, and his institutional methodology burns. Burning his notes and potentially even himself in the process, John establishes a new relationship to historical materials. Highlighting this shift away from empirical evidence and the notion of a fact of history, the chapter also accounts for new ways of conceiving temporality and space in the Black archive, particularly as they illuminate the epistemological crisis of "Man."

Taking up the trope of the speculative in a new genre, the project concludes by way of M. NourbeSe Philip's poetic cycle, *Zong!*. The only text of this study set in the twenty-first century, *Zong!* marks the culmination of the twentieth-century Black archive's fascination with the ideal subject. Introducing a poetic model of archive

aesthetics, *Zong!*'s multigeneric, polyvocal structure ultimately deconstructs the archive's stakes in racialization and the humanist imperative that drives it. Marking the transition between Black archives of the twentieth and twenty-first century, Philip's poetry collection renders the spade futile. It locates Black archives, instead, in the waters of a more fluid understanding of blackness and its subjects.

Focused on Alexis Pauline Gumbs's poetry collection *M Archive* (2018), the project's coda, "Unmanning the Archive," brings the literary scope of the project to the contemporary moment. It elaborates on the genre questions addressed in the examination of *Zong!* (i.e. the relationship of the archival novel to archival poetry), and it broadens the dissertation's emphasis on the role of the ideal subject in Black archives by thinking about the subject in species-oriented terms. Building from chapter four's theoretical interest in Sylvia Wynter's seminal essay, "The Ceremony Must Be Found" (1984), and her 2015 essay, "The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoetic Turn/Overturn, its Autonomy of Human Agency and Extraterroriality of (Self-) Cognition," "Unmanning the Archive" tests Wynter's hypothesis that a consideration of ourselves in a planetary symbolic order can potentially extricate us from the overdetermined version of the human in which we have been ensnared since the Western European middle ages. Taking up the planetary in its wake, *M Archive* provides us with a glimpse of Black archives freed, finally, from the constraints of Humanism. Amidst the post-apocalyptic rubble of environmental crisis, the collection's narrator, who for the first time successfully resists the ideal subject status, excavates another way of being human. As ecofeminist, intertextual archival poetry, *M Archive* confronts the anti-blackness so central to the archive as we know it by disposing of its most persistent culprit: *Man*.

The current, precarious state of the humanities, and the public and top-down assault on “facts” and “evidence” has contributed to the archive’s revival. The projects that are most readily funded by the few sources that remain for humanistic study are privileging projects oriented either towards the future—represented by the Digital Humanities—or the past—represented by the materiality of its archives. The stakes are especially pressing for Black subjects who remain excluded by the nation and whose throats, hoarse from centuries of protest, continue to cry out that Black lives matter beyond the material. It is a request born from the same place as Schomburg’s call for the spade, his belief that through evidence new futures might be possible. Except that now, in the wake of the post-structural archival turn, the notion that archives somehow contain the “whole story” has at least been critically debunked. The question of where Black subjects are to go for their own cultural memory remains ever pressing. As the writers of this study elucidate, refusing to take archival value as a fait accompli deconstructs the archive as possessing authoritative value. Destabilizing discourse and its disciplines, Black archives assume the responsibility Hurston decried, that none should lie in inconspicuous forgetfulness. They do so with an eye towards new ceremonies and new repositories. Leaving behind the traditional archive’s chapels, Black archives function more like that hall of meeting Hurston imagined, decorated by Black artists depicting scenes “from our own literature and life. Mythology and all.”

CHAPTER ONE

Shovels, Matches, and Museums, or, The Problem with Archives: Schomburg, Ellison, and the NMAAHC

Under the subheading, "Questions for Archives and Archivists," of The National Archives and Records Administration website (archives.gov) is the following query: "What is the difference between the National Archives, the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian Institute?" The response begins: "The National Archives and Records Administration is an independent federal agency that helps preserve our nation's history and define us as a people by overseeing the management of all federal records." Although it goes on to account for each of the institutions' distinctions, what is worth highlighting here is its triangulation of history, documentation, and national definition. What does it mean to claim that we are defined as a people not only by the records we keep but also by those we manage? Besides, who exactly are "the people," what precisely is "our" national history, and what are the stakes in the archive's relationship to these categories?

Such questions about national belonging and cultural memory are particularly relevant when we think about the latest addition to the National Mall.[26] With more than

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[26] Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1995) also usefully gestures to the relationship between the archive and the museum. In his case, delivering a lecture on the role of the archive in psychoanalytic theory at the Freud museum (once Freud's house), Derrida expounds upon the value of thinking about the spaces of archives across institutions: "It is thus, in this *domiciliation*, in this house arrest, that archives take place. The dwelling, this place where they dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from the private to the public, which does not always mean from the secret to the nonsecret. […] With such a status, the documents, which are not always discursive writings, are only kept and classified under the title of the archive by virtue of a privileged *topology*. They inhabit this uncommon place, this place of election where law and singularity intersect in *privilege*. At the intersection of the topological and the nomologial, of the place and the law, of the substrate and the authority, a scene of domiciliation becomes at once visible and invisible." The National Museum of African

36,000 artifacts, the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) is the nineteenth, and newest, museum of the Smithsonian Institution.[27] "Devoted exclusively to the documentation of African American life, history, and culture," the museum opened its doors September 24, 2016 in the middle of one of the most highly contentious presidential campaigns of the last century—a campaign that challenged not only the place of the museum's subjects in the nation but the status of historical evidence itself.[28] President Obama, in a speech delivered at an awards dinner of

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American History and Culture amplifies the intersection between the nomological and topological by virtue of the position (de jure and de facto) of Black subjects in the nation. Indeed, even the language Derrida employs in the passage, of archival house arrest and the "privilege" of intersecting law and singularity take on new significance in view of the conditions both on display and housed in the backrooms of the NMAAHC. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Trans. Eric Prenowitz, Chicago: U Chicago P, 199). 2-3.

[27] It is worth noting the lengthy process for the approval and construction of the museum, as it reflects changing concerns with collective national identity and archival inclusivity. First proposed by Black veterans in 1915, Congress actually approved the construction of a Black museum on the National Mall as early as 1929 but subsequently denied it financing. The effort was revived in the late 1960s with the help of figures like James Baldwin and Jackie Robinson who lobbied Congress to no avail. In 1988, Rep. John Lewis and Mickey Leland introduced a bill for a Smithsonian dedicated solely to African American history, and this, after various iterations, led to the approval of an investigation to determine the necessity of the museum by President George W. Bush in 2001. By 2005, President Bush had finally endorsed the museum's construction. The site for the museum was selected in 2006; ground broke February 22, 2012 in a ceremony that included speeches by President Obama and museum director, Lonnie Bunch. The museum finally opened September 24, 2016, more than 100 years after it was first proposed.

[28] While the scale and location of the National Museum of African American History and Culture are unique, the museum's focus is less groundbreaking. By 1988, for example, the African American Museums Association (AAMA) had documented 108 museums and archives in the US and Canada with a similar focus (including the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard, open since 1867, and Schomburg's NYPL archive, which will be discussed in more detail in this chapter). For more on the role of the AAMA as "chief inter-organizational voice for 'ethnically specific' cultural organizations," see Faith Davis Ruffins' "Culture Wars Won and Lost, Part II: The National African-American Museum Project." *Radical History Review* 70 (1998): 78-101. More recently, the digital project "BlackPast.org: Remembered and Reclaimed,"

the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation on September 17, 2016, for instance, pointed to the museum as a place for educating then Republican presidential nominee Donald J. Trump on the nation's history of race relations: "You may have heard Hillary's opponent in this election say that there's never been a worse time to be a Black person. I mean, he missed that whole civics lesson about slavery and Jim Crow and (applause) -- but we've got a museum for him to visit. (Applause.) So he can tune in. We will educate him."[29] Indeed, with such a prominent address,[30] a 500 million-dollar construction budget, and an opening ceremony during the final months of President Obama's presidency amidst glaringly turbulent national conversations on race relations and the fallacy of the "post racial," the stakes remain especially high for the museum's narrative of history and national belonging. [31]

Nowhere do the public pressures and expectations of such a project fall more squarely than on the shoulders of museum director Lonnie G. Bunch, III. Responsible for casting the vision of the museum to potential investors and the public, Bunch is

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lists African American museums and affiliated digital archives by state. However, it fails to account for university archives and private collections.

[29] Barack Obama, "President Obama at Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Dinner." 2017. 46th Annual Legislative Conference Phoenix Awards Dinner of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Dinner. Washington, DC. 17 September 2016.

[30] The National Mall has become, in many ways, an important site for the representation of minority difference in the nation. The antecedent to the AAMHC on the National Mall is the National Museum of the American Indian (opened September 21, 2004). As of May 8, 2008, the Commission to Study the Potential Creation of the National Museum of the American Latino Act of 2007 was signed into law.

[31] President Trump allegedly cancelled a visit to the new museum in observance of Martin Luther King Day following a heated exchange with Civil Rights leader and Georgia Representative John Lewis days before Trump's inauguration. Whether or not this meeting was actually scheduled, the controversy surrounding the President-elect's failure to visit the museum prior to his election highlights the museum's place in a changing national imaginary.

essentially a narrator of the museum's story. Commenting on the vision of the museum for *The New York Times*, Bunch asserts: "'This is not being built as a museum by African-Americans for African-Americans…The notion that is so important here is that African-American culture is used as a lens to understand what it means to be an American.'"[32] A guiding principle of this large-scale project, in other words, is that African American history, identity, and experience function as representational resources for national identification. Turning to the museum website—and its foundational pillars—we see this language repeated, but with an even clearer investment in nation than that stated by Bunch Jr. in his interview. There one finds the assertion that the museum "explores what it means to be an American and shares how American values like resiliency, optimism, and spirituality are reflected in African American history and culture."[33] What initially appears as an innocuous approach to recognition begins to illuminate some of its inherent risks: the bolstering of the status and legitimacy of the nation (complete with its own fundamentally racist pillars).[34]

The museum's paradigm, the catch-22 of its efforts to bolster the place of African Americans in the nation and the nation's fundamental rejection of such efforts, reflects in curatorial decisions. Take for example the question of how best to exhibit the influence of Bill Cosby (currently on display in the museum's "Taking the Stage," which explores the

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[32] Kate Taylor, "The Thorny Path to a National Black Museum," (*The New York Times*, 22 Jan. 2011).
[33] "About the Museum." *National Museum of African American History and Culture.* (Smithsonian, Date Accessed August 11, 2018).
[34] *Race and the Production of Modern American Nationalism* usefully critiques the assumption that nationalism be seen as unitary or univocal. Reynolds J. Scott-Childress, Ed. *Race and the Production of Modern American Nationalism* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999). xiii.

impact of African Americans in film, theater and television).[35] We see the "lens" at work too in the space's layout schema,[36] and, of course, in its archival acquisitions.[37] Take, for instance, the handcuffs used to arrest Henry Louis Gates, Jr. outside his home on July 16, 2009. Originally considered an artifact at odds with the museum's directive given by

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[35] Bunch responds to critics of the museum's Cosby exhibit in an article published in *Museum News* March 31, 2016. He argues in that "This is not an exhibition that "honors or celebrates" Bill Cosby but one that acknowledges his role, among many others, in American entertainment. Some people feel that the Smithsonian should eliminate all mention of Bill Cosby as a result of recent revelations. We understand but respectfully disagree. For too long, aspects of African American history have been erased and undervalued, creating an incomplete interpretation of the American past. This museum seeks to tell, in the words of the eminent historian John Hope Franklin, "the unvarnished truth" that will help our visitors to remember and better understand what has often been erased and forgotten." "Lonnie Bunch on Bill Cosby and the National Museum of African American History and Culture," *Museum News*, The National Museum of African American History and Culture. (Smithsonian: March 31, 2016).

[36] The museum's lower levels are dedicated to "History," with its uppermost level dedicated to "Community Galleries" and "Culture Galleries." The subterranean three lowest levels house materials and artifacts in ascending chronological order ("Slavery and Freedom: 1400-1877; "Defending Freedom, Defining Freedom: The Era of Segregation, 1876-1968; A Changing America and Beyond: 1968 and Beyond). One of the most impressive (and largest exhibits) of the bottommost floor juxtaposes statues of conventional white American historical figures (Jefferson, Washington, etc.) alongside Black men and women who, foundational to the construction of the nation, were often overlooked in its history. As a sort of backdrop to the statues reads the Declaration of Independence's "All men are created equal…." Thus, the exhibit, and museum for that matter, is clearly invested in a necessary historiography and in elucidating the many paradoxes at the core of our national history. And while the subterranean element of these floors of history is obviously metaphorically motivated, I can't help but wonder whether the layout perpetuates or reinforces notions of historical distance and progress narratives that would see contemporary culture as a part of a larger teleology that still relegates "Slavery" to the basement, and, perhaps even more telling, necessarily conjoins it immediately with freedom.

[37] Many of the museum's artifacts were accumulated, thanks to Antiques Roadshow-style events sponsored by the museum to encourage people to "Save Our African-American Treasures." "The goal was to encourage people to bring heirlooms from their closets and attics to be assessed by experts. The owners would get advice on how to preserve their keepsakes, and, if anything amazing showed up, the museum just might get an addition to its collection." Kate Taylor, "The Thorny Path to a National Black Museum." (*The New York Times*, January 22, 2011).

former President George W. Bush, to create a "healing place," the handcuffs were eventually accepted by the Smithsonian and on display at the institution's opening.[38] As recent evidence of Black men's unjust treatment by the police, the handcuffs were nearly refused in the name of the museum's "healing" project. This initial hesitation reiterates the epistemic conundrum of the museum itself: how to untangle the status of the nation from its foundational racism; how to "evidence" race without deconstructing the nation in its wake? Refusing to take for granted symbolic legibility, moreover, means that objects like Emmett Till's casket, the shotgun shell retrieved from the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, or the Gates, Jr. handcuffs (all on display at the NMAAHC)—not only challenge what the museum deems the "American" values of "resiliency, optimism and spirituality" but also, they ultimately obfuscate rather than illuminate "what it means to be an American."[39]

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[38] The debate about the handcuffs illuminates contrasting views on the purpose of museums organized around racialized populations. President Bush's interpretation of the space as a "healing place," for instance, privileges the affective value of historical objects on display. It considers audience engagement as paramount, which, in turn, raises questions about whose feelings are being considered, and to what ends? Meanwhile, Achille Mbembe in "Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive," defines museums as an epistemic space: "a museum properly understood is not a dumping place. It is not a place where we recycle history's waste. It is first and foremost an epistemic space." In his estimation, museums need not be safe or comfortable, as they derive value from their exhibition of epistemological truth. In ultimately deciding to display the handcuffs, the NMAAHC aligned itself with Mbembe's vision. At least in this particular case, it resisted efforts to coopt Black history for the sake of the nation and its overdetermined white supremacist narratives. Achille Mbembe, "Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive" (lecture, Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2015).

[39] In some ways the paradigm of difference that undergirds the museum serves as a tool for what David Palumbo-Liu describes as the "management of race in the name of cooperation and harmony." David Palumbo-Liu, *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, and Interventions* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995), 10.

Questioning a range of assumptions about the status of the archive and its implications for racialized subjects in the nation, this chapter invites an evaluation of the extent to which archives can advance Black interests in the United States. By interests, I mean: 1) wanting to learn or know blackness; 2) the advantage or benefit that an archive could/would yield Black subjects; 3) the extent to which Black people are shareholders in the epistemological undertaking. Black archives do, indeed, advance such interests.[40] In their most radical formulations, they simultaneously interrogate the epistemological underpinnings of empirical evidence and the fact of blackness itself. They refuse the traditional temporality of archival knowledge, and they destabilize the relationship between subject that observes and object under observation.

As this chapter's attention to the work of Arturo Schomburg and Ralph Ellison reveals, Black archives are also tasked with resistance. They resist pressure from white cooptation, systems of capitol that render Black subjects and their knowledges as commodities, and the compelling pull of national conscription. And yet, such archival pressures are often overlooked or taken for granted, for presence, as in the availability and preservation of material evidence of Black life and history, is taken to signal promise. Consequently, the purpose of collecting is pushed to the background; impulse and motivation cede the floor to responsibility and archival redress.

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[40] Because the US as nation is defined by its relationship to Black as other (marked by Black subjugation in various forms across its history), I propose the third form of interest—the extent to which Black people are shareholders in epistemological undertakings—remains out of reach for African American archives. For instance, the NMAAHC has made concerted efforts to elucidate the inextricable relationship of the nation's foundations to the subjugation of Black people. Its exhibit "Slavery and Freedom" explicitly addresses the paradox at the heart of US independence from Britain. However, the narrative of that same exhibit, posted to the museum website, problematically parallels freedom from Britain and abolition.

This chapter, however, shifts the focus from who collects or what is collected, to why. What drives the accumulative agenda for Black subjects? What affective networks does it elucidate? And to what extent is the impulse more affectively charged than we may have previously considered? This line of archival inquiry aims to move beyond a dialectical reading of the archive that toggles between presence and absence or silence and voice. Instead, it takes seriously the affective economies in which Black archives participate. Attention to these more complex networks enables us to spot otherwise obfuscated connections between a subject's orientation towards history and the pressure to evidence their place in the nation.[41] For this, though, the conversation must start long before controversies about handcuffs and "healing places," or questions about exhibition, curation, and donation.[42] To diagnose such unique archive "fevers," our attention must shift to the interstices between subject and object. There, where the motives of the archivist and the constraints of its object of study mediate one another, we can gauge the impulse that predetermines not only the archive but the place of its subjects.

Reading for the material, social, and psychic conditions of the desire to archive (or not) as they circulate between objects and subjects, the chapter turns to figures like Arthur A. Schomburg and Ralph Ellison. Each underscores the relationship of individual responsibility to what becomes material relic for a collective history. Likewise, they consider the specific relationships of these archival expectations to the stakes of

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[41] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2004), 8.
[42] In an interview for *New York Times Magazine,* Gates, Jr. made public his donation to the museum of the handcuffs used to arrest him outside his home. Bunch denies that the publicity this admission received impacted his final decision to incorporate the item; he argues instead "he grew to appreciate" it. Deborah Solomon, "After the Beer Summit," (*New York Times Magazine*. Feb. 11, 2010).

blackness in and out of the nation. In their professional lives, Schomburg and Ellison also worked closely with the institutionalization of Black archives. For Schomburg this meant collaborating with the 135th street branch of the New York Public Library, which would later become the capstone of his legacy: the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Ellison, meanwhile, worked (as did many Black writers of his time) for the Federal Writers Program of the WPA, documenting Black life in New York City. In addition to first-hand experience with the accumulation of records, both Schomburg and Ellison theorize the Black archive, although, on this front, their ideas diverge dramatically. Schomburg, of course, is Black archivist par excellence. His seminal essays, "The Negro Digs Up His Past," and "Racial Integrity," not only vastly anticipate the end of the century's "archival turn" where sources become subjects, but also, they provide us with the earliest contemplation of archival significance for Black subjects in the US. The field for archival representation where Ellison is situated, meanwhile, is much vaster; it spans genres, literary movements, nations, etc. And yet *Invisible Man* stands out as one of the most important novels of Black archival theory. On the one hand, it provides a thorough representation of Black archives (from call to contents to classification). On the other hand, it gives us what is still one of the most detailed interrogations of the archival impulse.

Attending to the archival impulse of racialized subjects in the nation moves us from the national scale of the newest Smithsonian integrant and its director back to an exploration of Arthur A. Schomburg's counter-archival legacy and his 1925 essay, "The Negro Digs Up His Past." One of the most well-known appeals for Black archival practice and its attendant historiography, Schomburg's essay highlights the restorative

potential and progressive possibilities of historical retrieval. Promoting archival practice for the sake of subjugated knowledge, in a tone both inspirational and urgent, "The Negro Digs Up His Past," reflects a burgeoning moment of counter histories that encouraged Black historical narratives grounded on "less the sand of controversy and more the dust of digging" (Schomburg 672). This digging has, of course, continued—as well it should. Its dust is kicked up in the halls of museums and archival holdings across the nation and indexed across fields and institutions. However, not enough attention has been paid to texts that signal the limitations of what has otherwise been framed as an empowering cultural practice bolstering ethnic nationalism. Thus, the two-fold aim here: to interrogate, on the one hand, the specific stakes of archival "status," Achille Mbembe's term in "The Power of Archive and Its Limits"; and, on the other hand, the relationship of this status to burgeoning minority nationalisms.[43] It is widely recognized that the idea of minority nationalisms and multiculturalism moved the production of difference from the body to space and national identification. In so doing, such ideologies also succeeded in producing a comparative methodology to mediate racial subjection. However, in addition,

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[43] While for Hong and Ferguson in *Strange Affinities*, "minority nationalisms" emerged as part of the epistemological challenge to racist and colonial legacies of Western thought articulated by the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, their collection demonstrates how these networks can be traced back to W.E.B. DuBois. Grace K Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson, *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2011),10. Some of the catalysts for such challenges are evident as early as the late nineteenth century. See Achille Mbembe's "The Power of Archive and Its Limits," *Refiguring the Archive*. Ed. Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover (Graeme Reid & Razia Saleh. Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002. 19-26).

the move from body to space and national identification also meant a recasting of the stakes of the archive. Black archives require a new theory.[44]

The focus on the production, dissemination, and validation of Black archives thus needs to shift to the theorization of the praxis and subjects central to such archival practices.[45] For this reason, the chapter traces the archive's valuation of empiricism, authority, and singularity to the position of the racialized subject in the nation. It does so in order to illuminate the radical challenges to the epistemological practices that govern the status of both the archive and its subjects as they are mutually reconstituted theoretically. For example, moving from the archived (or unarchived) object to the archival impulse and its subject helps us think through Schomburg's important and revolutionary call for archivization while simultaneously attending to its limits. This concern for the limits of the traditional archive, particularly as it relates to the consolidation of the "ideal type" in New Negro ideology, also leads to Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel, *Invisible Man*. There we find the unnamed protagonist burning what seems to be just the sort of materials Schomburg argues "makes history yield for him the same values that the treasured past of any people affords" (672).

Schomburg's and Ellison's vastly different conceptualizations of nation, history, and the status of cultural memory allows us to better see the difference between the

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[44] This is especially true if, as David Palumbo-Liu suggests, this model of difference merely serves as a tool for the "*management* of race in the name of cooperation and harmony," an idea that returns us to the Smithsonian's claim for the "management" of knowledge. Palumbo-Liu, *The Ethnic Canon*, 10.

[45] The archival efforts of Arthur A. Schomburg, Alexander Gumby, and Zora Neal Hurston are particularly relevant to this discussion, as are W.E.B. DuBois' *The Encyclopedia of the Negro* (1946) and Elinor Des Verney Sinnette's *Black Bibliophiles and Collectors* (1990), which demonstrate efforts to organize and make known the various holdings across the nation.

shovel and the match, as a negotiation of the impulse to record subjugated knowledges and the willingness or refusal of an "ideal subject" as type.[46] Schomburg's investment in collective recognition and the production of a "new" subject position leads him to a counter-archive, one that validates the status of the conventional archive as a repository for a future history while expanding its subjects and their histories. In contrast, Ellison's faith in democratic individualism and his resistance to recognition as a marker of inclusion leads him to alternative archives of disqualified knowledges.[47] If Schomburg's laudable aims are proved self-defeating by Ellison's protagonist, it is worth noting that Ellison's approach explicitly marks both the praxis and its result as inevitably disqualified. It would seem we either need both the shovel and the match, or an altogether new set of tools.

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[46] I borrow the term "subjugated knowledge" from Foucault's "Society Must Be Defended" lectures where he distinguishes between subjugated and disqualified knowledges. The former refers to historical knowledges masked or ignored, while the latter means more specifically subjugated knowledges that have also been disqualified as nonceptual, or "below the required level of erudition or scientificity." Black archives, I posit, accumulate subjugated and disqualified knowledges as an epistemological and ontological tool of resistance. Michel Foucault, "*Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76*. (Ed. Mauro Bertani, Alessandro Fontana, and François Ewald. New York: Picador, 2003), 7

[47] As Jean-Christophe Cloutier clarifies, Ellison was working with archives precisely at the moment when archives were becoming increasingly popular: "the United States literary archives coalesced as a cultural and monetary value in the wake of modernism and the Depression and thus on the heels of New Deal reforms such as the Works Progress Administration as well on the paradigm-shifting turn in archival science brought about by the publication of Schellenberg's manual *Modern Archives* in 1956" (20). He also attributes "the upheavals in paper-reproduction technologies to "make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present." Jean-Christophe Cloutier, *Shadow Archives: The Lifecycles of African American Literature* (New York, Columbia UP, 2019), 21.

Schomburg's Shovel

Before delving into Arthur A. Schomburg's call to archive—his commitment to material accumulation in the name of race consciousness—it is important to consider the various catalysts that contributed to his well-known efforts. Though widely recognized as one of the most important and foundational bibliophiles of Black cultural studies (his collection of over 10,000 documents and items of the "global Black experience" is the central collection of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture), Schomburg's disillusionment with the anticolonial efforts that influenced his faith in the pan-African impulse of his archival practice remains fairly underexplored. Reframing Schomburg as both a Black *and* Puerto Rican intellectual and archivist illuminates not only the development of one of the most significant African American and African diaspora archives, but the specific practice of its namesake—a minoritized subject negotiating race and national belonging vis-à-vis material accumulation.

Although Schomburg's archival impulse fostered racial sensibility and cultural nationalism, it also responded to the nation's expectation of evidentiary inclusion, an expectation rendered all the more complicated by the fact that Schomburg was a Black Puerto Rican living in the United States during the country's invasion of Puerto Rico. Taking into account these socio-political and personal valences, Schomburg's archive fever looks less like "an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement," than a material protest of exclusion produced at the intersection of anticolonial disillusionment and burgeoning New Negro ideology.[48]

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[48] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 23.

That Schomburg's relationship as a Puerto Rican to the broader American nation receives little critical attention is quite surprising. His earliest forays into politics and archivization in the United States did not begin with the racial focus for which he and the eponymous institution are now best known. In fact, when Schomburg moved to New York from Puerto Rico in 1891, he held the post of recording secretary for the *Las Dos Antillas*, a political club formed to promote Cuban and Puerto Rican independence. Influenced by José Martí's political philosophy, it advocated color-blind nationalism and imagined a state where its subjects were considered "only Cubans."[49] Privileging national identification over racial identification, Schomburg's early politics nevertheless reinforced the binary between the two modes of identification that continued to influence his future projects. His allegiance shifted when, as his literary compatriot Jesús Colón indicates, "*something* happened' to so frustrate Schomburg that he eventually renounced his allegiances to Puerto Rico, adopted the Anglicized form of his first name, and began to identify with the broader struggle for liberation by people of color everywhere.[50]

Various scholars have tried to supplement Colón's ambiguous declaration about the "something" that happened to Schomburg, especially since the transition marks his investment in a formative project for Black cultural studies. On the one hand, Elinor des Verney Sinnette, Schomburg's biographer, argues that his patriotic disenchantment

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[49] As Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof has argued, the club "was unusual, perhaps unique, in the Americas in the 1890s for its open call for fraternity between Blacks and Whites." Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, "The World of Arturo Alfonso Schomburg." (Ed. Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores. *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 70.

[50] According to Jesus Colon, "something happened whereby Arturo shifted his interest away from the Puerto Rican liberation movement and put all his energy into the black movement." Elinor Des Verney Sinnette, *Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, Black Bibliophile and Collector: A Biography*. (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1989), 23.

stemmed from infighting among the party's independence leaders, as well as from Puerto Rico's transition from Spanish to US colony in 1898. On the other hand, Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof's study, "The World of Arturo Alfonso Schomburg," reroutes Schomburg's position on race through his status as a colonial subject: "excluded from the prevailing narratives of race, nationhood, and history, [Schomburg] experienced a sense of dislocation and alienation that allowed him to imagine alternate forms of belonging either as an Antillano or as part of an international community of Black people."[51] Meanwhile, Winston James' *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia* traces the reluctance to maintain national affiliation to Schomburg's lineage. James argues it was Schomburg's attachment to his mother, a Black Protestant migrant worker from St Croix, whose family he spent considerable time with in the Virgin Islands as a child,[52] in addition to his patrilineal German ancestry that contributed to Schomburg's decision to prefer a racialized cultural collective over a Puerto Rican nationalism with which he never fully identified.[53] Lisa Gonzalez's *Boricua Literature* (2001), however, challenges James's position as the "predictable enthusiasm among scholars who want to claim him as a West Indian radical" (60). Instead, she asserts that Puerto Rican expatriate activist communities mostly disbanded after 1898, so "even if Schomburg had been inclined to continue the struggle

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[51] Hoffnung-Garskof, "The World of Arturo Alfonso Schomburg," 72.
[52] The emphasis on Schomburg's lineage corresponds with Lisa Gonzalez's critique in *Boricua Literature* that "Over the past twenty years, Schomburg's biography has been reinvented by North American scholars interested in reclaiming him and his legacy as West Indian American." Lisa Sánchez-González, *Boricua Literature: A Literary History of the Puerto Rican Diaspora* (New York, New York UP, 2001), 45.
[53] See Winston James, "The Peculiarities of Afro-Hispanic Radicalism in the United States: The Political Trajectories of Arturo Schomburg and Jesús Colón." *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America*. (New York: Verso, 1998), 195-231.

for Puerto Rican independence, he would have probably had to go it alone" (59), that is, at least until the resurgence of these movements, which occurred after Schomburg was already working as a full-time librarian/archivist.

While these positions productively signal Schomburg's complicated identification as Black Puerto Rican, they fail to fully account for the racial politics of Puerto Rico itself, especially when we consider that the island is where a young Schomburg was told by his teacher "the Negro has no history." For example, the Puerto Rican myth of the *jíbaro*, the isolated, mountain-dwelling, Spanish-speaking, creolized, Euro- peasant, was circulating widely during the late nineteenth century. A sign of white supremacy at the bedrock of Puerto Rican national identification, the jíbaro served white, intellectual elites' efforts at "exclud[ing] the emerging, and largely nonwhite, working class [,which led] some of the working-class leadership [to even reject] "nationalism" as an ideology." [54] Thus Schomburg was not only reacting to the general condition of coloniality, to specific failed political independence projects, or to a family lineage at odds with Puerto Ricanness. He was also responding to a particular discourse of Puerto Ricanness that, in its elevation of white and Iberian figures, excluded him as subject from its histories. At this intersectional discursive field of race and national belonging, the once Arturo—now Arthur—Schomburg called on the Black community to dig.

In addition to the socio-political and personal conditions that impacted Schomburg's departure from the independence movements of his early career, his archive also reacts to burgeoning movements stateside advocating race pride, particularly the rise

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[54] Frances Negrón-Muntaner, *Boricua Pop: Puerto Ricans and the Latinization of American Culture*. (New York UP, 2004), 15-16.

of New Negro ideology. Indeed, this cultural movement proved the ground on which Schomburg would most notably make his mark. Not only is his essay included in Alain Locke's defining anthology, *The New Negro* (1925), but his archive became a fixture in the Harlem literary scene. Schomburg also developed such close personal and professional ties with some of the most significant members of the Black cultural elite, that he eventually figured as one of its representative figures. Indeed, Schomburg's investment in this particular arena begs the question: why the turn to the New Negro?[55] Claude McKay commented on Schomburg's affiliation, suggesting his friend's desire to identify with the African American condition in the United States was a product of his diasporic blood: "In appearance [Schomburg] was like an Andalusian gypsy, olive-complexioned and curly-haired, and he might easily have become merged in that considerable class of foreigners who exist on the fringe of the white world. But because of his African blood, he chose to identify himself with the Aframerican [sic] group."[56]

Stepping back from this idea of the blood as a unifying vector, especially since it suggests an essentialist drive that unites minor subjects to the cultural legacy predetermined by the expectations of the archive, we might wonder, why did Schomburg not turn to *hispanismo*, a construct promoted by Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Schomburg's contemporary and fellow hispanophone Black Caribbean intellectual and archivist? The two scholars, in fact, shared much in common. Henríquez Ureña was also explicitly against US intervention in the Caribbean, though his relationship to 1898 was more

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[55] Schomburg's "The Negro Digs Up His Past," was first published in *Survey Graphic of Harlem* (March 1925) and later republished by Locke later that same year in his seminal anthology *The New Negro*: *An Interpretation*.
[56] Claude McKay, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis*, (New York: Dutton, 1940), 140.

removed as he was ten years younger than Schomburg; and yet, Henriquez Ureña also desired a canon outside national parameters. However, Henríquez Ureña did not turn to race as a vehicle through which to achieve an alternative unifying identification. As Arcadio Diaz Quiñones avers, there is no indication that Henríquez Ureña ever became interested in African American culture or in contemporary figures like W.E.B. Du Bois or Arthur A. Schomburg." [57]

Schomburg, meanwhile, was not only invested in African American culture but, as Romero's pairing with Du Bois suggests, he became a representative figure of the cultural collective. To a certain extent, his status correlates with his archival efforts, as Schomburg comes to stand in for the Black community precisely because he accumulates the material evidence required by the nation to validate this alternative sense of belonging. Such efforts of course fly in the face of what Gates, Jr. describes as the New Negro paradox: "self-willed beginning […] depended fundamentally upon self-negation, a turning away from the 'Old Negro' and the labyrinthine memory of Black enslavement and toward the register of a 'New Negro,' an irresistible, spontaneously generated Black and sufficient self." [58] Even so, as Schomburg reveals, New Negro ideology was less spontaneous than rooted in a new archive. As a result, for him, turning away from old stereotypes meant substituting evidence for memory.

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[57]"*No hay indicios […] que se haya interesado por la cultura afronorteamericana o por figuras contemporáneas como W.E.B. Du Bois o Arturo Alfonso Schomburg.*" Arcadio Diaz Quiñones, "Pedro Henriquez Ureña y las tradiciones intelectuales caribeñas,"*Historia de los intelectuales en América Latina II*, Ed. Carlos Altamirano (Buenos Aires: Katz Editores, 2010), 71.

[58] Gates Jr. Henry Louis and Gene Andrew Jarrett, *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1892-1938*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007), 4.

Schomburg's most renowned theoretical engagement with the archive is his seminal 1925 essay, "The Negro Digs Up His Past." Republished in Locke's era-defining *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, Schomburg's contribution highlights the restorative potential and progressive possibilities of historical retrieval. In a tone both inspirational and urgent, the essay promotes archival practice for the sake of subjugated knowledge and reflects a burgeoning moment of counter histories.[59] And yet, as seminal and groundbreaking as "The Negro Digs Up His Past" is for Black archival practice and its attendant historiography, its title misleads. Less an exhortation to a racialized community than a productive positioning of new possibilities produced in the archive, Schomburg argues that archival absence is the result of racist ideologies that need to be remedied: "The Negro has been a man without a history because he has been considered a man without a worthy culture. But a new notion of cultural attainment and potentialities has recently come about."[60] For this reason, Schomburg establishes a material and discursive storehouse in the nation for the racialized subject that counters the white hegemony prevalent in both the Latin American independence movements of his earlier days and the *Hispanismo* of his contemporary compatriots. In other words, the subject of the essay exists not a priori in the archive but in its wake.[61] Schomburg, as a result, does not simply

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[59] Schomburg's claim that "[…] the study of the Negro's past has come out of vagaries of rhetoric and propaganda and become systematic and scientific" (231-232), speaks Foucault's notion of "Subjugated knowledges." "Propaganda" signals, for instance, the racist logic that masks History's current narrative.
[60] Schomburg, "The Negro Digs Up His Past," 237. Subsequent Citations in Text.
[61] Notably, the New Negro for Schomburg is figured as male, hence the male pronoun of the essay's title. The archival impulse, as a result, is represented as masculinist enterprise, which raises questions, not the least of which is: what do Black archives mean for Black women? I specifically address the gendered implications of the archival impulse as routed through New Negro ideology in Chapter Two. For seminal work on the masculinity of New Negro ideology, see Hazel Carby's *Race Men* (1998), Michelle Stephens' *Black*

archive blackness, but, through archivization that is less "a response, material or affective, to the past, as working toward a preservation of what has been, [than] the mark[ing] out the space of beginnings and futurity, he produces the "New Negro."[62] The new subject that emerges though is not entirely free of its past fetters. At least as per Schomburg's essay, it remains inextricably linked to the nation, so linked, in fact, that the history of the New Negro means "the rewriting of many important paragraphs of our common American history" (232).

For those familiar with the expansive work and global networks of Schomburg's collection, the notion that he theorizes the archive through the United States may be surprising. It is less so, however, if we think of "The Negro Digs Up His Past" as the byproduct of the affective economies of a burgeoning New Negro ideology.[63] In this sense, the essay figures less as a testament to Schomburg's own theories of the archive than as a way to place his practice in a contemporary critical conversation and intellectual network (the subtext of US exceptionalism is apparently the price of admission). For this reason, the essay's first line carefully defines the Black subject ethno-nationally: "The American Negro must remake his past in order to make his future" (231). Focusing on the particular needs of Black Americans, the essay gives way to a discussion of the fraught

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Empire (2005), and Anna Pochmara's *The Making of the New Negro: Black Authorship, Masculinity, and Sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance* (2011).

[62] Jonathan Boulter, *Melancholy and the Archive: Trauma, History, and Memory in the Contemporary Novel* (Continuum, 2011), 3.

[63] According to Locke's essay, "Enter the New Negro," from the same issue of *Survey Graphic* where "The Negro Digs Up His Past" was first published: "The Negro mind reaches out as yet to nothing but American wants, American ideas. But this forced attempt to build his Americanism on race values is a unique social experiment, and its ultimate success is impossible except through the fullest sharing of American culture and institutions." Locke, "Enter the New Negro, *Survey Graphic: Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro*, Ed. Alain Locke (March 1925): 633.

relationship between the archive and US history more broadly. "Though it is orthodox to think of America as the one country where it is unnecessary to have a past, what is a luxury for the nation as a whole becomes a prime social necessity for the Negro" (231).

Schomburg comments specifically on the fractured hierarchies and power dynamics of the US that contribute to a particular subject's archive fever. Rejecting the idea of a universal drive to archive, Schomburg goes so far as to call it an unnecessary "luxury" for the nation.[64] The national archive is superfluous, at least in the terms proposed by Schomburg, since the construction and status of whiteness already operate as the centrifugal force of national coherence. Its investment in whiteness renders archivization as empirical evidence redundant; the necessary evidence or the materiality for such an imagining is not necessarily located in documents but in Black subjects.[65]

Insofar as the nation's relationship to the archive is rooted, as Schomburg elucidates, in white supremacy, the counter-archival project of "The Negro Digs Up His Past," emphasizes moving history away from a science of the body to artifacts in the field.[66] Critiquing racist historiography as a consolidating model for US ethnic

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[64] Ellison on this idea of national memory in "Blues People" argues: "Perhaps more than any other people, Americans have been locked in a deadly struggle with time, with history. We've fled the past and trained ourselves to suppress, if not forget, troublesome details of the national memory, and a great part of our optimism, like our progress, has been bought at the cost of ignoring the processes through which we've arrived at any given moment in our national existence." Ralph Ellison, "Blues People," *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, Ed. John F. Callahan (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), 280.

[65] See Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* (1992), Mia Bay's *The White Image in the Black Mind* (1993), and Peter Coviello's *Intimacy in America* (2005).

[66] Notice, for instance, how often Schomburg invokes empirical knowledge and science in his short essay: "Gradually as the study of the Negro past has come out of the vagaries of rhetoric and propaganda and become systematic and scientific three outstanding conclusions have been made" (231-232); "the remote racial origins of the Negro […] offer a record of creditable group achievement when scientifically viewed" (232); "We

nationalism, Schomburg's emphasis on archeology and his fixation on empirical "facts" challenge the organizing principles of the nation itself. Confidently, he asserts: "When we consider the facts, certain chapters of American history will have to be reopened" (234). In other words, the war for him, and in this he differs from Du Bois's notions of double consciousness, is neither about the body (especially as it is being coopted by the nation to archive white supremacy), nor is it anchored in the individual.[67] Schomburg battles, instead, at the intersection of material evidence and minority subjectification. Clearly influenced by New Negro ideology, his call to dig is an assertion that oppositional discourse requires a new resource.

The archive for Schomburg, however, does not just critique the disconnected relationship between the US and its management of records, it also responds to the need for alternative collective identification. Accordingly, it is the site and process of "the antidote to prejudice." Placing his faith in racial collectivity as an alternative to national belonging, Schomburg dismisses outright the political possibilities of individual achievement, which though "vindicating evidence, leads to a slow development of historical sense" (231). Instead, Schomburg claims, "There is a definite desire and determination to have a history, well documented, widely known at least within race

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seem lately to have come at last to realize what the truly scientific attitude requires," "Of course, a racial motive remains—legitimately compatible with scientific method and aim"; "[…] a new notion of the cultural attainment and potentialities of the African stocks has recently come about, partly through the corrective influence of the more scientific study of African institutions" (237). Schomburg, "The Negro Digs Up His Past," 231-237.

[67] According to Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, "The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self." W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. (1903. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver. New York: Norton, 1999). 11.

circles, and administered as a stimulating and inspiring tradition for the coming generations" (231).[68]

Insofar as the nation's relationship to the archive is rooted, as Schomburg elucidates, in white supremacy, the counterarchival project of "The Negro Digs Up His Past," emphasizes the science of history. A mode of the Black archive, Schomburg's counter-archive functions like Lauren Berlant's "counter-memory," which "does not oppose official memory but exists alongside it, recording information about the dominant culture without situating it as the only important site of activity and meaning."[69] Such a practice, however, runs the risk of perpetuating the systems that subjugate the knowledges such digging is meant to excavate. Schomburg's archival theory, as it plays out here—in the most explicit terms of New Negro ideology—apparently finds the risk worth taking, and indeed, worth taking more than once. Notice how often he invokes empirical knowledge and science in his short essay: "Gradually as the study of the Negro past has come out of the vagaries of rhetoric and propaganda and become systematic and scientific three outstanding conclusions have been made" (231-232); "the remote racial origins of the Negro […] offer a record of creditable group achievement when scientifically viewed" (232); "We seem lately to have come at last to realize what the truly scientific attitude requires," "Of course, a racial motive remains—legitimately

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[68] This idea of the need for history also emerges in his "Racial Integrity: A Plea for the Establishment of a Chair of Negro History in Our Schools and Colleges, Address Delivered at the Teachers' Summer Class at the Cheney Institute, Pennsylvania, July 1913," which concludes: "We must research diligently the annals of time and bring back from obscurity the dormant example of agriculture, industry, and commerce, upon these the arts and sciences and make common the battleground of our heritage."

[69] Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991. 98.

compatible with scientific method and aim"; "[…] a new notion of the cultural attainment and potentialities of the African stocks has recently come about, partly through the corrective influence of the more scientific study of African institutions" (237). Critiquing racist historiography as a consolidating model for US ethnic nationalism, Schomburg's emphasis on archeology and his fixation on empirical "facts" challenge the organizing principles of the nation on its own terms. Confidently, he asserts: "When we consider the facts, certain chapters of American history will have to be reopened" (234). Thus the war for Schomburg, and in this he differs from Du Bois, is neither about the body (especially as it is being coopted by the nation to archive white supremacy) nor anchored in the individual. Schomburg battles, instead, at the intersection of material evidence and Black subjectification. Clearly influenced by New Negro ideology, his call to dig asserts that oppositional discourse requires a new resource— a counter-archive, produced by a "counter-bias" for a counter-history.

Historical inclusion clearly marks Schomburg's archival impulse, or to put it simply: history feeds his fever. The conclusion to "The Negro Digs Up His Past," for example, presents us with a clear articulation of Schomburg's expectation that history as epistemological and institutional structure give way under increased pressure from counter-history: "Already the Negro sees himself against a reclaimed background, in a perspective that will give pride and self-respect ample scope, and make history yield for him the same values at the treasured past of any people affords" (237). And yet, for as much time, energy, and resources as Schomburg commits to the archive, he, himself, did not endeavor to write the histories for which he so passionately advocated. According to Sinnette's biography of the bibliophile, Schomburg hesitates because of his own

insecurities (e.g. his lack of formal education and his accent when speaking in English). While this may be true of the Schomburg amidst the rise of New Negro ideology and its Talented Tenth cohort, this take does not ring true for the Schomburg of his 1913 "Racial Integrity: A Plea for the Establishment of a Chair of Negro History in our Schools and Colleges, etc."

Read before the Teachers' Summer Class at Cheney Institute in 1913, "Racial Integrity" eloquently traces a global network of Black evidence of achievement that lacks the impulse toward national belonging of his 1925 call to dig. In fact, this earlier text rejects the notion of history as being able to fully account for Black achievement, which is why, I argue, Schomburg later refuses to narrativize as history the achievements he uncovers. Schomburg chooses, instead, another genre for representation. With the exception of "The Negro Digs Up His Past," his work suggests he understood the archival form as itself radical resistance, not necessarily only to the service of "history." While for the New Negro Black archives might remain tied to a national project that requires a particular genre as a result of the affective economy in which it is embroiled, as per "Racial Integrity," history is not necessarily the aim. Let me flag the irony: "The Negro Digs Up His Past," which seems the clearest articulation of Schomburg's archival theory marks history as the ultimate goal for the counter-archive. Meanwhile, "Racial Integrity," which is subtitled "A Plea for the Establishment of a Chair of Negro History," actually presents us with a more radical archival mode that exceeds the constraints of history. Schomburg in this earlier essay pursues, instead, a whole new knowledge system: "We need the historian and philosopher to give us, with trenchant pen, the story of our forefathers and let our soul and body, with phosphorescent light, brighten the chasm that

separates us."[70] His radical proposition: history needs philosophy in order to interrogate and upset its own epistemological foundations. Likewise, Schomburg critiques the pedagogical forums that have systematically worked against Black interest: "The university graduate is wont to overestimate his ability, fresh from the machinery that endows him with a parchment and crowns him with knowledge, he steps out into the world to meet the practical men with years of experience and mother wit."[71]

Less concerned with national belonging and the terms of a systematized movement, the Schomburg of "Racial Integrity" theoretically excavates the subjugated knowledges he later papers-over in his more well-known articulation of Black archives. The essay also suggests that Schomburg's reluctance to write history was neither the result of personal insecurity nor a lack of rhetorical flourish (after all, "Racial Integrity" even more so than "The Negro Digs Up His Past" is replete with figurative language). Instead, in "Racial Integrity" Schomburg interrogates the stakes of the project even as he vouches for its possibilities.[72] Rather than suggest the archive as historical insufficiency or as precursor, it models the potency in a method of accumulation that resists teleology: that is both a resource and resistance.

To read either Schomburg or his archive as simply historical resource is to ignore its possibilities for production in process. As "The Negro Digs Up His Past" reveals, the

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[70] Schomburg, "Racial Integrity: A Plea for the Establishment of a Chair of Negro History in our Schools and Colleges, etc." *Negro Society for Historical Research. Occasional Paper*, (No. 3. A.V. Bernier, 1913), 19.
[71] Schomburg, "Racial Integrity," 5.
[72] Formally, "Racial Integrity" reads less like historical prescription than a Black Arcades. In this piece, Schomburg recounts histories from across the globe, digresses from person to place, and narrates events outside chronological constraints, in the vein of Walter Benjamin's "secret world of affinities."

archive is a means to establish subjectivity vis-à-vis an emphasis on the materiality of historical "evidence." In other words, digging itself can reveal the ways in which subjects and objects are mutually constituted. Furthermore, as "the Negro digs up his past," they find not only future possibilities but can, in the vein of "Racial Integrity," potentially deconstruct the binary that identifies the object of study in the first place. Foucault identifies this differentiating feature of the archive in his own work on discourse: "far from being only that which ensures that we exist in the midst of preserved discourses, [the archive] is that which differentiates discourses in their multiple existence and specifies them in their own duration."[73] The archive, in other words, operates as a tool for distinction; it distinguishes material as objects worthy of preserving. Black archives are, of course, no exception. Even as they simultaneously elucidate the stakes of race and evidence, they run the risk of being coopted by an agenda that would take the counter-archive to bolster Black objectification. Likewise, intervention in the terrain of history to the service of subjugated knowledges does not necessarily provide access or status to the disqualified knowledges of other political possibilities for resistance. For as this next section invites us to consider, shovels can also be prizes in the nation's race war played out as a battle royal.

Ellison's Briefcase Bonfires

As the nation optimistically celebrates in the NMAAHC a racialized archive that grants a minoritized subject a sense of belonging, critical race theory and postcolonial studies have taught us to remain attentive to the impulse that catalyzes the effort,

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[73] Foucault, "The Archeology of Knowledge," 129.

especially as it often remains circumscribed by the minority position it tries to resist. Ralph Ellison, understands the moves Schomburg celebrates, for example, as efforts to console the white subject:

> it is the creative function of myth to protect the individual from the irrational, and since it is here in the realm of the irrational that, impervious to science, the stereotype grows, we see that the Negro stereotype is really an image of the unorganized, irrational forces of American life, forces through which, by projecting them in forms of images of an easily dominated minority, the white individual seeks to be at home in the vast unknown world of America. Perhaps the object of the stereotype is not so much to crush the Negro as to console the white man.[74]

In other words, insofar as the archive bolsters the myth of equal access to national belonging, it operates as another consolation for hegemonic power. There is a danger in the counterarchive, as Ellison's concerns with the archive in his 1952 novel *Invisible Man* illustrate, for it can reinforce the notion that historical knowledge is somehow only valid when collectively organized and empirically validated—a danger that potentially works to further subjugate and disqualify Black subjects.

Before engaging directly with the representation of and resistance to the archive in Ellison's seminal novel, it is important, as it is with Schomburg, to consider the status of collective organization and cultural legacy in Ellison's philosophy more broadly. For Ellison, his dissatisfaction with Black nationalism and his belief in democratic individualism impacts his relationship to archival knowledge production and history twenty-five years after Schomburg's appeal. For one, Ellison challenged the concept of "Negro culture," a foundational premise of a racialized archive.[75] He reiterates this idea

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[74] Ralph Ellison, "Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity," *The Collected Essays*, 97.
[75] Notice how central "culture" is as an organizing principle for the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture.

after conceding the political promise of collective identification when rooted in shared resistance: "while it has political value of great potency, its cultural value is almost nil."[76] Without dismissing collective organization outright, he challenges the notion of a cultural collective particularly when at odds with national incorporation: "For better or worse, whatever there is of value in Negro life is an American heritage, and as such it must be preserved."[77] By questioning the value of differentiating cultural parameters to the service of minority identification, Ellison denounces the "blackness" that anchors Schomburg's archive. Describing this "ideology—what they call *blackness*," he argues that "[the people of his background] don't quite know what to do about it, except sometimes to boast about it," a declaration clearly at odds with the pride of race advocated by his predecessor.[78]

Further complicating the cultural status of collective experience and group tradition, Ellison championed democratic individualism.[79] For him, the subject free from the fetters of cultural responsibility makes best use of the past. Here again Schomburg and Ellison diverge. Sharing a regard for the value of the past, they nonetheless evaluate its material evidence differently. For Schomburg, to make use of the past means to extricate material for validation. Meanwhile, Ellison asserts in his introduction to *Shadow and Act*: "The act of writing requires a constant plunging back into the shadow of the past

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[76] Ralph Ellison, "Some Questions and Some Answers," *The Collected Essays*, 293.
[77] Ralph Ellison, "That Same Pain, That Same Pleasure," *The Collected Essays*, 80
[78] Ralph Ellison, "My Strength Comes from Louis Armstrong': Interview with Robert G. O' Meally, 1976" [May 1976]. *Living With Music: Ralph Ellison's Jazz Writings*. (Ed. Robert G. O'Meally. New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 275.
[79] For a thorough examination of democratic individualism and Ellison see Lucas E Morel's "Ralph Ellison's American Democratic Individualism" in *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope: A Political Companion to Invisible Man*. (Lexington, KY: U of Kentucky Press, 2004), 58-90.

where time hovers ghostlike."[80] Emphasizing the ephemerality and spectral nature of the past, Ellison identifies no soil in which to dig.[81] Ellison's refusal to participate in the empirical project of substantiating collectivities via "fact," "evidence," or, to take up Schomburg's trope, the archeological remains of history, suggest he has less use of a shovel precisely because he has no need for the bones.[82]

What for Schomburg is proof of a cultural collective and resource for that collectivity and its future, Ellison finds limiting and potentially paralyzing for individual action.[83] He describes this tension in "The Little Man at Chehaw Station":

> We repress an underlying anxiety aroused by our awareness that we are representative not only of one but of several overlapping and constantly shifting categories, and we stress our affiliation with that segment of corporate culture which has emerged out of our parents' past—racial, cultural, religious—and

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[80] Ellison, "Introduction: *Shadow and Act,*" *The Collected Essays*, 56.

[81] Ellison makes use of a soil metaphor in "The Little Man at Chehaw Station," but rather than signifying a solid past in which buried histories reside and await excavation: "The rock, the terrain upon which we struggle, is itself abstract, a terrain of ideas that, although man-made, exerts the compelling force of the ideal, of the sublime: ideas that draw their power from the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights." Ellison, "The Little Man," 505. In this way, Ellison points us back to the nation and the impulse for archival integration. As he also clarifies in the "Commencement Address at the College of William and Mary," "We do not bury the past, because it is within us. But we *do* modify the past as we live our own lives." Ellison, "Commencement Address," *The Collected Essays,* 417.

[82] This trope of a history that is both haunted and material is particularly prevalent in contemporary literatures' investment in the afterlives of slavery. I will return to this idea in the second half of the project's interrogation of David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident* (1981) and M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* (2005).

[83] Ellison's emphasis on individualism also stems from what Parker calls "a peculiarity of subjectivity under capitalism" wherein "the human subject—the nature of their being in the world and their reflexively elaborated relation to others—is that of a subject as an isolated individual. From this separation of each subject from others, individualism thus defines the ground on which someone will conceive of themselves as electing different options, as if choosing commodities." As a result, his reading of writing as somehow distinct from the "materiality" of archival evidence still falls victim to the process of labor as a system of commodity exchange, which "produces a further reification of relations reconfigured as if they were things." See Ian Parker, *Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Revolutions in Subjectivity*. (London: Routledge, 2011), 87.

> which we assume, on the basis of such magical talismans as our mother's milk or father's beard, that we "know." Grounding our sense of identity in such primary and affect-charged symbols, we seek to avoid the mysteries and pathologies of the democratic process. But that process was designed to overcome the dominance of tradition by promoting an open society in which the individual could achieve his potential unhindered by his ties to the past. […] Here the security offered by [the individual's] familiar symbols of identity is equivocal. And an overdependence upon them as points of orientation leads him to become bemused, gazing backward at a swiftly receding—if not quasi-mythical—past, while stumbling headlong into a predescribed but unknown future.[84]

Resisting the premise of organizing racial and cultural loci (particularly when imagined as inherited—an idea that returns us to McKay's description of Schomburg), Ellison warns the individual against the disorienting effects of a fixation on the past.[85] Schomburg's compensation for persecution and the antidote for prejudice, Ellison deems affective talisman for an evacuated democracy. Ellison's concerns with this effort are not simply a matter of theoretical perspective. In fact, like Schomburg, he spent a considerable amount of time with the archive. Ellison performed general editorial work for the American Guide WPA series project on New York City, and also researched and reported for *The Negro in New York* and Nicholas Wirth's Living Lore subproject.[86] As

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[84] Ellison, "The Little Man at Chehaw Station,". *The Collected Essays.* 495-523. 507-508.
[85] Published originally in *The Atlantic*, December 1970 and later in the *Collected Essays* as "Indivisible Man," James Alan McPherson (with whom Ellison maintained a correspondence) describes one of Ellison's "problems, peculiar to any black who attempts to assert his own individuality in his own terms, is that he challenges the defense mechanisms of the black community. […] When a black man attempts to think beyond what has been before, or when he asserts a vision of reality which conflicts with or challenges the community's conception, there is a movement, sometimes unconscious to bring him back into line or, failing that, to ostracize him" Ellison, "Indivisible Man," *The Collected Essays*, 364.
[86] For an illuminating examination of the influence of the Federal Writer's Project on *Invisible Man*, particularly as it relates to Ellison's implicit critique of the developmental narrative of the *American Guides* and the New Deal more broadly see J.J. Butts' "Pattern and Chaos: Ralph Ellison and the Federal Writer's Project" in *American Studies* 54.3, (2015): 35-59.

was also the case for Richard Wright and Zora Neal Hurston, the WPA clearly impacted Ellison's relationship to historical knowledge, its material "evidence," and the notion of an externally (and this case federally funded) archival impulse.[87] We see this most clearly in the anonymous narrator of his seminal novel, for whom the archival impulse is also less a fever that emerges from within than a responsibility imposed—a prerequisite for national belonging that maintains the racialized subject's position: the result of which is violence and the weapon of choice—a match.

In turning from practices that use the archive "for contrary purposes" to the literary representation of the archive,[88] I propose that fiction has the potential to provide us unique access to the interstices of subject and object that play such an organizing role in the archival project. When it depicts the racializing symbolic order that holds Black bodies captive, for example, fiction potentially upsets the conventional representational grid and its discourse.[89] With the grid more explicitly exposed, one can then identify different models of resistance to the archival impulse as well as alternative formulations

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[87] In an interview with Ann Banks, Ellison describes his experience with the WPA as "a way to broaden my knowledge of Afro-American culture. […] this was throwing me into my own history. Once you touched the history of blacks in New York then you were deep into American history." Ralph Ellison Interview with Ann Banks, 12 Dec 1977, *RF Illustrated*, Rockefeller Foundation 4, no. 2 (Sept. 1978) [Box 19, Folder 6] Ralph Ellison Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

[88] Using the archive "for contrary purposes" as Saidiya Hartman describes it in *Scenes of Subjection* has been the more popular result of the archival turn. See Burton's *Dwelling in the Archive* (2003), Eichhorn's *The Archival Turn in Feminism* (2013), Kumbier's *Ephemeral Material* (2014), and Lowe's *Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015).

[89] My use of the term "captive body," points, of course, to Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" which differentiates the captive body from flesh. The captive body, which "demarcates total objectification" is overdetermined by racializing discourse, while "flesh is that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse." Spillers, 67.

of its knowledge.[90] And yet, fiction even as it opens up possibilities for resistance, also participates in the larger network of the material; after all, novels also take up space in institutional archives.[91] Schomburg himself, an avid bibliophile, incorporated hundreds of novels about the global Black experience into his archive. Thus, both the dynamic interplay of representational possibilities and the status of material artifact and place in the archive lead the conversation to Ellison's *Invisible Man*.

In fact, these issues are so central to the concerns of Ellison's novel that it could be described as an "archival novel." It certainly meets the terms Marco Codebo lays out in his definition of the subgenre: it "performs the same kind of meaning-making operations executed by the records, files, and inventories that characterize bureaucratic archives' practices," and it pays explicit attention to "the search for documentation, the appraisal of records, the taking of notes, the storing and arrangement of papers."[92] To Codebo's definition, however, I would add a feature of David Scott's claim of the "*meta*-dimension" of the archive as crucial to its identity and function.[93] The archival novel should also be characterized by a reflexive mode—an awareness of its own production

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[90] While I take Alexander G. Weheliye's point in *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Feminist Theories of the Human* (2014) that "resistance and agency assume full, self-present, and coherent subjects working against something or someone," this chapter's aim to lay out the complex terrain of the archive for racialized subjects leads me to maintain "resistance" as an operating term because of its relationship to counter-archival projects and subjugated knowledges. In future chapters, where there is a more intricate working through of the possibilities and limitations of the archive in relation to the status of the human, the term "resistance" is reconsidered. Weheliye, 2.
[91] The holdings of the Library of Congress include both *Invisible Man*, and many of Ralph Ellison's original manuscripts of published and unpublished material in the "Ralph Ellison papers, 1890-2005."
[92] Marc Codebo's *Narrating from the Archive: Novels, Records and Bureaucrats in the Modern Age* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh, Dickinson UP, 2010), 14-15.
[93] David Scott, "The Archeology of Black Memory: An Interview with Robert A. Hill" *Small Axe* 5. (March 1999): 80-150.

and place. Described by Sundquist as "encyclopedic in scope,"[94] *Invisible Man* is clearly invested in meaning-making operations. It showcases a protagonist wrestling with the weight and responsibility of a race archive, and ultimately culminates in a metafictional epilogue about the status of knowledge, history and the possibilities of its own literary project.[95]

Long before the epilogue or the ashes is the archive itself: the gleaming calfskin briefcase of *Invisible Man.* Described by Rosemary Hathaway, in one of the most direct treatments of material culture in the novel, as "a repository or travelling museum of African-American history, jumbling relics of slavery with contemporary icons based on Black stereotypes, as well as the papers speaking out the narrator's new, Brotherhood-ascribed identity," the briefcase is less a jumble than a systematic way to navigate subjugated discourse.[96] Indeed, as "a collection of materials, clues and cases that can be brought together, sometimes seemingly at random, in one location," it is an archive.[97] The contents, for instance, do not make a museum insofar as the narrator never shows his collection to anyone and is in fact remarkably private about his briefcase. There is neither intention nor promise of exhibition; the impulse is to gather, not to display, and it is the impulse, not necessarily the archival contents, that the novel challenges.

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[94] Eric J. Sundquist, *Cultural Contexts for Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 1995), 1.
[95] These elements are nicely triangulated in the narrator' closing remarks "So why do I write, torturing myself to put it down? Because in spite of myself I've learned some things. Without the possibility of action, all knowledge comes to one labeled "file and forget," and I can neither file nor forget." Ellison, *Invisible Man,* 579.
[96] Rosemary V. Hathaway, "'Painful Yet Precious Things': Material Culture in Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man." *Griot: Official Journal of the Southern Conference on Afro-American Studies, Inc* 28.1 (2009): 2.
[97] Thomas Osborne, "The Ordinariness of the Archive." *History of the Human Sciences*. 12.2 (1999): 58.

Given to the narrator by the superintendent upon successfully delivering a speech on social responsibility and humility to "a gathering of the town's leading white citizens,"[98] the briefcase is awarded with instructions, a label, and a caveat: ""Boy," he said, addressing me, "take this prize and keep it well. Consider it a badge of office. Prize it. Keep developing as you are and some day it will be filled with important papers that will help shape the destiny of your people" (32). The irony, of course, is that the prize and its accompanying praise comes after the narrator and his classmates have been humiliated and forced to box each other while blindfolded, witness a naked white woman dance in front of them, and scramble for worthless tokens on an electrified rug. Unable, yet, to recognize the weight of the object, the narrator naively takes the gesture as a sign of approval from the white community "in the form of a first class-article from Shad Whitmore's shop" (32). He accepts the award with gratitude, as evidence of the ordeal trickles down his chin: "A rope of bloody saliva forming a shape like an undiscovered continent drooled upon the leather and I wiped it quickly away. I felt an importance that I had never dreamed" (32). In fact, he seems unaware for much of the novel of the archival imperative of the briefcase, which develops as the papers and artifacts it accumulates register less the quotidian concerns of a man about town than one figured as representative of a community's cultural legacy.[99] Only later does he recognize how it reinforces history's color line.

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[98] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1953, New York: Vintage International, 1995), 17. Subsequent citations in text.
[99] Appadurai's definition of the archive as "an empty box, a place a site or an institution, whose special role is the guardianship of the document" is useful here. Appadurai, "Archive and Aspiration," 15.

Instead, the narrator remains attached to the treasured briefcase he considers a representation of the authority and approval of the white community. Exhibiting an ironic pride in the pristineness of that charged object, he grips powerfully and "with a sense of importance" (164) what he takes to be an emblem of validating authority. When he arrives in Harlem after having been expelled from the university by Dr. Bledsoe, his first comment is, unsurprisingly, about "my prize briefcase, still as shiny as the night of the battle royal" (157). Later, responding to what he takes to be the secretaries' surprise at his business with many of the prominent white men of Wall Street, he asserts: "Well, there were unseen lines that ran from North to South, and Mr. Norton had called me his destiny… I swung my briefcase with confidence" (168). Falsely confident, the narrator is unaware the briefcase is loaded with letters meant to "hope him to death" (194). If, as Derrida asserts "there is no archive fever without the threat of this death drive, this aggression and destruction drive," what is unique to the narrator as racialized subject is that this destruction and loss is less about memory than it is about disqualification.[100] Indeed, the effort to redeem the subject returns the narrator time and time again to that prized object. It is its false promise of power: the power to consign, to order, to qualify, and to shape destinies that tightens his grip.

The idea that the power to forge a destiny resides in the empirical machine of documentation and history is one of the novel's central concerns.[101] We see this in an

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[100] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 19.

[101] Fanon's *White Skin Black Masks* also addresses the shackles of historicity and evidence, and like Ellison finds promise in fiction: "I am not a prisoner of History [l'Histoire]. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny. I should constantly remind myself that the real leap [*le véritable saut*] consists in introducing invention into existence. In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself. Frantz

early conversation between Mr. Norton and the narrator in which they discuss the motivations behind Mr. Norton's investment in the college. Mr. Norton confesses: "I felt even as a young man that your people were somehow connected with my destiny" (41). Once again, as at the battle royal, "destiny" is being used as a false sign of possibility. This time the sleight of hand is easier to identify, especially when the narrator presses for clarification. In his follow-up responses, Mr. Norton routes this idea to the relationship between Black progress and white power: "But as you develop you must remember that I am dependent upon you to learn my fate. Through you and your fellow students I become, let us say, three hundred teachers, seven hundred trained mechanics, eight hundred skilled farmers, and so on. That way I can observe in terms of living personalities to what extent my money, my time, and my hopes have been fruitfully invested. I also construct a living memorial for my daughter" (45). A far cry from the expectation that the narrator can somehow accumulate evidence in support of his own freedom and upward mobility, much less that of his people, Mr. Norton's intervention suggests whatever the narrator accomplishes serves as a validation of Mr. Norton's investment. In other words, if the papers to be collected in the briefcase are to shape the destiny of the narrator's people, and according to Mr. Norton that destiny is already intimately linked not just to Mr. Norton but to white privilege, then the archivable content is already preordained.[102] According to this logic, the narrator's fate is significant only to

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Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks.* 1967. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 229.

[102] Michel Foucault's description of the archive as that "which defines at the outset *the system of its enunciability*" (129) is a useful way of thinking of the briefcase as announced in the battle royal. Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. (1969. Trans A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 129.

the extent that it reestablishes white supremacy, an idea elucidated in the vet's description of Mr. Norton at the Golden Day as "a trustee of consciousness" (89).[103]

It takes the course of the novel, however, for the narrator to realize that while the briefcase guards "important papers" (32), these are of a destiny forged in a white imagination for further minority subjugation, a destiny set in motion by the first acquisition—"an official looking document. It was a scholarship to the state college for Negroes" (32). What seems like a sign of possibility—the power to select the documents that shape a past and, in so doing, a future—is actually undermined insofar as the archive is already predetermined by the discourse of race. This moment reflects critically on Schomburg's efforts to establish race as a precondition for archival knowledge. Ellison's protagonist understands that there is no space for a New Negro ideology or evidence of Black achievement as signs of Black value.

At times, the narrator appears able to exert some level of control over the items he includes in the archive. We see this whenever the narrative informs us that the narrator has pocketed items as a sort of precursor to his archival decision. (You would think a man with a briefcase would have less use of his pockets.) In some cases, items such as the gold pieces the narrator takes during the battle royal or Brother Jack's contact information given him during their dinner meeting do not make their way into the briefcase at all. Others, like the Rinehart glasses, Brother Tarp's leg chain, Tod Clifton's

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[103]The vet rails: "You cannot see or hear or smell the truth of what you see—and you, looking for destiny! It's classic! And this boy, this automaton, he was made of the very mud of the region and he sees far less than you. Poor stumblers, neither of you can see the other. To you he is a mark on the scorecard of your achievement, a thing and not a man; a child, or even less—a black amorphous thing. And you, for all your power, are not man to him, but a God, a force—." Ellison, *Invisible Man,* 95.

sambo doll, do, but only after the narrator confesses "My pocket was getting overloaded" (500). In other instances, we get the detailed journey from informal site of collection to formal archive, as occurs with the paper providing the narrator with a new name. We first encounter this document at the brotherhood event when Brother Jack asks Emma for "the slip of paper I gave you," which she has stored in a white envelope held in "the bosom of her taffeta hostess gown" (309). Later, the narrator tries to memorize his name by removing "the perfumed paper from my wallet" (327). Next time we encounter this paper it is being extricated from the briefcase, used to verify the handwriting of the anonymous letter sent to the narrator, and finally used as kindle: "it was the slip upon which Jack had written my Brotherhood name. I could still smell Emma's perfume even in the dampness of the cellar" (568).

Simply placing items inside the briefcase does not constitute archivization. It is only those items that are "preserved for reasons other than for those for which they were originally created," that become archival.[104] Take, for instance, the letters given to the narrator by Dr. Bledsoe, letters the narrator thinks are meant to secure his employment after he is expelled from the college, but are actually documents intended for quite the opposite purpose. Oblivious to their content, the narrator asserts that the letters "gave me a feeling of sophistication, of worldliness, which, as I fingered the seven important letters in my pocket, made me feel light and expansive" (157). As a result, they make the transition from pocket to briefcase with a certain degree of ceremony: "Before going to bed that night I wiped off my briefcase with a clean towel and placed the letters carefully

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[104] James O'Toole, *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago, Il: Society of American Archivists, 1990), 22.

inside" (164). Still, these documents are not archived insofar as their use value remains intact from origin to destination. We hear no more of these letters following the narrator's meeting with young Mr. Emerson, and, ostensibly, the final letter the narrator reads remains in the office. Having served their purpose of ensuring the narrator neither finds employment nor pursues further action against the college, the letters are removed from the briefcase. Like the gold tokens that reflect both the manipulations of white supremacy and the narrator's unfortunate naiveté, the letters are excised from the archive, deemed unfit for a future History. Although there seems to be a sense of selection in the process of the briefcase items: the question is, to what extent is the narrator in control, or even aware, of the implications of these choices?

Inextricably linked to the institution that allots the narrator this space for collection, the archive silences and disqualifies as much as it also symbolically demands evidence that perpetuates oppression and exploitation. For example, some items like Mary Rambo's bank —"the cast-iron figure of a very black, red-lipped and wide-mouthed Negro" (319), which the narrator takes with him after his stay at her house—refuse to be excised).[105] Mary's bank resists being left in the snow or tossed away onto neighborhood trash heaps. Ultimately, like the destiny invoked by Mr. Norton, the archival impulse of Ellison's narrator is fated to reinscribe white supremacy. He removes some of the more blatant examples of white subjection (the letters, the gold tokens, etc.), and retains the following: the narrator's high school diploma, the affidavit the narrator is

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[105] In both cases, efforts are made to erase these signs of Black oppression (either from display at the NMAAHC or from the narrator's private collection in *Invisible Man*). That the handcuffs and the bank, however, persist as signifiers of epistemic value testify to the resistance against dominant narratives and their praxis at the heart of Black archives.

asked to sign to waive the Liberty Paint Factory's responsibility for the accident that resulted in the narrator's lobotomy; the name the Brotherhood assigns him when he joins their party; the bank he breaks at Mary's house; the coins from that same bank; the anonymous letter the narrator receives from a member of the brotherhood warning him he will be cut down if he grows too much; Brother Tarp's broken link from his time in a chain gang; papers given him by the brotherhood when he is demoted to lectures on "the woman question" (408), Tod Clifton's Sambo doll, which Tod had with him when shot and killed by the police, and the Rinehart glasses the narrator uses to disguise himself as he walks though the city. The items on this list, if decontextualized, can be misread to account for Black educational achievement, employment, opportunities afforded by the communist party, material wealth, etc. The most obvious symbol of racism, the coin bank, is shattered and the image fragmented, the threatening letter is anonymous, and the chain link is broken. What remains as evidence of racial objectification is the Sambo doll, a symbol of minstrelsy the narrator has been inadvertently performing throughout the novel, which is ultimately rendered "the smoke sputtering doll." Regardless of the archivist, is this even an archive of subjugated knowledge? If so, who and how can we read these objects in any way that leads us to the systematic oppression at the center of each of the events it supposedly evidences?

The idea of both writing and reading the archive reaches a poetic climax in the eviction scene that results in the narrator's introduction to the brotherhood. Here we encounter the material possessions of an elderly evicted couple and a knocked-over drawer "that spilled its contents at my feet" (272). Emblematic of the personal impulse for private archiving, the objects the narrator locates in this drawer, like his briefcase,

necessitate the "epistemological work that brings the archive into a relation to providence."[106] In other words, the narrator is uniquely qualified to read the archive: "with this sense of dispossession came a pang of vague recognition: this junk, these shabby chairs, these heavy, old-fashioned pressing irons, zinc wash tubs with dented bottoms—all throbbed within me with more meaning than there should have been" (273). In the spirit of the archivist, he proceeds to list the items that prove so affective:

> Crudely carved and polished bones, "knocking bones," used to accompany music at country dances, used in black-face minstrels; a straightening comb, switches of false hair, a curling iron […], a small Ethiopian flag, a faded tintype of Abraham Lincoln;" "three lapsed life insurance policies with perforated seals stamped "Void"; a yellowing newspaper portrait of a huge black man with the caption: MARCUS GARVEY DEPORTED; [and] "a fragile paper, coming apart with age, written in black in grown yellow. I read: FREE PAPERS. *Be it known to all men that my negro, Primus Provo, has been freed by me this sixth day of August, 1859. Signed John Samuels, Macon*…. (271-272)[107]

Feeling a "discomfort so far beyond their intrinsic meaning as objects" (273), the narrator highlights the interpretative role of the archive. Beyond the activity of collecting there is also a reading of these "obscure existences that come to tell a story," a reading that nonetheless remains paratactic and discombobulated.[108] Following this ambivalent interpretation of the objects, the narrator proceeds to deliver a moving speech that incites the gathered crowd to action against the eviction. He makes use of the term "dispossession," useful to our thinking of the role of the archive in relation to the minor subject. It invites us to consider the extent to which the Black archive is not only

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[106] Osborne, "The Ordinariness of the Archive," 58.
[107] Catalogue is an important technique for the archive as it establishes an order to accumulation. Foucault's "The Historical A Priori and the Archive" expands upon this further, but it is worth noting how much Ellison makes use of catalogue throughout the novel. To highlight two examples that bookend this eviction scene: the narrator catalogues his description of the Men's House and of Harlem street windows.
[108] Osborne, "The Ordinariness of the Archive," 61.

motivated by the loss of the self, or what Derrida identifies as the death drive, but about a reaction to dispossession.[109] The archival mode, however, by imbuing certain materials with a value that isolates them from the exchange value that threatens, tries to resist dispossession. The danger is when what is retained reinforces the system of your dispossession, an issue the narrator confronts whenever he is forced to reckon with the status and value of all that he has deemed worthy.

Such a confrontation occurs in two separate moments, both of which result in the narrator nearly losing his prized clasp on the briefcase. The first time, amazed by the items in Mr. Emerson's office, which "beyond the door was like a museum," the narrator "was so taken aback that I almost dropped my brief case" (180). Here his own, still relatively small archive (it only contains the letters and scholarship at this point), is confronted with an elaborate collection motivated by imperialist fetishism. The narrator imagines that because of this expansive accumulation of materials, "These folks are the Kings of the Earth!"(180), and begins to compare this display to those he has encountered elsewhere.

> There was nothing like this at the college museum—or anywhere else I had ever been. I recalled only a few cracked relics from slavery times: an iron pot, an ancient bell, a set of ankle-irons and links of chain, a primitive loom, a spinning wheel, a gourd for drinking, an ugly ebony African god that seemed to sneer (presented to the school by some travelling millionaire), a leather whip with copper brads, a branding iron with the double letter MM. (180)

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[109] The idea of dispossession as related to the status of the subject in the nation has long been a feature of critical race theory. See, for example, Colin Dayan's *The Law As A White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons* (2013), which examines the construction of personhood through legal discourse, or the work of Stephanie Smallwood in *Saltwater Slavery* (2007) and Ian Baucom in *Specters of the Atlantic* (2005), which engage with chattel slavery's commodifying agenda.

Comparing these two modes of collection unwittingly draws attention to the project in which the narrator himself is unconsciously participating. Insofar as Mr. Emerson collects the byproducts of colonialism and the college museum those of enslavement, the narrator too files away artifacts of (and for) his own oppression.

During the final riot scene of the novel, the narrator again nearly loses his briefcase, but realizes "something was missing. […] It was my briefcase, extended to me by its handles. I seized it with sudden panic, as though something infinitely precious had almost been lost to me" (537). Once again this threat of loss occurs in relation to another collector, this time a looter who carries with him a box of items stolen during the riot. The man notices the narrator's briefcase and "misinterprets" it to be a parallel form of the box he himself holds: "'Looks like you got some loot too,' he said, pointing to my brief case. 'Not much,' I said, thinking, loot? *Loot?*" (540). Despite his surprise, the narrator has indeed been metaphorically pillaging, as exemplified in the shattered bank he steals from Mary. While briefly threatened, the narrator manages to keep hold of his archive, even as he admits its meaning has been evacuated for him, and he has simply "had it too long to leave it now" (548).

Beyond this idea of rehearsing an engrained practice, it is worth interrogating the narrator's attachment to the briefcase throughout the course of the novel, particularly as it underscores the affective economy in which the archive participates. Why does the narrator race back up the steps of an evacuating tenement building about to burn down to retrieve the briefcase? Why does he make sure to take it with him after Sybil's husband discovers him in bed with his wife? Why does he use it as a pillow while in the hole regardless of the fact that it has recently been covered in bird excrement and the blood of

a man whose tourniquet he tightens during the final riot? Why does he hug it to his chest, refusing to release it even under threat of death? One answer could be the narrator's naïve faith in history, of which we get a glimpse even before we encounter his archive.

Preceding the gruesome scenes of the battle royal, the narrator contemplates his invisibility as connected to the proximal reality of slavery—a reality that for him is as close as his grandparents. Exposing his personal attachment and reaction to this legacy, the narrator confesses: "I am not ashamed of my grandparents for having been slaves. I am only ashamed of myself for having at one time been ashamed" (15). Tracing his existence and sociality back to the historical moment of abolition, "I was in the cards, other things having been equal (or unequal) eighty five years ago" (15), the narrator counters his declaration with a critique of the discourses surrounding freedom: "About eighty-five years ago they were told that they were free […] And they believed it" (15-16). This move, from the fact of history to the internalization and response to such a fact. Followed by a critique of the instability of the terms by which that fact (in this case the "fact" of freedom) is understood, parallels the narrator's larger relationship to historical knowledge. It stages questions of how we know what we know of history, or how we measure an inherited historical teleology when it supposedly determines a racial past, present, and future.[110]

As this reflection of the narrator's relationship to his grandparents and their understanding of freedom illustrates, the narrator faces an epistemological conundrum. He can either pursue what Schomburg described as "the science of history" or he can

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[110]Consider the narrator's affirmation that the world moves not like an arrow but a boomerang, warning "Beware of those who speak of the spiral of history; they are preparing a boomerang. Keep a steel helmet handy?" Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 6.

pursue alternative knowledges that resist history's disciplinary strangleholds. His initial encounter with the Brotherhood after the eviction scene highlights the narrator's options. On the one hand, the eviction scene provides us with an affectively charged engagement with materiality that never quite reaches the science of strategy. This archive—of belongings thrown out on the city street—traffics in affective knowledge. The narrator responds accordingly; he speaks in the tradition of "the old ones" (291). This affective approach, however, is at odds with the Brotherhood, who recruit him after his speech. Though they praise his oratorical prowess, they immediately criticize the fact that he allowed the emotional register of his speech to overshadow the rationality of the moment. They encourage, instead, a History "born in the brain" (291). They expect the narrator to use "scientific terminology" rather than spout lines like: "During these times of indecision when all the old answers are proven false, the people look back to the dead to give them a clue" (306). He is asked to speak more concretely, for "We are all realists here, and materialists. It is a question of who shall determine the direction of events" (307). Compliantly, the narrator adopts the specific terminology to what he calls this "science of history business" and quickly rises in the ranks of the brotherhood: "The organization had given the world a new shape, and me a vital role. We recognized no loose ends, everything could be controlled by our science (311). Life was all pattern and discipline; and the beauty of discipline is when it works" (382). In many ways, this approach mirrors a positivist approach to history, which imagines the archive as providing all the necessary materials for an account of history. What remains outside this approach, however, are the voices of the "old ones"—the voices that first got him noticed in the first place. As one of many institutional forces in the novel that coopt the narrator's

agency, the Brotherhood's privileging of the science of history mirrors what Foucault describes as the disqualification of knowledge. A subtype of subjugated knowledges, disqualified knowledges are specifically deemed "nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naive knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity."[111] If Schomburg's response to subjugated knowledges is to dig up the past so as to validate its value (its erudition and scientificity), Ellison's response to disqualified knowledge, which is not only buried but discounted as knowledge altogether, is to demand a new way of knowing and recording outside the "science of history" and its archives.

The narrator confronts the limitations of the empirical approach in his final moments with Tod Clifton. Feeling betrayed because this party leader had "chosen […] to fall outside history" (434) and sell sambo dolls in front of the largest branch of the New York Public library, the narrator witnesses Tod's death at the hands of the NYPD. The site of Tod Clifton's death is especially important as it symbolizes what it means to die not only outside history, but outside the register of its archive. Tod dies in between the library and the subway stop; neither integrated into the science of history, nor the freedom of the underground. The narrator, meanwhile, plunges into the subway system after the incident. Reeling with questions, he makes his most explicit commentary on the status and condition of history that will serve, first, as the catalyst for counter-archival resistance, and ultimately, for the destruction of his archive:

> Why should a man deliberately plunge outside history and peddle an obscenity? […] Why did he choose to plunge into nothingness, into the void of faceless

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[111] Michel Foucault, "*Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76*. (Ed. Mauro Bertani, Alessandro Fontana, and François Ewald. New York: Picador, 2003), 7.

> faces, of soundless voices, lying outside history? I tried to step away and look at it from a distance of words read in books, half-remembered. For history records the patterns of men's lives they say […]. All things, it said, are duly recorded—all things of importance, that is. But not quite, for actually it is only the known, the seen, the heard and only those events that the recorder regards as important that are put down, those lies his keepers keep their power by. [….] Where were the historians today? And how would they put it down? […] What did they ever think of us transitory ones? Ones such as I had been before the Brotherhood—birds of passage who were too obscure for learned classification, too silent for most sensitive recorders of sound; of natures too ambiguous for the most ambiguous words, and too distant from the centers of historical decision to sign or even to applaud the signers of historical document? We who write no novels, histories or other books. What about us? (439)

Finally recognizing the ways his own access to history has been foreclosed by the disqualification of the knowledges that actually "shape the destiny of his people," the narrator is able to identify sites for alternative knowledge production. He hears, for instance, the transitional thoughts of jived up language, the zoot suiters "heavy heel plates clicking remote, cryptic messages in the brief silence of the train's stop," "the only true history of the times, a mood blared by trumpets, trombones, saxophones, and drums, a song with turgid, inadequate words" (443). Undergirding this recognition, is of course the realization that you cannot archive transitional thoughts any more than you can a mood blared by music. Unless, that is, you change your storehouse.

Like Schomburg, Ellison theorizes Black archives as repositories for "subjugated" (and specifically "disqualified") knowledges that function as epistemological and ontological tools of resistance. *Invisible Man* specifically attends to the power of Black archives in the novel's climax, which sees the narrator experiment with alternative uses for the archive he has so preciously guarded. Unintentionally caught up in the bedlam of the culminating Harlem riot, the narrator peers into his briefcase, first, in search of the Rinehart glasses with which he hopes to disguise himself but finds these crushed. As the

tension mounts between the police and rioters, he reaches in again for self-defense: "feeling papers, shattered iron, coins, my fingers closing over Tarp's leg chain, and I slipped it over my knuckles, trying to think, I closed the flap locking it" (557). He has symbolically initiated the counter-archival mode; by grabbing that link, once an emblem of slavery, then an archival material for preservation, now a weapon, he has invoked a new alternative use for the resource. He has plunged the link outside history. Eventually even the link proves insufficient, and he turns to the repository itself: "I hit first with Tarp's leg chain and the other in the middle with my brief case" (569). Black archives as weapon.

Repurposing the traditional archive (the counter-archival mode) leaves the narrator wanting. Despite the help of his new weapon and efforts to avoid detection by plunging into a manhole, the narrator is quickly discovered and threatened by white civilians. The men almost immediately draw attention to the briefcase: "What's in that brief case?" they said, and if they'd asked me anything else I might have stood still. But at the question a wave of shame and outrage shook me and I ran" (565). Here the narrator's affective attachment to the briefcase has been reconstituted as shame, a shame that returns us to the narrator's initial musings on his own legacy of slavery. The briefcase, once a source of confidence, approval, and authority has now been evacuated of its pretense, and this sends the narrator running.[112] The narrator, however, does not get

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[112] The statement "I ran" is particularly significant as it resonates with the dream that haunts the narrator throughout his travails. Dreaming he is at the circus with his grandfather, his grandfather tells to him to "open the briefcase and read what was inside and I did, finding an official envelope stamped with the state seal; and inside the envelope I found another and another, endlessly, and I thought I would fall of weariness. "Them's years," he said. "Now open that one." And I did and in it I found an engraved document containing a short message in letters of gold. "Read it," my grandfather said.

very far, as he immediately plunges into what will become the hole of his hibernation. Still, the men persist: "Hey black boy. Come on out. What's in that brief case?" (565). Finally, when asked to read the contents of his briefcase for white persecutors, the narrator realizes how like Tarp's chains, the briefcase too has been designed to render him object. Thus he responds: "You. I've had you in my brief case all the time and you didn't know me then and can't see me now" (566). In a moment of interpellation, the narrator constitutes his own subjectivity in the hole, while also constituting as objects the white men who chase him.[113]

To use Fanon's oft-quoted line, Ellison's narrator essentially finds himself "an object in the midst of other objects."[114] The moment resonates too with the narrator's comments during Tod Clifton's funeral: "Such was the short bitter life of Brother Tod Clifton. Now he's in this box with the bolts tightened down. He's in the box and we're down there with him, and when I've told you this you can go. It's dark in this box and it's crowded. […] Tell them to get out of the box, that's what he would say if you could hear him. Tell them to get out of the box and go teach the cops to forget that rhyme. Tell them to teach them that when they call you nigger to make a rhyme with trigger it makes the gun backfire" (458). In both instances, the narrator acknowledges the source of the

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"Out loud!"" Then the infamous line: "To Whom it May Concern […]. Keep This Nigger-Boy Running." Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 33.

[113] In her reading of Althusser's dramatization of interpellation, Ahmed argues "inter-subjective encounters in public life continually reinterpellate subjects into differentiated economies of names and signs, where they are assigned different values in social space," which we see at work here in the intersubjective encounter between narrator and his pursuers. Moreover, if as she proposes "it is the recognition of others that is central to the constitution of the subject," then the narrator's reversal of "you" here reinforces his own subject position. Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2013), 21-22.

[114] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 77.

archival impulse, while also affirming the fact that its efforts do not actually reroute the status of inclusion from the body to the field. Instead, the narrator finds himself in a dark container, where he is being interrogated by observers who after failing to recognize him properly, seal off the box/manhole, leaving him metaphorically filed and forgotten.

Interpellated as archive in the space of the manhole, the narrator's relationship to those materials to which he has been so long attached shifts. No longer finding these objects useful for an alternative account of subjugated history, and consumed by the darkness of the manhole, which metaphorizes material realities that extend beyond historical findings (after all, what is the point of the archive in darkness), the narrator decides he needs a light. "I started for paper to make a torch. […] I needed just one piece of paper to light my way out of the hole, but there was nothing. Next I searched my pockets, but there was nothing. […] I'd have to open my briefcase. In it were the only papers I had" (567).[115] The narrator begins the process of destroying the very same archive he has spent the novel building. He starts with his high school diploma, "applying one precious match with a feeling of remote irony" (568). Although he had originally suggested he needed only one paper to make his way out, the experience becomes about much more than the physical escape from darkness, and it evolves into a psychological escape from oppression, an oppression that has been catalogued and contained in the

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[115] An earlier manuscript of the novel rewrites the scene. Its noticeable variations include the retention of the briefcase after the decimation of the documents for the sake of economic exchange. In this case, the briefcase functions as a sort of refurbished coinbank—further proof of its imbrication in white supremacy. It also signals more of an affective response to the destruction of the documents. The Narrator in the published versions seems significantly more detached from the items themselves and yet retains the briefcase. The unpublished variations would suggest a more tempered response to traditional archival practice. See Box I: 145, Folder 10. Ralph Ellison Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

archive. The dream/prophesy that has been plaguing the narrator throughout the novel, of his grandfather telling him to "open the briefcase and read what was inside" is also, in this moment, fulfilled. He has opened his own archive, and encountered items sealed with the subjugation of their symbolic institutions (i.e. Brotherhood, university, slavery, etc.). Aware of the project to which he has been contributing, the destiny, which as the Superintendent first indicated he has been helping to shape, the narrator finds himself free also to plunge outside the history reproduced by the archival mode.

In many ways Ellison's desire for a new way to tell a new story resonates with Schomburg's efforts at collection. But where Schomburg finds possibility in the counter-archive as a way to validate a new history and so produce a "New Negro," Ellison's narrator sees the structures of recognition, of which the archive is but one, as inadequate insofar as they reify systems of oppression. Motivated too by what Derrida describes as the archive's motivating condition: the death drive, the narrator steps out of history altogether, including a renunciation of the pressure to evidence materially.[116] Writing from the hibernating space of the hole, or what he calls "a border area," the narrator lives "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" (6). From this symbolically archival

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[116] Derrida's elaboration of the relationship between destruction and the archival impulse in *Archive Fever* identifies what Freud calls "death drive, sometimes aggression drive, sometimes destruction drive, as if these three words were in this case synonyms. […] It destroys in advance its own archive, as if that were in truth the very motivation of its most proper movement. It works to destroy the archive: on the condition of effacing but also with a view to effacing its own "proper" traces-which consequently cannot properly be called "proper." It devours it even before producing it on the outside. This drive, from then on, seems not only to be anarchic, anarchontic (we must not forget that the death drive, originary though it may be, is not a principle, as are the pleasure and reality principles): the death drive is above all anarchivic, one could say, or archiviolithic. It will always have been archive-destroying, by silent vocation" (10).

locale he pens what constitutes the novel, and, in so doing, embodies the response to the question he poses earlier: "Where were the historians today? And how would they put it down?" (439). At the time, the narrator considered himself one of those "who wrote no novels, histories or other books" (439), instead opting to collect in the service of scientific history. However, after confronting and reading his own memorabilia, the narrator initiates a Black archive, bound not in a briefcase given to him by the white power structure, but in the pages of his own text, thereby thematically challenging the stakes of the archive. Addressing the energy behind this new mode of production, the narrator comments:

> So why do I write, torturing myself to put it down? Because in spite of myself I've learned some things. Without the possibility of action, all knowledge comes to one labeled "file and forget," and I can neither file nor forget. Nor will certain ideas forget me; they keep filing away at my lethargy, my complacency. Why should I be the one to dream this nightmare? Why should I be dedicated and set aside—yes, if not to at least *tell* a few people about it? (579)

The narrator contrasts his own narrative with the archival process by signaling his refusal to "file and forget," yet attentive to the fact that he as "subject" is also interpellated, or "filed away at."[117]

Finding less promise in the archeology that Schomburg encourages, *Invisible Man* instead operates as a Black archive that exposes the stakes of archivization and asks us to reconsider the agendas of the archival impulse—even when put to use for "contrary

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[117] Roderick Ferguson's argument of the novel and its missing chapter on Woodridge, sees this moment as reflective of Ellison's broader critique (evident too in *Shadow and Act*) of sociology's production of racial knowledge: "Ellison's interest in sociology was not informed by canonical mandates; it was not inspired by his desire to become the subject of sociology. Indeed, the essay implies an interest in sociology's construction of African Americans as objects of study." Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004), 56

purposes." Insofar as the counter-archive "destabilizes and exposes the archive's regulatory production,"[118] Schomburg's project elucidates how that effort can be put to use for subjugated knowledge. As a Black archive, however, Ellison's novel "exposes what was at stake in [the] formulation" of the traditional archive.[119] He draws our attention to the ways in which its subject/object binary can be used for a consolidating white supremacist agenda, wherefore, as the narrator identifies: "I was simply a material, a natural resource to be used" (508). The metafiction of the novel notwithstanding, Ellison in fact produces material evidence. His novel preserves all the objects that were in the briefcase, but only by translating them into another genre. And as his place in the American literary canon suggests, *Invisible Man* becomes as useful and complicated as a site for alternate knowledge as Schomburg's now state-sponsored archive. How can we account for disqualified discourse if to do so means to plunge outside history with the certainty of invisibility? If "they were outside the groove of history, and it was my job to get them in, all of them" (443), what does it mean to be in history but not shaped by the very structures that condemn you to its silence?

President Donald Trump did eventually make it to the AAMHC. On Feb. 20, 2017, museum director Lonnie Bunch and Smithsonian Secretary David Skorton led him on a tour of the museum with a group that included: Ben Carson and his wife, Candy, Alveda King, the niece of Martin Luther King Jr., Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina, presidential aide Omarosa Manigault and his daughter Ivanka Trump. Standing in front of "The Paradox of Liberty Exhibit," which features a statue of Jefferson flanked by the

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[118] Rebekah Edwards,"The Counter-Archive of Elizabeth Nielsen." *Australian Feminist Studies.* 25.64 (2010): 110.
[119] ibid.

names of his 612 slaves, Bunch affirmed for the group: "for us, this whole museum is about humanizing the stories of people that have been left out of history." President Trump's take away from the tour, unsurprisingly, seems to have been much less about history or systematic archival silence than about the costs of museum inventory and construction. In his concluding remarks as he was leaving the premises Trump declared: "What they've done here is something that probably cannot be duplicated. […] It was done with love and lots of money, right Lonnie? We can't avoid that. But it was done with tremendous love and passion and that's why it's so great."[120] A far cry from the object lesson Obama hoped the museum would provide, I find in these words evidence of the dangers of assuming that material resources of "truth" somehow bring us closer to a more inclusive version of "national belonging." Rather, as the work of Zora Neale Hurston and Erna Brodber elucidate in the next chapter, we need to continue to take seriously alternative channels of knowledge—even when plunging outside of history for the sake of the disqualified requires a new technology. For it is these alternative channels and mediums that may provide access to the humanizing stories of people left out of history, and to those for whom "history" was perhaps never even the goal.

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[120] Jackie Mansky, "President Trump Visits the African American History Museum," (*Smithsonian Magazine*, Feb. 21, 2017).

CHAPTER TWO

Archive Channels: Zora Neale Hurston and Erna Brodber

For those in search of Zora Neale Hurston's archive, there are three major repositories. The University of Florida houses 16 boxes and a binder filled with her "correspondence, newspaper clippings, articles, manuscripts, photographs, and miscellaneous personal papers."[121] Yale's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library has two boxes of Hurston's correspondence, as well as drafts of *Dust Tracks on the Road*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Mule Bone*. Finally, the Library of Congress has two collections dedicated to the writer. One, "Zora Neale Hurston Plays at the Library of Congress," consists of ten plays unpublished during the writer's lifetime but now made available by the LOC digital collections. The other, housed between The Archive of Folk Culture and the Manuscript Reading Rooms contains: "Zora Neale Hurston: Recordings, Manuscripts, Photographs, and Ephemera." Here you can find items like the 227 discs of "African American, Bahamian, and Haitian songs, music, tales, and church services recorded on instantaneous discs by Alan Lomax, Zora Neale Hurston, and Mary Elizabeth Barnicle in summer 1935 for the Archive of Folk Song"; manuscripts of Hurston's work with the United States Work Projects Administration records; and a wealth of photographs, including one of Hurston seated on a porch with Rochelle Harris and Gabriel Brown playing his guitar (Eatonville, Florida, 1935).[122] According to the

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[121] "A Guide to the Zora Neale Hurston Papers," Finding aid, George A. Smather's Libraries, Gainsville, University of Florida. http://web.uflib.ufl.edu/spec/manuscript/hurston/hurston.html

[122] "Zora Neale Hurston: Recordings, Manuscripts, Photographs, and Ephemera," Finding Aid, The Archive of Folk Culture, The Library of Congress, Washington DC, http://www.loc.gov/folklife/guides/Hurston.html

collection title, you should also be able to find "ephemera" stored here. And yet, the collection's detailed finding aid only uses the term once in a note at the end of one of its resource outlines: "There is more information about Zora Neale Hurston in the Archive's vertical files, including correspondence with and about Hurston, articles, and other ephemera." The note's ambiguous syntax, however, raises some questions: do the letters and articles qualify as ephemera, or is the suggestion one of deferral: are we simply meant to find this "other" elusive material somewhere in the collection?[123]

A fairly conventional term in library and information science, "ephemera" provocatively relates to Hurston given the ways in which her work challenges and subverts traditional archival conventions. For instance, according to the Society of American Archivists "ephemera" refers to "materials, usually printed documents, created for a specific, limited purpose, and generally designed to be discarded after use."[124] However, what about the distinction between ephemera that matters (because it destabilizes a regulatory agenda—or, alternatively, because it expands subjective and

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[123] Ironically, the Library of Congress—the nation's oldest federal cultural institution—is the only one of Hurston's archival repositories to use the term "ephemera." On a personal note, when I requested this folder the archivist seemed puzzled. He had many times looked through and pulled the collection but had yet to encounter this request. Eventually, the folder was located. It contained flyers of special exhibits dedicated to Hurston at the LOC itself. It also included magazine clippings of her revival in the 1970s. There was no rhyme or reason to the order of this collection (it was neither chronologically ordered nor systematically labeled). Instead, like a trace, it registers a degree of national awareness of the subject's relation to belonging and inclusion while remaining ultimately peripheral.

[124] Examples of ephemera include advertisements, tickets, brochures, and receipts. A repository may collect ephemera as examples or specimens. Individuals often collect ephemera as mementos or souvenirs because of their association with some person, event, or subject; personal collections of ephemera are often kept in scrapbooks. *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*, Society of American Archivists, 2017. s.v. "ephemera."

racial possibilities), and ephemera that seems not to matter in any conceivable way—that which does not make it into even the most ambiguously titled of folders? Who decides which kinds of ephemera are actually ephemeral? For conventional archivization, the power to create the label rests in the hands of the archivist rather than of the creator or collector. The archivist, working backwards from the value placed on the item by the collector—usually because of its relation to a person, event or subject—imagines either the intention of the source creator or the value to the collection as a whole. Thinking, however, about ephemera in Hurston's archive, complicates such long-standing methodologies. Her work on folklore, for example, demands that we reconceptualize creator intentionality. Her archive demands a view of ephemera given that the acquisition of her material itself relied on a lived, embodied, and ultimately transitory engagement. So, while the mystery "vertical file" titled "ephemera" in the LOC might be filled with photocopied articles and newspaper clippings related to Hurston's "revival" in the 1970s and library announcements of events in her honor, what it cannot quite answer is the question of how to read for ephemera in what is fundamentally the cultural ephemera of folklore.

An archive like Hurston's requires us to reconsider the politics of determining intentionality (for preservation) outside the cultural sphere of its particular context.[125]

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[125] Jose Esteban Muñoz's definition of ephemera as related to queer performativity and alternate evidence is useful in further expanding the possibilities for a reformulation of the term: "ephemera as a modality of anti-rigor, anti-evidence, that, far from filtering materiality out of cultural studies, reformulates and expands our understandings of materiality. Ephemera as I am using it here, is linked to alternate modes of textuality and narrativity like memory and performance: it is all those things that remain after a performance, a kind of evidence of what has transpired but certainly not the thing itself. It does not rest on epistemological foundations but is instead interested in following traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things. It is important to note that ephemera is a mode

When, for example, do the folk tales told to a group sitting on an Eatonville porch stoop qualify as ephemera, or where does such an "archive" even start? The problem is less where we find the "ephemera" than what we qualify as indisputably "archival" and why.[126] Despite the fact that by recording her subjects Hurston establishes their particular archival value, the status of the subject still manages to challenge efforts to classify their material according to institutional rubrics. The category/ label, "ephemera," allows us to engage more usefully with a project like Hurston's, as it requires us to contend with issues of intention, ownership, materiality, as well as the febrile impulses of archivization.

Setting to one side the official definition of the term for archivists, "ephemera" also gestures, if accidentally, to a Derridean rubric for considering the work and status of Black archives. According to the *OED*, the term refers to: "An insect that (in its imago or winged form) lives only for a day, [or] one who or something which has a transitory existence." According to Derrida's groundbreaking treatise on the archive, *Archive Fever*, the desire to accumulate is produced by the very fact of finality and

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of proofing and producing arguments often worked by minoritarian culture and criticism makers." Jose Esteban Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts," *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 8.2 (1996): 10.

[126] Derrida poses a similar question: "what is the moment *proper* to the archive, if there is such a thing, the instant of archivization strictly speaking, which is not […] so-called live or spontaneous memory […], but rather a certain hypomnesiac and prosthetic experience of the substrate." In a metatextual reflection of the lecture he transcribes, Derrida queries whether the archive exists once the letters are on the page or at the moment he hits save, "so as to ensure in this way salvation and *indemnity*, to stock, to accumulate […]. Hurston's ethnographic work on folk culture complicates Derrida's analysis as it demands first a negotiation of the substance of the object and it's relationship to the archive. Not only is one querying the moment of archivization but the value of its accumulation, and especially, the power dynamics of its indemnification. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 25-26.

impermanence—or what he calls the death drive. There would be "no archive desire without the radical finitude, without the possibility of a forgetfulness."[127] To put it another way, we archive in the face of and for the sake of oblivion. The *OED's* second definition of "ephemera" is perhaps even more Derridean than its suggestion of transitory existence. Serendipitously linking the terms of this project's fascination with Black archives and the impulse to accumulate in the name of a racialized subject, "Ephemera" also means "of a fever."

Originally delivered as a lecture for a colloquium sponsored by the *Société Internationale d'Histoire de la Psychiatrie et de la Psychanalyse* at the Freud museum, Derrida's *Archive Fever* explores the archive's relationship to the body, memory, and technology. Through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis (Derrida directly engages Freud's work, his legacy, and even the space of the Freud house-turned-museum where the colloquium is taking place), the essay interrogates what motivates subjects to name (the archive's archontic function) and to consign.[128] Although the archive appears to privilege construction and accumulation, the impulse to archive is motivated in large part by the death drive.[129] As a result, the death drive, which inspires accumulation in the face

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[127] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 19.
[128] Consignation, as per Derrida's usage, means to "gather together signs. […] coordinate a single corpus, in a system of synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration" Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 3.
[129] According to Derrida, "if there is no archive without consignation in an external place which assures the possibility of memorization, of repetition, of reproduction, or of reimpression, then we must also remember that repetition itself, the logic of repetition, indeed the repetition compulsion, remains, according to Freud, indissociable from the death drive. And thus from destruction. Consequence: right on that which permits and conditions archivization, we will never find anything other than that which exposes to destruction, and in truth menaces with destruction, introducing, *a priori*, forgetfulness and the archiviolithic into the heart of the monument. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 11.

of finality, also introduces destruction: "it not only incites forgetfulness, amnesia, the annihilation of memory, […] but also commands the radical effacement, in truth the eradication of that which can never be reduced […], that is, the archive, consignation, the documentary or monumental apparatus."[130] In other words, the archival impulse actually produces the very forgetfulness against which it operates; hence Derrida's claim that "the archive always works, and *a* priori, against itself."[131] Ultimately, it is this tension—between the seemingly contradictory aims of the conservation and destruction drive—that incites *le mal d'archive,* or archive fever.

Despite its elaborate diagnosis, the subject of the fever remains unclear in Derrida's analysis. One might, for example, take "archive fever" to mean that the archive produces a fever in an unnamed subject. In this case, the subject suffers at the expense of the tension at the core of archival desire. Another might imagine "archive fever" to signify a compulsive desire to collect, in which case the tension between destruction and conservation produces anticipation or excitement rather than illness. In either case, the ambiguity produced by the juxtaposition of these words (which each can mean noun or verb) functions to support the argument's stake in "universality."[132] But, as is normally the case for claims of universality, the febrile subject as presented in *Archive Fever* is

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[130] ibid.
[131] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 12.
[132] Freud's definition of the death drive as the "most universal endeavor in all living matter--namely to return to the quiescence of the inorganic world," adds another dimension to the inquiry as it suggests the possibility of the archive's erasure of the subject. In this case, archival accumulation and consignation work to erase the subject (as organic being) for the sake of material (or inorganic) evidence. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961), 56.

clearly male.[133] To this point, its examples all register patrilineal archival legacies.[134] Likewise, its concern with bodily technology privileges masculinist engagements with history, memory, and psychoanalysis. The essay's guiding metaphor for the body's relationship to the archive is, after all, circumcision.

*Archive Fever'*s investment in a "universal" archiving subject also renders race peripheral.[135] The text gestures to "impression[s] of erogenous color [that] draw a mask right on the skin," but ultimately bypasses the role race plays on memory and the body.[136] And yet, Derrida's engagement with skin as archival substrate usefully intersects with groundbreaking work on skin, the body, and flesh in Black studies. Most notably, Hortense Spillers's "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book"

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133 In only three instances do women arise as subjects of Derrida's archival theory. In fact, the word "women" appears only twice in the text. Once as a subject disallowed from archival ownership: "the phylacteries, those archives of skin or parchment covered with writing that Jewish men, here too, and not Jewish women, carry close to their body, on their arm and on their forehead" (42). The other is a ghost that appears as a hallucination to a patient. The closest the essay comes to acknowledging the relationship of women to the archive is in its discussion of transgenerational memory: "Without the irrepressible, that is to say, only suppressible and repressible, force and authority of this transgenerational memory, the problems of which we speak would be dissolved and resolved in advance. There would no longer be any essential history of culture, there would no longer be any question of memory and of archive, of patriarchive or of matriarchive, and one would no longer even understand how an ancestor can speak within us, nor what sense there might in us to speak *to* him or her, to speak in such an *unheimlich*, "uncanny" fashion to his or her ghost. *With* it." Otherwise, all of the examples provided return us to the male experience of the archive and to its "paternal phantom." Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 35.

134 The essay's emphasis on circumcision as biological substrate is one example, as is the place of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* in the study. Through Yeryshalmi's work, Derrida traces a patrilineal relationship to the archive that extends even to his dedication: "I will dare to dedicate it at the same time to my sons-and even to the memory of my father, who was also called, as is life itself, Hayim." Derrida, 21.

135 In turn, Derrida's close reading of Freud privileges the phallo-centric interpretation of archival desire.

136 Derrida,*Archive Fever*,11.

(1987), postulates that "the undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color."[137] Racialized skin thus provides "evidence" of a particular version of Black being while also masking a blackness lived in the flesh.[138] For Derrida, meanwhile, skin consigns "in a place of relative exteriority whether it has to do with writings, documents, or ritualized marks on the body proper (for example, phylacteries or circumcision)."[139] Evidence, in his case, is constituted in the removal of skin, or as with phylacteries, "two small leather boxes, containing Hebrew texts of the Bible written on parchment, worn by Jewish males" in proximity to the body.[140] Spillers's interrogation of racialized skin, however, draws attention instead to process and procedure. Furthermore, while Derrida's work on skin as an archival "substrate" primarily functions as a metaphor to better understand the archive, Spillers illuminates the work of skin in more material terms.[141] Indeed, as "a site of sensory, interpersonal contact and racial, intersubjective

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[137] Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.
[138] According to Weheliye's reading of Spillers, flesh antecedes the body. It "operates as a vestibular gash in the armor of Man, simultaneously a tool of dehumanization and a relational vestibule to alternate ways of being that do not possess the luxury of eliding phenomenology with biology." Weheliye, 44.
[139] Derrida, *Archive Fever,* 45.
[140] *Oxford English Dictionary,* OED Online, *s*.v. "phylacteries"
[141] Derrida elaborates the metaphor of circumcision as archive: "A very singular monument, [circumcision] is also the document of an archive. In a reiterated manner, it leaves the trace of an incision right on the skin: more than one skin, at more than one age. […] It accumulates so many sedimented archives, some of which are written right on the epidermis of a body proper, others on the substrate of an "exterior" body. Each layer here seems to gape slightly, as the lips of a wound, permitting glimpses of the abyssal possibility of another depth destined for archaeological excavation." Derrida, *Archive Fever,* 20.

knowing," skin functions as repository and resource for the production of fleshly knowledges.[142]

To speak of skin this way is to signal the Black body as archive.[143] This conceptual formula requires some clarification, as each of its component terms can signify so wildly. Black body here means the flesh-and-blood material body as well as the projected idea of the Black body. Harvey Young usefully identifies the duality*:* "When popular connotations of blackness are mapped across or internalized within black people, the result is the creation of the black body. This second body, an abstracted and imagined figure, shadows or doubles the real one. It is the black body and not a particular flesh-and-blood body that is the target of a racializing projection."[144] The projection also contributes to another split sense of the Black body: "The captive body," which is caught by an exterior gaze that racializes and "the fleshy body," which "represents racializing assemblages of subjection that can never annihilate the lines of flight, freedom dreams, practices of liberation, and possibilities of other worlds."[145] Despite the projection or

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[142] Michelle Stephens, *Skin Acts: Race, Psychoanalysis, and the Black Male Performer*. (Durham: Duke UP, 2014). 29. Marisa Fuentes models the paradigm in her interpretation of the scars on enslaved women's bodies as "symbols of the deep penetration of violence that mark the relationship between the body of the archive, the body in the archive, the material body, and the enslaved female body in space." As etchings on the skin, skin functions too as evidence of the Black body as archive. Marisa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2016), 14.

[143] Reading the body as an epistemological repository is central both to queer theory and critical race theory. Jose Esteban Muñoz's work on the ephemerality of performance, inspired, in part, by Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* is helpful for thinking about how the body as archive functions as a site for fleeting captivity.

[144] Young uses the saying "flesh and blood," to mean the material biological corpus. It seems that even in language and slips of the tongue, we cannot escape the "flesh" as surplus of the Black body. Harvey Young, *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body*. (Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 2010), 4.

[145] Weheliye, 2.

"captivity" of the Black body, its flesh retains ontological and epistemological possibilities.[146] Thus the Black body as archive also contains emancipatory potential. Finally, the term "archive" is used here both in the traditional sense of the archive—as a literal repository of past events for a future history—and as per Foucault's definition of the archive—as a "general system of the formation and transformation of statements."[147] The projected idea of the Black body is particularly relevant for Foucault's formulation of archival knowledge as it both anticipates and defines a priori the racializing assemblage. It resonates too with the idea of the hieroglyphics of the skin as laid out in Spillers's theorization of the Black body. That is, Black body is also a practice that causes the emergence of statements about blackness; hieroglyphics on the skin of and for Black being.

As evidenced by the multiple meanings of each of its component parts—the Black body as archive can mean the flesh-and-blood black body as repository and the projected idea of the Black body as a function of the archive as discursive system—such a figure contains conceptual multitudes. One combination of the term's definitions is that the physical body serves as a material repository for the race's future history.[148] In another

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[146] Weheliye uses "fleshy" and "fleshly" interchangeably in *Habeus Viscus*. I prefer the term: "fleshly," which not only refers to actual physical presence but gestures to sin and Christian notions of carnality.

[147] In *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault diverges from notions of the archive as repository to think about the archive as discursive systems. Accordingly, for him, the archive is not that which preserves the discourses institutions "wish to remember" but rather the system that polices statements (129). It is neither the repository (or corpus) nor the language that defines enunciation, but the practice that causes emergence: "It is the general system of the formation and transformation of statements." Foucault, 120.

[148] Marisa Fuentes argues for a reading of the scars on enslaved women's bodies as "symbols of the deep penetration of violence that mark the relationship between the body of the archive, the body in the archive, the material body, and the enslaved female body

case, the archive's role as a system of enunciation fosters projections of the Black body that cohere in an ideal subject of blackness. These are the ideal subjects that the Black archives studied here confront.

In the early decades of the twentieth century for example, New Negro ideology attempted to redirect the projections of blackness accumulated during slavery—the "Old Negro"—onto a new image of Black bodies, all in the interest of heralding and securing a new, future history for the race. This chapter focuses on an early, and later, twentieth century author whose Black feminist archival praxis demonstrates a confrontation with the ideal subjects of blackness imagined by someone such as Schomburg and deconstructed by Ellison. Hurston and Brodber reject the ideals projected onto New Negro blackness wholesale, but also, they go further than Ellison in suggesting altogether new Black archives in, and of, the flesh.

Challenging the hard paradigms of the post-Enlightenment body, its fixed categories of racial, gender, and sexual difference, Black feminist archives move like the libidinous Black body: "chiasmically between body and flesh, the sexual and the consensual, phallic closure and invaginated openness, but also between phallic signifier and epidermal image, flowing in and around the discourse, visual codes, and language of race."[149] The work of Zora Neale Hurston and Erna Brodber provides evidence of such fluid archival multicorporeality. By approaching archival knowledge through a matriline that exceeds a gendered category rooted in biology, their work reimagines the body not as a product of possessive individualism, but as another way of imagining the relationship

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in space." Fuentes, 14. Sethe's back in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* serves as a poignant example of this version of Black body as archive.

[149] Stephens, *Skin Acts*, 19.

between flesh and subjectivity.[150] They represent bodies of the sort Spillers argues, "claim the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to "name")," and in so doing, rewrite, a radically different archive for blackness itself.[151]

From cosmic Zora's mystic corporeality, this chapter transitions to Erna Brodber's 1994 novel *Louisiana*, which extends the world and context of Hurston's oeuvre. In *Louisiana*, one sees how the issues of temporality and site specificity which occupied Derrida, can get stretched even further as the recorder (black box) given by the anthropology department at Columbia to the novel's protagonist, Ella Townsend, supernaturally accumulates oral records spanning two countries (the United States and Jamaica) and 100 years.[152] Ella's experiences eventually lead the skeptical academic to become so involved in mysticism that she leaves the ivory tower in order to become a medium (a decision Hurston herself faced after pursuing field work in 1928). This does not mean, however, that Ella somehow "heals" her archive fever. Rather, the move to medium responds to the impulse differently by finding alternative channels for accumulation. For Hurston and Brodber, the archive expands in order to accumulate a

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[150] Marisa Fuentes reads the scars on enslaved women's bodies as "symbols of the deep penetration of violence that mark the relationship between the body of the archive, the body in the archive, the material body, and the enslaved female body in space." Etched onto the skin, these scars penetrate flesh. Similarly, fevers may be registered on the skin but bred by an infection in the bloodstream. Fuentes, 14.

[151] Spillers concludes her seminal essay by returning to the opening image of the multiple markings/names placed upon Black women. She argues: "we are less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness than gaining the *insurgent ground* as female social subject. Actually *claiming* the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to "name"), "Sapphire" might rewrite after all a radically different text for female empowerment." Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 80.

[152] One of Derrida's central tenants in *Archive Fever* is, after all, "There is no archive without a place of consignation, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority." Derrida, 11.

wider array of Black experience that, in turn, redefines the notion of the archive's "ideal subjects."

These radical archives that Hurston and Brodber model do not only respond to white supremacist archives that would silence Black experience write large. They also respond to the masculinism of early twentieth century Black scholarship, which overwhelmingly privileged male participation and achievement.[153] Schomburg's essay title underscores this point: "The Negro Digs Up *His* Past."[154] Over the course of the century, Black studies has made significant moves towards recuperating, acknowledging, and celebrating the contributions of Black women across fields and disciplines.[155] Even so, Black archives remain plagued by the pull of the patriline, evidenced most recently by Stephen Best's *None Like Us: Blackness, Belonging, Aesthetic Life* (2018).

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[153] The most obvious example of this is Du Bois' argument in "The Talented Tenth" that because "The Negro race like all races, is going to be saved by exceptional men" we need to adequately train these men: "Men we shall have only as we make manhood the object of the work of the schools […]." W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative Negroes of Today,* (New York: J. Pott & Company, 1903).

[154] Beyond the title, Schomburg's essay exemplifies a patrilineal approach to history. Although it is structured around lists of people who exemplify Black achievement, the only women it includes are Phillis Wheatley, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth. So too, the history the essay draws upon is decidedly masculinist and (e.g. "Just as black men were influential factors in the campaign against the slave trade, so they were among the earliest instigators of the abolition movement" ("The Negro Digs Up His Past" 671). The introduction to *The Question of Recovery: Slavery, Freedom, and the Archive* in *Social Text* 33.4 (December 2015) also makes note of Schomburg's title: "The gendered construction of Schomburg's declaration ("to remake his past") underscores the acts of exclusion—in this case, the presumptive equation of "Negro" with "his"—inherent in the construction of even insurgent national histories." Helton, Laura, et al. "The Question of Recovery: An Introduction." *Social Text 125* 33. 4 (December 2015): 12.

[155] Examples of this abound. To name a few: Toni Cade Bambara's *The Black Woman* (1970); Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens;* Hazel Carby's *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the African American Woman Novelist* (1989); Cheryl Wall's *Women of the Harlem Renaissance* (1995); Carla Peterson's *Doers of the Word: African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North* (1998).

Disavowing the melancholic historicism of looking to the past for a sense of Black identity, *None Like Us* draws from queer theory's work on futurity to speculate on new ways of imagining a collectivity rooted in a hermeneutics of disintegration and fragmentation.[156] It opens with a reading of "blackness as a condition of genealogical isolation" that reaffirms the patrilineal trope of Black archives.[157] Articulating a "shared sense of alienation, a shared queerness, emerging from a shared blackness," the work unsettles the traditional view of filial intersubjectivity. However, it organizes itself around a Black literary-philosophical patriline: "Walker's prayer on behalf of the 'coloured citizens of the world'; Baldwin's figuration of his father, and me of mine."[158] Such a figuration, though explicitly queer, nonetheless affirms Black masculinity as the sphere for archival inquiry. By way of a response, I propose a new matrilineal figuration

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[156] Stephen Best's work is certainly in conversation with my own in important ways. He draws attention, for instance, "less to what searching finds (to what can or cannot be held, has or has not been retrieved from the archive) than to what searching itself brings about, what is born of the understanding of the archive as a scene of injury." Likewise, I also trace blackness outside the assumed "We," and yet I refuse its whole negation and refusal. Rather, I posit that searching itself produces the "we." Black archives are less concerned with the event or moment of their origin, than they are with the quest for reversion (above even reversion itself). In other words, the concern with history (not as the detail of a past but as a concern with temporality and the development of subjectivity in relation to that temporality) is the terrain of Black archives. Stephen Best, *None Like Us: Blackness, Belonging, and Aesthetic Life*, (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2018. Kindle Edition), "Introduction."

[157] In conversation with Ismail Muhammed's ideas on James Baldwin, Best provides an insightful reading of lineage that is relevant to my claims about Black history's patrilineality: He "hijacks" Muhammed's language "[…] Baldwin's figurations of his father challenge the idea of familial lineage and "the logic of perpetual trauma. […] Wanting to exit the paternal function and to supersede his father, Baldwin proposes in [*The Fire Next Time*], to affirm "a queered definition of reproduction." Accordingly, […] Muhammed and I share the view that Baldwin's figurations of his father and the paternal relation, across his writings, represent as much a sustained working out of his relationship to history as a statement of personal biography." Stephen Best, *None Like Us: Blackness, Belonging, and Aesthetic Life* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2018), 6.

[158] Best, 11.

that, in moving us from Zora Neale Hurston to Erna Brodber, and to M. NourbeSe Philip and Alexis Pauline Gumbs in future chapters, elaborates not only new lines of flight and freedom, but also, an altogether new terrain for archival inquiry.

Brown Bag Bodies and the Archive

Without the clear agenda of a resource for a new subject position and less conscripted by the structures of power that would organize a particular history, Zora Neale Hurston's work challenges the expectations of the archive as a tool for differentiating discourse and disciplinarity.[159] A true intellectual revolutionary, Hurston anticipates Spillers's concern about needing a vocabulary through which to discuss Black female subjectivity, and challenges distinctions between the body and the archive that remain relevant even now.[160] Her work on hoodoo practice and the body as a channel for the otherworldly, for example, demonstrates new ways of conceptualizing the

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[159] According to Foucault's *The Archeology of Knowledge*, the archive "differentiates discourses in their multiple existences and specifies them in their own duration." Foucault, 129. My examination of both Hurston and Brodber, however, reveals the ways in which the archive also exceeds the stakes of disciplinarity carved out by Thomas Osborne in "The Ordinariness of the Archive," *History of the Human Sciences* 12.2 (1999): 51-64.

[160] In "Whatcha Gonna Do? Revisiting Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," a conversation between Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Jasmine Griffin, Shelly Eversley, and Jennifer L. Morgan, Spillers responds to praise about her groundbreaking work by clarifying its impetus: "what I saw happening was Black people being treated as a kind of raw material. That the history of Black people was something you could use as a note of inspiration but it was never anything that had anything to do with you—you could never use it to explain something in theoretical terms. There was no discourse that it generated, in terms of the mainstream academy that gave it a kind of recognition. And so my idea was to try to generate a discourse, or a vocabulary that would not just make it desirable, but would necessitate that Black women be in the conversation." Hortense Spillers, et al., "Whatcha Gonna Do? Revisiting Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Women's Studies Quarterly*. 35 1/2 (Spring 2007): 300.

relationship of the body to the archive. Positing the body as a legitimate site for the accumulation of knowledge, Hurston's work reconceptualizes ephemerality and permanence as well as embodiment and consignation.[161]

Unlike Ellison's symbolic briefcase, awarded to the narrator by the white men of the town for the sake of collecting a history of the race that perpetuates and reinforces white supremacy, Hurston's archive is a brown paper bag. Carried in the hand but ultimately felt within, she describes its contents affectively in the culmination to her essay, "How It Feels To Be A Colored Me."

> But in the main, I feel like a brown bag of miscellany propped against a wall. Against a wall in company with other bags, white, red, and yellow. Pour out the contents, and there is discovered a jumble of small things priceless and worthless. A first-water diamond, an empty spool, bits of broken glass, lengths of string, a key to a door long since crumbled away, a rusty knife-blade, old shoes saved for a road that never was and never will be, a nail bent under the weight of things too heavy for any nail, a dried flower or two, still a little fragrant. In your hand is the brown bag. On the ground before you is the jumble it held—so much like the jumble in the bags, could they be emptied, that all might be dumped in a single heap and the bags refilled without altering the content of any greatly. A bit of colored glass more or less would not matter. Perhaps that is how the Great Stuffer of Bags filled them in the first place—who knows?"[162]

This is an unexpected archive, admittedly, especially since Hurston appears to be dispelling its promises. More akin to the heap of items accumulating on the sidewalk in front of an evicted apartment in Harlem than any contained in a briefcase, Hurston's

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[161] Diana Taylor's work on the relationship between the body and the archive posits a "rift […] between the *archive* of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e. spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)." I propose that Hurston's work, especially on hoodoo practice and the body as channel for the otherworldly, challenges this distinction on which Taylor's argument relies. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003), 19.
[162] Zora Neale Hurston, "How It Feels to Be A Colored Me," in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2004), 1032-1033.

collection, at least at first glance, does not seem filled with the productive discoveries for which Schomburg invites excavation. Reading Hurston's metaphor here as archive, in fact, unsettles some of the foundational principles of archival holdings. The items, for one, are not particularly unique: "a bit of colored glass, "rusty knife-blades," an "empty spool." You can also ostensibly replace items without much difference: a challenge to the archival principle of *respect des fonds*, the basis of archival arrangement and description.[163]

The bag further illuminates Hurston's archival sensibilities insofar as it critiques its traditional praxis as well as its institutionalized value system. Hurston's conceit probes, for example, the worth of items. It challenges the stability of the resource: after all, the ambiguous subject who holds the bag and the rhetorical final question remain ambiguous: "Who knows?" Likewise, her bag addresses the structural system that predetermines discourses of race, subjectivity, and culture substantiated by the archive—a sort of naming of the forces that operate to fill Ellison's briefcase. Like Ellison, who finds himself interpellated into the archive, Hurston feels herself to be such a repository for what "The Great Stuffer of Bags" deems worthy.

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[163] According to the first principle of the Society of American Archivists, "Archival materials have traditionally been understood to consist of the documents organically created, accumulated, and/or used by a person or organization in the course of the conduct of affairs and preserved because of their continuing value." The second principle, regarding *respect des fonds*, asserts: "The records created, assembled, accumulated, and/or maintained and used by an organization or individual must be kept together (i.e., identified as belonging to the same aggregation) in their original order, if such order exists or has been maintained. They ought not to be mixed or combined with the records of another individual or corporate body." *Describing Archives: A Content Standard.* Second Edition. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2013. (http://www2.archivists.org/standards/DACS/statement_of_principles), xv.

Responding to the essay's title, "How It Feels to Be A Colored Me," Hurston states, "I feel like a brown bag of miscellany." In so doing, she highlights the relationship between the raced body and the raced archive. She is but a bag of skin, and her flesh contains the "jumble," or those hieroglyphs Spillers insists are hidden by race. Most haunting in the conceit, however, is the second-person address that punctuates the anecdote and breaks up the syntactic momentum of the list that precedes it: "In your hand is the brown bag." The power on display and afforded to this hand is quite striking: the hand holds out the bag to do with it what it will. It may opt to carry the Zora therein buried as a prize for display or it may empty the bag, only to refill it "without altering the content of any greatly." Here, Hurston names the symbolic, projected upon, Black body.

And yet, the affective frame of the episode also suggests fleshly knowledge and the possibility of agency. First, such a possibility exists in the mediated narrativization of the feeling. Hurston after all recognizes the procedure of symbolic projection as it applies to her own embodiment. She describes her body as a brown bag propped against a wall, signaling that she also holds within a fleshly ontology that identifies and describes the projection as it is witnessed somewhere else internal to the self. She concludes, finally, by leaving the brown bag as projected racialized Black body in the hand of an ambiguous "you," who has dumped the contents of the bag out before them, just as she also catalogues its contents for her readers. Hurston's reflections on blackness and the body raise the questions: To what extent can subjects subvert their complicity in archival processes? How do their bodies operate as repositories and resources, moreover, for whom and how? This chapter examines how Hurston's work responds to these questions, interacting with the archive as anthropologist, folklorist, and author. It explores the

effects of patronage on archive accumulation and considers how Hurston's impulse is formed within an institutional paradigm she eventually subverts. Questions about the folk and its relation to archival ephemera motivate an examination of Hurston's work with hoodoo and her sound recordings, including how the machines of archival accumulation impact the materials collected, and reflect on the body as another resource for collected memory.

Attending to the body also means addressing the archive's ideal subjects. Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) is a useful interlocutor here as it clarifies the social politics of idealization that defines archives organized around a category of collective identification (i.e. race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, etc.). According to Ahmed's reading of shame and the ideal, the ideal (for example, white, heterosexual, male) functions as a "proximate we," insofar as it coheres subjects around the expectations of those qualities. Meanwhile, those subjects that fail to live up to that ideal not only experience, but also, are defined by shame. The nation, of course, establishes its own ideals: it "takes some bodies as its form and not others."[164] At this juncture we locate blackness, which (like Ahmed's example of queer love), is experienced as the "affective cost of departing from the scripts of normative existence."[165] Black archives, meanwhile, work to interrogate those scripts that marginalize and subjugate by virtue of the ideal they organize. The figure of the New Negro is thus especially interesting because of the way in which it aims to establish a new

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[164] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2004).109.
[165] Ahmed, 107.

"ideal subject" so as to re-organize the collective outside of the paradigm of shame.[166] And yet, because "ideals can be binding, even when we feel we have failed them; indeed, the emotions that register this failure might confirm the ideals in the first place," the New Negro as ideal subject reaffirming that the defining feature of its archive is shame.[167]

Hurston's work with Black archives, however, did not just respond to the New Negro in radical ways, but also, it challenged the "ideal subject" erected within the disciplines to which she committed so much of her early efforts: anthropology and ethnography. After all, the ethnographic archive in many ways is also designed (like the tenets of New Negro ideology) to prove value and justify inclusion (if only still in the cultural margins). Also impelled by the notion of the "ideal subject," it seeks representative examples, rendering people as objects of study. The ethnographic impulse is also a product of the nation's capitalist underpinnings, particularly with regards to the commodification of Black bodies. Ian Parker's study of "Perverse Objects" for instance, defines the "ideal subject of capitalism [as] one in which the individual is able to configure themselves not only as one who chases after commodities, objects of desire, but also as an object to be consumed by others." [168] Such consumption, however, is challenged by the multiple subjectivities, intersectional identities, and reconfigured

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[166] Locke frames the need for a New Negro as follows: "So for generations in the mind of America, the Negro has been more of a formula than a human being—a something to be argued about, condemned, or defended, to be "kept down," or "in his place," or "helped up," to be worried with or worried over, harassed or patronized, a social bogey or a social burden." Alain Locke, "The New Negro," *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance,* Ed. Alain Locke. (1925; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992. 3-16). 3.
[167] Ahmed, 109.
[168] See Ian Parker, *Lacanian Pyschoanalysis: Revolutions in Subjectivity* (London: Routledge, 2011), 94.

spatio-temporalities at work in the forms of Black possession that come to figure so prominently in both Hurston and Brodber's texts. Moreover, while such consumption may work to captivate the Black body, the fleshly body's excesses challenge the coherence of the ideal subject. This challenge (not only to the ideal subject but to the very process of idealization), I argue, is what Hurston and Brodber's Black archives record. Consequently, their texts manifest less an oppositional position to archival knowledge, despite the fact that they might begin in the vein of a counter-archive, than an extension of its possibilities. The metaphoric soil of Schomburg's excavation and the narrator's tight grip on the briefcase in *Invisible Man*, moves to the body for epistemological credibility. Both Hurston and Brodber elucidate alternative "channels" for archival knowledge that work through, rather than around, that "Great Stuffers of Bags."

Hurston and the Anti-ideal Subjects of the Black Archive

Hurston's relationship to the archive was shaped by her position in the Black literati of the Harlem Renaissance and New Negro movement, and by her well-documented training in anthropology, especially as the latter proved instrumental in her later work with the Federal Writer's Project of the WPA.[169] The fact that Zora Neale Hurston's literary and anthropological careers took off nearly simultaneously makes

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[169] Hurston, like Ellison was employed by the Federal Writer's Project under the auspices of the WPA. During her two-year relationship with the organization, she was charged with chronicling the life histories of Florida's diverse communities. Both writers--Hurston in the South chronicling Black folk life and culture and Ellison in the New York concentrating on the folk as reconstituted in urban spaces—reveal a concerted effort to trace a history even outside the national parameters of the project that employed them. I will return to the role of nation-building and the WPA later in this chapter as I consider how Hurston's work is saturated with efforts to represent and subvert the call for representation.

efforts to separate one enterprise from the other nearly impossible. So, while Hurston describes in her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on the Road*, how "the first week of January, 1925, found me in New York with $1.50, no job, no friends, and a lot of hope" (138), by the end of the year she would be a published author travelling in the most elite literary circles of Harlem, and the only Black student at Barnard college training in the tradition of a counter-archive she will ultimately find insufficient.[170]

Hurston's meteoric success after arriving from Eatonville is not a wholly New York phenomenon, but rather the product of literary networks she developed before arriving in the city. In fact, many of the contacts that served her so well in Harlem she

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[170] Rebekah Edwards's "The Counter-Archive of Elizabeth Nielsen" provides a relevant definition of counter-archives as related to "subaltern archives." According to her reading, a counter-archive "exists coterminous with a 'state' or 'discursive' archive [; it] destabilizes and exposes the archive's regulatory production. […] Counter-archives are often also 'subaltern archives'; those methodologies by which subaltern communities preserve and transmit a history otherwise discursively repressed or erased. Unlike many subaltern archives, however, the counter-archive is neither self-constituting nor is it independent of the regulatory archive, the articulation of which is one of its primary concerns." Michael Warner's theory of counterpublics further clarifies the relationship between the counter and subaltern archive: "[…] it is not clear that all counterpublics are composed of people otherwise dominated as subalterns. Some youth-culture publics or artistic publics, for example, operate as counterpublics, even though many who participate in them are "subalterns" in no other sense." Counter-archives are thus not necessarily constituted by subaltern subjects. Moreover, as Hurston comes to discover in her career as an anthropologist, the counter-archival mode may also be coopted to the service of white supremacist endeavors. Hurston's relationship to Charlotte Osgood Mason exemplifies the distinction between these two modes of archivization. Osgood Mason's patronage testifies to a counter-archival investment in Black ethnography. The more time Hurston spends on the field, however, the more she realizes the need for an approach to archivization that exceeds the counter-archive. Subaltern archives, she discovers, cannot in some cases exit coterminous with traditional archives (state or discursive) that fundamentally disqualify these alternative knowledges. Unable to marry their two distinct approaches, the professional relationship between Hurston and Osgood Mason eventually disintegrates. Rebekah Edwards, "The Counter-Archive of Elizabeth Nielsen," *Australian Feminist Studies*. 25.64 (2010): 110; Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, (New York: Zone Books, Brooklyn 2002), 57.

made while studying at Howard University, which she attended sporadically between 1918 and 1924.[171] For example it was Alain Locke, whom Hurston met at Howard, who recommended she submit her work to Charles S. Johnson's Harlem Renaissance magazine, *Opportunity*. Thanks to this suggestion, four of Hurston's pieces were published there within months of each other. At the publication's 1925 awards dinner she received four prizes: two honorable mentions for "Magnolia Flower" and "The Hue and Cry About Howard University," a second-place fiction prize for her short story "Spunk," and a second-place drama prize for her play *Color Struck*. "Spunk" was also selected for inclusion in Locke's groundbreaking—and period-defining—edited volume, *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (1925).

At the epicenter of such an inspiring literary community, Hurston also found academic networks that would become fundamental to her later oeuvre's archival sensibilities. Only eight short months after her move, Hurston was enrolled as a student at Barnard College; by the time she graduated in 1928, her seminal work on Black folk culture had attracted the attention of Columbia University Anthropology Professors Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict, who fostered Hurston's commitment to folklore and cultural anthropology, helped her attain funding for some of her early projects, and encouraged her to pursue graduate work in the field at Columbia.[172] As was the case with many artists

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[171]Although she did not complete a degree program at Howard, Hurston's experiences, and the contacts she developed there, further highlight how inextricable Hurston's artistic accomplishments are with the networks she fostered at academic institutions.

[172] Despite being the only Black student at Barnard, Hurston felt quite encouraged and supported there. She says as much in a letter to friend Constance Sheen written shortly after the completion of her first semester: "I suppose you want to know how this little darkish piece of meat feels at Barnard. I am received quite well. In fact, I am received so well that if someone would come along and try to turn me white I'd be quite peevish about them." Hurston to Constance Sheen, January 5, [1926]. So too in *Dust Tracks on a*

of the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston quickly drew the attention and support of a wealthy white patron: Mrs. Charlotte Osgood Mason.[173] Hurston's patronage, however, uniquely straddled the terms of art and science; backing Hurston meant supporting both a cultural anthropologist and a writer, each approach distinctly related to the subjects of study and the terms of "authorship." Moreover, while Mason's financial support may have provided Hurston the means to travel South to collect folk tales, such patronage was certainly not without its strings. Mason was not only legally entitled to the material Hurston collected but the contract established between them made Hurston Mason's representative; to put it bluntly, for wealthy white "Godmother" to own this archive of Black folklore, the Black woman's body had to be expunged from the site of its collection.[174]

Eventually, Hurston would go on to publish *Mules and Men* and sever ties with her patron—the contract between the two ended March 31, 1931.[175] Yet this idea of

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Road Hurston assures readers: "I have no lurid tales to tell of race discrimination at Barnard;" despite the fact, she later clarifies: "I became Barnard's sacred black cow." Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*: *An Autobiography*. (1942; New York: Harper Perennial, 1996). 139. Subsequent citations in text.

[173] Charlotte Osgood Mason likewise provided financial backing for other prominent Harlem Renaissance writers like Langston Hughes and Alain Locke.

[174] Cheryl Wall elaborates on this conflict in her seminal lecture on Hurston for the Chicago Humanities Festival, clarifying that while Mason provided Hurston a car and stipend, "not only did Hurston have to account for every nickel she spent, including the most personal items, she was employed as 'an independent agent' who was deputized to collect Black folklore on Charlotte Mason's behalf. Mrs. Mason would own the folklore Zora Neale Hurston collected. So many problems with that, but let me just point to one. Nobody owns folklore! And Hurston absolutely understood that her contract with Mrs. Mason complicated her ability to publish what she found. She persisted." Cheryl A. Wall. "Go there tuh know there: Zora Neale Hurston's Journey's," (lecture, Chicago Humanities Festival, Chicago, IL, 1 November 2014).

[175] For more on the legal, contractual and personal dynamics between Hurston and her patron see Robert Hemenway's *Zora Neale Hurston*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977) and Steven Watson's *The Harlem Renaissance: Hub of African-American Culture, 1920-1930*. (Pantheon Books, 1995).

owning folklore raises questions about the extent to which folklore can operate as a commodity, and how this, in turn, affects its relationship to a race archive.[176] When, after all, does folklore become the object: in its collection, compilation, or publication? And what is the role of the subject in relation to its objectification? What's more, if as John Cruz highlights in his study of the institutionalization of ethnosympathy in *Cultures on the Margin*, academic investment in folklore emerged as a response to the "sense of a waning black authenticity," how "authentic" does the object of study remain after the transcription and inevitable decontextualization that results from archivization? Finally, what is the status of "authenticity" amidst a tradition of signification?[177] Indeed, Hurston and Mason's conflict over the materials not only reflects distinct agendas in archivization and disparate interpretations of "folklore," it also demonstrates how even "benevolent" patrons of the arts can use evidence collected in the name of authentic Black expression to bolster white supremacy.[178] Before turning to how Hurston specifically navigated

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[176] John Cruz's study of Black music-making and the popularity of the Fisk Jubilee Singers elaborates on the processes of institutionalization and commodification to which I gesture here. Accordingly, he asserts, "traversed as it was by sentimentality and science, testimony and artifact, folklore was born with congenital ambivalence. Nonetheless, the rationalist dispositions came to outweigh antimodern disenchantment. By the turn of the century, folklore was resigned to the triumph of modernization and market society." His argument that the "concern that a vital aspect of black culture was in danger of disappearing" was what "motivated intellectuals to capture, collect, transcribe, and then reteach the songs to younger black students" (169) is also useful in reinforcing the particular conditions of the death drive faced by Black archival practice, a concern we see echoed in Schomburg's call to "dig." See John Cruz, "Institutionalizing Ethnosympathy," *Cultures on the Margins: The Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999), 164-188.

[177] For a concise but thorough overview of the status of the folk in discourses of authenticity and Black identity, see J. Martin Favor, *Authentic Blackness: The Folk in the New Negro Renaissance* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1999).

[178] "Put another way, the White Redeemer culture in the South, with the aid of its silent and acquiescent allies in the North, regained control over the political economy while the cultural intellectuals in the North— or, more precisely, a dominated fraction among the

scientific and cultural legitimacy in her work, or how she commented on the notion of "authentic" Black cultural expression, it is worth noting what drove Hurston's impulse to collect. If her archive challenges the stakes of New Negro ideology as well as those of anthropology (a version of the white men's command in the Battle Royal of Ellison's novel to "shape the destiny of his people"),[179] what motivates her particular fever? [180] For this one must examine the work Hurston managed to extricate from her contract with Mason, her 1935 autoethnographic collection of African American folklore, *Mules and Men*.

Mules and Men opens with the following assertion: "I was glad when somebody told me, "You may go and collect Negro folklore."[181] What appears as affirmation and recognition, however, also raises suspicion.[182] Who, after all, grants such permission; how did they achieve such power; and why have they now acquiesced? The line also triangulates the dynamics of archival praxis: subject (you), object (Negro folklore) and task (collect). It imagines an object exists ready for the taking and that the subject will

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dominant class— annexed black culture as part of a new grammar for a modernity sanctioned by, while quarantined within, the growing parameters of late- nineteenth-century academic social science." See Cruz, "Institutionalizing Ethnosympathy," 177.

[179] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 32.

[180] This command resonates with much of the support Hurston received from white intellectuals in her field, from Boas to Benedict to, of course, Osgood Mason.

[181] Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (1935; New York: Harper Perennial,1990), 1. Subsequent citations in text.

[182] Hurston describes this call to collect in *Dust Tracks on a Road*: "Two weeks before I graduated from Barnard, Dr. Boas sent for me and told me that he had arranged a fellowship for me. I was to go south and collect Negro folk-lore. Shortly before that, I had been admitted to the American Folk-Lore Society. Later, while I was in the field, I was invited to become a member of the American Ethnological Society, and shortly after the American Anthropological Society." I take the description of the organizations in which she participated as a sort of marshaling of her own credibility by and for institutional practice. Hurston, *Dust Tracks*, 141.

somehow be able to access this object—in fact, Hurston later details the complexities of this very process. The opening also resonates with Derrida's morphological argument of the archive as originary order: "*Arkhc,* we recall, names at once the commencement and the commandment. This name apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, there where things commence-physical, historical, or ontological principle- but also the principle according to the law, there where men and gods command, there where authority, social order are exercised, in this place from which order is given-nomological principle."[183] In other words, if for Derrida the archive dictates a relationship to time, "where things commence" and to power, "where men and gods command," Hurston's opening not only recognizes and calls out such intersectionality, but from its nexus she launches her own subversive account.[184] On the one hand, Hurston admits to feeling "glad" with the call to "collect," but, on the other

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[183] Derrida, *Archive Fever,* 1.

[184] See "Federal Writers' Project: Folklore Project, 1936-1940," *United States Work Projects Administration Records,* Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C. Compare, for instance, Hurston's entry on religious custom titled "Negro Religious Customs": "Suddenly all of the Saints gathered about the railing, kneeling reverently, and began talking in what is known as "the unknown tongue," with that of fellow WPA employee, white ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax for the same project: "The religious fervor of the Negro is a characteristic as old as the history of the race itself, for the African VooDoo worship was very impressive although it was a worship of fear and superstition" [Box A.591]. Lomax's observations are routed through a prescribed history and representation of Black life that Hurston's transcription, meanwhile, challenges. Hurston's entry for "Eatonville (When You Look At It): Oct. 1, 1938, and her use of "the stranger" further elucidates how she navigates the expectations of her field coupled with the desire for a representation that doesn't reinforce white supremacy: "Maitland is Maitland until it gets to Hurst's corner, and then it is Eatonville. Right in front of Willie Sewell's yellow-painted house the hard road quits being the hard road for a generous mile and becomes the heart of Eatonville. Or from a stranger's point of view, you could say that the road just bursts through on its way from Highway #17 to #441 scattering Eatonville right and left." [Box A. 875] *Zora Neale Hurston: Recordings, Manuscripts, Photographs, and Ephemera* at the Archive of Folk Culture of the Library of Congress.

hand, the ambiguous command structure implicit in "somebody told me" and "you may go" destabilizes this gratitude. The fact that Hurston underscores the need for permission also points to the structures of power with which she must contend as a Black woman who not only seeks to engage anthropological discourse, but who intends to study precisely, Black folklore. The structure of power to which she alludes is of course the financial support of the white establishment, a thematic strand that remains consistent in her introductory remarks to *Mules and Men*. She concludes the preface, for example, by acknowledging her patron, Mrs. R. Osgood Mason of New York City, who "backed my falling in a hearty way, in a spiritual way, and in addition, financed the whole expedition in the manner of the Great Soul that she is. The world's most gallant woman" (*Mules* 43). Let us not forget, though, that such homage to gallantry was written in the wake of severed contracts and the broken ties of patronage.[185]

The permission to collect folklore as indicated in Hurston's opening also reveals the burden to validate the need to pursue such an endeavor. Only once Hurston has justified such a need, not simply to her white patron but also to some of the most prominent figures in cultural anthropology, can she pursue this course. Whereas Schomburg's fever can, in a sense, be routed through his participation in Puerto Rican and Cuban mutual aid societies and later the Free Masons, Hurston's archival fever is tellingly caught from within a foundationally white, European field of study (more akin

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[185] In a June 8, 1930 letter to Boas, Hurston encodes Mason Osgood as "the angel," and suggests tensions already brimming between the two women's distinct visions for research and field work: "It's been very hard to get the material in any shape at all. The "angel" is cold towards the degrees but will put up money for further research. I have broached the subject from various angles but it got chill no matter how I put it." Correspondence from Zora Neale Hurston to Franz Boas, 8 June 1930, Ms.B.B61, Digitized, Frank Boas Papers, Library of Congress Washington DC.

in some ways to Ellison's acquisition of the briefcase at the battle royal). So, while she grows up amidst the folk tales and story porches that will later become her objects of study, Hurston supposedly learns of their cultural "value" at a distance and after a particular type of training. As she describes in *Mules and Men*, her heritage "was fitting me like a tight chemise. I couldn't see it for wearing it. It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment" (1). Away at college, Hurston recognizes the systems and values at play in the social context of her community, a move she tellingly describes as "seeing myself like somebody else."[186] With this new perspective and detached subjectivity she needs new tools: "Then I had to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look through at that" (1). [187]

Although anthropology theoretically provides Hurston with a scientific detachment from the cultural context of her upbringing—a distance that allegedly allows her to better assess the value of certain materials—as she comes to discover, the field of her study requires a particular performance of insider status. The conundrum is exposed in her laying out of the terms of her project for *Mules and Men*, wherein she clarifies that she did not choose Eatonville for her first fieldwork assignment, "so that the home folks could make admiration over me because I had been up North to college and come back

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[186] Such detached subjectivity harkens back to Mason's contractual stipulations in which Hurston was to act as "representative" for Mason in her collection of folklore.
[187] The spy glass metaphor Hurston uses here brings to mind Locke's insistence that the "Negro of to-day be seen through other than the dusty spectacles of past controversy. […] The popular melodrama has about played itself out, and it is time to scrap the fictions, garret the bogeys and settle down to a realistic facing of facts." Likewise, the commitment to empiricism as an antidote to racist mythology seems the promise of anthropology, at least as per Hurston's description. Locke, "The New Negro," 5.

with a diploma and a Chevrolet. […] I'd still be just Zora to the neighbors" (2). She chooses Eatonville because she assumes insider status. What Hurston does not anticipate, however, is the extent to which the diploma that "certifies" her authority on the matter and the Chevrolet her patron provides her to make the trip more feasible would actually impede her access.

As open as the arms of the Black literati were to receive Hurston in the North,[188] Hurston's return South for ethnographic fieldwork found her less hospitably received—at least at first. In fact, the success she had received among Harlem's elite proved detrimental to her efforts to collect Southern folklore. As a result, despite fellowship support and the backing of Boas, Hurston's first project was in many ways a failure. The failure, however, was less in Hurston's inability to collect than in her not transferring the material collected to an interpretation suitable for her field. Arnold Rampersad, for examples, attributes the "failure" to Hurston having "returned to New York with raw material in her notebooks rather than with a mature, complex grasp of the implications of that material that would have enabled her to move from being simply a transcriber to becoming a profound interpreter of Southern folklore's place in the culture of black America."[189] Hurston herself recounts the experience in *Dust Tracks on a Road*: "My first six months was disappointing. I found out later that it was not because I had no talents for research, but because I did not have the right approach" (143). It would seem that where

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[188] Hurston did not actually feel connected to many of this group, even referring to them as the "Niggerati"

[189] Arnold Rampersad, "Foreword." *Mules and Men*. (1935. New York: Harper Perennial, 1990). xvi.

Hurston succeeds as archivist she fails as anthropologist, and her "wrong approach" is the flaw of disciplinary conventions.[190]

Hurston's institutionally acquired "sophistication," as she describes it, also complicated her early efforts to connect to the subjects of her work:

> The glamor of Barnard College was still upon me. I dwelt in marble halls. I knew where the material was all right. But I went about asking, in carefully accented Barnardese, "Pardon me, but do you know any folk tales or folk songs?" The men and women who had the whole treasuries of material just seeping through their pores, looked at me and shook their heads. No they had never heard of anything like that around here. Maybe it was over in the next county. Why didn't I try over there? I did and got the self-same answer. Oh, I got a few little items. But compared with what I did later, not enough to make a flea a waltzing jacket. Considering the mood of my going south, I went back to New York with my heart beneath my knees and my knees in some lonesome valley. I stood before Papa Franz and cried salty tears. (*Dust Tracks* 144).

Even though Hurston's contract may have stipulated she travel South as Mason's "representative," Hurston quickly learned she would need to disguise any and all such ties in order to actually access the materials she needed. She could not gain insider status by relying on a name the town members would recognize. She needed to find some other way to bridge the distance between her subjects of study and herself.

In *Mules and Men,* Hurston details the challenge of connecting with the people of Polk County: "Very little was said directly to me and when I tried to be friendly there was a noticeable disposition to *fend* me off. This worried me because I saw at once that this group of several hundred Negroes from all over the South was a rich field for folk-

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190 Osborne's description of the archive as like "raw material" is useful here in tracing the value systems at work in ideas of failed research projects: The archive is like a raw material, which is not the same as saying that it is an originary material or an unworked-upon material; rather it is what has been made available, what has been thus presented to us, a kind of gift, which is to say also – for future constituencies, future publics – a kind of debt." Osborne, 57.

lore, but here was I figuratively starving to death in the midst of plenty" (60). Hurston eventually discovers the culprit is the "shiny gray Chevrolet," lent to her by Mason. According to one of her sources, the car "made her look too prosperous. So they set me aside as different" (60). Hoping to salvage the opportunity and make the most of this "rich field for folklore," she invents an excuse for the car that makes her more acceptable to the community: "I took occasion that night to impress the job with the fact that I was also a fugitive from justice, "bootlegging." […] I was hiding out. That sounded reasonable. Bootleggers always have cars. I was taken in" (61). Hurston provides a backstory that she assumes her subjects can relate to, a backstory that both imagines her at odds with the system and renders her legible as a participant in the "exchanges of capital that transforms spaces into places."[191] In order to actually collect the folklore she has been sent down South to collect, she needed to shuck off the institutional position that rendered her a stranger in her own land. She needed, as Spillers suggests Black female subjectivity does, an American Grammar, a new language with which communicate. Hurston, cannot be the "New Negro" to this community; instead, her "fieldwork" demands its own array of lies.[192]

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[191] In Ahmed's study of neighborhood watch programs and the status and legibility of the stranger, she argues "stranger's lack of purpose conceals the crime," which makes Hurston's ingratiating into the community as criminal all the more poignant since Eatonville as neighborhood is already framed as marginal in its status as the only all-Black incorporated Florida town. See Sarah Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2013), 28.

[192] Hurston is unique in that she is an artist trained in the North who travels South even under the auspices of the New Negro movement to "capture" the Southern Black voice and experience. Kabnis in Toomer's *Cain*, for example, reveals the limitations of this effort to engage with Southern Black folk experience.

Hurston's anthropological training cannot be singularly blamed for her initial telescopic approach to the study of Black life in the South. The New Negro ideology of the Northern Black elite played a part in her archival endeavors.[193] Given Schomburg's call in "The Negro Digs Up His Past," that archivization serve as a way to evidence and validate a "New Negro" subject, it would be impossible to imagine a race archive without taking seriously the role of the folk in its development. But the folk, in the spirit of New Negro ideology, has a fraught history. Since New Negro ideology involved establishing a new subject position that ruptured from older figurations dependent on the folk and rural subject, then what becomes of folklore in New Negro ideology? This is precisely where Hurston's contributions to the field are significant. Her move to include the folk, however, should not be read as simply another effort to create an ideal (Black) subject. Rather, her anthropological work highlights the process of idealization itself, which works to reframe Black archives outside of the affective paradigm of shame.[194] Hurston rejects the romanticization or caricaturization of Southern Black life and its subjects as well as the bolstering of New Negro ideology in contradistinction to Black folk culture. Likewise, by challenging the very systems and tenets of the process of collecting Black

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[193] Regional detachment corresponds, for example, with Schomburg's disinvestment in the independence projects of Puerto Rico and the lexicon he develops in relationship to burgeoning New Negro ideology. See also Brent Hayes Edwards's *The Practice of Diaspora* for a discussion of the relationship between New Negro ideology and Black cultural internationalism. Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism (*Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003).

[194] At a time when, as Alain Locke put it, the "New Negro" was moving towards urban spaces of "Modernity," "Hurston sought cultural wisdom by working her way physically and ideologically backwards: mining the communities and local traditions that blacks were beginning to leave behind." Ewing's invocation of "mining" reverberates with the image of Schomburg's call to dig. See Adam Ewing, "Lying Up A Nation: Zora Neale Hurston and the Local Uses of Diaspora," *Callaloo* 37.1 (Winter 2014): 135.

experience and its history, Hurston undermines the status of the archive by attacking how it marshals epistemological credibility. Her work demonstrates that access to Southern Black folk archives requires not only a different approach and relationship between the subject who studies and the object studied, but an alternative epistemology for understanding evidence and its empirical value. There is just as much a place for "lies" in Black cultural expression than in the acquisition of its archive.

Imagining the role of the archive for a figure like Zora Neale Hurston means navigating institutional and traditional as well as nontraditional and unofficial praxis. While we see this explicitly in *Mules and Men*'s reference to stories as "lying," *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), Hurston's autobiography, similarly rattles the conventional relationship between truth and empirical evidence. Take the humor with which she recounts her entry into the world. Chapter Three titled, "I Get Born," begins: "This is all hearsay. Maybe, some of the details of my birth as told me might be a little inaccurate, but it is pretty well established that I really did get born" (19). In fact, the details of her birth, namely the year, have been famously inaccurate and, even still, ten years of the writer's life remain unaccounted for. Interesting too is Hurston's decision to qualify this chapter as hearsay given that the first chapter details the history of the all-Black incorporated town of Eatonville, and the second chapter traces her family lineage. In other words, the text has already begun with a "hearsay" named history long before the caveat.

The chapter also challenges the status of truth in Hurston's description of the relationship with the "one person who pleased me always," a white man who aided Hurston's mother in giving birth to her daughter. Throughout her childhood, Hurston and

this man would go on fishing trips together during which he would bestow upon her some words of wisdom. Although Hurston's tone as she recounts this anecdotal evidence is fairly upbeat and positive, the content of the advice he gives her establishes an important distinction in the status of truth as it pertains to racial and class lines—an issue that permeates her contributions to the archive. Calling Hurston by the pet name he had given her at birth, he advises:[195]

> "Snidlits, don't be a nigger," he would say to me over and over. Niggers lie and lie! Any time you catch folks lying, they are skeered of something. Lying is dodging. People with guts don't lie. They tell the truth and then if they have to, they fight it out. You lay yourself open by lying. The other fellow knows right off that you are skeered of him and he's more'n apt to tackle you. If he don't do nothing, he starts looking down on you from then on. Truth is a letter from courage. I want you to grow guts as you grow along. So don't you let me hear of you lying. You'll get 'long all right if you do like I tell you. Nothing can't lick you if you never get skeered." (31).

As if anticipating the reader's reaction to what is otherwise being framed as amicable communication between the two parties, Hurston footnotes the anecdote: "The word Nigger used in this sense does not mean race. It means a weak, contemptible person of any race."[196] She reiterates this later in the body of her story, asserting: "I knew without

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[195] The pet name with which the anecdote begins, "Snidlits," reinforces the dehumanizing naming of the pejorative. As Hortense Spillers argues in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe": "The nicknames by which African-American women have been called, or regarded, or imagined on the New World scene […], demonstrate the power of distortion that the dominant community seizes as its unlawful prerogative." Spillers, 69.

[196] In the first edition of *Dust Tracks on a Road*, the clarification of the word exists in the body of the text and not as a footnote. Hurston's note about this term, as well as the paragraph that describes "the robust, gray-haired white man who had helped me get in the world," are the only two markings in Ralph Ellison's personal first edition copy of the text, which suggests he too found the moment particularly compelling. Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography. 1792-1942*. First Edition. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippencott Co.,1942 in "Ralph Ellison Personal library and Ephemera, 1937-2010." Container A/VIII/1. <http://www.loc.gov/item/magbellbib004020>.

being told that he was not talking about my race when he advised me not to be a nigger. He was talking about class rather than race. He frequently gave money to Negro schools" (33). Following her "justification," Hurston recounts his funeral: how all the stories told about him reiterated his masculinity, his sense of honor, justice, and truth. But to use Henry Louis Gates' term, here Hurston signifies.[197] We are, in fact, meant to question the value of the sage advice given by this white man.[198] How can we imagine that someone who spent so much of her career collecting, justifying, and explaining what lying was for her community, takes seriously the correlation between truth and courage? As Hurston later admits in her autobiography: "what I really loved to hear was the menfolks holding a 'lying" session'" (48). Dispelling a correlation between truth and courage, or honor, is precisely what the folk, at least in her account, enables.

Lying, dissembling, storying, and signifying are certainly not unique to Hurston's work. Signs of what Kevin Young describes as the "counterfeit tradition" in African American cultural expression, they operate as resources for "the forging of black lives and selves in all their forms."[199] What for Dunbar is the mask "that grins and lies," Hurston describes as strategy. In her description of the challenges that face a collector of

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[197] The seminal work on Black signification is Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (1988; Oxford, Oxford UP: 2014). Of particular relevance is his chapter "Zora Neale Hurston and the Speakerly Text," 170-216.

[198] In her introduction to *Dust Tracks on a Road*, Maya Angelou expresses puzzlement over Zora's reaction to the advice she is given. She attributes this to a certain distance between author and reader in this autobiography: "the author stands between the content and the reader. It is difficult, if not impossible, to find and touch the real Zora Neale Hurston." Maya Angelou, "Foreword," *Dust Tracks on a Road*: *An Autobiography.* (1942. New York: Harper Perennial, 1996), xii.

[199] Kevin Young, *The Grey Album: On the Blackness of Blackness*. (Minneapolis, MN, Graywolf Press, 2012).

Black folklore in *Mules and Men*, Hurston acknowledges two hurdles: First, "The best source is where there are the least outside influences and these people, being usually under-privileged, are the shyest" (2). Second, there is the hurdle of racial politics: "And the Negro, in spite of his open-faced laughter, his seeming acquiescence, is particularly evasive. You see we are a polite people and we do not say to our questioner, "Get out of here!" We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the white person because, knowing so little about us, he doesn't know what he is missing" (2). Hurston's description assumes (by the end of her account especially) that the questioner is white and male and that the power dynamics of race and gender in the nation means that the anthropologist simply cannot assume universal tactics.[200] She theorizes Black tactics for responding to white intervention, as follows: "The white man is always trying to know into somebody else's business. All right, I'll set something outside the door of my mind for him to play with and handle. He can read my writing but he sho' can't read my mind. I'll put this play toy in his hand, and he will seize it and go away. Then I'll say my say and sing my song" (3).[201] The idea of a "play toy," suggests a way of understanding

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[200] Such factors also play out famously in the WPA collection of slave interviews. In the account of the "Limitations of the Slave Narrative Collection," the LOC acknowledges, "It is probable that the interviewer's race affected an informant's response. […] The relative absence of black interviewers introduced an important source of bias, for the interviewer's race was a significant factor in eliciting responses from the former slaves. The etiquette of Southern race relations influenced the definition of the interview situation for these aged African Americans, and some of their interviewers were even members of the former slaveholding families. As a result, informants may frequently have told their white interviewers "what they wanted to hear." For similar reasons many were undoubtedly less than fully candid or refused to tell a complete story, resulting in a kind of self-censorship." See also Catherine A. Stewart's *Long Past Slavery: Representing Race in the Federal Writer's Project* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2016).

[201] Eric Sundquist elaborates on Hurston's signifying technique in *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993).

radical archival praxis. Rather than dismiss the archive altogether, or even establish a binary relationship between something like the embodied knowledge of repertoire versus the "stable" documentation of the archive, the "play toy" suggests ephemeral possibility for the archive.[202] It challenges what we assume to be archival value and its attendant knowledge structures and creates a counterfeit tradition within the discourse that seeks to position the subject in a particular place in the nation.[203]

The conclusion of *Mules and Men* further elucidates the subversive archival impulse of Hurston's project, as the final folk tale of Sis Cat tellingly interpellates author and subject. The folk tale in this case comes as a sort of surprise at the end of the chapter otherwise focused on Hurston's initiation and apprenticeship with the hoodoo doctor of New Orleans, Kitty Brown. Following a conversation between Kitty Brown and a client in which Kitty Brown explains how to make a man change his mind about leaving, the chapter transitions into a story that seems connected to the chapter if only by virtue of the feline designations. The story basically describes how Sis Cat accidentally releases a rat it has caught for dinner after the rat insists she show her manners and wash up before eating. The next time Sis cat catches the rat, she explains to her prey that she prefers to wash her hands and face and use her manners only after the meal and so proceeds to take

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[202] I am, in a sense, challenging Diana Taylor's notion of archival stability in light of the performative possibilities of the repertoire in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). The play toy example also brings up Freudian psychoanalysis again and the idea that the child works through and repeats the significant events of their life in play in the hopes of "mastering" whatever situation. Play, Freud argues, is undertaken with an "economic motive" or the consideration of the yield of pleasure involved." Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* 8.
[203] Hurston's concern with nation is particularly evident in her work with WPA and the Federal Writer's Project. I will return to this in my discussion of Brodber's geographically flexible archive.

her meal—hence cats bathe themselves after eating. Then in the concluding sentence to *Mules and Men*, Hurston asserts: "I'm sitting here like Sis Cat, washing my face and usin' my manners" (252). The story complete, the author now emerges, not simply as character in the stories she collects, or as collector or producer, but as consumer.

Just as it is impossible to divorce literary Hurston from Hurston the ethnographer or anthropologist, so too is it impossible to divorce her archive from the texts she produces and, ultimately, from her own body, which replaces the traditional site of the archive. Hurston's collection process, particularly in the second half of *Mules and Men* dedicated to her experiences with Hoodoo in New Orleans, and later in Haiti and Jamaica as recorded in *Tell My Horse* (1938), becomes increasingly intertwined with her own body. Her body, for instance, becomes a canvas on which the signs of her initiation are recorded: "With ceremony Turner painted a lightning symbol down my back from my right shoulder to my left hip. […] The Great One was to speak to me in storms." It operates as a surface for recording alternative epistemological abilities: "a pair of eyes was painted on my cheeks as a sign that I could see in more ways than one (*Mules and Men*, 200)." Her flesh is pierced in order to connect her to a new body of believers: "Turner cut the little finger of my right hand and caught the gushing blood in a wine cup […] Then he and all the other five leaders let blood from themselves also and mixed it with wine in another glass" (200). To imagine that the archive for Hurston can somehow be relegated to institutional repository ignores the ways in which her own work reveals alternative sites for knowledge retention, sites, like the body, that do not simply counter

traditional archives but that expand the terms of their institutionalization.[204] *Mules and Men* may begin with a permission to go and collect, but it ends with a subversion of that very process. Flesh, instead, holds truths dismissed as superstition.[205] What for Schomburg is a potential spade with which to mine the soil of history for Black achievement, and for Ellison is the curse of white supremacy disguised as "progress," for Hurston is a brown bag of miscellany that in its fleshly ambivalence threatens in its "lies," a Black archive.

Brodber's Archival Credibility

A postmodern reimagining of Hurston's anthropological experiences in *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse*, Erna Brodber's novel *Louisana* (1994) works as a useful resource to further explore the status of the body as an alternative site that can work both in tandem and in excess of the institutional archive.[206] Metatextually underscoring the affective economies of the archive alluded to in Hurston's texts, *Louisiana* reinforces not only new sites for new histories, but also, new ways of constituting collectivity and its subjects. It presents both the archival impulse as routed through technologies of

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[204] Hazel Carby's suggestion that "Hurston's representation of the folk […] is also the creation of a folk who are outside of history" resonates with Ellison's closing commentary of those who fall outside history and the work of his novel to bring them in. Hazel Carby, "The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston," Edited by M. Awkward, *New Essays on Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 32

[205] If as Spillers teaches, "we think of the "flesh" as a primary narrative" then, I argue that narrative too comprises Black archives. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.

[206] See Samantha Pinto, "Asymmetrical Assumptions: Zora Neale Hurston, Erna Brodber, and the Gendered Fictions of Black Modernity," *Difficult Diasporas* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 106-141.

accumulation and institutional pressures, as well as alternatives to disciplinary shovels and socio-culturally foisted briefcases.

It does not take much to read Ella Townsend, *Louisiana's* protagonist, as a re-imagined Zora Neale Hurston. After all, according to the Prologue, "Ella Townsend was one of those up and coming Black women writers the [WPA] project employed," who was "to retrieve the history of the Blacks […] using oral sources."[207] Like Hurston, Ella studies Anthropology at Columbia University; she has a successful literary career including publications in both *Crisis* and *Opportunity*; and her work supposedly reemerges in the 1970s thanks to the efforts of a "small black woman's press, [which] like all other publishing houses was looking for works on and of black women" (3)—a clear parallel to Alice Walker's "revival" of Hurston in the same decade.[208] But where Hurston opts to return to New York rather than remain in the service of New Orleans hoodoo doctor Luke Turner, who "wanted me to stay with him to the end. It has been a great sorrow to me that I could not say yes," Brodber's protagonist remains and continues

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[207] Erna Brodber, *Louisiana: A Novel* (Oxford, MS: UP of Mississippi, 1994), 3. Subsequent citations in text.

[208] In situating the discovery of Townsend's manuscript in the 1970s and at the ends of a Black woman's press, Brodber seems to be alluding to Alice Walker's essay, "Looking for Zora," originally published in *Ms. Magazine*. 1975, and reprinted in *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*, (San Diego: Harcourt, 1983).Walker's essay starts with the anecdote of Hurston's letter to the editorial department (reminiscent too of the form of *Louisiana's* "Editor's Note," "inquiring if they would be interested in seeing, 'the book I am laboring upon at present" and goes on to account for Hurston's death in seeming obscurity. Walker's essay also traces her own archival methods and discoveries while researching Hurston's life. By alluding to Walker's process in the frame of the book we see a mirroring of the channels and multiple subjectivities at work in Black archivization.

to develop the gift that would eventually see her channeling a variety of women across time, space, and spiritual planes.[209]

The inspiration for Brodber's novel, however, extends beyond parallels between its protagonist and Hurston. For example, invested thematically in interrogating epistemological credibility, *Louisiana* formally takes up Hurston's "lying" trope as a framing device for the novel's epilogue, structured as an introductory note by editor, E.R. Anderson. Assuring readers that Ella Townsend "did exist" (4), Anderson describes how Townsend, an anthropology student employed by the WPA, inexplicably disappeared while on assignment in Louisiana. Consequently, her project was rendered incomplete and her findings unpublished. Fortunately, Anderson claims, Townsend's missing manuscript has resurfaced and so we now are privy to a missing archive of African American history and folklore. Or, at least we would be, if the novel's introductory note were not a sham, for *Louisiana's* protagonist, Ella Townsend, is about as "real" an anthropologist as E.R. Anderson is editor of "The Black World Press; Coral Gardens, Miami, Florida, 20067" (5).

Not only does *Louisiana*'s faux authentication set up the preemptive challenge to empirical positions on evidence and truth at the heart of Hurston's work, but in its ambivalence, it highlights the intersection of alternative epistemologies and racialized subjects' relation to the discursive systems that enunciate them. Although, on the one

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[209]In another parallel with *Louisiana* Hurston writes: "He said that soon I would be in possession of the entire business, for the spirit had spoken to him and told him that I was the last doctor that he would make; that one year and seventy-nine days from then he would die." Hurston, *Mules and Men*, 205. This notion of being in possession of "entire business" resonates with Ella's experiences with Madam Marie whose business Ella takes over after she dies.

hand, the note is identified as Prologue, which contextualizes it within and as a part of the fiction to follow, on the other hand, its tone and structure helps manipulate our expectations of authentication. Highlighting the continued privileging of projects and voices that have somehow been legitimized empirically, the note also attempts to seduce our historicist leanings; hence, we are first presented with a description of the WPA "which provided gainful employment for many writers black and white, male and female" (3).[210] Whether or not we immediately believe the declaration that a particular subject has lived, contextualizing that subject in a legible teleology reinforces such claims—we can now place that subject in a history we "know." The specific address provided at the end of the note also manifests a subversion of our desire to "place" subjects and read them cartographically. Whether or not we immediately recognize the name of the press, we recognize Coral Gables and the structure of the address and so give the claim further value. Finally, perhaps most radically, by classifying Ella Townsend as a Black anthropologist within a redemptive project of a historiography focused on race, the note calls attention to our expectations of her place as a subject in the nation. Are we more inclined, in other words, to give credence to such a discovery because we recognize that it is being appraised by an enterprise with clear stakes in race as identifying marker? If so, idealization has indeed succeeded in establishing yet another ideal subject.

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[210] The novel's introduction seems to suggest the text is historical fiction. However, as the "manuscript" demonstrates, *Louisiana* upends notions of teleological time itself, thereby challenging us to reevaluate where we ascertain historical credibility. Moreover, as *Louisiana* seeks to trouble the rigidity of nationalism and the relationship to the archive, so too the text rejects many of the tenants of the historical novel (as understood to be referencing a particular and singular social history).

Emphasizing the distinction between archivist as subject and the archived as object, the note considers the nature of the real crisis not, in fact, to be Ella's disappearance; after all, it queries: "was Ella Townsend a petty thief, incompetent? The rumor was that she had disappeared with a confidence trickster into a store-front fortune-telling in receptive New Orleans" (3). The crisis as per the "editor" is not the missing person but the missing materials, and the injured party is the institution that had trusted her: "This promising writer, for whom they had even procured a fellowship in Anthropology to upgrade her fieldwork skills, was one of the few to be given the new field aid, an approximation of today's tape recorder. Neither recording machine, reel, transcript nor manuscript was submitted" (3).[211] Apparently "real" evidence is containable and valuable in technology and materiality, while bodies, especially those of the other, be damned.

The idea that what matters most is what can be proven, evidenced, and legitimized underscores not only the introductory note's emphasis on the manuscript, but manifests itself throughout the novel in the burden Ella feels to fulfill her obligations and prove herself "worthy" of the power to collect in the name of an institution. Like Hurston, Ella exhibits an archival impulse formed amidst institutional pressures and financial responsibilities. Quite aware of what counts (thanks to her disciplinary training), she also knows who establishes value. Where Hurston speaks of her struggles with patronage and of "failed" trips to the field, we see Ella agonize over the materials she is

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[211] Ahmed's reading in "Affective Economies," usefully reminds us how "The ordinary or normative subject is reproduced as the injured party: the one "hurt" or even damaged by the "invasion" of others. The bodies of others are hence transformed into "the hated" through a discourse of pain." Ahmed, "Affective Economies," 118.

expected to be producing for the sake of "her masters," Columbia and the WPA: "the girl made a note to be sure to find some way of transposing those sighs and those laughs and other nonverbal expressions of emotions into the transcript she would submit to her masters" (14).[212] Such institutional pressures also manifest in Ella's increasing frustration over the perceived recalcitrance of the subject to which she was assigned, Sue Anne King/Mammy King:

> —One whole side gone--, she thought, --and not a thing to give to the white people. How would it look? This woman they say has important data to give; is important data; she has seen things; had done things; her story is crucial to the history of the struggle of the lower class negro that they want to write. I was chosen to do her. It was an honour. Because of my colour, I could get her to talk. […] Because of my colour, I have nothing from her but orders on this reel. What can I tell them? How is this going to look? (21)

It is worth pausing to think about the extent to which race is implicated in these institutional pressures. Ella is concerned with not having some "thing" to give to "the white people," and she feels particularly burdened by the expectations of access due to her own race, a pressure she acknowledges is clearly more complicated than had been assumed.[213] Ella's frustration comes to a head when, to her dismay, Mammy dies a few days later. Sensing Ella's disappointment over what this loss means for her project and the "them" who expect evidence apparently now impossible to obtain, Lowly telepathically comforts Ella, but not without subtly reinforcing the racialized impetus behind such archival accumulation: "Just tell the white people the old lady has died" (27).

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[212] This observation about Ella's efforts is made by Mammy and Lowly—two of the women Ella/Louisiana channels—before Ella's transformation into medium.
[213] The complexity of access to racialized communities and the ways in which the archival impulse is routed through the oversimplifying, false narratives of white supremacy resonates with Hurston's own issues as detailed in her first efforts at collecting material from her community in Eatonville.

The fears of institutional deviation continue to plague Ella even after she has given herself over to the work of supernatural mediation, developed her own practice, and taken on the new name Louisiana, thereby reflecting just how deeply intertwined the archival impulse can be with dominant power structures—particularly those of white hegemony. Ella writes in Late March 1938, for example: "I do hope [Mammy] does talk about herself and her times because I would love to send some information of this kind back to Columbia in expiation of my crime" (109). Even ten years after that (late 1946-1947), Ella still cannot release the expectations given her for collection. She tries to redeem her "failure" and what she describes as the crime of having kept the recording machine awarded her by Columbia long past its deadline: "Let the record show that Louisiana, Ella Kohl, the former Ella Townsend made every effort to return the recording machine of the project to its rightful owners" (130). By this point, the university has long forgotten about the dispensation of the object; the WPA is no longer operational; and, besides, the technology is out of date: '"Not even the juvenile rehabilitation center [wanted it]. 'Too old,' they said, 'the children would have difficulty handling it'" (131). Struggling to surrender the expectations placed upon her by "the white people," Ella reframes the archival impulse as a debt owed and her deviation from the traditional process of collecting as crime.

Reuben, Ella's husband who narrates the final section of *Louisiana*, also comments on the absurd hold the institution has on his wife as she, weakened and near death, still concerns herself with the project assigned her: '"Good,' she said. I suppose she feels she has struck pay dirt—something more on Mammy's history." Still working for Columbia and the WPA, she is! Can't shake the guilt" (147). What Reuben calls guilt

is shame, and indeed, Ella's shame is part and parcel of the work itself. Accumulating the stories of Black women for the sake of disciplinary narrative places Ella in the unique position of confronting her own subjectivity as well as her own complicity in the objectification of Black subjectivity. Ella's shame also results from failing to meet others' expectations placed on her by her parents, the university, her field, and the federal government's "promise" of some sort of historical inclusion for her race. If, as Sara Ahmed argues, "Shame as an emotion requires a witness: even if a subject feels shame when it is alone, it is the imagined view of the other that is taken on by a subject in relation to itself," [214] then Ella refuses to let herself off the hook not because she is particularly concerned with having injured Columbia or the WPA, but because of how that "crime" is perceived by others.

Take the moment when Ella reaches New York at the bequest of her parent's estate lawyer. Shame defines the contours of the interaction between Mr. Lukas and Ella: first, because of her appearance, which she had, up until this point, taken pride in, and second, because she realizes the extent to which she has disappointed her parents and their hopes for her. Amidst mutual recognition, Ella describes a shame more difficult to redeem than the crime that otherwise defines her project:

> The lawyer's first glance at me told a tale. He had seen me—I hesitate to say "known" me—as a child. My mother had taken me to see them on several occasions and as is the wont, they had headed down books, clothes and so on to me. At my entrance, Mr. Lukas turned cherry pink […]. Sin had entered Mr. Lukas' space in the form one Ella Kohl, now called Louisiana, the former Ella Townsend. The heat of its lair which she brought with her reddened the dear man's cheeks. I knew then—he didn't have to tell me—there was no record of a missing recording machine at Columbia. […] my parents had somehow paid for that first-edition-and-difficult-to-replace gadget and had paid off whatever else was necessary to expunge me and my history from their records. […] We faced

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[214] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 104.

> each other with a common determination—to have this interview as fast as possible—I, so I could weep for distorted history and he, to fumigate in his office. (134)

The shame here appears mutual: Mr. Lukas blushes; Ella expresses a desire to leave his presence as quickly as possible.[215] Most significant, though, is how shame in this interaction disrupts the subject/object dyad: "In shame, I am the object as well as the subject of the feeling. […] In shame, I expose to myself that I am a failure through the gaze of an ideal other."[216] Such dyadic disintegration, however, is not actually detrimental. In fact, it prompts Ella's ultimate rejection of shame and its attendant social pressures. Recognizing the "ideal subject" myth that undergirds shame, Ella declares before leaving Mr. Lukas' office: "Sin, Sir, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder." […] The piercing was instant for I saw his ears redden. I curtseyed again and took leave of that part of my life" (135). Ella here identifies shame as the product of idealization imposed on her by others and, in turn, refuses to affirm its value: hence the ironic curtsey as the ultimate embodiment of her rejection.

Although Ella finally realizes the role of the ideal subject in her direct confrontation with shame in Mr. Lukas's office, the fact is that the ideal subject has always been part and parcel of the project to which she was assigned. After all, the notion of collecting for the sake of national inclusion and racial redefinition rehearses

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[215]Ahmed suggests that hiding is a byproduct of shame; in other words, we avert the gaze or remove ourselves from a site where shame is being produced. So too is the body evidence of the affective state: "Shame consumes the subject and burns on the surface of bodies that are presented to others, a burning that exposes the exposure, and which may be visible in the form of a blush, depending on the skin of the subject, which might or might not show shame through this 'colouring.' Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 104.

[216] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* 106.

representative figures. The expectation of Ella's anthropological endeavor, moreover, is that she too adheres to "the scripts of normative existence,"[217] since those who have sent her to collect have done so to affirm a particular subject's place in the nation. Her deviation from the script—her attention to embodied memory, her infiltration into the community to such an extent that the lines between subject and object are blurred, her inability to produce a "coherent" narrative for the sake of her discipline—produces evidence contrary to the goals of the project, the institution that sends her, and most notably the nation that funds her.[218] Shame, in this case, is less a byproduct of Ella's exceptional situation than a mechanism by which her "white masters" uphold the power structure that makes Black archives marginal in the first place.[219] Pivotal in reorienting Ella's attitude towards her work, her interaction with Mr. Lukas renders visible the affective economy of the archive.[220] Only because Ella has by this point experienced an expansive paradigm of subjectivity—alternative positions and new relationships that do not conform to subject/object dyads—she is better prepared to reject the hold of the ideal

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[217] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 107

[218] Ella is after all sponsored by the Federal Writer's Project through the WPA, which pursues the accumulation of source materials and evidence of Black communities in the United States in the efforts of furthering a particular national narrative, complete with its own scripts.

[219] I am also interested here in how "The New Negro" as "this kind of racial-historical fiction—the weary black dream of a perfect state of being participates in this affective economy of shame." In other words, how does the "need" or impulse to redefine blackness in the nation operate as a reaction to this particular affect. Gates Jr., *The New Negro*, 5.

[220] I am borrowing Ahmed's term "affective economy," which she uses "to suggest that emotions circulate and are distributed across a social as well as psychic field" in order to consider how the archive is also coproduced by these circulating relationships between subjects and objects. Whereas she is interested in "a theory of passion not as the drive to accumulate (whether it be value, power, or meaning), but as that which is accumulated over time," I am invested in the coproduction of passion and accumulation. "Affective Economies," 120.

subject and its attendant shame.

Reminding Ella constantly of the institutional trust, favor, and grace from which she falls, the recording machine is, at least for her, a sort of encapsulated symbol of her shame.[221] Yet what Ella reads as evidence of her crimes, the novel calls archive. After all, the black box is originally entrusted to Ella as a repository for future histories. As per Derrida's description of the archive as "a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded," the black box in *Louisiana* is also the site of access for those who command or dictate the history Ella transcribes. Accordingly, Mammy, Lowly, Louisiana, and Silas function as archons or those "accorded hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives."[222] What is this notorious instrument then? Brodber's use of the black box as a symbol for the archive elucidates, on the one hand, how an externally imposed archival impulse can function to reinforce racial shame. On the other hand, the kaleidoscopic

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[221] Hurston also used a recording machine, "The Sound Scriber University Type Machine," in her own anthropological expeditions, particularly those to the Bahamas and Haiti. Colleague, Alan Lomax describes the use of the recording machine, for instance, in a letter dated August 3, 1935 to the Music Department of the Library of Congress, in which he also describes the inadequacies of the both epistolary and disciplinary conventions for relating the events: "The department's recording machine has had an interesting time this summer and I should like to give you some account of it […]. In many ways this has been most exciting field trip I have made and, really, can only be told in a long, rambling novel, but I shall confine myself to a catalogue of records which, while exciting enough, is by no means adequate for the whole story." Hurston, meanwhile, he describes as an instrumental member of their team: "probably the best informed person today on Western Negro folk-lore […] through Ms. Hurston's influence we were soon living, in an isolated community on St. Simon's island, on such friendly terms with the Negroes as I had never experienced before." Correspondence from Alan Lomax to Oliver Strunk/ Music Department of Library of Congress, 4 August, 1935, Box 3, Folder 115, John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax papers, 1907-1969, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

[222] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 2.

features of the black box disrupt the stability of the symbol, which renders it more akin to Black archives that work through and in excess of the traditional archive. Understanding the archive in such a multifaceted way, however, does not come naturally to Ella. First, she must dispel herself of a disciplinary paradigm unable to account for her lived experiences with the black box.[223]

Ella, for example, finds it difficult to accept that the black box can operate outside of the control and ownership of the white people who put it in her possession. So long as her archival impulse is attached to the institutions that sent her South, she cannot fully understand the work the black box is doing in expanding such a limited horizon. Notice, for instance, Ella's early concerns about how much reel she is using, and whether or not her use of the machine will be considered wasteful. She also expresses fear about leaving the machine for Mammy to record herself unmediated: "I did not want the people's recoding machine to hurt its head. That would be embarrassment plus. I from nowhere was one of the first to be given this instrument, this precious instrument, first of its kind, donated to the programme by the manufacturers" (32). Then, there is of course her

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[223] The Society of American Archivists includes "black box" as one of the terms of its glossary. There it defines "black box" as a "conceptual model used to simplify the representation of a process by indicating only the inputs and outputs of a device without regard to its internal functions or mechanisms." It adds to this a note, which references Frank Boles' and Julia Marks Young's article, "Exploring the Black Box: The Appraisal of University Administrative Records," *American Archivist* 48 (Spring 1985), p. 121-140. There, "the authors argue that for too long the actual process of making archival appraisal decisions (what factors are considered, how much weight they are given, etc.) was implicitly viewed as an impenetrable mystery. Boles and Young defined specific elements that should go into making an appraisal, and argued that these could be refined to a mathematical model." In other words, black boxes as per the archivist's definition also references the mysterious processes of valuation, processes with which Ella now contends. See *Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology.* Society of American Archivists. 2017. s.v. "black box."

repeated concerns throughout her journey with returning said instrument back to its rightful "masters;" again, as if the archons exist in the libraries of her degrees or the government buildings of her funding. Understanding the archive as a static object institutionally "owned" compels Ella to return the archive to Columbia or the WPA. The problem she confronts, however, is that of Black archive. The black box no longer serves the institution for which it was originally created, as there is no room for evidence that takes liberties with the normative script.

Ella's struggle to rid herself of the black box is interesting to think about in relation to Ellison's narrator's inability to "lose" his own briefcase (also donated under the guise of white educational institutionality). In both cases, the narrators feel a sense of responsibility for the items in their care. They both wrestle with the shame that accompanies having failed to fulfill its mission. And yet, Ella's recording machine expands Ellison's metaphor insofar as it is more than a mere repository for histories and continued repression. Instead, it reveals possibilities for disqualified knowledges—those otherwise overlooked by disciplinary conventions and History. As a result, Ella, unlike Ellison's narrator who retains the briefcase even in his hole of hibernation, is finally able to dispose of the instrument: "I left it in the garbage by [the juvenile rehabilitation center] gate. I hope some electronic minded juvenile finds it and learns something from it that will help to set him straight" (131).[224] Ella finally trashes the recording machine only because archival access has shifted to that of a pendant given to her by Reuben:

> since I named myself Louisiana the sisters have not conducted conversation with me via the machine. I like to feel that there is some promotion in that for me.

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[224] In her confrontation with Mr. Lukas, Ella discovers that when she discarded the machine, she was not jettisoning university property but rather her parent's property. They had purchased the machine when their daughter went missing.

> They have been making contact with me via the pendant that I designed and which Reuben got a jeweler to execute. I have never been happy holding something that was not mine, and satisfied that all involved had made the switch from machine to pendant, from just talking to talking and seeing. (132)

Later the pendant will also render itself useless as the archive finally moves into the contours of Ella's flesh. Reuben describes the final shift: "After the pendant and before this last onset of illness, the conversation between Louisiana and her otherworldly people was a private affair between them: they spoke in her head; she wrote what they said. I heard nothing and knew nothing excepting for that which she shared with me. Now conversation still takes place in her head but it is expressed through her speaking organs" (143). Even relegated to the trash, the recording machine retains its original recordings. Although the new messages are now being transmitted elsewhere, the instrument remains ultimately defined by the new channels to which it had access. More akin perhaps to the phonographs in Ellison's narrator's basement than his briefcase, the archive, the pendant, and Ella's body all elucidate an alternative relationship between subject and time crucial to the role of Black archives.[225] Legible only in other frequencies, their subjects have plunged outside of history.[226]

It takes time for Ella to recognize all these possibilities for the black box, as is

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[225]"I'd like to hear five recordings of Louis Armstrong playing and singing 'What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue—all at the same time. […] Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind. 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. And you slip into the breaks and look around. That's what you hear vaguely in Louis' music." Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 8.

[226] The conclusion to the opening chapter of *Louisiana* describes Ella's first engagement with the voices of the women on the machine: "The ears are hearing other frequencies. The child has come through. Anna she'll make it." Brodber, 28. The line strikes a similar chord to Ellison's novel's final line, which uses the same sonic metaphor: "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you." Ellison, 572.

evident in her unrelenting commitment to using empirical language to describe events outside her disciplinary scope. In other words, Ella spends much of the novel trying to make her experiences match anthropology's notational discourse. Her immediate assumption when she first discovers the machine's powers to extract voices and messages otherwise inaccessible to her, for example, is to doubt her sanity. After all, "What are the qualifiers suitable for what I would admit? –'Unconscious involvement?' 'Subconscious involvement?' Nothing I had read had prepared me for the notion of thought transplant or whatever name we give it" (31). After she has convinced herself against madness as explanation, Ella pledges allegiance to science in the face of these events. By week five of her engagement with the machine and its multiple voices, Ella tries to "transcribe and draft conceptual schemes in my head" (63). By week 6, she engages analysis for the sake of history: "On separate pieces of paper list names of people mentioned, list names of places mentioned, list cultural items, then add data as found. […] I would rinse and rinse until everything was down, then with my one little date I would try the historical reconstruction of the life of Mrs. Sue Ann Grant-King" (64).[227] Refusing to surrender to the language of mysticism, Ella renames experiences to fit her disciplinary lexicon. Attempting to connect the relationship between herself, Mammy, and Lowly she reasons: "anthropology of the dead? Celestial ethnography?" (61). In another instance, rather than incorporate "getting over" –the term utilized by Madam Marie, Ella's supernatural

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[227] Analysis is given further credence in Reuben's transcription of Louisiana in her final days: "People's memories of events close in time to them is poor. Poorer still if it is a painful memory. They don't want to remember. The failure as it apparently was in this case, is just so painful and difficult to handle. It inhibits analysis. And putting words on things means analysis. People share post analysis. They file things away until their emotions can deal with them." Brodber, 149.

mentor—into her vocabulary Ella asserts: I prefer to call it hegemony of the spirit. I had experienced hegemony of the spirit" (98). In fact, even after Ella has wholly embraced her role as medium, she continues to reach for the language of the academy, which remains for her a source of epistemological comfort: "I feel that things are going to happen which are going to take me away and away and away from the analysis of those ladies' testimony and from writing that history. I fear that I might only be able to put down the facts that come to me from them. They are facts. I defend that, though I can't prove them to be so" (102).

As hard as it is for Ella to set aside her deeply rooted academic preparation and disciplinary training, gradually she does come to accept the black box's otherworldly possibilities for historiography. We see this slow development in the evolution of her epistemological allowances regarding the recording machine. In her first run at the machine, Ella tries to convince Mammy of the machine's value for her work in its simplest terms, yet falls into a suggestive metaphor of racial violence, perhaps suggesting the racist underpinnings of the project in which she unwittingly participates: "I'm putting this tube round your neck… remember we talked about that? … so I can't get into my black box here all that you have in that head you're so determined to dry out in the sun" (12). When Mammy remains silent at this (understandably so if you gather the subtle undertones of lynching emphasized in the use of ellipses), Ella changes tactics. She rehearses the machine's empirical value in technological detail, as if this will make Mammy more comfortable with the device: "Now, see this red button. It is pushed right down to record what you say. After about an hour it will jump with a ping. Don't let it worry you. It just means that we will have used up one side of the spool" (17). Still

unable to get Mammy to open up to her, Ella finally tries personifying the machine with some success: "So shall we now pick through those brains and put what's in them in my hungry black box" (18). Finally, when Ella refers to the device as "hungry," Mammy interjects. Marking the shift in description from empirical instrument to personified and mystical entity, Mammy inquires: "Where do you come from child? […] You really do talk in two different ways. Can't figure it" (19). From this entry point, the conversation turns into one of Ella's own background, her accent, her Caribbean lineage. By referencing the machine as alive, Ella finally opens up a channel of communication between herself and Mammy.[228] Such anthropomorphism continues in Ella's personal interaction with the machine following her engagement with Mammy and Lowly: "I couldn't avoid dusting it. I found myself talking to it: 'Yes, you there, I see you and I am going to dust you. Think you are going to stop me from tidying this house, you blinking black box?" (49). Again, once personified, the machine seems less intimidating and transforms into a marker of expansive opportunities for accumulation.

Despite its initial parallel in the novel with the "pine box" of interment, the recording machine or "black box," does not simply entomb voices and messages across time and space, but functions as a sort of agential portal between spiritual dimensions.[229]

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[228] As much headway as Ella makes in understanding the alternative epistemological system to which she has access, her academic training seems to a certain extent to hold her captive to the end. For example, when deep into conversation with Mammy, long after the transition to pendant from machine, long into her status as principal medium, Ella still draws upon the Western academy and its archives as sources of fact. Mammy mocks her on this tendency: "As I am writing this Mammy is laughing at me. Information on the Teche strike in the library? News of my mother in the library? Where else Mammy?" Brodber, 139.

[229] Mammy in telepathic conversation with Lowly justifies her decision to not attend Lowly's funeral: "Back cross the sea to your bitty old island, how was I with only these hands, these feet, and that fat head of hair, with Silas, two fading blooms, three units to

In some ways then the black box functions more in step with Foucault's assessment of the archive in *The Archeology of Knowledge* as "the general system of the formation and transformation of statements."[230] Less static than discursive site, the recording machine exhibits the power to act upon its subjects: "the machine pulled out those words, that thought, out of me and in my voice" (33). And as in the terms laid out by *Skin Acts*, whereby the skin can serve as "a fleshy site of relation between self and other, a liminal space of inter-action in which the body left behind, the body as flesh without image, can appear briefly in various specters, shapes, and forms," the black box functions as a sort of metaphor for the Black skin that racializes its subjects.[231]

In its anthropomorphism, the machine also reformulates the archival impulse from something externally motivated by white institutionality and disciplinary convention to Black archives and their attendant impulses. Ella herself struggles to name the motivation for this alternate archive though she recognizes it as outside the constraints of her disciplinary paradigm. For example, hearing Lowly's voice comment on Mammy's death, Ella assumes initially that Mammy must have recalled Lowly's posthumous speech, only to later query: "Or did the machine pull it from her, from her friend, and from me?" (61). Removing "the black box" from the institutional center and the

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set up, to do more, to find the strength to sail cross the seas to see people like birds lowering a pine box into six feet of earth[…]?" Brodber, 11.

[230] Also relevant is Foucault's assertion that: "[The archive] deprives us of our continuities; it dissipates that temporal identity in which we are pleased to look at ourselves when we wish to exorcise the discontinuities of history; it breaks the thread of transcendental teleologies; and where anthropological thought once questioned man's being or subjectivity, it now bursts open the other, and the outside." Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 131.

[231] Stephens, *Skin Acts*, 29

paradigms that entrap Ella, we see her instead accumulate an assemblage in the flesh, thereby tracing a larger, looser, more contextually varied set of coordinates.

Finally, the anthropomorphic agency of the machine introduces the most compelling metaphor for archival technology: Black women's bodies. Despite the fact that the editor's note in the prologue tries to make the crisis of the text the documents, *Louisiana* actually subverts that position and demonstrates how the body, and most especially, Black women's bodies are a critical site for Black archival practice.[232] Hence Ella's description of the Black box after she ultimately assents to the probability of her sanity despite the inexplicability of her experiences: "I felt a softness in that box, the-about-to-cry phase and tell-all phase and I could sense the reconciliation coming. I, the lover, pressed on to opening and to fingering, to locating the essentials, the paper and pencil and to getting ready for the profound intimacy. I depressed the button. With that touch my head grew large, suffused by my liquefied body" (50). Here Ella figures as disembodied gender-ambiguous penetrator of the box rendered female, a version of Spillers's "female flesh ungendered."[233] The phallus is ultimately epistemological and the climax transcendent knowledge. The metaphor is also not one of violence. Despite the ways in which it figures into Ella's anthropological project, here it reveals a certain

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[232] Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* powerfully illustrates the relation between the idea of "evidence" and Black women's bodies. Like the voice of his grandfather that haunts Ellison's narrator, Ursa, *Corregidora's* protagonist hears the instruction: *"… They burned all the documents, Ursa,but they didn't burn what they put in their minds. We got to burn out a wound. Except we got to keep what we need to bear witness. That scar that's left to bear witness. We got to keep it as visible as our blood."* Gayle Jones, *Corredigora* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 72.
[233] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 68.

tender intimacy as the veil between subject and object is torn.[234] Ultimately, the new relationship of the archive to the body outlines the contours of Black feminist archives and their practice. While Derrida's archival lineage is a Freud steeped in the death drive, Brodber works through the corpora (literal and metaphoric) of Hurston for the sake of an archive that reproduces anew.

The notion of the Black box as reproductive space is also reinforced in the text's abundance of maternal metaphors, especially prevalent in interactions between Mammy, Lowly, and Ella. Take the description of Ella's preparation to serve as the newest channel in clear birthing terms: "The child smiles. The baby is turning. You push, sensible Anna. […] Our headwater is breaking" (22), or Lowly's affirmation to Mammy: "The ears are hearing other frequencies. The child has come through. Anna, she'll make it" (28). There is also the statement "two places make babies," which recurs throughout the text, or the fact that Ella herself struggles with biological infertility, as if her body is too busy birthing these alternate lives in her to make room for conventional reproduction.[235] Even Ella's initiation as New Orleans soothsayer is framed as maternal: "I saw myself on the floor. I saw the men around me. I saw Madam's encouraging smile. I heard myself talking to that company in a baby's voice, as if a nine-month old baby can talk. I saw

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[234] The metaphor here also suggests a more Lacanian rendering of the body as invaginated orifice over the phallic body so central to the work of Derrida, for instance.
[235] When Ella references her parents she uses purely clinical language to emphasize their reproductive choices. She "[expands] this thesis concerning their quasi-barrenness. Work. Work kept them from meeting to make babies. […] I was an egg, for those two held in me the potential for all kinds of things they hadn't done and like an egg if I fell I could break and splatter all over their faces. […] This particular egg was to be a medical doctor like [Susan McKinney Steward]. […] To create the right environment for my hatching, they said was the reason for their hard, childless work and for their further hard work when I got into medical school." Brodber, 39.

space. […] My head returned to its normal size" (89). What do these bodies and babies have to do with the archive? The trope of reproduction operates as a Black archival response to fever. In other words, where Derrida reads the "universal" impulse as the product of a death drive, Brodber suggests an alternative impulse rooted in a sort of birth drive.[236] Suggesting the Black box as metaphor for Black women's bodies, however, does not mean conflating it with singular, individual embodiment nor reducing it to performance as embodied memory. Instead, Brodber's reproductive metaphors suggest Black women's bodies as themselves cumulative, multiple, and (re)productive resources.[237] Ella in her climactic self-definition registers, perhaps most clearly, this idea of multiplicity as possibility:

> I am the link between the shores washed by the Caribbean sea, a hole, yet I am what joins your left hand to your right. I join the world of the living and the world of the spirits. I join the past with the present. In me Louise and Sue Ann are joined. Say Suzie Anna as Louise calls Mammy. Do you hear Louisiana there? Now say Lowly as Mammy calls Louise and follow that with Anna as Louise sometimes calls Mammy. Lowly-Anna. There's Louisiana again, particularly if you are lisp-tongued as you could well be. Or you could be Spanish and speak for those two venerable sisters as Louise y Anna. I was called Louisiana, a state in the USA. Sue Ann lived in St. Mary, Louisiana, and Louise lived in St. Mary, Louisiana, Jamaica. Ben is from there too. I am Louisiana. I wear a solid pendant with a hole through its centre. I look through this hole and I can see things. Still I am Mrs. Ella Kohl, married to half-caste Congolese reared in Antwerp by a fairy godfather. I wear long loose fitting white dresses in summer and long black robes

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[236] In thinking through what a "birth drive" could mean for the impulse to archive, it might be worth considering the ways in which reproduction for women under the terms of slavery (a legacy at work in some of the stories Mammy relates) is intertwined with the death drive, or at least the death of the subject as their children are rendered objects of property. Hortense Spillers's work in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Baby" is a useful rubric for such an analysis, particularly her reading of the semantic slippage of *partus sequitur ventrem*, which renders the terms "mother" and "enslavement" as indistinct categories of the illegitimate" Spillers, 80.

[237] In some ways this approach is more Glissantian (less about reversion or the pursuit of singular originality than the diversion of camouflage). Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1989), 23.

> over them in winter. I am Louisiana. I give people their history. I serve God and the venerable sisters. (125)

In their refusal to admit a singular subjectivity, Louisiana challenges the archive's stakes in ideal subjects, its demand of empirical credibility and its investment in linear temporality that imagines a present collection for a future that looks back. In refusing the stakes of their "masters," admitting only to serving God and the venerable sisters, they present us with an archive that in its most fundamentally nationally constituted impetus (WPA) also refuses such limiting constraints. Brodber, channeling Hurston in her own right, thus invites us to imagine Black archives that expands the limitations of its organizing principles, in order that we may discover not only new sites for new histories, but also, new ways of constituting collectivity and its subjects.

CHAPTER THREE

From Fever to Fire: *The Chaneysville Incident*'s Speculative Archives

David Bradley knows a thing or two about archival loss. First, his most well-known novel concludes with a documentary pyre to rival Ellison's *Invisible Man* briefcase bonfire. In *The Chaneysville Incident*'s (1981) final scene, history professor protagonist John Washington—who has spent the course of the novel accumulating information related to the deaths of his father and great-grandfather—decides to dispense with his method of study and its tools. To this end, he builds a structure and burns the constraints of such disciplinary knowledge. Pulsating with empowered possibility and interpretative ambiguity, John's final gesture claims epistemological freedom amidst the archival ashes and "smoke rising from the far side of the hills."[238]

Despite what such a beautifully enigmatic conclusion would lead us to believe, archival sacrifices are actually harder to come by than accidents. Years after penning *The Chaneysville Incident*'s denouement of documentary devastation, Bradley's personal archive was destroyed when a house flood and mold claimed the bibliophile's extensive

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[238] The novel's final scene invites us in as a possible "someone": "As I struck the match it came to me how strange it would all look to someone else, someone from far away." Then, almost immediately, it shuts the metaphoric door of interpretation and reiterates the specificity of the event by drawing attention back to the protagonist's white girlfriend: "I wondered if that someone would understand. Not just someone; Judith." Drawing attention to Judith's concerted efforts to understand John and the events that led him to the hill that day, John's final question interrogates white access to the knowledges and knowledge systems in which Black archives traffic. David Bradley, *The Chaneysville Incident, A Novel*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 432. (Subsequent citations in text)

collection.[239] Less altar than faulty plumbing, over two thousand books (many of them rare and irreplaceable) drowned: victims of happenstance and a leaky toilet.[240]

Compounding the tragic irony of the ordeal, because Bradley lacked the systematicity characteristic of his most famous archivist/protagonist, the extent of the loss remains perpetually unquantifiable. As he confessed in a 2011 interview with Adrienne Gunn shortly after the flood, "You know, I don't even know what I lost. Sometimes I'll look for something and it's not there anymore, and sometimes I'll come up here and here it is."[241] Despite his resignation to the disaster, Bradley's attachment to the collection is clear: "So I had a lot of books […]. You know, for two bucks you could find all sorts of things like 1898 books on constitutional law. That's one I wish I had back. [laughs] I had a copy of a book called *The Negro and How He Fits into Society* [...], which is now

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[239] A point of terminological clarification: I use "collection" and "archive," as per the glossary of the Society of American Archivists. On the one hand, a "collection" means both "a group of materials with some unifying characteristic" and "materials assembled by a person, organization, or repository from a variety of sources." By this rubric, Bradley's books constitute a collection (both organic and artificial). On the other hand, "archives" are 1) "materials created or received […] and preserved because of the enduring value contained in the information they contain or as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator[…]"; and as 2) "The building (or portion thereof) housing archival collections." I also read Bradley's collection as even more narrowly archival following in the tradition of US archivists who adhere to Theodore Schellenberg's approach to "a more inclusive definition of archives, which encompasses a wide variety of documents and records. [For Schellenberg] only materials with secondary value, value beyond their original purpose, could be considered archival." My reading of Bradley's books elucidate what I take to be this secondary value. "A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology," *Society of American Archivists*, s.v. "collection," "archive" https://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/a/archives.

[240] Some of the more memorable victims he cites in the interview include Robert H. deCoy's *The Nigger Bible* (1968), *The Negro and How He Fits into Society* (1837), and an original copy of an 1898 textbook on constitutional law.

[241] "David Bradley: Shelf Lives," interview by Adrienne Gunn, *TriQuarterly*, Northwestern University School of Professional Studies, (Sunday, November 6, 2011).

available online . . . it was written in 1837 and republished after the Civil War."[242] On the one hand, Bradley acknowledges that the fact that some of the content remains digitally accessible tempers the loss. On the other hand, he reckons with the fragility of material evidence. Even those items available digitally, Bradley confesses: "I wish I had back."

As he negotiates the emotional value of his lost archive, Bradley also highlights its market value. While he describes the worth of some items like *The Negro and How He Fits into Society* as invaluable and incredibly rare, he also shares how little he actually paid for the texts. In some cases, the texts are even more precious because of how historically overlooked they are. Thus it takes someone with the ability to identify their value outside the traditional norms of valuation. Someone who, like Bradley, can put them to the use, if not to the service of history, then most certainly fiction. The fact that *The Negro and How He Fits Into Society* is only valued at two-dollars also serves as an apt metaphor for interrogating the place of Black subjects in traditional canons and archive. Thus Bradley's multifaceted reaction to the loss—resignation, laughter, acquiescence, and nostalgia—points simultaneously to the affective economies in which Black archives participate, and to a market from which it seems they cannot escape.

In addition to highlighting the affective dynamics at work in Black archives, Bradley's reflections on the loss of his materials point to the unique emotional and psychological stakes of the process for Black archivists. Take, for instance, Bradley's contemplation of a book given to him by his father. Gunn observes: "*Bradley shows me a book with Dewey Decimal markings, and on the inside cover, a stamp of his father's*. 'It was your father's.' Bradley: Yeah, it was my father's. This was written by John [Hope]

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[242] ibid.

Franklin in 1947. When my father was studying history and writing his books, this is what he knew . . . It's called *From Slavery to Freedom.*" A momentary glimpse into his archival lineage, Bradley does not dwell on the personal value of the piece. Instead, he changes course into a conversation about the differences between reading printed and digital materials. The transition emphasizes the artifactual value of the piece, or the specific characteristics of the material object that make it worth preserving. But the details of that copy, which go otherwise unremarked upon are also quite telling. For one, the title, *From Slavery to Freedom*, suggests a developmental narrative—a teleology of freedom that, as Bradley puts it, "is what [his father] knew." A foundational textbook of African American history, the work not only signals the academic discipline but also its specific approach to the terms of freedom and slavery from which David Bradley, the novelist son, now clearly diverges.[243] Telling too, this particular copy was once catalogued and institutionalized. This means it probably circulated among the networks of Black knowledge production, at least until Bradley's father claimed it for his own private collection. Now, in Bradley's possession, the item's value further increases artifactually thanks to the sentimental attachment that results from a patriarchal legacy of Black archivization and interpretation. The copy of *From Slavery to Freedom* ultimately includes Bradley—or perhaps more appropriately, it conscripts him—into the "we" of African American history and culture, a position from which he now responds.[244]

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[243] The full title of the book Bradley references is *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans* (1947).

[244] My suggestion of Bradley's inclusion here in the "we" reflects upon Stephen Best's *None Like Us: Blackness, Belonging and Aesthetic Life* and his argument of the "we" of melancholy historicism that has thus far defined the African American literary tradition. As he avers, "melancholy historicism is a kind of crime investigation in which the forensic imagination is directed toward the recovery of a "we" at the point of "our"

As Bradley demonstrates in *The Chaneysville Incident*, one of his primary responses to the legacy of history that infiltrates his collection is to argue for more expansive systems of evaluation for Black archives. In other words, what would it take for us to know differently? One of those ways is to appraise differently what constitutes as "evidence" of blackness. In the context of Black archives that are systematically overwritten by history, the differences between archival and historical value are especially relevant.[245] Bradley gestures to such expansion in his reflections on what it would have meant to lose *Sculpture of a City: Philadelphia's Treasures* to the flood: "It would have killed me to lose this […] it's old enough that there's not going to be another one, and it basically tells you where all the sculpture was, the public sculpture, in the city of Philadelphia at the time." A testament to its archival value, Bradley emphasizes the book's originality.[246] He also points to the work's historical value by emphasizing space

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violent origin." Stephen Best, *None Like Us: Blackness, Belonging, and Aesthetic Life*, (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2018), Kindle edition, Introduction.

[245] For the Society of American Archivists, historical value is defined as: The usefulness or significance of records for understanding the past. [As well as] The importance or usefulness of records that justifies their continued preservation because of the enduring administrative, legal, fiscal, or evidential information they contain." In other words, historical value means that the material is deemed useful for the project of history. Archival value, on the other hand, is less concerned with the portability of the resource than the specific qualities that would determine its originality. "A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology," *Society of American Archivists*, s.v. "historical value," "archival value," https://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/a/archives. O'Toole usefully elucidates archival value as primarily invested in uniqueness: "Of all the core archival concepts, none has been more central or more frequently identified than the idea of uniqueness. Archival records are thought above all to be unique, and much of their value is seen as a consequence of this inescapable circumstance. Unlike other forms of information, especially library materials, archival records are one of a kind. In professional practice, archivists rest secure in the knowledge that the uniqueness of the materials in their care justifies their efforts and makes their collections valuable." James M. O'Toole, 'On the Idea of Uniqueness'. *American Archivist* 57.4 (1994): 633.

[246] Of *Sculpture of a City*, Bradley also claims: "It would be hard to find that elsewhere; maybe you can find it on Google, or some online page if you know where to look, but

as a key resource of historical knowledge.[247] More implicitly, however, Bradley gestures to another element outside of the conventional approach to archival valuation. One might overlook the fact that the "time" of *Sculpture of a City*—1974 Philadelphia—is also the setting of his first novel, *South Street*. The hypothetical reflection culminates, therefore, in an interplay between source material and fiction,[248] which reiterates the speculative dimension of Black archives and their epistemologies.

In its treatment of the troubled relationship between archives, history, and blackness, this chapter argues that *The Chaneysville Incident* presents us with a subjunctive history—that is, a history rooted in possibility—and a knowledge less disqualified and subjugated than speculative. To speak of speculative knowledge, however, is to introduce from the onset a paradox. Speculation traffics in imagination and conjecture, which seem antithetical to "knowledge" and the positivist myth of archival evidence.[249] Instead, speculation correlates with the "aspirational possibility" of the archive.[250] Even in its most conventional understanding as a repository for a future

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probably you wouldn't." Not only is the text singular, therefore, because "there's not going to be another one," but because it probably doesn't have a digital version.

[247] *Sculpture of a City* makes literalizes de Certeau's claim in *The Writing of History* that "The historical book or article […] is the product of a place." De Certeau, *The Writing of History*. Translated by Tom Conley. (New York: Columbia UP, 1988), 64.

[248] The title of his first novel *South Street* plainly signifies the value of space at least as thematic organizer. Meanwhile, *The Chaneysville Incident* constantly tracks the movement through space of its protagonist and ultimately culminates in a reading of space as epistemological alternative to documentary evidence.

[249] Both the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* and the *New Oxford American Dictionary* cite "knowledge" as a direct counterpoint to "speculation."

[250] Arjun Appadurai's "Archive and Aspiration" clarifies: "Rather than being the tomb of the trace, the archive is more frequently the product of the anticipation of collective memory. Thus the archive is itself an aspiration rather than a recollection" (15). Appadurai, Arjun. "Archive and Aspiration." *Information Is Alive: Art and Theory on Archiving Data*. Ed. Joke Brouwer and Arjen Mulder. (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2003): 14-25.

history, the archive is, indeed, the work of imagination; it makes of scraps possibilities.[251] The notion of the archive's speculative possibilities resonates with what Saidiya Hartman describes as the "critical fabulation" necessary to paint a fuller picture of the lives of those for whom the archive proves not only silencing, but violently so. According to her 2008 "Venus in Two Acts," critical fabulation "[strains] against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the same time, [enacts] the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration."[252] However, where Hartman finds that labor to be the work of critics reengaging with the archive and the afterlives of slavery, I propose a speculative lens integral to Black archives themselves. In other words, an act of collecting that organizes itself around critical fabulation rather than the traditional definition of archives as "material repositories for a future history."

By projecting into the future, archivists already imagine the many ways in which an object can be of use to scholars. They imagine possible concerns and consider possible directions for fields writ large. Historians, meanwhile, imagine the historical value of particular resources. While all of this is true for all archives, I argue it is especially integral for Black archives that must navigate value systems—historically, archivally, ontologically, epistemologically—inextricable from the project of white supremacy. In that vein, this chapter asks us to interrogate what it would mean to imagine a future for

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[251] Pierre Nora describes the mystery as affective condition: "Since no one knows what the past will be made of next, anxiety turns everything into a trace, a possible indication, a hint of history that contaminates the innocence of all things." Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire,*" *Representations* 26 (Spring,1989): 17.
[252] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 26 12.2 (June 2008): 11.

blackness when making determination of artifacts for history. What value system is being used to appraise Black archives and their contents, and to what ends?[253]

To be fair, even traditional archives are often discussed in terms of economic systems. Archivists talk, for example, of "archival value" (the value of documentary materials for continuing preservation), "primary value" (the material's value with regards to the originating agency or user), and secondary value (the material's value for other agencies and private users). Items with secondary value can also be distinguished by "evidential value" (documentation of a material's producer) and "informational value" (the information a material provides related to, but not directly about, its producer).[254] Of the physical objects themselves there is "artifactual" or "intrinsic value" (the specific qualities and characteristics of a material that require they be preserved in their original physical form)[255] as well as "digital artifactual value."[256]

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[253] Jean-Christophe Cloutier's *Shadow Archives: The Lifecycles of African American Literature* elaborates the concept of value as it relates to the lifecycle of archives. The work's attention to '"secondary value or repurposing of a document," which it reads as a "second lifecycle, a kind of afterlife, akin to secular resurrection" is especially relevant to Bradley's treatment of archival value and its stakes in Black being in *The Chaneysville Incident* (18). "Far from representing the triumph of the empirical in literary studies, the archive therefore might hold sway in that discipline in part because of the way it taps into basic fantasies of immortality and offers a balm against the threat of loss and impermanence. In seeking the dry bones of evidence, we have […] stumbled upon spirituality even if we, too, prefer to deny it." Cloutier, 19.

[254] See T.R. Schellenberg, "The Appraisal of Modern Public Records," *A Modern Archives Reader*, Eds. Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch (National Archives and Records Service: Washington DC, 1984), 57-70.

[255] For a comprehensive definition of intrinsic value see, "Intrinsic Value in Archive Materials," Reprinted from National Archives and Records Service Staff Information Paper 21 (Washington: National Archives and Records Service, 1982) in *A Modern Archives Reader*, Eds. Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch, Washington DC (1984): 91-99.

[256] For more on digital artifactual value see Ronald Abbot, *Going Digital: Electronic Images in the Library Catalog and Beyond* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1995).

The glossary of Archival and Records Terminology of the Society of American Archivists cites at least nineteen entries that contain the word "value."[257] Artifacts are "evaluated" or "appraised" in order to establish value and determine acquisition, and they undergo processes of "preservation" and "conservation," so as to maintain a particular object's value by extending its lifespan. In addition, we must also consider the affective economies in which archives participate—a factor often outside the purview of even the most expansive archival glossaries. What are the emotional costs of archivization? What does the affective labor of valuation, appraisal, preservation look like for Black archives? Determinations of value—both at the level of institutions, where that process is formalized and regulated, and in private, personal collections, as is the case with Bradley's extensive book collection—thus define the process of archivization. When it comes to archives, there is, in other words, no way around the market.

Speculation usefully services this question of value because it draws attention to the taken-for-grantedness of archival value as much as it does the problematic underpinnings of history for Black subjects. To follow, a few definitions of "speculation" that are particularly relevant to the concerns of Black archives: 1. power/action of seeing; 2. a place from which a wide view is obtained; 3. a spectacular entertainment or show; 4. the profound study of some subject; 5. the conjectural anticipation of something; a plan or scheme; 6. engagement in any business enterprise or transaction of a venturesome or risky nature, but offering the chance of great or unusual gain; and finally, the action or

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[257] These include administrative value, archival value, artifactual value, associational value, continuing value, enduring value, ephemeral value, evidential value, fair market value, fiscal value, historical value, informational value, intrinsic value, legal value, monetary value, operational value, permanent value, primary value, and secondary value.

practice of buying and selling goods, land, stocks and shares, etc., in order to profit by the rise or fall in the market value.[258] To speak of speculative archives also means to call up speculative fiction as a literary genre that imagines futures outside of empirical-material realities.[259]

Bradley's negotiations with archival loss (both on the page and in person) invites us to consider what makes Black archives, whether institutionalized or housed in attics and living rooms, so valuable. In that vein, this chapter shifts from earlier chapters' engagements with the archive as marked by the impulse to accumulate and consign (whether that be in a briefcase or on the flesh), to an examination of the Black archival impulse as marked by valuation and interpretation. Taking seriously the question: "How do Black archives advance Black interests?", the chapter moves the project from the who and how of the race to collect, to the why and for what ends. In concert with Appadurai's claim that "all design, all agency and all intentionalities come from the uses we make of the archive, not from the archive itself,"[260] the chapter begins by working backward from what has been mythologized as the archive's endpoint: history. For this, it turns to Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident,* as a way to explore the limitations of "historical value" in the context of Black archival praxis. It interrogates history's investment in teleology, its relationship to "ideal subjects," its patriarchal legacy, and, in the case of

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[258] Oxford English Dictionary, "Speculation,", accessed February 20, 2019, https://www-oed-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/186113?redirectedFrom=speculation#eid.
[259] See Marek Oziewicz, "Speculative Fiction," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2019).
[260] Arjun Appadurai, "Archive and Aspiration." *Information Is Alive: Art and Theory on Archiving Data*. Ed. Joke Brouwer and Arjen Mulder (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2003): 14-25.

Black studies in particular, what Stephen Best describes as its "forensic imagination." It engages with the idea of space as archival and knowledge producing, before turning to question the stakes of "archival" or "artifactual value" that render some items but "scraps" to history. In lieu of the conventional models of archival appraisal, *The Chaneysville Incident* offers up an alternative system more relevant and useful for thinking about Black archives: speculative value, and its attendant epistemology: speculative knowledge. As Bradley's work elucidates, once we disentangle Black archives from the overdetermined teleological patriarchies of history's "ideal subjects," we find new, liberating, routes for the speculative "may have happened."

History Meets Its Match

Before the "may have happened," a brief overview of what does happen in *The Chaneysville Incident*. Set primarily in Bedford County, PA, over the course of ten days (March 3, 1979-March 12, 1979), Bradley's novel follows University of Pennsylvania history professor John Washington on the reluctant trek home to care for "Old Jack" Crawley. One of John's father's oldest and most loyal friends, Old Jack acts as a sort of surrogate father to John after Moses' unexpected death. Now reunited after years of John's self-imposed exile from home, Old Jack and John can finally talk candidly about Moses. For the first time, John learns details of his father's life, including his relationships in the town, his reputation amongst its wealthy white men, and even his feelings towards his two young sons. John is also bequeathed his inheritance (of which he had no prior knowledge), which includes a large plot of land and a folio with the names of the white men that had essentially subsidized his father's bootlegging enterprise.

Unfortunately, John and Old Jack's time together is short lived. Within a week, Old Jack succumbs to the illness that prompted John's mother to call her son back. In the wake of Old Jack's death, John is left with resurrected memories and a newly kindled interest in his own history and that of the town from which he had long since fled.

At this point in his life John is better equipped to handle the mysteries that have for so long eluded him, or at least so he thinks. Armed with extensive training in archival research and historical interpretation, John embarks on a journey to uncover his father's legacy. He originally seeks answers to questions like: Who was Moses Washington to the community? What power did his bootlegging afford him in town? Where did he come from and how did he end up here?[261] In his pursuit, John ends up stumbling across a much longer legacy of local race relations, including his great-grandfather C.K. Washington's involvement in the underground railroad that ran through town. Once he is able to trace his family back generations, John discovers a patriarchal pattern of suicide from C.K.'s decision (and that of twelve former enslaved people in his care) to end his

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[261] Pierre Nora's reading of memory, history and archives draws a clear connection between history and genealogical quests of the sort John here undertakes. According to Nora, modern memory's archival impulse (or "the passage from memory to history"), "has required every social group to redefine its identity through the revitalization of its own history. […] Indeed, there is hardly a family today in which some member has not recently sought to document as accurately as possible his or her ancestors' furtive existences. The increase in genealogical research is a massive new phenomenon: the national archives reports that 43 percent of those doing archival research in 1982 were working on genealogical history, as compared with the 38 percent who were university researchers." In *The Chaneysville Incident*, John clearly falls into the majority of archival researches motivated by his own genealogy, and yet, his position as historian means he often performs the role of "university researcher" so as to bolster his authority and justify his project, in other words, to avoid speculation. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire," Representations* 26 (Spring, 1989): 15.

own life rather than face capture and return to slavery.[262] John does not, however, make this particular discovery, the epiphany with which the novel culminates, with the help of the dusty books or misfiled paperwork that otherwise define his archival quest. Instead, it is only when he reaches the graveyard where his great-grandfather and father died and are buried that John realizes the insufficiencies and dangers of his discipline's approach to knowledge. Less the blank page on which to write his history, John discovers there a site already brimming, saturated, and populated; a space where the chronology of his discipline and the teleology of his journey are upended in the face of memory.[263] Subverting what de Certeau describes as the "inaugural scene" so foundational to the project of history, John lights a match.[264] Burning the materials of his scholastic interpretation, his archive fever turns pyre and history becomes the allotted sacrifice.

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[262] Although the pattern of suicide is actually initiated by Harriette Brewer, C.K.'s love's interest (she also leads the fugitive slaves to where C.K. finds them), John insists on a patriarchal legacy and emphasizes C.K.'s role, in some cases at the expense of her leadership. In the spirit of his father before him, John often patronizes and silences the voices of the women in his life, his treatment of this history is no exception.

[263] Pierre Nora's definition of memory usefully summarizes the realization to which John arrives in his pursuit of history: "memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic-responsive to each avenue of conveyance or phenomenal screen, to every censorship or projection." Memory, is, in other words, always, already speculative. Nora, 8.

[264] In Michel de Certeau's analysis of the inaugural scene, Amerigo Vespucci encounters for the first time the nude female body of "Indian "America," [and so], after a moment of stupor, the conqueror will write the body of the other and trace there his own history. From her he will make a historied body-a blazon-of his labors and phantasms. She will be "Latin" America." For him this scene represents "the beginning of a new function of writing in the West." As he —"the moment of a rupture between a subject and an object of the operation, between a will to write and a written body (or a body to be written)." Michel De Certeau, *The Writing of History,* trans. Tom Conley, (New York: Columbia UP, 1988), xxv.

The status of history in *The Chaneysville Incident* has certainly received its share of critical attention.[265] Nevertheless, as important as it is to trace how the novel takes up history as politically conditioned or how it critiques history's alleged universality, the aim here is not to subordinate the archive to another conversation about history, especially when such a hierarchy reaffirms Humanism's stakes in evidence.[266] I encourage us, instead, to focus on historical value as a category for appraising Black archives. Hence the questions: what is the relationship between Black archives and history? And, how do we rate the usefulness of the resources to the service of the field? For this, one must reckon with disciplinary expectations, including the pressure of teleology. As Michel de Certeau lays out in *The Writing of History* (1988):

> The first constraint of discourse consists in prescribing for beginnings what is in reality a point of arrival, and even what would be a vanishing point in research. [….] The exposition follows a chronological order. It takes the oldest point as its beginning. […] In becoming a text, history conforms to a second constraint. While research is interminable, the text must have an ending, and this structure of finality bends back upon the introduction, which is already organized by the need to finish.[267]

In other words, if historical value means the utility of an object for the purposes of history, and, that project is already teleologically predetermined, then Black archives inevitably confront the temporal predilections of history when assessing "historical

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[265] See W. Lawrence Hogue's "Problematizing History: David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident*," *College Language Association* 38.4 (June 1995): 441-460; Kenneth Warren's *What Was African American Literature?;* Missy Dehn Kubitschek's "So You Want A History, Do You?: Epistemologies and *The Chaneysville Incident Mississippi Quarterly* 49.4 (Fall 1996): 755-774.

[266] Nora's assertion that the archive is produced as a result of the pressure to historicize memory elucidates some of the affective conditions to which the Black archive is subject : "The indiscriminate production of archives is the acute effect of a new consciousness, the clearest expression of the terrorism of historicized memory." Nora, 291.

[267] De Certeau, 86.

value." To imagine an object's usefulness requires imagining its place (albeit imaginary) within some sort of a priori chronology.

The challenge between the archive and historical time is indeed the entry point to *The Chaneysville Incident's* representation of Black archives. The novel's chapter titles read like file names or metadata entries (e.g. "197903042100 (Sunday)." A codified time signature: year, month, day, time of day, day of the week introduces the narration, which emphasizes, from the onset, the expectation of chronology. Despite this framing pressure, the narration refuses linearity. Each chapter, for example, consists of furtive flashbacks, which accumulate without necessarily organizing past events. Highlighting the paratactic form of archives, wherein interpretation is gathered through juxtaposition, readers are thrust from a conversation between John and an ailing Jack to a scene between the two at least ten years earlier. At best, tenuous thematic connections link the two. Less history than historiography in process, *The Chaneysville Incident* reads like the inner working of a historian as he makes determinations about the value of the resources at his disposal.

In addition to John's memories, the novel manages a multitude of temporalities and stories that range from the private experiences of John's great-grandfather CK Washington to the long-history of Black experience in the United States. It moves in some chapters from the interiority of an enslaved person on the run to John's problems with his white psychologist girlfriend more than a century later. Chapters move backward and forward in time within the experiences of the narrator's paternal line. Likewise, they shift registers between his personal and professional self, his role as protagonist and his persona as narrator. Perhaps most jarring of all these features though, are the lectures it includes on topics related to—but not necessarily advancing—the novel's plot (e.g. the

Methodist Church's eighteenth-century position on slavery). The novel's temporal structure operates, in other words, in the vein of what Michelle Wright theorizes as "epiphenomenal time."[268] In "epiphenomenal time" the now through which the past, present, and future are always interpreted does not preclude any and all causality: "only a *direct*, or *linear*, causality." Bradley's novel also refuses to cater to historical value and its imperative to trace cause and effect for the sake of explanation. Instead, it metaphorically positions the reader in front of a series of boxes that contain the multiple forms, voices, genres, materials, and registers of Black archives.

In addition to its structural representation of Black archival time, the novel also thematizes the breakdown of history's teleological imperative. Take John's effort to establish a timeline of his hometown. With the help of notecards and complicated coded systems, John tries to determine a stable point for the town's origin. Working within the constraints of his historical training, he seeks to add historical value to his hometown, which as he describes it has now become a "forgotten place." The effort to accumulate for the sake of understanding, however, ultimately proves useless. As John later admits, the facts prove wanting, but not because they do not exist or he does not have access to them. The novel is less a call to fill in the silences or point out the gaps in the archive than it is a reckoning with the standard of fact as evidence: "Oh, I had seen the facts, there was no shortage of facts; but I could not discern the shape that they filled in" (146). Again, in this the project differs from critical fabulation, at least at the onset. The

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[268] For Wright, "the current moment, or "now" can certainly correlate with other moments, but one cannot argue that it is always already the effect of a specific, previous moment." Michelle W. Wright, *The Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology*, (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2015), 4.

epistemological paradigm, and not just the material itself, proves wanting. John's historicizing thus falls short, not because he fails to acquire the right information but because Black archives work to the service of speculative, not historical value. That fact, however, it will take him the course of the novel to discover.

Glimpses of the role speculative knowledge plays in *The Chaneysville Incident* can be seen in John's first lecture about his hometown.[269] In this lecture, John insists on linearity as his goal is to establish a historical timeline for the town. Fittingly, speculation, in the sense of a risky business enterprise offering the chance of unusual gain, proves central to the town's development. Originally named "Raystown," John's hometown was first "discovered" by Captain Thomas Powell of Virginia. After hearing rumors of silver, Captain Powell visited only to discover the claims to have been the result of "one group of these transient Indians, probably Cherokees, […which] evidently had rather a malicious sense of humor" (9). His reports discouraged others from visiting, that is, until his grandson returned a century later "leading a party of twelve men" including Richard Iiames. Despite brief moments of popularity during the War of 1812 and the Civil War, and Frederick Jackson Turner's having once declared it "a watermark of westward expansion," the town never really thrives (11). Eventually, the train system bypasses it, and people stop visiting altogether. Now functioning more as archive for a past pregnant with historical possibility than a hub of public life, the town is nearly

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[269] "Epiphenomenal time [is] … the 'now,' through which the past, present, and future are always interpreted . . . [it] denotes the current moment, a moment that is not directly borne out of another. . . [it] does not preclude any and all causality: only a direct, or linear, causality." Wright, 4.

inaccessible by public transportation. It is a veritable "forgotten place," or would be, if John had not taken up the task to memorialize its forgetting.

But, as with the encoded chapter titles, there is something in the novel that does not love arrangement. Consequently, the emphasis on the town in the opening lecture introduces the destabilization of empirical truth and certainty central to the novel's critique of historical and archival value. For example, in the middle of the lecture on his hometown, when John's authority as historian seems so secure, he gestures to archival uncertainty (the material does not clarify) and historical debate (the interpretation proves insufficient): "There is some doubt about the accuracy of the claim that it was Ray's trading post that formed the nucleus of the Town. […] the spelling of the name in some documents is odd. One historian reports that the actual nuclear establishment was a tavern, and another claims it was operated by John, not Robert, Ray. Such is history" (10). John cannot quite parse what these failures mean for his project, at least not yet. Nevertheless, they prove early cracks in the armature of historical methodology, and, as a result, in its power as ontological resource.

Similarly, John's reading of the "discovery" of the town by Captain Powell as a product of intentional misleading on behalf of a community of Native Americans against the potential white settler, destabilizes originary truth claims—claims central to traditional historical value. For not only is the information incomplete because "such is history," but the events themselves are defined by manipulation and fabrications. Ultimately these false promises highlight the political stakes of the project to settle. After all, the Native Americans intentionally mislead the captain not because of their irreverent sense of humor (which John seems to suggest), but because the project of white

settlement exploits Native Americans. Indeed, the fact that John chooses to emphasize their humor as character trait over their cunning as subversive technique against exploitation demonstrates how imbricated history as a discipline is in the aims of white supremacy.

Refusing to cater to historical diachrony, *The Chaneysville Incident* introduces synchronicity as a way to read Black archival time. One of the ways the novel trains its reader into this temporality is by saturating the text with possible symbols. In many cases, these symbols remain unexplained, more gestural than explanatory. For example, John points out in his lecture about the town that during the Whiskey Rebellion, George Washington supposedly visited in order to protect the army in danger of local rebellion against the federal tax on spirits. The information is presented as an innocuous detail despite the fact that it calls our attention to the protagonist's surname and his father's bootlegging legacy. John, however, makes no connection apparent. While he is committed to a neat historical timeline, John remains blind to alternative temporalities that would conflate present and past and so render the archive more epiphonemic than linear.

Even when the symbols are more explicit, John still often remains oblivious. The first, and most obvious of these, is the early mention of the twelve men that accompany Joseph on the expedition to settle the town. A parallel to the central plot of the twelve fugitive slaves of Moses' story, John details that of these twelve early settlers to the town, only the death of two are recorded: "one man, Joseph Johnson, died in 1731, but the second of the party to die, Richard Iiames, lasted until January 26, 1758" (10). Signaling the insufficiencies of the archive, only two deaths are recorded. How the others died, one

can only speculate. Even so, the archive does at least provide two names, one of which is particularly significant to the novel's central event: Iiames. Iiames, after all, calls up the land where the fugitive slaves are buried, where C.K. and Moses Washington die, and where John eventually burns the artifacts of his discipline.[270]

Tracing the Iiames connection—using the land as archival clue to establish a cause and effect relationship for the aforementioned characters—is, I will admit, tempting. Teleology, after all, promises clarity. The novel anticipates and rejects such efforts, however, by creating multiple points of connection. In doing so, it establishes a much broader network of understanding. For instance, twelve white men also threaten to kill Josh after he is caught in a relationship with a white woman in town. As Jack describes the incident, Moses takes a sheet from one of the Klansmen and impersonates a member to save his friend Josh from a lynching. Moses recounts, "it was too dark for me to see the boots, but it wasn't too dark for me to count, an' when he got back to the middle a the clearin' there was thirteen sheets there" (106). Moses' plan is ultimately successful and Josh escapes. To a pining Josh who laments his broken heart, Moses simply responds: "I ain't got no time to be huntin' down women anyways; we got twelve men to lay for" (110). Of Moses' vengeance plot we do not know much more. The twelve men ultimately meet untimely ends, and the role Moses played in their deaths is left up to us to conjecture. Again, the fact that we know no details of the death of these 12 resonates with the settlers who perished without leaving a trace at the town's foundation,

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[270] The scene plays out in John's recounting of the narrative of the fugitive slaves for Judith as they walk towards the graveyard: "I remembered what hillside that was, and I stood there, shivering with the cold and looking out over the place where Moses Washington had died. 'Here,' she said, after a while. […] 'It looks like…' 'A graveyard […] family graveyard. Belonging to a family named Iiames" (377).

as well as the 12 enslaved people that die with C.K. at the graveyard. Why conflate these groups of men: Black and white? The novel insists upon synchronous possibility and speculation even at the level of its symbols. In this way, it challenges the "we" of archival origin and opens up possibility without the pressure of explanation. In the spirit of Black archives, *The Chaneysville Incident* refuses to be conscripted to history and historical value. Instead, it organizes a different knowledge system, which requires its own reading practice.

Another problem with history *The Chaneysville Incident* faces is at the level of genre. In many ways, this is not a new problem. Archival novels have often been deemed historical novels even when they explicitly critique, question, and disavow history's epistemological authority.[271] Straddling the need for documents and the use of fiction, Bradley's work is, as he describes it, "The story of something that might have happened."[272] This open-ended sense of possibility is essentially the work of an archive, which provides the material for the might-have-happened.[273] Less counter-archive than counter-factual archive, this mode of Black archivization removes the Black subject from history as conventionally understood. For its critique of the process of history-making, its

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[271] In his study on Black prize-winning novelists from 1977-1993, Michael DeRell Hill deems David Bradley a Black Archivist, which for him "[…] names prizewinning African American novelists between 1977 and 1993 [who] scoured academic collections and touted skillful writers such as Hurston, Hughes, Wheatley, Jean Toomer, Dorothy West, and Wallace Thurman." Hill, Michael D. Hill, *The Ethics of Swagger: Prizewinning African American Novels, 1977-1993*, (Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 2013), 12.

[272] Bradley, "The Business of Writing," 24.

[273] In stating that archives can only provide sources for possible histories, I come up against arguments that take the archive as the repository of evidence. Still, such a repository always demands interpretive gestures (both at the level of archival collection and of its narrativization). What they "prove" is thus always only conditional.

privileging of the disordered, expansive opportunities of archival knowledge, its meta-fictive awareness of the archival process, and its explicit representation of "the search for documentation, the appraisal of records, the taking of notes, the storing and arrangement of papers,"[274] *The Chaneysville Incident* proves less historical than the archival novel.[275]

Indeed, for as committed as his protagonist is to history—John Washington is Professor of African American History at the University of Pennsylvania, or as he describes it a specialist in "atrocities"—David Bradley overtly refuses it. For example, to an interviewer who describes *The Chaneysville Incident* as "a historical novel," Bradley retorts: "That's what you say!" The question is rephrased: "Well, it has this historical incident at the core. How much of it is researchable history?" Ironically, in response to this version of the question, Bradley concedes to what sounds like quite a lot of history for a text that in his esteem is so definitely *not* a historical novel:

> The further back you get, and the more objective you get, the more researchable it is. There was never a C.K. Washington. There was never a C.K. Washington's father, Zack. There was a rebellion in Louisiana at that time, and they did place heads on stakes. There was a man named Lewis Bolah, who betrayed that rebellion, who did serve with Commodore Perry, did petition the legislature of Virginia for permission to live in Virginia. There was a Cherokee nation that had slaves, and experienced difficulties because gold was discovered on their land. There were the things C.K. Washington supposedly wrote. They were usually listed as anonymous.[276]

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[274] Marco Codebo, *Narrating from the Archive: Novels, Records and Bureaucrats in the Modern Age,* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh, Dickinson UP, 2010), 14-15.
[275] Reading John as caught up in a modernist dilemma, W. Lawrence Hogue describes *The Chaneysville Incident* as "historiographic metafiction [that] is intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lays claim to historical events. It rewrites history yet calls history as a referent into question." Hogue ultimately takes up the novel as straddling modern and postmodern fiction, while my classification of the novel as archival novel emphasizes the aesthetic possibilities of archival representation. For my purposes, John's dilemma is less modernist than a product of his racialization and negotiation with history. See W. Lawrence Hogue, "Problematizing History: David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident*." *CLA Journal* 38.4 (June 1995): 442.
[276] Bradley, "The Business of Writing," 24.

To the "facts" Bradley lists, we could add too that the novel's protagonist is a historian in the throes of historical investigation and that one of its central themes treats the relationship of history to the African American experience. Even so, still Bradley refuses the label, "historical fiction." He confesses:

> You see, I hate it. I hate history on account of my father because my father refused to have any fun with the stuff. And it's, you know, it's a style of black history, name history; you read a bibliography or a book, it consists almost entirely of names, no faces, no events, and you don't know what's going on. I mean it's boring. It was boring to me. I like stories. So, that's when I decided that John had to be a historian; I figured, O.K., I'm gonna let the guy talk about history.[277]

History, in other words, functions as "raw material" rather than evidentiary resource. For instance, writing in the spirit of the archive, Bradley finds "the beginnings of lines in history, and I sort of filled in the dots."[278] Such "filling in the dots," is the speculative work of Black archives, which insist on fiction as the more worthwhile endeavor of narrativizing the past because it makes explicit the extent to which any effort to understand blackness is embroiled in the conjectural.[279]

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[277] Bradley, "The Business of Writing," 27.

[278] This notion of the "beginnings of lines in history" is important for Bradley as it speaks to his skepticism about the role African Americans have played in the historical narratives that circulate. As he describes in his interview for *The Missouri Review*: "If you're a black person in this country and you believe what the history books say about you and your people, you'd probably figure you ought to just die and get out of everybody's way because if it wasn't for you everything would have been cool. This was my first indication that maybe the problem wasn't history, but the history that I'd been taught." "An Interview with David Bradley," Interview by Kay Bonetti, *The Missouri Review*. 15.3 (1992): 73.

[279] Wynter's claim in "The Ceremony Must Be Found" is useful here as it clarifies some of Bradley's resistance to history as paradigmatic mode for articulating the past. As she reiterates, imagination, and in particular that of literary fiction opens up new possibilities of human experience and its definition: "Hence the paradox of the major proposal that we make: that it is the literary humanities which should be the umbrella site for the

Madhu Dubey's categorization of *The Chaneysville Incident* as "speculative fiction of slavery," comes the closest to pinning down the genre, and yet it still remains confined by the insistence on slavery as the primary feature of the novel. While she astutely argues that "speculative fictions overtly situate themselves against history, suggesting that we can best comprehend the truth of slavery by abandoning historical modes of knowing," I propose Bradley's novel is not actually committed to the "truth of slavery."[280] Instead of pursuing truth, *The Chaneysville Incident* elucidates the extent to which the pursuit (and the many projects that coopt it) are worthy of critique.

Refusing history's chronology also means the text complicates reading slavery as legacy (which presupposes a before that resonates now). Instead, it functions as much as a "now" as a "then," a reaction to history of the sort Best posits in *None Like Us: Blackness, Belonging, Aesthetic Life* (2018). Notice, for example, how Bradley frames his qualms with history in another interview directly engaging the role of his novel: "*The Chaneysville Incident* was shaped by a frustration with the assumptions and dominant theories of American History in the 1960s and 1970s—to put it simply, that black Americans had no history apart from the oppressions visited upon them by dominant American (which was to say, white) society—slavery, lynching, segregation, all sorts of racial discriminations." Challenging the fixed collective position of the afropessimist strain of Black studies, *None Like Us*, shows "that there is and can be no "we" in or following from such a time and place, that what "we" share is the open secret of "our"

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transdisciplinary realization of a science of human systems." Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found," 45.

[280] Madhu Dubey, "Speculative Fictions of Slavery," *American Literature*, 82.4 (December 2010): 784

impossibility. […] Whatever blackness or black culture is, it cannot be indexed to a "we"—or, if it is, that "we" can only be structured by and given in its own negation and refusal."[281] While I concur with Best's interrogation of blackness outside of the assumed "We," I propose this interrogation need not necessarily result in such wholesale negation. After all, the archive itself is already motivated by a death drive that undergirds the project of accumulation with destruction. When it confronts blackness as its organizing impetus, Black archives do not simply evacuate the "we." They do not double down on negation, but, rather, they subvert the stakes of the archival project and produce new forms of collective identification. They produce a "we" born in the search, not just from the archive's "raw materials."[282] Black archives—not the events, moments, or even incidents it uncovers—produce the "We."

One of the byproducts of such searching is the imagination so central to the speculative mode of Black archives. To Best's provocative interpretation of Black archives as impelled by a "forensic imagination," I concede that the archival impulse is predetermined by imagination. Where I diverge, however, is in the assumption that such imagination is necessarily "forensic." Neither is the archival quest "born of the understanding of the archive as a scene of injury" (21).[283] John, for example, eventually

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[281] Best, 22

[282] Best argues, "there is something impossible about blackness, that to be black is also to participate, of necessity, in a collective undoing, if not, on the occasion that that should either fail or seem unpalatable, a self-undoing." Best, 2. My project's concern with Black archives, however, disrupts the future/past binary necessary to the fundamentals of afropessimism or afrooptimism.

[283] Best makes the "case for the conceptualization of the archive as process—attending principally to archivization as a process whose goal is both to preserve some record of Black culture and to deform it in the process," he emphasizes its impossibility, its "emptiness." He argues it sets Black culture hopelessly beyond the reach of cultural preservation and historiographical recovery." Best, 87. As *The Chaneysville Incident*

comes to discover that the problem with his method of interpretation is that it lacks a space for imagination: "I had everything I needed, knowledge and time, and even, by then, a measure of skill—I could follow a fact through shifts and twists of history, do it and love it. But I could not imagine. And if you could not imagine, you can discover only cold facts, and more cold facts; you will never know the truth."[284] Truth, in other words, does not traffic in fact, but rather speculation and possibility. It is not stable or fixed waiting for the right historian to dig it up. Reversion cannot find it, and yet the quest for reversion can produce it. The concern with history—not as the detail of a past but as an engagement with temporality and the development of subjectivity in relation to that temporality—it turns out, is the speculative work of Black archives.

In this move away from forensic imagination, Bradley diverges from what has long been heralded as *The Chaneysville Incident's* predecessor, *Invisible Man*. The Black archival novel par excellence, *Invisible Man* sets up the affective networks of the Black archive that organize *The Chaneysville Incident*.[285] The observation is reinforced by

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demonstrates, however, Black archives need not be plagued by impossibility. Instead, they can wrest from impossibility a new epistemology, which grants them a new "we" outside the terms Best delineates.

[284] According to Wynter's assessment about the overarching power of discourse: "The liminal frame of reference, therefore, unlike the normative, can provide what Uspesnkij et al call the "outer view," from which perspective the grammars of regularities of boundary and structure- maintaining discourses are perceivable, and Whatmough's "external observer's position" made possible." Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found," 39.

[285] Examples of this pairing include Pavliç's assessment that "In terms of African-American literary ancestry, the emergence of John Washington's process can be read as a liberating extension of Ralph Ellison's narrator's underground process in *Invisible Man,*" or Brigham's claim about the status of materiality in both novels: "Just as Ellison's *Invisible Man* burns the contents of his briefcase—the evidence of his visibility, of his established identity—to light the darkness of the tunnel he finds himself in at the novel's close, John burns the artifacts of his identity quest. Unlike Ellison's solipsistic protagonist, however, John watches the fire and imagines connection with another human being." Although Brigham's argument about the role of the burnt archive similarly

decades of criticism that pairs the two novels, though none through the lens of the archive as genre. For a testament to how often Bradley's novel is read in conjunction with Ellison's, see the 1990 Harper Perennial cover of *The Chaneysville Incident*.

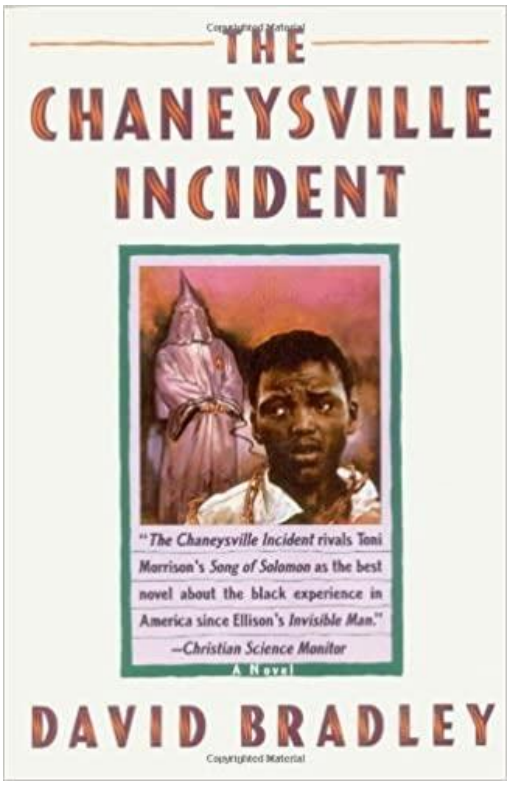

Figure 1. The 1990 Harper Perennial cover of *The Chaneysville Incident* excerpts Bruce Allen's closing line in his review of the novel for the *The Christian Science Monitor,* May 20, 1981.

In the same framed image of a young chained Black man whose back is turned to a Klansman holding a whip, the cover (see Figure 1) includes a quote from *The Christian Science Monitor* that claims, "*The Chaneysville Incident* rivals Toni Morrison's *Song of*

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queries the status of the archive in both novels, she uses this as metaphor to the service of identity politics. I aim, instead, to use such moments as entry points into specific theories about the Black archive as such. See Edward Pavlić, "Syndetic Redemption: Above-Underground Emergence in David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident*." *African American Review* 30.2 (Summer, 1996): 166; Cathy Brigham, "Identity, Masculinity, and Desire in David Bradley's Fiction." *Contemporary Literature* 36.2 (Summer 1995): 313.

Solomon as the best novel about the black experience in America since Ellison's *Invisible Man*."[286] To their point, the similarities between Bradley's and Ellison's novels are quite striking.[287] Both texts use fiction (and its unique ability to represent affective experience) to challenge and rework the stakes of the archive for the Black subject.[288] They interrogate the ideal subject and the inevitably doomed project to live up to such an ideal as foundational elements of a racialized archive conceived in the throes of New Negro ideology.[289] For both, Black archives are framed as a masculinist practice—the narrators inherit the practice (or catch the fever if you will) from other men.[290] In the case of

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[286] Bruce Allen, Review excerpt on book cover. *The Chaneysville Incident*, by David Bradley, Harper Perennial, 1990.

[287] Adding Morrison's *Song of Solomon* to the mix favors a male bildungsroman and masculinist engagement with the ideal subject. Although Morrison's novel complicates the masculinity of the ideal Black subject, the critic's glossary triangulation suggests a reaffirmation of the male protagonist as exemplary of said experience.

[288] As but one example of the extent to which Bradley criticism has been routed through Ellison, take Edward Pavlić's claim that "In terms of African-American literary ancestry, the emergence of John Washington's process can be read as a liberating extension of Ralph Ellison's narrator's underground process in *Invisible Man."* Pavlić, 166. See also Kamau Kemayo, *Emerging Afrikan Survivals an Afrocentric Critical Theory*, Studies in African American History and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2003); Trudier Harris, "History as Fact and Fiction," *The Cambridge History of African American Literature*. Eds. Maryemma Graham and Jerry W. Jr Ward, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011; Jeffrey B. Leak, *Racial Myths and Masculinity in African American Literature*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005).

[289] According to Sara Ahmed in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), "The content of the ideal (for example, the nation as being white, or heterosexual, or even as being tolerant, caring, and so on) is an effect of the process of idealisation. In other words, it is not that there is an ideal, which some more than others can approximate or 'measure up to'. The national ideal is shaped by taking some bodies as its form and not others. The pride of some subjects is in a way tautological: they feel pride at approximating an ideal that has already taken their shape." 109.

[290] Even as Best theorizes Black archives with an eye toward queer archives and their theory, his own intellectual genealogy registers the project in fairly masculinist terms. His reading of "blackness as a condition of genealogical isolation," triangulates, for instance, only men: "Walker's prayer on behalf of the coloured citizens of the world"; Baldwin's figuration of his father, and me of mine." He goes on to parallel the queer relationship of the figures laid out one to another with the queer relationship one may have to the Black

Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the impulse is explicitly routed through the white supremacy of the battle royal. Meanwhile, for Bradley, the archival impulse has been routed through institutionalized African American history and the "racializing assemblages" of its humanism.[291] Similarly invested in space as a feature of epistemological possibility and alternative historical knowledge (e.g. Ellison's hole of hibernation to Bradley's graveyard), both novels lead us to question the fate of Black archives as radical repositories of historical value.[292]

The stakes of archival destruction are significantly higher for Bradley's history professor protagonist than they are for Ellison's invisible man.[293] In John's case, the

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tradition: "the recognition that separation, fearful estrangement, is what makes relationship (makes relationships) possible; the challenge of calling an object into being without owning or being owned by the call of identity or identification, of recognition or acknowledgment." Despite the emphasis and dialogue with queer studies, the text's approach, nonetheless, renders the tradition, masculinist. Best, 10-11.

[291] I use "racializing assemblages" here in reference to Alexander Weheliye's argument in *Habeas Viscus:* "If racialization is understood not as a biological or cultural descriptor but as a conglomerate of sociopolitical relations that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans, then blackness designates a changing system of unequal power structures that apportion and delimit which humans can lay claim to full human status and which humans cannot." Weheliye, 4.

[292] In her seminal essay, "The Ceremony Must Be Found," Sylvia Wynter also highlights the Ellisonian strand in Bradley's thinking. She elaborates Bradley's argument about how *Invisible Man* transgresses the prototypical inclusive/exclusive binary of American Fiction by identifying the yam scene as the moment when Ellison's narrator "[…] awakening from the mimetic desire which had him chasing his "natural" and/or his "proletarian" and/or his "black" identity, breaks through all the inter-dictions." Wynter's framing illuminates the scene as a moment of Black archival interpretation. Attuned to the imagination that sends John Washington running, Ellison's protagonist "takes as the object of its irreverence the very system of figuration." Despite their shared concerns, Bradley's presentation of the archival impulse and black subjectivity uniquely forces us to reckon with the status of the archive in multiple presents. Thus, while it may share with its literary predecessor the archival impulse, it charges its historian, John Washington, to pursue those Ellison would describe as having fallen outside history. Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found," 55.

[293] Most relevant to this project's investment in the Black archive and its attendant impulse, Cathy Brigham specifically addresses the status of materiality in both novels:

archive is not one of many tools for self-discovery (or more appropriately for the discovery of all the ways in which Black subjectivity is coopted by white supremacy). Instead, it is the very foundation on which John has built a life and a career. Because of such disciplinary entrenchment, it takes John the course of *The Chaneysville Incident* to surrender history as the paradigmatic mode of interpreting the Black archive. His longstanding commitment to history's methods notwithstanding, John also refuses to acknowledge history's failings because he has deftly transformed the enterprise into a weapon against emotional engagement and vulnerability.

History, *The Chaneysville Incident* argues, is as much a product of archival research as it is a psychological recourse, or in the case of John Washington, a way to protect his role as ideal subject. Indeed, the notion of the "ideal subject" is produced, in part, by history, which aims to identify a coherent narrative of the archive's parts. What is less often considered is the extent to which the archive also participates in the production of the "ideal subject." Insofar as archives gather together, they participate in what Derrida deems the power of consignation, which "aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration."[294] In the name of this unifying element, they traffic too in affective networks that prop up the ideal by featuring those who fail to achieve that ideal.

"Just as Ellison's *Invisible Man* burns the contents of his briefcase—the evidence of his visibility, of his established identity—to light the darkness of the tunnel he finds himself in at the novel's close, John burns the artifacts of his identity quest. Unlike Ellison's solipsistic protagonist, however, John watches the fire and imagines connection with another human being." Brigham, 313. However, where Brigham's argument about the role of the burnt archive uses materiality as a metaphor for identity politics, I think about the two as demonstrations of racialized archive fevers.

[294] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 3.

For twentieth-century Black archives born under the weight of New Negro ideology, the "ideal configuration" has often been overrepresented as the "ideal" Black subject.[295] According to Schomburg's logic in "The Negro Digs Up His Past," John seems a prime example of the archive's ideal subject. He is the sort of figure around which to rally the evidence and the sort of figure who collects in the name of the ideal subject for the sake of blackness. A well-educated, professionally successful Black historian, John has liberated himself from the paternal pattern of illicit activity and committed himself to education and the cause of Black studies. However, as his return home highlights, tucked away in the ivory tower he is certainly no ideal subject for the community he leaves behind. Indeed, as his engagement with the archive bequeathed him by his father reveals, John's status as "ideal subject" is as mythical as is the methodology he assumes will provide him access to the truth to which he so desperately clings.

As a defensive mechanism, history works both to shore up the false bravado of academia that John uses to bolster his authority, and, as the novel's metafiction makes clear, as a way to conceal areas where John feels exposed. So much of his commitment to history, it turns out, is a way to deflect personal introspection. That is, history functions not only as a way to organize memory but as a way to obviate a painful past. Consider the novel's opening scene: John's first conversation with Judith about travelling back home. Teasing her for her curiosity and concern for him (which is even more important when

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[295]The overrepresentation of the "ideal configuration" for Black archives is another example of what Trouillot cautions are the "silences [that] enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance)." Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 26.

we remember that Judith is a white woman trained in psychology), John deflects Judith's advances to understand him better. It is a pattern of deflection that eventually culminates with the novel's final query: "I wondered if Judith would understand" (432). Resisting being made an object for interpretation, John distracts Judith with a joke that the trip to visit Jack is an excuse to engage in an affair: "Now, every student of marital infidelity knows, a sick friend is just a tired euphemism for a willing wench. Seeing as we're not what you call legally espoused, it isn't precisely adultery, but—Judith said something highly unprintable and spun me around and wrapped her arms around me" (5). Notably, what remains "unprintable" is usually unarchivable. Judith's voice, in other words, is left out of *The Chaneysville Incident* altogether.

John uses history as a way to keep the secrets of his past hidden not only from the prying efforts of his white lover but as a way to deny their relevance to his own life and present. It functions too as a smoke screen for another sort of knowledge. The novel marks this protective redirection through the juxtaposition of John as self-same subject and John as lecturer. The aforementioned conversation between Judith and John exemplify this. By refusing to reveal the intimate, "unprintable," conversation between him and his lover, John denies us evidence of his own vulnerability. Then, as if viscerally reacting to such a close call with emotional transparency, John immediately shifts into his professorial persona. Performing emotional detachment as intellectual objectivity, he launches into the first of many history lectures included in the novel. The first few lines of the lecture highlight the dramatic tonal shift of the juxtaposed scenes:

> The key to the understanding of any society lies in the observation and analysis of the insignificant and the mundane. For one of the primary functions of societal institutions is to conceal the basic nature of the society, so that the individuals that make up the power structure can pursue the business of consolidating and

increasing their power untroubled by the carpings of a dissatisfied peasantry. (6) Without any formal cues to help the reader transition from intimate exchanges to the lecture hall, the juxtaposition does, nevertheless, hint at buried information. Press the lecture further, and a disguised analogy emerges that figures Judith as dissatisfied peasantry. John, meanwhile, "conceals the basic nature" in his effort to retain power.

The lectures peppered throughout the novel thus provide readers with clues as to the text's interpretative practice. Hence the first line of this first lecture: "The key to understanding […] lies in the observation and analysis of the insignificant and mundane" (6). Taking that as a cue, let us return to the preceding scene of intimacy between John and Judith. It concludes with an apparently insignificant detail: "[Judith] stepped back and, with her head down, fastened the zipper of my coat. "Stay warm," she said" (5). This foreshadowing detail of course points us to the novel's conclusive pyre and John's ambiguous relationship to the fire that consumes the archive.

Even this practice of deciphering the symbols is part of the text's operation of redirection. It lures reader into a reading practice that would distract them from the protagonist's interiority. Having deciphered the interpretative key, the temptation arises to move on. To do so, however, leads us straight into the narrator's trap. It forces us to ignore his interiority and overlook the buried archive of his psyche. Indeed, because of Judith's repeated prodding and John's deflection via historical narrative, we are as informed of the correlation between class and the status of restrooms on particular modes of transportation, as we are of the emotional weight of John's narrative quest: the mystery of the death of his father, Moses. History, John Washington teaches us, functions as

crucial resource for the sublimation of the Black subject's archival impulse.[296]

Sometimes, as is the case with John's efforts to recount the history of the town of his upbringing, the tools of the discipline prove insufficient. Of the Hill John confesses, "I knew nothing about the Hill any longer, I had made it my business not to know. But now suddenly, inexplicably, I was curious, and so I thought for a moment, pulling half-remembered facts from the back of my mind—scraps of information—and made extrapolations" (17). History thus takes John only so far. The rest he must speculate from scraps.

History from Archival Scraps

Despite the fact that John does not arrive at the answer to his questions about legacy and history until he leaves the traditional sites of knowledge production and preservation, most of the novel is spent in and around archives. John begins his investigation into his father, for example, in Moses' attic where, to John's surprise, his father had amassed quite an impressive archive. Moses too had apparently spent many years of his own life in extensive (and clandestine) research driven by the same impulse that now drives John. Even C.K. Washington had archival experience. As John tells Judith: "in the beginning of 1833 he was hard at work in the Philadelphia Negro Library, which had just opened" (337). Like his great-grandson, C.K. was also a published writer. John briefly describes the content of his work, including his first book *Sketches of the*

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[296] The onslaught of historical information the novel provides, for example, lectures on The Civil War, public transportation in the northeast corridor, local town politics, and the slave trade from 1441 Portugal to the institutionalization of Black Studies, to name a few, further reveal John's sublimation.

Higher Classes of Colored Society in Philadelphia by a Southerner, which publicized "the prosperity and responsibility of the black community" in Philadelphia. Critical of its toeing of the moderate line, what John really fixates on is not its problematic politics. Instead, John takes great pains to emphasize C.K.'s writing style.

John assiduously tracks precisely how C.K.'s writing reflected particular emotional and political investments. He critiques outright his style in some instances, exclaiming that "when [C.K.'s] style developed it got worse, in terms of information, because he cluttered up the facts with hyperbolic metaphors and literary allusions. It's obvious that he loved writing, and he loved his own style, which is understandable; when you've been flogged for trying to read your own name and branded for trying to write your father's name, it's probably quite a thrill to not only read books but quote from them in your own hand, even if nobody else is going to read it" (338). In another scene, when Judith inquires as to why C.K. did not move to Pennsylvania after falling in love with the state's countryside, John retorts: because "he could read a map; he knew he was only about thirty miles from slave territory. But he did speculate. I guess you could call it a daydream, if you made allowances for his awful style" (341). Because John never provides examples of C.K.'s writing style, what one is left with are suspicions about John's own narrative style in *The Chaneysville Incident*, which like C.K. before him, is also more speculative archive than historical narrative.

Judith explicitly confronts John with the parallels she notes between his own approach to the writing of history and that of his great-grandfather before him. John notes, for example that C.K. after the riot in 1842, dropped the flowery style altogether, "and started putting down the facts, nothing else: names, dates—" (343). John justifies

that facts became so critical to C.K. that he refused to communicate unless he had detached himself emotionally from the information at hand. He defers providing an account of the riot when pressed by a white abolitionist, for instance, because, as John tells it, "He couldn't give the man facts, you see; he was still sorting through things—[…] Rubble. And emotions were part of the rubble" (344). Judith interjects here as she notes a relevant connection. Repeating John's words back to him, Judith provides her assessment of John's reading of C.K.'s motivations: "Busy sorting through things […] I know. Just like A good little historian. You like him […]. And you want to be just like him. You think there's something good about getting the feelings out of things." Her observations, however, are not taken to kindly and the conversation devolves into a lover's spat. John defensively responds by generalizing and justifying the approach: "a historian has to have ordinary feelings—a little sympathy, a little anger. That's what makes him human. But if the feelings are so strong they get in the way of the facts—." Judith, nonetheless, maintains her position, which only angers John further; hence he retorts: "I don't give a damn what you think. […] Because you don't have the facts" (345). John's reaction only proves Judith's point, for he unwittingly demonstrates that emotional detachment in the face of history is at best sublimation. Despite John's effort to make of emotions archival scraps that need to be discarded for the sake of facts, as his conversation with Judith reveals, Black archives cannot—nor need not—service an unemotional, detached, objective engagement with history. If history demands of men like C.K. that "without even making a blot, [they recount] that among those killed was Priscilla Langley Washington, aged twenty-seven, and in her seventh month of

pregnancy" (345), then the real question raised is why the investment in the project anyway.

Once history is jettisoned on the grounds of its insufficiency to account for the fullest scope of Black experience, John turns to imagination. Such a turn to imagination proves monumental for John, for once he recognizes imagination as a legitimate source of knowledge, and communicates the epiphany to his partner Judith, his archive fever breaks. The "archive," he now realizes, is necessary not for "truths"—buried, disqualified, or subjugated—but for imagination, or the may-have-happened of speculative possibility and futurity.

The expansion of John's epistemological paradigm also provides him with the psychological tools to remedy the avoidance coping mechanism that defined his earlier interactions with Judith. He can now relinquish his commitment to history as a neutralizing distractor. For this reason, attuned to the broader scale of Black archives John decides in the last pages of the novel to burn the tools of his trade.

> Then I gathered up the tools of my trade, the pens and inks and pencils, the pads and the cards, and carried them out into the clearing. I kicked a clear space in the snow and set them down, and over them I built a small edifice of kindling and then a frame of wood. I went back inside the cabin and got the kerosene and brought it back and poured it freely over the pyre, making sure to soak the cards thoroughly. […] When the can was empty I set it down and went and got the folio and tucked it beneath my arm. I took the matches from their keeping place, took one out and closed the lid of the can and put it back in its place, so that it would be there when they wanted it. And then I left the cabin for the last time and went and stood before the pyre and stood looking at the cards and the papers and thinking about all of it, one last time. (432)

Emphasizing the novel's thematic investment in death and its archiviolithic interest in the archive, John's version of a briefcase burning figures as a pyre.[297] Accordingly, his interpretative efforts and the methodological systems he so carefully crafts (e.g. the careful dating of events that map onto chapter titles, the index cards he uses to organize moments deemed particularly relevant, the marginal notes, etc.) are rendered body for ceremonial dismissal, and ceremony is precisely what we get. John clears space, builds a kindling and a frame, soaks the items "thoroughly" and stays with the documents as they burn. He takes the time to mourn his emblems of process—these emptied signs of historical methodology.[298]

Epitomized in the conclusion's pyre, *The Chaneysville Incident* is about as concerned with death, decay, and destruction as it is with the desire for answers. In this way, the novel allegorically manages the accumulation of evidence for the sake of a future that will require it. The hunt for answers, it suggests, is always already littered with death. We start, of course, with John's return to Bedford and the death of Old Jack within a week. Moses' death, in turn, plagues both Old Jack and John and stirs, in part, the archive fever John catches in adolescence. Then, as the novel reveals piecemeal, Moses himself searches for answers about his grandfather C.K. Washington's death and that of the twelve fugitive slaves buried on the Iiames plot.

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[297] Derrida's reading of the archive in *Archive Fever* cites Freud's death drive as the motivating impulse of archivization. He describes the relationship of the archive to the death drive and its impression of finality as archiviolithic: "the death drive is above all anarchivic, on could say, or archiviolithic" –and as such "the archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory." Derrida, 10-11.
[298] In the pyre, a body of knowledge is exchanged for a body of imagination.

The Iiames plot, a *lieux de mémoire* or a site of memory, works as the novel's epiphenomenal polestar. Drawing John to the site over the course of his journey, the graveyard refuses to be historicized in the way John imagines. Instead, as a "moment of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned; no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded,"[299] the graveyard proffers memory.

Allegorizing John's journey in search of answers as a hunt, the novel eventually concludes with John's arrival to the site of the incident as a sort of portal to a past lacking the necessary documentation to count as "official history."[300] On the one hand, the allegory illuminates John's patrilineal, inherited archive fever. Moses, as John comes to discover, himself an avid game hunter, also changes the object of the hunt from animal to knowledge. As John explains of his father's archive: "I knew instinctively that he had been researching something, that what had happened was not, as everybody thought, that Moses Washington had given up hunting, but rather that he had transferred his efforts to a different forest, to the pursuit of other game" (142). This "other game" Moses tracks, like his son to follow, are answers to mysterious deaths. These they never find, for the graveyard provides neither of the men with the answers, just the possibilities and speculation.

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[299] Nora, 12.

[300] A Channel 6 news story on the Chaneysville Incident as historical lore of Bedford, PA, ends by affirming that the graveyard site of the "incident" has been refused status as a historical landmark because there is a lack of sufficient documentation. *Channel 6 News*. "Your Town: Bedford." WJAC Staff: Marty Radovanic and Jen Johnson, (WJACTV. 3:38, August 21, 2014).

The graveyard thus upends the historical imperative at the center of the novel's plot. It challenges the archive's historical value because it challenges history's investment in explanation, teleology, causality, evidence, and certainty. Likewise, it makes explicit the "now, through which the past, present, and future are always interpreted."[301] Indeed, time at the graveyard refuses linearity. Access to the past through the conventional methods of history prove inadequate tools—especially for the information at stake in this particular quest. But where history proves insufficient, as the graveyard scene reiterates, the space remains pregnant with possibility. For where the "past," remains conscripted to a historical time that works to subjugate Black epistemology and ontology, space remains a key resource in the pursuit of knowledge. For the sake of the allegory in the novel then, John as historian figures as predator, historical methodology as his weapon of choice, and the prey (imagined as deer and allegorized as Moses) as the event, or as the novel describes it—incident.

Now, what John discovers in his hunt is that the incident is less about a specific event than a plot to destroy a system. John burns his materials as a way to take down history in the same way C.K. speculates that the absence of slave bodies can eradicate the system that enslaves them in the first place. In other words, after discovering the mystery of C.K. Washington, John lights the pyre not because he is disenchanted with history as a discipline that buries truths of the past, but because from C.K. he learns the power of evacuating systems. He hints at this in his conversation with Judith, wherein he shares how after a period of isolation C.K. "started to speculate about what kind of action *would* be effective against slavery." Realizing that the fight is not to be won on the grounds of

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[301] Michelle Wright, *The Physics of Blackness*, 4

morality or even politics, but on that of economics, C.K. considers the terms of value in which slavery as a system operates: "a slave in the Upper South represented a tremendous investment, but his value was only potential. Steal him, and the potential was never realized." Meanwhile, the only collateral the planters of the Lower South had was "the land itself, and the land was worse than worthless without slave labor to cultivate it." His conclusion: "to bring the whole system crashing down, all you had to do was to encourage a sizable percentage of those people to use their feet at the same time." C.K. especially needed women and children to leave as they represented the most significant financial loss to the system: they represented future earnings. What John thus uncovers in his discovery of C.K.'s history is a plan for speculation that relies on eliminating whatever can be used in the future for the benefit of a system of white supremacy and Black subjugation. As a result, what John takes to the pyre is more than documents and artifacts. It is a system that, as he speculates, collapses when emptied.

Patriarchy and the *Archons*[302]

Although John is able to identify history and conventional archives as participating in a system that reinforces race as a measure for the overrepresentation of the human as "Man," he remains unable, even by the novel's end, to identify the extent to

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302 According to Derrida's etymological study of the word "archive": "The *archons* are first of all the documents' guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives. Entrusted to such archons, these documents in effect speak the law: they recall the law and call on or impose the law. To be guarded thus, in the jurisdiction of this speaking the law, they needed at once a guardian and a localization. Even in their guardianship or their hermeneutic tradition, the archives could do neither without substrate nor without residence." Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 2.

which patriarchy shores up the system. John's blindness is not, however, the novel's. For this reason, John does not leave the scene of the conflagration after gazing at its destruction "one last time" (432). As a sort of coda to the novel's theories about Black archives, he ponders:

> As I struck the match it came to me how strange it would all look to someone else, someone from far away. And as I dropped the match to the wood and watched the flames go twisting, I wondered if that someone would understand. Not just someone; Judith. I wondered if she would understand when she saw the smoke rising from the far side of the Hill. (432)

Much has been made of how this ending proves John's self-immolation. Less so of the fact that it gestures to Judith's ability to read "the smoke rising."[303] It invites us to inquire whether she can interpret it as evidence, and if so, as evidence of what? What frame of reference would she have for this practice?

By way of a response, I take Moses's statement to Josh, "I ain't got no time to be huntin' down women anyways; we got twelve men to lay for" (110), as a challenge to explore women's archives in *The Chaneysville Incident*. Certainly, the novel makes most salient the patriarchal legacy and masculinist paradigm of the archive (of which the Black archive, it would seem is no exception). However, I propose Bradley's work also blurs some of those edges. It gestures (perhaps even in spite of itself) at an archive fever beyond the ideal subject.[304]

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[303] In the cases where critics have read this ending with an eye towards Judith's role in the novel, they often read the novel as problematically masculinist. I am more interested, however, in how it lays out a racialized reading practice.

[304] John's treatment of women in *The Chaneysville Incident* has received much critical attention (especially his self-confessed rape of a white woman). While most critics are willing to acknowledge the character's misogyny, some read the novel as moving away from such a position. For instance, Philip Egan, who reads John as a misogynist with an oedipal complex, argues that as the novel progresses, John improves in his treatment of women. Cathy Brigham, acknowledges a similar character arch of progress and claims

An archive fever is responsible, at least in part for the novel's origin story. As Bradley tells it in a 1984 interview for *Callaloo*, his mother, working on a local history project, discovered thirteen unmarked graves in the outskirts of their hometown of Bedford, Pennsylvania. Notably, Bradley clarifies that his mother, Harriette Jackson Bradley, was not the first choice for the commission. Instead, Bradley's father, a trained historian and minister, was originally considered only, to be passed over because his writing style was found to be "too dry." Next, David Bradley himself (at 19) was offered the job. However, he turned down the offer admitting: "I wanted as little to do with Bedford at that time as possible."[305] Finally, Harriette accepts the project to honor the town's bicentennial. She discovers the graves and the bodies there interred, which her son years later fictionalizes for his award-winning novel. Bradley credits his mother's research for the discovery that would prove so critical to his own achievements, but initially he seems to fold her efforts into a masculinist archive and its attendant history. He recounts, for example, how Harriette, at a loss with where to begin the project, asks her husband for advice. Bradley's father instructs her to "go to the graveyards and the courthouses. And that's what she did. She looked at these records and slavery

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the novel "is a transgendered text: it moves from a distinctly masculine to an ambiguously feminine mode." Others like Maha Marouan are less inclined to read John so generously asserting instead that "women, black and white, are seen as obstacles to the men's process of constructing an African American identity." See Philip J Egan, "Unraveling Misogyny and Forging the New Self: Mother, Lover, and Storyteller in *The Chaneysville Incident*," *Papers on Language and Literature* 33.3 (Summer 1997): 265-287; Cathy Brigham, "Identity, Masculinity, and Desire in David Bradley's Fiction." *Contemporary Literature* 36.2 (Summer 1995): 310; and, Marouan Maha, "The Stillness That Comes After: African Traditions and the Meaning of Death in David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident*" *CLA Journal* 51.4 (June 2008): 331.

[305] See "The Business of Writing: An Interview with David Bradley," by Susan L. Blake and James A. Miller, *Callaloo* 21 (Spring-Summer 1984): 26.

transactions. Because these little courthouses preserve everything, and this one never burned. And the graveyards, the old graveyards. I think those are the two places that people don't lie."[306]

On the one hand, this is a story of Bradley's intellectual legacy, complete with a quotable line about the value of graveyards and courthouses for Black history in this country. It remarks upon archives caught up in various systems and spaces and elucidates the possibilities in collaborative investigation. On the other hand, the anecdote frames Bradley's mother's archival impulse as subject to male direction. After all, her husband's advice leads her to the site that would make the project so successful. The archival impulse apparently runs right through patriarchy, and a woman's intervention is relegated to the margins of another man's success, or as Bradley claims: "it was from a mere "three sentences" of his mother's work that "I got 432 pages."[307]

The tendency to overlook or minimize women's participation in Black archives also emerges in another anecdote about the novel's inspiration. In this version, Harriette first hears of a graveyard where thirteen slaves were buried after they requested to be shot following their capture on the Underground Railroad, from "a guy in a store in a town called Clearville, about fifteen miles from Chaneysville. [He] told her to go there and look for these graves. She says that when she first went there, the guy, Iiames, who was then alive, told her that, yeah, yeah, the graves were up there."[308] Whether Bradley's mother arrived at the graves because of her husband's instructions or the directions of a

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[306] ibid.
[307] See "An Interview with David Bradley," by Kay Bonetti, *The Missouri Review*, 15.3 (1992): 73.
[308] "The Business of Writing," 25.

"a guy in a store," is perhaps irrelevant but what is worth noting, especially for this project's investment in Black archives in theory, practice and representation, is how often Black women's archival and historical impulses are routed through men.[309] This tendency, I argue, can be traced back to the role of the ideal subject in Black archival history, which operates as a way to establish a particular project as more palatable to a history circumscribed by Enlightenment ideals that value "Man" and white supremacy. It is no coincidence that one of the most famous calls for Black archival practice and the establishment of Black history aligns squarely with New Negro ideology's pursuit of an exemplary subject on which to build both the race's past and its future. To Schomburg's encouragement that "the Negro dig up his past," one is left to wonder where are the women, ready with spade in hand? Bradley's work, I argue, addresses this question, if we look at how he sets up John as a narrator in the process of shedding the shackles of indoctrination.

Although it may seem as though Bradley underplays his mother's contributions, the novel actually provides evidence to the contrary. After all, his mother shares her first name and initials with one of *The Chaneysville Incident'*s most important characters:

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[309] In addition to elucidating the role of women in *The Chaneysville Incident* (both as historical source material and fictional representation), Bradley's efforts to trace back to the archive the event that spurred the work reinforce another ambiguity at the heart of the Chaneysville Incident—memory itself. Although Alton Iiames confirms the story of the buried runaway enslaved peoples in a televised Bedford local news interview, Bradley alleges that when he went to validate his mother's source, Iiames "either had forgotten or had changed his mind and said that he hadn't known the story until my mother came and told him." The opacity noted—whether Bradley's mother had access to a history unavailable to Iiames himself, or whether Iiames simply forgot the details of the conversation— like the epistemological binary of his father's dual career and the ambiguity of memory as valid historical resource, emerges as a thematic through line in *The Chaneysville Incident.* See "Your Town: Bedford," Channel 6 News Video, 22:13 (June 9, 2017), https://wjactv.com/station/your-town/your-town-bedford?jwsource=cl.

Harriette Brewer. A runaway born free (she remained the property of her father from whom her mother had fled), Harriette Brewer is C.K.'s love interest and the most significant catalyst for the suicide at the center of the novel's plot. As John tells Judith, "When C.K. met her she was thirty years old, as beautiful as her mother must have been. But that wasn't what impressed him. What impressed him was that she was educated and intelligent [….] She was working with [William] Still, keeping records for him. She had worked out a code, and she kept the records in it, and eventually Still was going to be able to decode and publish the accounts" (355). The proto-archivist of the novel, Harriette is more than collector. Indeed, much is made of her strength, her determination, and her intellect. As John clarifies, "she undertook some of the most dangerous jobs, helping to take escapees who had made it as far as Philadelphia […]. She knew the safe routes, and safe houses, and she was tough enough to have killed a couple of slave catchers" (355). Moreover, while C.K. pines for her and documents his love in "really bad sophomoric poetry, [Harriette] had decided the best way to make plans was to try them out" (356). She thus functions as the catalyst in turning speculation into investment, and imagination into action. All the while, she continues archiving, recording, encoding.

Eventually, Harriette's initiative motivates C.K. who, unable to track her down, begins to put his plan into action too and so participates in aiding enslaved peoples escape to the North. What exactly becomes of Moses we cannot know, for as John tells Judith, "That's all I know, all I can figure out. There's no more record, and there's nothing in code [….] That's the end of it; a period at the end of the sentence. That's the way history is sometimes. Sometimes you don't even get periods" (367). From this period, John is left to fill in the dots. Like C.K. Washington running from Pettis at the

end of his life, John speculates and imagines the rest.[310] In that imagining he comes to realize that even of Judith, "I had underestimated her, and had done it in a way that had cheated us both" (411). The novel's pattern of dismissing women's archival efforts as "scraps" is the representation of the discipline's commitment to patriarchy, not necessarily the novel's commitment.

Indeed, to the extent that men define John's past, women organize his present. Of the novel's cast of characters, the people most notable in John's life in 1979 are his white girlfriend Judith, and his mother, Miss Yvette Franklin Stanton (herself the daughter of a Howard University Professor, which reinforces the legacy of patriarchal knowledge instruction). Meanwhile, all the men who played a significant role in John's upbringing (and the ways in which he defines masculinity) are now deceased, including his veteran brother Billy, his father Moses, his great-grandfather CK Washington, and even The Professor himself, for whom he digs the grave. In fact, the only exception to this rule is Old Jack Crawley, who serves as the transitional figure that sets up the questions regarding the stakes of patriarchal investments in historical knowledge and self-awareness. As the dying figure of masculinity, John must discover who Jack is as "man" in a world where he no longer figures as the quintessential Black ideal subject, and where

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[310] Speculation is a central to the confrontation between Pettis, C.K. and the group of runaway enslaved peoples. For instance, "as [C.K.] climbed the mountain, he speculated as to what effect the weather would have on Pettis' plans. […] And so he went on, trotting quickly on the downgrade, filling the time with more speculation: what he would do if he wanted to rescue the runaways. […] But in less than an hour the speculation had ceased to be idle. […] He could not imagine what had happened" (400-401).

women (even as John marginalizes them) prove more formative for Black archives than he gives them credit for.[311]

Although Moses's attic (which John inherits at thirteen) figures as the central archive of the text, tellingly, John's mother also archives.[312] In fact, her archives take up significantly more room in the family home: "No space that fell inside my mother's orbit ever went unused, or at least unfilled" (125). Hoarding everything from scraps of cloth to "three years' worth of David C. Cook Sunday School literature," John's mother's most significant collection is photographic: "For years she put them everywhere, sticking them in the edges of windows and mirrors, pasting them to walls and taping them to doors the way some people hang up flypaper." She, too, is trying to make sense of text; through these photographs, she too is trying to navigate a past that would see one son killed at war and the other in a sort of self-imposed exile to the ivory tower. Eventually, she reevaluates her photographic archive and decides to expend her energy on curation—which is also the product of imagination.[313] Thus, she "established the dining room as the Washington family Gallery, collecting in it the pictures she believed were most

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[311] This notion of women as powerful influencers on John was even a point of concern for Moses. As Old Jack informs John in one of their first meetings: "Your daddy. He liked you. He was proud a you. An' he was worried about you. […] Said you was too much your mam's child. Said he was worried you was gonna end up bein' a preacher or a sissy or somethin', on account a the way that woman carried on around you […]. He said there was a lot a woman in you" (34).

[312] As per Eichhorn, "to adopt the term archive over collection is to consciously choose to think about documentary assemblages as sites that are as much about texts and textual practices as they are about people and relations of power." Kate Eichhorn, "Archival Genres: Gathering Texts and Reading Spaces," *Invisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture* 12 (May 2008): 3.

[313] See more on reading the domestic space as archive in Antoinette Burton's *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003).

representative of us all" (126). She selects from her archive so as to narrate her own version of the family as ideal subject. In doing so, she establishes a collective rendering of the "ideal" that expands the notion of the possessive individualism of the masculine ideal subject. Hers is a testament to Black archives that refuses the epistemological pressures of the traditional practice.

Like her son, John's mother inherits her archival impulse from her father. And yet, her impulse remains discredited even by John himself who insists—up until the novel's last question about Judith's capacity to understand—that the archive is for men only. John, however, is not alone in his misogyny. After all, Yvette's father does not leave her his valuable collection either. A bibliophile in his own right, The Professor—as John deems him—collected books "that no local library or high school library, not in western Pennsylvania, was going to have. Books by Black people. […] He loved to take them down and [show] me, […] making sure I did not touch the pages" (129). What most infuriates John is how little use his grandfather makes of the books at his disposal: "*he* didn't read them. He rarely even touched them. He had hired a woman to come in and dust them, a white woman; he had been particular about that. So I had hated him, hated him for every time he had taken me in there and tortured me" (129). Highlighting the affective networks of the archive and its relationship to white supremacy, John's grandfather accumulates evidence of Black artistry and achievement for the sake of a future he entrusts neither to his daughter nor his grandson. As a result, John decides to help himself to the texts. That is, he steals these at least until his grandfather dies, for then, in a posthumous final gesture of archival value, The Professor, reaffirms institution over family. Despite John's wishes to be bequeathed, at least the "more mundane

volumes. […] he had left the lot to Howard University. And so when they had buried him neither Bill nor I had shed any tears; for me, dropping the ritual spade of earth on his coffin had been a pleasure tempered only by curiosity—he had been buried in his ancestral home in Virginia, and I had never before then seen red Piedmont earth" (130). Burying with his grandfather the hope of this great documentary archive, the scene ends on the curiosity of the soil, the narrator's observation that he had never seen this type of ground before--a gesture to the novel's interest in the possibility of space itself as archivally-productive.[314]

Archive as Place[315]

A year after *The Chaneysville Incident*, Bradley published one of the clearest examples of his investment in the idea of space as knowledge-producing and –preserving.

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[314] In the vein of McKittrick's argument about space and the Black subject in *Demonic Grounds*, I take Black archives to constitute a variant blackness, not another within the category of Man but an altogether new way to be human: "Recognizing that new forms of life, occupying interhuman grounds (beneath all of our feet), can perhaps put forward a new worldview from the perspective of the species— that is, from outside the logic of biocentric models: not as a genre or mode of human but as human. Consequently, if the flesh-and-blood human can know from outside the logic of biocentric models, special/partial vantage points only make sense as indicative of patterns that are inside the logic of biocentric models and familiar plots—because special-ness and inclusions, in these theories and through our existing sociospatial arrangements, are necessarily produced in conjunction with (repeating and/or undermining) Man's geographies, old hierarchical tensions, old grounds, partial histories, and partial interests." Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2006), 135.

[315] A relevant term for thinking through the role of place in *The Chaneysville Incident* is Derrida's definition of *arkheion*, which suggests an alternative relationship to space in the context of the Black archive. Derrida's identification of the archive as an intrinsically politically motivated space (where the powerful reside), sheds light on the need for alternative spaces and sites for Black archives, which must contend with those that would disqualify their documents as illegitimate in the name of preserving the master's house.

In his essay "Black and American, 1982," Bradley explicitly addresses the relationship between race, space, and institutional knowledge. "Black and American, 1982" helps us to move from thinking about Black archives as produced and constructed in New Negro ideology, to their post-Black Arts legacy. It considers the role of the post-sixties university in the institutionalization of identity politics and the expansion of area studies. Explicitly skeptical of diversity programs that reinforce what Bradley calls "achromism"—that within his social context nothing outweighs the fact of race in determining his destiny or defining his identity— "Black and American, 1982," nonetheless, suggests hope, or at least possibility.[316] Bradley clarifies: "I suppose I still believe that there is a place in space or time where the pigmentation of my skin might be of only incidental relevance—where it would be possible to give a socially meaningful description of who I am and what I've done without using the word Black at all."[317] A gesture more in line with Avery Gordon's notion of "utopian margins," which she articulates as the "exclusionary zone of tremendous magnitude [where we might find] fugitive moments of comprehension that could yield a genealogy of and paradigms for more adequate histories," Bradley manages the tension of race and identification by imagining analogous sites for `alternative ontological and epistemological models.[318]

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[316] Bradley defines "achromism" as follows: "I accept a belief that I have taken to calling achromism (from the Greek a-, meaning "not," and chroma, meaning "color"), which is that within the context of the society to which I belong by right—or misfortune—of birth, nothing I shall ever accomplish or discover or earn or inherit or buy or sell or give away—nothing I can ever do—will outweigh the fact of my race in determining my destiny." David Bradley, "Black and American, 1982," *Esquire* (May 1, 1982): 60.
[317] Bradley, "Black and American, 1982," 59-60.
[318] Avery Gordon argues for a reading of utopia outside the traditional western model, a sensibility that, I argue, also emerges in Bradley's articulation of space (both in *The Chaneysville Incident* and "Black and American, 1982"). Gordon, for instance, affirms the utopian margin as "a mode of living," which has already been and is being, a site

Hence, as a space for Black archives this utopian margin operates in a future conditional mode or, at the very least, it disrupts conventional coordinates of space-time relationships. If space accumulates for a future history, Black archival space, I argue, speculates a future counter-history.

Bradley's essay explores these alternative temporal-spatial organizations by moving beyond the subject to the institution. It interrogates how particular institutional and disciplinary formations organize our knowledge systems and the methodologies that contribute to particular epistemological repositories.[319] Bradley exposes, for example, how the "social programs" of the 1980s that intended to remedy systematic racial inequality, more often than not, repurposed the ideal "minority" subject.[320] This

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where "theories of the many real and imaginary strivings for a livable and humane social existence emerge." She argues, moreover, that "in that zone of exclusion, we find a utopian thought and practice which is as transnational as it is local; which is as oriented to the present and the past as it is to the future; which is as comfortable with wild speculation as it is with collective movement [….] In that zone of exclusion, the utopian is a standpoint for the here and now—not only the future—which registers and incites the works, the thoughts and the better worlds […]." I propose Gordon's notion of this "other utopianism" reflects Bradley's larger claims about ontological and epistemological possibility and the Black archive's role in relationship to utopian margins. Avery Gordon, *The Hawthorn Archive: Letters from the Utopian Margins* (New York: Fordham UP, 2018), viii.

[319] Roderick Ferguson usefully traces the post-sixties US university which, pressured by the ethnic and women's studies movements' demand for inclusion and representation, navigated (and set the terms, in many cases, for state and capital) "how best to institute new peoples, new knowledges, and cultures and at the same time discipline and exclude those subjects according to a new order." See Roderick Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2012), 12.

[320] Intention proves an important factor in these social programs for Bradley. He argues: "That rather than initiate the upheaval that would have resulted from altering the systems by which wealth and opportunity were distributed, the liberals set up new systems to cancel out the effects of the old systems. And that in order for such cancellation to come about, the new systems had to be just as biased as the old ones, with only the opposite arithmetic sign applied. The effect was not to eliminate racism in society but, in absolute terms, to double it." This too is relevant in thinking about the Black community's

repurposing of the ideal subject is, of course, nothing new in the project of constructing Black national belonging. After all, before New Negro ideology's imagining of subjectivity in terms of a masculinist talented tenth literary elite, there was the respectability politics of the nineteenth century with its own classed and gendered expectations.[321] In Bradley's account, meanwhile, the ideal is predetermined by a post-Civil Rights politics of respectability, a burden he is expected to manage as an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania. As he describes it: "Essentially, I was supposed to demonstrate with the respectability of my demeanor, the diligence of my labor, and the quality of my achievements that a black could walk through society's big front door and take a seat in the parlor and not make the place smell musky or track mud on the broadloom."[322] Racialized subjectivity is thus continually marked by space, at least

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relationship to the archive, particularly as a project to evidence a particular place in the nation and cement a particular version of man. See Bradley, "Black and American, 1982," 64.

[321] In *The Amalgamation Waltz,* Tavia Nyong'o provides a useful definition of "respectability" worth citing here, especially as it relates to Bradley's experience: "Respectability, to specify a vague term, historically referenced the volitional aspects of class and race, that is, the part the individual or family might voluntarily choose to alter or change. As a vehicle for social change, it undoubtedly colluded with the bourgeois values: abstaining from immorality, dancing, alcohol, and gambling. Insofar as it did so, there is the temptation to see, as Foucault warned against, the mirage of symmetrical hypocrisies, bourgeois and subaltern. But against such an explanation one might mobilize an argument that in claiming practices from the bourgeois, respectability also resisted the automatic equation of poverty or race with degradation. The long history of the working-class and African American pursuit of dignity, at work and in society, speaks to this complexity." Tavia Nyong'o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, P, 2009), 116. Brittney Cooper's *Beyond Respectability* usefully elucidates the intersection of gender and race in nineteenth-century respectability politics; specifically, the ways in which Black women navigated a politics of respectability outside the cult of true womanhood, and against "white male standards of power as the goal to which Black people should aspire." Brittney Cooper, *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women*, (Urbana: U of Chicago, 2017), 5.

[322] Bradley, "Black and American, 1982," 62.

insofar as the Black subject is forced to maneuver white space for the sake of a subject position acceptable to the terms of white supremacy.[323] The negotiation of the racialized subject moving through white space resonates with the Black counter-archive as discussed in the previous chapter, which manages an epistemological position as repository that already marks you out of its space (literally and metaphorically). Space itself participates in the affective economy that marks objects and subjects for futurity. Black archives meanwhile reckon—uniquely so—with their status as both collections and coordinates that identify Black belonging. They function, in the vein of Hurston's petition to Du Bois for "a cemetery for the illustrious Negro dead," as "rallying spots for all that we want to accomplish and do."[324]

For his most salient example of the relationship between space, race, institution and identity in "Black and America, 1982," Bradley turns to another site at the University of Pennsylvania: the Du Bois College House. A synecdoche for Black studies and the inclusive efforts resulting from the social programs the rest of the essay details, the Du Bois College House—an institutional space designated for "students interested in Afro-American culture"—as Bradley learns through his participation in an informal steering committee of his alma mater, had suffered a string of racist attacks that included

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[323] In the previous chapter on Schomburg and Ellison, I elaborated on how the ideal subject proves a significant rubric for measuring the Black archive. There I argued that while Schomburg seems to support the idea of an archive to bolster their position, Ellison's narrator refuses a pre-ordained subject position, no matter how "ideal" it may appear. Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident* takes the ideal subject to the Ellisonian pyre even more literally.

[324] The Introduction explores in more detail Hurston's letter to Du Bois. Correspondence from Zora Neale Hurston to W. E. B. Du Bois, 11 June 1945, *W. E. B. Du Bois Papers* (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

pejorative prank calls and threats. Consequently, this same steering committee, which Bradley describes as "an informal group of active and influential students, faculty, and administrators (who that night included a vice-provost, the Faculty Senate chairman, and the Undergraduate Assembly chairman) who gather on Fridays at the Faculty Club for fellowship" led a public rally in defense of the space.[325] Bradley, however, does not buy their narrative of inclusion or protection. After all, he argues, the "cultural center was a subtle indicator of what the university thought Black culture was: a rotting, whitewashed house on what was at first the nether edge of campus and what later became the epicenter of a giant demolition site, reachable from the main part of the campus by way of a scramble up a muddy bank."[326] Spaces like this, in his estimation, are less the solutions to a problem than an evolution in the strategies of white supremacy. Furthermore, like the social programs of the 1980s, they are "in harmony with the white-supremacist tenor of society. They made white people seem grand, and they made black people seem less grand."[327]

Bradley's warning of the different guises of academic racism are worth heeding in discussions of Black archives. In many ways, this project's investment in "Black archives" versus counter archives of blackness seeks to extricate the archival practice from a white supremacist agenda and imagines an alternative impulse for accumulation that challenges the stakes of racialization itself. Black archives are more than sites for alternative knowledge accumulation; they destabilize the terms not only of white supremacy, but also, of the genres of Man that organize its systems and storehouses of

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[325] Bradley, "Black and American, 1982," 69.
[326] ibid.
[327] Bradley, "Black and American, 1982," 62.

knowledge. Bradley's essay demonstrates this, for instance in his interrogation of those spaces in academic institutions allocated in the name of blackness. *The Chaneysville Incident* makes it even clearer, as Black archives demand new relationships to evidence, space, temporality and future possibility. In the spirit of Baraka's 1965 Black Arts manifesto, they respond to the call for a revolutionary theater that, "must EXPOSE! Show us the insides of these humans, look into black skulls."[328]

Baraka's call to "show us the insides of these humans," resonates with the work of Sylvia Wynter on the genres of man/human. In fact, Wynter cites Bradley's "Black and American, 1982" at length in her own seminal essay: "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism." Here, Wynter reads Humanism's development of "Man" by taking into account the Du Bois house in Bradley's essay as a symbolic site "made to function as the extra-cultural space, in relation, no longer to a Wasp, but now more inclusively to a White American, normatively Euroamerican intra-cultural space; as the mode of Chaos imperative to the latter's new self-ordering."[329] In other words, she reaffirms Bradley's argument about the house as simply another tenor of white supremacy that reveals the status of blackness within a humanist knowledge system as foundational structural opposition. Indeed, for Wynter, all normative orders of knowledge require a similar antithesis. Expanding on Bradley's assessment, Wynter equates blackness itself with the ultimate chaos. As she claims, the dominant model (in all its forms—though in this case it is the ivory tower) "[averts] any effort to find the

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[328] Amiri Baraka, "The Revolutionary Theatre," *Home: Social Essays by Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka)* (New York: Akashi Classics, 2009), 236.
[329] Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found," *Boundary* 2 12.2-13.3 (Spring-Autumn, 1984): 41.

ceremonies which could wed the structural oppositions, liberating the Black from his Chaos function, since this function was the key to the dynamics of its own order of being."[330] As she avers, a ceremony that de-links blackness, epistemologically and ontologically from Chaos must be found.

Black archives, I propose, function as such ceremonies—but not in the way of the Du Bois College House. They are not college add-ons, but rather, reimagined systems of knowledge. Archives may collect chaos for the sake of order, but Black archives, which are forged in the fires of evidence, race, and memory as *The Chaneysville Incident* demonstrates, destabilize the order of the traditional repository. They introduce instead new political possibilities tied to, and made possible by, speculation. Thus, while I take seriously Wynter's warning of the dangers of "incorporation into the normative order of the present organization of knowledge," especially as these moments of incorporation may entrap us into enclaves, as Bradley illuminates in both the Du Bois College House of "Black and American, 1982" and The Hill in *The Chaneysville Incident*, Black archives may also function as ways around such entrapment.[331] They may, in fact, lead to us to the ceremony Wynter pursues in her own work, a ceremony that rejects blackness as chaotic other not through some sort of wedding of the Color Line but as a funeral for Man and his archive.

The need for such a radical ceremony is the result of smaller ceremonies that have for far too long provided spaces of otherness disguised as belonging. *The Chaneysville Incident* directly addresses the different scales of ceremony in a conversation between

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[330] Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found," 37.
[331] Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found," 38.

Jack and John about a local rite of passage—the first haircut. Criticizing how local ceremonies were often used to protect the younger generation from feeling the brunt of racism, Jack explains why the young men of town travelled so far for a haircut despite the fact that there were many local barbers in the area:

> if we'da ben like some these folks nowadays, we'da probably burnt them barbershops to the ground. Maybe we shoulda. […] But then that didn't seem to make no sense. So what we done, Johnny, was we worked it out like it was some kinda ceremony down to the Legion—just like that, on accounta it was Bunk that thought it up, an' Bunk surely loved his Legion ceremonies. […] an' soon as a colored boy looked like he was getting' tall enough to go to his first real barber, we'd get together an' scratch up some way to carry him over the mountain to Altoons, so's he could get his hair cut by a colored man. (65)

As Jack tells it, a ceremony was instituted to work around the de facto segregationist policy and simultaneously build up the young Black men of the community. Reflecting now upon that decision, particularly given the fact that John seems so oblivious to the ways in which his town was also the site of intense racism, Jack argues that perhaps the ceremony only prolonged the inevitable confrontation with white supremacy: "We shoulda let you find out. We shoulda let you bleed the same damn way we did every damn day" (66).

As this local ceremony that brings the Black boys of the town 40 miles away for a haircut demonstrates, *The Chaneysville Incident*, even more so than "Black and America, 1982," uses space to radically theorize the Black archive and its anti-Humanist promises.[332] Consider, for example, how much the novel invests in tracing the routes travailed by its protagonist, or the extent to which the ability to understand and manage

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[332] This notion of space as archival repository is usefully elucidated by Antoinette Burton's *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (2003), which examines how the space of the home (particularly for the three Indian women of her study) archives a history of national belonging.

space—historically, cartographically and theoretically —proves key to solving the central plot of the novel, the mystery of the fugitive slaves and that of John's own father, Moses Washington. These geographies and landscapes illuminate the ways in which knowledge of the past and the present cooperate in ways legible beyond the documentary archive. What history do we find if we read space as part and parcel of Black archival production?

Resisting the temptation to theorize the Black archive as simply a project of Africana epistemologies, Bradley posits the epistemological predicament as inherently unresolvable (though not necessarily problematically so). He takes this position from his father, whom Bradley confesses to using as a model for the novel's protagonist, John Washington. As a famous minister, a general officer of the A.M.E. church, and a historian, Bradley's father navigated a calling that refuted the need for empirical evidence foundational to his training as historian.[333] Bradley describes such an epistemological quandary in a 1992 interview with *The Missouri Review*:

> [my father] was very strict in his methodology, but on Sundays he was a Christian minister and had to have total faith in things not seen. Pop had an old ice box in which he kept documents in case the house burned down. He wouldn't say anything unless he had a document, unless he had a footnote. Yet he would say, "You must believe." You must act as if you had faith.[334]

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[333] Bradley's description of his father's conundrum as historian and minister parallels arguments John Ernest makes about the relation between sacred and secular history for the nineteenth century African American writer/historian in *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794-1861*. Ernest defines his organizing term: Liberation historiography as "a mode of reading of history in a way that respects the authority of the fragmented communities of experience, and that arranges those fragments according to the guidance of biblical narratives that themselves become comprehensible through the various experiences of the communities of the oppressed." John Ernest, *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794-1861* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2004), 18.

[334] David Bradley, "An Interview with David Bradley," Interview by Kay Bonetti, *The Missouri Review*. 15.3 (1992): 70.

A similar conundrum strikes John Washington, who pours over his father's documentary evidence hoping for answers to the mystery of his untimely death only to arrive at an understanding that such knowledge is accessible outside conventional textual, disciplinary, chronological, and spatial bounds.[335] The awareness that there is no comfort, no easy resolution, and certainly no answers takes us to the empty signifier at the heart of the novel's quest narrative: the folio.

To a certain extent, the folio is the most emblematically anti-Humanist of the novel's archives.[336] Held in a trust by Judge Scott (one of the most powerful white men of the community), the folio contains the documents John legally inherits from Moses. Imagined as containing the illicit deals negotiated between his bootlegger father, Moses Washington, and the powerful white men of the community, the folio and the ledger it contains are reluctantly handed over to John by the executor of Moses' will, Judge Lucien Scott. John seemingly inherits power, or at least power as leverage. But, despite

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[335] John digresses amidst a lecture on the slave trade to launch a complaint against the institutionalization of Black Studies: "what it all means is that those of us who count black people among our ancestors (they are never *all* our ancestors) must live forever with both our knowledge and our belief. It is not that we must choose traditions—that has been tried, and the attempt ended in failure. It is not even that we are caught in some dialectical battle between African thesis and European antithesis—then at least we could hope for synthesis. No, the quandary is that there is no comfort for us either way" (213-214).

[336] Sara Ahmed's description of the affective economy if helpful for thinking about the ways in which the archive circulates in *The Chaneysville Incident*. Bradley's novel frames the archive as a sort of generational investment in a particular knowledge system and its resources. As Ahmed indicates: "What I am offering is a theory of passion not as the drive to accumulate (whether it be value, power or meaning), but as that which is accumulated over time. Affect does not reside in an object or sign but is an effect of the circulation between objects and signs (= the accumulation of affective value). Signs increase in affective value as an effect of the movement between signs: the more signs circulate, the more affective they become." Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2004), 45.

the careful attention it has been paid, the ledger is, and apparently always has been, blank. Its value is thus not found in any information it contains, but rather, in the absence of the same. Indeed, there is perhaps no more de-centered Subject, or object for that matter, than the blank signifier.[337] As John tells the Judge—per Moses' instructions, "There was nothing in that folio that would implicate anybody. No list of names and dates and amounts" (230). And as Moses instructs John to tell the judge: Tell Lucian what's past is ashes." He burned it. […]" (230).

Because John knows the ledger is blank, the final pyre ceremony is really more symbol than conclusion. What is more, the scene renders the act of actually burning the ledger unclear. In some ways, it appears as though he actually preserves the folio. Prior to setting up the pyre, John takes the time to erase his archival footprint from the document. In a move similar to his putting the match-tin lid, "back in its place, so that it would be there when they wanted it," John carefully "sealed [the folio] with candle wax, as my father had done for me" (431). Indeed, such careful attention to the folio troubles an easy reading of John's self-immolation.[338] Why take such great pains with an article if the end

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[337] Jesus Benito reads the folio as an empty signifier: "[…] because this repository of history, is shown to be a mere blank. It is an empty sign, a mere signifier devoid of any referential value, but a signifier that offers power to those who have control over it." Jesus Benito, "*The Chaneysville Incident:* The Narrator as Historian*"* in *Telling Histories: Narrativizing History, Historicizing Literature*. Ed. Susan Onega (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), 187.

[338] Kenneth Warren's reading of the pyre scene in *What Was African American Literature?* suggests John also participates in the suicide of the 13 slaves who refused to return to slavery: "John then enacts his own belief in the truth of his recreated narrative by setting up his own immolation as a historian and as a person. […] He ignites the pyre, and the story ends with John wondering whether Judith will understand the meaning of what he is doing, leaving us to presume that he, like his father before him and like the runaways before them, has chosen to return home." While Warren's interpretation certainly exists as a legitimate reading of that final pyre, and in many ways as the most probable reading, the ambiguity of the final scene is critical to the work the novel does in

result is its incineration? The only detail we have of the folio in the scene is that it remains tucked under John's arm throughout the ritual.

An alternate ending that does not see John leaving the pyre, folio in hand, reads the final scene as another instance of ritual suicide. This interpretation correlates with the temporal cycle that sees John follow in the footsteps of his father and great-grandfather. Meanwhile, the details that "it would make no difference" that John carelessly gets kerosene in his boots (432), or that he stands at the pyre "thinking about all of it, one last time" (433), make us at least consider that John plans a more dramatic end to his narrative. Perhaps the most convincing clue as to the conclusion is the novel's line about whether Judith would understand. Harkening back to John's news of Old Jack's death, this final line about whether she would understand the meaning of the smoke rising from the hill parallels his earlier concern: "and it occurred to me that she did not understand—she thought he was dead" (160).[339]

Here John alludes to what he takes to be a racial capacity for understanding outside western epistemology and to his unraveling the story of the runaway slaves, who ostensibly commit suicide in the face of returning to slavery.[340] For them, John recounts,

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deconstructing not only our expectations but our own reading practices. That is, Bradley challenges the notion of finality altogether by refusing to clarify the certainty of "death" in this moment. Kenneth W. Warren, *What Was African American Literature?*: *The W.E.B. Du Bois Lectures* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011), 99.

[339] According to John, Judith's understanding is limited both by her race and her gender. Speaking of why he wants a toddy rather than the coffee she serves him he states: "I wanted a toddy. I needed one. But I could not expect Judith to understand that. There was a lot that I needed that she would never understand. For she was a woman and she was white, and though I loved her there were points of reference that we did not share. And never would" (384).

[340] For a compelling reading of Bradley's "ambivalent use of the African belief system," see Maha, "The Stillness That Comes After," 331-355.

death was escape not end: "Death was not an ending of things but a passing on of spirit, a change of shape, and nothing more" (428). Similarly, whether or not John participates in the suicide is secondary to a resistance to the binary of life and death. I delineate, therefore, all of these possibilities precisely because this is the very core of the novel—not the self-immolation, nor a reading of afro-pessimism that would see John unable to escape a return to the original trauma of enslavement—but the multiplicity and openness of interpretation. In other words, an archive generates not one but all the histories. An archival novel, like *The Chaneysville Incident*, points to fiction as a way to generate multiple histories without the pretense of "fact." Such multiplicity in the Black archive thus means that the very source material is not fact, evidence, or even truth, but possibility.

Long before John is able to articulate his own relationship to history, memory, and the archive, and certainly before he verbalizes a critique of Humanism and alternative epistemologies, the novel points to the inherent anti-Humanism of Black archives. Foreshadowing the pyre of the conclusion, John sets up a fire for Jack as he grows increasingly ill. The narrative flashes back to a scene in which Jack teaches John not only how to light a fire, but also, about the power fire provides: "[Fire]gives a man say. Gives him *final* say. It lets him destroy. Lets him destroy anything. There ain't nothing in the world that wont burn or melt or change some way if you get it hot enough, if you got enough fire. […] a man with no say is an animal." Responding to young John's question about whether building a fire will make him a man, Jack affirms: "No, […] Nothin' *makes* you a man. It means you can be a man. If you decide you want to" (42). This notion of deciding whether John wants to be a man is laden with anti-Humanist meaning

including the possibility of a decentered subject. In the spirit of Wynter's "The Ceremony Must Be Found," John commences the ritual: "Now I laid the tinder in the firebox, keeping it an open, crisscross pattern. On top of it I built a fragile edifice of kindling and small pieces of wood. […] I put the can [of matches] back on the shelf before I lit my fire" (43). Further compounding the metaphor, John burns text. In fact, not just text but pre-archival text:

> I watched as the fire caught in the dry newspaper and began to devour the records of the goings on in the County three months back and I wondered if some unimaginative scholar in some unimaginable future would have given his eyeteeth for the very bit of newspaper I had burned. Historians think that way, losing sleep over documents that they deem precious, but which, in the evaluation of people who have reason to know, are most useful as tinder, or mattress stuffing, or papier-maché. I was burning sacred primary source material; but it was the heat that mattered right then, not history. (43)

The scene gestures to what Wynter identifies as the first normative order of knowledge: theology, burning as sacred documents.[341] John ceremoniously incinerates the institutions of white Man thereby delinking blackness from Chaos. The scene also points to what Wynter describes as the second and third order, or reason and high art, respectively mirrored here in the "unimaginative scholar." In the form of a ceremony for releasing imagination via the burning of history, Bradley tells us what archival novels do. They release and structure memory with imagination, which in turn, provides us with the possibility for speculation that results in action. What remains, I propose, therefore, is heat for the sake of the human not "Man." Human, as Wynter describes it in the tradition

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[341] See Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism" *Boundary 2* 12.3-13.1 (Spring-Autumn 1984): Duke UP, 19-70.

of Césaire and Fanon, as a new invention that provides us with "the possibility, therefore, of our fully realized autonomy of feelings, thoughts, behaviors."[342]

Highlighting the need for the invention of a human free from the descriptive phrases that have for far too long yoked blackness to chaos, Bradley's novel presents us with a self-conscious "ideal" African American historian who navigates his place and relationship to blacknesss through the paradigms of western thought. What he discovers in what proves to be a quest for self, is an archive more akin to what Glissant calls nonhistory and an incident that embodies "the problem faced by collective consciousness [that] makes a creative approach necessary, in that the rigid demands made by the historical approach can constitute, if they are not restrained, a paralyzing handicap."[343] *The Chaneysville Incident* thus introduces us to Black archives that, even when conscripted by ideologies that would reinforce their marginality, imagine a freeing, albeit ambiguous, epistemology.[344] Such imagination, however, is not without its victims. Some it loses to the fire. Others, as the next chapter's treatment of *Zong!* elaborates, it loses to water.

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[342] Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3.3 (2003): 331.
[343] Edouard Glissant, *Carribean Discourse: Selected Essays*, Trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville, VA: UP of Virginia, 1989), 61.
[344] Missy Dehn Kubitschek's reading of Yoruban syndesis as an epistemological system that refuses historical fact, favoring instead an accretive process of storytelling and interpretation is a useful interlocutor in my interrogation of archival humanism.

CHAPTER FOUR

Archives in the Wake: M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!*

In 1985, the Society of American Archivists published a 112-page manual titled "Archives and Manuscripts: Law." The manual provides information about local, state, and federal laws relevant to archive management (e.g. Records Act, Privacy Act, Sunshine Act, Freedom of Information Act, and Freedom Disposal Act). It reviews legal standards for admissibility of documents in evidence and provides advice about how and when to work with lawyers and what to expect in the litigation process.[345] The manual also responds to questions concerning legal issues that arise when working with archives, including an overview of restrictions placed on materials that reveal criminal activity. It asserts that as long as the materials reveal "clear evidence" of a crime, "the archivist - like any other citizen - has an obligation to report the evidence to the legal authorities, whether or not the donor has specified that those materials be restricted." The manual's writers acknowledge the ambiguity of their response: after all, what exactly constitutes "clear evidence"? The best they can do is recommend professional counsel, for when it comes to evidence, they admit "it is not easy to tell a smoking gun from a water pistol."[346]

The metaphor employed—smoking gun to water pistol—points to the power of evidence without affirming any sense of intrinsic value. One of the challenges archivists face when responding to the question of what constitutes "clear evidence" turns out to be

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[345] Gary M. Peterson and Trudy Huskamp Peterson, *Archives and Manuscripts: Law* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1985).
[346] Peterson and Huskamp Peterson, 42.

one of semantics and disciplinary conventions. The term "evidence" means something quite different for archivists and lawyers. The Society of American Archivists' glossary entry for the word "evidence" clarifies the distinction by positing two separate definitions. The first entry defines "evidence" fairly broadly as "something that is used to support an understanding or argument."[347] In this case, there is no burden of proof since value is determined by the user's interpretation and its usefulness for their argument. As for the second definition there is no part of speech indicated. Instead, categorized as related to "Law" the definition proceeds: "a record, an object, testimony, or other material that is used to prove or disprove a fact." In this case, no allowances are made for understanding. Hewed to the terms of fact rather than to the terms of use, "evidence" is conscripted by a legal code that illuminates an epistemological paradigm founded on notions of "truth."

Insofar as archivists and lawyers understand "evidence" differently, so too do they interpret its value differently. In legal contexts, evidence is valued based on its relevance, materiality, and admissibility. Archives, meanwhile, evaluate evidence for the purposes of acquisition. They make their determinations based on "uniqueness, form, and importance."[348] Both, nonetheless, appraise evidence with an argument in mind. In the case of the law, the matter is explicit. Archives, however, have historically glossed over

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[347] "Evidence," "Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology" (*Society of American Archivists*, 2017).

[348] According to a bulletin of the National Archives published in 1956: "In appraising the value of information in public records, the archivist is not greatly concerned with the source of the records -- what agency created them, or what activities resulted in their creation. The concern here is with the information that is in them. There are a number of tests by which informational values of public records may be judged. These are (1) uniqueness, (2) form, and (3) importance. T. R. Schellenberg, "Bulletins of the National Archives," *The Appraisal of Modern Records,* Number 8 (October 1956).

the notion of argument-driven evaluation. The impulse to archive has often been rendered a universal imperative and the motivation for a particular consignation occluded in the name of scientific objectivity or historical value.

One of the most significant contributions of the archival turn has been a clearer sense of the extent to which archives make arguments about what matters, who matters, and why they matter.[349] Many of these arguments are then reinforced by the law. In *Archive Fever*, Derrida gestures at just how symbiotic the relationship is between the archive and the law:

> the meaning of "archive," its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded. The citizens who thus held and signified political power were considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law. […] The archons are first of all the documents' guardians. […] They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. […] Entrusted to such archons, these documents in effect speak the law: they recall the law and call on or impose the law. To be guarded thus, in the jurisdiction of this speaking the law, they needed at once a guardian and a localization.[350]

Tracing the term "archive" back to its etymological origin, Derrida highlights the extent to which the guardianship of documents is predicated on political power. Archive means, after all, the site where the "superior magistrates" live. Those who held power not only made laws but were in charge of keeping evidence of said laws. Additional to the power to preserve and protect the document, or as he claims to "in effect speak the law," the

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[349] See Trouillot's *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995); Elinor Des Verney Sinnette's *Black Bibliophiles and Collectors* (1990); Carolyn Steedman's *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (2001); Antoinette Burton's *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (2003); Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003).
[350] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 2.

archons were also "accorded hermeneutic right and competence." Preserving material evidence thus becomes another way to maintain systematic socio-political hierarchies.

Black archives are, of course, no stranger to the relationship between those who speak the law and those entrusted to protect the evidence for a future history. Fundamentally aware of these dynamics, Black archives actively resist the terms by which such power is maintained. As Chapter Two explored, they turn to the body as a material site for a different sort of repository to challenge the "hermeneutic right" otherwise reserved for those who "speak the law." Chapter Three examined, moreover, how they accumulate and preserve for the sake of speculation rather than history, which in turn resists the conclusive narratological teleology that reinforces Black subordination. And, as this chapter emphasizes, they raise questions about the stakes of "evidence" and the epistemological paradigm that undergirds a burden of proof. Black archives ultimately highlight the extent to which traditional archives have been used as legal resources for what Sylvia Wynter describes as the maintenance of "Man," first as Man1 (homo politicus or the political subject of the state) and later as Man2 (bio-economic subject).[351]

Precisely because archive theory has so systematically sidelined issues of gender and race, Black archives confront the politics of preservation and the discourse of its power relations. Take, for example, the aforementioned manual produced by the Society

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[351] Wynter lays out the evolving epistemes of the overrepresentation of the human as "Man" in terms of a ""politics of being"; that is, as a politics that is everywhere fought over what is to be the descriptive statement, the governing sociogenic principle, instituting of each genre of the human. With the result that as Christian becomes Man1 (as political subject), then as Man1 becomes Man2 (as a bio-economic subject), from the end of the eighteenth century onwards." Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," 318.

of American Archivists. The manual's only mention of race or gender is relegated to a footnote in a discussion of archival ethics and the Freedom of Information Act: "A private institution technically could discriminate against categories of researchers based on race, gender, religion, and so forth; however, the institution would probably lose its tax-exempt status, federal and state grants, contracts, and accounts."[352] Although the manual acknowledges discrimination as a legal concern for archives and accessibility, it ultimately routes the issue through economics and the question of institutional tax law.[353] That is to say, race apparently only matters to traditional archivization on the grounds of money, not rights.

In turn, the organization's glossary makes no mention of race or gender. Nevertheless, the glossary entry for the term "evidence" includes two appended notes that I propose can serve as a way of thinking about the official relationship between race, gender, and the archive. Ironically, the notes do not provide much in the way of the definition they are meant to bolster. They are essentially citations from canonical archival texts that use the term "evidence' in context and actually prove more the exception than

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[352] Peterson and Huskamp Peterson, 72.

[353] The manual includes as appendix a sample loan agreement from the National Archives that resonates with some of the central concerns about insurance and property in *Zong!* Of the seventeen conditions therein presented, number fourteen is especially relevant: "The borrowing institution must, at its own expense, cover the documents involved with an all-risk fine arts insurance policy from the time the documents leave the Archives until the time they are returned. An evaluation for insurance purposes will be made by the National Archives and must be kept confidential. Evidence that insurance coverage is in full force and effect must be given to the National Archives before the documents may leave the building" (102). The hypothetical insurance claim parallels that at the center of the *Zong!* and serves as another example of the fact that the state has historically taken greater care of its documents than it has its Black subjects. The fact that the glossary spends so long on this sample insurance claim for a hypothetical archive than it does attending to either gender or race in its treatment of the law and the archive further reiterates the point.

the rule in terms of the glossary's format (most glossary entries do not include these notes). The first cites David Levy's *Scrolling Forward: Making Sense of Documents in the Digital Age* (2001): "The receipt is meant to function as 'proof of purchase,' as *evidence* that an exchange of money for goods actually took place. Coming into being at the very time and place the food was prepared and the goods were delivered, the receipt serves as witness to these facts." The second note draws from Heather MacNeil's *Trusting Records: Legal, Historical, and Diplomatic Perspectives* (2000): "The Latin word *evidence* means 'that which is manifest of in plain sight.' In its metaphoric sense, evidence brings the invisible (that is, a past event) back into plain sight." I highlight these two notes, included as addendums to the Society of American Archivist's entry for "evidence," because of how they inadvertently point to obstacles that keep Black archives excluded from traditional archive theory's transactional invisibility. The first example—which positions evidence in the context of the market—evokes a long history of Black commodification, a history that has also systematically excluded Black subjects from serving as witnesses to their own facts. As for the second example, we need only remember Ellison's eponymous narrator for whom the accumulation of "evidence" only reinforced his invisibility.

These addendums to "evidence" also resonate with the central concerns of the text under examination in this chapter, M. NourbeSe Philip's poetry cycle *Zong!* (2008). In the case of the first citation, whereby evidence is related to receipts as proofs of purchase, evidence is routed through the market. In a similar vein, *Zong!* deconstructs a legal claim to insurance money related to the Middle Passage. The text functions, in a way, as a public receipt for the purchase of Black bodies—a witness of their commodification as

much as of their murder. The second citation—evidence as that which is "in plain sight"— renders the invisible visible. This approach, which in many ways defines Black archives across the twentieth century, appears in *Zong!* as the effort to bring the invisible back into plain sight "through memory, and water."[354]

Committed to making visible the invisible, M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* tells the "story that must be told; that can only be told by not telling" (194). The story around which the collection is constructed is the 1781 massacre of over 150 slaves aboard the slave-ship *Zong*.[355] Commandeered by Captain Luke Collingwood and owned by a syndicate of Liverpool merchants headed by William Gregson, the ship, carrying 442 enslaved people, drifted off course on its way to Jamaica.[356] Realizing that inevitable financial loss would stem from this navigational blunder, and that the ship owners stood

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[354] M. NourbeSe Philip and Setaey Adamu Boateng, *Zong!* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2008), 203. Subsequent citations in text.

[355] The exact number of the murdered varies. According to "Martin Dockray and the *Zong* A Tribute in the Form of a Chronology," which primarily draws from new evidence at the hearing of the motion--an affidavit from the mate James Kensall—on November 29, 1781, 54 women and children were thrown overboard. On December 1, 1781, 42 men were thrown overboard. "Over the course of the next days, thirty-six more slaves were thrown overboard and a further ten jumped into the water by themselves. Kelsall later considered that 'the outside number of drowned amounted to 142 in the whole. In addition, thirty-six slaves died from lack of water during the voyage back to Jamaica." The *Jamaican Cornwall Chronicle* published on 5 January 1782, indicates that "the vessel, there named *Zorgue*, was 'in great distress' having jettisoned some 130 slaves." Andrew Lewis, "Martin Dockray and the *Zong:* A Tribute in the Form of a Chronology," *Journal of Legal History* 28. 3 (2007): 364. Meanwhile, in *Zong!* Philip footnotes her use of the number 150: "The case mentions 150 slaves killed. James Walvin in *Black Ivory,* 131, others 130 and 132. The exact number of African slaves murdered remains a slippery signifier of what was undoubtedly a massacre." Philip, *Zong!*, 208.

[356] Philip describes the cargo as one "of 470 slaves" (189). I derive the number 442 from Lewis' article on Martin Dockray's archival work about the event. For other texts that detail the *Zong*, see Jane Webster, "The *Zong* In the Context of The Eighteenth-Century Slave Trade," *Journal of Legal History* 28.3 (2007): 285-298 and Ian Baucom's *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance, Capitol, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2005).

to make more money from insurance policies if the slaves were thrown overboard rather than allowed to die aboard the ship, Capt. Collingwood ordered the massacre of the enslaved people aboard the ship.[357] The matter was brought before a court of law when the ship's insurers refused to pay out the claim on the "destroyed cargo" (Philip 189). Jurors in the *Gregson v. Gilbert* (1783) case found in favor of the ship's owners (Gregson) based on Collingwood's claim of a significant lack of water on board.[358] The court not only exonerated the Captain and crew but, ultimately, reinforced the murder of enslaved peoples as legal. Its only gesture to murder was one line describing a legal definition of the enslaved as property, which indirectly legitimizes their status as non-human, and marks the event not as murder but as insurance claim: "It has been decided, whether wisely or unwisely is not now the question, that a portion of our fellow creatures may become the subject of property." And so it is, from the archived version of the *Gregson v. Gilbert* decision, that Philip culls the material, and her inspiration, for *Zong!*.

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[357] There is debate about whether or not Captain Collingwood ultimately made the decision to throw the enslaved peoples overboard. He is reported to have been incredibly ill during the latter part of the voyage and died soon after arrival in Jamaica. Lewis's account of the incident provides evidence to suggest that the ship's leadership was taken over by Robert Stubb who was the former governor of Annamboe and an experienced slaver. Stubb also owned some of the enslaved peoples aboard the ship, which may have further influenced his decision to throw them overboard.

[358] Full case name: *Gregson v Gilbert* (1783) 3 Doug 232, 99 ER 629, [1783] EngR 85 (22 May 1783). In the trial of March 6, 1783, the jury awarded the owners of the *Zong* £30 per enslaved person thrown overboard. On May 21-22, 1783, a motion for appeal was heard by the court of King's Bench. According to James Oldham's investigation of the court materials regarding the case at various stages, "no evidence has been discovered to show that a new trial was ever conducted." Likewise, there is no evidence as to whether or not the insurers ever paid out the original award. James Oldham, "Insurance Litigation Involving the Zong and Other British Slave Ships, 1780-1807," *The Journal of Legal History* 28.3 (2007), 318.

Deconstructing *stare decisis*

A practicing lawyer for seven years before turning to writing full time, M. NourbeSe Philip's legal training undeniably affects her relationship to and handling of archival evidence.[359] In conversation with Patricia Saunders for *Small Axe* (2008), Philip elaborates on just how acutely her legal training influenced *Zong!:*

> I think, for instance, just the ease with which I decided I would go and look the case up at the law library—even knowing that there was a reported case—is directly linked to my studying law. On another level, the training in law teaches you to squeeze all of the emotion out of the events that comprise the case in question to get to the fact situation. And then you have, I suppose, this wonderful thing, the law, that is supposedly so constant and so unchanging and that at times is modulated by the principles of equity. Equity's purpose was supposed to soften the hard, unyielding law.[360]

Philip tellingly begins by acknowledging that archives and their knowledges require specialized access. Reminiscent of Hurston's spyglass of anthropology, she draws attention to the juridical "spy glass" that enables her to maneuver the archival material of this particular case.[361] Not only does she have access to the materials but can decipher the code of its discourse.[362]

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[359] Philip wrote two books of poetry while working as a lawyer, *Thorns* (1980) and *Salmon Courage* (1983). After giving up her legal career in 1983, she went on to publish books of poetry (*She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1988) and *Zong!* (2008)); novels (*Harriet's Daughter* (1988), *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* (1991); essays (some of which are collected in *Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture* (1992) and *Bla_k* (2017); chapbooks; and short stories.
[360] "Defending the Dead, Confronting the Archive: A Conversation with M. NourbeSe Philip," by Patricia Saunders, *Small Axe* 12.2 (June 2008): 66.
[361] Although Hurston claims that "I had to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look through at [myself]," some of the resources she acquired through her preparation in the discipline were also the very things that thwarted early efforts on the field. Hurston, *Mules and Men*, 1. For more on this see Chapter Two's discussion of *Mules and Men*.
[362] Like Hurston, Philip also deploys her academic networks for the sake of the archive. The acknowledgments in *Zong!* testify to just how much she relied on collaboration for the project; she acknowledges, for example, that "Ian Baucom very kindly shared his archival research on the Zong massacre with me" (xi). Baucom, meanwhile, uses a

In "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," Spillers emphasizes the need to decipher discourse, particularly where Black women's exclusion is concerned. Referring to the trap of "overdetermined nominative properties" that have historically been used to label Black women, Spillers affirms that in order to "speak a truer word concerning myself, I must strip down through layers of attenuated meanings, made an excess in time, over time, assigned by a particular historical order, and there await whatever marvels of my own inventiveness."[363] To Spillers's notion of "historical order" M. NourbeSe Philip adds the dimension of the "the law." As she demonstrates in *Zong!*, the law functions as an accomplice to the production (and maintenance) of "overdetermined nominative properties."[364] Stripping through attenuated meanings thus demands reckoning with the legal discourse embedded in our "American Grammar." It means deconstructing the grammar of violence at the level of the law and its archive.[365]

One of the most significant tools of violence by which the law and its archives have systematically overwritten blackness is with the doctrine of precedent or *stare decisis*. Translated to mean "standing by things decided," *stare decisis* constructs arguments on the basis of previous arguments. Decisions are rendered because they align with earlier decisions. *Stare decisis* supposedly provides efficiency and improves the chances at adequate preparation for argumentation. The danger, however, is that "unless

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number of poems from *Zong!* ("*Zong!* #4," "*Zong!* #14," "*Zong!* #17," "*Zong!* #20," "*Zong!* #22," and "*Zong! #*24") as chapter epigraphs to his own extensive study on the subject, *Specters of the Atlantic*.

[363] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 65.

[364] ibid

[365] *Zong!*'s deconstructionist approach to language and the law responds also to the question Saidiya Hartman poses in "Venus in Two Acts": "How does one revisit the scene of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence?" Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 4.

administered wisely, the doctrine may, through its tendency to perpetuate that which is traditional, prevent the law from keeping pace with changing conditions and work unnecessary hardship in particular cases."[366] It is a legal approach that ultimately requires faith in the law as a moralistic system.[367] On this account, Philip dissents. She speaks sarcastically to Saunders of "this wonderful thing, the law, that is supposedly so constant and so unchanging and that at times is modulated by the principles of equity." Equity supposedly holds *stare decisis* accountable, bending the law when it proves otherwise too unyielding. The problem, of course, is that these assurances ring truer for white subjects whose birthright is citizenship and belonging than it does for Black subjects who find themselves perpetually excluded from such promises.[368]

Why then should Black subjects put their faith in a system that, as Alexander Weheliye argues, "establishes an international division of humanity, which grants previously excluded subjects limited access to personhood as property at the same time as

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[366] Some of the benefits to juridical systems that abide by the doctrine of precedence are that: "It expedites the work of the courts by preventing the constant reconsideration of settled questions; it enables lawyers to advise their clients with a reasonable degree of certainty and safety; it assures individuals that, in so far as they act on authoritative rules of conduct, their contract and other rights will be protected in the courts; and, finally, it makes for equality of treatment of all men before the law and lends stability to the judicial arm of government." See Robert Von Moschzisker, "Stare Decisis in Courts of Last Resort," *Harvard Law Review* 37.4 (Feb. 1924): 410.

[367] According to Von Moschzisker's analysis of the *stare decisis*: "All scientific systems produce their own guiding doctrines; in the common law, a controlling one is that the greatest average of good and the least harm will be achieved if a court, having once deliberately adopted and declared a rule of action or construction of a statute or constitution, shall not, in future cases, disturb its prior decision except for very cogent reasons, and on a clear conviction of error." Von Moschzisker, 414.

[368] The Black Lives Matter movement shines a light on the relationship between *stare decisis* and the systematic murdering of Black people at the hands of white police officers who are then acquitted or not tried.

it fortifies the supremacy of Man"?[369] Philip poses a similar question to Saunders: "How do you/we relate to the law when it once said that we were things, and upheld all of these decisions that supported that view?" In doing so, she not only rails against a social code predicated on the exclusion of Black bodies, but also, calls out the ways in which the doctrine of precedent has been used to "fortif[y] the supremacy of Man," which keeps Black as "other." As the language of the *Gregson v. Gilbert* decision makes clear, the bearers of the brunt of such legal stagnation are subjects already systematically excluded and oppressed by the legal system, those on whom the heavy hand of the law falls swiftly, violently, and unrelentingly.[370]

The doctrine of precedent essentially relies on evidence of what was to determine what will be. Archives, as a result, function as stakeholders in a system of legal repetition masquerading as consistency.[371] In addition to serving as repositories for future histories, they preserve social codes.[372] This dynamic between history, politics, and Black

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[369] Weheliye, *Habeus Viscus*, 79.
[370] Although *stare decisis* remains in practice in the US and English legal systems, "in international law, the *stare decisis* rule has been excluded since 1922, but permanent jurisdictions constantly refer to their previous decisions." Gilbert Guillaume, "The Use of Precedent by International Judges and Arbitrators," *Journal of International Dispute Settlementi* 2.1 (2011): 5.
[371] Colin Dayan's work on legal personhood and race calls this reliance on repetition ritual: "The will to repeat, the insistence on the already that must be redone, accounts for the power of ritual, an action both civil and sacred." Colin Dayan, *The Law is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011), 9.
[372] In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor also focuses on the use of repetition for the transmission of collective memory. In other words, where the archive (as documents accumulated in the most traditional sense) transmits collective memory through narrative, the Repertoire transmits collective memory through embodied performances of predictable and formulaic encounters which, she calls "scenarios." The "portable framework" of the scenario, Taylor argues, "bears the weight of accumulative repeats. The scenario makes visible, yet again, what is already there: the ghosts, the images, the stereotypes." Taylor, 28.

subjecthood is what prompts Ellison's narrator to take a match to his archive at the end of *Invisible Man*. He essentially realizes that his briefcase archive contains evidence of an array of decisions made against him (the diploma, the letters of "recommendation," the name of the Brotherhood). They reinforce a *stare decisis* of Black being that renders him invisible. Rather than deconstruct the materials though, he opts for destruction.

Philip's *Zong!*, meanwhile, finds another form of Black archiving. Revolting against *stare decisis* in its own way, *Zong!* deconstructs previously held decisions in order to disturb what for far too long has been considered settled. By working through the language of the law, she dismantles its power. By aminating the dead, she ushers in a new archive.[373] Working within the tradition of Black archives, *Zong!* plunges through history to its outside. There it locates an epistemological plane outside the grasp of Humanism's Man and its history of rendering Black bodies as property.

One of the techniques through which to access this "outside" is by incorporating another grammar into the legal discourse in which archives are so often steeped. By design, legal discourse (attached to Enlightenment notions of evidence, fact, and reason) evacuates affect. As Philip describes it, the law "squeezes all of the emotion out of the events […] to get to the fact situation."[374] This, in turn, reinforces a binary—emotion and feelings versus fact and reason—that is actually built into the overrepresentation of the human as "Man."[375] It has historically been used to undercut other ways of knowing from

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[373] I allude to zombification with a caveat I borrow from Colin Dayan: "I try to show how the ghosts of Enlightenment past become the demons of modernity. I also suggest how what we call supernatural or think of as ghostly is really quite natural, corporeal, easily recast as reasonable." Dayan, 9

[374] Saunders, 66.

[375] Sylvia Wynter elucidates how rationality was used to exclude racialized bodies from the category of "Man." She argues that "while the "Indians" were portrayed as the very

people for whom "fact" and "reason" not only have proven insufficient but, ultimately, exploitative and self-defeating.[376] Philip refuses this binary by affirming: "the disorder, illogic, and irrationality of the *Zong!* poems can no more tell the story than the legal report of *Gregson v. Gilbert* masquerading as order, logic and rationality" (197). Confronting and naming the charade of the grammar that overrepresents Man, Philip deconstructs the archive for the sake of Black archives.

In the spirit of Sylvia Wynter's request for a new ceremony, *Zong!* rewrites the grammar of the archive for the sake of the law as much as history. Unlike some of the other texts examined in *Collecting Race* (e.g. *Invisible Man*, *Louisiana*, *The Chaneysville Incident*), Philip's work theorizes Black archives by deconstructing them formally as much as thematically. The text's deconstruction and fragmentation results in a more paratactic than syntactic grammar. Resisting teleology at the level of the sentence, meaning often emerges without subordination or coordination.[377] Likewise, the collection deconstructs the Black archive's ideal subject (carried over from the New

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acme of the savage, irrational Other, the "Negroes" were assimilated to the former's category, represented as its most extreme form and as the ostensible missing link between rational humans and irrational animals." Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Truth/Power/Freedom, 266.

[376] Philip attaches this rationality back to traditional grammar and language, for "if language is to do what it must do, which is communicate, these qualities—order, logic, rationality—the rules of grammar must be present. And, as it is with language, so too with the law" Philip, *Zong!*, 197.

[377] Philip reflects on her work in *She Tries Her Tongue* in a way that reflects a similar motivation as I am describing is operative in the Black archival aesthetics of *Zong!*: "the imperative for me was to move beyond representation of what the New World experience was—even one filtered through my own imagination and knowing, for that would have meant working entirely within the order of logic, rationality, and predictability; it would have meant ordering an experience which was disordered (and cannot ever be ordered), irrational, illogical, and unpredictable; it would have meant doing a second violence, this time to the memory of an already violent experience." M. NourbeSe Philip, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1989), 197.

Negro ideology of its theoretical emergence). In fact, it destabilizes the self-same subject to such an extent that it even defers authorial singularity.

Archival Un-Tellings

Haunted by the "sounds of those murdered Africans [that] continue to resound and echo underwater. In the bone beds of the sea" (203), Philip's poetry collection uses the one-page court decision that ruled against life as its primary inspiration. In the collection's "Notanda," Philip explains the constraints she imposes on her collection as strategies for the "critique of language": "I use the text of the legal report almost as a painter uses paint or a sculptor stone—the material with which I work being preselected and limited. Henry Moore observed that his manner of working was to remove all extraneous material to allow the figure that was "locked" in the stone to reveal itself. It is an image that has always appealed to me, although I work with words rather than stone" (198). The first of the five sections of poetry, "Os," radically utilizes the original legal document. In the spirit of procedural poetics, each of its individual poems restrict its language to the words contained in the document transcription for the legal decision of *Gregson v. Gilbert*.[378] In some instances, this means dividing up the words from the

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[378]According to David Huntsperger, "Procedural form, then—in opposition to the free verse of the second half of the twentieth century—involves adherence to certain constraints upon the generation of content." Building off of Marjorie Perloff's argument about the procedural in postmodern poetry, Huntsperger avers that "In all procedural poetry, labor is inevitably a 'thematic property." David W. Huntsperger, *Procedural Form in Postmodern American Poetry: Berrigan, Antin, Silliman, and Hejinian* (New York: Palgrave, 2010): 22. Philip, meanwhile, makes the relationship between labor and poetry clear in *Zong!*'s "Notanda," which also lays out for the reader the collection's procedural constraints. Where she digresses from Hunstperger's investment in Postmodernity, however, is that while she admits that "on their surface the poems approximate language poetry; like the language poets I questions the assumed

decision and working at the level of consonant sounds, as Philip does in the first of the section's poems. The poems are also unique in that they are numbered and labeled (e.g. "Zong! #1). As their numbers increase so too does the configuration of letters and sounds develop into words. For example, the first line of the first poem, "Zong! #1" dwells on the sounds in the word "water,": "w w w w a wa/ w a w a wa t" (3). "Zong! #26," the first section's final poem, meanwhile, signals more explicitly the language and tone of the court document: "was the case was the remedy was the argument was the delay was the evidence," and it concludes with a harrowing reminder of the subjects at the root of the incident, and the motivation at the root of the decision, the idea that: "negroes was the cause" (45).

Following the precise procedural poetics of "Os," *Zong!*'s next four sections of poetry ("Sal," "Ventus," "Ratio," and "Ferrum") continue to work with the language of the decision but more liberally. Some of the words still come from the decision verbatim while others are made from recombining its letters. That is to say, in these four sections of poetry new words emerge out of the "bones" of the decisions. With these new words in play, the sections also provide a more expansive sense of story and of life aboard the ship.

According to Philip, the relationship between "Os" and the four sections that follow is one of translation: "I now think of the poems that come after the first twenty-six as a translation of the opacity of those earlier poems—a translation that, like all good

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transparency of language and, therefore, employ similar strategies to reveal the hidden agendas of language. In my own work, the strategies signpost a multifaceted critique of the European project." Philip, *Zong!*, 197.

translations, has a life of its own" (206).[379] Take the first poem in "Sal." Gesturing back to the opening of "Zong! #1" which stuttered through the word "water," the first poem in "Sal" reads: "water parts / the *oba* sobs" (59).[380] "Sal" thus begins with the word "water" fully articulated on the page. This, I propose, is only possible because of the *oba*'s presence in the poem.[381] The translation and recombination, the mutilating of the text "as the fabric of African life and the lives of these men, women and children were mutilated" (193), allows for another force to pierce through, and with it a new episteme: the *oba*. Not only does the section use the *oba* as an emotional agent. In just four words of the first poem, "Sal" responds to the affectively evacuated legal language of the decision to which "Os" so strictly adhered. It metaphorically presses beneath the water for the sake of another power, another hierarchy, another way of being, knowing, and ultimately, of mourning.

In addition to reconstituting the vocabulary of the legal decision included at the end of the collection, "Sal," "Ventus," "Ratio," and "Ferrum" experiment with font and,

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379 There are two possible ways to read the significance of the number 26 in the sections contained in "Os." One might be a play on the number of letters in the English alphabet, in which case the restraints of language would appear early on in the collection. The other meaning might allude to a specific detail of the ship *Zong*. According to various reports it landed in Africa on February 26, 1781 before departing with the enslaved to the Caribbean. As "Os" is the first poem of the series it may also reference this point of departure.

380 "Os" is the only poetry section that titles the poems. The remaining four sections of poems do not include any titles.

381 In Yoruba tradition, Ọba is the name of a river goddess married to the god of thunder, Shango. According to the Yoruba myth, Ọba cuts off her ear and cooks it into a dish she prepares for Shango because Ọshun, Shango's other wife, convinces her this would prove her devotion. When Shango discovers what Ọba has done, he leaves her for Oshun, who had orchestrated the events for just this end. The poem's juxtaposition of Ọba with water and the line "Oba sobs" alludes to her status as river goddess and the myth of Shango's rejection. See William Bascom, "Ọba's Ear: A Yoruba Myth in Cuba and Brazil," *Research in African Literatures* 7.2 (Autumn, 1976): 149.

through the recombination of letters into new words, introduce different languages. Some of the poems also extend up to the very top of the page, which is particularly striking since the poems in "Os" are limited to the space below the title of each poem and, as a result, appear much more compressed. Limited procedurally to the language of the decision as well as to the conventional structure of poetry (at least as per its use of titles), "Os" reflects a more inhibited, captive poetics that is juxtaposed against the subsequent sections that expand the conceptual paradigm.

In addition to the sections of poetry, *Zong!* includes a transcription of the poems that due to a printer malfunction resulted in the superimposition of multiple pages of text ("Ẹbọra"); a multi-lingual glossary of "Words and Phrases Heard on Board the Zong"; a "Manifest" that lists "African groups and languages," "animals," "body parts," "crew," "food and drink," "nature," and "women who wait." It also includes Philip's personal narrative of the experience of producing these poems ("Notanda"). Following the book's endnotes, the collection concludes with a transcription of the *Gregson v. Gilbert* decision. The deconstruction of the first five sections is thus reconstructed by the end of the work. It is a reconstruction, however, that has actually been in the works over the course of the collection. *Zong!*, after all, moves from the Black archives of the poems to the more traditional methods of accounting and ordering (the manifests and glossary), to the endnotes, before concluding with the court decision transcribed from the archived document verbatim.

A model of Black archival aesthetics, *Zong!* reflects the various elements of archivization while also reframing their value in, and complicity with, particular epistemological projects. As "the Song of the untold story; it cannot be told yet must be

told, but only through its un-telling," (207), *Zong!* mirrors the archival journey to the story itself.[382] "Os," for example, highlights the fragments of archival inquiry. Its poems refuse traditional lineation as much as they do the constraints of syntax, and in so doing, they invite readers in at different points.[383] Similarly, pursuing archival knowledges means fairly arbitrarily picking an entry point—one cannot know the material until one accesses it, and so the ways in are limitless. Additionally, the multiple entry points, fragmented ideas, piecemeal thematics, and the generic pressure exerted by the titles (which read more like folder enumerations than they do poetry titles) mirror the archival materials themselves. The sections of poetry that follow "Os" begin to reflect a more sustained engagement with archives. From the fragment, one arrives at the mass of information. What appears initially to be a systematic approach to the materials becomes overwhelming and much less organized as one begins to swim in the "bone beds of the sea."[384] For example, "Ẹbọra," which Philip explains is the result of a printer malfunction

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[382] What I describe here as the journey through and to Black archives, Philip compares to a "fugue." "*Zong!* is a counterpointed, fugal antinarrative in which several strands are simultaneously at work. [It] is a sustained repetition or reiteration of various themes, phrases and voices, albeit fragmented. […] The fugue has, however, another darker meaning, referring to a state of amnesia in which the individual, his or her subjectivity having been destroyed, becomes alienated from him- or herself. […] In my fragmenting the text and re-writing it through *Zong!*, or rather over it, thereby essentially erasing it, the original text becomes a fugal palimpsest through which *Zong!* is allowed to heal the original text of its fugal amnesia." Philip, *Zong*!, 204.

[383] Philip will often invite collective readings of her poems. In these cases, she typically refuses to provide any directions for her readers. I experienced this in my own participation at one of these collective readings on Dec. 1, 2014 at Rutgers University, New Brunswick. She encouraged us to not be afraid to speak over each other either. We were explicitly encouraged to experience the poem and not try to perform it with a particular directorial agenda in mind. A variety of videos reflecting this participatory, collaborative reading can also be found on Youtube. See Philip, M. NourbeSe. "nourbese-Zong! 2013 CollectiveReading& Improv-5 min video." YouTube video, 5 minutes. December 7, 2015.

[384] Philip, *Zong!*, 203.

that superimposed the pages of text, resonates archivally in that it gestures to pages stuck together, faded texts, difficult to read print, palimpsests, fragile technologies, and human intervention. The glossary as well as the manifest, meanwhile, introduce systems of accounting and organization. These function like the collection's metadata catalogue, while the "Notanda," like so many seminal works on archive theory, hinges on the personal anecdote of the journey to and through the archive.[385]

Thus far I have referred to *Zong!* as a poetic cycle since this is the term used on Philip's website description of the collection.[386] The reality is that *Zong!* challenges the constraints of genre as much as it does those of language, the law, and archives. For example, in "Notanda" Philip specifically labels five of the eleven sections of the collection as poems. Indeed, these five demonstrate a thematic and formal cohesion; each of these sections is framed by an epigraph and they become increasingly more convoluted and saturated with text as they develop. And yet, if these are the only "poems" of the collection, then what are we to do with the other six sections? I propose that another way to read *Zong!* is as a collection of poetry with a rich supply of paratext. By paratext, I

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[385] The trope of the personal journey through the archive can be found in many books of archive theory. Derrida's *Archive Fever* includes anecdotal evidence of his own relationship to the Freud museum where he delivers the lectures, for example. Carolyn Steedman's *Dust*, building off of Derrida's diagnosis of "archive fever" also uses the personal to elucidate her archive theory: "For the fever […] usually starts at the end of the penultimate day in the record office. Either you must leave tomorrow (train times, journeys planned, a life elsewhere) or the record office will shut for the weekend. And it's expensive being in the archive, as your credit card clocks up the price of the room, the restaurant meals. Leaving is the only way to stop spending. You know you will not finish, that there will be something left unread, unnoted, untranscribed." Steedman, 18.

[386] Philip's website describes *Zong!* as an "extended poetry cycle [that] is based on a legal decision, at the end of the eighteenth century, related to the murder of Africans on board a slave ship." "M. NourbeSe Philip," 2013, https://www.nourbese.com/poetry/zong-3/.

mean "the highly creative essays, notes, prefaces and source documents that authors provide with their experimental poetry. Paratexts offer a forum in which the author can present ideological agendas more directly to an audience, […] or simply contextualize new poetry within literary and historical traditions more familiar to a broad range of readers."[387] In this way then, the sections from "Ẹbọra" to the transcription of the final legal decision constitute paratext.

As the product of an inexplicably and eerily "computer related" mishap that printed "the first two or three pages" of each poem "superimposed on each other" (206), "Ẹbọra" encapsulates the moment and process of production. As a visual sign of the archived (faded font, bleeding ink, gaps in the material), the section also reiterates the deconstructive paradigm of the collection and captures what Derrida describes as the "differance" or "the formation of form [and] the being-imprinted of the imprint."[388] By drawing attention, moreover, to the process of poetic production and the fiction of machine-repeatability, "Ẹbọra" elucidates the fantasy of origin. It invites us to reconsider our stakes in vanishing history by reflecting back to us "the value of the transcendental arche [that] must make its necessity felt before letting itself be erased."[389] A signifier of bodies erased by a watery grave, the section ultimately traces another route through the

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387 Susan Vanderborg, *Paratextual Communities: American Avant-Garde Poetry Since 1950*, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2001), 5.
388 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 1997): 63.
389 In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida claims that "The concept of arche-trace must comply with both that necessity and that erasure. […] The trace is not only the disappearance of origin-within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin." Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 61.

untelling of a story, always, already superimposed by various temporalities, voices, and technologies.

Juxtaposing Ẹbọra's "dense landscape of text" (206), the glossary of "Words and Phrases Heard On Board the Zong" (the paratext that follows) alphabetically organizes and translates the foreign phrases that emerge in the poems. By doing so, it returns what may be perceived as new language into pre-existing semantic networks. And yet, it also signals the incompleteness of "order" and the impossibility of providing equal linguistic access, as the words selected in the glossary do not account for all of the foreign language words that appear in the text. Like the glossary, the "Manifest" alphabetically organizes itself into random lists that reflect the arbitrariness of the ledger system by which the lives and value aboard the ship was measured. Separated by the "Notanda" from the final section—the transcription of the *Gregson v. Gilbert* decision—the glossary and manifest demonstrate that as the collection approximates the legal language of the decision, the epistemological pull of white supremacy and its systems of accounting become readily apparent. *Zong!* thus moves from deconstruction and procedural poetics to reconstruction and the archive.

The most explicit paratext of the collection, "Notanda" organizes the movement of the text and orients the reader. On the one hand, the section serves as a sort of spatial diagramming for the rest of the collection. The poetry sections, for instance, create a chaos of plot points or bodies sinking into a sort of spatial vacuum of directionless water. Then, the axes are marked by the lists ("Glossary" and "Manifest") that structure the text vertically. These establish a metaphoric y-axis on which to begin to locate the bodies. Through its prose form, "Notanda" creates a horizontal linearity that reads like the absent

x-access missing from the piece. By the end of "Notanda," Philip has essentially constructed a coordinate plane on which to locate the missing bodies of the *Zong* massacre. By doing so, the text provides another way to understand and access the tragedy outside of the constraints (grammatical and syntactic) of language.

"Notanda" is also such a striking paratextual element because of how much Philip herself anchors the text. With a direct first-person address, she explains *Zong!*'s procedure and the process of its composition. The move makes visible how the procedural poetry of the collection functions as "a special case in that the secret of production is no longer a secret, no longer an 'inner form.' […] In other words, the visibility of a procedure subverts commodity fetishism itself."[390] Thus as Philip explains in the "Notanda" entry dated, July 12, 2001: "The legal text parallels a certain kind of entity—a whole, a completeness which like African life is rent and torn. This time though I do the tearing" (192). Thus by drawing attention to the "impure" cut-up form of the collection's poetry and to her own reckoning with language as legal resource, Philip draws attention away from the fetish of the enslaved to the fetish of the text.

Because of how explicitly the author organizes the space, form, and function of the text, *Zong!* works as the last stand of the Black archive's ideal subject. As I argued in Chapter Three, twentieth-century Black archives born under the weight of New Negro ideology have often deemed the "ideal configuration" of Black archives to be organized for the benefit of constructing an "ideal" or representative Black subject. Although the ideal subject of Black archives has often figured as male, the way in which "Notanda" uses Captain Luke Collingwood as Philip's foil deconstructs the ideal subject. Philip's

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[390] Huntsperger, 39.

guiding hand, for example parallels that of the original ship's captain and, for this reason, many of her entries read like a captain's log. It often takes great pains to establish temporality and place in a way that the rest of the collection refuses. The entries, for example, record dates, times and locations: "It is June—June 15, 2002 to be exact, a green and wet June in Vermont" (190), "*Dec. 15, 2003, Tobago* (200)," or "November 2005—Munich Airport (201)." Philip also establishes a direct connection between the procedures invoked while writing the poems and the rhetoric of travel. She reenacts the deadline for completion, reminiscent of the fatal deadline Capt. Luke Collingwood missed for his arrival to Jamaica: "like him I feel time yapping at my heels—have but three months to deliver this ms" (190). Claiming herself as captain thus props Philip up as the ideal subject of *Zong!'s* Black archival project.

And yet, Philip also undermines her steady hand. "Notanda" frequently alludes to being lost in her text, in the language, and in the procedure. Writing of the process to arrive at the book's conceit: "two legal texts […] one on contracts, the other on insurance law. But I am hunting for something—anything—to give me some bearing, since I am, metaphorically speaking, at sea, having cut myself off from the comfort and predictability of my own language—my own meaning" (190). She also finds herself running low on metaphoric provisions in this textual journey: "Like Captain Collingwood, I am now fully launched on a journey. Unlike the good captain, however, I do not feel fully provisioned, indeed uncertainty is my familiar?" (190). Subverting the trope of the ideal subject of the archive (the white figure of authority aboard the ship, Captain Luke Collingwood), Philip, in communion with the ancestors), deconstructs any stabilizing authority—even her own.

Philip's authority is also undermined by the intrusion of voices that do not align with the "ideal subject" paradigm. She notes in her "Notanda" for example, both the urgency to organize Black archives around respected, lauded, recognized subjects of blackness, and yet, as she claims of *Zong!*, the project is ultimately "multiple and many-voiced." And indeed, at times the voices are less than ideal. In the "Notanda" she admits that:

> One of the strongest "voices" in the *Zong!* text is that of someone who appears to be white, male, and European. Had I approached this "story" in the manner of wanting to write the story *about* the *Zong* and the events surrounding its fateful journey, I would not have chosen a white, male, European voice as one of the primary voices in this work. My "authorial intention" would have impelled me toward other voices. […] by refusing the risk of allowing ourselves to be absolved of authorial intention, we escape an understanding that we are at least one and the Other. And the Other. And the Other. That in this post post-modern world, we are, indeed, multiple and "many-voiced. (205)

The ideal subject *Zong!*'s "Notanda" erects is most dramatically unsettled by the collection's authorial credit. *Zong!*s' cover and title page both read as follows: M. NourbeSe Philip / As told to the author by Setaey Adamatu Boateng. The second author, according to Philip, is the immaterial force or African spirit/muse that tells the story. She is, as described on the back cover copy, "the voice of the ancestors revealing the submerged stories of all who were on board the Zong!". This dual approach to authorship draws the reader into an allegorical mode. In "Notanda" Philip claims, for example, "I have found myself absolved" of "authorial" intention. So much that even claiming to author the text through my own name is challenged by the way the text has shaped itself" (204). The text thus resists the cultural tendencies that seek to identify and fix material and turn it into product, including the identification of authorship. The split also allows there to exist both the literal level of the author that forges and manipulates the text and

the symbolic level of the "spirit" that gives it life. Consequently, the text becomes procedural and conceptual, muse and managed, all at once.

Philip's *Zong!* functions as bridge between the fleshly knowledge to which Zora Neale Hurston and Erna Brodber reference in their articulation of the body as archival repository, and the speculative knowledge contained in Bradley's work in *The Chaneysville Incident*. That is, Philip is concerned both with the body as material resource and the practice of critical fabulation as a resource for future stories (if not histories). She frames herself as a censor who functions "like the law whose role is to proscribe and prescribe, deciding which aspects of the text will be removed and which remain […], which determines which facts should or should not become evidence" (199). She claims, however, that in addition to censor, she is "magician," and "as magician, […] I conjure the infinite(ive) of to be of the 'negroes' on board the *Zong*. This is axis on which the text of *Zong!* turns: censor and magician; the told and the untold; the telling and the un-telling of what cannot, yet must, be told*"* (199). Embracing duality at every turn, Philip functions like the graveyard in *The Chaneysville Incident*, as a site for the preservation of alternative knowledge. Hence, she confesses of her process: "My intent is to lock myself into this particular and peculiar discursive landscape in the belief that the story of these African men, women, and children thrown overboard in an attempt to collect insurance monies, the story than can only be told by not telling, is locked in the text" (191). The text itself, language and more-than language, telling and un-telling, functions as a site for knowledge and repository for the same. Her example also speaks to the sense of speculation as financial endeavor. Both the story of the people thrown

overboard and the choice to throw the bodies aboard for the sake of financial gain are acts of speculation.

Reanimating Black Archives

In her essay, "Memory Is Matter…" Philip poses a powerful question: "How does one make memory "matter" and what is the nature of the impulse that attempts to make memory material?"[391] Published ten years before *Zong!,* "Memory is Matter" reflects upon the pressures exerted upon the archival impulse. Ultimately, she manages the tension by turning to the body: "The text of the African's history and memory was inscribed upon and within that body which would become the repository of all the tools necessary for spiritual and cultural survival."[392] She elaborates upon this idea of the body as crucial resource by first speculating what parts she would choose to take with her on a trip to Africa. Enumerating its parts, she creates a sort of corporeal ledger: "1 head, 1 torso, 2 lungs—breathing rapidly, 1 heart—don't forget the heart still steadily beating its refrain—its praise, its prayer to living […]."[393]Almost immediately, however, the poem subverts her lyrical rendering of the body by turning it into a site of danger and threat. Philip remembers, for example, a man coming to her house and asking for her nine-year old sister in marriage. She connects the memory to Africa which like the body becomes a site of exploitation, abuse, and desire. Even so, she insists upon taking it with her to Africa: "So I did take with me my body. To Africa. But I also took a stamp—known as

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[391] M. NourbeSe Philip, "In the Matter of Memory," *Fertile Ground: Memories and Visions* (1996): 22.
[392] ibid.
[393] Philip, "In the Matter of Memory," 25.

an Affidavit stamp. […] I knew I had to take it, because a part of that journey to Africa had to do with finding the evidence. The evidence of something that had happened. Something which had been recorded in History. Something which I had a memory of. But my own thoughts, my feelings, the memory of my body was not enough. I longed for evidence—hard evidence—and the affidavit stamp would help to solidify the evidence."[394] Philip thus understands the relationship between body as archive and the traditional archive and argues for one as a resource for the other.[395]

Zong! elaborates upon this theme of the body as archive, and in the tradition of Hurston, Brodber, and Black feminist archives, operates as a text of the flesh. As Spillers defines it "if we think of the 'flesh' as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship's hole, fallen, or 'escaped' overboard."[396] M. NourbeSe Philip's text reflects this position by refusing the law as "primary narrative" for subjecthood. For this reason, *Zong!* starts, for example, with the deconstructed legal decision that ratified Black bodies as property. In her accounting of the enslaved peoples, and in her attention to the women aboard the ship specifically, we gauge the text's commitment to female flesh ungendered. The traditional archive, Philip's text argues, preserves bodies. It includes bodies in its system of accounting, in its ledgers and insurance decisions. Spillers also addresses the system of accounting found in archived ledgers and the extent to which they erased the names of those held captive: "Quite naturally, the trader is not interested, in any *semantic* sense, in this 'baggage' that he must

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394 Philip, "In the Matter of Memory," 26.
395 Weheliye's reading of *habeus viscus* articulates the "fleshly surplus […] as a pivotal arena for the politics emanating from different traditions of the oppressed." Weheliye, 2.
396 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.

deliver, but that he is not is all the more reason to search out the metaphorical implications of *naming* as one of the key sources of a bitter Americanizing for African persons."[397] Philip also reflects on the anonymity of the ledger system, but for her Black archives stand to do some of that reparative work.

More than critical fabulation, Philip's process seeks to give name to the flesh and, in so doing, free the captive body from its archival and legal stronghold. She is only able to do so once she comes to the decision "to break the words open. I devise a dictionary with a list of each of the "mother" words followed by the words contained in that particular word. […] As I put the dictionary together, little dramas appear to take place in the margins of the text and so the poem continues to write itself, giving up its stories and resulting in four subsequent movements or books." Speaking of "Sal," "Ventus," "Ratio," and "Ferrum," Philip admits, "I think of these poems as the flesh—the earlier 26 poems are the bones" (200).

As Philip admits, "the African men, women, and children on board the *Zong!* were stripped of all specificity, including their names. Their financial value, however, was recorded and preserved for insurance purposes, each being valued at 30 pounds sterling" (*Zong!* 194). As a result of this systematic erasure, Philip introduces the names of those deceased at the foot of the first section of poetry, "Os."[398] Each of the poems of this section are numbered. They begin with letters floating as utterances and groans. As

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[397] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 73.
[398] The tragedy of this loss is exacerbated by the fact that because of the preservation of medieval manuscripts printed on animal skins, scientists have actually been able to isolate the DNA of animals living over 1000 years ago. Reanimation, it seems even still privileges livestock. For more on the particular scientific process by which the DNA was isolated see Mattew Teasdale, et al. "The York Gospels: a 1000-Year Biological Palimpsest," *Royal Society Open Science*. 4.10 (25 October 2017): 1-11.

the numbers increase, the consonants and vowels are paired. Then words emerge and the statements become more intelligible. Underneath each of these poems, throughout the entire section, Philip includes a short line of about six inches long centered on each page. Underneath that line in a font significantly smaller than the font used for the poems above the line, she writes three to six names of African origin. There seems to be no relation between the names listed (except perhaps in "Zong! #17" where the names all start with the same letter). The names also have no known archival referent. Philip comments on the decision to include these names in "Notanda" by way of a transcription of notes she takes while writing the poems. The notes interspersed within the "Notanda" are dated and italicized, thereby distinguishing them from the rest of the Notanda's narrative structure.

> *November 25, '03*
> *Caledon, Ontario*
> *I cannot say when I first conceive the idea but once it has taken hold I know that I must honour it. "Defend the dead." The Africans on board the* ZONG *must be named. They will be ghostly footnotes floating below the text—"underwater… a place of consequence.*
> *Idea at heart of the footnotes in general is acknowledgment –someone else was here before—in* ZONG! *footnote equals footprint.*
> *Footprints of the African on board the* ZONG. (200)

The notes read as a sort of captain's log or historian's journal. Written in much more of the traditional grammar that characterizes the rest of "Notanda," the notes function as a break from the genre of the rest of the section. That is, even in this large aside about process and procedure, the section needs further notes and marginalia. Part of the reason provided for this break is the interjection of the second author. As Philip claims in the note, the inclusion of the names was not an act of authorial inspiration but more of a channeled experience. Setaey Adamu Boateng invites her to "defend the dead."

"Os," the section of poetry to which Philip alludes to in the aforementioned, concludes with another section that is not listed as distinct in the book's table of contents. "Dicta" instead appears as a sort of second part to "Os." According to the "Notanda," "Dicta" (from the legal term *orbiter dicta*) signifies all the opinion that is not considered part of the *ratio decidendi,* or the heart of the decision. This poetic subsection is, in other words, a sort of legal surplus, which as Philip asserts "is what the Africans on board the *Zong* become—*dicta,* footnotes, related to, but not, the *ratio*" (199). As if to reinforce such legal erasure, the poems contained in "Dicta" are similarly labeled as those in the earlier "Os" sequence, except that now they lack the number of the sequence. They all simply read: "Zong! # ". Likewise, while the centered six-inch line remains on each page of "Dicta" the names are noticeably absent. What remains both in the title and footnote is a notation of absence, loss, and erasure.

Saidiya Hartman addresses notations of absence, loss and erasure in "Venus in Two Acts," which argues that archives never record the stories of the enslaved. Instead, they accumulate stories

> about the violence, excess, mendacity, and reason that seized hold of their lives, transformed them into commodities and corpses, and identified them with names tossed-off as insults and crass jokes. The archive is, in this case, a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of property, a medical treatise on gonorrhea, a few lines about a whore's life, an asterisk in the grand narrative of history. Given this, 'it is doubtless impossible to ever grasp [these lives] again in themselves, as they might have been "in a free state."'[399]

Philip's *Zong!* certainly testifies to the reality of the archive's death sentence. It engages closely with the death sentence, the tomb, and especially the "inventory of property."[400]

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[399] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts" *Small Axe* No. 26 12.2 (June 2008): 2.
[400] Hartman's "Venus in Two Acts," was published in the same year as *Zong!* and both texts are clearly in conversation. Hartman cites Philip's work (identified as forthcoming),

And yet, it does not pursue "a different set of descriptions from this archive." *Zong!*, instead, turns to deconstruction for the sake of "a free state from this order of statements."[401] By deconstructing the language, the discourse, and ultimately, the episteme of the archive, *Zong!* introduces a possibility beyond description, it introduces Black archives themselves.

To position *Zong!* within a deconstructionist paradigm is to take Philip at her word. As she confesses in "Notanda," "re-reading *Specters of Marx* by Derrida has clarified some of my own thoughts and confirmed me in my earlier feelings that *Zong!* is a wake. It *is* a work that employs memory in the service of mourning [….] Derrida asserts that we must identify the remains and localize the dead" (202). Although Philip directly references Derrida's earlier work on Marx, his definition of deconstructionism in "The Death Penalty Lectures March 1/8 2000" speaks perhaps even more neatly to *Zong!*'s concern with massacre and the legal decision rendered with respect to the lives lost. In his later essay, Derrida elaborates upon the many ways in which the term "deconstructionism" has been taken up by the academy. He claims: "If there was one thing, one word to deconstruct, it is indeed what is called death. […] Not to put into again the question, what is death? […] But to deconstruct death. Final period. […] Death to death. […] It is necessary of course to deconstruct death and perhaps this is even the depth of the desire of what is called deconstruction."[402] As decisive as his tone is when

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and, indeed, much of the language of the two concerning archives clearly resonate. To Hartman's point about the archive as tomb, Philip asserts, for example, "the legal report is the tomb stone which speaks" (Philip, *Zong!*, 192).

[401] Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 7.

[402] Jacques Derrida, "Ninth Session, March 1/8, 2000" *The Death Penalty Volume* 1, Trans. Peggy Kamuf. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2014): 240.

introducing the concept of death to deconstruction, Derrida almost immediately tempers his stance. He warns of some of the dangers of trivializing death in the effort to deconstruct it. Then, in a move that resonates with Philip's source text, Derrida avers: "It is not enough to deconstruct death even, as it is necessary to do, in order to survive or take out a life insurance policy. For neither does life come out unscathed by this deconstruction. Nothing comes out unscathed by this deconstruction.""[403] As *Zong!* demonstrates through its treatment of the *Gregson v. Gilbert* decision, which not only justified the murder of black people but debated the monetary value of their life, deconstructing death thus does not simply mean defining it in opposition to life or quantifying its value. It means interrogating the systems that have erected the very concept.

It is worth pausing to consider Derrida's reading of death and deconstruction for a number of reasons. For one, his statement regarding death as "the depth of the desire of what is called deconstruction," parallels his earlier argument in *Archive Fever* that the death drive compels archivization. The death and destruction drive is in tension with the impulse to accumulate and preserve, resulting in the malady from which he derives the title of that work. Another reason for pausing to reflect on Derrida's reading of death in the context of deconstructionism, particularly as it relates to M. NourbeSe Philip's work, is because of how clearly it traces the relationship of death to indemnity. What begins as a call to deconstruct death culminates in a conversation about the value (juridical and economic) of life. Indeed, this is where I argue that Philip and Derrida intersect and why deconstructionism is the guiding force for the conceptual poetics at the heart of *Zong!* By

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[403] ibid.

attending to the dead as she does in *Zong!*, Philip does not only deconstruct death as it relates to Black life and being, but takes to task the legal system that renders the death of the enslaved as loss of property. Likewise, she critiques the role of archives that bolster systems designed to prove Black as disposable.

Philip's relationship to Derrida's work extends beyond a shared intellectual investment in death and memory. *Zong!*, after all, clearly demonstrates an investment in deconstructionism as methodology. Part of the reason for this is because of what Philip identifies as the parallel between legal and poetic discourse.[404] As she claims, "law and poetry both share an inexorable concern with language—the "right" use of the "right" words, phrases, or even marks of punctuation; precision of expression is the goal shared by both" (191). The stakes for each of these are radically different: "In the case of the former this concern has both material and nonmaterial outcomes" (191). And yet, poetry too faces its own pressures—including the pressure exerted by grammar as another "ordering but a violent ordering" (192).

To resist the logical hermeneutics of the law, which renders Black people as property and their murder as the jettisoning of cargo, *Zong!* refuses first, the logical hermeneutics of language. Out of the exchange of language for life a new grammar emerges. Thanks to that new grammar, new laws, linguistic and legal, are possible. Hence Philip affirms

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[404] Derrida also saw deconstructionism as a crucial resource for justice and the law. As he argues in "Force of Law: 'The Mystical Foundation of Authority'" it was "foreseeable and desirable that studies of deconstructive style should culminate in the problematic of law and justice." Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: 'The Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" Eds. Drucilla Cornell, et al. *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 7.

> I fight the desire to impose meaning on the words—it is so instinctive, this need to impose meaning: this is the generating impulse of, and toward, language, isn't it—to make and, therefore, to communicate, meaning? […] The poems resist my attempts at meaning or coherence, and, at times, I too approach the irrationality and confusion, if not madness (*madness is outside the box of order*), of a system that could enable, encourage even, a man to drown 150 people as a way to maximize profits—the material and the nonmaterial. Or is it the immaterial?" (194-195).

By leaning into what she describes as the madness, confusion and irrationality of the system, Philip puts pressure on terms that have historically overrepresented the human as Man. Mirroring, moreover, the text's thematic investment in dismantling the legal system's investment in white supremacy, *Zong!* formally deconstructs language, genre, and, ultimately, the archive, and its wake introduces a new grammar for Black archives.

Foucault's articulation of the archive as a system of enunciation elucidates the relationship between language, genre, and the archive. Foucault defines the archive as that which defines the enunciability of statements.[405] The archive, in this case, is not simply the place Philip visits to read the decision that would inspire *Zong!* It is the system that defines the enunciability of Black life as property. The archive operates, in other words, as a grammar for memory. Philip, recognizing the incapacity of that grammar to include Black life, deconstructs, therefore the archive. Her procedural poetics models Black archives by introducing a new grammar (not just for the sake of a new story) but for the reanimation of the outside of or beyond its overrepresentation as Man. Rather than work within the system of language for a new justification of value, Philip upends

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[405] He clarifies that "The archive is not that which, despite its immediate escape, safeguards the event of the statement, and preserves, for future memories, its status as an escapee; […] Nor is the archive that which collects the dust of statements that have become inert once more, and which may make possible the miracle of their resurrection; it is that which defines the mode of occurrence of the statement-thing; it is the system of its functioning." Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 146.

the system that defines value in the first place. Her poems introduce, in many cases, language at the level of the statement and not that of the sentence.[406] Insofar as the legal system is predicated on "telling the story" (it pursues evidence to substantiate its claims about that story), *Zong!* deconstructs not just the story but the discourse itself. In so doing, *Zong!* illustrates how the law not only shapes ways of knowing and being, but ways of remembering and of articulating memory.[407]

Black Archives and the Aquatic Turn

As the only text of this study published after the "archival turn," *Zong!* interrogates the stakes of Black archives in the new century. Marking the transition between Black archives of the twentieth and twenty-first century, *Zong!* moves away from the archeological metaphors upon which Black archive theory was founded. It affirms, instead, that the battle for evidence will not be won on land but in the waters of a

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[406] Foucault's definition of statement highlights the difficulty of identifying the particular boundaries of the statement, for "When one wishes to individualize statements, one cannot therefore accept unreservedly any of the models borrowed from grammar, logic, or 'analysis.'" Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 94.

[407] Philip's notion of the "story that can only be told by not telling" resonates (not only with Morrison's famous, "this is not a story to pass on" but with Derrida's description of the "Secret" in "How to Avoid Speaking." (Derrida's interrogation of the secret which in its not telling is told helps frame the work of the mystical and the community that is so central to Philip's *Zong!* That is, it establishes a construction amidst the deconstruction and difference. It suggests the trace while fostering another sense of space. Derrida: "What is thus this place? Between the place and the place of the secret, between the secret place and the topography of the social link which must protect the nondivulgence, there must be a certain homology. This must govern some [secret] relation between the topology of what stands beyond Being, without being—without Being, and the topology, the initiatory politopology which at once organizes the mystical community and makes possible the address to the other, this quasi-pedagogical and mystagogical speech." Jacques Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," Trans. Ken Frieden. *Derrida and Negative Theology*. Ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 1992), 91.

more fluid understanding of blackness and its subjects. In the spirit of this fluidity, *Zong!* also operates within a different genre than the other texts under examination in *Collecting Race.* As this project illustrates, most of twentieth-century Black archive theory happens in prose and, more often than not in fiction. Texts like Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse* and *Mules and Men* reevaluate the disciplinary expectations of archivization; Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* considers the archival impulse as it relates to white supremacy; Erna Brodber's *Louisiana* moves the archive to the body and away from the institution and its technologies; whereas David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident* posits speculative over historical archival value. In each case, prose functions as a way to explain Black archives and the radical traditions they inspire.[408]

Black archive theory in the twenty-first century, however, happens in poetry and criticism (and, in many cases, at the intersection of the two). One finds the evidence of this in the work of Fred Moten, Kevin Young, Tyehimba Jess, and Alexis Pauline Gumbs. This is not to say that Black archives are only theorized in prose in the twentieth century and only in poetry in the twenty-first. Such neat delineations and periodizations cannot encapsulate the Black archive as understood in relation to large-scale literary trends. Instead, I am pointing out a shift in the aesthetic sensibility of archive theory and its representation in Black literature—a shift marked most prominently by the production

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[408] In *Specters of the Atlantic,* Baucom argues that the eighteenth century's displacement of "real' property in favor of imaginary stocks, bonds, and bills-of-exchange" resulted in an epistemological shift that gave rise to the novel and fiction as ways of making sense of these new structures of knowledge. In the vein of his claim that the long twentieth century "inherits or extends the long eighteenth," I posit that twentieth-century black archive theory also turns primarily to fiction. By the twenty-first century, however, poetry becomes a more popular genre for making sense of the structures of knowledge particular to black archives. Baucom, 16-17.

of M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!*.[409] Ushering in a new wave of Black archive aesthetics, Philip's work deconstructs some of the central ideas at the heart of Black archive theory in the previous generation: the ideal subject, the role of fiction, the effort to order. Perhaps most substantially though is how she carves out a new terrain for imagining Black archives—except that her terrain is precisely a rejection of land and the conceit of digging. She jettisons Schomburg's spade for the sake of Black archives' aquatic turn.

What could the archive possibly have to do with water? As the Northeast Document Conservation Center points out: "Protection from water damage is essential to the preservation of library and archival materials. Even a minor water accident such as a leaky pipe can cause extensive and irreparable harm to collections."[410] For this reason, most of the metaphors for the archive are quite terrestrial. Arthur Schomburg affirms: "the Negro historian today digs under the spot where his predecessor stood and argued"; Foucault's archival conceit is structured around archeology; Carolyn Steedman theorizes

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[409] I attribute the shift to a number of factors including the Archival Turn and its relationship to poststructuralism, the expansion of Black studies in the university and its global/diasporic turn, and the increase number of creative writers in traditional English or area studies departments. Ryan Sharp's reading of contemporary Black poetry and the archive, meanwhile identifies a pattern of what he calls "persona poets." He also notes the trend arguing that "the 2000s have seen a sharp rise in Black American poets employing the mask of persona, often including and interrogating archival materials as they do so. […] these poets are utilizing persona to reclaim Black voices that have been silenced or misheard in the Archive. Persona provides a unique vehicle both for signifyin' on the Archive's historical portrayal of blackness and, in complicating how past blackness is read, a concomitant means of broadening the boundaries of contemporary Black identity and the corresponding racial imaginary." Ryan Sharp, "In the Shadow of the Archive: *The Big Smoke* and Black American Persona Poetry," *African American Review* 52.4 (Winter 2019): 373.

[410] Sherelyn Ogden, "3.1 Protection from Loss: Water and Fire Damage, Biological Agents, Theft, and Vandalism," Emergency Management, Northeast Document Conservation Center, last modified 1999, https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/3.-emergency-management/3.1-protection-from-loss-water-and-fire-damage,-biological-agents,-theft,-and-vandalism

dust as the archival matter of history that will not go away. Critics in the twenty-first century, however, have begun to move away from such dusty digging and are more frequently considering alternative approaches to memory and the stakes of blackness that take us from land to water, for as Philip argues: "our entrance to the past is through memory—either oral or written. And water" (201).

Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016) exemplifies the theoretical turn towards the aquatic in Black studies. As Sharpe proposes, water provides a conceptual framework for living blackness in the diaspora and "in the still unfolding aftermaths of Atlantic chattel slavery."[411] Advocating for "wake work" (one of the meanings of the word she relies on is in the wake of the slave ship), Sharpe insists we need "new ways of entering and leaving the archives of slavery […], new ways of encountering the past that is not past."[412] In her "Notanda," Philip also flags the need for new routes of recovery by posing the question: does this mean that "unlike being interred, once you're underwater there is no retrieval?" (201).

By way of a response, Philip coins the term "exaqua." Exaqua (as it pertains to the retrieval of bodies from water and in memories from the wake), however, does not just challenge archival methodology. It requires reimagining archival status itself, particularly as it has been used to produce categories of "Man" from which racialized subjects have been (and continue to be) excluded. *Zong!*'s procedural aesthetics exemplify this, as it works through the historical archive to give us an account of the systematic murder of people conscripted to a genre of the human that excludes them.

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[411] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2016), 2.
[412] Sharpe, 13.

Gregson v. Gilbert, is not, after all, a murder trial. Rather it is a decision about insurance fraud: a determination about the "right" to throw "cargo," not "people" overboard. Turning away from approaches to subjugated and disqualified knowledges that simply repurpose traditional strategies, *Zong!* thus demonstrates an altogether new technique for accessing submerged histories. To deconstruct the terms of oppressive valuation, it pursues the wake work of archival exaqua.

What, however, are the implications of aestheticizing the archive for the sake of submerged histories? What does it mean to drown the archive instead of culling it for silence? The turn to water, I propose, is another way to deconstruct the epistemological hold Humanism has traditionally held on the archive. And yet, *Zong!* does not ignore the fact that resisting one episteme does not readily lead you into another. Philip's project elucidates the challenges in imagining epistemological resistance and in constructing Black archives in the wake. The text's component parts break like waves into each other, sometimes rejecting, other times reiterating archival status. On the one hand, the archival state of assemblage in which those initial sections operate seem emblematic of the Black archive's alternative epistemologies. So too, the fact that M. NourbeSe Philip positions herself as transcriber to "Seteay Adamu Boateng." And yet, while these features signal the work's effort to deconstruct subjectivity and the archival value of provenance (or original order)—or to use Glissant's terms, our impulse towards reversion—the text's "Notanda" disables the nonreduction of nonmeaning.[413] Instead, it attempts to render

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[413] Reversion, according to Glissant, is the "obsession with a single origin," a way "to consecrate permanence, to negate contact." Glissant, 18. This impulse, he argues, declines "as the memory of the ancestral country fades" and transforms from the pursuit of "some immutable state of Being, [to] a return to the point of entanglement from which we were forcefully turned away." Glissant, 26.

transparent the opacity so central to the rest of the work, which is why I have dubbed it the ideal subject's last stand. Philip as authorial organizer remains a central feature of the text's ordering and explication, even as she actively deconstructs her own position in relation to that "ideal." *Zong!* thus returns us back to the singular subject, even as it temporarily blurs its contours. The fact that the text also includes the transcription of the original legal decision also speaks to the text's relationship to the tradition it works to deconstruct. For all the "untelling of the story" we return, it seems, to the told, recorded, and filed away.

The move away from "the dust of digging" to the sea leads us to imagine new ontological and epistemological possibilities. It does not, however, ignore the terrestrial traditions in which Black archives were born. Philip toggles, therefore, between the untelling and telling. She confesses: "I feel strongly that I need to seek "permission" to bring the stories of these murdered Africans to light—above the surface of the water—to "exaqua" them from their "liquid" graves." She never receives their permission. Instead, on a London dock after pouring out a libation for those aboard the *Zong*, Philip "falls flat on my ass. I am embarrassed, wondering if anyone has seen me fall and whether the fall means the pleasure or displeasure on the part of the Ancestors" (203). The fall provides a moment of respite for what remains for Philip and all Black archives, the weight not just of memory but of racialized memory, injury, trauma, life, birth, rememory. It also returns us from the theoretical reflection of "Notanda" to the body and the material, to the injury of flesh. It represents a trope of contemporary Black archive theory: the personal as a way through the archive.

Black archives in the twenty-first century thus seem to drown documents for the sake of embodied subjectivities and experiences. Engagement with personal experience and anecdote moves Black archives away from the ideal subject; it routes them back to the body and the self.[414] The aquatic serves therefore as a way back to affect. Philip alludes to this return to affect in her conversation with Patricia Saunders: "as I am talking to you, what I'm understanding now is that […] you take these hard facts, this desiccated fact situation of *Gregson v. Gilbert*--and you reintroduce those emotions and feelings that were removed. If you have something that is dried, when you put it in water, the water restores the dried fibers--and if you think about this, this two-page account of *Gregson v. Gilbert* that I found, squeezed out the lives that were at the heart of this case."[415]

Deconstruction, in the context of building infrastructure, means to tear down with an eye towards preservation. Often after a natural disaster strikes, such as hurricanes, floods, tsunamis, and earthquakes, usable building materials remain even in those structures that appear destroyed. Builders will often deconstruct such structures and use the materials to rebuild an otherwise devastated region. In one sense, Black archives deconstruct in this way also. The disaster they face however, is far from natural. Theirs is the "trauma [that] links the origin of Slavery with a capital S . . . to the paradigmatic and value-laden operations of the capitalist market. […] a market whose exchange relations continue to transform the living into the dead, a system of social relations that

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[414] Examples of the personal as a frame for critical conversations about Black archives abound in contemporary critical work on Black archives. Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, (2016); Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019), Philip's *Bla_K* (2017), Moten's *Stolen Life* (and all of his trilogy *Consent to Not Be A Single Being* (2018), are just some that utilize the personal anecdote as a way through archives towards blackness.
[415] Saunders, 66.

fundamentally objectifies and dominates in a putatively free society."[416] Theirs is the disaster of a different sort of water. Even so, Black archives find the materials with which to rebuild another repository that thrives in the water rather than finds itself destroyed there. After all, aquatic archives resist the weight of sedimentary strata; they reject the top-down dynamics of power and systemic silencing. Instead, they allow us to imagine voices as co-existing in and among archives. They encourage far more fluid notions of belonging. Perhaps this is the place for that new ceremony—a sort of water birth. The drowning of "Man," and in his wake, the human.

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[416] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*: *Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 1997), 168-169.

CODA

Unmanning the Archive in Alexis Pauline Gumbs's *M Archive*

> What if I can never find evidence of what the people did to break the silence? Am I looking to the past in vain? Am I depending on evidence to confirm what my soul has evidence enough for?—Alexis Pauline Gumbs, "Evidence"

Published ten years after *Zong!*, Alexis Pauline Gumbs's *M Archive: After the End of the World* (2018) introduces Black archives after "Man." The second book of a triptych, each of which is organized around a foundational work of Black feminist theory, *M Archive* honors M. Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing* "as an ancestrally cowritten text and an ancestor to this book."[417] The first book of the series, *Spill: Scenes of Black Feminist Fugitivity* (2016) dialogues with Hortense Spillers's *Black, White, and in Color*, while the collection's last and final book, *Dub: Finding Ceremony* (2020), attends to Sylvia Wynter's oeuvre.[418] Although each of the three texts emphasize their corresponding ancestral cowriter, the intellectual conversation of Gumbs's triptych is

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[417] Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *M Archive: After the End of the World* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2018), xi. Subsequent citations in text. According to *M Archive*'s introductory remarks on *Pedagogies of Crossing*, an "ancestrally cowritten text […] means that in addition to the interventions this text makes in the ways we imagine transnational feminist accountability, movements from within the university industrial complex, layers of time and space in quantitative research, postnationalist Caribbean sexualities, radical feminist of color memory, and the labor economics of spirit work, to name a few of the enduring interventions this text has made over the past decade, the book itself also works to create textual possibilities for inquiry beyond individual scholarly authority" (ix).

[418] At the end of *Dub*, Gumbs provides a bibliography titled, "crate dig: Source Riddims from Sylvia Wynter." The bibliography cites 10 primary texts by Wynter and 30 "relevant texts by Sylvia Wynter that are not directly cited." Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Dub: Finding Ceremony* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2020), 273-274.

more in the spirit of an intergenerational Black feminist collective that, like Philip's *Zong!*, transcends supernatural planes.[419]

This chapter's emphasis on the human in *M Archive* anticipates *Dub*'s explicit engagement with Wynter. It provides, however, a clearer demonstration of the Wynterian ceremony in progress—that is to say the delinking of blackness from chaos and the writing of a new archive in its wake. *Dub*, meanwhile, emphasizes the world after the Wynterian ceremony. Engaging with the human at a planetary scale, *Dub* "is structured to ask, what if you could breathe like whales who sing underwater and recycle air to sing again before coming up for air? What if you could breathe like coral from a multitude of simultaneous openings connected to one source built upon the bones of all your dead? […] What then? And by then I mean now. These are the ceremonies I found."[420] These ceremonies push the human towards interspecies relationality, or a "kindred beyond taxonomy."[421] *M Archive* stays close enough to "Man" to represent its deconstruction. As "an experiment, an index, an oracle, an archive," *M Archive* straddles the problem space of *Spill* and the possibilities of *Dub* and "invites us into the blackness of what we cannot know from here" (xii).[422] This invitation is for another ceremony: the initiation of Black archives in the twenty-first century.

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[419] "*M Archive: After the End of the World* [is] not *not* ancestrally cowritten but is also written in collaboration with the survivors, the far-into-the future witnesses to the realities we are making possible or impossible with our present apocalypse." Gumbs, *M Archive*, xi.
[420] Wynter, *Dub*, xiii.
[421] The story, according to Gumbs, is of "a real universalism or a real species-level interaction with the universe." Gumbs, *Dub*, x.
[422] Gumbs describes the trajectory of the triptych: "If *Spill* took me to the contemporary afterlives of slavery and *M Archive* took me to the postdated evidence of our imminent apocalypse, *Dub* eviscerated me of my own origin stories, the fragmentary resources I had used to make sense of my life." Gumbs, *Dub*, xi.

According to Gumbs, *M Archive* is a "speculative documentary […] written from and with the perspective of a researcher, post-scientist sorting artifacts after the end of the world."[423] It consists of 10 sections: the first, "From the Lab Notebooks of the Last Experiments," is followed by a series: "Archive of Dirt: What We Did," "Archive of Sky: What We Became," "Archive of Fire: Rate of Change, and "Archive of Ocean: Origin." There are two sections after the series: "Baskets (Possible Futures Yet To Be Woven)" and "Memory Drive." The text concludes with "Acknowledgments," "Notes," and the "Periodic Kitchen Table of Elements," which lists "texts other than *Pedagogies of Crossing* with an elemental impact on this archive organized by atomic number" (227). The final section's title brings full circle the image of a blacked-out table of elements with which the lab notebooks section begins, and which the collection slowly brings back into disjointed focus over its development.

The introductory image of the blacked out periodic table, which suggests resistance at the most elemental level, is worth mulling over. As a tabular display of chemical elements, the periodic table not only organizes the relationship between the elements we know, but it also helps predict the chemical properties and behaviors of undiscovered or newly synthesized elements. Blacking it out completely, as Gumbs does in the opening of the text, introduces a fundamental resistance to the organizing principles of modern science. It also challenges the ability to predict behaviors accordingly.[424] Likewise, the move highlights the relationship between archival evidence

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[423] Wynter, *M Archive*, xi.

[424] It is worth noting that the periodic table that Gumbs uses throughout the collection is outdated. The version she uses labels the newly synthesized elements (numbered 112-118) by their placeholder names: Uub, Uut, Uuq, Uup, Uuh, Uus, Uuo. As of 2016, however, all of the elements have been verified by the International Union of Pure and

as empirical project and scientific racism that renders blackness disposable. By framing *M Archive* with the blacked-out periodic table, the text destabilizes the primacy of epistemological paradigms that have been used to disqualify and subjugate Black peoples and their knowledges.

While the periodic table appears completely obscured in the first instance of the image, other versions of the table reappear throughout the collection that do not black it out so completely.[425] In some of these, only selected columns of the table are blacked out, or as is the case with the image that introduces, "Archive of Sky," the table appears totally uncensored. There are other instances where selected elements appear to be stamped onto the page rather than printed on.[426] By blacking out the model, distorting the relationship of its elements, or representing the table as inked impression, Gumbs highlights the need for a similar rupture that would allow for the emancipation of Black people. Resisting racial disposability, *M Archive* posits, starts long before Adam—you have to take down "Man" at the level of the atom.

This dismantling of "Man" at a theoretical level also manifests formally in the collection. We see evidence of this, for example, in its approach to the lyric I, as well as in the perspective from which the collection is written, "a researcher, post-scientist" (xi).

Applied Chemistry (IUPAC) and have been renamed. The table has ostensibly been completed.

[425] In the image that introduces the section "Archives of Sky," the periodic table appears uncensored, a move reminiscent of Philip's inclusion of the *Gregson v. Gilbert* decision at the end of *Zong!*.

[426] The elements selected for each of these stamped images correspond to the archive section they introduce. "Archive of Ocean," for example, stamps on to the verso of the chapter break: Hydrogen, Sodium, Oxygen, and Chlorine (elements typically associated with saltwater). Similarly, "Archive of Fire" includes: Hydrogen, Iron, Nitrogen, Helim, and Neon, all of which are primary elements in the sun.

Sometimes this researcher is figured as singular subject, other times it is a collective voice. The text acknowledges this directly in its introductory note, which posits that the work is "written in collaboration with the survivors, the far-into-the-future witnesses to the realities we are making possible or impossible with our present apocalypse. […] This is you beyond you" (xi). To that, I would add that *M Archive* is chorus beyond chorus, lyric i beyond lyric i, Black being beyond the New Negro ideal subject, and human beyond Man 1 and Man 2.[427]

In the tradition of *Zong!* and *Louisiana, M Archive* refuses the "ideal subject" that otherwise plagues twentieth-century Black archives by rejecting the constraints of a singular subject altogether. The text performs, in other words, the sociodiagnostic Fanon calls for in *Black Skin, White Masks*. It articulates Black experience as a resource for and event of transformation without necessarily attaching that experience either to the collective or the individual. Like Hurston and Brodber, Gumbs presents the body as "a technology for remembering […] as a connection site for all intergenerational knowing" (200). Where she deviates from them, however, is in stretching the body to such an extent that it also operates as a connection site for inter-species knowing, a move that radically rewrites Black archives as planetary ceremonies.

What links these multiple bodies across time, space, and species is "breathing." Inspired by the work of Ntozake Shange and Franz Fanon on "combat breathing," Gumbs understands breathing as a fundamental tool of resistance in the face of multiple forms of

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[427] Throughout the triptych, Gumbs maintains "i" in the lowercase. It is a move that reinforces the collection's commitment to destabilizing traditional understandings of the individual and their agency.

violence.[428] In *M Archive*, it appears in the context of Black feminist metaphysics: "this thing about one body it was the black feminist metaphysicians who first said it wouldn't be enough. Never had been enough. Was not the actual scale of breathing. […] One body was not a sustainable unit for the project at hand. The project itself being black feminist metaphysics. Which is to say, breathing" (6-7). The trope of breathing also emerges in an earlier Gumbs short story titled, "Evidence." Anthologized in the 2015 collection *Octavia's Brood*, "Evidence" centers on Alandrix, a twelve-year old Black girl who lives in the post-apocalypse known as "the breaking of silence." The story consists of a series of exhibits about Alandrix's time-travelling communications. It also functions as a sort of archive but without the epistemological rupture that is formalized in *M Archive*.[429] A letter from post-apocalyptic Alandrix to her pre-apocalypse ancestor Alexis, for example, describes life as release and breathing its most radical act of resistance:

> Just breathing is like a choir. […] breathe this deep because this is the message. We did it. We shifted the paradigm. We rewrote the meaning of life with our living. And this is how we did it. We let go. […]. We let go and re-taught ourselves to breathe the presence of the energy that we are that cannot be destroyed, but only transformed and transforming everything. Breathe deep, beloved young and frightened self, and then let go. And you will hold on. So then let go again.[430]

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[428] Gumbs describes Black feminist breathing as "an Afro-futurist faith practice that incorporates the dreams and prophecies of Black revolutionaries in the production of an embodied present that is love, which is god, which is bright and Black and old and always new and feminine in a queer way and feminist in the very first way. […] Black feminist breathing as a cosmology draws on ancestor reverent earth-based belief systems and practices that activate embodiments and personifications of the elements that make life possible." Alexis Pauline Gumbs, "That Transformative Dark Thing," *The New Inquiry*, (May 19, 2015), https://thenewinquiry.com/that-transformative-dark-thing/

[429] According to the synopsis of *M Archive* printed on the book's back cover, the text follows "the trajectory of Gumbs's acclaimed short story "Evidence."

[430] Alexis Pauline Gumbs, "Evidence," *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories From Social Justice Movements,* Ed. by Adrienne Maree Brown Walidah Imarisha (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2015), 41.

Although breathing in the case of the short story appears as a collective act of resistance to racial disposability, *M Archive* expands the argument about breathing to include an ecological imperative. It suggests that the current epistemological paradigm by which we have come to understand the human (a paradigm that renders blackness as other and Black people as nonhuman) is also responsible for the contamination and destruction of the planet. Interconnecting sexism, racism, and environmental injustice, *M Archive* affirms that "this was their downfall. they hated the black women who were themselves. a suicidal form of genocide. so that was it. they could only make the planet unbreathable" (7). The systematic oppression of Black women, in other words, makes the apocalypse inevitable. What Gumbs suggests emerges on the other side of the cataclysm, though, is a world free from those archives that have, for centuries, maintained these oppressive regimes. That is to say, after end of the world, after the *archons* and their archives, space opens up for new epistemologies and practices to flourish; space, in a Black feminist metaphysical sense, to breathe.

Although the trope circulates across her work, Gumbs's apocalypses are not created equal. *M Archive's* apocalypse, for example, is much more expansive than "the breaking of the silence" in "Evidence." Thinking back to Schomburg's archeological metaphor, *M Archive* is littered with the rubble of late capitalism, colonialism, environmental crisis, patriarchy, and antiblackness. The work responds by way of collaborative, feminist, intertextual wake-work that ultimately confronts the violence head-on by disposing of it all: "after the end of the world as we know it. After the ways we have been knowing the world." We have here no "Alexis" or "Alandrix," there is no ideal subject around which to anchor the experience. It is only breathing, not even the

telling of breathing as it is in "Evidence." If the ceremony found is the realization of our own participation in the development of Man and an understanding outside its terms, then resistance, as Gumbs shows us, figures as both the end and the beginning. It is the blacked out periodic table of elements and the shifting social subject of the collection. Resisting racial disposability means resisting the foundational terms of "Man" that render race disposable in the first place. *M Archive*'s subjects, modeling Black archives for a new century, thus find new scales of relationality, including the power of species-level breathing.[431]

Gumbs's investment in Black archives at a planetary scale is undeniably inspired by Sylvia Wynter. First, there is Wynter's foundational essay "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism," which is published in 1986. Then, in 2015, the same year Gumbs's "Evidence" is published, Wynter responds to her own essay with the sequel: "The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoetic Turn/Overturn, its Autonomy of Human Agency and Extraterritoriality of (Self)Cognition 1." In "The Ceremony Must Be Found," Wynter points to the overrepresentation of Man from which, she insists, we need an epistemological break. We are so stuck in its paradigm of understanding the human, in its structural oppositions that render Black the chaos to white order and progress that we need a new ceremony. *M Archive* describes the tension as:

> the problematic core construct was that in order to be sane, which is to live in one body, which is to live one lifetime at one time, which is to disconnect from the black simultaneity of the universe, you could and must deny black femininity. and

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431 *M Archives'*s speaker confesses to feeling disoriented after losing the archives: "the time was fast approaching when i wouldn't be able to afford to care how the signs got lost, when i would even disdainfully appreciate the waterlogged and quickly illegible cardboard and paper replacements that people affixed. but i was never again able to trust that the world i was living in or what i was capable of. i never really felt grounded in what i could see ever again after that. Gumbs, *M Archive*, 159.

> somehow breathe. the fundamental fallacy being (obvious now, obscured at the time). that there is no separation from the black simultaneity of the universe also known as everything also known as the black feminist pragmatic intergenerational sphere. everything is everything. (7)

Wynter revisits her quest for a ceremony that would redefine Man outside the biocentric racism of its Humanist iteration nearly two decades later in "Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoetic Turn/Overturn, its Autonomy of Human Agency and Extraterritoriality of (Self) Cognition1" (2015). To a certain extent, this quest leads her to a version of a utopian place Bradley gestured to twenty years earlier—"the someplace, somewhere" his "polychromist" utopia in "Black and American, 1982." For Bradley, this someplace, somewhere works at a planetary level, or what Gumbs describes as "everything is everything." Wynter, for her part, makes clear that the ceremony that would bring this new space into being also requires a new scale of articulation. In contrast to Bradley's obsequies, Wynter affirms the ceremony supersedes the ends of "biocentric (neo)Liberal-monohumanist ethno-class Man(2)" and of "the religio-secular counterends of the contemporary westernized imperialist and/or fundamentalist forms of the three Abrahamic monotheisms."[432] She favors a different "we" than that proposed, for example, by Stephen Best. For Wynter, it is the "We-the ecumenically-Human," or a "we" that exists at the planetary scale of species-being.[433] It evokes spirit and the speculative but goes beyond religion and its versions of the human.

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[432] Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoetic Turn/Overturn, its Autonomy of Human Agency and Extraterritoriality of (Self-)Cognition1," *Black Knowledges/Black Struggles: Essays in Critical Epistemology,* Ed. Jason R. Ambroise and Sabine Broeck (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2015), 194.
[433] ibid.

Although Wynter's new ceremony never specifically uses the word "archive," she attends to the archival impulse in her concern with the categorizing of knowledge. A priori even Man, she argues that humans have "selectively known and categorized our social environments in the good/bad terms which ensure the conservation of our cosmogonically chartered, sociogenic replicator code of symbolic life/death."[434] It is, as Gumbs describes it, "a false and impossible belief about origin" (7). What marks the second emergence, which Wynter argues moves us to the human on a planetary scale, is the recognition of the extent to which we have invented ourselves as Man. How we have imagined and maintained a particular narrative of life and death.[435] A meta-approach to these discourses is fundamental to the work of Black archives.

Black archives provide us with new epistemological and ontological possibilities—possibilities not just for a new future, but a new human in that future. Rather than allopoietic systems, which use raw materials to create something other than itself, Black archives in their twenty-first century imagining, thrive as autopoietic or living systems capable of reproducing and maintaining themselves on their own terms. Understanding them in these terms requires a new epistemological frame, just as theorizing them as discursive systems requires a new grammar. This is precisely where Gumbs builds off of Philip's theoretical legacy in *Zong!*. Or, to put it another way, from the deconstruction of *Zong!*'s archive, Gumbs ceremoniously assembles an "An Archive

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[434] Wynter, "The Ceremony Found," 221.
[435] Wynter describes this narrative as: "our own humanly invented, autopoetically instituted cosmogonies or origin narratives and their mandated/prescribed sociogenic replicator codes." Wynter, "The Ceremony Found," 223.

of Dirt," "An Archive of Sky," "An Archive of Fire," and "and Archive of Ocean." And of the scraps left over, she weaves, "Baskets (Possible Futures Yet To Be Woven)."[436]

Although she leaves the "M" of *M Archive* ambiguous,[437] Gumbs clearly calls the ceremony to transform the world and unseat its systems of power as an "unmanning" of the archive. We can understand this to mean both the unmanning of the ideal subject in the black archive and the unmanning of human as Man in the tradition of archiving writ large. Pairing some definitions of what it means to "unman" with lines from *M Archive* gestures to the ways in which her work articulates a new sense of the human for the black archive of the twenty-first century.

The first definition the *OED* provides of "unman" is "to remove the crew from a vehicle, particularly a ship."[438] For Philip, this looks like the violent unmanning of the enslaved aboard the *Zong*. Gumbs's speaker in "Archives of Ocean" also recalls the

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436 Each of *M Archive*'s sections, correspond in interesting ways to the texts examined in *Collecting Race*. "Archive of Dirt," for example, parallels Schomburg's call to dig and the underground metaphor elaborated in *Invisible Man*. "Archive of Sky: What We Became" emphasizes the role of the mother and birthing and includes a hoodoo ritual of rebirth that parallels the work of Hurston and Brodber discussed in Chapter Two. "Archive of Fire" relates to Bradley's culminating conflagration in *The Chaneysville Incident*, while "Archive of Ocean," readily connects to Philip's *Zong!*.

437 Gumbs bookends the collection with potential definitions for the titular "M." She concludes the opening section, "A Note" with a catalogue of options: "*M* is for Mary and Maryam and Moses and make-believe. *M* is for McKenzie. *M* is for miracle and mayhem and mass incarceration. *M* is for migrant and microcosmic and major. *M* is for magic and metastasization. *M* is for muscle and memory and mitochondria. *M* is for minor and malevolence and manna. *M* is for maternal and mule and music. *M* is for meal and minute and mandrill. *M* is for mammal and makeup and mercury. *M* is for must be and maybe and much." Gumbs, *M Archive,* xi-xii. The acknowledgments with which she closes the collection include more potential definitions: "M IS FOR MULTITUDE. […] M IS FOR MOTHERING. […] M IS FOR MEMORY. […] M IS FOR MAGIC. […] M IS FOR MAKING-IT-HAPPEN. […] and from the very beginning, M HAS BEEN FOR M. JACQUI ALEXANDER AND KITSIMBA. […] M IS FOR MY MAJOR MIRACLE. […] IS FOR MORE." Gumbs, *M Archive,* 213-216.

438 *Oxford English Dictionary,* OED Online, s.v. "unman."

"memory of being packaged and preserved (barely) while crossing it over. […] when they were pushed out onto land, the kidnappers treated then like an undifferentiated mass. Or a mass differentiated by market value. Which was part of the violence and all of the lie" (115). Both examples call into questions the relationship of Black subjects to the idea of an "unmanned" ship, and the ways in which Black bodies were rendered disposal and Black subjects nonhuman. And yet, in both *Zong!* and *M Archive*, despite being violently cast off and disposed of, voices and names reappear. Spirits find other places, spaces, and ways of telling (or untelling) stories qualified and included in Black archives.

"Unmanning" can also mean "emasculating." This definition is particularly relevant to Gumbs's career investment in the legacy and archives of Black feminist writers. A commitment to Black feminist metaphysics, for example, shapes the *M Archive*'s postapocalyptic creation myth. Rooted in the divinity of Black femininity, the myth finds expression in the text's final image of an oracle. Reminiscent of Brodber's titular character in *Louisiana*, Gumbs's oracle "had been internationally outlawed and confined to small island spaces without bridges," but now "differentiates the molecules […] and sets them all on their task" (211). She holds the power that has been denied the periodic table of elements, to organize and manipulate matter, and thus serves as the text's guiding epistemological resource. Nevertheless, as indebted as Gumbs's oeuvre is to Black feminist practice and Black femininity, *M Archive* also affirms an aqua archival poetics that expands gender to accommodate inter-species kinship. "we liked to think of it as an evolutionary approach. And really at that point what could anyone do with the rising water but emulate the amphibians. What we had done to the planet made us crave and need a bothness of slick skin and webbing and genital adaptability" (12).

Unmanning, in this case, not only means making effeminate but challenging the stakes of our understanding of gender as a strict biological binary.

In a twentieth-century context, the final definition of "unman" as "to deprive of the attributes of a human being," might read as if it is about making people property, seeing them as not human. Indeed, the very project of twentieth-century Black archives is an effort to reject such dehumanization, an effort that often resulted in the elevation of an ideal Black subject. Gumbs, however, suggests that Black archives strive to articulate and imagine a different version of the human entirely. She is not alone in this assertion. Hurston and Brodber's notion of the flesh and its knowledges, for example, draws us away from the body as a tool that bolsters Man 2 at the expense of Black belonging. Bradley's insistence upon speculation as a model for remembering and knowing destabilizes paradigms of time and space that have been used to discredit Black epistemologies and exclude Black subjects from the category of the human. Philip models the deconstruction of the traditional archive and through *Zong!* provides a new grammar through which to articulate a human free from the language of "Man." "Unmanning," as these examples demonstrate, is thus not the refusal of the attributes of being human but the refusal to accept the definitions of those attributes according to the terms of Humanism. *M Archive* most radically ruptures with those attributes by revealing how the systematic refusal of humanity for Black subjects (and Black women in particular) jeopardizes planetary health. This is not a mining or pursuit of the underwater archive, but the tale of a people after the end, as they learn to rebuild, recreate and find new ways to remember the human as "Unmanned."

A new scale of understanding the self and its relation to others—the planetary—ultimately characterizes Black archives for the twenty-first century. Rooted in the discovery of the Wynterian ceremony, they navigate the call to dig in radically different ways from Schomburg's original appeal. The masculinism of New Negro ideology and its impact on the construction of the "ideal subject" of Black archives gives way to theories that insist not only that "The Negro Digs Up *Her* Past," but that she consents to not be a single, invisible, (much less ideal) being.[439] Black archives as the new ceremony of the twenty-first century imagine repositories that are as aquatic and celestial as they once were made to seem terrestrial. These accumulate, preserve, and produce knowledges previously disqualified and subjugated, knowledges like the speculative and fleshly.

Beyond accommodating for new histories, Black archives in the twenty-first century allow for the possibility of no history. Gumbs acknowledges this prospect in what I read as a fortuitous response to Bradley's closing line in *The Chaneysville Incident*, which sees John wondering "if [Judith] would understand when she saw the smoke rising from the far side of the Hill." *M Archive*'s speaker confesses:

> i knew the ones who would understand wouldn't be here for three thousand years, or three thousand minutes. or three thousand seconds. or three thousand days. or later today in the year three thousand. truth be told i didn't have much use for the specificity of time in there. and i didn't think i would keep on existing for any unit of time/ what I knew was that the ones who would understand were not here now. (212).

Ninety-five years after Schomburg's clarion call, Black archives still require intentional excavation. *Collecting Race*, in other words, does not encourage us to put down the spade. Rather, in the tradition of Black archive theorists like Ellison, Hurston,

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[439] See Fred Moten's trilogy, *consent not to be a single being*, which includes *Black and Blur* (2017), *Stolen Life* (2018), and *The Universal Machine* (2018).

Brodber, Bradley, Philip and Gumbs it invites us to consider a more expansive archival project. Black archives that call us to hibernate, to plunge the depths, to turn inward, to consider the flesh, to speculate, to incinerate, to write, to create, to collect, to remember, to forget, to tell, and untell. To "build your memory early in the morning out of secrets and intuition. make your archive out of unauthorized claims. craft your knowing out of water and heat."[440] And, finally, to breathe.

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[440] Wynter, *Dub*, 28.

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