'A Kind of Logic, A Kind of Dominant Logic': Navigating Colonialism, Honoring Black Mobility, and Thinking on Moving Through

By

Kara Melton

A thesis submitted to the Department of Gender Studies
in conformity with the requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts

Queen’s University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
June, 2016

Copyright © Kara Melton, 2016
Abstract
My thesis thinks through the ways Newtonian logics require linear mobility in order to produce narratives of progress. I argue that this linear mobility, and the resulting logics, potentially erases the chaotic and non-linear motions that are required to navigate a colonial landscape. I suggest that these non-linear movements produce important critiques of the seeming stasis of colonial constructs and highlight the ways these logics must appear neutral and scientific in an attempt to conceal the constant and complex adjustments these frameworks require. In order to make room for these complex motions, I develop a quantum intervention. Specifically, I use quantum physics as a metaphor to think through the significance of black life, the double-consciousness of land, and the intricate motions of sound. In order to put forth this intervention, I look at news coverage of Hurricane Katrina, Du Bois’s characterization of land in *Souls of Black Folks*, and the aural mobilities of blackness articulated in an academic discussion and interview about post-humanism.
Acknowledgements

Thank you Dr. Katherine Mckittrick for your guidance and support. Thank you for your constant reminders to make room for black life in its myriad forms. Thank you for sharing with me Wynter, Brand, Wilson Gilmore and the work (which includes your own) of many many other scholars, creators, artists, thinkers, and movers who offered such generous and more livable futures.

To the members of my committee, Dr. Beverley Mullings, Dr. Barrington Walker, and Dr. Scott Morgensen, thank you for your pointed questions, and the gentle reminders of the gaps in this project.

To the entirety of my cohort (Asti, Avery, Jamie, Jan, Meg, Roxanne, Zoya) and the other friends in my Queen’s community (Brett, Yaniya, Yasmine) I endlessly appreciate how each of you has allowed me to think and learn with you. Thank you to all the folks in the Department of Gender Studies who have helped craft the spaces and conversations that have made this work possible.

Mom. I am endlessly grateful for your love and patience. Joshua, my big little brother, you have taught me so much about what it is to be kind. To the rest of my family – I am here because of all of you.

Apologies and thank you to any who I have forgotten – this, and all other mistakes, are mine.
Table of Contents

Abstract......................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgements....................................................................................................... iii

Table of Contents......................................................................................................... iv

List of Figures................................................................................................................ v

Chapter 1 Introduction................................................................................................. 1

Chapter 2 29°57’53” N 90° 4’14” W............................................................................ 33

Chapter 3 My Daddy Alabama, My Ma Louisiana..................................................... 66

Chapter 4 Listen (W)here........................................................................................... 90

Conclusion..................................................................................................................... 110

Works Cited................................................................................................................ 113
List of Figures

Figure 1. “Chart on Residency, Race, and Sea Level in 2000”…………………………………43
Figure 2. “Hurricane Katrina Flooding: 2005”………………………………………………….44
Figure 3. Image of Evacuations………………………………………………………………...47
Figure 4. Comparison of Ads and News Coverage version 1……………………………………50
Figure 5. Comparison of Ads and News Coverage version 2…………………………………51
Figure 6. Example of Brownian Motion…………………………………………………………69
Figure 7. Comparison of Interview and Audio Transcript………………………………………107
Chapter 1
Introduction

Remarks on the Project

I am not a reliable narrator, and what follows is not, necessarily, an attempt at Truth.¹ When dealing with matters of space, time, and colonialism one quickly finds that Truth is not particularly interesting anyway. Instead, I set out to present a possibility, an option, and certainly a model for further review. At the core of this thesis rests a purposeful re-envisioning of the relationship between the subject, land, and colonial inheritance. Put another way, I will think through the ways land has, like those who inhabit it, encountered colonial logics, and I will address the ways those encounters require marginalized peoples to move through the world in complex ways. In this project I define colonial logics as those overarching systems that produce seemingly static knowledge that rationalizes various discourses of power in an effort to organize the world in seemingly static ways: as knowable and measurable. Importantly, while these logics tend to present the world and its inhabitants as knowable and measurable, our collective experiences in and of the world actually reveal it to be deeply fluid and contextual. It is the tension—between stasis and fluidity as well as the attempted erasure of this fluidity—that adversely shapes the lives of black and other marginalized peoples. In order to unpack “colonial logics” further, I turn to “Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, The Logic of Coloniality and The Grammar of De-Coloniality” by Walter Mignolo. In this text Mignolo asserts that a decolonial project “fracture[s] the hegemony of knowledge and understanding that have ruled, since the fifteenth century and through the modern/colonial world,” which he argues are “the

¹ The title of my thesis is taken from David Scott in “The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview
theo-logical and the ego-logical politics of knowledge and understanding." Importantly, these knowledge structures were transformed at various points in time in order to craft the necessary categories of exclusion when religious domination could no longer be justified. Mignolo writes:

The Theo-logical politics of knowledge and understanding was, then, the platform for the control of knowledge and subjectivity in Europe and the Americas, but not yet in China, India or the Arabic-Islamic world. When Western politics of knowledge began to be imposed in Asia and Africa, in the nineteenth century, Europe has already gone through an internal transformation. The sovereignty of the subject began to be felt at the beginning of the seventeenth century (Cervantes, Bacon, Shakespeare, Descartes) and the questioning of Theology open[ed] up the doors for a displa[ce]ment, within Europe, from the Theo-logical to the Ego-logical politics of knowledge and understanding. 

Crucial to my thesis is Mignolo’s emphasis on a “politics of knowledge.” This phrase becomes particularly important as we consider the ways the theo-logical hegemony transformed in order to stay viable but nonetheless remained “cloaked in the rhetoric of universality,” which is to say it continued to function as the obvious or appropriate model for engaging with and organizing the land and peoples of the world. In my project, when I use colonial logics I want to invoke this politics of knowledge as a type of dispossession and tool of marginalization. I highlight that we must engage with how we come to think about the world in order to craft a different one. More directly, my thesis pays specific attention to the hierarchies, assumptions, and orders produced through the sciences in order to connect this seemingly rational thought back to the theo- and ego-logical orders Mignolo discusses.

This thesis acknowledges the ways geographic processes (such as but not limited to mapping) and geographic concepts (such as but not limited to the underground railroad) are imbued with colonialism, and it also explores the ways the physical terrain has survived and

---

4 Ibid., 463.
absorbed these processes of dispossession.\footnote{Katherine McKittrick, “Freedom is a Secret: The Future Usability of the Underground Rail Road,” in \textit{Black Geographies and the Politics of Place}, eds. Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods (Toronto: Between the Lines Press; Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007), 91-111.} I will address the ways black peoples experience and transform land in order to think through how land has not only been encountered, but has encountered the knowledge systems of modernity.\footnote{In this project I define modernity as a spatial and temporal guide that relies on Enlightenment ideals to fix black cultures in ways that shape our geographic worlds.} Crucially, this project focuses on these knowledge systems as they attempt to fix—in the sense of making static/stable/unchanging—the complexities of “cultural/historical/racial difference” through the use of scientific knowledge and order.\footnote{Homi K Bhabha, “The Other Question: Homi K Bhabha Reconsiders the Stereotype and Colonial Discourse,” \textit{Screen} (1983): 18.} Put another way, I address the ways in which these logics—geographic processes and concepts, the land and its inhabitants—are presented as fixed despite the fact that they are constantly fixing as they expand and contract in order to remain somehow truthful.

Understanding fixity in relation to race and colonialism, engenders, as Homi Bhabha suggests, ambivalence:

It is this process of ambivalence, central to the stereotype, that my essay explores as it constructs a theory of colonial discourse. For it is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalization; produces the effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must also be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed.\footnote{Ibid.}

Building on Bhabha’s analysis, I am interested in the ways predictability becomes crucial to particular narratives about race and particular motions—movements, travels, mobilities—that are performed by racialized bodies. I focus on the ways in which scientific discourse serves as one site through which truth becomes Truth, despite its ambivalence, and people become bodies that...
can be classified, organized, and known. Nested in ideas of empiricism, neutral data, and objectivity, it is within the knowledge systems of colonial and scientific empiricisms that race becomes a static biological category that can be mapped onto the body. My thesis thus links colonial constructions of race to the production of space in order to think on the significance of travel and movement within a system that renders both marginalized people and places static. The ability to make a person static through scientific knowledge parallels efforts to make space, place, and time static as well. To be clear, one crucial assertion of this project is that science has geographic implications that often go unacknowledged, but shape how we come to understand the world around us. Despite the necessary ambivalence of the colonial project, this scientific evidence seemingly solidifies the ability to predict where and when and why particular peoples should take up particular locations and how they should perform in those locations. These processes of colonial constraint cannot honor the fluid ways that these peoples refuse transparent and colonial space. This movement, even when it is not physically happening, is always a threat and it is therefore constantly surveyed and punished. By highlighting instances where this fixedness appears in expectations and investments in linear narratives and movements, I hope to show how non-linear mobility resists colonial constraints and violences and also produces critical interventions into how we come to know our surroundings.


It is my contention that just as people have encountered oppressive structures, so has land. As such, I think about land as a container and conductor of colonial legacies—an actual storage unit of inherited dispossessions—that, as a result, plays a central role in shaping black mobility and subjectivity. In connecting discourses of space, place, and time with ideas of subjectivity and black mobility, I will consider how movement through space-place-time is shaped by constant encounters with colonial matters and examine how the chaotic mobility of black people refuses linear representations of black life. I argue, then, that paying attention to the complicated, fluid, and strained movements that shape the experiences of black people brings to life unstable geographies and draws attention to the ways the (in)tangible logics of colonialism have hidden usable potentials. \(^1\) Rinaldo Walcott reminds us “[i]t is, however, the migration of non-whites that has continually disrupted the fictions of the nation-state because they show attempts to both conceal and deny otherness within the nation and to reproduce racial sameness as the basic of the nation-state.” \(^2\) Walcott delineates the ways the movement of non-white peoples is a critique of normalized geographies (such as the nation) and that these critiques destabilize space, even when it is not physical movement and even when the people are apparently still. He unpacks the ways the poetic, musical, fictional, and other creative works of black Canadians and other diasporic artists forces the nation to attempt to make sense of these movements that refuse the nation. What this means is, in a nation that excises black life and existence from the national narrative, the presence of black people is a type of movement. The presence of black people, even when they are seemingly still, produces a ripple in the national imaginary that cannot account for them or can only account for them if they perform a particular


version of fabricated identity. In this way, these movements appear via processes of physical motion, but they must also be explored in aural exchanges, literature, art, architecture, and more. A burdened creativity—which must always be moving, which must never be still—is a fraught mobility. Movement can and has been viewed as dangerous (as we know, and for example, many slaves were punished for fleeing plantations, traveling without slave passes, and so on). The danger implicit in black movement impacts how space is organized. Indeed, particular sites seem to explicitly limit black movement, such as jails or ‘urban ghettos.’ This interpretation of these kinds of geographies serves to isolate specific locations (the jail, the ‘ghetto’) from the broader context that has produced them (practices of racism, poverty, traveling without a pass) while also obscuring the fluidity I noted above. More directly, the complex mobile arrangements that happen through these particular sites are often read as violent or unproductive in order to obscure what are complex movements through colonial logics. I argue, furthermore, that these geographies illuminate how land is connected to, and in some ways experiences, the colonial project. My thesis project is therefore designed to acknowledge both the costs and the potentials of black mobility, while also drawing attention to how the land—where movement happens—is meaningful to how we understand the relationship between the subject, space-place-time, and progress.

In the remainder of this introduction I connect the various theoretical links that support my thesis by threading together the following keywords: identity, geography (with thoughts on space-place-time), and mobility. I present them independently in order to outline the stakes of my analysis; however, each is deeply connected. I attend to constructions of black geographies and mobility in order to outline the processes that connect colonial matters to black mobility. This project works to disrupt discursive attempts to read our geographies as fixed and knowable
and therefore outside of the complex and fluid navigations I have introduced above. As such, my thesis argues that colonial processes, specifically those that work to territorialize our physical geographies into readable state-country-nations, have been unsuccessful. Crucially, they are made unsuccessful by the intimate moments of refusal that appear when marginalized peoples—and for this thesis specifically when black peoples—create new geographic knowledge within static readings of space-place-time.\(^{14}\) At stake in acknowledging these alternative conceptualizations of space-place-time is honoring the ways in which living within and through this complex environment requires critical and deeply contextual mapping practices that are intimately connected to the people who craft them.\(^{15}\) Also, in acknowledging these alternative conceptualizations of space-place-time is honoring the knowledge of those who are often considered ungeographic in order to produce new ways of relating to each other.\(^{16}\) These relational practices refuse the objectivity of empiricism, and therefore require that we produce new and more livable notions of how marginalized communities navigate space-place-time, and, significant to this analysis, how these movements produce new and important knowledge about race, place, and mobility.\(^{17}\)


\(^{16}\) Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

Space-place-time is not, as many have argued, transparent. A transparent understanding of space, place, and time can appear across disciplines, and in a 1997 article Gillian Rose engages with this model as it appears in feminist research. She argues:

The feminist task becomes less one of mapping difference – assuming a visible landscape of power with relations between positions ones of distance between separate agents – and more of asking how difference is constituted, of tracing its destabilizing emergence during the research process itself.

While Rose’s discussion is focused on the notion of “transparent reflexivity” she produces this intervention through reference to the geographic flattening of the complicated relationship between researcher and subject. She adds:

This visible landscape of power, external to the researcher, transparently visible and spatially organized through scale and distribution, is a product of a particular kind of reflexivity, what I will call ‘transparent reflexivity’. It depends on certain notions of agency (as conscious) and power (as context), and assumes that both are knowable.

---

18 Transparent space is refused in work that highlights how space-place-time is produced through various collisions of people and systemic processes. These collisions produce particular narratives of locations and peoples as valuable and other locations and peoples as invaluable or even particular people and locations are expected to ‘perform’ in one way, but critical attention to these sites highlights how those expectations are refused and navigated. This highlights the processes of production that go in to making space-place-time. See: Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference: Notes on Racism and Geography,” The Professional Geographer (2002), D. Alissa Trotz and Beverley Mullings, “Transnational Migration, the State, and Development: Reflecting on the ‘Diaspora Option’,” Small Axe (2013), Gloria Wekker, The Politics of Passion: Women’s Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora (Columbia University Press, 2006), Linda Tuhiiwai Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies Research and Indigenous Peoples, (Zed Books, 1999), and Andrea Smith, Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide, (South End Press, 2005). In contrast to these works, in J. Jack Halberstam’s, In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives, (NYU Press, 2005) space-place-time becomes transparent via a dichotomy between fundamentally urban and rural spaces. Additional readings where this appears (in different ways) are Peter J. Taylor, “A Materialist Framework for Political Geography,” Transactions of the Institute of British Geography (1982) where, even as he thinks critically on the political nature of geography still refers to the “the freeing of private property from social restrictions” and “collectives (classes, nations, states, urban labour markets). These conclusions are troubled by attention to the knowledges of space-place-time presented by racialized peoples. In addition, Neil Brenner, “Between Fixity and Motion: Accumulation, Territorial Organization, and the Historical Geography of Spatial Scales,” Environment and Planning (1998) or Martin Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking” in Basic Writings, ed David Farrell Krell (Routledge, 1993). 343-364.


20 Ibid., 311
This analysis highlights the ways transparent theorizations of self rely on transparent understandings of space-place-time. These formations result in particularly static version of self and produce knowledge that is easily categorized. Rose asserts that, while seemingly advancing an investment in situated knowledge, transparent reflexivity produces clear cut distinctions between the role of researcher and researched. These distinctions are produced through clear-cut distinctions in the landscape. She highlights the experience of transparent space-place-time as she grapples with an offhanded questions asked of her interviewee. She writes:

As a friend of his, another worker, at the centre, walked past us, he laughed and said, ‘look, I’m being interviewed for Radio 4’. She laughed and so did I, and the interview – a long and very helpful one for me – continued. But that joke has bothered me ever since; or, rather, my uncertainty about what it meant has bothered me. Was it just a reference to the tape recorder? Was it to do with his self-consciousness at being interviewed? But Radio 4 is a national station of the British Broadcasting Corporation, which means in effect it’s English, so was his joke a reference to the middle-class of Englishness of my accent? If so, was the joke a sign of our different ‘positions’? But does he like Radio 4’s Englishness? And how do any of these possibilities relate to how the interview went?21

Rose’s questions highlight the interactions of space-place-time that create an experience that is difficult for her to process in a linear fashion. She moves from one question to another without coming to any specific conclusion about the statement or the interview. This experience, which refuses transparent space-place-time in the overlapping references to each site, produces an experience that is difficult to report. The data is not clear and no conclusions are resolutely identified. Rose intervenes in this assumption in order to insert the significance of “absences and fallabilities” and make room for theoretical significance of the unknown.22

My project proposes an exploration of the possibilities and freedoms of those openings and unknowns. I highlight the ways non-linear movement produces non-linear knowledge that

21 Ibid., 306  
22 Ibid., 319
cannot be read in transparent ways, and, as a result, complicates a transparent version of space-place-time that privileges seemingly tangible, inherent, and predictable Truth. I hold on to place here in an attempt to grapple with intricate contexts of the spatio-temporal arrangements that are the arena for this movement. Mignolo writes that “in the spatial organization of the modern/colonial world: the geo-politics of knowledge names the historical location (space and time, the historical marks and configurations of space and a place, etc.) and authority of loci of enunciations that had been negated by the dominance and hegemony of both the theo-logical and ego-logical politics of knowledge and understanding.”23 It is my argument that, despite the appearance and privileging of motionlessness, colonial constructions of race and space require deeply complex configurations of movement. Paying attention to these non-linear movements troubles these colonial constructions while honoring the new and more livable knowledges produced by these refusals.24 I want to hold on to these tensions in order to consider how encounters with colonial logics produces a contextual and fluid narrative that cannot be made universal.

Throughout this project space-place-time is deeply connected to processes of mobility, and mobility draws attention to the intricate enfolding of space, place, and time. These geographic processes and mobilities allow me to refuse a more vertical approach to space and place, one that understands place as fundamentally nested inside of space and where both of

24 Bruno Latour, “Drawing Things Together” in Representation in Scientific Practice, ed. Michael Lynch and Steve Woolgar (The MIT Press, 1990), 26-34. Latour’s discussion of immutable mobiles is particularly useful. He asserts that knowledges are inscribed through “invent[ing] objects which have the properties of being mobile but also immutable, presentable, readable and combinable with one another.” As he thinks on the immutable mobility of the printing press he asserts “Immutability is ensured by the process of printing many identical copies; mobility by the number of copies, the paper, and the moveable type. The links between difference places in time and space are completely modified by this fantastic acceleration of immutable mobiles which circulate everywhere in all directions in Europe.”
these constructions exist independent of time. On refusing this division, Kevin Hetherington
writes:

We are led to believe that spaces become remembered landscapes and those landscapes
are the substance of place… What, however, if we interrogate that muteness and let the
objects speak of place? What if we let them move across that division between space and
place? In doing so we have to leave behind both Euclidean geometry and hermeneutics
and consider instead the issue of a more complex topology. The topological folding
together of space and place leads to the creation of more complex geographies that allow
us to see the spatiality upon which this division is usually performed.25

In this project space-place-time points to the movement between, among, and through various
arrangements of space and place as they are mediated through and by time. I am not throwing
away the specificities of place as a site within space; instead, I consider the ways place can
become space and vice versa depending on time and movement. Nigel Thrift reminds us that,
“there is no static and stabilized space, though there are plenty of attempts to make space static
and stable.”26 I do not want to ignore the significance of the specific relations that shape and
create spaces, places, and times; instead, I think on space-place-time as an effort to consider the
ways these specificities are also deeply linked. These overlapping and necessarily porous
manifestations simultaneously shape movement, while being shaped by movement, while
providing the stage on which this movement is performed.

I articulate the relationship between space-place-time and movement using the concept
“moving through.” I use this phrase to highlight the complex tensions that underwrite black
mobilities and geographies and to propose an alternative site for the study of black mobility.
Moving through complicates a transparent reading of space-place-time and its attendant
expectation of linear and forward moving motion. Moving through draws our attention to the

porousness of geographies and highlights the processes of meaning making that are produced as people perform mobility in contested spaces. Mignolo is again useful here. He writes,

Decolonization of knowledge shall be understood in the constant double movement of unveiling the geo-political location of theology, secular philosophy and scientific reason and simultaneously affirming the modes and principles of knowledge that have been denied by the rhetoric of Christianization, civilization, progress, development, market democracy. 27

Moving through emphasizes this doubleness: it pushes to the fore the processes that have situated particular knowledge systems and hierarchies as rational and appropriate; it serves to flag our lived encounters with colonial logics in order to destabilize the assumptions of their stability; and, it seeks to highlight the subversive and/or alternative mobilities of black people. Moving through is engaged and illuminated via encounters with the physical landscape, but I am hopeful it is evident how these movements are also linked to emotional, affective, and cognitive motion.

In the chapters that follow I tease out moving through by addressing how orderly, linear, and forward moving understandings of time, space, and place appear through the use of Newtonian physics. I argue, in short, that Newtonian logics underwrite linear assumptions of causality that require linear versions of mobility. Thrift writes, “it is the peculiar linearity of Western culture that dictates this perception, a linearity made up of writing, clocks, and other one-after-the-other manifestations of a particular practice of causality.” 28

Turning to quantum physics I explore the ways the random movement of particles, theorized within the quantum theory of Brownian Motion, makes room for the non-linear mobility required of black people. This also opens up the important theoretical intervention, chaos-monde, made by Édouard Glissant’s. Glissant’s intervention serves as a refusal of the orderly violences that have organized

28 Ibid., 142
the world, and makes room for celebrating the complicated non-linear movements and knowledges of black peoples.

My overall project is a theoretical investigation of movement, identity, race, and geography, and the methodology for my thesis is interdisciplinary, drawing on black studies, black diaspora studies, and theories of physics, mobility, and sound. I bring these theoretical approaches together and use them as a lens to read news media coverage of Hurricane Katrina, the writings of W.E.B. Du Bois and his understanding of land, and the sounds and pauses of a textual and oral interview. Overall, this interdisciplinary lens has allowed me, methodologically, to highlight the ways in which space-place-time and moving through challenge prevailing colonial logics. In bringing theories of particle movement into conversation with black studies and diaspora studies, I argue that despite the surveillance and suppression of black mobility, these movements are intimately connected with alternative theorizations of space-place-time that require new models of navigating land and celebrating black life.

Identity

My thesis centers the black diaspora in order to consider the ways in which theoretical attention to the experiences of individuals within this group produces a radical framework for engaging geographies and mobility. As diasporic populations negotiate the nation (as exiled from their homelands, as relocated elsewhere, as always being and becoming) their physical and theoretical routings produce a dynamic politics of location.29 These politics emphasize the connections between movement, geography, and identity, and the experiences of diasporic

populations require new reference points, temporal experiences, and languages for explaining, understanding, and navigating this convergence. Carol Boyce Davies writes:

I want to activate the term “Black” relationally, provisionally and based on location or position. The term “Black,” oppositional, resisting, necessary emerges as whiteness seeks to depoliticize and normalize itself. Still “Black” is only provisionally used as we continue to interrogate its meaning and in the ongoing search to find the language to articulate ourselves.30

Powerfully, Boyce Davis highlights the temporality of blackness. She unfixes it with quotes even as it is simultaneously fixed by its publication on the page. It is this conflict, that takes place in the space of the text on the place of the page and within the time of the reader’s glance, that parallels the doings and undoings of identity that are produced through the experience of blackness in the diaspora. This disruption refuses a depoliticized version of identity/subjectivity/experience, and it requires that these realities be understood within the context that they are produced. In this way neither geography nor mobility can ever be neutral. These constructions are always implicated in how we come to understand ourselves. We are constantly encountering and resisting them as we produce a provisional self as we search for the right language to speak on who we are.

We can see this complex process appear in Frantz Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks where blackness is presented as a physical experience. In Chapter Five, “The Lived Experiences of the Black Man,” Fanon articulates what it feels like to experience blackness. In addition, he highlights the ways in which blackness requires a constant restructuring and reevaluation of identity that relies on moments of contact between spaces, places, times, and people. In addition to the content of this work, its structure is significant. In this chapter, Fanon presents several important questions. For my purposes I want to highlight the moments when he asks, “[w]here

do I fit in? Or, if you like, where should I stick myself” and “[w]here should I put myself from now on.”31 These questions are framed by two important moments of recognition earlier in the text. In the first Fanon writes, “I came into this world anxious to uncover the meaning of things, my soul desirous to be the origin of the world, and here I am an object among other objects.”32 In the second part of this sentence the preposition (among) makes meaning out of the verb (am) and gives relational sustenance to the subject (I). That is to say, the preposition, or the site through which Fanon understands his relationship to the spaces and objects around him, is what constructs his existence. Fanon presents an understanding of self that relies on identity doing the work of a preposition. It relies on identity being taken up through its relationship with surrounding places and objects. Adding to this, Fanon points out that he cannot encounter space as the kind of human that Eurocentric and colonial perspectives demand of him. He carries with him “responsib[ity] not only for [his] body but also for [his] race and [his] ancestors,” which points to how Fanon’s corporeal script, his black skin, both defines who he is and connects him to a longer history of anti-black oppression.33 He reiterates this point when he writes, “I knew for instance that if the physician made one false move, it was over for him and for all who came after him” and again when he says “the black experience is ambiguous, for there is not one Negro – there are many black men.” 34 Notably, because he moves in multiples he is increasingly exposed to colonial collisions. He is in motion even when he is not physically moving, as his blackness ensures constant multiplicity.

32 Ibid., 89
33 Ibid., 92
34 Ibid., 97 and 115
Additionally, I am particularly interested in Fanon’s use of the word ambiguous, which pushes a bit at Bhabha’s use of ambivalence. Ambiguity suggests the possibility of multiple interpretations, and ambivalence suggests an indecisiveness that is caused by conflicting value propositions. In removing the possibility of value, Fanon makes the experience difficult to categorize. Again, this multiplicity refuses the singularity of identity/subjectivity/experience in order to produce a new type of geographic knowledge: this knowledge is framed by processes of movement that lead to encounter, where the subject comes into being through visual (aural, artistic, physical, literary, geographic) collision.

As we think on collisions, it is useful to briefly nod to the notion of matter and colonial matters. Howard Winant writes, “[r]ace and racism may be termed the ‘dark matter’ of the modern epoch. ‘Dark matter,’ as you know, makes up much of the universe. Invisible, it possesses mass and gravitational attraction.”35 So then, as we move we must encounter these matters, and these encounters produce a contested mobility. For those whose bodies are read through the matter of race these particular kinds of encounters and collisions direct and misdirect movement. It is difficult to move straight as you navigate this field. Moving through is produced through the constant collisions with colonial matters where identity is made through these complicated collisions and necessarily non-linear movements.

To provide further context to Fanon’s experiences, I turn to *The Black Atlantic* by Paul Gilroy. In this text Gilroy presents a relational model of black identity that acknowledges how blackness is built across, outside, and within nations. More specifically, Gilroy refuses to locate the production of black knowledge at or in any specific location, and suggests that it is the

hybridity of experiences that truly shapes the diaspora.\textsuperscript{36} Of particular note for this analysis are the ways Gilroy analyzes black creative texts in order to highlight the complicated responses to modernity. He writes:

The effects of racism’s denials not only of black cultural integrity but the capacity of blacks to bear and reproduce any culture worthy of the name is clearly salient here. The place prepared for black cultural expression is the hierarchy of creativity generated by the pernicious metaphysical dualism that identifies blacks with the body and whites with the mind is a second significant factor.\textsuperscript{37}

Gilroy’s attention to creative works is critical for my own analysis. I explore creative works that purposefully take up and refuse racial hierarchies in order to take seriously the alternative models of survival, emerging from black geographies and mobilities, that are offered through cultural production.\textsuperscript{38}

As we transition to the next key term, and with my above thoughts in mind, it is necessary to articulate the relationship between race and land. The question becomes—as we think on the ways experience is shaped through racial and cultural collisions—what role does land play? How does the category of race connect with land? What happens when we work to acknowledge these encounters? To begin to answer these questions it is useful to note that the category of race and processes of racialization help structure how we come to understand who belongs where. Brahinsky, Sasser, and Minkoff-Zern assert:

…[C]oncepts of nature, environment, and the ordering of space are fundamentally linked to the organization of social and political life, a process in which race is central. Racial constructs naturalize social hierarchies. Similarly, racial ideas of biological difference, purity and pollution, and the management of bodies and populations, are woven through conceptualizations of nature, the environment, and space.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{36} Paul Gilroy, \textit{The Black Atlantic} (Harvard University Press, 1995), 33.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 97
\textsuperscript{38} Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” 990)
This organization appears in the ways particular environments are often read as “appropriate” locations for particular peoples, and, to this end, “people of color must be written out of the landscape for the symbolic ideas of untouched nature to hold up” so that “the ways humans think about and represent nature is always already imbricated with the human social system and forms of classification.”

In effect, land cannot stay neutral in relation to these systems. It becomes a method for isolating and organizing particular peoples, and these organizations reproduce the values and assumptions that accompany racial differences. One way of understanding the relationship between black culture and exclusionary land practices is by paying attention to environmental racism. In this vein, Laura Pulido disrupts theorizations of environmental racism that are focused on siting practices and intent in order theorize that attention to more insidious projects of coloniality, such as white privilege. Pulido argues “that all places are racialized, and that race informs all places.”

A brief example may demonstrate how white privilege allows us to historicize environmental racism: A polluter locates near a black neighborhood because the land is relatively inexpensive and adjacent to an industrial zone. This is not a malicious, racially motivated, discriminatory act. Instead, many would argue that it is economically rational. Yet it is racist in that it is made possible by the existence of racial hierarchy, reproduces racial inequality, and undermines the well-being of that community. Moreover, the value of black land cannot be understood outside of the relative value of white land, which is a historical product.

Pulido shows that black land, and other sites that are historically associated with non-white peoples, become particularly vulnerable to projects that have a negative impact on the environment—abandoned toxic wastes, air toxins, or waste transfer and disposal. This relationship is a direct result of different valuations on land that are tied up with blackness and

---

40 Ibid., 1142 and 1144
42 Ibid., 16
43 Ibid., 21
black culture. Simultaneously, the land is made invaluable by blackness just as blackness is marked as invaluable by its presence on wasteland. However, even as these lands are produced as suitable sites for death, “vibrant communities” make room for black and brown life that complicates this inequitable system. Through various musical or creative or aesthetic cultures life is produced in these neighborhoods that refuses the cartographies that construct this land as unlivable and therefore appropriate sites for waste. In this analysis, I understand those refusals as forms of movement, as to be more specific, moving through, and attempts to navigate a colonial encounter. These movements, which come at the cost of increased exposure to these toxins, re-map the area and reassert life even when death is predicted and connect the production of black identity to the land and efforts to make space-place-time more livable.

**Geographies**

Exploring how landscapes have absorbed colonial logics requires an analysis of the ways these physical locations have been employed to recreate and enforce racial hierarchies. The cartographic processes that are used to transform and read space-place-time as transparent and mappable, run parallel to the same structures that attempt to make knowable and therefore profitable categories such as race, gender, and sexuality. Paying close attention to the similarities between struggles to organize space-place-time and struggles to organize humanity show overlapping knowledge systems. Sylvia Wynter evidences this relationship in her article “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom.” Throughout her discussion, Wynter weaves together the theological, political, and geographic process that led to the invention of the category of human, the bifurcation of human from Man, and the remodeling of

---

44 Ibid., 25
Man 1 into Man 2. Of note for my thesis, is Wynter’s refusal to read and present these processes as distinct. Throughout her study these categories of knowledge work not as individual actors, but, instead, as re-articulations of the same logics, different only in who or how or what they target. To this end, Wynter presents Man 2 not as a rejection of the narratives that formed Man 1, but, instead, as a process of “redescription.”

It is these amorphous processes that licensed the global expansion of Western European ideologies, enabled colonization, and upheld prevailing geographic systems.

In *Demonic Grounds* Katherine McKittrick centers the experiences of black women in order to further engage Wynter’s “ethno-geographies” and articulate new ways to refuse the imposed silences of geographic concealment. These silences, McKittrick argues, are caused by colonial reading practices that assume geography is mappable and stable and, consequently, render certain peoples always present, and certain peoples never present. When we understand that certain communities belong in particular locations then space-place-time concretizes, geographically, racial categories. In looking to the ways those who are considered to not belong move through these exclusionary locations we open up new ways to read geography and therefore new ways to read those processes that organize humanity.

The rationalities that made Wynter’s Man possible are deeply (un)rooted in this work. What is powerful about McKittrick’s argument is the tangibility of these logics and how they intersect with experiences that are mitigated through the narratives, bodies, ideas, and geographies of black women. Whether it is the fictional loss of Dana Franklin’s arm in *Kindred* or the imprisonment, torture, and hanging of Marie-Joseph Angélique, these moments of violence evidence the smothering nature of

---

46 Ibid., 288
spatialized histories that are inflected with anti-blackness, racism, patriarchy, and so on. Dana Franklin and Marie-Joseph Angélique, for example, demonstrate how moving across and within racial and racist geographies is predicated on struggle. For example, and extending McKittrick’s analysis, I suggest that Dana Franklin loses her arm precisely because her experiences (as a black woman and as a time traveler who moves back and forth between 1976 California and plantation era Maryland) refuses a transparent conceptualization of space, place, and time where each is understood as distinct and disconnected and therefore linear. Her existence is evidence of another story and therefore of a different sense of space-place-time. In a moment when those forces, demonstrated in the physical grip of her white slave-owning ancestor Rufus, are constricting around her, working to capture her in the past and prevent her movement through space-place-time, she escapes. In this instance we see how “[t]he violence of power is answered by the violence of subversion.” This unsettling encounter leaves a physical mark, and while Dana is no longer able to travel freely through time, the loss of her arm serves as a constant reminder of her earlier mobility. The past cannot actually remain ‘there,’ in the past. Notably, it is those subjects who are understood as non-belonging whose movement through space-place-time is infused with the constant navigation of violence, and it is a violence that seeks to reinstate the order that the very presence of these peoples disrupts. In this way, geographic processes (re)create and (re)enforce these volatile arrangements. Dana’s mobility refuses expectations of linear movement, and, as a result, she encounters more and more complex hubs of space-place-time.

The tensions between space, race, gender and geography that McKittrick outlines can be read alongside Saidiya Hartman’s Lose Your Mother. Throughout the text, Hartman pays

---

attention to the ways the same violent process that were introduced by Wynter and revealed by McKittrick are actually embedded within specific locations. While much of Hartman’s analysis focuses on the author’s travels to Ghana, I am interested in exploring the ways New York emerges as a particular site wherein violent processes are entrenched. For Hartman, New York is a site that creates a very particular type of physical discomfort and fear. Interestingly, and to the point of this analysis, despite the fact that Hartman’s experiences are mitigated by several hundred years, the geographic arrangement of New York is not dissimilar from McKittrick’s presentation of Angelique’s Montreal. Serving as both a physical location and a particular type of worldview, Hartman’s relationship with New York evidences the ways orders of space and the category of the human circulate within landscapes, and produce space and place.\(^49\) Describing an encounter with a police officer when she was a young girl, Hartman writes:

> I’m certain the police officer could not have imagined his daughter saying the awful things I had said to him. A black girl with two ponytails and ashy knees and a plaid school jumper had shared her view of the world and it frightened him or it shamed him. He recoiled from the ugliness off it. To put on that uniform each day, he needed to believe it wasn’t true. As he drove away, I’m sure he was thankful no child of his lived in the same country I did.\(^50\)

Hartman’s New York is not wrapped in a cloak of Northern freedom, and it is not only New York that Hartman presents this way. She writes, more broadly, of the picture of America that she has inherited from her mother:

> The picture of the world my mother drew was one of infinite possibilities and absolute limitations. Her vision of America was an amalgam of dream and nightmare: spacious skies, amber waves, and niggers hanging from trees.\(^51\)

---


\(^51\) Ibid., 132
Hartman’s experience of space-place-time is not necessarily mediated through the violent actions of a particular person or group of people. Instead, she describes her encounter with location, and with a version of location that she inherits from her mother. In one instance, the police officer refuses her disruption of his country, and the set of rules Hartman’s mother sets for her children stem from her fear of America. These locations become actual characters—villains—New York, America, the World hold these violent realities. Land not only serves as a tool of exclusion, but it becomes a threat to particular inhabitants. Across changing geographic scales, these engagements and encounters produce the racial subject.\textsuperscript{52} Paying close attention to the ways mobility is performed across the various arrangements of these geographic locations highlights the ways racialized subject comes in contact with particular formations of the human through land.

**Mobility**

Movement serves not only as tool to support a mental image of a broader theory, but also as another vehicle for producing theory.\textsuperscript{53} For this project, the sub-discipline of mobility studies offers several important theoretical interventions. The following are of particular interest: how space-place-time is shaped by and implicated in mobile processes; how we should not privilege mobility as a new Truth; and how paying attention to movement allows us to think in new ways about the production of power relations. Beginning with the first claim, Tim Cresswell writes:

…[M]obility involves a fragile entanglement of physical movement, representations, and practices. Furthermore, these entanglements have broadly traceable histories and geographies. At any one time, then, there are pervading *constellations of mobility* – particular patterns of movement, representations of movement, and ways of practicing

movement that make sense together. Constellations from the past can break through into the present in surprising ways.⁵⁴

These entanglements craft experiences and theorizations of space-place-time. In the same way that particular constellations of mobility seemingly “make sense together” they also help us make sense of various spaces, places, and times and the particular ways these formations intersect. Consider the familiar directive to a young child, “no running in the house.” This statement demands a particular type of movement, but it also tells about space-place-time of the house and home. If we understand running as motion that occurs in moments of fear or is uncontrollable then we also learn that the home is supposedly separate from those disruptions. To this end, when we do not perform a desired mobility or when we cannot perform the mobility there are consequences. In the case of the earlier statement, perhaps the child is chastised or something inevitably breaks. The performance of good or appropriate movements are not universally accessible, which makes those who cannot perform them particularly vulnerable to policing, surveillance, and other practices designed to bring order.

Moving to the last two points, while this project is deeply invested in mobility and the possibilities of moving through, I am not interesting in developing a new “grand narrative” of mobility, fluidity, or liquidity. The new mobilities paradigm suggest a set of questions, theories, and methodologies rather than a totalizing or reductive description of the contemporary world.”⁵⁵ Attention to the expectations of movement, and in particular, when these expectations are complicated or refused makes room for understanding how movement has been used to shape theorizations of the other key words presented in this introduction. Paying close attention to the complex forms of mobility experienced by black individuals sheds light on the embodied

---

negotiation of colonial logics. For this discussion, Edouard Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation* provides a useful introductory framework. For Glissant, the birth of The West required that nation be understood as valuable not because it is a specific territory connected to various social processes, but, instead, because a set of social processes define a particular territory.\(^5\) In the first view, land remains static. It is something that is inherently connected to particular social systems, and not understood as a specific space-place-time that is constructed through those social organizations and does not exist outside of them. This dichotomy, Glissant suggests, is forged out of a particular type of mobility: arrowlike nomadism, which makes Others of the “conquered or visited peoples.”\(^6\) The impact of this mobility, the marking of the Other, is a project of conquest that allows the nation to read the newly colonized space in transparent ways. The visited are read flatly as the Other, which makes it possible to ignore the cultural connections and combinations that are formed via the encounter. Fundamentally designed to facilitate territorial expansion, arrowlike nomadism serves simultaneously as an option of resistance and as a tool of subjugation. It is this seemingly dichotomous structure that is particularly influential for my analysis of mobility. Glissant’s overarching analysis explores the ways in which various forms of mobility were used to solidify the discursive valence of the nation; what he also reveals is the way in which, despite the name, this arrowlike nomadism is not necessarily vector directional. The picture Glissant paints is one of release and arrival (movement from place A to place B, for example). However, I would argue that while these movements pushed forward, there were (are) significant encounters along the way. I therefore refuse to read this movement, and the others that I will engage with later in this analysis, as moving in a singular uninterrupted direction. The refusal to read movement as inherently or


\(^6\) Ibid., 17.
necessarily moving *ahead* in time and place, in a linear progressive fashion, opens up new ways to think about race, mobility. I make this analytical shift with the intention of disrupting the connection between forward-oriented movement and progress, and to begin to articulate what I think is a mobility that refuses such targeted terms. With respect to Glissant’s analysis, I think, perhaps, his borrowing of geometric language hides the messiness of the movement he explores. In this text, Glissant’s overarching project is an exploration of multiplicity. He refuses the monolingual and the non-relational to develop his poetics. I highlight this moment not to detract from the value of his overarching work, but, instead to highlight the theoretical basis for my own discussion of mobility and progress.

The movement of certain peoples is sometimes associated with good and rational thought, and the apparently erratic movement of others is read as a product of their irrationality. More specifically, those who challenge the stability of the nation are often understood as moving incorrectly. This connection enables particularly static versions of space, place, and time to remain seemingly in tact while simultaneously isolating those peoples who can open up new versions of space-place-time. Sarah Jane Cervenak’s *Wandering: Philosophical Performances of Racial and Sexual Freedom* is particularly useful for unpacking this correlation. What is noteworthy about her project is the rereading ‘wayward’ movement in order to critique the Enlightenment, with its notions of reason and order (and therefore with straightforward notions of mobility). Cervenak suggests that this system of (il)logic fundamentally required “perverse movements” of thought – often doing and undoing and ignoring their previous work in order to put forth ideas that rationalized exclusion. In order to license the dehumanizing

---

58 Cresswell, “Toward a Politics of Mobility,” 19-20
practices of slavery and colonial expansion Enlightenment thinkers, such as Kant and Rousseau, had to advance ‘off-centered’ and crooked logics that made inhuman peoples who, by their own previous philosophical work, qualified as human. These scientific maneuvers highlight the illogical workings of the Western philosophical project. In order to rationalize this exclusionary version of the human, Enlightenment thinkers had to work around their previous arguments that would have included those peoples who were being made slaves. This project required evidence of the inhumanity of the enslaved. To this end, and in line with the principles of empiricism and the scientific method that are foundational to the Enlightenment, rationality was measured according to each subject movement. Cervenak suggests, the inherent violences of slavery and colonialism were not only rationalized, but became fundamental requirements that underwrote the management and policing of irrational and violent (black) mobility. For Cervenak, theoretical attention to the non-linear black mobility opens up a new model of the ‘good’ subject, and opportunities for resistance. Notably, however, she suggests:

What the white European Enlightenment never anticipated was that those straightened out could reason, imagine, and philosophize themselves, achieving what was otherwise only murderously dreamed about. These headless philosophers, dreaming of monsters, never anticipated that those wandered upon also theorized with and against the Enlightenment.\(^60\)

I would add to Cervenak’s critique that it is perhaps the reality of the potential of alternative theorizations that also motivated these intellectuals. Put another way: what of the reality that racialized and dehumanized peoples could theorize back? Perhaps, in order to legitimize their status as producers of logic, it was necessary to create an Other. At a moment when the opportunity of thought is expanding, and, perhaps more importantly, the title of Thinker is gaining influence as a form of social currency order arose to solidify this particular social strata

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 58
as accessible to some and exclusionary to others. I think this addition necessarily complicates the somewhat buoyant reading Cervenak employs in her analysis of black mobility. For example, reading the experiences of Harriet Jacobs Cervenak writes:

Here I want to signal again how Jacobs’s path toward freedom becomes itself through invisibility and, as such, not as straightforwardly available as her abolitionist readers might have liked.\(^{61}\)

Although the overarching analysis is incredibly useful, I want to reassert the lived terms of this mobility. Invisibility is not bereft of labor, and to cloak it as such, I think, hides the true impact of how invisibility requires physical, mental, and affective efforts. It is not only “the private light of will and the grace of god” that guides Jacobs as she rushes along the road toward her eventual hiding place, but also fear at the potential of her capture and return to a life that is not livable.\(^{62}\) Attention to the ways in which this movement can be freeing while at the same time deeply challenging allows my analysis to explore mobility as an academic endeavor while holding, at its center, a deep respect for those people who bodies are read as a threat and therefore must move in ways that attempt to mitigate their very presence.

In *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes on Belonging* Dionne Brand artfully unpacks a relational mobility that is haunted by the possibility of space-place-time. Throughout the text, Brand’s narrative bumps into the limitations of location, destination, departure, and arrival, and Brand works to un-stick these concepts even as she adopts them. She offers no alternative to these options and, in so doing, portents the potential of the creative text as a vehicle of analysis. Instead, Brand’s dedicated attention to mobility, provides new methods of engagement, ones that do not require resolute conclusions or cursory celebrations of the potential of migratory movement. It is the actual project of movement that takes center stage, and is therefore central to

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 69
\(^{62}\) Ibid.
Brand’s presentation of her experiences. Brand’s transitions between narrating in the first- and
second- person structurally convey the rootless movement that sits at the heart of her text. She
writes:

When you embark on a journey, you have already arrived. The world you are going to is
already in your head. You have already walked in it, eating in it; you have already made
friends; a lover is already waiting.

When I arrived at the apartment on Keele Street, Toronto, I was in America. Somewhere
downtown was the hop fast world of jazz and poetry, esoteric arguments and utopian
ideas.63

These two sections of text are separated by a space, and as Brand bridges them her narrative
position changes. I would like to suggest, then, that this narrative switch evidences a subjectivity
that is changed by movement through space-place-time. This pointed change parallels the
broader moments of encounter that Brand presents throughout her text. This chunk of space
divides each paragraph, regardless of whether or not the point of view changes, and I would
suggest that Brand uses this break to purposefully disrupt her narrative. Brand builds moments of
fluidity that are fractured as the reader encounters the whiteness of the page, which mirrors the
disruptive colonial encounter. Notably, even as the narrative is threaded between paragraphs
each new section begins without an indent, which serves as a visual and compositional refresh.
This space is not empty, and moving through it shapes your experiences.

**Breakdown**

In the next chapter I unpack how Newtonian Logics appear in news coverage of the 2005
Hurricane Katrina disaster. My work with Newtonian logics have led me to consider a quantum
model that acknowledges and makes room for the possibility of black life outside normative
(linear, forward moving) understandings of time, geography, mobility, and race. I focus on

---

articles in *The Times Picayune*. I chose this text because it was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of the disaster, and, in particular, it was awarded the prize as a Public Service. I am interested in thinking on what discursive service may have been provided that relied on Newtonian logics in order to predict black death. As an apparent harbinger of excellence in reporting on Hurricane Katrina, I think through the ways this newspaper struggled to make room for black life amongst the destruction.

Chapter Three focuses on *The Souls of Black Folks* by W.E.B Du Bois. As I have suggested throughout this introduction, land has been used as a colonial tool, but it has also encountered these logics as well. I think through the ways Du Bois’s engagement with the land, as both an object and subject, is wrapped up in the concept of double conscious. My reading of Du Bois allows me to address the ways double consciousness is a useful concept to analyze mobility. More directly, Du Bois’s double consciousness provides one of the most significant scholarly insights about being human in North America, and I wanted to think about this concept in geographic terms. Pulling from the quantum thread introduced in the previous chapter, I introduce Brownian Motion as a valuable model for imagining the complexity of movement that inflects the geographies of Du Bois’s text.

Chapter Four concludes by unpacking moving through, which is a phrase I have used throughout this introduction to describe the complex project of mobility required to navigate the colonial landscape. Turning to sound studies, and thinking about the quantum implications of sound, I consider the ways moving through can be articulated in how we theorize and discuss sound. In order to take this up, I look closely at the soundscape of an hour-long interview with Alexander Weheliye. I chose this interview because the topic of the interview is how race is

---

theorized alongside the concept of the posthuman, and I think this academic intervention mirrors the complicated process of moving through in the same way the audio landscape recreates this field.

I conclude this project with a discussion of the ways the unknowns of quantum space push us to think on the relationships between coloniality, mobility, and black life. What I hope to provide here is a project that uses geographies, mobility, and creative texts to disrupt, as Jacqui Alexander puts it, these dichotomies of “here and now” and “then and there.” In realizing the lived connections between categories of space, place, and time we can make room for more livable movements and their connected geographic arrangements.

The three analytic sites that are outlined above came to me unexpectedly. Given that moving through works as a core component of this analysis I consider the non-linear connections between the various articulations of black life and mobility that appear in these sites, and I do this with a particular interest in the conversations that form through and among sites that are seemingly separated by the sometimes linear categories of discipline and methodology. For me, there is “a promise of intellectual collaboration and emancipatory possibility.”65 This project takes seriously the possibilities of interdisplinarity and the methodological insistence that “we take a chance on what we do not know while also thinking about how the encounter of various intellectual traditions creates something new.”66 These possibilities open up intricate readings of the offerings and costs of non-linear black mobility. In my analysis of Hurricane Katrina I work to show the relationship between land and colonial logics. In the chapter that follows I work to think more specifically on the relationship between land that has inherited these logics and the

66 Ibid.
people who move through, and my final site of analysis works to unpack how sound offers an example of the non-linear movement required in this context.
Chapter 2

29°57’53” N 90° 4’14” W

Working with the terms presented in my introduction (identity, geography, and mobility), this chapter brings together the remaining pieces of this analysis’ theoretical project in order to convey the epistemological and ontological concerns that shape the remainder of the analysis. More specifically, I turn to the field of quantum physics in order to firmly address the colonial matters that I pointed to in Chapter One, and with the intention of contextualizing the analysis that I present in Chapters Three and Four. As I begin this chapter let me quickly restate that the goal of this project is to address how static and directional notions of linear movement have produced logics that cannot address the unpredictable and illogical movements of colonial matters and black peoples. With this in mind, this chapter focuses on how narratives of progress have been conflated with a forward mobility, and, in so doing, have failed to take into account the nonlinear responses to modernity that are often necessary for survival. While I am not a quantum physicist, or any type of physicist for that matter, I turn to this field for the analytical possibilities it opens. Quantum physics, as a point of study, provides a useful lens to consider those worlds, or perspectives, that refuse—or cannot be easily situated within—comfortable and linear progress narratives. This framework opens up concepts of uncertainty and chaos that speak to my theory of moving through. The theorists Max Born, Max Planck, and Michelle Wright provide useful theoretical frameworks and interventions that shape how I engage with what I am calling quantum geographies. Through the use of quantum geographies I am referring to the movements of colonial matters through land and colonial organizations of space, place, and time. Glissant tracks the implications of scientific, and, in particular, quantum interventions in the chapter titled “The Relative and Chaos” of Poetics. In this chapter he asserts “[i]t required the
illustration of the notion of relative in the scientific theory of Relativity for an awareness of the relativism of cultures to prevail.”

He warns against the deifying of particular scientist and theories that result from refusing to critically engage or analyze their theories. He breaks down the ways relativity has been used as a project of hierarchy. This pushes me to assert that this project is not invested in quantum physics as a particular type of answer to Newtonian physics. I am not suggesting that we should replace one field of knowledge production with another in order to make sense of non-linear movement. Instead, I am using some of the theories of quantum physics as a metaphor for thinking through the ways complicated movements can make room for a more “rebellious consciousness.”

Quantum geographies point to the more complex version of movement and mobility that is made possible by quantum physics. I am interested in considering the following questions: How and why do Newtonian ways of knowing and organizing the world exist, co-dependently, with mobile practices and projects that refuse these models? What happens when we consider the movement of black peoples who were trapped in Hurricane Katrina as experiencing and enacting quantum geographies? How do these movements help us craft new models to reimagine our relationship with Cartesian and Newtonian geographies and, as well, illuminate our constant quantum confrontations with colonial matters? The core site of analysis for this chapter is The Times-Picayune’s “Hurricane Katrina” archive.

Through metaphor or scientific application, quantum physics has been used to open up new avenues for cultural conversation (Captain America, Star Trek, Star Wars, The Big Bang Theory) and scientific innovation (X-Ray Machines, Ultrasounds, Computers, and Cellphones),

---

67 Glissant, Poetics, 133.
68 Ibid., 139.
but the same cultural or critical attention has not turned to the experiences of the communities impacted by Hurricane Katrina (or other displaced migratory communities). My goal in this chapter is, then, to frame Katrina’s communities as quantum and therefore engaging disruptive nonlinear practices.

At the foundation of classical physics, rest Sir Isaac Newton’s three laws of motion. These laws provide the foundation for, as Michelle Wright argues, the “central concept” of a “linear progress narrative”:

1. A body at rest will remain at rest and a body in motion will remain in motion, unless an outside force – such as friction or a collision with another solid object – intervenes.
2. The greater the force applied to an object, the greater the rate of acceleration.
3. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

Wrapped up with this narrative of linear progress is an oversimplified and hierarchical model of space-place-time, and, more specifically, an oversimplified model of interactions that take place through space-place-time. Newton’s portrait of the world is painted as “purely deterministic with no room for chance.” In it “a particle has a definite momentum and position at any given time. The forces that act on that particle determine the way it’s momentum and position vary.” The terms of this system stem from Newton’s famed observation of a falling apple, and they require a particular assumption of clarity and simplicity. In order to extrapolate the cause and effect outlined above, Newton concluded that his individual observations allowed him see all of the forces at play in the apple’s descent, and more importantly, that the version of movement he saw could be extrapolated universally. Newton’s vision of these mechanics requires the ability to

---

69 Michelle Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 40.


72 Ibid.
overlook the possibility of things unseen, and, therefore, avoids the complicated nature of the universe. It allows for a cause and effect dynamic that is free of external intervention, and it is this simple connect-the-dots framework that bore Newton’s three laws. In addition, these laws produce a particular arrangement of space, place, and time. Agnew reminds us:

In the Newtonian view, space is absolute, in the sense that it is an entity in itself, independent of whatever objects and events occupy it, containing these objects and events, and having separate powers from them. Newton’s view is best used to describe the motion of rigid bodies through ‘empty’ space.\(^7^3\)

Fundamentally, a Newtonian model of space supports a colonial model of progress in that it allows linear movement forward through bare space. If we keep in mind the relationship between colonialism and modernity then we can think on the relationship between modernity, colonialism, and progress. Mignolo writes:

The conception of modernity as the pinnacle of a progressive transition relied on the colonization of space and time to create a narrative of difference that placed contemporary languages ‘vernacular’ (indeed, imperial) languages and categories of thought, Christian religion and Greco-Latin Foundations in the most elevated position. Hence, men of letters in the European Renaissance invented the idea of the Middle Ages in order to locate themselves in the present of a history that could trace back to Greece and the Roman Empire, after the dark centuries, re-emerged in the radiant light of Antiquity. The idea of Western civilization that emerged at that juncture was based on pure and simple identity politics. The colonization of time and the institution of the temporal colonial difference were crucial for the narratives of modernity as salvation, emancipation and progress.\(^7^4\)

Evidently, these workings produced a type of orderly timeline that enabled European and other Imperial powers to understand themselves as more advanced than the countries they encountered. This type of timeline prioritizes linear movements that refuse to complicate this arrangement. Similarly, these forward movements occur without hiccups or encounters because contained and controlled bodies are able to move uncomplicatedly through space that is free of

\(^7^4\) Mignolo, “Delinking,” 470.
relationship to other processes and peoples. The complicated relationships between people and the spaces and places they produce and refuse do not need to be accounted for. As a result, the rigid and static body is important to this conceptualization because a more mobile performance may cause encounter. Given how deeply embedded this version of space is it can appear even when we are attempt to refuse it.\textsuperscript{75} Newton’s arguments are fundamental to the project of colonial and imperial expansion. If space is empty, and that movement does not impact those who move through space, it is possible to develop a colonial or imperial binary between the Other and the self. In this hierarchy, if space can be a container for particular objects while being fundamentally distinct from them, then the Other can be containable and controllable as well—particularly when allowed access to only specific places and particularly when “allowed” to move in only rigid ways. Colonial expansion becomes a type of Newtonian space where the objects and peoples being contained are marginalized peoples.

A Newtonian conception of space, place, and time locates the West at the center of progress and humanity, and the further one moves from this core, perhaps as a result of race, class, sexuality, and other social differences, the more “backward” one becomes. While a useful way to rationalize the West’s violent expansion, I suggest that a Newtonian model serves as an inaccurate effort to “[tame] the challenge that the inherent spatiality the world presents.”\textsuperscript{76} The interpretation and expansion of these laws guardrail the complicated and messy connections between people, place, space, and time. I am struck by the ways Newtonian laws appear in popular conversation surrounding the rebuilding of New Orleans immediately following Katrina.

\textsuperscript{76} Doreen Massey, \textit{For Space} (Sage Publishing, 2005), 7.
A Quantum Disruption

Quantum physics began as an “act of desperation” – an extemporaneous attempt to make sense of research data that did not fit into the rules outlined by classical Newtonian physics.\(^7\)

Despite this anxious start, the theoretical and experimental interventions of individuals like Marie Curie, August Piccard, Werner Heisenberg, Wolfgang Pauli, Neils Bohr, and many more presented a fundamental reworking of the universe. It is notable how fervently these foundational theorists worked to secret their own paradigm changing work. This reticence, I would suggest, arose as a product of discursive friction. Many of these thinkers quickly realized the core findings of quantum physics, the results of their own laborious experiments and thinking, fundamentally refused the classical model, which had staked claim to the world since the 17th century. Quantum physics did not, importantly, arrive *after* classical physics had been debunked. The thinkers that are placed at the core of its conception did not set out to challenge the classical model of the world. I am trying to refuse the one-after-the-other logic that could shape this analysis. It is an important refusal because the overlap of quantum and Newtonian physics produces the complex movement that I am working to address. It is, I think, the fact that quantum mechanics actively refutes the classical model of the world while simultaneously existing within it that makes it such a useful tool for this analysis. Nonlinear mobility, as a framework, simultaneously refuses, but nonetheless exists within, the constraints of modernity.

In the discussion that follows, I work to connect the classical-quantum enmeshment to the uninhabitable-inhabited Katrina geographies of New Orleans, Louisiana. I am intrigued by the ways quantum physics has come to be recognized as a fundamental epistemological and

\(^7\) Max Planck, *Max Planck to R.W. Wood*, 1931. Letter. From *Classical and Geometrical Theory of Chemical and Phase Thermodynamics*
ontological disruption, which is to say it is situated as a departure from Newtonian physics. I suggest that the socio-cultural devastation experienced by black citizens during and after Hurricane Katrina is its own type of discursive intervention. Similar to the ways quantum physics refused the Newtonian version of the world, the experiences and movements of Hurricane Katrina survivors are an important break from colonial logics of linear movement. Interestingly, the implications of these movements have not been taken up as an opportunity to critique or refuse these logics. Instead, they have been transformed into an overarching narrative of progress that leads toward eventual economic rejuvenation—even though this rejuvenation has not come to fruition. In paying attention to the narratives of progress that appear in local news sources covering the storm’s devastation, I work to make sense of the ways the quantum movements of Hurricane Katrina survivors has been cast within a classical framework. More specifically, the complex quantum geographies Katrina survivors’ inhabited—radical motions and mobilities—were inappropriately framed through a Newtonian lens.

The following discussion pays particular attention to the appearance of Newtonian narratives in *The Times-Picayune* published in United States in the days immediately following Hurricane Katrina’s landfall. I follow this by tracking images of survivors trapped on roofs in the days following the storm and think about how these representations can be read as quantum jumps. I argue that the discursive media reaction to the people on rooftops is predicted on linear classical movement towards black death or disappearance; this linearity, that acts like a prediction, was refuted by the presence (survival) of those people who were spotted on the roofs of their homes. While black people were certainly not the only survivors of hurricane Katrina to take shelter on their roofs following the storm, there was a marked popularity of images depicting black people who desperately sought assistance. I work to intervene in the circulation
of these images and repurpose the shock and surprise that these images elicit by enjoining these strategies of survival with a quantum moment of movement. This analysis is an effort to highlight the ways in which the movements of Hurricane Katrina’s survivors points to a new framework for confronting colonial matters.

**Encountering Coloniality in New Orleans**

In 2006, *The Times-Picayune* was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in the Public Service category for its coverage of Hurricane Katrina. The Pulitzer Prize Board heralded the paper for “its heroic, multi-faceted coverage” of the storm.\(^{78}\) The analysis that follows relies on the “Hurricane Katrina Archive,” which houses copies of the paper from August 29, 2005 – November 9, 2005.\(^{79}\) Importantly, my critiques are not of the paper, specific storylines, or the journalists, per se. Instead, I read *The Times-Picayune* archive as a focused and concise textual window to think through, and trouble, the overarching Newtonian knowledge systems described above. I will explore the coverage of Katrina and post-Katrina activities and consider how the narratives rely on Newton’s three laws of motion. The Newtonian framing forecloses the stark critique articulated by many Hurricane Katrina survivors.

Before I begin this analysis, it is important to briefly outline how New Orleans is, spatially, a particularly potent container of colonial matters, which, as a result, made particular residents of New Orleans exceedingly vulnerable to the destructive forces of Hurricane Katrina. Founded in 1718, New Orleans sits at the intersection of three bodies of water, and its original

---


settlement, the French Quarter, is situated on the highest ground in the area.⁸⁰ As a prime trading point, the French Quarter quickly expanded into a bustling city. As the population grew, homes were constructed further from the city-center with many residences built below sea level.⁸¹ The expansion of the city, and in particular the allocation of residents and residential homes throughout the city, exemplify the relationship between mapping and coloniality. Said differently, the mapping of the residential areas of the city assured that valuable bodies would have good land and unvalued bodies would have bad land. Since the city’s inception the housing that the socially vulnerable New Orleans populations could access “was invariably located in the most undesirable areas.”⁸² In an area sitting precariously amongst water, these undesirable areas are particularly vulnerable to floods. As residences stretched further and further away from the city’s economic center, employment opportunities became increasingly tenuous, with limited access to a high quality education, and a cyclical process of dispossession continued shape the spaces poor and racialized communities inhabited.

Although my focus here is on the USA, other global black and poor geographies reveal the pattern of pushing racialized communities to unsafe or vulnerable areas, which speaks to longstanding racial segregations. The organization of race by particular location or neighborhood is not unique to New Orleans, and has played a role in the racialization of black peoples throughout the United States. In thinking on the political processes that separated the white indentured servant from the black slave and the black slave from free blacks, Dorothy Roberts writes “[b]y the early 1800s, Northern states tried to keep free blacks from their borders and

---

⁸¹ Ibid.
⁸² Ibid.
restricted those who lived their to distinct neighborhoods.”83 Despite the narrative of the free and inclusive North, systems of race-based community formation were enforced in order to manage the movement of free black peoples whose mobility was not seemingly controlled by slavery. Certainly, race is not the only cause for this geographic segregation, but it does provide a useful colonial thread that demonstrates how racial histories inform geographic patterns in the past and present. In this system of organization lurks the invention race. Roberts argues that by 1700 “Africans were treated as a distinctly different kind of slave.”84

Despite the previous similarities between white indentured servants and African slaves the landscape of bondage changed greatly following Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676. Bacon’s Rebellion was a project of solidarity between black and white men who were united in their desire to expand into Indian territories. Roberts argues that, “after Bacon’s Rebellion and similar revolts, it was imperative for European landowners to prevent future interracial solidarity.”85 The eventual vehicle for this disruption was race. Slowly ratified through legislative measures designed to “differentiate the status of blacks and whites” race became a clear marker of social identity that licensed social, political, and economic forms of inequality that were and remain implicit to spatial organization.86 This logic appears in the layout of residences in New Orleans: the city’s most socially vulnerable residents were living in that were hit hardest by the storm.

85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., 9


What these maps make clear is that Hurricane Katrina impacted the entire region— and thus a range of different racial communities— but also that those who were hardest hit were black, poor, and especially vulnerable to environmental hazards.  

To summarize, it is no coincidence that marginalized individuals lived in the areas that were more susceptible to the rising floodwaters, and the logics that ordained their location finds their place with those that fostered chattel slavery. In this way, the precarious positions of those most heavily impacted by Hurricane Katrina are foretold by this previous arrangement. If, in a Newtonian model, time simply moves forward and is disconnected from space and place then these organizations do not rework or change. If, in the past, the most vulnerable are marked by

---

their location in the city then the present will be the same, which, as a result, predicts black death in a seemingly new way. This connection highlights the precarious relationship between black peoples and colonial conceptions of space, place, and time, and how an epic event like Hurricane Katrina simply made very visible the encounters amongst race and geography that impact racialized communities. Thinking through the ways these encounters were read through a Newtonian lens that could not consider the complexity of the confrontation, between the non-linear movements of black life and the seemingly linear movements of racial order, enables a critique of this framework. In effect, the complicated motions of survival make space for non-linear readings of space-place-time that refuse linear orderings, and, in the days immediately following the storm, these non-linear movements circulated at the forefront as the linear orders struggled to destabilize in the devastation.

**Newton’s First Law - A body at rest will remain at rest and a body in motion will remain in motion, unless an outside force – such as friction or a collision with another solid object – intervenes.**

In the days following the storm a number of New Orleans residents committed to staying in their homes, but by the early days of September the city’s Mayor instructed many of these residents to vacate. One article, written by Brett Anderson and Jeff Duncan, provides useful insights into these evacuations. Published on Thursday, September 8, the article titled “Rescuers face fight from those who won’t leave” provides a snapshot of the conversations that took place. Anderson and Duncan set the terms of these encounters writing that “[s]oldiers in Humvees and military transport vehicles, boat-towing wildlife officers and law enforcement from across the
country” were tasked with evacuations. In addition to a constant barrage of visits by “hodgepodge” crews “of armed officers” one pair of residents reported that “a helicopter hovered over their house as many as eight times a day” after they were discovered in their home. Many evacuation personnel turned to Mayor Nagin’s evacuation order to legitimize the movement of residents. In the article one officer argues, “‘[t]he problem is the mayor of your town has said you have to leave.’” For many residents, this rational was not enough. Rita Moragne, who had lived in her New Orleans home for 87 years, argued “‘to hell with the mayor” and added “‘[w]hy do I gotta leave? I don’t have nowhere to go.’” The events depicted in this article bring to life Newton’s first law of motion. In this case the bodies at rest are the New Orleans residents who resisted evacuation, and the force acting upon them was the military and police officials sent to urge them out of their homes. The cause and effect of Newton’s law is amplified by an article and image that spans the entire above the fold section of the September 9 newspaper. The headline reads: “After hell, high water holdouts pried loose.” Putting these two articles in conversation tightens a clear thread of causation. The citizens not leaving their homes will be found by military and police personnel and then spurred into motion. It seems an incredibly simple story, but what else, does this moment offer? I turn my attention first to the dichotomy between the caption of the September 9 image and my visual analysis of the photograph.

---

90 Anderson and Duncan, “Rescuers Face Fight From Those Who Wont Leave”
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
The central person in this image is an older black man, staring directly at the camera, with a gaze that seems to refuse the curated and comfortable tone that the caption implies. The sleeves of Silas Walker’s white sweater are brown perhaps darkened by his sweat, rising floodwaters, and the dirt he may have rested on. Nonetheless, his gaze is sharp and direct. He looks back at the

94 Ibid.
home he has left, and his back faces the military personnel and other residents who ride in the truck with him. The use of the word “left” implies a voluntary journey, but Walker’s posture does not communicate this attitude. A quick search outside of the archive finds a short piece featuring a brief comment by Walker that reveals he would have preferred to stay in place. The dissonance between the caption, photo, and Walker’s personal comments disrupts the simplicity of the cause and effect movement that is outlined by the sequence of articles. I acknowledge that the author’s project may have been to simply report on the difficulties after the storm; what I am arguing, however, is that the articles together construct a narrative of linear movement away from danger that relies on Newton’s first law, and that, as a result, elides the complicated critique offered by the residents who were being evacuated. Neither Rita Moragne nor Silas Walker cared that a governing authority had ordered them to evacuate their homes, and this refusal, articulated through their lack of movement, points to a broader critique of the government and nation.

Newton’s Second Law - The greater the force applied to an object, the greater the rate of acceleration.

On November 2, 2005, a little over a month after Hurricane Katrina had officially dissipated, The Times-Picayune published an article titled “N.O. rebuilding to highlight conference.” The article details a three-day land-use conference where experts in the fields of “planning, development and economics” would weigh in on how to rebuild the destroyed city. The conference began on November 2, 2005, and was organized by the Urban Land Institute. Despite the billion-dollar price tag, if measuring only property damage, and the more than a

---

97 Ibid.
thousand lives lost to the storm, the timeline (three days) for this brainstorming conference is remarkably short. Over the course of three days a total of “six sessions” were allocated to “deal specifically with Katrina-related concerns” and “a large advisory panel” was sent to “tour the city and meet with residents.” Those gathered for the conference “volunteered to advise” the state committee tasked to “Bring New Orleans Back” and put together “an overall master plan for the city by December.” Noticeably, “unlike other disaster areas members have helped rebuild, this group is under great pressure to work fast.” Hurricane Katrina is just one topic of conversation for conference participants who have a “keen interest in the rebuilding challenges facing the region,” but will also have the opportunity to take part in other sessions and conversations. Nonetheless, those in attendance “seize[d] the opportunity” to discuss ways to rebuild. It is of course understandable that during a period when thousands of people were suddenly homeless there is a push to develop housing solutions; but, in this instance, the great force of Hurricane Katrina is met with three days of discussion. A massive force garners a rapidly accelerated response. Newton’s second law is here.

It could be argued that this push to quickly rebuild—or respond—occurred because a it had been a little over a month since the storm, and that the focus on rebuilding was an effort to provide a sense of security to those who were impacted. I am not sure that this is an entirely accurate claim. Looking at The Times-Picayune adverts published on August 30, one day after

98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Interestingly, a push to rationalize this using a corrective to homelessness must ignore the country’s ongoing homelessness that goes ignored or inadequately addressed.
the storm hit New Orleans, there are full-page advertisements for State Farm and All State Insurance.

The State Farm advertisement reads “Hurricane Katrina has caused extensive property damage, and State Farm® agents and catastrophe team members will help you recover.”

The Allstate advert assures that “The Allstate Catastrophe Team is here to help.” Each advertisement instructs the reader to call or, in the case of the State Farm advert, visit the website to make a claim. These advertisements are placed alongside images of destroyed homes, an inaccessible highway, and one article warning “now power for a month is possible.”
How, with sweeping power outages and the inability to access life sustaining goods and services, were those devastated by the storm supposed to contact anyone—let alone their insurance provider? Instead of being supportive and caring, these advertisements read as insensitive and wholly unaware of the reality of the conditions. The advertisements produce a linear narrative in two ways. One, there is a linear expectation of communication. Seemingly, the viewer is able to easily access their phone or computer as if these tools are in safe, accessible, and pre-identified places. Implicit in these narratives is an ordered version of space-place-time that measures to the scale of the orderly home. The State Farm advertisement is written in the imperative—the action should happen immediately, but in order for this to happen the tools to communicate must also...
be immediately available. This accelerated response is only possible if the space is orderly. There is no hint that the reader may have to search for their phone. Call now, right away, even as you are reading this you are not performing this movement fast enough. Two, in encouraging folks to immediately begin to rebuild they leave no room for any of those affected to process the impact of what they have experienced. I am certainly not suggesting that living in damaged home is the ideal response; however, I am arguing that the notion of immediately rebuilding also suggests an impetus to quickly forget or erase the impact of the storm. Once the home is restored the catastrophe can be forgotten. For those who are able to access their phones and are able to move forward they are already out of step—out of time. They are already later in calling than they should have been. For those who are not able to access their phones they are Other to those who are able to call.

I have suggested that one critical aspect of colonial movement is the production of linear progress. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina this investment in progress appeared in the push to rebuild the devastated city. This accelerated response served to produce the event as a single instance of environmental devastation that could be addressed with the rebuilding of city infrastructure and damaged levees. What both of these responses fail to take into account is Katrina was not the first time that New Orleans had dramatically flooded. In 1849 a breach of Sauve’s Crevasse “inundated nearly a fourth of the land that flooded during Katrina. Most of this land in Jefferson County was agricultural or underdeveloped at the time, but when the floodwaters reached the city, it began flooding homes at a depth of about six feet.”\textsuperscript{104} When we analyze the desire to rebuild while keeping in Sauve’s Crevasse we can see how this accelerated,

seemingly linear, response actually pulls on a saga of non-linear labor in New Orleans. Rollings writes:

Crevasses in the 1800s were a fairly common event, but were mostly small-scale – flooding agricultural land and not much else. This is because levees in the New Orleans area were still maintained by private, riverside landowners who were almost entirely plantation owners. And most of the plantations in Louisiana’s cotton, sugar, and indigo kingdoms, were maintained by slaves of West African, Caribbean and (to a much smaller degree) Native American descent.105

This accelerated response leaves little room for engaging with the ways in which New Orleans’s efforts to cordon off and control water have relied on the labor of racialized peoples. Additionally, it reifies the seeming benevolence and support of the state without producing a critique of the state systems and policies that have facilitated the destruction. Speedy state intervention, whether it’s removing inhabitants or rebuilding neighborhoods, becomes the natural and appropriate response to chaos even as those interventions are intimately connected to other processes that have facilitated the ‘current’ moment of calamity.

**Newton’s Third Law - For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction**

Military and police personnel were intent on suppressing the wave of “looting” that rose in the city in the aftermath of the hurricane.106 This response took place despite the fact that many New Orleanians lacked access to basic supplies, electricity, or transportation. As images of broken storefronts made their way into national news, a jail was one of the first organizations to

---

105 Ibid., 32
106 In the media coverage that took place following the Hurricane only particular peoples were recognized as looters while others were presented as taking items that were necessary for their survival. To be more forthright, the survival tactics of black residents were often presented as looting while white residents were not. Not only do these differences highlight racialized expectations of crime, but they also narrate a politic of whose survival we encourage/acknowledge. See: Henry A. Giroux, “Reading Hurricane Katrina: Race, Class, and the Biopolitics of Disposability,” *College Literature* (2006), 176-177.
be reestablished in the city. Ed Anderson, Michael Peristein, and Robert Travis Scott describe the responsive measures in a September 1 article titled “‘We Will Do What It Takes to Restore Law and Order.’” The article quotes then Governor Kathleen Blanco who portended the deployment of “an infusion of 200 State Police troopers and 350 Louisiana national guard troops” who would serve in addition to the “200 state troopers assigned to riot control and SWAT Units [that would] be working with New Orleans Police Department to reduce looting.” With nearly 800 military and police personnel on site, this display of force is presented as an appropriate response. An article published on August 30 paints the scene that warrants these tactics. While covering the scene at a Wal-Mart, Mike Peristein and Brian Thevenot report that “many people carried out food and essential supplies, others cleared out jewelry racks.” Amongst the scramble “another man rolled a mechanized pallet stacked six feed high with cases of vodka and whiskey. Perched atop the stack was a bewildered toddler.” Things descended into such chaos that “some officers joined in taking whatever they could.”

In this scenario violence certainly sits as a potential amongst the bedlam, but more threatening than that is the apparent moral descent of the officials who were charged with reinforcing order. Hurricane Katrina destroyed homes, and it also washed away the loose social structures that attempt to make order of a chaotic world. If everyone is lawless then who can appropriately mete out punishment? The scene of police officers participating in chaos easily

109 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
reveals the blurry line between our apparent “moral compasses” and those who are positioned as “the lawless other.” The tenuous nature of these organizational structures—law and lawlessness—is highlighted by the distinction between which items are appropriate to take. Commenting on the salvaging of non-perishable items such as electronics and tennis shoes, then State Representative Arthur Morrel said “they don’t need that for survival.” Suddenly, there are appropriate items to take, but the terms of survival seem rather bare. This is to say, that, for some, the ‘necessities’ of life often exclude items that enable happiness and joy and that are seemingly appropriate for others, particularly others of higher classes, to access. Speaking at the Miami Book Fair International in 2007 Nikki Giovanni reminds:

[D]on’t tell me about some tennis shoes, why is it that poor kids have to wear Keds and everybody else can wear Michael Jordan’s… what kind of person would I be that every kid has a bike and the black kids have to have skates. Every kid has a leather jacket and the black kid has to have cloth.

Survival then, in the context of the hurricane or otherwise, takes on different forms that are recognized as good/bad or right/wrong depending on how an individual or community navigates colonial matters, and depending on how willing we are to support life. For marginalized peoples, whose misery is predicted and produced by systems of dispossession, instances of happiness refute those narratives and, as a result, engender disdain. When we do not expect particular people to live we certainly do not expect them to craft moments of celebration.

113 Anderson, Peristein, and Travis Scott, “‘We Will Do What it Takes to Restore Law and Order.’”
Those hit hardest by the storm, in many ways, enacted everyday practices of survival given that they confronted the high rates of poverty and violence in the city long before August 29, 2005. Sarah Kaufman writes:

The catastrophic results of the hurricane could have focused attention on these social causes of violence and mass incarceration, but instead the public was served with images that emphasized individual responsibility and individual failure. While the circumstances of a post-apocalyptic city might have driven any of us to violence, only some of us would be publicly admonished as a part of a band of irresponsible citizens of violent criminals.

The aggressive response to a horde of negligent and lazy—but still somehow violent and aggressive—group of lower class black people is not unfamiliar. Importantly, I am not arguing that there were no instances of violence that took place as the city began to emerge from the storm. Residents of the area as well as military and police attest to this reality. However, I am suggesting that the military and police response to the ‘looting’ of local stores was a reaction not simply to the loss of property and/or lawlessness. Instead, what these moments also reveal, is the mobility of a group of people who were now able to access the commercial and consumer goods that had been denied to them due to various forms of social and economic restriction and other inequities. Perhaps more importantly, when we are invested in the idea that justice is enacted equally by unbiased and goodwill actors then instances where this narrative is disrupted critiques the systems that produce them. The hurricane flooded the seeming stability of the naturalized military/police state, and it was this threat that I think more acutely became the concern that necessitated increased military and police response. However, this response could not be meted against those military/police individuals who were working outside of the ‘law’ as that would

---

115 I want to be careful here, and also acknowledge the reality that black New Orleanians have a rich cultural history outside of the oft cited statistics of violence, poverty, and crime. See: Katherine McKittrick, “Mathematics Black Life,” *The Black Scholar* (2014)

116 Kaufman, “The Criminalization of New Orleanians in Katrina’s Wake,”
further destabilize the rationality of their control. Instead of directing this response toward those systems of inequality, the idea of the black looter became the vehicle through which to reassert control. In this way, the actions that disrupted the police and military state (i.e. the ineffectiveness of the police and military state to serve or protect) were met with the reaction of increased military response in order to recreate order. The idea of the black looter as the appropriate receptacle for this order is produced out of the specific intersections of expectations of black crime that are mediated through the southern urban landscape. Which is to say, we expect black criminality in the space of particular wards and neighborhoods in New Orleans.\footnote{117}

What I am suggesting here is that Newton’s third law appears not in opposition to black criminality, but actually in reaction to the destabilization of the order of the police/military state. This destabilization was enacted by the chaos of Hurricane Katrina. As a result, the equal and opposite reaction was the increased presence of military personally to restore order. Seemingly, Katrina’s chaos is met with the order of increased military presence, but, in the event that this action cannot be performed directly on the cause (the Hurricane), the appropriate site of response becomes the mythical black criminal, which is produced through repeated narratives of looting.

**Fanonian Context for all Three Laws**

What, then, is the purpose of these responses—the inattention to residents hesitant to evacuate, the refusal to sit with, acknowledge, and think through the chaotic mess that New Orleans, and the move to police those remaining who took items from stores? Frantz Fanon...
provides a useful point of discussion in his 1963 text *The Wretched of the Earth*. Thinking through the processes of decolonization and its relationship to violence he writes:

The masses battle with the same poverty, wrestle with the same age-old gestures, and delineate what we could call the geography of hunger with their shrunken bellies. A world of underdevelopment, a world of poverty and inhumanity. But also a world without doctors, without engineers, without administrators.\(^{118}\)

While Fanon uses this commentary to point to the costs of decolonization in Algeria, he has informed my own analysis of the political and social reaction to Hurricane Katrina. In the above quotation, Fanon paints a picture of “the underdeveloped regions,” and I am struck by how closely he also describes—or anticipates—the hardest hit areas of New Orleans immediately following the storm.\(^{119}\) Indeed, there are areas of New Orleans that remain uninhabited more than ten years later. In the days immediately following the storm the United States was forced to confront the (false) reality of its “opulence.”\(^{120}\) Put another way, the United States is understood as a “world leader” that thrives in and epitomizes the promises of a “capitalist system,” and Hurricane Katrina reminded the world of the fragility of that title. So, Hurricane Katrina provided a glimpse behind the United States’ imperial curtain to expose a vulnerable, disorganized, deeply racialized and inequitable nation. Further, Hurricane Katrina refused the post-racial narrative that has become so popularly tied to the United States’ chronicle of social progress. From the coverage of looters to the geographical allocation of those who were hit hardest by the storm, it quickly became clear that the terms of engagement in the US—how the public sees, responses, and reacts to crises—still very much rely on race. Hurricane Katrina did not allow these conditions to suddenly manifest; rather, the storm exposed deeply divisive racial

\(^{119}\) Ibid.  
\(^{120}\) Ibid.
histories and contemporary struggles around race, poverty, location, and survival. Hurricane Katrina made these inequitable social processes impossible to conceal. Analyzing these moments through Fanon highlights the geographic stakes. When country making is implicit with processes of violence then violence becomes part of the fabric of the nation. Therefore, the work of resistance must constantly encounter this violence and even as it appears in a variety of forms. This troubles Newton’s three laws because they are seemingly produced within a neutral context that is free of these violent encounters. Fanon offers a reminder of the ways Enlightenment knowledge is produced within this violent context, which necessarily impacts the knowledge that is produced.

With this in mind, I am arguing that a classical model of physics, and its extrapolation into our social, political, and economic models, forecloses a nuanced reading of the experiences of individuals who challenge these simplistic interpretations. This particular model attempts to construct “political stability and a peaceful social climate” that is “fed on the blood of slaves, and owes its very existence to the soil and subsoil of the underdeveloped world.” Together, the Newtonian responses and reactions to the Katrina crisis unveiled a moment of extreme discursive friction where the popular discourses surrounding the United States were fiercely disrupted. While Newtonian logics works to make order in this highlighted moments of chaos (which is to say that chaos is happening all of the time) attention to these narratives highlight the ways they require particular types of linear movement (or an investment in controlling seemingly non-linear movement) to exist. While I use the past tense here I do not think this disruption has ever stopped nor do I think that this disruption was necessarily a moment of origin. To return to a past-to-present logic would also be a return to Newton’s framework, and that is fervently what I

121 Ibid.
am working to complicate here. Despite attempts to read this project as complete, Fanon and the Hurricane remind us of the desperation to move towards, rather than the finality of, resolved closure. This movement disrupts the idea of a finished colonial project, and highlights the ways these logics continue to work and evolve. In the section that follows I meet this act of desperation with another in an effort to analyze the movement of Hurricane Katrina survivors in quantum ways that bring to light our confrontations with colonial matters.

A Quantum Interpretation

A quantum model of motion makes room for the complicated and unpredictable interactions that shape our world, but in what additional ways does a classical interpretation fall short? Most useful to this analysis is the intervention that Max Born made regarding determinism. In this section, I argue that a less linear interpretation of the movement that took place during Hurricane Katrina opens up a new analytical approach to the storm. This approach makes room to imagine the crises in relation to a different future. Importantly, within Newton’s model, one understands not only the full conditions of the present, but one can also assert that “if the present state of any system and the forces acting upon it are known, then what happens to it in the future is already determined.” Quantum physics complicates this particular condition. In this vein, a quantum model refuses the distancing of past and present that makes possible the less than nuanced readings of the Hurricane Katrina disaster that I discussed previously in this chapter. I have tried to think through the ways the racial and geographic arrangement of New Orleans predicted black death long before Hurricane Katrina impacted the city. Attempts to

---

122 Ibid., 60.
123 Kumar, Quantum
restore order in the aftermath of the storm are also attempts to recreate linear movement that can support the idea of a nation that is in progress. These accounts rely on a Newtonian version of space that is isolated from its connection to place and time and the peoples who move through it. This version of space cannot contain the relational connections that string ‘past’ events with the present and the future, which allows crisis to be presented in isolation of its connected events. This isolation allows for state intervention that, if placed in the context of the overall story of the city, may call for destabilizing state power and control. When these Newtonian logics are stretched by a moment of environmental chaos they respond by attempting to recreate the order that they seemingly produce. Crucial to the successful execution and adoption of Newtonian order is the ability to appear static while acting fluidly – i.e. the threat to the military/police state is righted not by destabilizing the state but by taking on the stereotype of the black criminal. This is an incredibly adaptive movement that appears linear in the context of other linear logics. In addition, this motion relies on unoccupied Newtonian space where inflexible bodies navigate uncomplicated terrain. In opposition to these restrictions, I argue that the non-linear movements of black survival push at and refuse these constricting logics in order to make room for black life. In addition, they produce a different organizational structure where self cannot be understood outside of the arrangements of space-place-time.

To unpack these points I turn to an image of six black New Orleans residents who were trapped on their roofs as they waited for rescue after the storm.125 I argue that these images circulated virally primarily because the movement, and perhaps more specifically the survival, of these individuals refuses Newton’s predictive analysis. Indeed, I am claiming these images had a

---

125 I have chosen not to include the image in this project. Its circulation in the media immediately following the tragedy marked a repeated surprise at the possibility of black life. I am not interested in making room for that here, and, instead, hope that an alternative discussion of the image may allow for a different interpretation.
meaningful impact precisely *because* Newton’s predictive model anticipated, or required, the death of these survivors, but the images confirm the reality of life.

In an attempt to model the distribution of spectral energy that radiated in a blackbody Max Planck introduced the quantum on Friday, December 14, 1900. When Albert Einstein submitted a set of four papers in March 1905 it was clear that Planck’s quantum was not something he could “get rid of.” As the physicist worked to make sense of the quantum, the atom, and the relationship between the two, one question that quickly developed was how did this new non-Newtonian model account for the movement of particles in an atom, and, in particular what occurred when two atoms collided. It is here that Born’s intervention makes a crucial intervention. As Born worked to combine the wave and particle theories of atomic motion he found that “probability lay at the heart of wave mechanics and quantum reality.” Newtonian physics suggests that following any encounter between two particles it is possible to “determine exactly” the location of the particles after collisions. Instead, Born argued that it is only possible to describe the *probability* of a particular location. Born’s function “does not give the actual position of an electron, only the probability, the odds that it will be found here rather than there… The electron could be found at X, Y, or somewhere else.” Significantly, the moment of ‘before’ impact is not mechanically tied to a predictable moment of ‘after’ impact. Instead, what comes to the forefront is the moment of encounter and the threaded relationship

126 Kumar, *Quantum*
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid., 219
between the before and after. As a result, an organizational structure of a past, present, and future as distinct categories is reduced to something less neat – something rather messy connects the in between. Glissant writes:

Yes, we are only just barely beginning to conceive of this immense friction. The more it works in favor of an oppressive order, the more it calls forth disorder as well. The more it produces exclusion, the more it generates attraction. It standardizes – but at every node of Relation we will find callouses of Resistance. Relation is learning more and more to go beyond judgments into the unexpected dark of art’s upsurgings. Its beauty springs from the stable and the unstable, from the deviance of many particular poetics and clairvoyance of a relational poetics. The more things it standardizes into a state of lethargy, the more rebellious consciousness it arouses.¹³¹

There is encounter and the possibility—not the anticipatory predictability—of what comes next. Significantly, the encounter does shape what follows, but what follows is not determinable.

Following Born’s analysis, I would like to consider the quantum collision between Hurricane Katrina and the individuals we see on the roof. A Newtonian analysis of this movement would predict death, and in this image that prediction is refused. What are the conditions of this negotiation? As the mass media served numerous reminders of the lack of resources available to those unable to evacuate, and as images of a flooded and destroyed city began to circulate, the frame of reference for this image, and the other images like it, came to reveal increasing desperation. In addition, the cultural reference point for the poor black inhabitants of New Orleans painted a picture of an uneducated group who could barely survive in their own neighborhoods let alone in the face of such insurmountable devastation. The public images of the storm were undeniably those of black anguish. Melissa Harris-Perry reminds us in her 2011 text that “almost exclusively, it was the suffering of black people that was broadcast to

¹³¹ Glissant, “The Relative and Chaos,” 138-139
the national viewing audience." In the face of these overwhelming forces, the fate of black New Orleanians seemed pre-determined. They were not supposed to survive.

It is the refutation of the conclusive narrative of death that, I think, caused this particular image to become representative of the disaster. More specifically, I think this image discloses the expectation of black death. I do not interpret this image and its circulation as discursive texts that support humanitarian attention to the crisis; instead, I read these images as invoking surprise and perhaps even spectacle. This image is significant precisely because it refuses what is expected. To this end, I suggest that the movements of this group parallels a quantum jump, which is the unpredictable movement of an electron from one quantum level to another as the result of gaining or releasing a quantum. In this instance, the black people signaling for help on their roofs encountered the ‘energy’ of Hurricane Katrina and rising flood waters brought on by failed levees. What they and others like them also encountered was a particular condition of vulnerability as a result of the histories of segregation and dispossession that were not left in the past, were increasingly visible in the present, and will surely move into the future. In the same way the quantum jump could not fit into the Newtonian model of physics, the movement of these individuals could not fit into a logical predication of survival. And, yet, in both instances, movement occurred. Using this rule of quantum mechanics, life, death, and other options in between become possibilities for these survivors. These logics do not necessarily predict black death in a linear fashion. They make room for the possibility of more complex navigations, which include navigating and surviving within a landscape filled with colonial matters.

I have suggested that Newton’s model of the world cannot accurately account for the complicated and chaotic movements of black people, and I have worked to outline the ways in which this model of the world supports an ideal of linear progress that is usefully debunked by a quantum interpretation. Importantly, I am not arguing that a quantum model of motion should replace a Newtonian version. This logic, too, relies on the before and after. Instead, I suggest that the development of quantum mechanics necessarily took place within a Newtonian framework and this simultaneity highlights how chaotic movement is produced through, not as a result, of the restrictions of colonial order. This is an ongoing process that is necessarily incomplete. The drive for economic progress and the restoration of order serve to collapse these critiques into narratives that more comfortably fit into a Newtonian worldview. In a very real sense, it is a confrontation with geography that brought these quantum movements to life. Paying close attention to popular news coverage of Hurricane Katrina I outlined the ways in which Newton’s Three Laws produce a interpretative framework that cannot contain, and as a result fails to address, the complex responses to modernity that black mobility and, perhaps more importantly, black life provides.
Chapter 3

My Daddy Alabama, My Ma Louisiana

“Black dust in orbit / cascades down like a parachute / bricks on my shoulders this gravity hurts when you know the truth / I’m pulling my weight in gold.”

- Gallant

Navigating quantum geographies requires a tumultuous mobility. Shaped by constant collisions with colonial particles, this mobility is characterized by pivots, restarts, conjunctions, and exclamations that refuse the neatly ordered Newtonian landscape that I previously explored. Furthering my use of quantum mechanics, the analysis that follows connects Brownian Motion (the random movement of particles suspended in fluid) to Édouard Glissant’s chaos-monde (a hidden non-deterministic relation) in order to think purposefully on W.E.B Du Bois’s Souls of Black Folks. In particular, I analyze Du Bois’s conceptualization of double consciousness in order to read double conscious as a type of mobility that is mediated, in particular, through encounters with the colonial landscape. I argue that Du Bois develops land, and in particular the space-place-time of the antebellum South, as a pivotal character and geography that serves an integral role in the lives of black Americans. I thus think through the ways Du Bois engages with land as both an object and a subject and in so doing recreates double consciousness through the land. I suggest, then, that in order to move through the complicated landscapes of his text, double consciousness can be interpreted as a form of mobility. Thinking of this mobility within the

---

context of Brownian Motion and Glissant’s *chaos-monde* encourages a further critique of the
directional and ordered linear logics that shape our world. Overall, I argue that double
consciousness offers us not only a psychological framework for engaging the black experience,
but also a way to think through black mobility.

**Glissant and Brownian Motion**

Now that a nonlinear model of mobility has been presented what other tools are available
to think through this concept? In the chapter titled “Dictate, Decree” of *Poetics of Relations*
Édouard Glissant unpacks a complicated model of relationality that centers on the concept of
*chaos-monde*. He writes:

> The *chaos-monde* is only disorder if one assumes there to be an order whose full force
> poetics is not prepared to reveal (poetics is not science). The ambition of poetics, rather,
> is to safeguard the energy of the order. The aesthetics of the universe assumed
> preestablished norms; the aesthetics of *chaos-monde* is the impassioned illustration and
> refutation of these. Chaos is not devoid of norms but these neither constitute a goal nor
> govern a method there. *Chaos-monde* is neither fusion nor confusion; it acknowledges
> neither the uniform blend – a ravenous integration – nor muddled nothingness. Chaos is
> not “chaotic.” But its hidden order does not presuppose hierarchies or pre-cellencies –
> neither of chosen languages nor of prince-nations. The *chaos-monde* is not a mechanism;
> it has no keys.\(^{135}\)

In my previous chapter I worked to disrupt a Newtonian model of the world, and, in this chapter,
it is my argument that Glissant’s *chaos-monde* represents an apt model for the complex quantum
movements that cannot be accounted for in a Newtonian model. What he opens up in the above
citation is room for the unknown and the unpredictable, the uncontrollable and the unnameable,
and with these undoings he refuses the knowable Newtonian world. *Chaos-monde* is a project of
simultaneity and multiplicity and sometimes looks linearly and it sometimes looks non-linearly.
In bringing together the possibility for various complex movements, *chaos-monde* refuses a

---

\(^{135}\) Glissant, *Poetics*, 94
prescriptive expectation of any particular type of movement. If, as I have suggested, the idea of linear movement is crucial to how we produce linear knowledge then the possibility of simultaneous and conflicting movements opens up the possibility for simultaneous and conflicting knowledges that push at and refuse the assumptions, orders, and violences of progress.

As part of this, I am also suggesting that navigating this model requires a chaotic mobility. That is, in this analysis, colonialism and colonial violence fundamentally shape and reshape the knowledge systems that are used to structure the world. Crucially, while these systems make apparent order out of the organization and policing of knowable (marginalized, racialized, gendered) bodies and communities, it is my assertion that the complex mobilities of these same peoples points to the fragility of these systems. I am interested in thinking through what type of mobility is required in Glissant’s chaos-monde. As such, I turn to the particle theory called Brownian Motion. An early confirmation of the existence of particles, and therefore a confirmation of quantum mechanics, Brownian motion is a used to describe the motion of particles while in suspension.\textsuperscript{136} When attempting to track the movement of a particle in suspension the movement of the particle is erratic. This erraticism is caused by random confrontations with the molecules that make up the suspension vehicle. So, instead of resting still in the suspension liquid or gas, the particle will move irregularly throughout the material.

Crucial to this analysis is the following: “the most striking quality of Brownian Motion is probably its nowhere differentiability.” In this case, “differentiability” refers to whether or not the motion that is being tracked is smooth or unsmooth, and, more particularly, whether or not it is predictable or unpredictable. Unlike a linear version of mobility (and I am being literal here, imagine a straight line) Brownian movement is wholly unpredictable and therefore cannot be tracked linearly. At no point within Figure 6 is there a chance to predict the future location of the movement being tracked. I want to pause here to consider a quick rebuttal. As I think through this analysis in the discussion that follows, I am certainly not saying that historical processes do not shape our experiences. I am simply not as interested in an analysis that reads these processes as an act of causation. I am more interested in opening up a Brownian randomness that makes room for all the complicated ways in which these processes are navigated smartly, creatively, and painfully in order to produce black life within the context of racial violence and premature

\[137\] Ibid.
death. Layered on top of this analysis is the intervention that is the focus of the rest of this analysis. I want to think through the ways chaos-monde can appear if we consider how land requires particular types of movement. If land has also experienced the frenetic rip of colonialism then how do we navigate that experience? I use this possibility to think through the ways Du Bois produces land as object and subject in his text. I suggest that, as a result of the relationship between land and colonialism it is experienced as both subject and object, which produces a complicated mobility that reflects the twoness of the veil. It is not my intention that Brownianism or Brownian motion be taken up to rationalize static logics or conclusions about the complex motions required to navigate modernity. I want to be clear that, in this project, it serves only as a useful metaphor/descriptor/visualization, but I am not suggesting that this is where the project ends or that this is the only method of understanding these complex movements. In fact, what is most useful about this model is that it points to instability and randomness. It points to possible encounters and spills and instances where things cannot be contained even as we try to contain them. As I hinted in the introduction of this project—this is not Truth. This is not a new Territory.

**Du Bois and Land**

Du Bois is wary of land. Or perhaps he is weary of it. Or perhaps his insights bring forth a combination of both wariness and weariness. This dichotomy parallels the way Du Bois presents land as both subject and object throughout *The Souls of Black Folks*. In this text, Du Bois presents land as both object and subject. He simultaneously recognizes land as a tool of subjugation, and he presents it as an active agent in processes of oppression. He engages this complicated narrative because he uses personification to develop the land as a character. In so doing, he is able to give the land personality, which is marked by physical infrastructure or
failing crops or war. As movement facilitates encounters with land it highlights the ways in which land performs a particular version of identity, which, similar to that of marginalized peoples, requires the merging and contestation of experience, identity, and subjectivity. Within this overarching project, he thinks on the ways systems that objectify land also impact, shape, and arrange people. In combining these two elements or, at the very least, in presenting land in one text in these two seemingly divergent ways, Du Bois produces land as a powerful character in his book. In taking up land as a character he engages with it in dynamic ways that allow him to trace the intimate relationships between land and people. Suddenly, land is something that can be encountered in ways that one might encounter another person. As a result, it is impossible to move through space impervious to the processes of colonialism. If land has also experienced the harsh violences of colonialism then it is impossible to navigate space without colliding with these colonial matters. In giving land this twoness Du Bois recreates double consciousness, which he defines as:

It is a peculiar sensation, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength keeps it from being torn asunder.  

Double consciousness points to moments of colonial encounter, and flags for us a complicated model of mobility. In effect, double consciousness points to the theoretical bifurcation between subject and object and the moment(s) the subject realizes they are being objectified by an onlooker. This encounter is both psychological and physical. Du Bois tells us of the “soul,” but reminds us of the site: “one dark body.” These two facets cannot be separated. Importantly, Du Bois reference to dogged strength also highlights an important element of moving through – its

---

139 Ibid.
cost. As I have mentioned earlier, moving through is a laborious movement, and the juxtaposition on dogged with strength highlights this aspect. This juxtaposition is strengthened through the use of “unreconciled strivings” and “warring ideals,” which both reference conflict and an ongoing and incomplete project. As a result, double consciousness complicates the idea of structural binaries – that something is either here or there or x and y – and shows us, through blackness, the potential for burdened relativity. It is through this framework that Du Bois crafts a complex engagement with land.

I argue that double consciousness serves both as a psychological concept and an aspect of mobility required to move through our burdened spaces. Paying particular attention to Chapter Two “On the Dawn of Freedom,” Chapter Four “On the Meaning of Progress,” and Chapter Seven “Of the Black Belt,” I explore the ways Du Bois’s presentation of land as object in response to moments of geographic crises, while his presentation of land as subject marks the ways land, through processes of containment, is implicated in systems of dispossession. Reading these presentations together makes room for the complicated reality of Glissant’s chaos-monde and, as well, requires a Brownian model of movement in order to emphasize practices of moving through.

Du Bois begins with land as object. This perspective comes through in the second chapter of his text titled “Of the Dawn of Freedom” where he traces the genealogy of the Freedman’s Bureau. This administrative body was tasked with “grappl[ing] with vast problems of race and social condition” that arose during a period of lawful black exodus from plantation spaces.\textsuperscript{140} In addition, and perhaps most crucially, this agency also governed during the aftermath following

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 16.
the initial moments of celebratory emancipation.\textsuperscript{141} Within the context of this legal and judicial intervention land becomes a static product of the nation. Du Bois highlights this via the mapping of racial prejudice and violence through the use of state names and, in particular, through his reliance on regionally dividing the country into two sections—North and South. This literary tactic, I argue, is a particular reaction to the devastating instability of the Civil War. Acknowledging the environmental, political, and social ruin that bore upon the United States during and after this period, I want to think more broadly on the instability caused by the fracturing of the knowledge scheme that was the plantation system—the geopolitical backbone of US (and other) economies. I am arguing that, as it appears in Du Bois’s text, the coagulation around the North and South is an attempt to create some sort of order that emerges within, through, and after militarized chaos (and nation-making). States become static in order to be ordered.

This chapter begins with several large questions. Military leaders ask, “What shall be done with Negroes”?\textsuperscript{142} Moving further into the text this question grows to “[t]he stream of fugitives swelled to a flood, and anxious army officers kept inquiring: ‘What must be done with the slaves, arriving almost daily? Are we to find food and shelter for women and children’”?\textsuperscript{143} The expansion of the question, from a single sentence to multiple sentences, marks the sense of growing urgency, and Du Bois’s use of the word stream evokes the uncontrollability of water which marks the critical concern: control. Importantly, these questions also point to real anxieties of space-place-time, and indicate the underlying emergency circulating just beneath the apparent question of housing and sustenance. Given the disruption of the ‘appropriate’ site for these

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 14. 
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid. 
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 15.
peoples—i.e. the plantation—the question truly being addressed here is not simply what do we do with these peoples, but where do we put them. In effect, these questions underscore the potential for, and thus anxiety about, black mobility outside of plantation spaces. They are also an attempt to make sense of this mobility within a knowledge structure that does not and cannot provide ways to affirm black life. I am arguing here that “the plantation serves as one (not the only) meaningful geographic locus through which race is made known” and that this is complicated by how military leaders show the inability to ‘place’ slaves outside of this context. In light of the disruption of the plantation space, military leaders were confronted with an inability to literally place slaves in physical locations, but, also, with an inability to place slaves within a system of knowledge that underpinned the carceral logics of the plantation. As we continue to read this chapter we can trace the ways the logics of the plantation transform, and McKittrick’s argument provides a useful metric:

The plantation evidences an uneven colonial-racial economy that, while differently articulated across time and space, legalized black servitude while simultaneously sanctioning black placelessness and constraint. In the Americas, free labour under bondage thus marked black working bodies as those ‘without’ – without legible-Eurocentric history narratives, without land or home, without ownership of self – as this system forcibly secured black peoples to the geographic mechanics of the plantation economy.145

McKittrick tells us that management of black labor is particularly important to the production of black placelessness. Therefore, I want to track the significance of labor as it pertains to the construction of mobility. I make this connection in order to argue that labor, as it is being used here and later on in Du Bois text, serves to re-signify the measurement and surveillance of black mobility.

145 Ibid., 948
Simone Browne’s discussion of branding and biometrics in Chapter Three of her text *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* helps unpack this connection. She writes:

Branding was a practice through which enslaved people were signified as commodities to be bought, sold, and traded. At the scale of the skin, the captive body was made the site of social and economic maneuver through the use of iron type. The brand, sometimes the crest of the sovereign and at other times alphanumeric characters, denoted the relation between the body and its said owner.

What this excerpt shows is that practices of racialization are intimately bound with economic structures, and these economic structures solidify power hierarchies that reinforce racial dominance. Moving with Browne’s argument, I would suggest that not only was the brand intended to tell the viewer about the slave’s status as owned commodity, but it was also designed to tell the viewer about the slave’s mobility. A commodity is not supposed to move on its own, and, when movement occurs it happens based on the decision of an owner. We see this mobility circulate in the other tools of surveillance that Brown discusses. For example, slave passes allowed slaves to move off and on the plantation to approved locations at specific times. These passes were markers of appropriate mobility. Slaves were expected to go directly to the pass and return as quickly and efficiently as possible. Browne writes “the racializing surveillance of the slave pass system was a violent regulation of black mobilities. On and off the plantation, black mobility needed to be tightly regulated in order for slave owners to maintain control.” This trend continues as Brown discusses *The Book of Negroes*. This ledger details who could and could not board boats bound for the apparent freedom of Canada, England, and Germany. For those who were able to secure certificates, or those who boarded the ships by other means, potential freedom came in the form movement. Importantly, this freedom only came after slaves

---

147 Ibid., 52.
148 Ibid., 53.
149 Ibid., 75.
were deemed free of the labor expectations of their bondage. If a slave could not prove that they were no longer tied to their owner, and therefore no longer a commodity whose mobility was therefore under the control of someone else, they were not allowed to board. The systematic monitoring of black labor, I am arguing, is always about the systematic monitoring of black mobility.

It is necessary to pay close attention to discussions of labor and mobility as they pertain to blackness in order to track the continued circulation of plantation logics. Du Bois marks labor concerns as one of the key reasons behind the programming implemented by the Freedman’s Bureau. He writes:

> And daily, too, it seemed more plain that this was no ordinary matter of temporary relief, but a national crisis; for here loomed a labor problem of vast dimensions. Masses of Negroes stood idle, or, if they worked spasmodically, were never sure of pay; and perchance they received pay, squandered the new thing thoughtlessly.\(^\text{151}\)

Du Bois use of the word crisis is particularly important here as it flags, for me, this moment of disruption in the system of plantation knowledge. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, in her text *The Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, is crucial to my analysis. In her discussion of the Californian political economy that undergirds the prison system in that state, she discusses the relationship between crisis and surplus. She first turns to Stuart Hall and Bill Schwartz who present crises as moments “when the social formation can no longer be reproduced on the basis of the pre existing system of social relations,” and she goes on to add:\(^\text{152}\)

> Crisis is not objectively bad or good; rather, it signals systematic change whose outcome is determined through struggle. Struggle, which is a politically neutral word, occurs at all

\(^{150}\) Ibid., 74.
\(^{151}\) Du Bois, *Souls*, 16
\(^{152}\) Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz, “Questions of Theory”
levels of society as people try to figure out, through trial and error, what to make of idled capacities.\textsuperscript{153} 

Reading Du Bois narrative through this lens highlights the implications of this moment of disruption. If we understand plantation logics as fundamentally supported by plantation geographies that tied black labor and mobility to plantation spaces then the movement from that space precipitates a geographic crisis. In this instance, the instability of the plantation space destabilizes the South, the North, and the Nation. This troubles notions of identity and belonging, and that, I think, is also what we see in Du Bois’s text as military commanders struggle to address questions of place.

While this may have been a moment for a new knowledge system, Wilson Gilmore reminds us that “tendencies are hard to buck” and with the transition to questions of labor we see these logics reasserted.\textsuperscript{154} Importantly, Du Bois turns to geography in an attempt to create a sense of stability. In\textit{ The Souls of Black Folk}, Du Bois responds to the uncertainty in the South by casting it as a solid mass of states connected by the thread of racial violence. In a few paragraphs Du Bois moves from Virginia to Missouri then to Tennessee and Arkansas with passing mentions of New Orleans and Kentucky in between. In the North, State names are attached to people as if they tell us something inherent about these individuals. They herald some version of freedom and change. It is individuals the likes of “Pierce of Boston” and “the crusade of the New England schoolma’am” who carry with them the potential of freedom.\textsuperscript{155} Notably, this is not a blanket valorization. Du Bois’s assessment is hesitant. On land redistribution he notes:

\begin{quote}
It had long been the more or less definitively expressed theory of the North that all the chief problems of Emancipation might be settled by establishing the slaves on the forfeited lands of their masters, - a sort of poetic justice, said some. But this poetry is
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 55
\textsuperscript{155} Du Bois, \textit{Souls}, 26 and 22
done in the solemn prose meant either wholesale confiscation of private property in the South, or vast appropriations. Now Congress had not appropriate a cent, and no sooner did the proclamations of general amnesty appear than the eight hundred thousand acres of abandoned lands in the hands of the Freedmen’s Bureau melted quickly away.¹⁵⁶

Du Bois tone is surprisingly gentle. The allocated lands evaporate from existence amongst the climate of legal inaction, and in this scene the North appears uninformed but well intentioned with its proposal. Seemingly, Du Bois remains cautiously hopeful and incredibly aware of the ways in which the North offers a specter of something transformative that is in stark contrast to the South. In addition to this juxtaposition, land is also presented as an object of trade, becoming part of various agreements, settlements, or management decisions. The dichotomy between the “unreconstructed South” and the North is supported by the use of other juxtapositions throughout the chapter. Du Bois presents “the tyrant” and “the idler,” which he rearticulates as “the Devil” and “the Deep sea.”¹⁵⁷ The agents in the Bureau span a spectrum of “unselfish philanthropist to narrow-minded busybodies and thieves” and there is the powerful conflict between the “gray-haired gentleman” and “the other, a form [who hovers] dark and mother-like.”¹⁵⁸ These dichotomies parallel the one Du Bois creates between the North and South. In this way, the North and South solidify as two rhetorical objects that Du Bois uses to signify two ends along the seeming spectrum of freedom. In so doing, Du Bois provides a sense of stability to a landscape that is rocked by a geographic crisis caused by the dislocation of the plantation geography. In this instance, the use of land as object facilitates this stability. Tracking the ways plantation logics reassert themselves in terms of labor and black mobility in post-slave contexts highlights the ways land can be used as a tool of subjugation. The logics that rationalize the organization of seemingly empty land can be used to reify the organization of particular peoples.

¹⁵⁶ Du Bois, Souls, 22
¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 24
¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 26
Further, access or denial of access to the somewhereness that land can provide enables the inclusion of some while facilitating the exclusion of others. When location within a particular geographic context serves as an important record of who or what one is then to be without land can simultaneously facilitate resistance while also rationalizing dispossession.

In Chapters Four and Chapter Seven Du Bois presents land as a subject. In Chapter Four it emerges as a charming character whose warmth envelopes the inhabitants in “the hills of Tennessee” with a perhaps loving, but costly, embrace. In contrast, the land that is described in Chapter Seven is harsh, angry, and desperate, serving as a more vivid reminder of the viciousness of slavery. Whether subtly insidious or forthrightly aggressive, this portrayal is two sides of one coin each preventing the black people in these places from moving beyond these locations. Land becomes itself through the context it is encountered. These processes mirror those that craft the construction of identity, experience, and self that I outlined earlier in this project. Land becomes something in various arrangements of space-place-time, which means it is not and cannot be static. In both of these chapters land is a crucial to the narrative Du Bois constructs. It is not simply a site for military movement or financial trade. Land chases and it contains and it also grapples with the constraints of nation, and the people who are moving through it perform this complex movements a well. In this process land complicates processes of mobility. Students cannot leave their town and sharecroppers cannot leave the South and neighborhoods are divided into racialized sections where movement between communities is seemingly scarce. To be clear, I am not suggesting that land functions outside of coloniality or that the hand of Wynter’s Man is not present. Instead, I am asking what happens when we take up land as something that also encounters socio-economic racial systems, and therefore we encounter these systems through it. Paying close attention Du Bois characterization of land in
these two chapters, and reading that characterization along with how he presents people, I am arguing that he personifies the land, complicating how we can read it as object and cementing double consciousness as a mobility praxis.

In Chapter Four Du Bois presents land delicately in a flash flashback that is a return to a place he loves for its simplicity and reminder his youth. His writing evokes a sloping, sleepy, comfort that is complicated by a sense of desperate isolation. Further, directional movement, or movement that goes forward through access to education and financial growth, is disrupted by land. Admittedly, people do leave this small community, but the conditions of these absences are overwhelmingly negative as they fall into three primary categories: death, disagreement, and the search for work. Analyzing this tone and characterization is the focus central of the analysis that follows.

Chapter Four opens with words familiar to a fairytale. As he searches for employment Du Bois “lazily” maps his explorations through the countryside where homes are “sprinkled” over “rolling hills.”\(^{159}\) The pacing of this first page is fluid and slow. The reader ambles through long sentences that seem to mirror the length of Du Bois’s winding dirt roads, and his focused attention on the physical surroundings breaths life into the environment. It is hot and land exhales in exhaustion. Immediately, Du Bois hints at the complicated character he is working to develop. As he approaches the small town where he will eventually teach, land subtly slips into a barrier that isolates the “men [who’ve] lived and died in [its] shadow.”\(^{160}\) What is interesting about this moment is it is one of the first in this chapter where a lack of movement is mentioned. Specifically, it is the first instance where something comes to a full stop. Until this point we are reminded, almost constantly, of movement. Du Bois wanders from one town to another and with

\(^{159}\) Ibid., 52.
\(^{160}\) Ibid.
every answer of unemployment he moves on. He is disappointed, yes, but he moves on. Land stops this motion. It offers perhaps some respite in its cool shadow, but this shadow portents a netlike hold on the area’s inhabitants. One of Du Bois’s students, Josie, is first introduced full of “earnestness and energy.” We learn that she “longed to go away to school,” but “the crops failed and the well was unfinished,” which keep her in place despite her desires. It is the land the keeps here in place, and while she leaves briefly for work she always returns eventually growing “thin and silent” until her death.

Du Bois presents education as a vehicle of movement. His access to education and his ability to bring his knowledge to another location is certainly what licenses his arrival in the homely area where he teaches. This, and the critical focus on education that arises throughout Souls, evidences the connection Du Bois sees between education and upward mobility. For Du Bois education is deeply tied to progress and progress will facilitate movement away from a past shaped by violent exclusion from the nation and toward a future of formal involvement marked by the vote, civil rights, and access to higher education. As such, paying close attention to the way land disrupts access to education highlights another way it complicates mobility. Further, I would suggest, paying attention to moments the land disrupts access to education highlights a moment of colonial encounter and produces a Brownian model of movement.

Du Bois begins his tenure in the small schoolhouse in the summer. The schoolhouse is quaint and Du Bois’s tone remains genial or, perhaps more accurately, paternal. He writes, “we read and spelled together, wrote a little, picked flowers, sang, and listened to stories of the world

---

161 Ibid.  
162 Ibid.  
163 Ibid., 58
beyond the hill.”\textsuperscript{164} Once again, land becomes a marker of enclosure. The use of the word stories furthers the significance of this separation and also continues the sense of dreamlike isolation running through this small community. Places beyond the hill are almost fictional to these students. They are nice places to imagine but are not actually real. Within this context, Du Bois writes “[a]t times the school would dwindle away.”\textsuperscript{165} He would then be forced to visit the homes of his students, inquiring as to their absence, and he was met with the response that “the crops needed the boys.”\textsuperscript{166} He is able to convince the parents to allow their children to return, but this attendance is temporary. The students stay only “for a week or so.”\textsuperscript{167} What this moment highlights is an instance of conflict between the version of mobility produced by the education system (i.e. students start at the beginning and remain in school until the end), and the version of mobility actually performed by the students. This latter version disrupts the arrow-like course and leaves Du Bois hunting for his students. If we trace this movement we can imagine something Brownian. The children attend school for a few weeks and move forward in their learning, then a moment of encounter that adjusts their direction and redirects their progress at school, and restarts in the changed direction, and then pivots again when there is another encounter. This movement is unpredictable and Du Bois can only address it after the fact. He cannot be assured of the direction of his students (i.e. their presence in his classroom), he cannot guess it before the moment he looks at the faces in his classroom like Schrodinger’s cat all options are possible until he looks. The students leave and come back and leave and come back. Overall, Du Bois seems to suggest that this disinvestment in education is a prime factor in the disenfranchisement of the community, but what is also offered here is portrait of Brownian

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.
motion that offers an important portrait of how land requires this complicated movement. Land plays this particular role and it requires this particular mobility. This land is not an object separate from the processes of people, but it is a character that plays a significant role in their lives. Some inhabitants leave the filtered landscape, but they are lost to the community once they leave. The reader is told of one young woman, Josie, who does leaves to work, but returns to support her family, and dies with her hopes for another life “wan and tired.” In this chapter, land serves as an integral character that simultaneously unites and restricts this community in a deeply crushing embrace. This dynamic produces a Brownian version of mobility that is outside of Du Bois’s linear expectations. In this chapter land smothers, and in some cases, black death comes from its slow and painful constriction.

In Chapter Seven, land is vitriolic. Du Bois’s new character, the Black Belt, is brutal and deeply scarred. As an introduction he writes, “the Black Belt, -- that strange land of shadows, at which even slaves paled in the past, and whence come now only faint and half-intelligible murmurs to the world beyond.” Similar to the tone in Chapter Four, land serves to restrict and isolate, but Du Bois’s tone is markedly different. Shadows form again, but there is something cold about them, and they do not offer even a semblance of protection. In this chapter, directional movement is disrupted through tenant contracts that create violent relationships between laborers and land that is haunted by its past. Similar to Chapter Four, Du Bois presents freedom in terms of economic mobility; for this discussion, however, I will explore how this mobility is halted via the presence of unlivable homes. I argue that these homes, the various physical structures that Du Bois mentions, serve as material characteristics of land that is haunted by plantation logics and, as a result, reproduces plantation architecture that serves as

---

168 Ibid., 59
169 Ibid., 93
souvenirs of this relationship. I work to read them as evidence of the land’s destructive personality, and center Du Bois’s reaction to them as a moment of colonial encounter. In so doing, I argue that land serves as a subject that requires nonlinear mobility.

The houses and buildings that Du Bois describes serve as character traits for the Black Belt and highlight the ways land is haunted by its intimate relationship with chattel slavery. In this chapter Du Bois writes of “The Big House,” which “stands in half-ruin, its great front door staring blankly at the street, and the back part grotesquely restored for its black tenant.”

In some ways, Du Bois presents this home as piece of memorabilia. It is decomposing evidence of the intimate connection between slavery and land. This reference to visual vacancy via a door that “stares blankly” complicates the direct overtones of disgust and horror in order to develop a more troubling sense of fear that fixates on questions of remembering. As these physical items crumble what will be left to remind us of this history, and if there is nothing left will we forget? Dionne Brand captures this anxiety in the final pages of her text *A Map to the Door of No Return*. As she visits a museum and takes in the exhibit she writes:

> Already this novel is about forgetting. Several millennia have been consumed in the airless small room of this exhibit. This small wreckage of broken stones, bones, and carvings strewn in a glass class without classification or dating is what is left of millions of journeys, millions of songs, millions of daily acts, millions of memories that no one remembers.

Both Brand and Du Bois grapple with the possibilities of remembrance and forgetting.

Powerfully, neither author offers us a conclusive answer. I get the sense that Du Bois, certainly more than Brand, is interested in providing one, but he is unable. You can see his frustration through his grammatical choices. He writes:

---

170 Ibid., 97
171 Ibid.
172 Brand, *Map to the Door of No Return*, 98.
All is silence now, and ashes, and tangled weeds. The owner put his whole fortune into the rising cotton industry of the fifties, and with the falling prices of the eighties he packed up and stole away. Yonder is another grave, with unkempt lawn, great magnolias, and grass-grown paths. The Big House stands in half-ruin, its great front door staring blankly at the street, and the back part grotesquely restored for its black tenant. A shabby, well built Negro he is, unlucky and irresolute. He digs hard to pay rent to the white girl who owns the remnant of the place. She married a policeman, and lives in Savannah.\textsuperscript{173}

He sandwiches this complex problem of unbelonging between two outright expressions of disgust. Quickly transitioning to another clause, Du Bois use of the comma allows the reader to roll from one thought to the next. The reader is given the opportunity to pause, but, nonetheless, Du Bois pushes us forward. He goes on to describe the home of the black tenant with a much more direct sense of antipathy. Arguably, this repugnance appears for two reasons. One, the actual physical living conditions of a home that is built into a vacant and crumbling dwelling, and, two, the notion of an “unlucky and irresolute” resident living in an arrangement that recreates this archetype of plantation slavery.\textsuperscript{174} Both of these moments evoke a sense of desperation and despondence, but of particular importance to this analysis is Du Bois description of the transitional state of destruction of both of the dwellings. Du Bois writes that The Big House rests in a half-state of decay and that the black resident’s home is built haphazardly around the other crumbling structure. It remains neither an unchecked symbol of the seat of plantation power nor has it crumbled into pieces of timber that only whisper of the home’s past. The temporal nature of this moment is disquieting, and it is this anxiety that undergirds the sense of disgust and discomfort that Du Bois builds through this chapter.

Du Bois goes on to say, “[t]his is the Land of the Unfenced, who crouch on either scores of ugly one-room cabins, cheerless and dirty” and adds later that he “spots quite a village” where

\textsuperscript{173} Du Bois, \textit{Souls}, 97
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid.
“the buildings were rotten, the bricks were falling out, the mills were silent, and the store was closed. Only cabins appeared now and then a bit of lazy life. I could imagine the place under some weird spell.” For Du Bois the arrangement of the plantation space and the construction of the slave home serve as tools to analyze the institutionalization of slavery in the United States. In his 1903 essay “The Home of the Slave” Du Bois tracks the development of slavery through the types of houses and housing arrangements that formed on plantations, and he reads the transformation of slavery into a “system” through formation of three types of slave homes and communal organizations. Key to the transition between these structures is the rise of “commercial slavery,” which Du Bois asserts can be marked by the propagation of the cotton gin. This device transformed the slave into an “investment” and, as a result, the new structures of social organization reflected the “widened distance between the top and bottom of the social ladder; it placed a third party between master and slave and it removed the worst side of the slave hierarchy far from the master itself.” The homes that grew out of this social organization were “filthy hovels” where “there was no family life, no meals, no marriages, no decency only an endless round of toil.” Seemingly, Du Bois searches for a type of order or organization that will allow these people to avoid a colonial encounter with toil that ties them to the slave system. He argues that there is a relationship between the development of unsuitable homes that produces unsuitable behavior. I am particularly interested in the ways Du Bois works to recreate a particularly linear version of mobility that is tied to a particular version of linear identity.

175 Ibid., 98.
177 Ibid., 21.
178 Ibid.
Throughout, Du Bois grapples with the possibilities of memory and forgetting. While the homes mentioned serve as important vehicles to present these questions, I suggest that what they are actually manifestations of land that has not and will not forget. What produces these homes is land that is haunted by the labor of slavery, and Du Bois reminds us through his continual references to cotton. Land vocalizes this history as it “groans with its birth-pains, and brings forth scarcely a hundred pounds of cotton to the acre, where fifty years ago it yielded eight times as much.”\textsuperscript{179} He refers to land as the “the great cotton country”\textsuperscript{180} and “the Cotton Kingdom”\textsuperscript{181} where “the half-desolate spirit of neglect born of the very soil seems to have settled.”\textsuperscript{182} This exhausted land produces dilapidated structures that cannot support a version of black life that satisfy or comfort Du Bois. In addition to this violence, Du Bois reminds the reader of the land’s history of violence with indigenous peoples. Du Bois offers a momentary reflection on “the fierce tragedy of seventy years ago” where the nearby swamp played host to a battle between a group of indigenous warriors who “fought beneath the tall trees, until the war-cry was hushed and the Indians glided back into the west” following this violent land grab “came the black slaves.”\textsuperscript{183} In connecting these two histories of violence Du Bois furthers the reality of land’s memory. In addition to the violence experienced by enslaved peoples during and after the recognized period of chattel slavery in the United States, land remembers the violences enacted upon indigenous peoples. These processes, Du Bois suggests, are intimately connected, adding “[s]mall wonder the wood is red” as the concluding sentence to this paragraph.\textsuperscript{184} This six-word sentence marks the end of this thought with a sense of finality. It evokes a sentiment similar \cite{du-bois1997souls:105, Ibid.,92, Ibid.,93, Ibid.,96, Ibid., 100, Ibid., 101}
course’ or ‘obviously’. Why wouldn’t land be impacted by these histories? Why wouldn’t land remember?

Reading these moments through Nina Simone’s “Mississippi Goddam” helps to clarify my analysis. In this song Simone sings, “Alabama’s got me so upset / Tennessee made me lose my rest / And everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam” this personification of the state parallels the ways Du Bois engages with land in this chapter. Unlike Chapter Four, the state names serve not as placeholders for broader political processes and systems, but Simone positions them as the subjects of each of her verses. She is reacting to them, and the violences that have occurred there, as if it is a physical encounter with a person, and these physical encounters generate physical reactions. She is angry. She is tired. She reminds the listener toward the end of her song “oh but this whole country is full of lies” and this invocation seems to reproduce the same sense of haunting evidenced in Du Bois does text. Reading Simone’s song alongside Du Bois highlights the continuity of these encounters. In this way, land in this chapter has encountered various forms of colonial violence.

So, how does Du Bois’s presentation of land as object and subject relate to Brownian Motion and chaotic movement? In presenting the land as object and subject, Du Bois situates a key element of double consciousness in land. As a result, he crafts a character that can be encountered through movement, and this character can and does impact the movement of those who navigate through it. These encounters produce the randomness of Brownian Motion as we frequently encounter the appearance of colonial matters that are embedded in land and appear, in Du Bois texts, as land that is tired or netlike or land that is made static by the nation-state. In this way, we must move through land. We constantly pivot and adjust to the randomness of these

---

185 Nina Simone, “Mississippi Goddam,” 1964
186 Ibid.
interactions, and, as a result, our mobility refuses the orderly arrangements of empty space-place-time and recreates Brownian Motion.

What I have worked to argue throughout this chapter is that land in Du Bois’s *Souls* is treated variously as an object and a subject. Earlier in the text, Du Bois engages with land as an object the produces subjugation. This objectification arises in a particular moment of geographic crises where, in order to find some semblance of stability within the challenge to the geographic knowledge system of plantation slavery, land had to be navigated as an object that is subject to prevailing cartographic rules, organization, and control. In Chapter Four and Chapter Seven Du Bois presents a complicated character that encounters people in two seemingly divergent forms. It is my suggestion that while these moments may seem divergent they stem from colonial practices of violence that are mitigated through location and craft different versions of land. What I am suggesting is, I hope, not unfamiliar. Identity is crafted through location, and land, in these locations, expresses that encounter in different yet connected articulations. The presentation of land as object and subject replicates Du Bois’s theory of double consciousness, and highlights how double consciousness can also be understood as a type of mobility required to move through colonial encounters that are intimately wrapped up in and experienced by land.
Chapter 4

Listen (W)here

In Chapter Two I outlined the ways Newtonian logics produce orderly readings of space-place-time that refuse dynamic and complicated moments of non-linear mobility; I also suggested that it is this non-linear mobility that makes room for black life in an environment that—because the dominant understanding of space and time is substantiated in a teleological arrow-like motion—predicts black death. In Chapter Three I read Du Bois’s *Souls of Black Folks* in order to think through the ways land experiences colonial logics while simultaneously serving as an object that requires linear movement. In those two sections I have tried to show how Newtonian geographic and temporal orders shape our engagement with land, but also how land becomes a contested site that produced through the movements of black peoples to navigate Newtonian logics. In this chapter I engage with the mobility that is produced out of these processes. Throughout this project I have variously used the phrase “moving through” to describe an overarching project of movement that occurs in this Brownian environment. Paying attention to the soundscapes of Alexander Weheliye’s 2014 interview titled “Claiming Humanity: A Black Critique of the Concept of Bare Life” helps articulate this movement.\textsuperscript{187} The discussion revolves around bare life and Weheliye’s investment in the academic work of diasporic thinkers to produce a more inclusive version of the human.\textsuperscript{188} I argue that the aural production of the interview, the academic intervention that occasions the discussion, and the


\textsuperscript{188} For more on this concept see: Girgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford University Press, 2004)
transcription of the interview are all sites that help articulate moving through. Through the use of these interdisciplinary sites, I point out the ways moving through is not only tied to instances of physical motion but can be, as well, tracked aurally. Specifically, I am arguing that navigating, engaging, complicating, and refusing the constrictions of modernity— which I read in relation to text, geography, land, maps, mobility, time, and colonialism in my previous chapters—are also aural practices. By turning to a multilayered text (oral interview, interview transcription, interview content), I will highlight the ways moving through is found in aural encounters. I hope this analysis makes room for a discussion of the way moving through shapes other material, experiential, and creative encounters that I have not been able to take up in this project.

**SoundTrack**

Throughout this section I provide an analysis of sound that articulates the fluid mobility of moving through. I begin by connecting three threads of literature on the topic. First, I present sound as a useful social text that helps us think through Newtonian logics. Then, I engage with the ways sound, and in particular, notions of loudness and noise have been used to produce racialized spaces. Following that discussion, I point to the ways black sonics often complicate and refuse both Newtonian and racial logics. These connected conversations help me theorize on the ambient noise that is audible in the background of the “Claiming Humanity” interview.

I think about background noise using the perhaps more familiar term: white noise. In the audio, white noise is a subtle and grating presence. I use this term colloquially to refer to the static-like and fuzzy noise that is audible in the background of the interview. It is worth nothing that a variety of colors have been assigned to noise signals (white, pink, blue, violet, red) and that each of these terms refers to specific frequency ranges and amplitudes. I was particularly pleased to find that red noise, also called brown noise, refers to the noise produced by Brownian
Motion. After listening to a few examples of the noises, the more accurate label for what is heard in the background may be pink or brown noise, but I lack the skillset to identify this directly.\textsuperscript{189} White noise can be a tool that facilitates relaxation and is used to block out other noises, but, as I listened to this audio, it was grating and distracting. My experience is of two conflicting audio reference points. Weheliye’s interview is not noise that I want to block out, but the audio I want to listen to struggles for my aural attention in the presence of white noise. It is certainly possible another listener may have a different audio experience. This analysis relies heavily on mine. I contend that this aural disturbance recreates the chaotic project of movement, and pushes us to realize the ways modernity can be an auditory experience. Notably, I am suggesting that these experiences can be uniquely individual. It matters that this is my reflection on this noise, as my experiences shape my reaction to moving through and my particular engagement with sound.

Within this context, I read Weheliye’s pauses and ums as useful articulations of mobility. The occasional extended pauses come in between and amongst often eloquent and descriptive articulations of his work and recreate the sonic effect of DJ scratching. I read these aural moments (the stops and starts, the white noise) as sonic practices that map out a non-linear mobility within the din of modernity. DJ scratching disrupts the seemingly linear narrative of a song as it simultaneously crafts a new and cohesive narrative. In this same way, the notion of the human is already disrupted by Weheliye’s academic intervention; however, his pauses articulate this disruption in an audible way that mirrors the pivots and turns of movement that also must confront the violent conceptualization of modernity’s human.

After this analysis, I think on the contrast between the audio of the interview and the written transcribed text. The interview transcript does not contain Weheliye’s hesitations or any

of the other audible interrupts, such as laughter, which are evident in the audio. Occasionally, they are indicated through the use of a dash or ellipses, but in some instances the transcript is presented as if they never happened. I think on the ways the transcript struggles to contain Weheliye and the interviewer’s aural navigations, and, in so doing, two narratives of the same event are produced. Together, these elements produce the complicated process that is moving through. Moving through is deeply embedded in the circumstances of modernity and those who move through are intimately aware of the presence of those violent logics. Nonetheless, this movement can produce a powerful refusal of these logics even as it is unrepeatable or translatable. It exists despite the inability for some to acknowledge it. It is not just a physical process, but it is perhaps a way of being that produces a more multifaceted ways of knowing.

On Listening for Moving Through

Sound is produced via a three step process (1) vibration occurs (2) the vibration moves molecules in a medium such as air or water (3) the medium transmits these molecular movements via changes in pressure.190 In this way, “sound sets matter in motion” and is “a material event, taking place in space and time, and involving the disruption of surrounding matter.”191 Therefore we return to a quantum model to make sense of noise. In the context of my analysis, I hope this flags for the reader the ways in which sound allows us to think critically about the overarching logics, such as colonialism, that organize the world. We see, for example, that the Newtonian order supports the general prioritization of the visual landscape over the soundscape. There is a trend in cultural criticism to rely on sight and the analysis of visual texts.

191 Ibid.,19.
While these engagements are certainly necessary, the focus on the visual has prioritized sight over sound. A visual framework lends itself to a division between subject and object through the positions of viewer and viewed.\textsuperscript{192} This investment in sight stems from the notion that it is empirical and therefore logical and neutral.\textsuperscript{193} Newton could look at the falling apple and from looking know its intimate properties. This preference for the visual mirrors the ways writing is often privileged over speech – “the act of writing signals truth-value and indestructability, while sound and voice are rendered effervescent.”\textsuperscript{194} We know nothing of what the falling apple sounded like because, seemingly, the sound could be offered no knowledge. Conversely, the translation of the fall from a visual encounter to a written text generates scientific fact. Consider the implications of the phrase: I see you. It can denote the act of noticing someone’s presence, but it can also connote an awareness of some intimate fact or information about the person. I can see you standing there, but I can also see how your actions or words convey something other than what you directly communicated. The person making the statement positions themselves as an outside assessor or observer who produces knowledge about the person that is viewed. In some ways, the linearity of sight is produced because of the physical condition of the eye, which is “often described as a focused sense, capable of parsing only one thing at a time. The ear, however, can discern and parse multiple sounds simultaneously.”\textsuperscript{195} I am hopeful that the implications of this linearity and multiplicity are familiar to the reader. Vision, as various cultural critics have taken it up, can create a linearity that mirrors Newtonian logics.

\textsuperscript{195} Sterne and Akiyma, “The Recording That Never Wanted to Be Heard,” 550.
Scholars who intervene in this dichotomy suggest that sound produces important geographic knowledge—“sound itself has meaning and position, and that music has power to evoke a sense of space different from that evoked by sight.”196 When prioritizing sight over sound we may miss the ways sound is a significant part of how we come to understand space-place-time. In particular, sound may be a useful tool for producing less empirical sets of analysis. I am hesitant to romanticize sound as an entirely affective experience that is somehow fundamentally oppositional to sight, but thinking on the ways loudness can break down the division between individual subject and community is useful for considering how sound can complicate the divisions between subject and object. In this discussion one aspect we can pay attention to is “‘listener collapse’.”197 This occurs when “loud sound dissolves the ability to distinguish between interior and exterior world, especially in regard to sound and self. Sound saturates and fills mental and physical consciousness, eliminating the possibility of detached listening.”198 Consider attending a concert and standing in front of the speakers or walking by a construction project where, even with headphones over your ears, you can hear and feel nothing but the vibrations being emitted from the speaker or the construction equipment. In this instance, loud noises and vibrations are the only things you can hear and feel. Often, these noises also have a noticeable or tangible interaction with your body: “this somatosensory shift transforms sound into a tangible presence, reminding us of sound’s identity as tactile object that operates in, around, and through the body.”199 In this physical interaction sound complicates the division between the person standing by the speaker or walking by construction and their fellow

196 Smith, “Soundscape,” 233-234
199 Ibid.
concertgoers or people on the sidewalk. The boundaries of the body are made porous via the experience of a loud sound.

I want to engage with this idea in order to think through the ways in which racialization or other processes of marginalization mediate this experience. There seems a subtle suggestion that this experience of collapse facilitates a lack of attention to location. Put another way, when a listener experiences the loud vibrations at a concert they are, perhaps, able to forget their fellow concertgoers and the other situational elements of the concert. The sound has produced an environment where these specifics are no longer relevant because the individual self no longer exists. Seemingly, the many mediating aspect of the experience fade out. I think this is perhaps a privileged inattention that requires a particular expectation of comfort and perhaps safety. I am wondering who in particular is able to ignore the context of this sound experience? How, if and when attention must remain, at some level, attuned to what is happening in one’s surrounding, does this change the experience of individual dissolution? Who gets to forget the body? These questions, I hope, highlight that not only is sound socially constructed, but so too are experiences of sound. As we think on the ways sound allows us to craft new notions of the self, we must also consider the ways in which the self is not a neutral concept and is mediated by a variety of factors.

Sound pushes against expectations of singularity not only through how it can be experienced, but also through how it is recorded and produced. If you have ever had the chance to listen to the same song across a variety of recording technologies then you may know that the listening experience of the same song can be vastly different across each medium. This process occurs because the production of sound, and we can think specifically about music as a type of sound, is a convergence of a variety of factors that, when recorded can produce different aural
narratives. Understanding noise, like a musical note, as a singular event elides the actually complex arrangements that produce the noise and the listening experience. In actuality, a note is made up of combination of a fundamental frequency, harmonics, and overtones, and when we hear that note through a recording we are listening to “a particular account of a specific event” that occurs as the frequency, harmonics, and overtones interact. Recording this process further complicates this convergence:

The situation is immensely complicated by the fact that sound recordings never convey directly the same information that a given auditor would experience. Far from arresting and innocently capturing a particular narrative, the recording process simply extends and complicates the narrative. Just as the upholstery of a particular soundscape has an impact on the sound narrative, so the way in which sound is collected and entered into memory becomes part and parcel of the overall sound phenomenon.

The decisions made while recording a sound produce another layer of the complex event. In addition to the specific encounter between frequency and partials, the location of the microphone, soundproofing equipment, and other recording technologies impact what version of the note the end listener finally hears. This disruption refuses the notion that there is a direct connection between the ‘live’ note and the final audio version. In this way, the idea that a single note moves directly from the performer to the ear is inadequate. In addition, as the musician produces the sound it bounces off and bends around the audience and the room, making these animate and inanimate objects an integral part of the sound narrative. How we hear sound is impacted by how the sound has impacted us. As a result, we are audibly implicated in the production of sound.

---

201 Ibid., 24.
202 Ibid., 21
Sound/Geography/Race

When recording equipment cannot pick up the intricacies of a note, or when choices are made to add or remove particular aural elements, our experience of the sound changes, and these changes impact how we use sound to make sense of our surroundings. Rick Altman writes:

While few people are trained to hear harmonics and overtones, most listeners will rapidly recognize the absence, as when music is played through the telephone or over an old record player with limited frequency response. While the loss of these partials reduces our pleasure in listening to music, it may have an even more radical effect on other sounds. Spoken language becomes far more difficult to understand, voices and familiar sound effects may become harder to differentiate, even our ability to judge the distance and direction of sound source may be impaired.203

With this quote we begin to see the ways sound can provide key indicators for location, which means that sound has significant geographic implications. Auditory queues are often processed to identify whether something is near or far as well as the specific or general direction of the sound. At the same time, we associate particular sounds with particular locations, and, in so doing, map those spaces through their sounds.204 Not only do we map particular locations with particular sounds we often interrupt particular bodies through sound. Who or what belongs where is often associated with what sounds they produce. In this way, race is produced through both audio and visual processes that are intimately related to how we understand space-place-time. Jennifer Stoever-Ackerman takes up this project in her 2010 article “Splicing the Sonic Color Line: Tony Schwartz Remixes Postwar Nueva York.” In this article she looks to the work of Tony Schwartz who mapped his Manhattan neighborhood through the various sounds and sound

203 Ibid., 17.
conflicts that occurred there.\textsuperscript{205} As I have tried to suggest in my earlier discussion of sound, “[it] is not merely a scientific phenomenon – vibrations passing through matter at particular frequencies – it is also a set of social relations,” which are implicated in the processes of dispossession that I have pointed to in the previous chapters.\textsuperscript{206} One way this dispossession appears is through the connection of racialized peoples with loud noise that is discursively connected to disorderly and uncontrollable behavior. Stoever-Ackerman writes, “vocal sounds like accents, dialects, ‘slang’ and extraverbal utterances, as well as ambient domestic and street sounds” can all be “identified, exaggerated, and sutured to racialized bodies.”\textsuperscript{207}

Each of these aural examples pivots away from the dominant discourse. An accent stands out. Slang switches the code. This loudness is presented as a threat to quiet and orderly behavior. As such, when particular peoples arrive they bring not only particular types of noise, but also particular types of behaviors. Both of these aspects are racialized. In a feat of aural conquering, these noises and behaviors impact the physical surroundings. Stoever-Ackerman asserts that, in the 1950s during significant migration of Puerto Ricans to New York neighborhoods such as Hell’s Kitchen and the Upper West Side, these neighborhoods became specific sites of noise and disorder. Prior to this movement, these neighborhoods were not presented as sites of sonic intensity, but with the arrival of brown peoples, these narratives of noise reproduced racial exclusion without, seemingly, directly referring to race.\textsuperscript{208}

Importantly, sound can create racialized space outside of tangible geographic locations. To be more specific, there are many instances of black artists, musicians, and performers using

\textsuperscript{206} Ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{207} Ibid., 65.
\textsuperscript{208} Ibid., 68.
sound to craft revolutionary space. In her discussion of Amiri Baraka’s *It’s Nation time*, Jessica E. Teague asserts that the genre crossing album, which combined Baraka’s spoken word with popular black music of the period and other musical types, “charts a new definition of space, one that better lends itself to a philosophical and spiritual account of geography and nationhood. As a central text and ‘institution’ of the black nation, *It’s Nation time* attempts to locate *where* such a new nation would exist by redefining space.”

Crucial to this articulation is Baraka’s use of “two channels of sound,” which “produce the illusion of hearing sound in real space.” As Baraka and other Black Nationalists grappled with questions of nation, or more accurately grappled with what black nation is/was or where it could exist, Baraka’s musical intervention produces a black nation aurally. This space is characterized by the convergence of multiple recording sites that refuse realism to produce a “uniquely imaginative sonic space.”

Similarly, Gayle Wald argues that the sound should be understood “as an instrument of oppositional consciousness, particularly in relation to struggles over space.”

Wald connects Marian Anderson’s 1939 concert on the National Mall to the 1972 black arts festival “Soul at the Center” in order to trace the ways these black musical performances destabilized the nation. Anderson’s performance took place framed by the Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial, and amongst a plethora of other buildings and monuments that craft the symbolic heart of the United States.

Wald asserts that Anderson’s song selection and performance complicated “the sound archive of American culture.”

---

210 Ibid., 28
211 Ibid., 27
213 Ibid., 676
She sang in German, Italian, standard English, and black English vernacular (‘Negro dialect’), in both American musical idioms and in European idioms thought to be outside the scope of her natural ability. She trilled the ‘r’ in ‘Sweet land of liberty’ and sang ‘Dere’s room for many a more’ in the spiritual ‘Gospel Train’ (mastery of form). She also showed that she could bring classical vocabularies to bear on African American folks music, performing ‘concertized’ spirituals in the manner of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, and in arrangements crafted by such eminent black composer-musicians as Henry T. Burleigh and Florence Price (deformation of mastery). In so doing, moreover, she made audible the centrality of the spirituals to a still-emerging American classical tradition, one that blended European, Native, and African sources.214

Anderson’s song selection and her vocal choices transformed the National Mall into a site that must suddenly account for an assortment of musical traditions that would otherwise have no place in the nation. More to the point, some of the songs might have found a place in the nation’s cultural production, but the moment they were performed by Anderson the had to be accounted for in new ways. It is also worth noting the ways Anderson vocally moves between and amongst a variety of genres and styles in order to produce this refusal. While Wald suggest that it is “in defiance of how some of these listeners heard her through the lens of the ‘visibilized’ spectacle of her raced body” I would argue that this performance is as a result of that racialization.215 It is precisely because of Anderson’s racialization that her genre crossing performance complicated this space. In vocal terms Anderson performed a Fanonian multiplicity, but in speaking across performance styles and languages that were not understood as ‘hers,’ she introduced a new sound into the space of the nation. Anderson’s movement is not only an articulation of processes of racialization, but it is an articulation and acknowledgement of the ways these processes require a complex movement. Amongst solid stone and monumental narratives of America’s history, Anderson’s voice refuses this attempt to produce a knowable nation and inserts a vocal multiplicity that challenges the assumptions and exclusions implicit in this grand narrative.

214 Ibid., 683
215 Ibid.
The rise of recording technologies is marked by an interest in engaging with blackness, the black body, the black voice, and racialized violence. In this way, sound and the manipulation of sound via sound technologies are deeply implicated in how we come to understand the human, and alternative articulations of the human can be heard in the aural interventions of black and other racialized peoples. In this section, I shown the ways sound and the study of sound can highlight the complex movements of individuals as they confront and navigate modernity. I have also articulated how moving through appears as an effort to shape a new nation in sonic space as well as vocal maneuvers that challenge the nation. Sound helps craft how we navigate space-place-time and how we listen for authentic notions of race and humanity.

**Being Human Sounds Like…**

Archipelago’s 2014 interview with Alexander Weheliye begins with the sound of moving water. Waves lapping against a shore or themselves, a bird flies overhead, and rhythmic percussion and perhaps a horn of some sort begin and then fade out as the interviewer introduces discussion. There is a momentary, less than a second, break between the end of the introduction sequence and the beginning of the next section of sound, and when the interviewer begins to speak again he speaks over a white noise in the background. Merriam Webster provides three definitions of white noise. The first: “a heterogeneous mixture of sound waves extending over a wide frequency range.” Put another way, white noise is “the noise produced by combining all the different frequencies of sound together at once. Each of these frequencies are projected at an

---


equal amount.” It is possible to engineer white noise, but, given that it is often used to block out other, engineering it over an interview seems unlikely. It is a grainy and omnipresent disturbance that is audible throughout the remainder of the recording. So, can this auditory phenomenon tell us something about the audio profile of modernity? Does the convergence of frequency levels reproduce the ways modernity requires a particular convergence of a wide cross section of constructions, assumptions, and violences that flattens the complexities of identity and experience? At the very least, the parallels between the description of white noise and the logics that support postracial progress are remarkably similar. Just as white noise is marked by the sounding of all frequencies at the same volume, a postracial project pushes forward ideas of equality that are built out of the disappearance and inaudibility of race. Suddenly we are all present and equal because race does not exist. Systems of modernity labor at an infinite number of discursive projects at same and different times in order to appear and disappear notions of race, gender, sexuality, and ability. What I am suggesting here is that the auditory experience of attempting to listen to Weheliye’s theoretical intervention in the interview—an intervention that pushes at the very notions of postracial society through a broad conversation on posthumanism—within a sound environment that is filled with white noise is an auditory experience that recreates an attempt to navigate modernity. While the listener is perhaps able to focus their attention on Weheliye’s comments, or the interviewer’s comments and questions, what remains constant in the background is the noise. Importantly, I am not suggesting that the labors or projects that are intended to disrupt or dismantle oppressive structures are insignificant or misdirected. Instead, I am suggesting, that when we are aware of the possibility of an ongoing decolonial project, aware

\[218\] “What Is White Noise?,” BrainStuff, accessed April 4, 2016. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EY5OQ2iVA50](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EY5OQ2iVA50)

\[219\] A useful quote from “What is White Noise” - “Because white noise has an equal energy distribution, sound technicians refer to its frequency spectrum as being completely flat.”
that this noise may remain in the background even as we are speaking over it changes how we can engage and refuse it. It requires a new temporal relationship that does not always situate progress or forward movement, but makes space for the frustrating and annoying intimacies that are produced by our embedded-ness in the system.

The audible impact of the white noise changes at various points in the recording. One of the most immediate ways this happens is listening to the overall audio at a low level the white noise is difficult to hear; however, when you increase the volume, the white noise becomes more audible. This shifting soundscape is a useful indicator of the ways systems of modernity can appear and disappear in different contexts, and therefore produce different experiences. If we are using listening experiences to also think about moments of mobility then we can also say that given the loudness of modernity in a particular moment different movements are required. Quite literally, in some contexts, certain motions can make you safe while others will produce you as a target.  

In the audio around 16:33, Weheliye concludes his thoughts on racial innocence and the way race is denied in critical theory, and there are a few seconds between the interviewer presenting his next question and Weheliye’s response. In the time between, where the interviewer forms his thoughts and presents his next question, the white noise is audibly louder.  

This volume change makes the listener aware of the labor of Weheliye’s commentary. This interview is nine minutes short of being an hour long, and, if there was an editing process, the total time of the discussion may have exceeded an hour. The resurgence of the noise during Weheliye’s silence draws attention to the physical, mental, and perhaps emotional work that was

---

220 Still, this depends on how a particular motion is read in a particular convergence, and, more broadly, this doesn’t only refer to bodily movement. Some actions, comments, pieces of art work, music are interpreted differently depending on the ways in which modernity circulates in the space-place-time they Modernity is sounded in this way – its systems bouncing and merging on and around and among the people who are listening to the noise and the space-place-time that it is produced.

221 From about 16:33 – 17:52
required of him during this extended engagement. I am interested exploring the gaps and sounds that accompany the pauses in the interview. Richard Iton’s thoughts on the Stuart Hall, colonialism, and post-colonialism are helpful here. Iton asserts:

Hall is suggesting that in those spaces and gaps between the camps that read postcoloniality as emerging immediately upon the granting or establishment of national independence and those that emphasize instead subalterns’ ability to read critically and imagine beyond the master’s texts exists generative albeit knotty theoretical territory.\textsuperscript{222}

Weheliye’s pauses recreate the potential of this in between, and, while he does moves through them to complete his thought, they are moments of potential. The pauses are generative because they refuse the closings that come with navigating the disciplinary expectations of the academy. In those instances, for better or worse, what comes next is unpredictable. This sounded intervention recreates Brownian Motion, and the burdened potential of moving through. In this way the sound also complicates linear versions of space, place, and time in that it refuses a linear version of the narrative. In so doing the statements that frame Weheliye’s pauses become deeply connected to the pauses—they are made through them and form a version of space-place-time that can make room for this non-linear narrative.

This, I think, is an important element of moving through. While I have presented it throughout as an important and significant method of navigating modernity, I do not want to ignore the tiring exertions of the movement. Moving through can and is often incredibly taxing on those who perform its chaotic motion. In an instance where the white noise becomes louder, and then quieter when Weheliye begins to speak again, I am reminded of Weheliye’s labor not necessarily over the noise, but as a product of his commentary. In this bit of analysis I am working to read the recording in two ways: first, I am acknowledging the labor of the academic intervention into conceptions of the human, and I am calling that a particular type of work

moving through; and second, I am thinking directly on the implications of talking for an hour. Both of these aspects, highlight the ways, even amongst the opportunity for celebration and resistance, moving through can be a tiring and strenuous. I turn again to Iton to elaborate on the relationship between sound and the labor of race. He writes:

If the expectation is noise and the commitment to visual ubiquity, a deeply radical politics might be correlated with aesthetic humanities, ablative disjunctions, intentional silences, hesitations, and invisibilities...It might be, perhaps, that the issue is not the pursuit of a certain setting of the visual, audio, and tactile levels but rather a refusal to assimilate any particular pattern (or assumptions regarding their proper intersections).

Iton shows us that radical refusals of coloniality can be sounded, and he asserts that they can be sounded in non-linear ways that produce moments that are unordered and unknown. It is exactly the refusal of a particular structure that makes these aural efforts significant. Discussing race in new and challenging ways is a labor that requires these disruptions and refusals that make room for new theorizations of the human that are not tied to linear expectations.

The last section of this analysis pays attention to the ways Weheliye’s vocal utterances recreate the effect of DJ scratching, and how these hesitations are disappeared in the written transcript of the interview. In his text on the relationship between musical technology, modernity, and black culture Weheliye defines scratching as “the action of moving vinyl records back and forth on one of the two turntables that compromise the basic DJing setup to create a scratching sound that corresponds to the rhythm of the record sounding on the rhythm on the other record player.” When a DJ scratches the sound, usually lyrics, being produced on one record stop and start in rhythm to the sound that is being put out by the other record. While Weheliye’s hesitations do not produce the same scratching noise his pauses do mimic the lyrical

---

223 Ibid., 39
breaks that occur when a record is scratched. Within the temporal expectations of the interview, Weheliye’s hesitations craft a new “sonic project of temporality.” These hesitations amongst and in between more flowing articulations of his work and it is the combination of both these vocal practices that craft the entire narrative of the interview. This back and forth highlights the ways moving through is often one aspect of motion that can be performed amongst more linear moments. If you return to the images of Brownian motion in the previous chapter there are instances in which the movement is tracked along a straight line, but following a molecular encounter the movement changes. These ums point to this complicated movement.

Interestingly, the stutters and other aural excesses of the recording are not recreated in the transcript creating two narratives of the same event. I have tried to put together a chart that shows the difference between the audio and transcript.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audio</th>
<th>Transcript</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My fundamental question has been for um um for awhile what happens if we don’t umm begin with that version of humanity but begin with the version of humanity that is not in control of itself right. Um the slave subject right or the colonized subject et cetera and um-um and-and-and so on. And then you get a very very different idea of what it m-might mean to claim the category of the human.</td>
<td>[M]y fundamental question has been for awhile, what happens if we don’t begin with that version of humanity but begin with a version of humanity that is not in control of itself: the slave subject or the colonized subject, et cetera and so on? And then you get a very, very different idea of what it might mean to claim the category of human.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

225 Ibid., 89
226 This audio is from about 7:22-7:49
In the recording there are several other instances where Weheliye’s pauses are not recreated in the audio. It is my suggestion that these aural disruptions recreate moving through in that they highlight the ways chaotic movement can occur amongst seemingly linear motion. While part of their absence can be attributed to the editorial choices of the interview transcriber, I would also suggest, referring back to the way the written word is often used to produce Truth, that these vocal utterances could not be contained in the written transcript. Rather, we do not often expect to see transcripts that contain indicators that the production was less than smooth because we understand the written texts as objective and the vocal utterances are indicators of subjectivity—a reminder of the person behind the Truth. They would show, map on the paper, as momentary disruptions of reason. For some reason, we tend to write out of the record the complicated vocal moments, but these moments provide valuable knowledge about knowledge production and exchange. Returning to moving through, these audible hiccups highlight the ways this motion is also seen as oppositional to the production of knowledge, and this happens particularly when the complex movement is attached to particular bodies. However, in the same way I suggest that the pauses and ums produce a powerful re-articulation of time and are useful for knowledge production and sharing, so to is the motion of moving through.

Throughout this chapter I have tried to think through the ways moving through appears in our narratives of sound construction and by examining how sound moves in an interview with scholar Alexander Weheliye. I have tried to do this without specifically pinning down the project. It is a constantly changing endeavor that opens up the possibility for resistance while simultaneously tasking its movers with a burdened mobility. In addition it produces a version of space-place-time that is deeply related to the soundings and unsoundings that make room for non-linear movement. This movement, and related version of space-place-time, refuse a forward
movement that is expected in Newtonian frameworks. They do this by breaking down the divide between subject and object and complicating linear expectations of narratives through complex pauses and restarts. Importantly, these pauses construct the resulting narrative to craft a non-linear account that draws attention to the significance of black life. In the context of modernity, which works to present knowledge as static even as these knowledges are constantly changing to continue its work, moving through refuses to be stationary. Chaos requires this movement.
Conclusion

The universe is expanding at a rate much faster than predicted.\textsuperscript{227} To this end, the exact rate at which the universe is growing, and the mechanics that facilitate this movement, are unclear. Despite efforts to accurately measure this movement, down to the closest possible value, the universe is moving, and it is moving in a way that we cannot currently describe.\textsuperscript{228} What we do think we know is that this movement, at whatever speed it is happening, is caused by dark energy. Scientists guess that dark energy works to expand just as dark matter works to hold together.\textsuperscript{229} We know desperately little about either of these substances, other than that they make up almost seventy-five percent of the universe.\textsuperscript{230} New measurements of the universe’s growth suggest, “that dark energy is even stranger than leading theory suggests” and complicate readings of the phenomenon where it “behaves like a ‘cosmological constant’.”\textsuperscript{231} Instead, the appearance of a faster-than-expected universe “suggests that dark energy might actually change over space and time.”\textsuperscript{232} This is fitting final thought for this project. This possibility that the universe is moving, in a non-linear way that cannot be tracked through the use of knowable


\textsuperscript{231} Moskowitz, “Cosmic Speed”

\textsuperscript{232} Ibid.
constants, and that, perhaps, during its movement it is shaped and changed by the space-place-time it encounters.

In this analysis, I have shown that the unknowable and non-linear movements of black peoples are powerful refusals of colonial order. In Chapter Two I connected colonial processes of exclusion to Newtonian logics while also underscoring the public reaction to Hurricane Katrina. I asserted that Newtonian versions of space, place, and time are deeply connected to the production of race. Further, I argued that we see these complex connections appear in the popular news coverage of the storm’s devastation. In Chapter Three I unpacked the relationship between these exclusions and land. I thought on the connection between land, mobility, and subjectivity in order to explore the complex relationship between black mobility and land that has also been ordered by these colonial exclusions. Turning to Du Bois I investigated the ways double consciousness provides not only a useful model of subjectivity, but, in an equally fraught landscape, a potential type of mobility. This mobility is one that is shaped by the movement between various subject positions caused by particular encounters with colonial logics. Finally, in Chapter Four I critically unpacked the version of mobility in relation to sound and moving through. I hope to show that moving through is a physical experience, but it can also be tracked aurally. The complex and subjective experiences of sound provide a useful background for exploring the intimate confrontations with colonial processes that produce moving through as a dynamic, pivoting, changing, non-linear movement.

In paying attention to the implications of knowledge as a type of border or container, and tracking the ways people encounter and move through these supposed boundaries, I have attempted to produce a model of mobility that can take into account the processes of racialization that shape movement and the significance of non-universal understandings of space-place-time.
Working across the fields of black studies, geography, and mobility studies I have attempted a “project of delinking from modern rationality” in order to “[build] other possible worlds.” By engaging with Brownian Motion and Glissant’s *chaos-monde* I presented a possibility that refuses the pre-determinant, static, tangible, knowledges of a Newtonian Model. These concepts are significant, I suggest, precisely because they refuse a causal version of the world while simultaneously existing within that world. In so doing, black mobilities offer a powerful refusal of the hegemonic knowledge systems that have produced certain peoples, spaces, places, and times along a linear hierarchy of exclusion and, crucially, point to the deep flaws and social productions of those systems we like to consider as fundamental and subjective.

I also argued throughout this analysis that Newtonian logics serve as another manifestation of the colonial project, which produces transparent notions of space, place, and time in order to flatten the complex moments of relationality that shape space-place-time. These versions of space are co-constituted with ideas that prioritize linear movement, and both of these constructs are invested in notions of stasis. As marginalized peoples encounter the projects of surveillance and violence that attempt to make them and space-place-time static, their non-linear movements offer a quantum disruption that must reshape how we theorize this ordering project. While celebrating this refusal, it is necessary to acknowledge that this movement is also a burdened project. Honoring this labor, and the knowledge that it produces, requires close attention to intricate moments of black mobility that yield silences, hesitations, unknowns, and pauses. Within these pivots, stop, and starts is a radical celebration of black life.

---

233 Mignolo, “Delinking,” 498
Works Cited


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EY5OQ2iVA50


Katherine McKittrick in “Interview – Meet Antipode’s new Editorial Collective.” *Antipode*, https://antipodefoundation.org/2013/08/05/interviews-meet-antipodes-new-editorial-collective/


Morters Peter Y., and Yuval Peres. “Figure 6.” In Brownian Motion. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.


http://www.nola.com/katrina/archive.html


