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Performing Bafflement: Time and Space in Photographer Ayana Jackson's *To Kill or Allow to Live*

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Introduction

Gallery Momo in Cape Town, South Africa staged a show of new and early works by Ayana V. Jackson entitled *Future Past-Imperfect* in 2016. While Jackson's practice has focused primarily on photography as a static study of the body, a recent turn uses movement in innovative ways. The show's title takes its cues from two grammatical tenses in the English language: the past imperfect and future perfect. The past imperfect describes the combined use of the past tense —an experience occurring in past time— and a continuous and repeating state. The future perfect, as a verb, describes something that will happen, is expected, or planned, before indication in a future time. As a case study, *Future Past-Imperfect* offers a multifaceted examination of how Blackness becomes sutured and evicted from categories of the human while simultaneously registering flights of fancy within the visual plane. Acknowledging the multiplicity of the racial sign, Jackson's work can be read as simultaneously reckoning with the imbrication of violence and vision that constitute Black subjects within modernity, particularly as Blackness is positioned as the site of lack and omission in Enlightenment humanism. In this article I use Ayana V. Jackson's series *To Kill or Allow to Live*, presented in *Future Past-Imperfect*, to articulate Blackqueer futurity at the intersection of vision and Black life.[1]

Take for example, the opening image to the series. "The Becoming Subject" posits a seated subject/object, against the backdrop of stage curtains and wooden floorboards.[2] The subject/object floats in the foreground with no visible furniture present. Clasped hands are placed in the lap. The desaturation of the photograph highlights a heightened tension between the pink of the dress, white gloved hands, and darkness that seeps in between the space where the stage curtain meets the floorboards. Muted coloring enacts silence and redirects the viewer's gaze to the ambiguity of pause or contemplation that holds the figure, rigidly upright and with an inward gaze. This is the only image in the series where the subject/object is not blindfolded. The becoming of the subject indicates a precipice and something on the horizon. One might encounter the image as both becoming a subject and negotiating necropolitics. Gilroy uses the phrasing "being and becoming" to note a process of existence against the sovereignty of the nation-state.[3] Jackson's series takes its name from Mbembe's theory of necropolitics.[4] Necropolitics accounts for the ways in which modes of killing are deployed to confine subjects to the state of *living-dead*.[5] The interplay between being and necropolitics that finds its way in *To Kill or Allow to Live* as a series of figural representations, negotiate the both/and of living and death-bound.[6]

This article works at the intersections of Black feminist thought, queer-of-color critique, and theories of Black life and social death, to elaborate on the problem of

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subjecthood. By drawing on Jackson's work I argue the modality of bafflement—through elsewhere and when—articulates a different orientation to time and space. Drawing on the turn to queer theorization to problematize social-cultural phenomena without a queer body and Ferguson's notion of queer-of-color critique to think Blackness as already non-normative and a site of possibility—I understand bafflement as a queer critique of normative time and space.[7] At the core of national narratives of belonging are how state hegemony marks certain bodies as criminal, terrorist, and fungible in time and space. Such notions of belonging have far-reaching implications for how, for example, healthcare is privatized or how the figure of the immigrant or refugee changes while sutured to the state's management of subjects. Contemporary discourses on subject formation are indebted to intersectional perspectives in Black feminism, critical race, and queer theorization. In critical race theory and Black feminist thought, what constitutes Black temporality has in part animated debates on Black life and death.[8] Simultaneously, within queer theory, polemics on the future have focused on time and space outside of biological reproduction.[9] This spectrum of work struggles with whose future we imagine and how we might imagine otherwise. In the era of Trump—mass incarceration, global warfare, and capital drive relation—attending to time and space offers a radical re-visioning of what Wynter terms "a humanism to the measure of the world."[10] Blackqueer futurity represents such a revisionist approach to time and space; outside of linearity.[11]

Black aesthetics has always been at the forefront of imagining new futures by disrupting the socio-historical and political trajectories of our times. Attending to the visual work of Black cultural producers contributes to thinking about (Black) lives that do not fit neatly into logics of resistance and recovery. Aesthetics is not only about art and beauty. hooks poignantly remind us that "aesthetics is more than a philosophy or theory of art and beauty; it is a way of inhabiting space, a particular location, a way of looking and becoming."[12] I understand Blackqueer aesthetics as an intervention into perception and perceptibility itself. While debates in Black feminist practice to the erotic, have focused on how cultural production resists and/or recovers the Black (femme) body from harm, considerable scholarship, has questioned the limits of such a dialectic relationship.[13] Furthermore, such an expectation that Black (queer) aesthetics represents and recovers Blackness adheres to national imaginaries of exclusion. These national imaginaries rely on respectable subjects to shape policy, citizenship, and belonging. A turn to Black embodiments that are in excess to respectable subject formation better serve to imagine new futures. Black life, for example, is caught between the limits of biological reproduction and natal alienation. Turning to futurity more broadly, I use the terms *elsewhere* and *when*—an element of what I call a poetics of bafflement—as a set of practices that approach time, space, and futurity, with a difference.

I define a poetics of bafflement as how elements of the art text come together and produce different, often difficult, effects and affects on the viewer.[14] A poetics of bafflement is a framework with which to conjure

moments of frustration for the viewer, particularly as confusion coalesces around art objects and their circulation. Bafflement enriches discourses of perception by getting at the core idea of who gets to be a subject, citizen, and human.[15] Bafflement theorized through material and psychic spaces in the afterlife of slavery and as an analytic of diaspora takes into consideration the social and cultural implications of belonging and uses the concept of elsewhere/when.[16]

Elsewhere/when orients bafflement to time and space, and toward the future of Black life. Elsewhere/when seeks out modes of existence in time and space that exceed hegemonic spaces of violence and coercion. In the elsewhere/when, we might reorient ourselves to an elsewhere/when against the grain of Black visual culture, or the elsewhere/when of *when* and *where* people mobilize Black visual culture to disrupt the citizen or who matters. What happens when we look towards *To Kill or Allow to Live* as a provocation that holds the space for creation? It is these spaces of elsewhere/when not solely predicated on an overdetermined future that read toward Blackqueer temporalities. Elsewhere/when as a paradoxical orientation of time and space brings together ontologies of Blackness, sexuality, and difference to a socio-cultural phenomenon and imagines a different orientation to the future. I open with an analysis of natal alienation and time in Black feminist, queer, and queer-of-color thought. I then turn to *To Kill* to demonstrate a temporal overlap between the past and present. Attending to Jackson's photography against linear time orients Blackqueer temporalities through bafflement's elsewhere/when. Elsewhere/when recasts the future of Blackness while expanding the visual field itself.

Orienting Blackqueer Time and Space: The Child and Natal Alienation

The figure of the Child and natal alienation is informative to a discussion of a subject worthy of a future and of Blackness as an ontological position to such a future. Some scholars respond to the limits of heterosexual reproductive sex that utilizes the figure of the Child as a guarantee for the future.[17] The Child and its biologically determined mathematics reproduces governmental management and structural inequality. It does so by using the stages of developmental biology to enliven a progression of bodily and socio-cultural linear time. Straight-time is animated as a moniker for how biological reproduction mirrors the formation of the national body as a series of progress-driven movements (heterosexual sex, insemination, growth of fetus, birth, etc.). The process of procreation, and the birth of children, denotes a secure future for generations to come. On first glance, the promotional material for *Future Past-Imperfect,* put out by Gallery Momo, mirrors this sequential display of time as linear.[18] The image depicts the seven photographs of *To Kill* in a grid and as a cohesive whole. Only a white border around each photograph denotes demarcation. The promotional image mirrors nineteenth-century photographer Eadweard Muybridge's "Woman Jumping over a Chair" (1887). Muybridge's image sequence depicts a woman who, in each sequence, moves towards, and ultimately jumps over a stool in the final frame. "Woman Jumping Over Barrier" features

prominently in Muybridge's *Animal Locomotion Study*. The study contains 781 photographs of men, women, and animals performing common actions. "The Becoming Subject" and "He Who is as if Death Were Not" bookend Jackson's sequence as the subject/object (the artist themselves) moves and dodges an unknown force.[19]

Linear time is disrupted by queer theorization and Black feminist scholarship. Edelman (2004), for example, suggests queer ethics ought to be premised on an anti-future approach and against the Child.[20] By embracing the very disorder of queerness—an inability to reproduce—queers can rupture the hegemonic social order that equates biological reproduction with future making. Halberstam (2005) and Muñoz (2009) alternatively argue that such a hopeless approach to the future is not a possibility for queers of color, as it leads to "epistemological self-destruction," and imagines a future that can only be the stuff of some children.[21] Here, Muñoz (2009) argues towards a futurity that relies on queerness as on the horizon: not yet here. Futurity on the horizon locates race and gender in the time and space of a future to come, rather than a future already experienced or predetermined. The presence of an imagined future is not *what* it will constitute, but *when* and *where* it will intersect with the context that makes possible a variety of lives and experiences. Wright calls this *epiphenomenal time*, whereby Blackness is temporal and dependent on the time and space of such expresses of Blackness.[22] Wright responds to the question "What is Black?" by focusing instead on where and when Blackness enters—"that is, when and where it is being imagined, defined, and performed and in what locations, both figurative and literal."[23] My use of elsewhere/when leans on epiphenomenal time to problematize the when and where in aesthetics; both as a site of cultural production and as a mode of perceptibility. By shifting to the when and where of Blackness, from the what, I utilize horizontal and vertical trajectories of time to better capture a range of Black experiences. The when and where of Jackson's sequence becomes informative here, particularly as it invites one of many counter readings of the Gallery's promotional material. To read the work out of sequence reveals other instances of Black being and futurity.

The ungendering of reproductive identities in transatlantic slavery further enumerates futurity, time, and elsewhere/when in *To Kill*. Natal alienation reflects the lost ties of birth and the non-relationship to reproduction. Mothers and fathers are severed from the children they produce. Black reproductive identities are unmoored from contemporary normative iterations of gender. Under the condition of violence, Spillers (1987) notes that "we lose at least gender difference in the outcome, and the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific."[24] The capacity for gender differentiation is lost through the outcome of the New World. Gender indefiniteness becomes a critical modality of maneuvering time. Take for example several notable narratives of fugitivity that have included hiding in plain sight for escape. William and Ellen Craft, slaves in Macon, Georgia, escape to the North, in part through Ellen passing for a white man and William as her enslaved servant. Harriet Jacobs in *Incidents in the*

Life of a Slave Girl tells the story of Jacobs hiding in the garret of her grandmother's quarters. Jacobs remains out of sight, and yet, in plain sight, of the plantation master for seven years. The narrative, written under the pseudonym of Linda Brent, also recount several instances of cross-gender practice to escape captivity. The Crafts' and Jacobs' accounts gesture to gender indefiniteness as a means to escape captivity. Simultaneously, these narratives disrupt the linearity of plantation time, by literally using gender indefiniteness and hiding within the plantation, as acts of escape.

If ties to birth and relation are severed, in transatlantic slavery, then natal alienation is a part of making Black futures. Natal alienation poses a conundrum to the linear progression of reproduction as a marker of futurity. Instead, natal alienation makes way for a different orientation to the future, and its time and space. Spillers ungendering in captivity, become the enabling feature of Edelman's no future for the Child by locating racial subjectivity as the site of possibility. To revisit *To Kill* is to further enumerate the symbol of natal alienation on the image. Jackson's use of the self-portrait recasts the subject/object becoming, against the sovereignty of the nation-state. The feminine is deployed against the universal subject position of maleness, often deployed in philosophies of subjectivity. Further, "Becoming Subject" represents the only instance in the series where the subject/object is not blindfolded. The lack of blindfold signifies a refusal to be in the dark. The becoming is eclipsed by the final image in the series, "He Who is as if Death Were Not." This work is iconographic of "Hands up, don't shoot!" The phrase was first spoken after the shooting death of Michael Brown, in Ferguson, Missouri, and has been adopted in protest of police violence and the movement for Black lives. At the crux of its ethos, "Hands up, don't shoot!" imagines Black subjectivities as caught in life and death, where the killability of Blackness is juxtaposed against the refusal of such death. "He Who is as if Death Were Not" positions the subject/object with their hands up, a prostrate back, and symmetrical bent. The subject/object mobilizes this symbolic registry of racial violence as the encounter before probable death and its refusal. Again, the artist uses their body to mobilize further representation —much like #sayhername, whereby the viewer is asked to grapple with the gendered dimensions of anti-Blackness and police violence.

"The Becoming Subject" and "He Who" expose the precarity of Black life and state violence. The racial disposability of "He Who" positions Black subjects as subject to the everyday (almost banal) reproduction of violence; "The Becoming Subject" articulates a subject/object on the horizon of futurity.[25] I am not suggesting that police and state violence is ever benign, rather that the everyday quality and its contradiction, to this phenomenon is important to locate. Jackson's "The Becoming Subject" and "He Who" function as an escape from captivity even as the terms of such escape are, in Moten's words, illicit criminal acts of fugitive flight.[26] Gender indefiniteness is deployed (e.g. passing, cross-gender practices) and subtler practices (e.g. hiding in plain sight) run counter to the logics of captive time and space. Instead of looking at "Becoming

Subject" and "He Who" as oppositional images, we might think of them as overlapping mirror distortions of each other. Given the context of a reorientation to (queers of color) in the equation of future, "The Becoming Subject" and "He Who" makes way for Blackqueer futurity.

Future Past-Imperfect and Timespace

Across the works in *To Kill or Allow to Live* instances of movement, otherwise unperceivable to the human eye, are broken down into perceivable parts. This is shown through slight inflections and micro-movements. *To Kill* depicts the artist, blindfolded and dodging an (unknown) object or presence, over the course of several images. Jackson transforms herself into one of Eadweard Muybridge's subjects/objects to illustrate what can and cannot be seen. Gilroy and Mbembe's subject with no formal guarantee to the sovereignty of the nation represents a significant backdrop to Jackson's structuring of the series. This is reflected in earlier works by Jackson in *Archival Impulse* (2013) and *Poverty Pornography* (2013) that pre-date Jackson's turn to motion.[27]. *To Kill* as an active engagement against necropower, and the being and becoming of subject formation, is to frustrate Blackness. Previously I assert that to look at *To Kill* as out of sequence with its promotional image is to locate Blackqueer futurity. The work, if read toward elsewhere and elsewhen, locates a refusal to social death and, in an expression by Spillers, "signs itself 'elsewhere' [and] represents itself beyond the given."[28] The lens of bafflement culls for logics that befuddle oppositional among Black life and Black as death-bound. Elsewhere mobilizes signs that are presented outside the given (and often oppositional matrix of Black life being and Black as death-bound). A repositioning from what a Blackqueer futurity is, to when and where such a future might be oriented, *holds the space for creation despite the everyday (and often banal) grotesque violence and anti-Blackness*. Such spacemaking produces simultaneous resistances and submissions that form juxtaposition between negation and possibility, and is a testament to the nuance of Black life and social death. I cite at length Jackson as she discusses the vision behind *Future Past-Imperfect*:

> After spending so much time digging in photographic archives looking at the multitude of ways the non-European body has been "framed"—literally and figuratively—I found myself feeling emotionally distressed. It was like trying to struggle with quicksand. The combination of discussing and defending recent work, and my personal relationship with my subject matter, set against the backdrop of the current round of public lynching of Black bodies in my home country … it was unbearable. I decided that I needed movement, air, weightlessness, and light. So, I decided to create a series of movement studies set in the 19th century. It was my way of shifting something in the past as a way to affect the present and the future (even if only psychologically). I wanted to see what healing would happen if I abandoned the act of deconstruction in favor of reconstruction.[29]

Jackson's words bring into the fold several interventions about time and futurity that I locate as bafflement's queer orientation to

time and space (the where and when). Most stark an intervention in *Future Past-Imperfect* is the use of the past, the historical past-ness of photography and the historical past-ness of the afterlife of racial slavery, to meditate on possibility—movement, [as] air, weightlessness, and light. The photograph always operates as a belated representation of a moment that has passed. Further, the mid nineteenth-century becomes the historical point of entry for Jackson to comment on the present tense of racial violence and futurity for blackness. It is here that Jackson's work articulates an elsewhere/when, by framing the subject/object as a living breathing refusal of absolute death through a return to a time and space of contradiction—the era of Reconstruction.[30]

Muybridge's *Animal Locomotion* study first circulated at a time where the age of enlightenment had been on the decline and modernist thought had turned to global ideas of industry and progress. These ideas are mapped into time/value/human that become some of the defining characteristics of cultural taste in the literature, art, and philosophy of the era. Simultaneously, the multiple visions of the after-effects of the U.S. Civil War through reconciliation, white supremacist articulations of terror and violence, and emancipationist visions present competing ideas of the nation-state.[31] Jackson's deployment of time through the *shifting* of something in the past to affect the present and future, is the past-imperfection at play. This conjugational discourse configures a different mathematics of Black embodiment and configures an elsewhere/when that befuddles the logics of Black death. Befuddlement as out of step with normative time functions across the remaining series of images in *To Kill*.

Turning to the ontological claims of Blackness in aesthetics rather than its sociological imprint, we might figure how the work disidentifies with the context of its production and toward an elsewhere/when of Black embodiments.[32] Jackson mobilizes movement that is not entirely predicated on the boundaries of the photographic assemblage itself. Rather, such movement can be read as out of sequence or out of step with photographic time. What happens, quite literally (and figuratively), when we *see* the work out of step with linear time; and how does this visualize the impossible possibility of Black life? To view the work out of step is to suggest that the sequence of the series does not predict the outcome of an encounter. In the "Romance of Sovereignty," the being is on the verge of becoming, an animated object, and subject/ed to the right of the nation. The subject is depicted in a state of being that resembled an assessment—gathering of bearings. Hands are in upward process, while blindfolded, in preparation for … For what? What is to come? A/the future in past imperfect. A/the future that warrants skepticism; for has not grotesque violence been the subject of the past? What is signaled by the next image is the relational encounter. "The Existence of the Other as a Threat to My Life" presents the subject/object, still with hands above and blindfolded, bending backward at the waist. This deep bend, upward moving arms, are the subject/object in contact with that which is threatened. Implied by its title, this site of threat is the Other; or the encounter with that which makes one Other. The script of Black social

death provides the material with which to decode the Black subject from the outside, and *against* a legible and culturally available prefabulation of Black identity. The work then offers a multifaceted speculative analysis with many pathways to consider selfhood and representation, while looking at the effects of the internalization of limits (e.g. afterlife of slavery), to locate the terms of livability. These sites of violence are precisely what determines the kinds of relationships available to subjects in the present. Jackson's molding of necropolitics and the being and becoming of subjectivity, are the site of contradiction that frustrate the very terms of blackness. Whether the work is read sequentially, or against the prefabulation of legible Black representation (or social death), it is useful to understand *To Kill* always already as a distortion; a befuddlement to such perception.

In what might be the most precarious position, for the subject, the moment of harm in the "State of Injury," the subject remains balanced. Subject/object, bent, still backward, places hands at the stomach (or is it the womb?), where injury has been inflicted; this, for example, might warrant the cause of what becomes "The Sovereignty of Death." Yet, it is only in "The Limits of Sovereignty," depicting the subject bent backward at the waist, hands ajar, that we *see* the only sign of imbalance. I propose that this imbalance is the problem of the nation-state, its boundaries and modes of demarcation, and also the precipice of a livability outside of its constraints.

An engagement with *To Kill or Allow to Live*'s consorts with bafflement's elsewhere and when. Between pause and motion, death and life, *To Kill* turns to an orientation to Black being not overdetermined by a universal human. Rather, the work frustrates and thus perceives possibility. This is a future that utilizes natal alienation and the slave as the relational space of possibility and future worldmaking. The elsewhere/when of Black and queer future, of Black next-ness as not-quite-here, is that which hides in plain sight. Temporality with a difference, elsewhere/when, utilizes contradiction in impossible possibility, through formal and temporal disruption. Jackson's *Future Past-Imperfect* shifts canonical knowledge of time and space, one attributed to Newton's laws of motion and biological reproduction, to Black-queer futurity. Orienting a reading of Jackson's work as one that can hold central the grotesque violence of Black embodiment and *simultaneously* engage a repertoire of ambivalence, despite violence, does the work of locating creation. My use of elsewhere/when in the context of this article has been to mark the modality of bafflement that is geared toward an engagement with time and space. Elsewhere/when asks us to think of time and space as a series of befuddlements against the naturalization of popular mathematics of perception, aesthetics, and the living.

Notes

1. Ayana V. Jackson, *To Kill or Allow to Live*, 2016, Archival Pigment Print on German Etching Paper, in Gallery Mom, Cape Town, South Africa, January 2016, https://www.ayanavjackson.com/to-kill-or-allow-to-live-2016.

2. I use subject/object to draw on the contradiction and history of transatlantic slavery and

racial dispossession. Through subjugation, the enslaved, though sentient beings, are not in possession of the self, but rather an object of capital. Doubly, in fugitivity, as in the case of Harriet Jacobs, the enslaved steals the self to become a subject.

3. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (New York: Verso Books, 1993).

4. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40.

5. Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 40.

6. Jackson's earlier work in *Archival Impulses* (2013) and *Poverty Pornography* (2011–2013) interrogates photographic representation of bodies in the global south and racial stereotypes that persist today and in the archive. Achille Mbembe contributes to the catalogue and discussions the archive as "a way of walking through time's thickets in the footprints of the past." For more, see Ayana Jackson and Achille Mbembe, *Ayana V. Jackson's Archival Impulse and Poverty Pornography* (Paris: Baudoin Lebon Editions, 2013).

7. D.L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, and Jose Munoz, "Introduction," *Social Text* 23 (September 1, 2005): 1–17; Roderick A Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004). I also understand queer orientations to socio-cultural phenomena through space and geography. Katherine McKittrick's writings, for example, apprehend the geography of Black women's lives in Canadian history; see Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women And the Cartographies of Struggle* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

8. See, for example, Frank B, Wilderson, *Red, White and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Fred Moten, "Black Optimism/Black Operation" (Unpublished conference paper, Chicago, October 19, 2007, 1); Hortense J Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism* 17, no. 2 (1987); Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

9. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); E. Reeman, "Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion," *GLQ* 13, no. 2–3 (2007): 177–195.

10. Sylvia Wynter, Anthony Bogues, and Demetrius Lynn Eudell, *The Hills of Hebron* (Kingston: I. Randle, 2010).

11. This article imagines time and space, in Blackqueer futurity as non-linear. By non-linear I mean to suggest time and space can function outside of Isaac Newton's law of gravity. Scholars such as Michelle Wright have found this discourse useful. See for example, Michelle M. Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

12. bell hooks, "An Aesthetic of Blackness: Strange and Oppositional," *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interarts Inquiry* 1 (1995): 65.

13. For more information see, Ariane Cruz, "Pornography: A Black Feminist Woman Scholar's Reconciliation," in *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure*, ed. Tristan Taormino, Celine Parreñas Shimizu, Constance Penley, and Mireille Miller-Young (CUNY, New York, NY: The Feminist Press, 2013), 215–227; Jillian Hernandez, "Carnal Teachings: Raunch Aesthetics as Queer Feminist Pedagogies in Yo! Majesty's Hip Hop Practice," *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 24, no. 1 (2014): 1–19; LaMonda Horton-Stallings, *Funk the Erotic:*

Transaesthetics and Black Sexual Cultures (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015); Mireille Miller-Young, *A Taste of Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

14. I draw on visual culture studies, whereby the study of the historical, socio-cultural phenomenon is mediated through pictures, images, and visualization, and not just words and texts. Viewer-spectators both consume cultural production and mobilize cultural production for their own purposes. See, for example, Nicholas Mirzoeff, "On Visuality," *Journal of Visual Culture* 5, no. 1 (2006): 53–79; W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

15. Bafflement draws from Édouard Glissant's use of poetics, but also his mobilization of opacity as a means not to be transparent, "right to opacity"; and in this context to frustrate and stymie. Glissant uses opacity in the context of cultural domination and precisely against the Enlightenment's project of knowledge making. Here, I imagine bafflement as the affective registry of such non-transparency both in and through the circulation of the art object and its interpretive matrix. So that bafflement as a lens is not only what cannot/must not/need not be seen or revealed, but a feeling/felt. See Édouard Glissant and Betsy Wing, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

16. In this article I focus primarily on bafflement and its relationship to time (elsewhere and when). For a discussion of interiority and bafflement, see Sarah Stefana Smith, "Surface Play: Rewriting Black Interiorities through Camouflage and Abstraction in Mickalene Thomas's Oeuvre," *Women & Performance* 28, no. 1 (2018): 46–64. For a discussion of aesthetics, deception, and bafflement, see: Sarah Stefana Smith, "Aesthetic Deception in Selling the Shadow (2016)," *Liquid Blackness* 4, no. 7 (October 2017): 118–141. My book manuscript, *Poetics of Bafflement: Aesthetics of Frustration*, specifically deals with the framework bafflement as it relates to contemporary Black and queer artists post 1990s.

17. See, for example, Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*; Lisa Duggan and José Esteban Muñoz, "Hope and Hopelessness: A Dialogue," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 19, no. 2 (2009): 275–283; Edelman, *No Future*.

18. Ayana Jackson, *To Kill or Allow to Live*. 2016. Gallery Momo, South Africa. http://www.okayafrica.com/armory-focus-african-perspectives-2016/.

19. Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904) gained considerable recognition in the mid-nineteenth century for his images of the American West. Many credit him with the creation of what we now understand as the moving image, through the *Animal Locomotion* study. The 781 photographs often depict subjects/objects from the Philadelphia Hospital who are nude and physically deformed. The study—completed between 1877 and1887 and published under the sponsorship of the University of Pennsylvania—would provide a large archive of the taxonomy of the form and species. To see the image, visit: Eadweard Muybridge, *Woman Jumping over Barrier* (1887), Collotype, 7 3/8 in. × 15 13/16 in., San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, https://www.artsy.net/artwork/eadweard-muybridge-woman-jumping-over-barrier.

20. Edelman, *No Future*; Alexis Lothian, "A Speculative History of No Future: Feminist Negativity and the Queer Dystopian Impulses of Katharine Burdekin's Swastika Night," *Poetics Today* 37, no. 3 (2016): 451.

21. Freccero et al., "Theorizing Queer Temporalities," 194; Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 54.

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

23. Ibid., 3.

24. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.

25. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 6. This is what Hartman notes as the unspectacular sites of violence and its afterlife.

26. Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness," *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* 50, no. 2 (2008): 177–218.

27. Jackson directly links the titles of individual works to Mbembe's "Necropolitics" article in *Public Culture*. For example, the becoming subject is the place where Mbembe notes the division of species between human and animal (Ibid., 14). For the purposes of this article, I do not go into a deep dive of this affinity, both to focus on queer-of-color critique/Black feminist practices of timespace and ungendering and to resist the urge to collapse Jackson's representational figuration with Mbembe's argument; though strong connections exist and are discussed at length in the larger project. Finally, I center Jackson's broader context of *Future Past-Imperfect* as a significant shift to motion (and time) in the artist's repertoire.

28. Hortense J Spillers, "All the Things You Could Be by Now, If Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother: Psychoanalysis and Race," *Boundaries* 23, no. 3 (1996): 713.

29. Angela Connor, Interview with Ayana Jackson, *Fierce Latitudes*, January, 2016, https://www.fiercelatitudes.com/ayana-v-jackson/.

30. Jackson's description of her art practice suggests reconstruction in part as an act of creation. I argue that the tension between creation and distortion in bafflement is a productive site of apprehending Black life. The tension between the artist's use of reconstruction as a process of creation need not be reconciled with an undercurrent of confusion, located in bafflement. Rather, this contradiction is the enabling aspect of bafflement.

31. These competing visions take hold, for example, in the narratives of Presidents Lincoln and Johnson. Johnson, a former Tennessee Senator and slave owner, shaped more lenient policies toward ex-Confederate powers, while Lincoln has been perceived as leaning toward the support of enfranchisement of all freedmen. See James M. Campbell and Rebecca J. Fraser, Reconstruction: People and Perspectives (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 15.

32. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

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