

Un-Doing time: How Artists Subvert Carceral Space-Time Logics through Multimedia and
Writing

By

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Abstract

The prison industrial complex in the United States is vast, with many overlapping institutions producing what I refer to as the carceral state. Under the carceral state, the intersection of policing, technology, incarceration and gentrification produces carceral logics. An example of a carceral logic would be sentencing regimes which imprison people through prolonged prison sentences. Mandatory minimums, for instance, is a policy exercised through sentencing regimes. Throughout American history, carceral logics have impacted millions of people, and to this day the carceral state continues to deploy carceral logics to maintain its legitimacy. Several artists have responded to the carceral state by imagining new methods of subverting its attendant logics. In my thesis, I assess three of these artists, specifically focusing on one of their artworks in each chapter.

Chapter one opens my argument with a close reading of prison abolitionist Jackie Wang's multimedia spoken word performance "The Cybernetic Cop." In this piece, Wang rejects carceral logics of time through a practice of combining scenes from the movie *Robocop* with ambient synthesizers and poetry. In dissecting this piece, I elucidate Wang's techniques in demonstrating how carceral logics of time hold people captive through impositions of temporal punishments.

Chapter two is a study of sections from *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* by Saidiya Hartman. In the book, Hartman makes use of "critical fabulation," a method of historical analysis which returns to the historical record to uncover its oversights, particularly with regard to Black people. Hartman demonstrates a range of techniques for subverting carceral spaces by looking at the homes of queer working Black women on the East Coast in the early twentieth century. Drawing comparisons to our current carceral state, she exposes how the historical record has disserved Black women, while illuminating how Black women dealt with carceral logics of the time.

Chapter three focuses on the musician, poet, and artist Moor Mother. In this section, I break down Moor Mother's song "Act 3 - Time of No Time" to examine how her practice helps undermine carceral space-time logics. Critiquing the role of gentrification in aggravating racism and incarceration, Moor Mother envisions new approaches to time and space. With free jazz and poetry, she provides new ways of thinking about how our current space-time logics harm Black people.

All three of these artists do crucial work in articulating new frameworks and ways of understanding the carceral system. In my thesis, their art serves a launchpad for larger conversations regarding carceral logics.

Keywords: carceral logic, carceral state, time, space, art, prisons, multimedia

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Introduction

The term “carceral state” is used to identify the vast, overlapping formal institutions that comprise the criminal (in)justice system. Sociologist Kayla Marie Martensen argues that while the carceral state shares many qualities with concepts like the new Jim Crow, the prison industrial complex, and the golden gulag, the carceral state is also distinct in its methods of control. What distinguishes the carceral state from similar descriptors, she claims, is “how carceral logic and carceral control expand beyond the prison, and is in fact embedded in the social fabric of the United States.”¹ In the US, the carceral state encompasses a wide array of public and private systems; from police and justices to the corporations which use prison labor for their products. Various institutions of the carceral state intersect, producing what is referred to as “carceral logics,” or practices which the carceral state utilizes to preserve itself. Taking input from prison studies and abolitionist writing, carceral logics refer to the rules of both geography and mobility enforced by the state. Prison studies scholars use “carceral geographies” to map out the state’s distribution of space and carcerality in relation to an area’s social context.² One of the carceral state's primary tools for preserving itself are embedding its logics within ostensibly non-carceral environments. Professor of carceral studies Dominique Moran contends that spatial and temporal conditions are affected by incarceration both within prisons and beyond. Moran lists the overlapping temporalities in prisons which help to control the movement of prisoners, such as:

¹ Martensen, Kayla Marie. “Review of Carceral State Studies and Application.” *Sociology Compass*, vol. 14, no. 7, 2020, doi:10.1111/soc4.12801.

² Moran, Dominique. *Carceral Geography : Spaces and Practices of Incarceration*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/umichigan/detail.action?docID=1869292>.

“The externally imposed clock time which measures sentences in days, weeks, months and years, and the experiential time as experienced by individual prisoners, who variously sense stasis (with time seeming to stand still while they are incarcerated through the daily repetition of penal routines), who perceive time to flow more quickly outside the prison than inside (as events in the lives of others seemingly pass them by), or who observe the passage of time biologically (through their own embodied processes of ageing and attendant physical deterioration).”³

In other words, prisons control inmates through a logic of time that coerces them into stillness and repetition. However, scholars suggest that prisons are not the only site where carceral temporalities are deployed. Sociologist Loic Wacquant calls the connection between prisons and urban centers “a single carceral continuum” that extends from prisons and into low-income neighborhoods.⁴ Thus, the prison system employs a wide range of practices to assert its sovereignty over space and time.

Abolitionists, who believe in dismantling the carceral state and its attendant logics, have shifted their focus since the 1990s from prison abolition to *penal* abolition.⁵ According to criminologist Willem de Haan, penal abolitionism has three components: a social movement

³Ibid., pp. 52

⁴Wacquant, Loïc J. D. *Punishing the Poor : The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*. Duke University Press, 2009.

⁵Ben-Moshe, L. Dis-epistemologies of Abolition. *Crit Crim* 26, pp. 341–355 (2018).
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-018-9403-1>

dedicated to abolishing current punitive penal structures; a theoretical framework reconceptualizing oppression within carceral spaces; and a strategy that promotes the creation of a more just, equal and equitable society.⁶ These domains cannot be separated from each other, as approaching abolition entails building a post-carceral society that does not rely on prisons to maintain social control. Criminology expert Liat Ben Moshe gestures the practices that maintain the carceral state as “carceral locales,” which “encompass a variety of enclosures such as psychiatric hospitals, detention centers and residential institutions for people with disabilities, to name a few.”⁷ I draw my definition of the carceral state from Ben Moshe, who defines “carceral” as a force extending beyond physical spaces to encompass the “particular logics and discourses that abolition (penal/prison/carceral) opposes.”⁸ With this understanding of “carceral” in mind, I approach the carceral state not as a monolith, but rather as a diffuse force arising in many contexts both within prisons and outside of them. Slavery, as one of the earliest sites of carcerality, maintained control over Black people through violence and fear, as well as the regimentation of movement and time. Activist Angela Davis has written extensively on the relationship between chattel slavery and modern day prisons.⁹ In the early twentieth century, Black migrants fled racism in the post-slavery South for cities like New York and Philadelphia. As they moved into tenement buildings, Black people, and in particular Black women, encountered laws that restricted their mobility and regulated their living spaces. While Black

⁶De Haan, W. (1990). *The politics of redress: Crime, punishment and penal abolition*. London: Unwin Hyman.

⁷Ben-Moshe, L. Dis-epistemologies of Abolition. *Crit Crim* 26, pp. 341–355 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-018-9403-1>

⁸Ibid.

⁹Davis, Angela Y. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Seven Stories Press, 2003.

people had just fled slavery, upon moving North, they discovered carceral logics which were similarly designed to strip Black people of autonomy over their movements and living spaces. The use of carceral mobilities and geographies to maintain white supremacy has greatly influenced the workings of the US prison system.

Prison abolitionists, in response to the carceral state, have rejected the United States's reliance on prisons as a means of social control and the maintenance of white supremacy.¹⁰ George Jackson, a civil rights activist known for his memoirs and manifestos written from prison during the 1970s, contends that the carceral state is the primary mechanism of political control in the United States, writing, "throughout its history, the United States has used its prisons to suppress any organized efforts to challenge its legitimacy — from its attempts to break up the early Working Men's Benevolent Party...to the attempts to destroy the Black Panther Party."¹¹ According to Jackson, as movements have risen to protest government sanctioned white supremacy, the carceral state quickly thwarts their progress through surveillance and incarceration.

Several contemporary artists grapple with Jackson's writing in their art, revealing that his thoughts on the prison state have never been more prescient. Poet and artist Jackie Wang extrapolates Jackson's writings to today's carceral system, arguing that technology has given rise to a carceral state which can reassert control in a more efficient manner. Wang argues that "labor-saving technologies will not necessarily liberate humans from work as we move toward a

¹⁰Gross, Kali Nicole. "Policing Black Women's and Black Girls' Bodies in the Carceral United States." *Souls*, vol. 20, no. 1, Taylor & Francis, Jan. 2018, pp. 1–13, doi:10.1080/10999949.2018.1520058.

¹¹ Jackson, Goerge, *Blood in My Eye*, pp. 107

post-scarcity and post-work society, but can lead to the creation of surplus populations that are housed — and generate value — in prison.”¹² For Wang, automotive technology does not entail more social benefits; rather, she believes such technologies will be used to uphold and reinforce the prison system by using prisoners as a means of generating economic value for both state-run and corporate-run prisons.

Wang’s artistic practice is devoted to subverting carceral logics of time. Wang focuses specifically on sentencing regimes, which hold incarcerated people captive through policies and practices such as mandatory minimums and the use of solitary confinement. Under mandatory minimums, if someone is convicted of a crime, regardless of the circumstance or the judge’s opinion, that person will be forced to serve at least that sentence.¹³ Through sentencing as a punishment, Wang believes that time becomes a fixed loop imposed on the prisoner as they remain incarcerated. In prison, time is managed by the carceral state in order to delegate work, as well as to maintain control over prisoners’ movements. The imposition of a permanent temporal structure on the prisoner is a primary logic the carceral apparatus deploys to preserve its presence and authority. From Wang’s perspective, this permanence is a stasis that obstructs the possibility for post-carceral futures. As an abolitionist, Wang’s objective lies in uprooting the carceral state and its many logics. Wang’s 2018 performance of *The Cybernetic Cop* is a demonstration of how

¹²Wang, Jackie. *Carceral Capitalism*. Semiotext(e), 2018, pp. 54.

¹³Cullen, James. “Sentencing Laws and How They Contribute to Mass Incarceration.” *Brennan Center for Justice*, 5 Oct. 2018, www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/sentencing-laws-and-how-they-contribute-mass-incarceration.

she undermines carceral logics of time through her art. She conceptualizes fixed time with spoken-word poetry, analog synthesizers, and visual references to the film *Robocop*. Wang demonstrates how carceral logics of time rely on past data to reinforce present-day carceral conditions. In doing so, Wang maintains that no futures can be built in the presence of a penal state, and that abolishing the prison system means rejecting both its physical and metaphysical logics.

Saidiya Hartman's book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Stories of Social Upheaval* deals substantially with carceral logics of space that exercise control over Black people in urban settings. Unlike Wang, Hartman's writing examines how carceral geographies manifest beyond prisons. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* is a revisionist account of working class queer Black women in Philadelphia and New York at the turn of the century. She responds to a lack of research regarding Black women at this time, reexamining the contemporaneous historical record to elucidate what was left blank. Hartman demonstrates how these oversights were deliberately made by researchers at the time to legitimize the carceral state, which sought to police the sexualities of Black women through Black domestic spaces. Hartman refers to her specific technique of historical analysis as "critical fabulation,"¹⁴ which combines historical and archival research with critical theory and fictional writing. By pulling these various approaches together, Hartman can fill in where the archive falls short in regards to Black women.¹⁵ In *Wayward Lives*, Hartman illuminates hidden spaces in Black homes, sites that

¹⁴Saidiya Hartman; "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe* 1 June 2008; 12 (2): 1–14. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/-12-2-1>

¹⁵Ibid.

researchers took little interest in studying at the time. She writes about ordinary people who had to live in daily awareness of carceral logics of space, or carceral locales, that were specifically designed to monitor Black women. Hartman's use of critical fabulation allows her to reveal how Black women have resisted carceral geographies. Through her use of second-person, present tense addresses, Hartman makes it clear that similar carceral logics continue to dominate the lives of Black women today. In showing how her featured subjects managed to resist carceral locales, Hartman encourages new ways of thinking about how Black women today who deal with similar constraints on their mobility can defy the carceral state.

Like Hartman and Wang, musician, poet, and rapper Camae Ayewa, known professionally as Moor Mother, is devoted to subverting carceral logics. In many ways, she is a synthesis of both Wang and Hartman, drawing on a wide range of techniques to upend logics of space *and* time. On her recent album *Circuit City*, Moor Mother draws our attention to how carceral space-time logics are exercised outside of prisons, specifically in relation to the current low-income housing crisis in Philadelphia. Moor Mother fuses free jazz, Afro-futurism, and spoken word poetry to perform her own rejection of carceral logics through *Circuit City*. The combination of these different forms allows her to indicate ways of liberation from US white supremacy.

In my thesis, I explore the work of each of these three artists to examine their unique approaches to subverting carceral logics through various artistic mediums. I begin with a close reading of Jackie Wang's multimedia spoken word performance, *The Cybernetic Cop*, guiding the reader through the specific techniques she harnesses in her performances, and how these techniques disrupt carceral logics of time. In my second chapter, I analyze Saidiya Hartman's

Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments, assessing how she subverts carceral geographies through critical fabulation which she applies to the lives of Black women in Philadelphia and New York in the early Twentieth century. My final chapter focuses on Moor Mother's song "Act 3 - Time of No Time," in which I examine how the song's elements of free jazz, Afro-futurism, and spoken word poetry reject carceral space-time logics in present-day Philadelphia.

While these three artists may appear distinct from each other in their various practices and methods, I demonstrate how thinking about different creative approaches to carceral logics can inspire new ideas and approaches to dismantling the penal system. Wang, Hartman, and Moor Mother, while situated in their own respective practices, come together in their shared efforts to undo carceral logics through imaginative work. This kind of approach is necessary to abolitionist work, as it demonstrates how carceral thinking influences people's movement through space and time. *The Cybernetic Cop*, as a performance piece, does not do the same immediate work as, for example, a public defender or a low-income housing attorney. The same can be said of *Wayward Lives* and "Act 3 - Time of No Time," both of which respond to carceral logics through imaginative artistic expression. Though art may not achieve the same material outcomes as frontline activism, creativity plays a vital role in fighting incarceration. Art which inspires new ways of thinking about carceral logics can help people to contemplate where in their lives they can reject the carceral institutions of social and racial control.

These three women frequently collaborate, connecting the dots between each other's artistry to support the goals of abolition. As recently as 2020, Jackie Wang held a virtual dialogue with Moor Mother and harpist Brandee Younger titled "Sonic Legacies and

Afro-Futures.”¹⁶ Wang also taught a course at The New School based on Hartman’s book called “Lost Grrls: The Politics of Waywardness,” using *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* as its “point of departure” in studying the legacies of rebellious women throughout American history. Their collaborative efforts testify to the importance of putting different artists and artworks in conversation with each other in bringing about new tactics to fight the carceral state.

I also chose these three creators because of how their respective artworks influenced my own thinking about carceral logics. When the University of Michigan announced a lockdown for COVID-19 in the fall, it was unclear how they would enforce students staying at home. Would they rely on us to police each other? Could we remain vigilant about observing COVID guidelines without having to inform other students? As I saw the University exploit our entrenched ways of thinking, I realized that carceral logics were influencing my attitude towards COVID safety. My analyses of these artists helped me identify how my beliefs and actions contribute to the maintenance of a surveillance state. In singling out the ways in which carcerality permeates my own thoughts, I have the opportunity to reject carceral rationales. As I contemplate the ideas about time and space which Wang, Hartman, and Moor Mother wrestle with, I hope their work will also help other people consider alternative avenues of thinking towards an abolitionist future.

¹⁶Wang, Jackie, et al. “Artists Space Dialogues: Jackie Wang with Moor Mother & Brandee Younger.” *Dialogues: Jackie Wang with Moor Mother & Brandee Younger*, 24 Dec. 2020, artistspace.org/programs/artists-space-dialogues-jackie-wang-with-moor-mother-brandee-younger.

Chapter One: *Robocop* is Here: On Jackie Wang's Performance of "The Cybernetic Cop"

Jackie Wang's oeuvre emerges from the prison abolition movement, a growing movement that calls to eliminate prisons as the sole means of solving social issues.¹⁷ Allegra McLeod defines abolition as, "An aspirational ethic and a framework of decarceration, which entails a positive substitution of other regulatory forms for criminal regulation."¹⁸ As McLeod explains, prison abolitionists are not only focused on tearing down prison walls. The abolitionist movement prioritizes dismantling the carceral state and replacing it with institutions that promote the expansion of social welfare programs to prevent the need for carceral responses. Abolition also seeks to dismantle carceral logics that contort the flow of time, both within and beyond prisons. To Wang, these logics present some of the greatest barriers to abolition. Through her artwork, Wang develops new strategies for approaching and dismantling carceral logics that are rooted in time.

Wang theorizes carceral time in her immersive, multimedia presentation "The Cybernetic Cop: Robocop and the Future of Policing." In the piece, Wang's focus is the captive and punitive qualities of time, specifically sentencing regimes that help to operate and maintain the carceral system. Sentencing regimes hold incarcerated people captive through policies and practices such as mandatory sentencing and the use of solitary confinement. Mandatory sentences are often

¹⁷Maryl, Damon. "Fields, Logics, and Social Movements: Prison Abolition and the Social Justice Field." *Sociological Inquiry*, 2012, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1475-682X.2012.00428.x>.

¹⁸McLeod, Allegra M. "Prison Abolition and Grounded Justice." *UCLA Law Review*, 2015, heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals%2Fuclalr62&id=1163&collection=journals&index=.

enforced as decades-long sentences in prison. With sentencing as a punishment, time becomes an unending stasis imposed on the prisoner as they remain incarcerated. In prison, time is regimented in order to delegate work, but also to maintain control over prisoners' movements. The imposition of a permanent temporal structure on the prisoner is a primary logic the carceral state deploys to preserve its presence and authority. From Wang's perspective, this permanence is a stasis that obstructs the possibility for post-carceral futures, a world she is dedicated to building. Sentencing regimes are used both to prevent these futures from materializing and to reinforce the carceral state's own legitimacy, which the state accomplishes by capturing people in unending cycles of time.

In "the Cybernetic Cop," Wang joins sonic and visual elements — an analog synthesizer she operates and the climactic scene from *Robocop* playing in the background — with spoken word. The 1987 film *Robocop* is about murdered Detroit police officer Alex Murphy, whose body is recycled by the megacorporation "Omni-Consumer Products" (OCP) to power the Robocop, OCP's newest weapon against crime. Murphy becomes the Robocop, a cyborgian police officer whose mission is to "clean up the streets," echoing anti-crime sentiments made by politicians during the 1980s. Wang conceptualizes the carceral temporal logics in *Robocop*, underscoring the film's similarities with the current penal system's use of time. Wang's piece begins in the past as she recalls, "I grew up with a little brother who had a RoboCop toy, and we would sit around taking turns touching the chest plate button that would activate actuated electronic speech."¹⁹ In *Carceral Capitalism*, Wang writes about her brother, who was incarcerated at 17 for a life sentence, which has since been reduced to forty years. For decades,

¹⁹ Wang, Jackie. *Carceral Capitalism*. Semiotext(e), 2018, pp. 254.

he has been locked up and kept in the same conditions, stuck in the loop of carceral time, likely performing unpaid labor in a correctional facility for the past several decades. Wang and her family are similarly ensnared in a loop defined by his absence, constantly awaiting his release. In this opening passage of her piece, Wang examines how prevalent carceral logics have been in her and her brother's lives, as demonstrated through the Robocop toy. It is not unexpected for Wang and her brother to be playing with a toy Robocop considering the franchise's popularity in the 80s and 90s. However, she also contemporizes *Robocop* to draw attention to present day conditions regarding time in the prison system. By using an older film about the future to depict the current carceral system, Wang demonstrates how time gets stuck when the present feeds off of the past. Wang's reframing of *Robocop* indicates that reusing the past to determine future outcomes of crime will enable the carceral state to exist in perpetuity.

The electronic speech Wang first recalls was meant to emulate Robocop's own phrases from the franchise; however, this particular toy's speech abilities actually serve more nefarious purposes. From the beginning, it appears that Wang and her brother, through their ability to activate this speech function, have control over Robocop. Wang recalls the toy's speech so she can analyze how technology administers carceral logics beyond prison walls. The toy accosts whoever plays with it, and in her piece, its speech functions to cultivate a police officer inside of Wang's head who will prevent her from committing crimes. The Robocop toy aids in the construction of static carceral times because of how it implicates Wang in the poem, forcing her to endlessly police herself. By repeatedly policing herself, she is stuck in the same pattern, immobilizing herself in time. The deployment of static carceral logics of time makes her unable to break free and build a future without prisons because it keeps her consigned to the same loop

of criminality. She describes the toy's abilities, recounting, "The RoboCop toy had three phrases: 'Drugs are trouble,' 'Drop it!' and 'Your move, creep.' For the Robocop toy, criminals were the enemy, but we were implicated."²⁰ Wang is using RoboCop's phrases to position herself as someone targeted by temporal punishments and carceral logics that weaponize time. By saying "Drugs are trouble," the toy Robocop has demarcated the borders of criminality, using drugs as a synecdoche for criminality that Wang is supposed to avoid. These borders will confine Wang and force her to continually reproduce the same conditions. "Drop it!" implies that the criminal is violent, the "it" presumably meaning some kind of weapon. With "Your move, creep," the toy positions whoever holds it as some kind of criminal, as it speaks directly to them. Hence, when she says, "For the Robocop toy, criminals were the enemy, but we were implicated," Wang is reflecting on how she starts to see herself as a criminal while she plays with the toy. Drugs are an example of the crime Wang must now guard against. The violent weapon the toy implies she is holding when it says "drop it!" makes the threat of violence more immediate. Thus, "Your move, creep" implies that Wang is the creep and criminal Robocop is fighting. Robocop's speech functions to construct a crime, imply Wang's culpability, and force her to defend herself against herself.

Wang's battle is with the carceral logics which, in a similar fashion, program her to police only that which has been delineated as "criminal." As she tries to wage this fight, she remains trapped in a cycle of self-criminalization. Temporal logics that force prisoners into a fixed loop of time similarly keep her stuck by forcing her to police herself ad infinitum. The Robocop toy represents Wang's early indoctrination into systems of carceral time. These fixed perceptions of

²⁰ Ibid.

time can only be broken through the abolition of the penal state. But, as Wang echoes later in the piece, these manufactured ideas about crime have already been successful in keeping her stuck. She says, “As a youth, I never did any drugs. Was it the RoboCop inside my head that stopped me from doing drugs?”²¹ Reflecting on her drugless childhood, Wang wonders whether the toy exercises control over her, and in this moment, she acknowledges that there is a spectre of surveillance which confines her, one that keeps her circling the same temporal coil. Her confinement to this cycle hinders her ability to create post-carceral futures as she is stuck recreating her own criminality.

With this forced re-creation of criminality in mind, the analog synthesizer and the muted projection of *Robocop* that takes place behind Wang during the piece become symbolic of temporal stasis. With the ambient noises she emits from her analog synthesizers, Wang brings herself and her childhood memories into the dystopian world of *Robocop*. The synthesizer helps insert her memory into the world of the movie because it is an instrument from the past whose noises are both futuristic and dated. By operating an analog synthesizer to accompany an older sci-fi movie, Wang has signalled the obstacles of envisioning new futures under carceral logics which confine people through time. She demonstrates the stifling nature of the carceral system by using older tools to elicit the feeling of a futurity, even though that “feeling” comes from the past. The synthesizer is a tool that is confined to its original programming, meaning it may not break the fixed loop of carceral time.

Furthermore, Wang uses the original *Robocop* movie to juxtapose her own experience with that of Alex Murphy, who is reconstructed into Robocop by OCP. Wang describes these

²¹ Ibid.

parallels to show how, much like the movie version of *Robocop*, she has been programmed to reinforce criminality and uphold corporate interests. Wang explains, “The RoboCop of yesteryear was at war with his creators. Sure, criminals were to be dealt with; without the criminal, there is no cop. But the criminals were a red herring. Ultimately, they were merely the lackeys of the suited businessmen.”²² Wang calls Alex Murphy “the RoboCop of yesteryear” because he is specifically a different incarnation of RoboCop than Wang’s toy. Like the synthesizer, Wang is using a movie from “yesteryear” to demonstrate that she is stuck in the same cycles of self-criminalization. Wang says, “Without the criminal, there is no cop,” mindful of the fixed loop of criminality which persists in her head. In this moment, she harkens to the construction of criminality discussed in the beginning of the performance. Referring to the movie criminals as “merely the lackeys of the suited businessman,” Wang reinforces the view that criminality is a construct which reinforces itself to keep people from building alternatives to carceral capitalism and escaping infinite stretches of temporal punishment. Imagining post-carceral ways of living is central to the abolition movement, as adrienne maree brown opines, “Look[ing] for alternative ways to address/interrupt harm, which do not rely on the state”²³ is fundamental in ending punitive responses to social issues. However, Wang has difficulty interrupting state violence because it is entrenched in capitalism. The “lackeys” who work on behalf of the businessmen serve as a distraction, or “red herring,” from their bosses, who create crime to legitimize force

²² Ibid., pp. 255

²³ brown, adrienne m. *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. AK Press, 2017, pp. 82.

taken against it. Wang designates the suited businessmen who seek wealth from this system as the creators of carceral logics that enforce unchanging temporalities, implicitly tying these logics to capitalism. The suggestion that capitalism underpins crime foregrounds the next line, in which Wang proclaims, “Robocop’s pursuit of the truth of his origin laid bare a technocratic capitalist conspiracy.” The “pursuit of the truth of his origin” is a reference to Robocop’s confrontation with the chairman at OCP. Upon discovering that OCP creates crime to sell its own policing technology, Robocop comes to the OCP headquarters to arrest the CEO. Similarly, as Wang pursues the truth about how carceral logics of time influence her, we are reminded of the real life capitalist forces which are reminiscent of OCP. The “technocratic capitalist conspiracy” she describes is OCP, a board of technical experts who seek to profit from ongoing cycles of crime which they perpetuate. These board members resemble actual companies like PredPol. PredPol — short for Predictive Policing — is a law enforcement software company that sells data analytic tools to police. Wang writes²⁴ in *Carceral Capitalism* that PredPol contributes to a digital carceral infrastructure which seeks to determine how and when crime will occur through analytics of previous crime statistics. Much like how Robocop recognizes that OCP creates both the criminal and the police, Wang holds that companies like PredPol operate in a parallel fashion.

As Robocop becomes cognizant of who the real criminals are — the board members of OCP — he struggles to accost them, which is similar to how Wang perceives her own battle against carceral capitalism. Though Wang is aware of the carceral logics that work on her, her performance shows how difficult it is to uproot them. She expresses this dilemma in the following stanza:

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 230

What is the future of law enforcement?

What is the future of law enforcement?

A technological experiment in cyborg policing

Half man, half machine

Skin and circuitry

I want to draw attention to a number of techniques Wang uses here to suggest that there is no future under a carceral state. By repeating it, the question becomes its own loop, a stuckness that persists because it is seemingly unanswerable. This stanza is also only one of three moments in the written version in which the writing breaks from a prosaic style into a poetic one. In each of those three moments, Wang discusses some aspect of the carceral state compartmentalizing the body. The breakdown in style reflects the breakdown of the body under the forced repetition of time, which Wang calls “a technological experiment in cyborg policing.” Cyborg is a portmanteau for “cybernetic organism,” and it works as both a reference to Robocop and a reference to Wang herself. Wang has been programmed to view herself as a criminal, as she describes at the beginning with the implanting of a Robocop inside her head. The synthesizer is an obsolete piece of technology that creates the illusion of a futurity, and as an extension of Wang, it allows her to demonstrate how she keeps herself in these cycles. As this programmable person, she is “half man, half machine / Skin and circuitry,” fighting to wrest control of her destiny from the capitalist forces that depend on making time static and imposing unchanging time onto subjects of the carceral state. “Skin and circuitry” is a dichotomy which embodies

Wang and the carceral state. Both Wang and the modern day police officer are composed of sentient elements and mechanical ones, and as such they both represent the effects of present-day forms of policing.

For Wang, Robocop is emblematic of the cyborgian police she encounters in the world and in her head. She describes Robocop as such, saying: “He’s equipped with[...]a data spike that lets him download information from the police database and rapidly compare these records with the information he’s gathered.” Wang’s description of Robocop’s weaponry demonstrates how Robocop can only function to reproduce the past and maintain a fixed state of time that is dependent on the capitalist penal system of the film. The data he collects allows him to continually reproduce the same conditions which he must patrol. This “data spike” gives Robocop past information on where and when crimes take place so he can prevent them from occurring. Wang writes in another section of *Carceral Capitalism* about how data analytics have become a primary tactic in stopping crime under the current carceral system, with companies like PredPol paving the way for intrusive forms of data harvesting. “Though the goal of algorithmic policing is, ostensibly, to reduce time,” she writes, “if there were no social threats to manage, these companies would be out of business.”²⁵ The algorithmic policing Wang refers to is similar to Robocop’s sweeping data checks, which he uses to track crime. However, by using past arrest data to determine whether or not a crime will occur, Robocop has to reproduce the same conditions as when the crime occurred. As Wang notes,²⁶ the police use similar tactics, often leading to an environment in which crime repeats itself so more arrests can take place. The

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 241

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 230

police officer who uses this data will be on high alert when someone passes through an area where crime is said to take place. In conjunction with arrest quotas police must fulfill,²⁷ data mining and the algorithmic mapping of crime are key in reproducing present conditions in perpetuity. By utilizing data about past arrests to inform themselves about the future, the police instead maintain a fixed state of conditions when crime is perceived as inevitably occurring in the same ways again and again.

Robocop's ability to prevent crime is contingent upon a permanent reproduction of the same conditions that lead to it. Wang makes this aspect of his powers most salient in the following passage:

“Today we might call the cybernetic cop *CompStat* — it lives in linked databases. It spreads out over the map as electromagnetic radiation, atmosphere, signals. It is inhaled. It moves through me. It puts me to sleep before I know I am tired. It captures me in a moment I never prepared for.”²⁸

Wang is drawing a comparison between Robocop and present day incarnations of similarly programmed cyber-police tools. “*CompStat*” is the cybernetic tool police have been using since the 1990s to track crime. Like Robocop, “it lives” and subsists off of the past. Robocop uses both the physical dead body of Alex Murphy as well as past statistics of crime to inform his

²⁷Speri, Alice. “Police Make More Than 10 Million Arrests a Year, but That Doesn't Mean They're Solving Crimes.” *The Intercept*, 31 Jan. 2019, theintercept.com/2019/01/31/arrests-policing-vera-institute-of-justice/.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 258

movements and decisions. Furthermore, the widespread nature of these practices allows for greater control over many people, widely impacting people's temporal conditions by determining whether folks can safely move around neighborhoods during certain times, or whether they will be threatened with incarceration or worse. Likening these tactics to "radiation" emphasizes their permanence, whereas the mention of its presence in the atmosphere reaffirms its diffuse effects. Wang also likens cybernetics to "signals" spread across a map, ones which indicate crime that will take place, reiterating how crime is constructed as something that will happen and can be pinpointed (and, in this sense, crime is something that must be created so it can be articulated as a problem that will occur). The ability to locate when and where a crime will happen ensures that some kind of confrontation takes place, contributing to this never ending cycle of policing.

As Wang discussed earlier, she is stuck in time because of how she has been programmed to view herself as both a criminal and a police officer, and thus is policing a construct she has internalized. She describes the experience of being surveilled as "inhal[ing]," recapitulating how she internalizes this criminality. "It moves through me," she says, conveying how surveillance technologies use temporal logics to keep track of people, ensuring they do not break the cycle of carcerality brought on through cybernetics. The effect these weapons of control have on Wang are not even perceptible to her in the moment, as she claims that "it puts me to sleep before I know I am tired." Wang demonstrates this overarching power's pervasiveness across time, detecting her feelings of exhaustion before she can even experience them. In this example, Wang is not in control of her future, making it seem as though she doesn't have one. If the future can be plotted using the past, then it is not really the future — just a composite of past events. Carceral

logics of time are meant to ensnare people in the past. This method of containment is accomplished through technology that subsists off the past as represented by data. “It puts me to sleep,” Wang claims, alleging that she has no control over how she can use her time. Carceral logics of time are tools of the state meant to strip people of their autonomy over how and when their life occurs. “It captures me in a moment I never prepared for,” Wang laments as any control she has over her future is seized by the powers that surveil her and are used to keep her in a static mode of time.

As mentioned, throughout “The Cybernetic Cop,” Wang sees herself ensnared in an endless loop of prison time. However, she still is able to reassert agency over carceral logics. Wang’s performance proves that prisons enforce static temporalities, yet her main objective is to escape the framework of time that keeps her rooted in place. How can she abolish these structures of time if they are ostensibly permanent fixtures in her life? As we have seen her achieve in this performance, Wang can still build something out of the past. Though the synthesizer and the film symbolize an obsolescent history, Wang gleans new meaning from these tools. She breathes life into the past to exhibit how carceral structures can be reshaped to serve people. Additionally, the act of naming the forces which seek to control her is an act of autonomy — by identifying what it is that manipulates her conception of time, she can begin to think of ways to subvert their logic. Emphasizing her discovery of how carceral logics influence her thinking, Wang invites audiences to consider how they can also identify the prison industrial complex’s efforts to render time static.

Jackie Wang's performance *The Cybernetic Cop* wields pop culture to illustrate temporal stasis under the carceral state. Juxtaposing her analog synthesizer with the 1980s film *Robocop*, Wang demonstrates that the future cannot be built by weaponizing the past. Her spoken word piece illustrates the effects of static temporalities on those who live under the carceral system. The implications of carceral logics of time are far reaching, as Wang describes, psychologically contorting people who live under carceral sovereignty into a constant state of self-incrimination that ensures an unending present of criminality, rather than a future without prisons. By exploring her own conditioning by the carceral state through the mediums of sound, film, and poetry, Wang allows viewers to examine the phenomenon of a fixed temporal logic in action as it occurs, demonstrating its static nature and persuading us to look beyond modern-day policing's futuristic facade when building a post-carceral society.

Chapter Two: Saidiya Hartman and Carceral Logics of Space

Saidiya Hartman's book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* pays special attention to the secret hallways and hidden nooks in the homes of working Black people in New York and Philadelphia at the beginning of the twentieth century. Like Jackie Wang, Saidiya Hartman sheds light on history to examine how people can resist carceral logics. Wang subverts carceral logics of time by assessing how technology works in conjunction with the carceral apparatus to impose time onto people as an unending punishment, while reasserting agency over fixed time through her mixed-media performance. Though Hartman analyzes a vastly different context — the homes of the working class, often queer Black women in New York and Philadelphia towards the beginning of the twentieth century — like Wang, she is interested in featuring different ways ordinary people can and have resisted carceral logics. However, in contrast to Wang, Hartman's work is focused predominantly on carceral logics of space that exist exclusively beyond prison walls, in Black women's domestic spheres. By carceral logics of space, I refer to the several ways in which the heterosexist, patriarchal, and racist state limits the geographical movement of queer Black women by imposing rules and conditions to surveil their living spaces. In the early twentieth century, white supremacy influenced how Black women could act and move.

In exposing the application of carceral geographies, and how the historical record bolsters them, Hartman helps readers see methods that Black women have adopted to defend their right to create new, post-carceral possibilities. Hartman focuses on the domestic spaces of working class Black women at the turn of the century to underscore how carceral logics of space, or carceral locales, saturated their personal lives. In her past work, she has discussed in-depth the means by which the historical archive disserves Black women with its glaring omissions about

Black people and Black society. Through specific writing techniques she has developed, Hartman uplifts stories about Black women that have been glossed over by historians.

Hartman calls her method of historical analysis “critical fabulation,” which she first introduced in her essay “Venus in Two Acts.”²⁹ In this piece, Hartman writes that critical fabulation is an attempt to “jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done.”³⁰ In other words, critical fabulation considers the motivation and impact of traditional academic literature in shaping narratives and limiting our understanding of crucial material. Throughout *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, Hartman uses critical fabulation to respond to the lack of historical accounts and narratives regarding working class Black women. This technique also exposes the racist underpinnings of sociology which guided research during the early twentieth century. For Hartman, jeopardizing “the status of the event” allows her to scrutinize the impact historians had on Black peoples’ living spaces. The “event” is a metonymy for Black women’s activities and day-to-day experiences that historians recorded. She uses the archive to expose how historians treated Black women and Black homes. Hartman speculates that Black women lived in vastly different ways than researchers perceived. The “received or authorized account” is the historical record that has been given legitimacy by the institutions which conducted the research, such as government and university sponsored inquiries into Black neighborhoods. Hartman’s technique of critical fabulation thus opens the door to “imagin[ing] what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done.” Through

²⁹ Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12 no. 2 (2008).

³⁰Ibid., pp. 11-12.

contextual analysis and deep readings of the historical record, she responds to the historical record's omissions and interrogates why such oversights about Black women were exploited to maintain carceral logics of space. Hartman then finds herself joining the conversation around the disruption of carceral logics of space. As feminist scholar Jessica Lapp explains, "critical fabulation troubles linear characterizations of the past by playing with and extending spatial boundaries."³¹ In speculating about the historical record's plentiful contradictions, Hartman invokes what Lapp calls the "imagined archives" to confront absences in the contemporary archive. This method of conjecture "allows us to foreground feminist imaginaries"³² by reconsidering what transpired while proposing new approaches to current systems of research and representation. Hartman's use of critical fabulation directly challenges previous errors in results by putting forth a new framework for telling Black women's stories. In this manner, she begins the process of shattering the illusion of an inevitable carceral state by throwing into question the necessity of surveillance.

Hartman criticizes how institutions and policies enshrined surveillance over Black women's spaces, such as wayward minor laws. Wayward minor laws were statutes that specifically targeted how Black women existed in urban environments during the early twentieth century. The title of *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* is a reference to these laws, which sought to restrict the movements of Black women and control who they interacted with. The

³¹ Lapp, J.M. "Handmaidens of history": speculating on the feminization of archival work. *Arch Sci* 19, 215–234 (2019). <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1007/s10502-019-09319-7>

³² Toupin S, Spideralex (2018) "Introduction: radical feminist storytelling and speculative fiction: creating new worlds by re-imagining hacking." *ADA J Gender New Media Technology*. <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.5399/uo/ada.2018.13.1>

code of criminal procedure described a “wayward minor” as someone between 16-21 who “habitually associates with dissolute persons[...]is found of his or her own free will or knowledge in a house of prostitution[...]or ill fame[...]is morally depraved or in danger of becoming morally depraved.”³³ Hartman explains how these laws were often applied at random, and why terms like “dissolute persons” and a “house[...]of ill fame” were intentionally vague. By criminalizing such a wide range of actions, the carceral state could justify taking efforts against Black women with backing from the law.³⁴ Hartman also emphasizes that these statutes were specifically designed to evade due process, as sentences were typically decided by magistrates who could either deliver a probationary sentence or send “wayward minors” to reformatories. In this sense, magistrates had the power to control the movements and accommodations of Black women, who were the most frequent targets of wayward statutes. Wayward laws provided the carceral state with coverage for infiltrating and controlling the space of Black women; by legally mandating where Black women moved, who they interacted with, and whether their interactions were considered “endangerments” to white civil society, wayward laws extended the specter of surveillance into the private, personal spheres of Black women at the turn of the century.

Wayward minor laws also permitted carceral forces to police Black women’s sexualities by deciding who they could interact with, the jobs they could have, and thus, the spaces they could enter. For example, Hartman makes note of the diverse living arrangements Black people made for themselves, such as, “unwed mothers raising children; same-sex households; female

³³ Hartman, Saidiya. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (p. 222). W. W. Norton & Company.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

breadwinners; families composed of siblings, aunts and children...‘widows’ without legal standing...”³⁵ These various ways of living went beyond the scope of prevailing heteronormative values and ideas about family, and each presented a threat to the heteronormative, patriarchal order. “Unwed mothers raising children” wasn’t uncommon among working class Black women at this time. However, heteronormative codes regarding “traditional relationships” would classify this household as precarious, especially in the absence of a male authority figure. Similarly, “same-sex households” threatened heteronormative values because of the presumed absence of heterosexual activity. Without any heterosexual unions, Black women demonstrated that they could unite to provide space for each other. The “families composed of siblings, aunts, and children” is also a denial of patriarchal spatial logics. Laws and societal norms mandated that heterosexual married couples and that their children should be the only ones occupying a given space.³⁶ Furthermore, by only referencing “siblings, aunts, and children,” and explicitly omitting male gendered family members, Hartman demonstrates that what was threatening to the carceral apparatus was the refusal of spatial arrangements predicated on heteronormative values. Since the population of Black women at the time exceeded the population of Black men,³⁷ these living arrangements had become quite normalized within their own communities. However, the carceral apparatus could not maintain surveillance of these homes without paperwork and marriage or birth certificates. The lack of available resources the carceral apparatus had in surveilling Black women motivated the police to break up relationships and living situations that were not formally recognized by the government.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 90.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 17.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 91.

Indexing Black women's space then became the primary motivation for local researchers. "Widows' without legal standing"³⁸ were also perceived as a threat because they did not leave any paper trails into their homes. In this sense, the government sought to depict their living spaces as subterranean so police could justify breaking into their apartments. The phrase "widows' without legal standing" also forces one to consider what kind of "legal standing" a widow may need that a widower does not. Without marriage documentation, the authorities had to come up with new ways to spy on the spaces in which widows lived. "Widows' without legal standing" is then another example of how Black women — especially unmarried women — were considered threatening to the patriarchal order, and why their marriage status warranted surveillance over their homes.

The heteronormative codes in the early twentieth century also sought to relinquish Black women of financial independence. Hartman recalls the wide range of Black "female breadwinners"³⁹ who had to provide money for their families, which was viewed as dismissive of the patriarchal order. Black women worked across industries in Philly and New York in the early 1900s, including as washerwomen, performers, housekeepers, and sex workers.⁴⁰ Even though Black women were widely discriminated against when pursuing work, finding jobs helped provide them and their families with some financial security. At this time, the carceral state saw Black women who made money as gaining too much autonomy in their living spaces. It would be harder for the carceral state to exploit and detain Black women if they had some aspect of control over their financial situation.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 90.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 17.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 55.

What gave rise to the laws and statutes that infringed on Black women's space during the early 1900s? In many ways, it was the researchers who gathered evidence to present a case for spying on Black women's domestic conditions. According to Hartman, sociological inquiries into Black neighborhoods helped to lay the foundation for these restrictions. In *Wayward Lives*, Hartman calls people who supported research into working class Black neighborhoods "concerned citizens, alarmed by the political corruption and crime in their city," who "held the growing population of black migrants responsible."⁴¹ The "concerned citizens" were often institutional leaders, such as Susan Wharton and Dr. Charles Harrison. During the early twentieth century, Susan Wharton was in charge of the College Settlement Association and Dr. Harrison was Provost at the University of Pennsylvania, and they both worked together on researching Black neighborhoods.⁴² Hartman discusses how "concerned citizens" felt motivated to place blame for crime on the "growing population of black migrants," who provided a scapegoat for the "political corruption and crime in their city," in this case Philadelphia. Hartman states that much of this anxiety was connected to the growing political power of Black people and immigrants, who largely decided the 1894 election, much to the displeasure of city elites.⁴³ With this context, we can begin to see why researchers focused on surveilling Black people's domestic spaces. Sociologists, journalists, and progressive social reformers conducted research to validate the racist perceptions that white people held of Black people. Sociologists would provide the carceral state with statistics that helped the government impose restrictions on the private spaces

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 88.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

of Black folks. By spying on the homes of Black women under the guise of “research,” sociologists could tear apart living arrangements that were perceived as illegitimate or threatening to the carceral state. Furthermore, by controlling domestic and private spaces, the carceral state could clamp down on Black people who attempted political organizing. Most acutely, policymakers and government institutions would harness sociological research to impose restrictions on the movements of working class Black women within their personal homes and neighborhoods.

Throughout passages of *Wayward Lives*, Hartman makes extensive use of critical fabulation to fill in the checkered historical record and determine how Black women attempted to counter government-led surveillance efforts. She delves into spaces that historians did not discuss in their research, such as the hallways in the tenement houses many Black families occupied during the early 20th century, large buildings with multiple rooms to rent that were popular with the working class in East Coast cities at the time. Hartman reflects on the disproportionate attention social workers and reformers placed on domesticity. who ventured into these buildings, describing how “the reformers and the journalists were fixated on the kitchenette.” The “reformers and the journalists” refer to the various researchers who visited Black people’s apartments. From the perspective of these reformers, poverty was essentialized as a Black issue rather than being viewed as an effect of systemic racism in the United States.⁴⁴ Thus, the solution of “progressive activists” was to impose rules and ordinances onto Black people’s living spaces, while encouraging heterosexual marriage and compact family units.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 112.

Hartman analyzes the captions of photographs taken by social reformers and activists at the time to unpack their effect on Black spaces. “The captions transform the photographs into moral pictures, amplify the poverty, arrange and classify disorder. *Negro quarter*,”⁴⁵ she observes. To Hartman, what is crucial seems to be the emphasis on “morality” as a rationale for imposing restrictions on space. “Morality” at the time reflected patriarchal and heteronormative codes of living and was primarily used to push the carceral state further into the Black domestic sphere. Heteronormativity “served as the trope of difference structuring social knowledge throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century[...]Normal and abnormal, secrecy and disclosure, public and private — these became the derivative tropes of the homosexual/heterosexual binary”⁴⁶ writes Stephen Valocchi. As he notes, heterosexuality was associated with normalcy while homosexuality was linked to deviancy. Beyond this perception, as writer Sasha Geffen explains, “A racialized figure already carries the specter of gender subversion when gender ideals are coded white.”⁴⁷ In this sense, Black women subverted normative expectations of gender simply by not being white. The “morals” of this time then saw domestic spaces without heterosexual relationships as hazardous. Hartman states that such photographs “amplify the poverty,” demonstrating that authorities emphasized abjection in Black domestic spaces to validate the police’s surveillance efforts. “Arrange and classify disorder”

⁴⁵ Ibid., 20

⁴⁶ Valocchi, Stephen. “Not Yet Queer Enough: The Lessons of Queer Theory for the Sociology of Gender and Sexuality.” *Gender & Society*, vol. 19, no. 6, Dec. 2005, pp. 750–770, doi:[10.1177/0891243205280294](https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205280294).

⁴⁷ Geffen, Sasha. *Glitter Up the Dark*. University of Texas Press, 2020, pp. 27.

refers to how researchers sought to index Black space for other carceral forces, such as the police, to use when hounding Black families. “*Negro quarter*” was the caption reformers went with, conflating all Black people’s space with this one photograph.

In making generalizations about Black people through ostensible research efforts, reformers made it easier for the authorities to mandate broad rules over Black living space. For example, the New York State Tenement House Act of 1901 was a law progressive reformers lobbied for before its implementation. The act claimed to target overcrowding and prostitution, which reformers believed necessitated a constant police presence in Black areas.⁴⁸ Though reformers viewed themselves as saviors, their work was a negative force which disrupted Black living spaces with incessant police raids. In 1909, the law was amended so that women who invited men into tenement homes would be charged with prostitution.⁴⁹ By 1914, thirty-six percent of prostitution charges involved Black women,⁵⁰ a disproportionate figure considering the Black population made up only 1.9 percent of New York City’s population around this time.⁵¹ Hence, Hartman helps readers see how reformers exercised heteronormative and patriarchal values of “morality” through the Tenement House Act, which encouraged police to infiltrate the domestic spaces of Black women and determine who Black women could meet.

Hartman also places these captions with their original photos in *Wayward Lives* to display the racist effect historians and sociologists intended the photographs to have. “These photographs

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 250.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 251.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹ “II. Population Changes by Census Tracts, 1905-1930.” *Population of the City of New York 1890-1930*, 1932, pp. 48–201., doi:10.7312/laid92372-003.

extended an optic of visibility and surveillance that had its origins in slavery and the administered logic of the plantation” Hartman writes. “(To be visible was to be targeted for uplift or punishment, confinement or violence.)”⁵² Featured in the book below this passage is a photograph of the kitchenette with the caption ““Home - One Room Moral Hazard.”” The juxtaposition of Hartman’s contention with the logic of these photographs and the actual picture with the caption helps elucidate the ways reformers and journalists intended to capture these spaces. Thus, reformers “extended an optic of visibility and surveillance” over Black women by portraying their conditions as having potential for “moral hazard.” Hartman ties carceral methods of surveillance to the logic of slavery, which at this point had been (officially) illegal in the United States for barely half a century. By drawing a connection between the “administered logic of the plantation” and the spaces Black people filled following their forced exile from the post-slavery South, Hartman gives us a specific context for understanding how white progressive activists at this period were reusing racist logics of slavery to maintain the subjugated position of Black people. Hartman establishes the connection to compare racist practices that both the system of slavery and the carceral system have engaged in. She emphasizes that “to be visible” means being targeted, since visibility is inescapable when the color of someone’s skin becomes an instant marker for criminality. In making Black women's domestic and personal lives visible, academics opened the door for their movements to be surveilled, leading to a police force which targeted Black women at a disproportionate rate.⁵³

⁵² Ibid., pp. 20.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 251.

Though Hartman has identified the ways reformers surveilled and controlled Black women's space, she uses critical fabulation to illuminate various strategies Black women employed to evade carceral forces. As mentioned earlier, Hartman's application of critical fabulation helps her "jeopardize" the assumptions of the historical record. By throwing into question the historical record's legitimacy, she fills in its blank spaces by imagining what took place in the unexamined corridors of the tenement houses where Black women lived. Speculating about the lives of Black women allows Hartman to demonstrate how working class Black folks in the early twentieth century subverted carceral logics of space. For instance, she portrays a scene taking place between a few women in the hallways of a tenement building. "The hallway provides the refuge for the first tongue kiss, the place for hanging out with your friends, the conduit for gossip,"⁵⁴ she writes. This passage features various modes of resistance Black women employed in opposition to carceral logics of space which relied on the patriarchal, heteronormative order. Hartman reveals how Black women had to maintain a kind of secrecy when exploring their sexualities as she writes about "the refuge" the hallway provided. Here, this space serves as an infrequent haven for Black women under duress. Hartman emphasizes how such hidden-from-view hallways were crucial to the construction of Black women's personal identities, implying that these corridors gave them brief opportunities to imagine ways of living that extended beyond the view of carcerality. Hartman suggests that these ways of living included queer love, which opposed heteronormative logics that tried to determine who mingled with whom. The "first tongue kiss" represents Black women's rejection of patriarchal and

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 112.

heteronormative codes regarding sexuality. Though a “first tongue kiss” may be a pivotal occasion in any person’s life, in this instance, a kiss between two Black girls is both a moment of resistance and a chance for self-actualization. Here, Black women resist carceral logics of space which have sought to separate them from each other, forcing them to circumvent the boundaries imposed on their sexualities. The hallways become a metaphor for these unexamined intimacies shared between Black women, especially as the corridors were places sociologists rarely discussed in their research. Hartman suggests that intimacy, bonding, and friendship are crucial ways that Black women can undermine carceral logics of space. To liberate oneself is to assume control over the little aspects of everyday life, such as “hanging out with friends.” Though one may see these as incidental moments, “hanging out with friends” threatened the carceral apparatus, as demonstrated by the implementation of laws like the Tenement House Act. Black women congregating was a threat to the carceral state because it gave them the opportunity to relate to each other and maintain solidarity in the face of the white androcratic state.

Hartman also focuses on how feminine expression and identity were battlegrounds for Black women. She postulates that the hallway became a “conduit for gossip and intrigue” that was seen as unbecoming of Black girls in this period. The hallway is a “conduit” for information that may be insignificant; however such a “conduit” still threatens dominant heteronormative values because it provides a space for Black women to meet with each other. The “gossip” may be seen as the greatest indication of Hartman restoring that which had been criminalized by the cisgendered, patriarchal order. Feminist scholar Silvia Federici has shown that gossip itself was in fact once a crime, and its etymology suggests that gossip initially referred to groups of women supporting a mother in childbirth. As the rise of capitalism following the Middle Ages instituted

a new, heterosexual familial order, women who congregated together were charged with accusations of “gossip,” which could ultimately have led to their executions.⁵⁵ Evidently, charging women with gossip has historically given the state an excuse to control the movements of women. Thus, when Hartman discusses “gossip” in the context of Black women on the Northeast coast during the early 1900s, she reimagines “gossip” as something Black women could engage in as a means of reclaiming a space for themselves to gather and communicate.

Throughout *Wayward Lives*, Hartman narrates in present tense from a second person point-of-view to remind readers about the ongoing threat carceral space logics pose to Black women. Often, this narration supports her in addressing Black women similar to those she is writing about, and with this tactic she can fully envision their experiences. Hartman claims in “Venus in Two Acts” that “confusing narrator and speakers”⁵⁶ gives her the ability to force the narrative into the present, emphasizing that the conditions her subjects live under persist today. In *Wayward Lives*, Hartman’s critical fabulation lets her demonstrate how carceral logics of space are also a present day reality. Through this narrative approach, Hartman insists that Black women can still employ similar modes of resistance as the women in her book.

However, Hartman reminds the reader that these hallways were not complete escape hatches from the heterosexist world of carcerality and racism. “The hallway is where the authorities post the tenement-house laws and the project rules,” she observes, “and the guidelines might as well say, *Negro, don’t even try to live*. It is inside but public. The police enter without warrants and arrest whoever has the bad fortune to be found and caught.” Hartman’s use of the

⁵⁵Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Penguin Books, 2004.

⁵⁶Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12 no. 2 (2008): p 13.

present tense second-person becomes a vital way of forcing the reader to imagine what it was like to be constantly under surveillance. Thus, readers must immediately register the dehumanizing way tenement housing was set up, gaining insight into how their space was rife with carceral forces. Rendering a vivid depiction of the hallway in second person forces readers to experience how carceral locales were set up in the tenement houses. Hartman walks the reader through one of these buildings. She conveys how “authorities post the tenement-house laws and the project rules.”⁵⁷The looming shadow of surveillance haunts all space, leaving no room unchecked. Hartman wants to demonstrate that hallways and stairwells were ambiguously defined areas constantly in flux. The “project rules” refer to the carceral idea that housing projects are places that could be monitored, where rules were actively enforced. These “guidelines” sought to restrain the movement and autonomy of Black women, which is why Hartman declares that the implicit message the police sent was to not “even try to live.” Further expressing the penal state’s violable approach to these hallways, she argues that they were both “inside but public,” which made it easy for the police to enter. “Inside but public” is also a dichotomy which indicates the lack of basic, assumed privacy Black women were afforded in their own spaces. The police entering “without warrants” exposes the state’s hypocritical treatment of Black space; as the state legislates how Black people live, they also sanction the police in breaking those laws. This contradiction can be seen as an example of how “progressives” failed to utilize their research in a productive, life-affirming way for Black people. A lawless intrusion by the police, Hartman claims, only destabilized Black people’s

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 112.

living spaces. She also reinforces the argument that the activism of white “progressives” was used arbitrarily, which is why it was simply a matter of “bad fortune to be found and caught,” even if it was for something as basic as stepping outside to breathe. Maintaining an environment where there is an unending police presence enables the state to keep Black people under control by patrolling their personal space. That the carceral logics of these spaces were devised in part by self-proclaimed “progressives” proves how all of white civil society contributed to upholding the racial hierarchy.

Saidiya Hartman’s *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* encourages various methods for contemporary Black women to resist carceral logics. For her general readership, Hartman proves that history must be re-articulated to protect Black women rather than to harm them. Through critical fabulation, she gives insight into untold histories of working class Black women who resisted similar carceral logics that Black people confront in today’s prison system. Giving readers an opportunity to witness how Black women reclaimed control of their homes and lives under the white supremacist, patriarchal carceral state, Hartman speculates about the history we’ve been given. Her ability to conjecture vividly about the past opens up new possibilities for understanding present day carceral logics which impact Black women.

Chapter Three: Moor Mother's Rejection of Carceral Space-Time Logics in Philadelphia

Philadelphia-based poet, rapper, and musician Camae Ayewa, known professionally as Moor Mother, has an artistic practice rooted in dismantling space-time logics of the carceral state. Similar to Jackie Wang and Saidiya Hartman, Moor Mother confronts the myriad ways in which the US criminal (in)justice apparatus manipulates the time and space of people living under its sovereignty, while paying specific attention to how those logics materialize beyond prison walls. Moor Mother focuses on the carceral state's accumulation of space through the dispossession of Black communities via gentrification. Along with her artistic collective, Black Quantum Futurism (BQF), Moor Mother grapples extensively with how Black people try to survive modern gentrification in US cities. BQF pulls from Afro-futurism, quantum physics, African notions of time, music, and art to imagine futures for Black people beyond a penal state. Co-founded by Moor Mother and housing attorney Rasheedah Phillips, BQF's mission is "to find a new approach to living and experiencing reality by way of the manipulation of space-time in order to see into possible futures, and/or collapse space time into a desired future in order to bring about that future's reality."⁵⁸ BQF contends primarily with destroying carceral logics by experimenting with the manipulation of space-time through art. In this vein, Moor Mother focuses on building new spaces and tenable futures for Black people in the absence of material intergenerational security. Moor Mother, along with Rasheedah Phillips, considers how to break from the constraints of space and time with music, poetry, and visual art. Part of their approach is

⁵⁸ "Black Quantum Futurism/The AfroFuturist Affair." *Blackquantumfuturism*, www.blackquantumfuturism.com/.

acknowledging how space-time logics enforce a racialized system of control and maintain a lack of intergenerational resources.

Moor Mother's album *Circuit City* is a response to gentrification in Philadelphia and a vision of Black life beyond structures of racialized discipline. *Circuit City*'s third track, "Act 3 - Time of No Time," represents the breadth of Moor Mother's various techniques for subverting carceral space-time logics, which threaten to destroy Black communities and futures. Moor Mother brings together free jazz, spoken word poetry, Afro-futurism, non-linear time, and electronic sampling inspired by composer and philosopher Sun Ra on "Act 3 - Time of No Time." By drawing on this wide set of practices, she demonstrates that intergenerational exchanges through music can liberate Black folks from spatial and temporal carceral locales.

Upon the release of *Circuit City*, Rasheedah Phillips wrote an accompanying essay detailing gentrification's impact on time and space in Philadelphia. In the piece, titled "Reverse Gentrification of the Future Now," Phillips describes the city's current low-income housing crisis and the 22,000 evictions people in Philadelphia face yearly along with housing discrimination that primarily threatens to displace the elderly, single mothers, LGBTQ people, Black people, immigrants, and people with disabilities.⁵⁹ Phillips connects the physical and temporal displacement of marginalized communities to the criminal (in)justice system's establishment of power over space and time, claiming, "Time poverty is routinely used to penalize marginalized people in the justice system, where being ten minutes late to court can mean losing your job,

⁵⁹ Phillips, Rasheedah. "Reverse Gentrification of the Future Now: Essay by Rasheedah Phillips." *FringeArts*, 24 July 2019, fringearts.com/2019/05/03/reverse-gentrification-future-now-essay-rasheedah-phillips/.

kids, home, and freedom.”⁶⁰ The “time poverty” Phillips describes refers to ways in which time becomes inaccessible to low-income folks. A parent who works two jobs may not be able to pay for a babysitter or a similar kind of service. So, if they have to make a scheduled court date, it will be in the midst of trying to find childcare and ensuring someone can fill in for their two jobs. If a parent is ten minutes late to court in the midst of this, as Phillips describes, the carceral state will punish them regardless of their circumstance. Hence, people who are already lacking in resources of time suffer from “time poverty,” which is then used by the state as a reason to punish them and assume more control over their time. Just as housing discrimination, redlining, and evictions⁶¹ have forced Black people out of neighborhoods in a spatial sense, temporal logics of the carceral state are deployed to strip Black people of their agency over time. This method of control makes it difficult for affected Black people to create futures beyond gentrification and mass incarceration, especially as the police maintain a forceful presence in their lives. In emphasizing that missing a court date can result in “losing your job, kids, home, and freedom,” Phillips emphasizes how “time poverty” can detach communities from their family histories. This detachment occurs as the forces of racism and gentrification lead to the incarceration and eviction of older members of the community. The “uneven access to safe and healthy futures” emphasizes the unsurvivable conditions of the carceral state. “Safe and healthy futures” are afforded to “traditionally privileged families” because there is wealth to hand down, and hence, a sense of security and stability. The racial wealth gap in the US exemplifies some of the

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹Zenou, Yves, and Nicolas Boccoard. “Racial Discrimination and Redlining in Cities.” *Journal of Urban Economics*, vol. 48, no. 2, 2000, pp. 260–285., doi:10.1006/juec.1999.2166.

roadblocks many Black people face in providing this kind of intergenerational security to their families and communities.⁶²

Moor Mother's song "Act 3 - Time of No Time" illustrates how free jazz can potentially liberate people from carceral logics of space. "Act 3 - Time of No Time" is a free jazz track, which means it experiments with jazz conventions of tempo, tone, phrasing, and chord progression. Free jazz has long been associated with liberation from white supremacy because of its resistance to American and Western modes of musical structure. Moor Mother has discussed how free jazz can be "a liberation technology."⁶³ Musicologist Ekkehard Jost asserts in *Free Jazz*, "Free jazz shows precisely how tight the links between social and musical factors are, and how one cannot be completely grasped without the other. Several of the initiators of free jazz, for instance, had to contend for a long time with systematic obstruction on the part of the record industry and owners of jazz clubs."⁶⁴ Jost claims that free jazz was a reaction to "systematic obstructions" that not only exploited Black people by appropriating their music without compensating them, but also sought to exclude them from clubs and venues where Black musicians could attract work. Jost believes that free jazz was the Black jazz musician's reaction to spatial discrimination that delimited where they could play music, as well as the Black musician's response to performing for white audiences with specific musical expectations of rhythm and timing. Free jazz in "Time of No Time" allows Moor Mother to channel the

⁶² Hamilton, D. and W. Darity. "The Political Economy of Education, Financial Literacy, and the Racial Wealth Gap." *Macroeconomics: Employment* (2017).

⁶³ Morrison, John. "Instruments of Liberation: Moor Mother's Camae Ayewa on Using Poetry, Jazz, and Theater to Tackle Housing Inequality and Big Commerce on Circuit City." *The Key*, 23 Sept. 2020, thekey.xpn.org/2020/09/23/moor-mother-camae-ayewa-circuit-city/.

⁶⁴ Jost, Ekkehard. *Free Jazz*. Universal Edition, p. 9, 1974.

liberatory element of free jazz Jost describes. Free jazz helps Moor Mother reject white supremacy's control over Black people's movements through physical space. Free jazz's connection to space, who has access to space, and who is denied space are questions Moor Mother contemplates by turning free jazz into a sonic backdrop for her poetry. She brings this unique musical form into her artistic practice to reject the limitations on space that have been historically imposed on Black people in the United States.

Moor Mother also subverts carceral temporal logics with the arhythmic nature of free jazz. Jazz enables her to interrupt the "time poverty"⁶⁵ Rasheedah Phillips discusses by engaging in tempos and rhythms that emphasize elliptical, non-linear patterns. These non-linear forms interrupt time poverty by collapsing temporal barriers between people separated through time. Much like Jackie Wang, Moor Mother is responding to the carceral state's imposition of time as a punishment. In contrast to Wang, however, Moor Mother's work tends to scrutinize the effects of punitive time outside of prisons, such as how "time poverty" makes people more vulnerable to incarceration, as well as how incarceration separates communities when the carceral state claims a family member. For Moor Mother, free jazz allows her to reopen lines of communication between herself and the people whom she has lost to the carceral state. In an interview discussing temporality, Moor Mother claims that "sound is a form of time travel"⁶⁶ that grants her the ability to engage with both the histories of Black people and the futures they can build beyond the carceral state. Free jazz engages with the history of Black American music through its

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶ Redbullmusicacademy. "Moor Mother on Sampling, Afrofuturism and Collaboration | Red Bull Music Academy." *YouTube*, YouTube, 25 Apr. 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPWi2wJELh4&t=1366s.

association with jazz, while simultaneously pushing jazz beyond the perceived temporal limitations of Western musical notation.

Free jazz has also long been associated with Afro-futurism, which is a prominent thread throughout *Circuit City* and in particular of “Act 3 - Time of No Time.” Afro-futurism refers to the wide range of aesthetics and philosophies that place the African diaspora in conversation with futurism and technology, while imagining realities that exist beyond colonialism.⁶⁷ As Moor Mother explains, Afro-futurism gives her new ways of conceptualizing the present, while also harnessing it to articulate alternatives to racial capitalism. Afro-futurism has been noted for its speculative style and utopian prospects, ideals which Black artists often explore to envision possibilities beyond white supremacy.⁶⁸ Moor Mother first performed *Circuit City* live, and during her concert she built a “time machine” of music that allowed her to escape the world of gentrification. The concept of building a time machine to escape the effects of racism is highly reminiscent of Afro-futurism. Moor Mother’s “time machine” is constructed out of free jazz, and the free jazz she references is rooted in Afro-futurism.

One can also see the Afro-futurist influence on Moor Mother’s performance through analyzing her musical citations. In “Act 3 - Time of No Time,” she alludes to the late musician and Afro-futurist philosopher Sun Ra with her extensive use of modular synthesizers. Sun Ra was one of the first innovators of modular synthesizers in jazz, and he developed an Afro-futurist

⁶⁷ Asim, J. (2016, Spring). AFRO-FUTURISM. *The Crisis*, 123, 22-28. Retrieved from <https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/magazines/afro-futurism/docview/1816620253/se-2?accountid=1466>

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 22-28.

philosophy and aesthetic alongside his music. Scholars have surmised that Sun Ra's innovative synth arrangements and futuristic influences were meant "to claim technical agency for African Americans."⁶⁹ Through musical technology and innovative techniques of free jazz, Sun Ra sought to explore time and space through jazz, finding new possibilities for Black people beyond the constructs of colonialism and racial capitalism. He claimed to visit planets such as Jupiter,⁷⁰ and he depicted himself as an intergalactic traveler, metaphorizing the search for a place beyond racism as an intergalactic trek. Moor Mother taps Sun Ra's interplanetary guidance to regain agency over space and time through music, exploring how she can build similar spacecrafts (or, in her case, a "time machine") to escape white supremacy. She channels Sun Ra through her instrumental arrangements, which are highly marked by his own compositions. In doing so, Moor Mother channels Sun Ra's ability to travel among the stars with jazz, creating new timelines and spaces that are post-carceral. She communicates with Sun Ra by putting her own artistry in conversation with his musical ideology. Here, she enters into a discourse with the "past," demonstrating how someone can communicate both with their history and through it. By holding this kind of communication with Sun Ra, Moor Mother exhibits a practice that lets her subvert the temporal and spatial effects of the carceral network. Starting a discourse with those who have passed is vital to her work, as it demonstrates how one can reject the spatial and temporal limitations that are imposed on the Black community through gentrification and

⁶⁹Kreiss, Daniel. "Performing the Past to Claim the Future: Sun Ra and the Afro-Future Underground, 1954-1968." *African American Review*, vol. 45, no. 1/2, 2012, pp. 197–203. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/23783446. Accessed 7 Mar. 2021.

⁷⁰KomischeStars. "Sun Ra Talks on 'The Possibility of Altered Destiny' 11/10/79." *YouTube*, YouTube, 1 Sept. 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=rKsMR5YmvyY&t=972s.

incarceration. Moor Mother contacts the spirit of Sun Ra in her performance to show how her community can recover its history through sonic experimentation.

Moor Mother also challenges carceral space-time logics during her performance by staging *Circuit City* at a corporate housing apartment, a setting which serves as a symbol of gentrification. The effects of corporate housing on Black communities have been seismic and devastating. As white people are incentivized to move from suburbs back into cities by newly subsidized corporate infrastructure, Black people are forcibly pushed out of their homes because of raised rents.⁷¹ Corporations also hire security for their newly built properties, leading to an intensified police presence in neighborhoods surrounding the new buildings.⁷² A greater police presence increases the possibility that someone can be arrested. In these instances, we can see how corporate housing promotes the carceral state while undermining Black communities. Moor Mother uses the setting of a corporate apartment as a launching pad for her to escape, or as she calls her departure, a “circuit break.” The “circuitry” she references is likely a response to the increasingly cybernetic state that turns technology into a tool of surveillance. Moor Mother places herself in corporate housing so she can perform a breakout from encroaching forces of carceral capitalism.

Moor Mother’s poem details how the carceral state oppresses Black people through space and time, and in doing so, she identifies how carceral logics function. Her piece comes towards

⁷¹Moskowitz, Peter. *How to Kill a City : Gentrification, Inequality, and the Fight for the Neighborhood*, PublicAffairs, 2017. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/lib/umichigan/detail.action?docID=5369164>.

⁷² Story, Brett, Maya Bankovic, Avril Jacobson, and Olivier Alary. *The Prison in Twelve Landscapes.* , 2017.

the end of “Act 3 - Time of No Time”; however, she features bits of her writing in the beginning of the song with Elon Battle, who provides vocals for Moor Mother’s lyrics. Battle sings, “So many people pushed away from home.”⁷³ This line may refer to the various ways the carceral state removes people from their families and communities, specifically in Philadelphia. In a study examining the racialized impact of gentrification in Philadelphia, researchers found that financially disadvantaged residents who moved from neighborhoods that were not predominantly Black benefitted from gentrification by moving to more advantaged locations. Conversely, people moving from once predominantly Black areas did not benefit from moving.⁷⁴ Furthermore, they found that when Black people are forced to leave by eviction, their main option is moving to a “shrinking set of affordable yet disadvantaged neighborhoods.”⁷⁵ In a spatial sense, “so many people pushed away from home” refers to this kind of gentrification, which physically removes Black people from their environments. “So many people pushed away from home” may also refer to the temporal exile Black people are sent into upon being incarcerated, especially as racial disparities in sentencing result in longer sentences for Black people.⁷⁶ Prison not only removes people from their physical homes, but it also separates families in a temporal sense, forcing prolonged periods of separation between loved ones. The sentiment

⁷³ Moor Mother, “Act 3 - Time of No Time.” *Spotify*, <https://open.spotify.com/track/5YaNf4B3N4ZyuTvThtAwRW?si=XN3tVcjQTIKy7pwSrhL6zw>

⁷⁴ Hwang, Jackelyn, and Lei Ding. “Unequal Displacement: Gentrification, Racial Stratification, and Residential Destinations in Philadelphia.” *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 126, no. 2, 2020, pp. 354–406., doi:10.1086/711015.

⁷⁵ “Unequal Displacement: Gentrification, Racial Stratification, and Residential Destinations in Philadelphia.” pp. 354.

⁷⁶Li, Weihua. “The Growing Racial Disparity in Prison Time.” *The Marshall Project*, The Marshall Project, 3 Dec. 2019, www.themarshallproject.org/2019/12/03/the-growing-racial-disparity-in-prison-time.

of loss in the line “so many people pushed away from home” indicates Moor Mother’s need to recover these lives and histories, which she attempts to do in her performance.

Moor Mother brings African space-time concepts into her lyrics as well. Battle sings, “we will return to a time with no time but this ain’t our future.” This declaration may refer to African space-time logics, a concept Moor Mother continually brings into her artistic practice.⁷⁷ Moor Mother has described how the manipulation of time through African principles of temporality can reject the limitations of carceral space-time logics. Professor of African Religion and Philosophy John Mbiti opines that African constructs of time do not conceive of a “future”, unlike Western concepts of time, which are divided into past, present, and future. Rather, African temporal logics envisage time as something people experience in relation to the events around them.⁷⁸ “We will return to a time with no time” perhaps then refers to this system of time that was lost to colonialism. By suggesting that Black people return to modalities of time that reject Western precepts of past, present, and future, Moor Mother demands new ways of thinking about time. She wants people to reject “past, present and future” because of how it has been weaponized to sentence Black people through the prison system, specifically by regimenting how Black people move through past, present, and future. “This ain’t our future” reasserts that the prevailing Western notions of time have been used to ensnare Black people in the carceral

⁷⁷ Redbullmusicacademy. “Moor Mother on Sampling, Afrofuturism and Collaboration | Red Bull Music Academy.” *YouTube*, YouTube, 25 Apr. 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPWi2wJELh4&t=1366s.

⁷⁸Evans-Pritchard, E. E., and John S. Mbiti. “African Religions and Philosophy.” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1969, p. 214., doi:10.2307/1594869.

state. The “this” she refers to may be the setting of corporate housing, which serves as an example of how racial capitalism siphons off Black futures. Moor Mother rejects the notion that the present conditions of gentrification and incarceration will inexorably extend into the future. She reiterates her belief in systems of time that break from Western notions of temporality to show how Western space-time logics are life-threatening forces used against Black people.

Moor Mother continues with her poem, lambasting the capitalist, racist violence perpetrated on Black homes. Following Battle’s vocals, Moor Mother recites: “Private violence, another day on the battlefield that is our home. We awake to a reality alone.”⁷⁹ “Private violence” is a critique of the private entities that push Black people out of their neighborhoods. The corporate housing in which Moor Mother first performed “Time of No Time” is a physical space that represents this “private violence.” “Violence” also refers to the forced removal of people from their homes by private companies. Furthermore, corporate sponsored gentrification is one of the preeminent factors exacerbating racism in Philadelphia.⁸⁰ “Private violence” may also refer to the violence that is enacted upon private spaces, such as the home, during gentrification. By specifying that the violence is “private,” Moor Mother reveals how gentrification penetrates and infringes on private, personal space. Incarceration also intrudes on the temporal aspect of a private space. Through arrests and long periods of imprisonment, “private violence” separates families and cuts people off from community members for long, often indefinite periods of time. Moreover, when corporate entities take over parts of a city, they require enhanced security and

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Hwang, Jackelyn, and Ding, Lei. “Unequal Displacement: Gentrification, Racial Stratification, and Residential Destinations in Philadelphia.” *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 126, no. 2, UNIV CHICAGO PRESS, 2020, pp. 354, doi:10.1086/711015.

police presence, and thus the neighborhoods surrounding them are highly policed. Hence, this kind of “private violence” provides the setting for the “battlefield that is our home.”

The “battlefield that is our home” references the military-like conditions which the Philadelphia police department brings to working class Black neighborhoods. A setting in which militarized policing is regularly deployed is an accurate depiction of a “battlefield,” as well as an apt sketch of how some Black people are often forced to live in Philadelphia. Analyzing city data taken between 1982-2007, Researchers Roger D. Simon and Brian Alnutt reported that Black people in Philadelphia are far more likely to be accosted by police. At one point, five police officers were convicted in a scandal that involved planting drugs, pocketing cash proceeds, and other illegal activities that were racially motivated.⁸¹ Moor Mother calls her home a “battlefield” to reiterate how the personal space of Black people in Philadelphia is regularly compromised by the police. The “battlefield that is our home” renders an image of Black people in Philadelphia as under attack while defending their environments. Her community also suffers when it is forced to isolate itself, as she laments, “We awake to a reality alone.” The “we” is the Black community, which has been broken up by gentrification and incarceration. Moor Mother uses the collective “we” but claims to feel “alone,” showing how she struggles to connect to the rest of her community as carceral forces use space and time to disperse them. However, in this line, she also delivers a sliver of solidarity across temporalities by implying that she wakes up *with* the Black community. Despite the efforts of Philadelphia officials to impose restrictions on Black people’s time and space, Moor Mother still feels she can experience life with her community.

⁸¹Simon, R. D. & Alnutt, B. (2007). Philadelphia, 1982-2007: Toward the postindustrial city. *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 131(4), 395-444

Though she wakes up physically alone and separated from them, she believes members of the Black community can still come together because they face a similar “reality” of existing under white supremacy.

Moor Mother proceeds by reasserting the importance of remembering loved ones taken by the police. She urgently pleads, “Say my name. Say my name so my children will know where to find me[...]loud bombing round of applause.”⁸² “Say my name” or “say their name” has become a rallying cry for those lost to the racist policing and mass incarceration. Moor Mother reminds listeners why they must “say my name.” By saying people’s names and sharing each other’s stories, future generations — as indicated by “my children” — will be able to find their histories amidst the rubble of racism. Moor Mother insists on keeping names alive as a way of perpetuating the survival of her culture and community. Reciting a name reminds the community of those who have been lost so that they are not forgotten. Moor Mother wants to ensure that the time and space which separate many Black people from their communities do not erase their legacies or histories. Saying the names of the victims of the carceral state is a way for people to keep in touch with their family histories beyond the physical and temporal constraints placed on them. Saying victims’ names also ensures that the state’s attempt to stamp out Black life ultimately fails. Remembering their names keeps victims of policing and imprisonment alive in the memories and hearts of their communities. Community remembrance can also be a powerful organizing tool when resisting the carceral state because it forces American society at large to remember and consider the systems in place that continually target Black people. This collective remembrance rejects death as a finality. By commemorating people who have been lost to

⁸²Ibid.

evictions, incarceration, and police brutality, Moor Mother aspires to new ways of living beyond these institutions of violence.

Moor Mother also gives blunt reminders of the Philadelphia police's history of brutality and racism. After reminding us of the lives taken by the carceral state, Moor Mother makes her most blistering and direct indictment of Philadelphia's police, recalling a "loud bombing round of applause." The "loud bombing" can be seen as an explicit reference to the Philadelphia police's bombing of 61 homes in a primarily Black part of West Philly on May 13, 1985. Philadelphia police claimed to be targeting MOVE, a Black liberation group, during the attack. The bombs killed eleven people and displaced more than 250 residents, who were then left homeless.⁸³ In this instance, we see the most direct and violent application of carceral logics of space and time working together to destroy Black communities. The bombings removed people from their homes, permanently razing their personal and familial spaces, as well as other locations of collectivity within the community. The Philadelphia police, with sanction from the municipal government, murdered eleven people to cut Black folks off from their communities, as the police use death to separate Black people from both familial and personal history. Moor Mother's cry to "say my name" is a cry not just for herself, but is also for the countless Black lives taken by the carceral state, exemplified by moments in history like the 1985 MOVE bombing.

The line "round of applause" after "loud bombing" may reflect how the Philadelphia police reinforces itself through public displays of self-congratulations. A "round of applause"

⁸³Norward, Lindsey. "The Day Philadelphia Bombed Its Own People." *Vox*, Vox, 8 Aug. 2019, www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/8/8/20747198/philadelphia-bombing-1985-move.

following the “loud bombing” is Moor Mother decrying the city of Philadelphia’s callous reaction to such killings. The Philadelphia police’s response to criticisms of abuse has been to reinforce the police state in both a temporal and spatial sense. Spatially, the police state looms large in Philadelphia. Beyond the increased presence of police brought on by gentrification, physical reminders are erected within the city to maintain a hovering carceral presence over Philadelphia. For example, a statue of former Philadelphia police commissioner and mayor Frank Rizzo stood in Philadelphia from 1998 until 2020, when it was taken down in the midst of the Black Lives Matter protests. Rizzo, who served as commissioner from 1967-1971 and Mayor from 1972-1980, was notoriously racist and known for frequently sanctioning deadly force against Black people.⁸⁴ His legacy can be seen even in events following his death, such as the 1985 MOVE bombing. Despite being viewed as racist and unpopular since his tenure,⁸⁵ the police still commemorated Rizzo even after his death. Hence, the “round of applause” following the MOVE bombing is the carceral state celebrating its “accomplishments.”

The Frank Rizzo statue is an example of a physical presence that reinforces the Philadelphia police’s presence in Black space. The statue is just one “round of applause” that mandates a racist presence over Black peoples’ space. The statue also forces the racist past into the present, and signifies a continuation of racism in Philadelphia even though Rizzo has been

⁸⁴ Laker, David Gambacorta and Barbara. “Frank Rizzo Leaves a Legacy of Unchecked Police Brutality and Division in Philadelphia.” *Https://Www.inquirer.com*, The Philadelphia Inquirer, 4 Aug. 2020, www.inquirer.com/news/philadelphia-frank-rizzo-police-violence-legacy-shootings-20200603.html.

⁸⁵Ibid.

dead for years. Moor Mother herself has decried the statue's presence in interviews,⁸⁶ and in "Time of No Time" the police's "round of applause" is a noise that echoes through such monuments. Philadelphian carceral institutions reduce the present into a never-ending cycle of policing and imprisonment, which is enforced through space in physical monuments that celebrate racism. The "applause" that follows bombing and death is enforced through time by racist monuments. Such statues reaffirm racism in policing, while maintaining a specter of racial control in the spaces around the monument. Moor Mother juxtaposes the "bombing" with the "applause" to show how the carceral state, in response to its own crimes, reasserts its presence over a given space. Linking "bombing" and "applause" in her performance helps listeners understand how the city of Philadelphia manages space in a life-threatening way, as the police solidify their presence in neighborhoods with intimidating statues like Rizzo. However, in exposing how these tactics work, Moor Mother makes her listeners reconsider how spatial discrimination is conditioned through propaganda. When she says "loud bombing round of applause", she gives listeners a chance to reconsider how carceral space logics are being administered around them.

Moor Mother's sonic and poetic concepts are extremely varied, yet they coalesce in the song "Act 3 - Time of No Time" to present a dismaying portrait of gentrification's effect on space and time in Philadelphia. Like Jackie Wang, Moor Mother is intent on breaking from the temporal restraints placed on the Black community by the carceral state. Similar to Hartman, Moor Mother also interrogates the way carceral logics contort space to prevent the Black

⁸⁶Ibid.

community from maintaining collectivity and family. In many ways, Moor Mother is a synthesis of Wang of Hartman. Through her own techniques of writing and musicianship, she transcends limitations of space and time that materialize under the carceral state, and she takes her listeners on a sonic journey in search of home.

Conclusion

The artists I cover in my thesis are both distinct in their practices and united in their goals. Some may view these pieces of artwork as not having the same scale or impact as frontline activists such as lawyers who fight for tenant's rights. Wang, Hartman, and Moor Mother all situate their practices in the imagination. Though we cannot really return to the 1900s, and though we cannot change how the laws of those times harmed Black women, we can use books like *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* to reconsider how the carceral logics Black women once faced persist against them today. Likewise, Wang and Moor Mother encourage ways to collectively broaden people's imaginations when considering how to build a post-carceral world.

Jackie Wang, Saidiya Hartman, and Moor Mother have discernable overlaps between their respective works. Wang and Moor Mother interrogate technology's violent applications in and around the prison system. Both Wang and Moor Mother discuss feelings of entrapment through "circuitry," a metaphor for the tracking systems police use to monitor the public. Hartman and Moor Mother also converge in their practices, as both artists assess the nature of space under the carceral apparatus. Hartman and Wang similarly align in their view that the carceral apparatus reuses the past to assert itself in the present. In *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, the historical record is seen reproducing the logics of racism. Hartman's usage of the present tense forces the reader to acknowledge how carceral geographies are an ongoing phenomenon informed by the archive. Wang reappropriated cultural artifacts like *Robocop* and an old synthesizer to demonstrate that carceral technologies keep people stuck in time, constantly experiencing the same conditions. As I mentioned in my introduction, it is evident that each of these artists are informed by each other's work.

Can imaginative work truly unite the masses in rejecting the carceral state and all of its appendages? I have hopes that it may, though I cannot predict the reaction audiences will have to Wang, Hartman, or Moor Mother's respective projects. Art projects the world around us with a new lens, refracting what we know into an image, a song, a poem, or a book that alters our perceptions of the world around us. For myself, these three creatives have shifted the way I experience daily life. When Jackie Wang refers to how she "inhales"⁸⁷ surveillance, the omniscient presence of carceral technologies becomes visible to me in every device I hold and every camera I pass. Hartman's critiques of historical archives has forced me to reckon with my own understanding of history and the government's role in constructing certain narratives about marginalized communities. Engaging with Moor Mother's song "Act 3 - Time of No Time," I can see in my home city, Philadelphia, how white supremacy folds itself into gentrification, and, through evictions and corporate housing, racism is secreted under the guise of "development."

There are a few angles I have left unexplored, especially as these artists have an extensive body of work beyond the three pieces I examined. Initially, I planned on analyzing Moor Mother's earlier work, specifically focusing on the power electronics of her first record. Electronic music, especially techno, has also been a disruptive force against white supremacy. Techno has emerged from similar contexts as free jazz, though at later periods in the twentieth century, starting in the 1980s. The connection between free jazz, techno, and Afro-futurism is strong and fortified by their shared histories. Wang also incorporated elements of electronic music into "The Cybernetic Cop," which I briefly touch on in her chapter. However, this ambient

⁸⁷Wang, Jackie. *Carceral Capitalism*. Semiotext(e), 2018, pp. 254.

soundscape could be reconsidered from a more musicological perspective, especially in relation to Afro-futurist aural aesthetics. And in Hartman's book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, there are more chapters that showcase Black women embracing their sexualities and autonomies in opposition to the racist norms of their time. There are many of these stories beyond Hartman's work, too. Throughout US history, gendered and racialized bodies have revolted against the suffocating standards of American white supremacy. Often, these rebels are incarcerated or killed or forced into exile. However, the stifling of dissent has not always succeeded, and more often than not, recalcitrant figures in history pass on their lessons to us through their art and through their actions. Our movements will be succeeded and remembered through our art. As Moor Mother showed us, the voices of the past are more accessible than we often realize.

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