"WRITING WITH THE GHOST": THE POTENTIAL HISTORIES OF SAIDIYA HARTMAN AND SUSAN HOWE

by
KATHRYN ANN BRADSHAW

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Approved by:

Prof. SİBEL IRZIK .....
(Thesis Supervisor)

Assoc. Prof. HÜLYA ADAK .....

Prof. ERICA L. JOHNSON .....

Date of Approval: June 15, 2020

ABSTRACT

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KATHRYN ANN BRADSHAW

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This thesis discusses and compares two different but resonant works of creative scholarship: Saidiya Hartman's Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval (2019) and Susan Howe's My Emily Dickinson (1985). Counter to a history conscribed by captivity and criminality, Saidiya Hartman "exceeds the archive" in order to speculatively narrate the "intimate histories" of African American women at the turn of the twentieth century. Susan Howe writes through a counter-historical poetics against mis-readings of Dickinson's literary experimentation while situating the poet in a feminine nonconformist tradition. Approaching the archive as a departure point rather than a site for answers, Hartman writes a "serial biography" of the "wayward" women who fashioned forms of freedom within constraint while Howe investigates patriarchal authority over literary history. After addressing the differences between these scholars' archives and the terms through which their subjects "enter history," I illustrate moments in both texts where specific resonances may be located, focusing on each writer's close readings of history, modes of listening for affect in the archive, and methods of counter-historical fabulation. I argue that Hartman and Howe engage adjacent aesthetic modes as they read their subjects otherwise, refusing normative terms by which resistance, representation, and intelligibility have been defined. They articulate openings for "potential history" through a shared recognition of the limits of genre and language while demonstrating a commitment to "unsettling what's settled."

ÖZET

HAYALETLE YAZMAK": SAIDIYA HARTMAN VE SUSAN HOWE METİNLERİNDE POTANSİYEL TARİHÇELER

KATHRYN ANN BRADSHAW

KÜLTÜREL ÇALIŞMALAR YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, HAZİRAN 2020

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Anahtar Kelimeler: Saidiya Hartman, Susan Howe, Potansiyel Tarihçeler, Hikayeleme (Fabulasyon), Emily Dickinson

Bu tez, yaratıcı yazın ve bilimsel araştırmayı birleştiren bir alanda birbirlerini yankılayan iki farklı eseri tartışıp karşılaştırıyor: Saidiya Hartman'ın Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval (Asi Hayatlar, Güzel Deneyler: Sosyal Ayaklanma'nın Özel Tarihi 2019) başlıklı eseriyle Susan Howe'ın My Emily Dickinson'ı (Benim Emily Dickinson'ım 1985). Hartman, Afrikalı Amerikalı kadınların yirminci yüzyılın başında geçen "özel tarihlerini" kurgulayarak, esaret ve yasadışı suçlarla kayda geçirilmiş bir tarihe karşı "arşiv-ötesi" bir anlatı kuruyor. Howe ise, Dickinson'ın edebi denemelerinin yanlış okumalarını hedef alan şiirsel bir karşı-tarih yazarken, şairin yapıtlarını konformizmi dışlayan bir kadın yazını geleneğine yerleştiriyor. Arşive, cevapların bulunduğu bir alan olarak değil bir çıkış noktası olarak yaklaşan Hartman, kısıtlanmaların içinde farklı özgürlük biçimleri şekillendiren "asi" kadınların "seri biyografisini" yazarken, Howe edebi tarih üzerindeki ataerkil otoriteyi soruşturuyor. Öncelikle bu akademisyenlerin arşivlerindeki ve araştırdıkları öznelerin "tarihe giriş" noktalarındaki farklılıkları ele alıyorum. Daha sonra onların tarihi yakın okumalarına, arşivdeki duygulanımları (afekt) dinleme biçimlerine ve hikayeleme (fabulasyon) yoluyla karşı-tarih yazım yöntemlerine odaklanıyor, bu iki metnin birbirini yankılama anlarını örneklerle açıklıyorum. Hartman ve Howe'ın, direnç, temsil ve anlaşılabilirliğin normlarını reddederek anlatılarının öznelerini alternatif biçimlerde okurken birbirlerine yakın estetik tarzlar kullandıklarını savunuyorum.

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Better an errant path than the known world. Better loose than stuck.

Saidiya Hartman

Wayward Puritan. Charged with enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is antinomian.

Susan Howe

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 1997 Saidiya Hartman, a scholar of African American literature and cultural history, published *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* in which she studied performances of power and rights discourses, investigated forms of terror and resistance during slavery, and discussed the "non-event" of Emancipation. Within this work, one can locate the beginnings of Hartman's long engagement and interest in forms of everyday or ordinary refusal, the manner through which gender and sexual norms operate to reproduce racial hierarchies, and spaces of refuge and redress available through poetics and performance. Throughout her writing she argues that the strategies of black subjugation and subjection continued after slavery through logics of capital, and particularly through the regulation of black women's sexualities and reproductive labors.

Hartman continued to discuss the afterlives of slavery in her next book *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2006) through narrating a personal story of journeying to Ghana's historical slave "sites." In this work, Hartman engaged reflexively with the silences and losses she encountered within the archive and began to experiment more with genre, mixing academic historiography with personal, reflexive writing. In an interview with Patricia Saunders, Hartman explains, "I'm writing about an experience that I psychically inhabit. Most history isn't written from that perspective ... I never wanted to write ... anything someone could refer to as a memoir. But I had to be there to be the bridge between the present and the past, since I was part of the remains" (Saunders 2008*b*)(9-10). Shifting between travel writing, memoir, history and reportage genres, Hartman in *Lose Your Mother* introduced her method of entering and writing from the archive through affect.

In a follow-up essay "Venus in Two Acts" (Hartman 2008), Hartman revisited a story she had previously avoiding telling about two girls murdered on a slave ship. She used this story to experiment with "another mode of writing" that could say the name or tell the story of "Black Venus" who fails to be found in the archive except as a "*dead girl*" (1). Venus, she writes, is "an emblematic figure of the enslaved

woman in the Atlantic world": "Hers is the same fate as every other Black Venus: no one remembered her name or recorded the things she said, or observed that she refused to say anything at all. Hers is an untimely story told by a failed witness" (1-2). Hartman considers in this essay how one might ethically undertake archival research and write about the lives of the enslaved without reproducing the grammar that made their subjection and disappearance "titillat[ing]" (7): "How does one revisit the scene of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence? ... Do the possibilities [of this revisiting] outweigh the dangers of looking (again)?" (7). Hartman suggests both advancing speculative arguments and using the subjunctive mood (expressing possibility) to tell "an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling" (11).

In "Venus in Two Acts" Hartman named this narrative mode "critical fabulation" (11). Critical fabulation is a mode that can be employed when there is no alternate way to tell the story. It is not a practice of "giving voice" to those obscured or erased in the archive but rather a method through which "to imagine what cannot be verified" (12). Against the archive that failed to bear witness, this mode addresses "an unrecoverable past" (12). According to Seth Moglen (Moglen 2016), Hartman's aim is to craft narratives "that explicitly link the past and present" through a double effort to attend to "dishonored lives" while "acknowledging 'what we cannot know'" (157). Hartman's strategy of "narrative restraint," he writes (quoting Hartman),

> "can be complemented by listening with the most careful possible attention and respect to 'black noise,' to 'the mutters and oaths and cries of the commodity' that hint at 'utopian' 'aspirations.' Hartman emphasizes that 'counterhistories of slavery' of this kind can contribute to a 'history of the present' and, in particular, to 'the incomplete project of freedom.' ... Through writing one can attempt to imagine 'a free state' – not through projected fantasies of 'the time before captivity or slavery, but rather as the anticipated future' of one's own writing." (Moglen 2016)(157)

Hartman found that trying to imagine the enslaved "outside the terms of statements and judgments that banished them from the category of human ... was beyond what could be thought within the parameters of history" (Hartman 2008)(9). The statuses of historical subjects such as the enslaved, ex-slave, newly free, or the criminalized black woman of the "ghetto" are "matters ... still contested in the present" given that if these subjects appear in the archive at all, they are conscribed according to a logic that reiterates their subjugation (10). Critical fabulation as an aesthetic mode works to read these subjects otherwise, and it necessitates an interdisciplinarity that

pushes the limits of scholarly or intellectual discourses.

Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval (2019), Hartman's latest work and the first text on which this thesis focuses, has garnered much interest for the way in which it is written through modes of "critical fabulation, speculative history, close narration, and documentary poetics," all which, Hartman explains, are at "the heart of [her] practice" (Hartman 2020). They "are methods for engaging and remaking the document, for building story from sampled utterances, photographs, fragments, and sonic traces, for attending to the radical thought of everyday life, for assembling and composing alternative narratives of Black existence." In *Wayward Lives* Hartman continues to map the afterlives of slavery but through imagining and describing in vivid detail the intimate, everyday rebellions of young African American women living in the northern city at the turn of the twentieth century. Sarah Haley writes that "reading *Wayward Lives* after 'Venus' allows one to linger even further in the definiteness of what is beyond archival accounting" (Haley 2020).

Since the records containing traces of the stories she seeks are conscribed by criminality and captivity, Hartman "exceeds the archive" through speculation (Hartman 2019)(360). She strives to provide "a different set of descriptions" counter to the repetitive violent excess and crude "shorthand" marking the archive of the enslaved and their descendants (Hartman 2008)(2-7). The archive in which Hartman found the subjects of *Wayward Lives*, she explains, was in fact full of fictions produced by the state to justify the confinement and punishment of young black women, fictions taken for granted as historical "data." Hartman explains how she writes "counter-fictions" to those the state conjured, choosing to fluctuate between speculative and historical-biographical narrative modes to loosen and blur the fiction-fact divide (Hartman and Jafa 2019).

Unlike most historiographies or conventional biographies, *Wayward Lives* describes quiet pursuits, private affairs, emotional journeys, and everyday experiments – what might be figured as the "unknowable" historical data. Haley writes, "In *Wayward Lives* 'want,' 'stubborn desire,' vision, rhythms, dreaminess, imagination, and practice are terms of order and history. These categories of narration and analysis contest, exceed, and derange the *ditto ditto* of violent details accumulated in the archive produced by sociologists, social workers, and prison authorities" (Haley 2020). Hartman's "modes of presentation, annotation, and narration ... exceed traditional regimes of substantiation." Hartman narrates the hopes, anticipations, fears, and desires of her subjects, all of whom were real people. As in *Lose Your Mother*, she "psychically inhabit[s]" the world of the women she narrates in *Way-*

ward Lives (Saunders 2008*b*)(9), and through narrative techniques, she expresses a "desire to mourn for victims of the past, endowing the dishonored with both 'love' and 'beauty'" (Moglen 2016) (157). The book is a continuation of Hartman's commitment to the study of what lies beyond official accounts purporting to contain the information through which we come to "know" the past and frame the present. Beyond addressing obvious silences in the criminal record and social reformers' accounts, the project exposes how the logics of archivization dishonor and erase lives from history. Rather than claim the authority to speak for underrepresented subjects, Hartman instead works to reveal how the terms of representation promised their exclusion and open a speculative space in which the reader can imagine those subjects otherwise.

Speculation is described by Tavia Nyong'o (2018) as a mode of "tactical fictionalizing of a world that is, from the point of view of black social life, already false" (Nyong'o 2018)(6). Next to this, Hartman attests that the difference between fiction and non-fiction is about who holds the power to make truth claims. What is called "non-fiction" can only be written, she claims, with authoritative power backing it (Hartman and Jafa 2019). Hartman's "critical fabulation" in *Wayward Lives* works to disrupt the authoritative status of so-called "non-fictive" or "truthful" "events" while unsettling teleological and falsely linear temporality overwriting the potentiality of our present. Her fabulation is "an insurgent movement – in the face of an intransigent and ever-mutating anti-blackness – toward something else, something other, something more" (Nyong'o 2018) (6).

Poet Susan Howe, like Hartman, has garnered attention for her creative recombination of historical artifact and found text and her attempts to deconstruct not only the boundaries between fiction and historicized "fact" but also those between scholarly disciplines. In the last decades much critical work has been centered on her artifactual collage poems in which she often weaves personal stories of loss. In addition, critics have been interested in her extraction of obscure textual artifacts which she often performs as sound-scape pieces, sometimes in collaboration with experimental musician David Grubbs. Prior to writing poems, Howe was an artist and performer on the stage. She tried acting, following in the footsteps of her mother, the Irish playwright Mary Manning, and from there, she became a painter. It was from the gallery that her word-collage installations eventually came to live on the page, first in artist-books and then in books of poetry starting with *Hinge Picture* (1974). She is occasionally grouped with "Language" poets and writers, namely for her poems' "concrete" appearance and emphasis on language deconstruction. The canvas and the stage figure often for Howe as metaphors for the page (Keller 1995) (7, 13). Rachel Blau DuPlessis devotes an essay in *The Pink Guitar: Writing as*

Feminist Practice (1990) to Howe's practice, in which she writes of the poet's "page space: a space devoted, consecrated to marginality, a page space that is a canvas of margins" (DuPlessis 1990)(136).

Beyond her poetry, Howe is known for her own reflexive, process-oriented essays, which she often places between poems within the same publication. In W. Scott Howard's recent book on Howe's work, *Archive and Artifact: Susan Howe's Factual Telepathy* (2019), he discusses Howe's recontextualization and performative repetitions of her poetry and essays across her publications. Much that has been written about Howe's experience with archival research and her creative process she has written herself, in essays appearing throughout her poetry books and in *The Birth-mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History* (1993) and *The Quarry: Essays* (2015). In *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives* (2014), her "collaged swan song" (Howe 2014)(9) for the physical archive in the face of its digital, virtual turn, she writes specifically on the possibilities and opportunities for free association and serendipitous encounters in the physical archive, a practice that is part of the poet's "factual telepathy"[1] and what Howard calls Howe's "radical contingency" (Howard 2019) (9).

Howe's prose and poetry have always been centered on North American and European history and literary history, with a focus on both canonized writers (like Dickinson, Melville, and Thoreau) as well as obscure literary figures. Throughout the 1970s and 80s Howe published small press editions of her poetry, including, for example, *The Liberties* (1980), which explores the role Esther (Hester) Johnson may have played as muse to Jonathan Swift. In *Secret History of the Dividing Line* (1978) Howe meditates on the relation between the "history" and "secret history" of events recorded in the diary of William Byrd on two land surveying expeditions resulting in the boundary marking between Virginia and North Carolina in the 1700s. Howe's interest in the exertion of political control over land and inhabitants and the history of borders continues in *Defenestration of Prague* (1983), in which she reflects on the division between Ireland and Northern Ireland by restaging events inaugurating the Thirty Years' War between Protestants and Catholics. After *My Emily Dickinson*, while Howe would continue to research Dickinson manuscripts, she expanded her poetic investigations on war (The English Civil War [1642–51], King Philip's War or the First Indian War [1675–78], and the American Civil War

[1]Howe defines "poetry" as "factual telepathy" (her first use of the phrase) in an essay on filmmaker Chris Marker called "Sorting Facts, Or, Nineteen Ways of Looking at Marker" (1996, 91). Howe doesn't offer a clear definition of factual telepathy, but the method stems from her study of filmic editing: "Editorial use of split sequences, 'disruptive-associative montage,' emphasis on the mysterious patternment and subliminal structures of images (icons), sensitivity to the sound shape (even in a silent film) of each pictured event, awareness of the time-mystery of simultaneous phenomena (co-occurrence and deployment)..." (93-94, republished in *The Quarry*, (Howe 2015)).

[1861–65]), American frontier literature, and various Puritan figures, ranging from fire-and-brimstone preachers, like Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards, to exiled theologians, like Anne Hutchinson and Hope Atherton. She has also engaged in the long study of obscured philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce, known as "the father of pragmatism." The centuries-long cultural and linguistic collision and comingling between Christian white settlers and indigenous communities are also a continuous thread throughout her work.

Ming-Qian Ma (1994) writes that Howe's "use of history departs radically from that of other poets, past and present" (Ma 1994)(717).

> "What distinguishes Howe especially in this respect is the poet's unremitting insistence upon the fusion of 'history and fiction.' In contrast to the modernist 'poetry including history,' which still demarcates truth from untruth, Howe's fusion of 'history and fiction' not only erases that boundary but also, by extension, calls our attention to the artificiality of such a distinction. Thus engendered, then, is the critical perspective which insists that 'what we were given of tradition is what we must break off, examine, fabricate' (DuPlessis 130)." (Ma 1994)(717)

In her poetry, Howe does not write "about history" but instead "immerses" herself in the historical lives she studies. As I will discuss in more depth in Chapter 4, Howe's "historical figuration," as named by Howard (2019), resonates with Hartman's methodology of "close narration." Like Hartman, Howe positions her personal narrative encounter with historical traces as a "bridge" that contacts the past through affect: "Once dams, narratives are bridges" (Howe 1993)(51). As Candace Stockton-Bleakley (2003) describes it, "Often Howe uses verifiable historical events as her paratext or framework, recreating them within the bounds of poetic license and creating a dialogue with the original text" (Stockton-Bleakley 2003)(30). The material of the archive, "the fragment, the piece of paper," and above all *words* themselves, for Howe, are how the past is "felt" and how we "connect with the dead" (McLane 2012).

My Emily Dickinson (1985) (reprinted in 2007 by New Directions) was Susan Howe's first work of criticism and is considered a seminal text of feminist literary criticism and creative scholarship. This immersion into Dickinson's interiority initiated Howe's long study of American history and the lasting effects of Europe's colonization of North America on psyches and landscapes. In *My Emily Dickinson* Howe concerns herself with the "psychic past" of New England (her birthplace and Dickinson's), and Puritan and Calvinist influence on the formation of an American literary

voice, a history which Howe connects to her own paternal lineage. In her project of recovering the marginalized voices of "wayward" thinkers, Howe writes that "Emily Dickinson's writing is my strength and shelter" (Howe 1993)(2). Dickinson, she explains, has been a "necessary" guide in her writing, "not at a remove, but in me" (Keller 1995)(20).

In form, one can see how *My Emily Dickinson* stands out from Howe's other publications, such as *Pierce-Arrow* (1999) and *Souls of Labadie Tract* (2007), in that her prose is not interrupted by discrete poems. However, as I will discuss, poetic gestures are woven throughout the text so much so that it becomes impossible to distinguish between poetry and prose while reading, mirroring Dickinson's own writing style. *My Emily Dickinson* makes transparent Howe's aim to articulate a writer's process. When Howe's study was published in 1985, it differed from the majority of Dickinson scholarship in its focus on the poet's working method rather than details of her life and enigmatic psychology. While Howe's study is informed by a dedicated interest in Dickinson's "psyche" culled from her poetry and letters within a larger historical and geographical context, in the text Howe passionately distances herself from others who, according to the writer, had uncritically assumed Dickinson's "madness."

My Emily Dickinson is driven by an investigation into Dickinson's influences by Howe's excavation of the poet's reading history and intellectual environment. As Howe wrote in a letter to George Butterick, "I needed to find out that she didn't just write all that stuff of the top of her head. That she used other writers and how she used them" (Collis 2006)(90) cited in (Heim 2015)(121). At the same time, Howe reads Dickinson's writing through researching the poet's New England, her Calvinist ancestry, the influence of the Civil War, and her refusal to join the Congregational Church during the Great Revival which "left her startingly alone" (Howe 1985*a*)(54). A method she would echo in subsequent works, Howe riffs off Dickinson's writing style and borrows her textual strategies. To invoke the writer, she consults dictionaries used in the Dickinson family house (Noah Webster's 1844 *American Dictionary of the English Language*) and immerses herself in studying the poet's linguistic climate, in which "change was happening wildly all the time" (Gallagher 2005)(48). Howe visits Dickinson's literary influences as she imagines Dickinson would have. This strategy of textual "mediumship" marks an early point in Howe's practice of writing "as" historical figures (Heim 2015)(112-15).

1.1 A "Counter-Tradition" of Writing Counter-Histories

In this thesis I propose that Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* and Susan Howe's *My Emily Dickinson* are counter-historical "fabulations" that value the "counter-fact" or "marginalia," by which I refer to the affective trace that complicates "official" historical narratives. Counter-histories, writes Stephanie Smallwood (2016), "are never not engaged with the archive, however fraught that engagement might be" (Smallwood 2016)(120). As Hartman's and Howe's narratives expose "the methodological limits of the discipline of history," both writers engage in a practice of refusal to take the archive as "merely a repository of free-floating empirical facts to be lifted off the page by the researcher" (123), or to take History (epistemologically and grammatically) for granted.

Before discussing their specific archives, including their important differences, I wish to situate Hartman and Howe within a tradition of scholars challenging the notion of the archive as a repository for the facts. Various critical concepts and theories of the archive commonly describe it as a site of power and a process rather than a thing. Michel Foucault (1972) wrote that the archive not only dictates "what can be said," but is also the process under which the "statement-event" is organized and functions (Foucault 1972)(145-46). Michel Rolph Trouillot (1995) has argued that the archive, as one of the first sites in which historical silencing happens through a process of assembly and selection, becomes a regime of knowledge (Trouillot 1995)(26). Jacques Derrida (1996) also highlights the impact of the process of archivization, which "produces as much as it records the event" (Derrida 1996)(17). The archive is also "a status," according to Achille Mbembe (2002), in that its contents are the result of a process of discrimination by actors exercising their power to privilege certain documents or objects judged "archivable." The authority of the archivist is, in this sense, conferred upon the items archived (Mbembe 2002)(20).

Several scholars, especially historians interested in the individual experiences of the enslaved, subaltern, dispossessed, or otherwise marginalized, advocate a critical move "beyond archival empiricism" toward "a kind of thinking that is askew from the empirically verifiable" (Kazanjian 2016)(134-35). These researchers call for "'the exercise of the imagination' en route to 'an uncoercive rearrangement of desire'" on more "unverifiable path[s]," and for maintaining a critical stance against the overdetermination of the "Archive" as a site for "answers" (134, citing Spivak 2008). Mbembe portrays the archive as "a type of sepulchre" (Mbembe 2002)(22), echoing Hartman's description of slavery's archive as "a death sentence, a tomb" (Hartman

2008)(2). Jennifer Morgan (2016) writes,

> "The archive is a site of violent dispossession, a point of departure, not a conclusion; so to navigate that archive is to foreground the speculative, to juxtapose the record with the imaginary, to leave the questions unanswered. The conceit of the archive is that it is the repository of answers, of knowable conclusions, of the data needed to explain or understand the past. The reality, however, is that the archive is the troubled genesis of our always-failed effort to unravel the effects of the past on the present; rather than verifiable truths, the archive – and its silence – houses the very questions that unsettle us." (Morgan 2016)(187)

These theorists and others have pointed to the problematics of considering the archive as a potential site of discovery, even (or especially) for the information that may be "loosely classified" or deemed excessive (Featherstone 2006)(594). Mike Featherstone (2006) draws upon Foucault's practice of reading the French national library "on the diagonal," or across disciplines, centuries, and civilizations, in order to "radically re-think and reclassify received wisdom," and likens this type of researcher to the *flaneur* who walks through the archive with an ear and eye toward serendipitous encounters (594). Featherstone's description of research that "can depend upon chance and be likened to divination" (594), which could possibly resonate with Howe's "factual telepathy," can be criticized for how it downplays the extent to which the archive's logic or order determines what is present and discoverable.

Further in this thesis, I attempt to address the kind of "hope" that seems to accompany this search for "serendipitous encounters." A critique of the "flaneur" approach may argue for the recognition of fundamental differences between archives. In other words, can a researcher "divine" what is obscured in the archive of slavery if this archive is structured by the erasure of all that one is looking for? What seems to be overlooked or under-considered is the possibility (or impossibility) of constructing *undiscoverable* histories through methods of reading that transcend typical utterances and ways of knowing. Hartman, for example, poses the question, "How does one write a story about an encounter with nothing?" (Hartman 2006)(16-17). How does one confront the "slipperiness and elusiveness" of the archive, while going beyond the limits of what's archivable, discoverable, and, therefore, sayable?

Omnia El Shakry (2015) in her article on the "vexed archives" of decolonization in the Middle East, explores "two senses" of the phrase "history without documents," borrowed from Egyptian historian Ibrahim 'Abduh (1975):

> "One references what Achille Mbembe calls the chronophagy of the state, the way it devours the past through either the material destruction of archives or the presentation of a history purified of antagonisms and embodied in empty commemorative accounts. The second sense refers to the history that we might seek to reconstruct because of, and despite, the absence of access to such documents. The archive thus functions as an 'instituting imaginary' that seeks to reassemble and inter the traces of the deceased – always incomplete, always unknowable, and always, at least partially, the projection of our own desires." (El Shakry 2015)(920)

Anne J. Gilliland and Michelle Caswell (2016) similarly consider "imagined-but-unavailable records" as possibly "fertile sources of personal and public affect" whose projections can inspire a multitude of artistic or scholarly productions (Gilliland and Caswell 2016)(55). These might include what Erica L. Johnson (2014) has termed the "neo-archive," or "fiction that creates history in the face of its absence" (Johnson 2014)(157).

Coming up I will discuss the differences or possible incommensurabilities I locate between Hartman's and Howe's archives and these archives' silences. I am, however, less interested in marking stark and irreconcilable contrasts between "archives" than I am in discussing the resonance between both researchers' sensibilities in approaching the archive and its exclusions and their resonant imaginaries or commitments to constructing something "because of, and despite" absences. I argue that Hartman's and Howe's "dispositions" (Rancière 2009) as researchers and their commitment to affectively and aesthetically unsettling what is settled, allow them to be similarly positioned in community with those scholars and artists building counter-histories out of an investment in not only falsifying the objectivity of historiography, but also revealing the complex constructedness or "falseness" of our stories, subjectivities, and realities generally.

In doing so, they are, as Moglen (2016) writes, "drawing on the representational strategies of modern fiction and poetry in order to create new nonfiction idioms that deploy the scholar's expertise to enhance available versions of the practical past" (Moglen 2016)(158). Referenced here is Hayden White's notion of the "practical past" (borrowed from Michael Oakeshott), which is counter to the disciplinary tradition of divorcing the past from the present in order to transform "history" into an object of study for professionals (White 2014)(10). The "practical past" is defined by White as "the past that people as individuals or members of groups draw upon in order to help them make assessments and make decisions in ordinary everyday life as well as in extreme situations" (xiii). Narratives of the "practical past" reduce the

"scholarly" distance thought to be required to study the past while dispensing with the myth of the "objective" scholar or historian (xii). White writes, "our interest in the practical past must take us beyond 'the facts' as conventionally understood in historiographical thinking. Indeed, it must take us beyond the idea that a fact, whatever else it may be, is identifiable by its logical opposition to 'fiction,' where fiction is understood to be an imaginary thing or product of the imagination" (23). I argue that methods like critical fabulation, close narration, and historical figuration seem similarly useful in that they make room for the study of affective and "intimate histories" and open the way for ethically researching minor figures and what Nyong'o (2018) calls the "shadow archive" (Nyong'o 2018)(12) – that which has been occluded by history and which vexes temporal linearity.

In addition, I propose that Hartman's and Howe's works can be connected within a tradition of feminist historiography and counter-narrative writing. *My Emily Dickinson* situates Dickinson in a lineage of feminine antinomians and rebels, making it comparable to Hartman's "serial biography" of wayward women (Hartman 2019)(31). *Wayward Lives* is, like Howe's study, a narrative of the non-conformist voice in American history. In Hartman's counter-history of the "ghetto," she rewrites young black women as catalysts of a radical, revolutionary, cultural-political rebellion prior to the Harlem Renaissance. In situating Dickinson alongside other historical nonconformists, Howe's study resonates with Hartman's utopian history of the "chorus." Howe counters normative narratives that have portrayed Dickinson as a fearful, non-political "spinster," out of touch and ineffectual, while Hartman writes against pervasive narratives that have cast black women as powerless victims and non-intellectuals. Both authors also locate their subjects in a larger feminist movement of the present.

Ma (1994) contends that Howe "subpoena[s] history for an investigation of its violent crime against women" (Ma 1994)(718).

> "'Sometimes I think my poetry is only a search by an investigator for the point where the crime began,' says the poet ('Difficulties' 21). That being so, poetry becomes for Howe counterdiscourse to history, a 'rereading [of] the reading that a social status quo puts [her] through' (Andrews 27). When enacted in poetry 'with the foregrounding of language' (Hartley xii), Howe's rereading demonstrates itself through a complex and peculiar textual feminism..." (Ma 1994)(718)

Though by no means do I intend to conflate the nature of the "excess" each researcher faced in her research, it is interesting to note how Howe describes confronting an ex-

cess of documentation in the "shadow archive" of feminine/feminist nonconformism that influenced Dickinson, an excess that attempted to mold this nonconformism into something palatable and intelligible to the "gentlemen of the old school" – editorial authorities and keepers of patriarchal literary history. In the following section, I will tell of how she contends with the "authority" of these documents, sometimes personally.

Antoinette Burton (2013) writes that "it remains the task of historians of women to challenge the residue of objectivist approaches to history-writing and, in the process, to continue to query the gendered presumptions of what counts as evidence, archive, impact, and History as well" (Burton 2013)(187). Of course, as I will discuss, Howe's *My Emily Dickinson* differs from *Wayward Lives* in that it focuses on a canonical writer as opposed to predominantly anonymous minor figures. The task Howe embarks on, however, resembles Hartman's because both writers "engage in [the] challenge rhetorically" by writing against the discourse of historical narratives attempting to limit the political or philosophical range or depth of subjects gendered female by defining them as incapable of true originality and creative thinking (Burton 2013)(187).

Howe writes, "History has happened. The narrator is disobedient. A return is necessary, a way for women to go. Because we are in the stutter. We were expelled from the Garden of the Mythology of the American Frontier. The drama's done. We are the wilderness. We have come on to the stage stuttering" (Howe 1993)(181). Both writers, I will argue, "return" "stuttering" to re-tell history within what Stockton-Bleakley (2003) names a "feminist imaginary" (Stockton-Bleakley 2003). Their counter-histories are not reversals nor simple acts of corrective "revenge"; the ways in which they "counter" history literarily reveal how the terms through which history has been written fail to make sense anymore. Their "stutter" loosens the narrative, revealing the textuality, constructedness, and performance of the stories on which we base reality and identity. Their reparative redress reveals a textual "self-consciousness," an undoing of our "common sense" and sensibilities.

1.2 Dissonance

While this thesis is primarily interested in considering how Hartman's and Howe's projects resonate and where their research and writing methodologies overlap, in

closely reading these two texts, I have also realized where they importantly diverge. The archives, first of all, from which Hartman and Howe craft their narratives are both "distorted" but differently so, and despite using similar approaches within the archive, these writers ultimately and necessarily produce different texts with different stakes. While I propose that their historical subjects are similarly written as nonconformists working to produce an "outside" within enclosures, these subjects' "beautiful experiments" necessarily differed since very different structures of enclosure were experienced.

The enclosure extends beyond the confines of the bedroom, the homestead, the ghetto, and the ward; it refers to the archive and its logics, which have long been in service to the structural logics deeming black life as worth less than white. Hartman writes (borrowing from Hortense Spillers), "Great dangers awaited those who lived in the lexical gap between black female and woman. This category crisis defined the afterlife of slavery" (Hartman 2019)(184). Though Howe is nothing if not deeply concerned with how language haunts in the gap, the stakes of Howe's project differ from those of Hartman's given the specific historical and theoretical moments in which they write and are read. My hope is that by considering these two works as somehow commensurate, I might assess more critically the logics determining the capacity by which narratives distort or occlude our stories and experiences. Though I will argue for resonance between Hartman's and Howe's refusals and imaginaries, I ask in the following, where do their projects diverge?

1.2.1 Different Archives, Incommensurate "Silences"

Studies of colonial archives, such as that of Ann Stoler (2002), have crucially expanded the discussion around the limits of the archive for knowledge retrieval by reframing colonial archives as "cultural artifacts of fact production [and] taxonomies in the making" (Stoler 2002)(91), or as "'fonts' of colonial truths in themselves" (Guha and Dening, quoted in Stoler 2002, 91). Rosanne Kennedy (2011) labels "perverse" the archives keeping record of private trauma, particularly of indigenous or refugee groups, and which document, for example, sexual abuses and forms of institutionalization or compulsory assimilation. In her consideration of how "perverse archives" can be used to create a "cultural memory of dehumanization and survival," Kennedy reads counterintuitively for other possible, obscured narratives (Kennedy 2011)(90). Through an expanded attention to "Dickinson's archive" (in which the silenced stories of banished antinomians and feminine nonconformists are included),

Howe reveals histories of trauma, exclusion, and marginalization as her study sheds light on the gendered violence wrought upon a poet's work and legacy. Howe's larger project too, as discussed, involves attending to the archive of the U.S.'s psychic past and aftermath of North American colonization. Admittedly, however, it would be a stretch to call the Dickinson archive "perverse" in the same way as that which Hartman consults of the lives of the enslaved, criminalized, or dispossessed.

Despite a resonance between evidence of distortion in their archives, one must ask if Hartman's and Howe's archives can really be compared. *Wayward Lives* is, first of all, a reading of mostly state archives whereas *My Emily Dickinson* is born mainly from Dickinson's own literary production. What must be acknowledged beyond the obvious differences between these scholars' archives is the "sub-status" of Hartman's subjects who represent historical "unknowability." In the archives of the Atlantic slave trade, Hartman has written of the dual violence of absence and excess. In researching for *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman had a "plentiful archive, of the Freedmen's Bureau papers, the WPA [Works Progress Administration] narratives, and hundreds of slave narratives produced in the U.S.," an archive she attempted to read "symptomatically and against the grain" (Saunders 2008*b*)(8). "But in order to do a symptomatic reading," says Hartman, "it presumes a kind of canon, and there was no canon or vast archive available regarding the experience of the captives in the Atlantic slave trade" (8). In researching for *Lose Your Mother*, she again faced excessive evidence of human commodification in "trade" documents but again no traces of the experiences of the enslaved. She tells Saunders, "the archive of the trade in some ways proved to be a distraction – I mean, it wasn't a trade for us. It was war and death, and kidnapping, but there was, again, the volumes of trade documents" (8). And, as discussed earlier, the archive of slavery Hartman confronted in her search for "Black Venus" was inundated by "scandal and excess" (Hartman 2008)(5).

Wayward Lives is written in response to the sociological surveys, prison files, and journalists' accounts that "failed to discern the beauty" in black survival, improvisation, and experiments in living otherwise (Hartman 2019)(5).

> "I am not an archival sleuth, so my counter-narratives have not been composed as a consequence of discovering new documents, but rather by engaging with extant archival materials critically and creatively. My aim has been to compose and reconstruct, to improvise and augment. In this task, I have embraced the document, which isn't to suggest any fidelity to the truth or authority of the document, but simply that I have tried to figure out what I might do with official documents, given the limits,

the lies, the omissions, the fabrications." (Hartman 2020)

In *Wayward Lives* Hartman writes, "The surveys and the sociological pictures left me cold. These photographs never grasped the beautiful struggle to survive, glimpsed the alternative modes of life, or illuminated the mutual aid and communal wealth of the slum. The reform pictures and the sociological surveys documented only ugliness" (Hartman 2019)(19). She writes in response, for example, to W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), which was a sociological study commissioned by the University of Pennsylvania intent on identifying social ills of Philadelphia's African American communities. In all of Hartman's sources, which beyond sociological surveys included rent collectors' journals, prison case files, trial transcripts, and the reports of parole officers, social workers, and psychologists, her subjects were represented as "problem[s]" (xiii). *Wayward Lives* (which is in many ways modeled after the poly-genre form of *The Souls of Black Folk*) critically addresses the terms through which Du Bois poses his famous question: "How does it feel to be a problem?" (Du Bois 1903). Perusing the files of the New York State Reformatory for Women at Bedford Hills, where many of her subjects would be held on trumped-up charges of errancy, vagrancy, and prostitution, Hartman learned that almost all of the black girls and women there were labeled "feeble-minded" by authorities: "It did not matter if they were intelligent, avid readers, songwriters. Ryan Lane, an opium-addicted poet, wrote a one-act play in verse, *In the Woods*, and composed thoughtful, melancholy letters. None of this mattered, only the results of the battery of intelligence tests to which she had been subjected" (Hartman 2019)(265).

To counter this archival violence, Hartman labors to liberate a new narrative free from that which described her subjects as "promiscuous, reckless, wild, and wayward" and in need of "uplift" and "reform" (Hartman 2019)(xiv). She expands her method of reading "against the grain" to include a form of affective "listening" that enables her to craft stories more accountable to those whose experiences the archive distorts or leaves out. As I will discuss and illustrate further in Chapter 2, Hartman subverts the paucity and excess of the archive, exploiting its limitations as well as the historiographical idiom in order write a "fugitive text" that might describe the "nowhere" of the ghetto or the ward, and how its errant inhabitants experienced it as a kind of utopia at the turn of the twentieth century. This "urban commons" is described through the perspective of its "wayward" dwellers (xiv): "Outsiders call the streets and alleys that comprise her world the slum. For her, it is just the place where she stays" (3). While Hartman quotes her subjects as much as possible in order to let them narrate the story, she avoids subjecting them to the same type of coerced visibility through which the so-called "progressive" reformers had forced

Harlem's inhabitants to be representatives of "the black urban poor" (21). She exposes the trap of racial uplift discourses and ideology that instructed young black women to raise themselves "up" according to the very terms through which they had been "kept down." And to trouble the logic of "uplift," she envisions how these women lived and what they thought as they creatively and beautifully survived precarity.

In Chapter 4 I will discuss more at length the breadth of Howe's archive, by which I include several of the major paratexts framing *My Emily Dickinson*'s counter-historical gesture. In large part, however, Howe's archive is mostly comprised of Dickinson's own poetry and letters, both the original manuscripts and fascicles and editors' printed versions. In comparison to Hartman, Howe arguably focuses less on the violence wrought by the archive as a structure and process because she spends more time critiquing the process of "archivization" via publication of a nonconformist literature. Because Howe's books typically focus on writers, her attention therefore shifts from the intellectual or philosophical systems guarding archives and obscuring anomalous contents and toward another but related authority: the editor. The "historian" or "archivist" in this case specifically for Howe is the (male) editor of Dickinson's writing. Those "gentlemen of the old school" figure prominently in Howe's study as they represent for the most part the guardians of Dickinson's archive (Howe 2015)(170). In Howe's prose she points out the ways in which the editor, publisher, and the critic's process and philosophy have been in line with the simplifying and silencing of nonconformist voices for centuries. Against this American Tradition, she unearths the roots of a counter-tradition out of which potential readings may recognize Dickinson's poetics as "processes rather than products" (Howe 1993)(19).

Dickinson scholarship, including Howe's, was revolutionized by Ralph V. Franklin's two-volume *Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* published in 1981 because it included facsimiles of her manuscript books and unsewn fascicle sheets. According to the Harvard University Press catalog, "Every detail is preserved: the bosses on the stationery, the sewing holes and tears, and poet's alternate reading and penciled revisions, ink spots and other stains offset onto adjacent leaves," and "the experience of reading these facsimile pages is virtually the same as reading the manuscripts themselves." This publication gave birth to "the manuscript school" of scholars who argued for the primacy of Dickinson's handwritten and self-copied poems, with their typographical originality and oddity, over previously printed versions. Examination of the manuscripts made possible a deeper exploration of Dickinson's myriad meaning and variations in "meaning-making" (Gallagher 2005)(11-12). Advocates for the study of Dickinson's fascicles or packets proposed a "theory of the fragment," arguing that the Dickinson's fragments – often found on the backs of envelopes or

scraps of paper – should be left to stand on their own as versions of poems or prose pieces. The publication of the unsewn fascicle pages and fragments, poems, and letters opened the Dickinson archive and destabilized the identity of poems, series, and all previous interpretations of her work.

In *My Emily Dickinson* and a subsequent essay "These Flames and Generosities of the Heart: Emily Dickinson and the Illogic of Sumptuary Values" (1993), Howe discusses the misediting of the poet's writing made evident via careful readings of her manuscripts and fascicles. The works Howe specifically critiques include *The Poems of Emily Dickinson; Including variant readings critically compared with all known manuscripts* (1951) and *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* (1958), both edited by Thomas H. Johnson and published by the Belknap Press of Harvard University, and *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* (1981) and *The Master Letters of Emily Dickinson* (1986) edited by Ralph W. Franklin and published by Belknap Press and Amherst College Press, respectively. Howe writes, "For a long time I believed that [Johnson] had given us the poems as they looked" (Howe 1993)(131). However, Franklin's publications would reveal Johnson's extensive editorial amendments. Examining the manuscripts, Howe learned "that Emily Dickinson ... may have been demonstrating her conscious and unconscious separating from a mainstream literary orthodoxy in letters" (1).

The poet's handwritten marks, crosses, dashes, and marginal notes demand Howe's devoted attention. To her they contain undervoices of what has disrupted an editor's order, defied interpretation, and have been summarily silenced and obscured in publications of the Dickinson's work. "Print beats imagination back" (Howe 1993)(66). In "These Flames and Generosities," she points to the various meanings of "to edit," one of which is "to prepare a book or paper for the public eye, by writing, correcting, or selecting the matter" (7). She adds:

> "Editing is the art of discipline; the mastery of detail. Eccentric punctuation, blots, dashes, smudged letters, gaps, interruptions, aborted sketches, 'textually irrelevant' numbers, uncanceled or canceled alternatives in the manuscript are a profitless counteraction. *Editing is sensible partitioning.* ... In spite of the zealous searching of editors, authors, and publishers for the print-perfect proof of intellectual labor, *the heart may be sheltering in some random mark of communication.* Cancelations, variants, insertions, erasures, marginal notes, stray marks and blanks ... Maybe they are memories in disguise ... another kind of writing, as are Dickinson's word variants, directional dashes and crosses. *Editors too often remove these original marks of 'imperfection' or muffle them in appendixes and prefaces.*" (Howe 1993)(8-9, emphases mine)

Editing figures for Howe in *My Emily Dickinson* (and elsewhere) as the removal of the "feminine mark," interpreted as excess or deformity by "masculine observers" (Hawthorne 1843)(2). While the "feminine" here includes both men's and women's nonconformist experimentation and affect, Howe attends to the banishment of women's voices specifically, an attention, Howard writes, that is central to her "poetics and praxis" (Howard 2019)(12). Despite knowing the archive preserves "the record of winners [and] documents were written by the Masters," she considers the possibility of locating affect "pre-removal" if she attends closely to "the marginalia" (Howe 2015)(179).

In addition, Howe closely studies Johnson's and Franklin's framing devices – their introductions, prefaces, appendixes, footnotes, and other notes – that reveal to her the ways in which these editors work to impose an order onto Dickinson's poems and letters. Next to these, she examines the same handwritten manuscripts these editors handled and follows textual traces that lead her to readings often countering their conclusions. Howe writes in response to Johnson's "formal assumptions" (seemingly shared by Franklin judging from his introduction to the *Letters*) (Howe 1993)(1). She cites that in Johnson's introduction, titled "Creating the Poems," he wrote that Dickinson's "latent talents were invigorated by a gentle, brave young man ... who taught her how to observe the world ... she was trying to fashion verses in a desultory manner. ... Whereas Newton as muse had awakened her to a sense of her talents, Wadsworth as muse made her a poet. ... [S]he continued to write verses throughout her life..." (Howe 1993)(133). Howe explains that Johnson assumes here that Dickinson, who could only write half-planned "verses," was inspired to write by a "male muse-minister" (134). Dickinson was also a poet who apparently only wrote *verses*, which Howe explains were "distinguished from poetry esp. by [their] lower level of intensity and [...] lack of essential conviction and commitment" (133). Johnson then arranges these "verses," she writes, "into hymn-like stanzas with little variation in form and no variation of cadence. By choosing a sovereign system for her line endings – his preappointed Plan – he established the constraints of a strained positivity. Copious footnotes, numbers, comparisons, and chronologies mask his authorial role" (134-35). Howe further cites Johnson's editorial notes: "*No important changes in form*" (131); "Standard typesetting conventions have also been followed ... No attempt has been made to indicate the amount of space between words ... Stray marks have been ignored" (132).[2] "For readability" (Howe 1993)(69).

[2]In the introduction to the published *Letters* (1958), Johnson also commented on Dickinson's lack of (direct) reference to historical events. He claims, "[T]he fact is that she did not live in history and held no view of it past or current" (132).

According to Howe, Franklin continues in the Johnsonian tradition of ignoring inconvenient marks. She quotes his editorial notes: "A drop of ink mars the top of the third page [first letter], but it may have come after she had written *an awkward predication* [my italics] further down the same page" (132, emphasis Howe's). More than this, Franklin ignores Dickinson's line breaks altogether. In 1985 (four years after his publication of the poems and one year prior to his publication of the letters), Howe stages an intervention:

> "I wrote a letter to Ralph Franklin, the busy director of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, to suggest ... [Dickinson] began to break her lines with a consistency that the Johnson edition seemed to have ignored ... I received a curt letter in response. He told me the notebooks were not artistic structures and were not intended for other readers. ... My suggestion about line breaks depended on an 'assumption' that one reads in lines ... " (Howe 1993)(134)

Apparently, according to Franklin, Howe was the one making assumptions. The next year, Franklin sent Howe a copy of the *Letters*, which "showed facsimiles, and had them set in type on each facing page, with the line breaks as she made them" (145).

> "I wrote him a letter again suggesting that if he broke the lines here according to the original text, he might consider doing the same for the poems. He thanked me for my 'immodest' compliments and said he had broken the letters line-for-physical-line only to make reference to the facsimiles easier; if he were editing a book of the letters, he would use run-on treatment, as there is no expected genre form for prose. He told me there is such a form for poetry, and he intended to follow it, rather than accidents of physical line breaks on paper... " (Howe 1993)(145)

Franklin's letter to Howe reveals more than his loyalty to generic rules. His condescension toward her (whom he refuses to see as a fellow Dickinson scholar) echoes his apparent attitude toward Emily Dickinson: he fails to consider her possible intentionality in writing how *she wrote* and prefers to see her formal decisions as "accidents."

In defiance of the editor, Howe attempts to consider Dickinson "poet to poet." The space between lines Howe calls "the poem's space" (139):

> "After 1861, Dickinson's practice of variation and fragmentation also included line breaks. Unlike Franklin, I believe there is a reason for them ... As a poet, I cannot assert that Dickinson composed in stanzas and was careless about line breaks. In the precinct of Poetry, a word, the space around a word, each letter, every mark, silence, or sound volatizes an inner law of form ... I wonder at Ralph Franklin's conclusion that these facsimiles are not to be considered as artistic structures ... It takes the poet to see how urgent this subject of line breaks is. But then how often do critics consider poetry as a physical act? Do critics look at the print on the page, at the shape of words, at the surface – the space of the paper itself? Very rarely." (Howe 1993)(139, 145, 157)

Howe's feminist intervention in the publication history and literary criticism of Dickinson's writing aimed to address an archive that at the time Howe wrote *My Emily Dickinson* in 1985 had rendered Dickinson's poetic innovation negligible or non-existent. Howe's intervention was feminist because it responded to Dickinson critics and editors that had reduced the poet to her gender and to the facts of her life (that, according to Howe, were limited and dubious at best). As I will discuss in Chapter 4, Howe also countered several feminist critics' assumptions as to the soundness of Dickinson's mind, which were affecting readings and limiting interpretations of her work. Most critically for Howe, this criticism had closed off other readings of the poetry and promised to inhibit the intellectual influence of Dickinson's experimentation in writing and thinking otherwise. Thus, secondly, Howe aimed to situate Dickinson within a collective of nonconformists who had been historically banished, erased, and forgotten, and in doing so, she points out historical exclusions in the archive. She writes: "The real Anne Hutchinson was banished by the founders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, then murdered in the natural wilderness by history. Emily Dickinson's textual production is still being tamed for aesthetic consumption. If antinomian vision in North America is gendered feminine, then what will save it from print misfortune?" (Howe 1985*a*)(4).

1.2.2 Disparate Stakes and "Subjecthoods"

In the following I aim to address something of the difference between the pressures, conditions, strategies, and stakes of survival confronting Hartman's and Howe's subjects. Before discussing both writers' works together in more depth, it feels necessary to address the different kinds of enclosure present in the comparison. How can Emily Dickinson, for example, who rarely left her family's homestead, be considered a part

of a social history adjacent to that of Hartman's subjects? How should one address the difference between the confinement of the "black ghetto" and Dickinson's privilege to confine herself at home and abstain from societal participation without reducing these subjects to their circumstances? How can homesteading (albeit anxious or agoraphobic) be compared to prison? But then, my question isn't, how were their isolations similar? They did not have to be and *would not* be commensurate experiences.

Nonetheless, I need to address the ways in which the relative privacy and freedom afforded to Dickinson and not to Hartman's subjects, whose private lives were publicly condemned and actively regulated, has had something to do with how their lives have or have not been recorded and historicized. To me, it is important to address the differences between Hartman's subjects first of all as laborers and members of an unsettled, displaced community (Hartman 2019)(23). The slum, Hartman writes, is a place where "no one ever settles [...] only stays, waits for better" (4); Dickinson, on the other hand, was materially and comfortably settled, rooted physically in place, and did not labor outside of her own home. Though her homesteading might not have felt mentally luxurious, in comparison, of course, it was, and it afforded the poet time and resources to write and thus the opportunity to create an imaginative "outside." More than this, and more to my present point, Dickinson's creation has been deemed valuable in large part because her life was.

Indeed, why is a counter-history or fabulation of Emily Dickinson "necessary"? As Howe makes plain, Dickinson's writing greatly inspires her own work, and Howe believes that Dickinson has been an underacknowledged innovator. When *My Emily Dickinson* was written, as I discussed, the extent of that innovation had been overlooked as part of a larger trend to discount the impact of poets gendered female and the influence of poetic experimentation on an American literary imagination. Howe's project at the time was partly critical and corrective; at the same time, it contributed to a longer engagement and confrontation with the archive and historical narratives through a poetic praxis. Beyond setting the record "straight," Howe was interested in unsettling the logic of the record altogether through using Dickinson as a case study or jumping off point. As I understand it, she began with a poet everyone "knew" already, in order to boldly insist on the necessity of confronting normative ways of structuring our knowledge of the world, our history and our heroes, and to reveal that our "sense-making" depends in large part on the stories we tell ourselves. She aimed to contribute, as she believed Dickinson had, to the repository or archive of a feminist and feminine oppositionality. Luckily for Howe, the publication of Dickinson's original manuscripts made it possible for her to become a scholar of the poet counter to the editor-expert. Howe, like Hartman,

is concerned about her subjects' gendered conscription within heterosexist, patriarchal norms in and beyond the academy, yet it cannot be overlooked that Hartman's subjects had to "earn" their subjecthood in a way Dickinson did not.

Earlier I addressed some of the differences between Hartman's and Howe's archives. According to Hartman, one difficulty in attempting to narrate black lives in history is to recover any trace of lives under "the annihilating force" of degrading and "obscene descriptions" that overwhelm reading. She writes, however, that "the more difficult task,"

> "is to exhume the lives buried under this prose, or rather to accept that Phibba and Dido [or Black Venus] exist only within the confines of these words, and that *this is the manner in which they enter history.* The dream is to liberate them from the obscene descriptions that first introduced them to us. It is too easy to hate a man like [slave owner] Thistlewood; *what is more difficult is to acknowledge as our inheritance the brutal Latin phrases* spilling onto the pages of his journals." (Hartman 2008)(5, emphases mine)

Thus, Hartman points to the tension I most want to highlight between *Wayward Lives* and *My Emily Dickinson* – that is, the differences between *the terms through which their subjects "enter history"* and *the stakes of refusing those terms conscribing subjecthood.*

I do argue that Howe's utopian vision of the poet beyond the confines of the gender binary and feminist stance against the sub-status of the female innovator and feminine voice reveals a rejection of the terms and categories imposed on subjecthood:

> "She works in issues of transcendence – as possibility, but also as impossible political privilege. Of 'feigning' and the sincerities of artifice. She works between abstract thought and precisions of image. She maintains a Woolfean admiration for the odd and quirky, the resistant and wayward. And makes fruitful a subtle play between determinate meaning and indeterminacy: a woman – a person mainly gendered female – writing 'feminine' discourses, knowing and rewriting "masculine" discourses, in the name of a feminist and critical cultural project which wants to transcend gender." (DuPlessis 1990)(125)

As Hartman is interested in both giving the capacity for agency and stories to subjects deemed "objects" while rejecting the normative terms of subjecthood, Howe

strives to create the "enunciative clearing" in which to grant Dickinson (and her nonconformist forebearers) the possibility for greater intellectual agency and intuitive consciousness (Howe 1993)(136). In attempting to do so, she simultaneously tries to challenge the terms through which subjecthood is granted and specifically the ways in which subjects are gendered.

However, Hartman's method in *Wayward Lives* is intimately linked to her project of imagining the subject otherwise or beyond that of "liberal" or so-called "emancipated" subjecthood. Despite clear differences between the writers' subjects' civil and social statuses, a more precise dissonance I think can be located firstly if we consider the historical difference and distance between Howe's feminist scholarly intervention in historical writing and criticism (in 1985) and Hartman's critique of the archive in our contemporary moment. In other words, as examined, Howe and Hartman are working with different archives and, therefore, incommensurate silences. Also, then, one must examine the differences in subjects' "capacities" for subjecthood, characterized by Smallwood (2016) as "the capacity for biography that is otherwise foreclosed ... in the normative registers of modern liberalism" (Smallwood 2016)(126). Examining both levels of dissonance together I believe helps reveal the differing stakes of *My Emily Dickinson* and *Wayward Lives*. Hartman's project significantly differs from Howe's in its gesture toward reparatively providing the conditions for "the capacity for biography." In doing so, Hartman places her subjects within a valid community, narratively structured as a "chorus." As I will discuss more, however, in Chapter 4, one of Howe's primary intentions is to show how Dickinson was a participant within a larger community of anti-authoritarian literary "enthusiasts" whose religion was poetry.

Utilizing experimentation at the level of grammar, Hartman writes a historical text that exceeds but also critically amends the archive, in affiliation with a tradition of black feminist scholarly interventions, such as Hortense Spillers's in her 1984 essay "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words": "[T]he point was to try to understand the maneuver, the colonial 'choreography' that rendered subjects dominant and subordinate not because some were inherently better than others, but, rather, because some were installed – a political decision reinforced by words, words, words – over others" (Spillers 2003)(22). As she discusses in "Venus in Two Acts," Hartman *un*-tells stories that could never be told through "telling" because to do so would re-inscribe her subjects as captives, criminals, and subjects without "subjecthood." To "tell" their stories, in other words, means to re-inscribe them in the language that has worked to obliterate the very possibility for them to have stories. "[W]hat was the 'problem'? Always shifting and elusive, it is the giant that the midget would depose. But in a word, it is the Word – both the named and that which struggled

to be named, but just as emphatically, it is the never-said" (Spillers 2003)(12).

Similar to the poet M. NourbeSe Philip, whose experimental, expressivist long poem *Zong!* (2008) is a "textual invocation" of the mass drowning of over 150 enslaved Africans who were thrown overboard the British slave ship Zong for insurance money, Hartman must "not-tell" these stories in attempts to avoid replicating the "logic" that foreclosed them, the same "brutal calculus," "logical system," and "technology by which Africans and their descendants are rendered as outside the scope of Man" and "by which African laborers would be routinely brutalized in service of national accumulations of wealth while simultaneously omitted from the categories of subject and citizen" (Morgan 2016)(189). "The disorder, illogic and irrationality of the *Zong!* poems," Philip writes, "can no more tell a story than the legal report of Gregson v. Gilbert masquerading as order, logic, and rationality. In their very disorder and illogic is the not-telling of the story that must be told" (Philip 2008)(198). Arguably, this logic is in and of the language that also structured "the antique imagination of [Dickinson's] fathers" (Howe 1985*a*)(85). Philip writes, "I deeply distrust this tool I work with – language ... language in which those events took place promulgated the non-being of African peoples, and I distrust its order, which hides disorder; its logic hiding the illogic and its rationality, which is simultaneously irrational" (Philip 2008)(198). Utilizing this shared distrust or hesitance with language, the point for Hartman, like Spillers, is to "translate certain subjectivities," whose traces she locates through listening in the archive, "back into modes of abeyance, in which case we would have to await a content, ideally, in contradistinction to arriving on the scene with one already in hand" (Spillers 2003)(22). In this "abeyance" or suspended state, Hartman's subjects are transported into an imaginative "content" that is critically fabulated in contradistinction to the narratives in which they were found.

The women whose stories Hartman desires to tell fall into what Spillers calls the "lexical gap" in "Interstices" (1984), in which Spillers describes the role of representations of black female sexuality in repertoires of dominant (white) myths. The black woman "mess[es] up a neat picture," she writes, being "sexual subject and object, simultaneously" (Spillers 2003)(13-14). Hartman expands on this in *Scenes of Subjection* in discussing the slippage between consent and nonconsent: "The opportunity for nonconsent is required to establish consent, for consent is meaningless if refusal is not an option. ... Consent is unseemly in a context in which the very notion of subjectivity is predicated upon the negation of will" (111, cited in (Hartman and Wilderson 2003)186). *Wayward Lives* is part of Hartman's long study of the tension between the capacity of "will" and objectifying conditions. "Ultimately it's about the paradox of agency for those in these extreme circumstances," who reside

in conditions where they cannot give consent (as "property") yet are considered culpable agents, because "in formulation[s] of law and its punishment, blackness is on the side of culpability" (Hartman and Wilderson 2003)(192). Spillers writes, "Winning the right to the *nuantial* – let's say – goes with the territory of subjecthood, which must be *earned* for some" (Spillers 2003)(14).

Hartman refuses throughout her work "to have faith in the liberal state which has licensed black death and dispossession for centuries" (Hartman, Campt, and Weheliye 2018). Her refusal matches that of the women of *Wayward Lives* – "to disavow what they know – the extraordinary violence of a world organized against them" (Hartman 2020). Hartman is concerned with how to tell socio-poetic stories from the paradoxical position of the "not yet free" within, between, and beyond the terms and language of unimaginative and repeatedly oppressive narratives (Hartman and Wilderson 2003)(192). These conditions essentially "necessitate fabulation" given the "necessity of trying to represent what we cannot," that "position of the unthought" the enslaved and their descendants occupy that reverberates through the historical present (Hartman and Wilderson 2003)(186).

1.2.3 Textual Dissonance and Adjacent Practices of Refusal

Arguably, Howe makes herself more "visible" in her writing than Hartman, perhaps in part because Howe relates to Dickinson as a fellow poet in order to specifically challenge editorial reduction and disfigurement with which she herself contends. Though Howe employs several of the same techniques as Hartman toward articulating the "unknowable," her writing does not "flatten" discourse in the same way as Hartman's to confuse historical or authorial voices; in other words, Howe's "historical figuration" is not identical to Hartman's "close narration." Hartman does, however, employ some framing devices (her note on method and endnotes, for example), but this seems to have to do with the context and characteristics of *Wayward Lives*' specific historical intervention and Hartman's device of the "chorus" I will discuss later on. While both writers find openings through hesitation and anticipation and possibilities in the interrogative, Howe focuses on articulating potentiality through poetic-syntactical deconstruction and the sounds of words themselves. Howe employs parataxis and wordplay to a great extent, so that prose and poetry in *My Emily Dickinson* cannot be clearly distinguished. In some ways, Howe's minimalism through operations of erasing grammatical connectives contrasts with Hartman's efforts to describe "as fully as possible" (Hartman 2008)(1). In the following, I locate

a textual dissonance in the style of their writing and divergent experimentations with language that reveal, paradoxically, what I argue could be an adjacent practice of refusal.

Hartman's rhetorical subversion is evident in the ways in which she blurs and flattens points of view by switching between first, second, and third-person narration. Use of the second-person point of view is especially arresting: addressed directly by the narrator, readers become aware of themselves and of a textual "self-consciousness." Like the interrogative, the shifts between these points of view emplace the reader as potential "narrators" through a poetic register. Next to this, Hartman also blends past and present tenses, narrating history as "unfinished" or "unending," and the subjunctive mood is weaved throughout the text to communicate the connection between "what happened" and otherwise narratively obliterated possibilities of "what could have been." Importantly, Hartman refigures the "the archive's object ... as its historical subject" by recasting the enslaved and their descendants living in the wake of chattel slavery in a historical collective biography and, furthermore, as intellectual innovators and creative revolutionaries (Smallwood 2016)(126). This kind of counter-historical narrative performs recuperatively to restore "the capacity for biography" to those who have been historically denied it, as previously discussed (126). Hartman's writing in *Wayward Lives* may express a kind of "hope" that is, however, more hesitant perhaps than Howe's in the sense that Hartman expresses a keen awareness of the *failures* of language. Her formal project in *Wayward Lives* is in many ways about using language "against" itself parallel to her strategy of using the genre of biography to narrate the lives of subjects lacking the "capacity" for life stories (i.e. minor figures, errant and wayward "criminals," the enslaved and their dispossessed descendants, and so on).

As discussed, Hartman refuses the terms of western modernity that have functioned to dehumanize individuals and a discourse that reiterates the ontological, epistemic violence of black being "in the hold" (Sharpe 2016). Part of the work of restoring the "capacity for biography" to subjects denied subjecthood while refusing these terms is practiced in the text through a form of narrative "disidentification" that extends beyond refiguring subjects and objects (Rancière 2009)(74). In several scenes of *Wayward Lives*, Hartman describes a loosening of imposed boundaries of the subject, figured as a kind of "self-forgetting." For example, in the story of Mattie Nelson she writes, "In the crush of folks on the pier, she breathed comfortably inside her own skin, enjoying the self-forgetfulness that she had imagined was possible in a free territory" (Hartman 2019)(48). Later, attempting to articulate the drive of desire in a girl who "wanted so much from the world and had been allowed so little," she narrates a scene of sexual flesh "enfolding" in which "the act confused the doer and

the deed": "Mattie threatened to disappear, the force of it exceeding her and erasing the boundaries of the discrete body, making her something less than she was and something more" (63). Similarly, through the repeated image of the "chorus" I will discuss more in the next chapter, Hartman experiments with making the subject porous and/or plural.

I have tried to show how Howe's intervention in the editor's authority is crafted in counterpoint to the assuredness of the historians' reason-centric language, which also anticipates Howe's own poetic impulse. Howe identifies with Dickinson as a woman poet but wants her own experiments in writing to speak louder than her gender identity. She turns away from the genre of biography partly in response to the slew of biographies that misrepresent Dickinson and her experiment, but she also wishes to speak a word for the poet as scholar, not only to challenge disciplinary boundaries and authorities but to expose the limits of the genre. To Howe, biography as well as the genres of historical writing and literary criticism lack the capacity to represent the excess and complexity of a life and mind, especially that of a poet. *My Emily Dickinson* reveals a curiosity about the potential gap in which the past and language meet and transform through the "feminine" voice and through "cinder[s] of the lexical drift" (Howe 2015)(167).

DuPlessis proposes that "the impossible question posed in every crevice" of the book is the following: "How to make a culture that does not demand subjugation when 'Culture representing form and order will always demand sacrifice and subjugation of one group by another'" (DuPlessis 1990)(131, citing (Howe 1985*a*)93). It seems that Howe's "counter-culture" insists on "show[ing] the half-seen, the half-forgotten" and representing "the silence half-sounded of the powerless ... and the sounds of power in relation to doubt and silence" (131). For Howe, "sound" is present in words down to their syllables and letters. Peter Nicholls (1996) compares Howe's Dickinson to Melville's Bartleby the Scrivener in their shared "refusal to relinquish 'spirit' to a language complicit with authority" (Nicholls 1996)(592). He writes, "in the poetry of 'spirit' or enthusiasm, words do not become figures for things but remain stubbornly themselves" (592). DuPlessis asks,

> "Why does Howe erase or elide some words? ... Why does she confound grammar? ... She is suspicious of languages and discourse as already made and inhabited things; she wants to enter and inhabit the untoward crevices of language ... archaic words, names that may no longer have things, shadows of things and feelings difficult to name ... where the whole weight of Indo-European consonant relations, not to speak of our culture's relations with the underwritten, undersaid, socially repressed,

> becomes the fulcrum for the line break, 'whispered' to 'buried.'" (DuPlessis 1990)(131)

Since "the page is not neutral ... [but] is a territory" (DuPlessis 1990)(131), Howe trespasses through linguistic "camouflage and cunning" to "unsettle" the settler's linguistic settlement (Howe 1985*a*)(70).

According to Tina Campt, refusal is not a question of participation per se, but rather a refusal of the categories and the assumptions that reiterate epistemic violence (Hartman, Campt, and Weheliye 2018). It is a refusal of the terms on which the violent question grasps (or gasps) for legitimacy.[3] Indeed, "The way in which the question has forever been posed deserves only a very deeply felt refusal to speak" (Abbas 2005). Campt clarifies that for her, "refusal is not *not* participating in [the] conversation, but literally challenging the categories on which it is based as in any way, shape, or form legitimate ... as well as, all of the collateral damage, ... injuries, erasures, negations on which it is premised" (Hartman, Campt, and Weheliye 2018). While refusal may be the refusal to speak, or the refusal to remain silent, or the refusal to look away and a commitment to looking differently, it is foremost a recognition of the inadequacy of our questions and our vocabularies, and a mode of engagement that undermines the capacity for and legitimacy of unimaginative thinking.

In the style of Dickinson, Howe's writing resists interpretation, and it is in this sense I propose that her poetic praxis can be described as a practice of refusal. Hartman refuses the terms of the archive, narratives of history, and readings that reiterate violence through care-less description. Howe's refusal resonates with Hartman's in the way Howe refuses to reproduce the codes through which "intelligibility" is determined. In the monograph *Through The Words of Others: Susan Howe and Anarcho-Scholasticism* (2006), Stephen Collis highlights Howe's formal method to "erase (as far as possible) the line between poetry and prose, primary and secondary text – to upset all discursive hierarchies" (Collis 2006)(19). She inspires to unsettle not only editorial and archival order, literary history, the canon, and normative historiographies, but also the logics of what Ma calls, "patriarchal language" (Ma 1994)(725). Both *My Emily Dickinson* and *Wayward Lives* cross and combine genres but appear to do so differently, as Howe's work is not only a combination of prose and poetry, but also "show[s] little interest in the connectedness of syntax" (DuPlessis

[3] In a lecture, prompted by an audience member, Campt responds to the question, "Should Europe accept refugees or not?" with critiquing the "basis" on which the question attempts to describe the capacity, for example, of a human to live in a place called Europe, and the basis of the very category of "citizenship." She asks, "What makes sense about that question? I refuse the very terms on which you are constituting *a* European and *a* refugee" (Hartman, Campt, and Weheliye 2018).

1990)(126).

One of the literary techniques Howe employs extensively in *My Emily Dickinson* is *parataxis*, in which short, simple clauses are placed "side by side" without conjunctions or with coordinating (not subordinating) conjunctions – that is, with words that show separate elements to possess equal grammatical rank and importance. In contrast to *hypotaxis*, in which conjunctions subordinate clauses while linking them, parataxis gives each clause equal "weight." "Finally freed from the 'halter measure,' words begin their chance meeting in 'another situation'" (Ma 1994)(734). Howe borrows the tactic from Dickinson, whose word variant lists placed at the end of poems Howe considers to be "strings of words [constituting] texts in themselves" (Nicholls 1996)(593). Her parataxis "defies syntactical regulation" and "forces prosody *against* syntax," favoring sound over "sense" (593-96). "This move carries us beyond the more familiar, modernist forms of fragmentation," according to Nicholls, "which tend to break discourse into phrases to recombine their elements into new wholes. In contrast, Howe attends to sound and to individual words, recombining these in an order that defies syntactical logic" (596).

Against the claim, however, that Howe's anti-syntactical style in *My Emily Dickinson* (and other work) is a purely "objectivist" project, Howard (2019) argues that Howe inserts herself affectively and dynamically into texts and contexts (Howard 2019)(114), which in effect destabilizes limits imposed between "experimental" and "expressivist" writing (Smith 2010)(104). In other words, Howe's parataxis may simultaneously be read as syntactic disjunction or rupture *and* as an aesthetics of relation; as words are laid side-by-side, so are their meanings. I borrow here from Laura Smith's analysis (2010) of Akilah Oliver's poetry: as the writer becomes "a site of larger and longer historical knowledge than one literal life experience affords," Smith writes, "parataxis binds this disparate knowledge together" (114). As Kristen Gallagher (2003) puts it, "Copious listing has a way of paratactically leveling hierarchy" (Gallagher 2005)(25), which, according to Smith, works toward "pluralizing, critiquing, and expanding ... representational possibilities" (115). Smith makes the case that parataxis "privileges a logic of relation" (rather than "rupture") in part because it "undermines the conventional division between formally-motivated poetics (often called 'innovative' or 'experimental')" and "identity poetics" or "expressive" poetry (104). Howe's parataxis performs a similar relation, parallel to challenging the division between subjective or personal and "historical-objective" scholarship. Paradoxically amplifying relations by trimming the syntactical linking elements, parataxis complements a poetics that aims to cross temporal "distances" and bridge subjectivities and knowledges. It should be noted also that Howe's relationship to the dictionary could be characterized as "excessive": she is a collector of

obscure etymologies. A word never has just one meaning because as it travels time it transforms. As a result, Howe's writing in *My Emily Dickinson* stays always in movement.

Nicholls writes that language, for Howe, is "a wilderness which – paradoxically – must now be *unsettled* if we are to avoid the Puritan trap" (589).

> "During the 1980s I wanted to transplant words onto paper with soil sticking to their roots – to go meet narrative's fate by immediate access to its concrete totality of singular interjections, crucified spellings, abbreviations, irrational apprehensions, collective identities, palavers, kicks, cordials, comforts. I wanted jerky and tedious details to oratically bloom and bear fruit as if they had been set at liberty or ransomed by angels." (Howe 2015)(53)

Howe's relational fragmentation of language is not unlike NourbeSe Philip's poem *Zong!* (2008), in which voices of the murdered slaves are "excavated" through the painstaking destruction and reconstruction of a legal decision (the only archived document surviving the case). *Zong!* is almost entirely written within the legal text. Philip tells Saunders, "I have locked myself in the text in the hope of discovering something that remains hidden below the surface of the legal document" (Saunders 2008*a*)(65). In *Zong!* she writes,

> "[T]he imperative for me was to move beyond representation of what the New World experience was – even one filtered through my own imagination and knowing, for what that would have meant working entirely within the order of logic, rationality, and predictability; it would have meant ordering an experience which was disordered (and cannot ever be ordered), irrational, illogical and unpredictable..." (Philip 2008)(198)

Besides their disjunctive style, resonance between *Zong!* and Howe's study of Dickinson can be located in Philip's method behind appropriation of the footnote, whose use is typically prohibited in poetry (except by editors). She names the Africans on board the ship as "ghostly footnotes floating below the text," highlighting their relegation to the margin even within the text that documents and "justifies" their murder, while at the same time referencing them in "acknowledgment" – "someone else was here before ... Footnote equals the footprint" (Philip 2008)(200). Their names function also "to establish[...] a critically dialogic relation between text and note," "something approximating a counter-text in the notes" (La Capra 2001)(6-

7). This relation resembles Howe's intention in reinserting the obliterated "stray mark" in her readings of the Dickinson facsimiles. In the last book of *Zong!* called "Ferrum," the poet "risk[s] destroying language" as she writes to appropriate "the code in which was encoded images of the horror and death on board the *Zong*" (Saunders 2008*a*)(71). Breaking the language of the legal text down to "its most intricate level" appears to affect Philip cathartically: "I felt that this broken, stumbling thing ... is my very own language" (71). Howe's deconstruction similarly serves to let "the explanation breaks free of itself" as meanings are multiplied and space is opened ("as if the words are seeking space to breathe") for other ways of knowing and reckoning with loss (Saunders 2008*a*)(73).

Howard (2019) contends that Howe shares with Philip an awareness of the risks of implication involved in appropriating stories of the dead particularly through "forms of discourse and figuration perhaps 'already contaminated, possibly irrevocably and fatally' (Zong!, 199)" (Howard 2019)(117). This, I find, resonates with Hartman's hesitation: "How does one recuperate lives entangled with and impossible to differentiate from the terrible utterances that condemned them to death ... that claimed them as property ... that stripped them of human features?" (Hartman 2008)(3). Where *Zong!* follows a different path from Howe's work, according to Howard, is through Philip's use of "several rhetorical framing devices – multiple personae and prefaces, annotations and appendices, voices and variables – that signify the poet's complex role as both censor and magician, either constraining speakers or conjuring spirits from varying proximities to the disaster" (Howard 2019)(117). *Wayward Lives* similarly includes framing devices, such as Hartman's "A Note on Method" and endnotes section, which is an amplified collection of bibliographic material. Although in Chapter 2 I will focus on the more speculative and poetic sections within the *Wayward Lives*, between these Hartman weaves more conventional, historiographical chapters which serve as frames. In contrast, *My Emily Dickinson* minimizes "rhetorical distinctions among and distances between layers of radical contingency and historical figuration" (Howard 2019)(118). Howe writes, "A great poet, carrying the antique imagination of her fathers, requires each reader to leap from a place of certain signification, to a new situation, undiscovered and sovereign. She carries intelligence of the past into future of our thought by reverence and revolt" (Howe 1985*a*)(85). Howe's own paratactic "leaps" propel readers through a "whirlwind" narrative.[4] With the dictionary close at hand, Howe illumines where the sense (meaning) is combined with and cancelled out by sense (sensation) (Reed 2014)(27).

[4]I confess that Howe probably wouldn't herself call it a "whirlwind." In an interview with W. Scott Howard, she corrects his characterization of her book *The Midnight* (2003) as an "intense remediation [of] photographs of books, of letters, of fabrics ... all in a *whirlwind*" by saying, "Not a whirlwind to me. It was formally arranged" (Howard 2019)(201).

Spaces opened between the contradictions are, for Howe, where the "feminine" poetry thrives through a refusal of an imposed order.

1.3 Making the Case for Resonance

Adjacent to these differences and deliberately unresolved ambivalences, in the following I make the case that *Wayward Lives* and *My Emily Dickinson* are resonant "potential histories" (Azoulay 2013), the results of Hartman's and Howe's methods of reading archival material through an "affective register" (Georgis 2013)(24). In their careful attention to and desire for what Georgis calls "the stories of the discarded in history" (21), Howe and Hartman confront discourses and logics of the archive's linearity, epistemologically taking care not to fossilize new teleological readings of resistance and freedom.

> "Might there be other ways to think about our relationship to domination outside the paradigms of emancipation? What would it mean to treat the violence of colonialism and its legacy in contemporary forms of social expulsion and racial hatred as psychic injuries – legacies that thrive in our constructions of history, identity, and cultural representation? Might this view of history, culture, and identity provide new conditions for creation and renewed political futures?" (Georgis 2013)(20)

By "tak[ing] seriously the presence of injury in our constructions," both writers demonstrate a practice of reading history otherwise, for the incompossible stories that unsettle and break open the stories we thought we knew and desire to hear and tell (Georgis 2013)(21-2). Hartman and Howe read archival texts affectively to refuse teleological, linear narratives of history or a "past that is past." Through doing so, they lessen the relevance or usefulness of imposed and repetitive divisions, like fact versus fiction. And they write "wayward" texts to "claim the right to opacity [and] love what is not loved" as a "practice of the social otherwise" (Hartman 2019)(228). "How might we grasp the significance of affect in shaping history as well as apprehending it?" asks Hartman (Hartman 2020). Writing through methods embracing ambivalence, Hartman and Howe attempt to narrate this "psychic past" and the injuries that leave traces in our texts, landscapes, bodies, and futurities.

1.3.1 Reading through an Affective Register

I first locate a similarity in Hartman's and Howe's approaches to the archive. Both employ methods of "listening" to traces and marginalia for the "ghostly affect" (Georgis 2013)(11) and to what Anthony Reed (2014) calls "a silence that is not silent" (Reed 2014)(47). One way in which affective engagement with archives has been approached is through reading existent archives with the purpose of constructing a "counter-archive." A thorough discussion of counter-archival projects, such as the Lesbian HerStory Archives in Brooklyn and Avery Gordon's *Hawthorn Archive* (Gordon 2017), is beyond the scope of this thesis though I am interested in the "frames of attention" surrounding such projects. As Ann Cvetkovich (2003) writes, the affective archive is that which views history "from the vantage point of memory and experience" and catalogues "emotional" histories (Cvetkovich 2003)(28). "Silence" has been considered part of the realm of the affective archive, especially in considering the archive of Atlantic slavery. Far from being "empty," silence, according to Jenny Sharpe (2014), can be a "space of affect" (Sharpe 2014)(474). Sharpe describes affect as "a potentiality for memory existing in places and things," and for beyond what is discoverable in the archive (469).

Recalling Mbembe's description of the archive as "sepulchre" from which we may reassemble remains and "resuscitate" the dead (Mbembe 2002)(25), Avery Gordon's (1997) theory of haunting attends to a mode of writing "ghost stories": "stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a countermemory, for the future" (Gordon 1997)(22). "To write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities," according to Gordon, "is to write ghost stories" (17). She advocates forms of reflexive writing that are concerned not only with those under study but also "the ones who investigate," since "the ghost must speak to *me* in some way" (24). This writing must be open to the unexpected and, along the lines of Toni Morrison's differentiation between "truth" versus "fact" (Morrison 1987)(93), negotiate "the always unsettled relationship between what we see and what we know" (Gordon 1997)(24). Hartman and Howe both engage in a practice of reading history's representations through an "affective register" (Georgis 2013)(24). Reading through affect allows one to think beyond the fact/fiction divide and makes room for "counter-historical" narratives. In the next chapters, I will illustrate moments when Hartman and Howe read the archive for stories of silencing and for the silences that refuse to be silent, as well as for the "psychic" resonance reducing the distance between "ghosts" and ourselves. Both researchers also closely read their own experiences researching in archives to attend to the trauma unattended or to that which

is still "unworked through." Oriented toward reading "feeling" in historical narratives, Hartman and Howe search for the archive of affect that "trespasses" official accounts, seeking evidence of how we perceive, attempt to make sense of, or renew our understandings of ourselves and each other, for our shared affective experience over time, and for our best methods of surviving trauma – a practice that Georgis (2013) calls crafting "the better story."

Georgis writes of the relevance of feelings, that which "fact" devoid of "fiction" generally leaves out. "Fiction," she writes, allows history the "space to mourn"; "it allows us 'to dispense with 'what really happened' (Morrison 1990, 302) and instead puts 'life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look' (Gordon 1997, 22)" (Georgis 2013)(11). She writes, "Official historical records are made with such renditions of traumatic tragedies: renditions that expel and sanitize the voices of injury. Indeed, when emotional life is washed out from the record, reason effectively functions to foreclose the fact of racism and the fact of suffering ... because such accounts cannot consider the centrality of trauma and suffering to history" (10). Quoting Deborah Britzman, she adds, "fiction allows history to be an 'improper study' (2006, ix) ... As long as ghosts exist, the story is interminable, sketched and resketched from the unassimilated traces of experience and of being itself" (11). Indeed, Georgis claims that "ghosts speak through affect, which is yet to narrativized," but "we can be sure that even the most hardened story-form cannot completely defend itself against its ghostly affect"[5] (11).

If we think back to Howe's and Hartman's archives, we can read the "trace" or "marginalia" as the "ghostly affect." Though arguably it seems that Hartman must in ways be a "historian" where Howe can be an "antiquarian" (in, for example, her excavation of buried etymologies and other obscurities), I locate a similarity between their openness and method of "listening" for affect within the archive. In my analysis, I extend Georgis's discussion (drawing from Andre Green and Mary Jacobus) of "listening" to aesthetic texts and objects to Hartman's and Howe's methods of reading "haunted" artifacts and history's narratives for their "affective remainders" (Georgis 2013)(19). Georgis writes, "In listening, the aesthetic object has touched you and found its way inside. That is because an aesthetic experience often 'rebinds affect to representation' (Jacobus 1999, 129)" (17).

As discussed, Howe approaches and "listens" to Dickinson's handwritten poems and fragments as visual and sonic artifacts through which to imagine the poet's inner

[5]Georgis calls the "ghostly affect" the "queer" affect because "queer etymologically registers socially repudiated desire." She writes, "In this sense, ghosts are anxiously censored, or cast out when they leak through the surface or face you by surprise. In the world of narrative, queer exceeds language, it haunts and disquiets and refuses endings. Queer affect unsettles meaning, creating the conditions for change within the story" (Georgis 2013)(11).

world and outer gestures. Dickinson's dashes or lists of word variants are invitations or openings for communion, for "ghostly affect" that resides in the "signal escapes" of a word assembled or disassembled and unsettling meaning (Howard 2019)(1). Hartman has also discussed her reliance on physical documents and attention to handwriting:

> "What sounds did Virginia and Jamaica, North Carolina and Guyana make when they collided in a Harlem row house, and how was this different than the rhythm and the tenor of those who could boast of having been in the city for generations? How could I tell the story of Eva Perkins and convey the bluesy tone of her speech, or the aspiration latent in her partner's diction ... I got to know Eva's man, Aaron, through his careful and practiced handwriting, a cursive style that shouted, 'I am a man.' 'I am an intelligent Negro.' All of which is simply a way of saying that in order to write, I had to engage the materiality of the document, study and remake it through transposition and augmentation, redaction and annotation. I thought of this practice as a historical poetics or poetics of the document, a radical sociography, a Black compositional practice." (Hartman 2020)

Often Hartman also finds openings for fabulation in the archival photograph. Affect is apparent in the unexpected small but urgent discovery of, for example, the blurred face in a photograph, or the ways in which there is an uncanny resemblance between a "manner of walking" and its criminalization "then" and now. This affect appears through kindred kinship arrangements between the plantation and the ghetto or the continuance of the pride and defiance of black assembly in the face of antiblack police violence a hundred years "distant."

1.3.2 Fabulating "Potential Histories"

According to Mbembe, the work of "following tracks" and "reassembling remains" is a "ritual" by which the dead are "reintegrate[ed] ... in the cycle of time" (Mbembe 2002)(25). To Hartman, writing counter-histories, counter-narratives, or counter-fictions is "inseparable from writing a history of the present," and as such, articulates our intimacy with the "lives of the dead" and the ways in which our present is "interrupted by the past" (Hartman 2008)(4). By shifting between historical registers and bringing forth a multivocality, Hartman and Howe assist readers in imagining

ways to acknowledge the continuance of lives that have been silenced both in and outside of the archive. Their work may be what Catherine Gander (2013) calls a "poetics of connection" in how archival "traces" and affects are read in order to, in Muriel Rukeyser's words, "extend the document" (Kingsley 2015)(31, 55). Both writers, I propose, craft their narratives through an aesthetic mode of fabulation (Nyong'o 2018).

Keeping in mind the cross-disciplinary uses of "fabulation," I am referring back to Hartman's "critical fabulation." In "Venus in Two Acts," Hartman cited Mieke Bal's (1997) definition of "fabula" as "a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused and experienced by actors. An event is a transition from one state to another. Actors are agents that perform actions ... To act is to cause or experience and [sic] event" (Hartman 2008)(11, citing Bal 1997, 7). Hartman writes that "by playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view," one may "attempt to jeopardize the status of the event and to displace the received or authorized account" (11). Hartman considers telling what *could* have happened in attempts to produce a "recombinant narrative" in which events are re-presented, narrators and speakers are confused, and "levels of narrative discourse flatten[ed]" (12).

Nyong'o (2018) cites "critical fabulation" as "crucial" to his application of fabulation to black performance and "afro-fabulation," which is "a theory and practice of black time and temporality" with the potential to "rearrange our perceptions of chronology [and] time" (Nyong'o 2018)(5-6). He writes that critical fabulation "throws into crisis the progressive teleology from bondage to freedom" and creates the conditions through which we can address how to tell the story of slavery's afterlife or talk about what it means to live in the wake of dispossession and trauma (6). Fabulation enters the scene when there is no other way to tell what happened at the level of subject, discourse, or other terms of intelligibility; it is a method through which to imagine "what cannot be verified" according to normative logics (Hartman 2008)(12). Fabulation is, therefore, an exercise in reading and writing our present as it is interrupted by the past, toward envisioning the anticipated future as a "free state" outside the terms of a "sense" that has ceased to make sense (Hartman 2008)(3, citing Foucault 2003, 284). Foucault (1977) writes, "We want historians to confirm our belief that the present rests upon profound intentions and immutable necessities. But the true historical sense confirms our existence among countless lost events, without a landmark or point of reference" (cited in (Howe 1993)103). The fabulated story does not only break open the story and unsettle officialized "truth," it also produces real emotion and attachment, thereby exposing the constructedness

of our history and our fictions, and ultimately our reality understood temporally as a series of discrete "events."

I borrow from both Hartman and Nyong'o in thinking about how "critical fabulation" can be brought to bear too on Susan Howe's counter-history of feminine nonconformist poiesis. In discussing "afro-fabulation," Nyong'o draws on the Deleuzean appropriation of Liebniz's concept "incompossibility," which is helpful in thinking about the nonlinearity of fabulation (Nyong'o 2018)(134). "Incompossibility," with "compossible" generally referring to one thing being possible with another, does not imply contradiction but rather "divergence from a continuous series of compossible individuals and events" and the co- or poly-presence of individuals and events outside of a linear cause-effect seriality (Widder 2012, 34, cited in (Nyong'o 2018)134-35). In my reading of Hartman and Howe, I find that they are both concerned with bringing into "co-presence a sense of the incompossible, mingling *what was* with *what might have been*," so that the so-called "originality" of events is unsettled (Nyong'o 2018)(7). Incompossible readings otherwise can be drawn upon in the service of contributing to our counter-archive of oppositionality. For example, both Nyong'o and Hartman discuss how "black bodies that were objects of speculation can become speculative bodies" (Nyong'o 2018)(25); the body, for example, that is gazed upon can *gaze back*. Howe rereads Dickinson's "failure" or "fear" to publish as a refusal to destroy the integrity of her work. Rather than a rewritten counter-story that "replaces" the so-called "original," the incompossible reading agrees that several stories are co-present. This opens room for the possibility that many stories may be "true," but, more importantly, it upsets the logic of an original or authorized account. In addition, affect is allowed entrance to history and historiography. History is re-framed as "incomplete" as our "urgent" desires come to bear on it.

Through the register of performance, Nyong'o proposes that "re-enactments" of historical events further destabilize the teleologic temporality of historical registers. By utilizing Henri Bergson's (2001) concept of "duration," he discusses "kind[s] of time" that disrupt "tensed" or linear time, and therefore, unhinge causal logic (Nyong'o 2018)(10). The "original" event in the past is not seen as "causing" a re-enactment or reperformance, and the re-enactment is not seen as an "effect" of an event; rather, both are co-present and may have effects (or affects) on each other. I read Howe's and Hartman's books and the scenes that comprise them as "re-enactments" written in the affective register of their subjects. Both writers perform a kind of "mediumship" or "care" work in order to speculate their subjects' experiences, journeys, and inner worlds. A method of "re-enactment" might be understood as a form of "close narration" or "critical fabulation" in the sense that it vexes "historical periodization and the discrete regimented time of capitalist modernity" and presents simultaneously

lived temporal registers (Haley 2020).

Though Hartman does not clearly differentiate between "critical fabulation" and "close narration" as methods employed in *Wayward Lives*, the latter she describes as a means through which time is "opened" by "entangl[ing]" narrator and character in an "intimate history" :

> "I believe that listening to and thinking with them for so long enabled me to hear something else in the compelled biographies and meager stories of the case file and the state archives, and to create what [Sarah] Haley names the 'long form historiographic song' of *Wayward Lives*. ... *Wayward Lives*, as Haley observes, is an intimate history in at least two senses. Intimate history describes the effort to convey the revolution of Black intimate life that unfolded in the twentieth century and it names the style of close narration that is utilized in the book. It reckons with the violence of history by 'crafting a love letter to all those who had been harmed.' As Haley notes, close narration produces a different tempo of history, which some might describe as the changing same or heterogeneous time or a constellation; in other words, it is an accumulated and sedimented experience of time, a *now* containing multiple moments and eras, a durée unregulated by discrete and homogenized units of time, imposed periodization, and hierarchical and linear plots of history. *It is all now.*" (Haley 2020)

Haley adds that close narration, as a "vivid rendering of violation, intimacy, care, closeness, assembly, mutuality, and mutual aid," "resists modes of estrangement and alienation upon which the afterlife of slavery depends": it renders the "slave" no longer a stranger (Haley 2020). Re-enactment, close narration, critical fabulation, and Howe's historical figuration, can be read as kindred methods of narrating the "now" through which it becomes possible to reactivate, revitalize, and thereby "fabulate" history.

Lastly, a method of writing "potential history" complements the "tactical fictionalizing" of fabulation. "Potential history," according to Ariella Azoulay (2013), both destabilizes univocal historical knowledge and recreates the conditions for historical potentialities. In an essay cited by Hartman in *Wayward Lives*, "Potential History: Thinking through Violence," Azoulay describes her own counter-archival project, "From Palestine to Israel," in which she re-reads documentary photography "against the grain." Specifically, she attempts in her readings to avoid reconstituting the "constituent violence" used by the regime to keep Israelis and Palestinians separated into "coherent" national identities. By reorienting her attention away from

teleological captions and toward body language and background, she writes, "one is rather invited to reconstruct the formations and deformations of being-together of all those taking part in the event of photography" and to "make that history appear as what could have been" (Azoulay 2013)(557, 554).

To me, Azoulay's counter-archive firstly recalls the ways in which Hartman, alongside Christina Sharpe and Tina Campt, approaches photographs. Hartman's readings of photographs found in the archive similarly seek to undermine the "scopic regime" that undergirds the system of disciplining racialized, gendered, and sexualized bodies, as I will discuss in more depth in Chapter 2 (Azoulay 2013)(571). Both Hartman and Howe extend new readings to archival documents, and Howe particularly examines *text* as a charged visual artifact. "One should aspire to a complete change of archival conditions," writes Azoulay, to expose not only the violence in and of the archive and historical tellings, but also "to approach a discursive or archival point zero from which one could begin to see that which could not have been seen" and traces of what has been "illegible, intangible, and unseen for years, buried under existent categories" (551). Through the use of a range of archival material and paratextual recontextualization, both writers attempt to create new conditions of potentiality for the study of the traces that feminine and feminist nonconformism leaves behind.

Azoulay explains, "*potential* has a dual meaning" in "potential history":

> "On the one hand, it signifies the reconstruction of unrealized possibilities, practices, and dreams that motivated and directed the actions of various actors in the past ... On the other hand, it means the transformation of the past into an unending event, into what Benjamin has called incomplete history, in which our deeds in the present allow us to read the violently constituted achievements of the past in ways that historicize the sovereign power of the past and render it potentially reversible." (Azoulay 2013)(565)

Potential history in Hartman's and Howe's books is a textual strategy to destabilize the past and to make it "unending," which has various effects. It first creates an opening for interventions in the present and future. Azoulay describes her counter-archive as enabling her "to make historical moments reappear at junctions where *other options could have been chosen*, not reiterated or altered later once their disastrous effects became clear" (Azoulay 2013)(551, emphasis mine). By making these "other options" somehow visible, knowable, or historically viable, potential history changes not only "the appearance of things" but also readers' appearance as his-

tory's potential narrators, "as the ones who can – at any given moment – intervene in the order of things that constituent violence has created as their natural order" (565). Within an incomplete history, the "moment of decision" has not ended, which means that "researchers, writers, spectators, or readers may be positioned as if they were actually participating" (553).

In diving into both books in the next chapters, I will aim to show how Hartman and Howe deliberately situate their texts in an unconfined phenomenal space and allow for the past and present to "invade" each other. Howe's concern with recontextualizing Dickinson's work in the context of a literary experimental tradition makes room for the reconsideration of "experimentation" in general and how the imposition of "patriarchal language" determines the boundaries around and within which we can imagine otherwise. Hartman reveals the continuity of antiblackness in the U.S. by weaving the experiences of young African Americans at the turn of the twentieth century with those of the twenty-first. When Hartman asks, "What is it like to imagine a radically different world, or to try to make a beautiful life in a situation of brutal constraint?" she creates the conditions in which we can reimagine a new past, present, and future (Siemsen 2018).

Readers of both texts are emplaced in a new relation to history. Making the past unending also means that texts and images travel and resonate, reverberating sometimes in unexpected ways and crossing disciplinary categories. Seeing *Wayward Lives* and *My Emily Dickinson* as potential histories is way through which they can be described as resonant historical poetics. I will show how Hartman's trope of the "chorus" is apt because through it we can further conceptualize both writers' projects as affiliated – as potential "members," conceivably, of adjacent or at least "compossible" choruses. Through kindred methods of counter-historical fabulation, I propose that Hartman and Howe engage their personal encounters with the artifact to articulate openings for a "potential history" of an "incomplete" past (Azoulay 2013)(565). This method is only possible for these writers through recognition of the limits of linearity and the traps of genre and language.

Both writers engage in an urgent, ethical, and personal aesthetic practice. I argue that Hartman and Howe share and express a commitment to expose, examine, and work through the psychic damage wrought by the unending colonialist project of the U.S., of which the institutional terrors of slavery and Christian white supremacy have been paramount. I propose that they both engage a "politics of knowledge production" and a "radical hope" (Lear 2006) through presenting "disturbing questions about race and origin, sexuality and domination, intellectual honesty and political engagement" that, according to Françoise Lionnet (1989),

> "are questions we must face with great urgency if we believe that intellectual work can have any kind of effect on reality, if we do not want our words to be 'dust tracks on a road,' aimless detours or strategies of deferral, and would rather choose to have them function as means of transforming our symbolic systems, for the symbolic is real, and in symbols lies our only hope for a better world. To reinterpret the world *is* to change it." (Lionnet 1989)(26)

In their works, they attempt "to narrate a certain impossibility" and plumb "the shadow-aspect" of a collective North American inheritance toward repair, redress, and renewal (Hartman and Wilderson 2003)(184); (Howe 2015)(196).

In the next chapters, I illustrate the contours and material of these critical, poetically fabulated histories, aiming to evince how these narratives are resonant "potential histories" offered in counterpoint to normative historical narratives found in the archive. I start by examining the ways in which Saidiya Hartman "exceeds the archive" through listening for affective encounters toward telling the stories "that cannot be told" (Philip 2008)(199). My analysis focuses on scenes in *Wayward Lives* that exemplify Hartman's approach to the archival artifact, her self-positioning as a reticent narrator, and the stakes upon which she bases her storying. I also choose scenes in which Hartman frames her desire for an alternative "better story" (Georgis 2013), which she narrates through close narration:

> "I recreate the voices and use the words of these young women when possible and inhabit the intimate dimensions of their lives. The aim is to convey the sensory experience of the city and to capture the rich landscape of black social life. To this end, I employ a mode of close narration, a style which places the voice of narrator and character in inseparable relation, so that the vision, language, and rhythms of the wayward shape and arrange the text. The italicized phrases and lines are utterances from the chorus. This story is told from inside the circle. All the characters and events found in this book are real; none are invented." (Hartman 2019)(xiii-xiv)

Hartman's stories differ from fictions that invent characters and events; rather, she crafts a "counter-narrative" that through the re-arrangement of lived events and real actors contests and refuses the terms of an "official" history inscribed by the "judgment and classification that subjected young black women to surveillance, arrest, punishment, and confinement" (xiii). In this chapter I examine the ways in which Hartman builds alternate accounts from archival traces and positions herself as someone "marked" by the worlds and lived experiences she describes (Hartman

2008)(4, citing Das 2006, 17). Close narration, she claims, is about "how to speak outside a fiction of the individual voice" and makes evident her entanglements or "intimacies" with her subjects (Hartman and Bruce-Jones 2019). I discuss how formally she reveals the plurality inherent in the idea or thought by marking her debt to others' "utterances": as she explains, "we are never alone on the page" (Hartman and Bruce-Jones 2019). I attempt to show how in its architecture, *Wayward Lives* "sounds" the space of an ensemble, an an-archive, assemblage, and dialogue across time and space with numerous contributors.

In Chapter 4 I focus on the ways in which Susan Howe inhabits a critical openness in the archive and trespasses disciplines and literary territories in order to listen for Dickinson's "ghostly affect." I attend to Howe's rigorous study of the poet's varied influences and her deft fabulation of the poet's formal experiment, highlighting specific instances where Howe counters editorial assumptions and challenges several paratextual judgments. This chapter discusses Howe's mode of "historical figuration" (as Howard names it), through which Howe writes "a book of love" to Dickinson and through the poet's language. Howe says: "It's my tribute and nothing is more difficult for a Yankee to do than to express love" (Beckett 1989)(36). Beyond what a novelist or biographer might contribute, I discuss the ways in which *My Emily Dickinson*, similarly to *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, unsettles the logic through which we differentiate between "fact" and "fiction" while disturbing imposed linguistic, generic, and cultural hegemonies.

2. A POTENTIAL HISTORY OF THE CHORUS

In *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* Saidiya Hartman casts the young women labeled "errant," "vagrant," and "wayward" as radical thinkers, "astute social analysts," and actors in a social movement, who recognized and could articulate how enforced domestic labor in the northern city perpetuated the same system undergirding the southern plantation. Hartman credits these women with shaping an urban cultural movement that would resist heteronormative forms of family and intimacy and create the conditions that made dwelling or "making home" possible.

> "By attending to these lives, a very unexpected story of the twentieth century emerges, one that offers an intimate chronicle of black radicalism, an aesthetical and riotous history of colored girls and their experiments with freedom – a revolution before Gatsby. For the most part, the history and the potentiality of their life-world has remained unthought because no one could conceive of young black women as social visionaries and innovators in the world in which these acts took place." (Hartman 2019)(xv)

In *Wayward Lives* Hartman builds the argument that these women were the catalyst for a revolution "in a minor key" occurring between 1890 and 1935. Futures during this time would necessarily be re-envisioned by new black residents as they were made painfully aware of the exclusions, brutalities, and deprivations of northern city life. In turn, a new language would be needed to imagine ways of living outside normative structures of thought that read strategies of creative survival amidst "the weather" (Sharpe 2016) of antiblackness as a "social problem": "It is our relation to the white world that is the problem," writes Hartman (Hartman 2019)(23). She describes the "mere" strategies of survival as the "real work" of social change (Hartman and Bruce-Jones 2019), namely of redressing social reproduction or the continuation of social inequality "in the wake" of slavery (Sharpe 2016) – "the state of emergency [that] was the norm not the exception" (Hartman 2019)(32).

Because Hartman is interested in writing in a new grammar to articulate the "unthought," she occupies a position that refuses to assume the archive "tells the truth" (Hartman and Wilderson 2003); rather, she attempts to make evident how the archive collaborates with hegemony through logics of classification and violent erasures. Hartman explains how she wrote *Wayward Lives* as a project that is "antagonistic to the state, as [her] subjects were" (Hartman and Bruce-Jones 2019). She repurposes and re-narrates certain historical concepts, like radicalism or anarchism, whose histories she reminds us have usually left out women and almost always women of color, who are "vulnerable to the triple jeopardy of economic, racial, and sexual violence" (Hartman 2019)(29). She also complicates the conventional history of black radicalism by revealing how black women refused the terms of what radicals and women "should be" (Hartman and Jafa 2019).

Where *Wayward Lives* seems to diverge from Hartman's other work is that it foregrounds a psychic or phenomenal space, wherein multiple lives intersect and become fused energetically. In this sense, this book is a kindred text to Toni Morrison's novel *Jazz* (1992). In the foreword to *Jazz*, which mirrors Hartman's "A Note on Method," Morrison describes how she attempted structurally in the narration to infuse the energy of "the so-called Jazz Age":

> "I was struck by the modernity that jazz anticipated and directed, and by its unreasonable optimism ... when an African American art form defined, influenced, reflected a nation's culture in so many ways: the bourgeoning of sexual license, a burst of political, economic, and artistic power; the ethical conflicts between the sacred and the secular; the hand of the past being crushed by the present. Primary among these features, however, was invention. Improvisation, originality, change. Rather than be about these characteristics, the novel would seek to become them." (Morrison 1992)(xii, xviii)

In *Beloved*, Morrison writes, she had explored the "emotional disfigurement that a slave society imposes" and the idea of "love as perpetual mourning (haunting)," which led after to a consideration of "how such relationships were altered ... in (or by) a certain level of liberty" (xii). With a similar focus on how notions of "beauty" and "freedom" were transformed and improvised in and by changing life conditions and new forms of constraint in "freedom," Hartman considered how to compose a narrative in which "structure would equal meaning" and not just "enhance" it: "The challenge," writes Morrison, "was to expose and bury the artifice and take practice beyond the rules ... [to make] the work [...] be a manifestation of the music's intellect, sensuality, anarchy; its history, its range, and its modernity" (xix).

In *Wayward Lives* Hartman writes through the aesthetic mode of critical fabulation in order to narratively inhabit the intimate, everyday experiences of young black women living in the "slum" between 1890 to 1935.[1] When possible, Hartman uses her subjects' own words, present in statements culled from their psychiatric and prison case files, which she puts in relation to a larger "chorus." In describing, for example, what outside observers failed to capture about the black home in the tenement, Hartman interweaves the voice of Audre Lorde (1978):

> "Some things didn't appear in the photographs, like the three flowerpots lined up on the windowsill ... The reformers and the journalists were fixated on the kitchenette. They didn't know that the foyer, the fire escape, and the rooftop were a stretch of urban beach ... They didn't know that the hallway and the stairwell were places of assembly, a clearing inside the tenement, or that *you love in doorways*." (Hartman 2019)(22)

The italicized phrase is borrowed from Lorde's poem "A Litany for Survival": "for those of us who cannot indulge / the passing dreams of choice / who love in doorways coming and going / in the hours between dawns / looking inward and outward / at once before and after / seeking a now that can breed / futures" (Lorde 1978). Lorde's poem is a rolling refrain, an orison for those "never meant to survive." As Hartman explains to Patricia Saunders, she is interested in describing "not home as inheritance, but home as making [...] about creating conditions that make dwelling possible" (Saunders 2008*b*)(13). In borrowing from Lorde, Hartman recasts those whom the journalists and reformists failed to see as more than poor inhabitants of cramped kitchenettes as dwellers who sought futures by making their own spaces for creative survival, and she repositions this survival as part of larger, continuous social movement. "For me," says Hartman, "at issue in this book was also thinking about young black women as radical thinkers, which no one ever does, because they imagine that thought is only the capacity of the educated, or the endowment of elites" (Siemsen 2018).

Stephanie Smallwood (2016) writes, "For as long as it has been a subject of professional scholarship, American slavery has exposed the methodological limits of the

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[1] When asked what drew her to these years specifically, Hartman answers: "In 1896, W.E.B. Du Bois arrives in Philadelphia. For a year and a half he lives in the heart of the black slum and then produces a monograph, which is *The Philadelphia Negro* ... the first study of the black slum, or what we will later call the ghetto. So much of the discourse on black pathology, on the forms of black intimacy, sexuality, kinship and affiliation that deviate from bourgeois heterosexual norms start with that monograph ... In the 1880s and 1890s black people are thinking very intensely about the meaning of freedom as is Du Bois. It's after the demise of Reconstruction and a new racial order is emerging, one also founded on violence, servitude and the disposability of black lives." (Siemsen 2018)

discipline of history" (Smallwood 2016)(120). In Hartman's previous books *Lose Your Mother* (2006) and *Scenes of Subjection* (1997) she mapped the geographies of slavery and its afterlives in the U.S. *Wayward Lives* continues this study, which puts it in community with the scholarship of Hortense Spillers, Sylvia Wynter, Christina Sharpe, Jenny Sharpe, and Fred Moten, among others, whose voices Hartman weaves throughout the text. The book's mode of critical fabulation also relates it to speculative historical literature, including neoslave narratives, or what Wynter (1990) calls "counternovels" (cited in (Walcott 2000)140). These include literary works by Toni Morrison, Dionne Brand, Michelle Cliff, Fred D'Aguiar, and Octavia Butler, who write historical or speculative fiction that in several ways engage what Erica L. Johnson (2014) has termed the "neo-archive": works that "create history in the face of its absence" (Johnson 2014)(157). In addition, *Wayward Lives* can be considered a form of historical or documentary poetics and linked to poetic works confronting the archive and conventional historiography. Muriel Rukeyser's and Susan Howe's poetry similarly re-imagine history through conjectural assemblage of archival fragments (Kingsley 2015). Hartman's book is also largely in dialogue with M. NourbeSe Philip's writing, specifically her "fugal antinarrative" *Zong!* (2008). Philip writes, "*Zong!* bears witness to the 'resurfacing of the drowned and the oppressed' and transforms the desiccated, legal report into a cacophony of voices – wails, cries, moans, and shouts that had earlier been banned from the text..." (Philip 2008)(203).

Hartman has defied genre in her previous works. For example, *Lose Your Mother* has been called memoir, autoethnography, history, and travel literature. It is evident to me, however, that *Wayward Lives* even more so than Hartman's previous work crosses genres and disciplines more freely, given the ways in which creative and academic writing are nearly fused. It is in many ways a sister-text to W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), which like *Wayward Lives* combines fiction, memoir, sociocultural theory, cultural history, and lyric. It is also indebted in several ways to Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* (1935)[2] and C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins* (1938), seminal revisionist historiographies of black revolution and rebellion. James in a 1971 lecture titled "How I Would Rewrite *The Black Jacobins*" stated, "I would write descriptions in which the black slaves themselves, or people very close to them, describe what they are doing and how they felt about the work that they were forced to carry on..." (Bertholf 2015)(82). Arguably, Hartman's

[2]Though *Wayward Lives* describes black life post-Emancipation, Hartman makes clear the ways in which the systems undergirding the plantation extend their reach. Smallwood (2016) notes how Du Bois considered questions of historiographical narrative methodology in *Black Reconstruction* which connects this work to Hartman's and her critiques of the archive. Du Bois asks, "What was slavery in the United States?" and "Just what did it mean to the owner and the owned?" "Shall we accept the conventional story of the old slave plantation and its owner's fine, aristocratic life of cultured leisure? Or shall we note slave autobiographies...?" (Smallwood 2016)(121)

book takes up that task while incorporating the music of *Souls*. *Wayward Lives* also scoffs at the boundaries separating academic disciplines and subdisciplines, crossing black studies, American studies, cultural, queer, and women's history with literature, and engaging critical archive, memory, trauma, and visual studies, as well as affect theory. This puts the work in community with scholars experimenting with new registers of witnessing embracing ambivalence, many of whom the book cites. The effect of Hartman's crossing or combining genres is powerful because, as Christopher B. Patterson puts it, "different genres ask different questions but also reach different audiences" (Patterson and Hannabach 2020).[3]

The following chapter will be my own reading of *Wayward Lives*, focused on those most speculative portraits and sketches which weave in literary, photographic, and theoretical texts. I argue that Hartman's intertextual engagement and mode of literary speculation most clearly serve to destabilize the archive through conjuring a communal phenomenal space in which to emplace the reader in "productive suspension" (Gopinath 2018)(16). The reader is invited to participate as narrator of the past in order to reimagine the present and future; thus, Hartman redefines the community, not only of the ghetto, the reformatory, and the social movement, but also of readers and narrators. This chapter does not spend as much time on Hartman's portraits of well-known figures, such as Du Bois, Ida B. Wells, and Hubert Harrison, and in future research it would be interesting to examine how speculation disorients or puts in doubt the validity of the archive's attempts to narrate these life stories. Therefore, this chapter does not attend in depth to the effect of the combination of known and unknown lives catalogued in the book. Relatedly, I have chosen to spend less time on the more historical-revisionist parts of *Wayward Lives*, in which Hartman in part rewrites and reframes the history of black intellectualism and radicalism. These segments contribute importantly to redefinitions of community; however, given the relative wealth of information in the archive about these subjects, I have chosen instead to focus my attention on the parts of book more clearly "critically fabulated."

In this chapter I will start by describing the overall dramatic structure of *Wayward Lives* and the important paratexts that serve to frame Hartman's counter-historical gesture and contribute to the book's "chorus." Next, I will visit specific scenes in the book in which Hartman's narrative method of weaving in others' "utterances" among recontextualized archival artifacts works to conjure a speculative, phenomenal space temporally unbound. Hartman's intertextual literary, photographic, and theoretical

[3]In a recent article (Hartman 2020), Hartman cites Sarah Haley's *No Mercy Here* (2016) LaShawn Harris's *Sex Workers, Psychics and Number Runners* (2017), and Cheryl Hicks's *Talk With You Like A Woman* (2010) as critical to the research and writing of *Wayward Lives*.

interventions operate to position the narrator, her characters, and others (including the reader) into affective relation – or a "chorus" arranged by the text. Her method also places the work in relation to other literary texts crossing subjects, time periods, and geographies, creating openings, in other words, within the "enclosures" of genres and disciplines.

I attempt to illustrate the ways through which *Wayward Lives* can be considered a "potential history" in how it recreates conditions for historically "incompossible" stories while destabilizing univocal historical knowledge. Hartman's text excavates "the energy of nonnormative desires" and practices of everyday revolt by minor figures so that the reader may be reattuned and suspended in affective affiliation in the present with an unending past (Gopinath 2018)(8). Overall I aim to show how Hartman's dialogic method of narration implicates the reader as narrator who can "at any given moment – intervene in the order of things" (Azoulay 2013)(565).

2.1 "Chorus" as Subject and Structure

Appropriating popular conceptions of the black chorus line, typically remembered in the American imagination as male-directed entertainment through which African American women were further subjugated and exoticized, Hartman describes the chorus as a space for performance and a means of creative survival through which women located an "outside" within the enclosures of heteropatriarchy and systemic antiblackness. Several of Hartman's historical subjects aspired to be chorus girls, choreographers and performers of synchronized song and dance routines for the musical theater, so in many ways *Wayward Lives* is a cultural history of the black chorine, setting the stage for the Jazz Age and Harlem Renaissance. The "chorus" of the book functions as a whole, however, to symbolize the community of "colored" women in the city, who sang, shouted, and moved in unison, a beautiful, choreographed force creating a "city-within-the-city" (Hartman 2019)(235).

The "chorus" is also represented in the book as a "swarm," a term appropriated and rearticulated in *Wayward Lives* and figured in a photograph of blackbirds; the chorus and swarm of "blackbirds" become visual and sonic emblems for the community of riotous black women. "Swarm" calls to mind its rampant contemporary usage to disparage and dehumanize people of color, typically marginalized groups of migrants and refugees. *The New York Times* called the influx of black migrants to San Juan

Hill in New York a "swarm" in 1905 (Hartman 2019)(181). According to Hartman's endnotes, the term "swarm" was also used by Du Bois to describe "the movement of the enslaved and the fugitive" as well as to describe "the collective action of the general strike" (394). In Hartman's appropriation, the swarm is transformed – it figures to represent beautiful, non-hierarchical organization, a powerful and potentially dangerous configuration that resists interpretation. The arrangement of the swarm eludes our "common sense" and defies explanation. Observers are left only to wonder at and consider perfect organization without hierarchy. As described by biologist Deborah Gordon (2007), "A flock of birds turning in the sky is doing something that people don't know how to do: moving together, beautifully, without a leader or choreographer. It's a spectacular version of the collective behavior that goes on everywhere, in groups of animals and among cells in our bodies. Each bird responds to its neighbors, and the whole flock turns" (Gordon 2007). In fact, Hartman makes the case that the chorus also or at least appears to function without hierarchy and with no single voice; instead, many single voices become one, noisy and harmonic.

Beyond the chorus line, "chorus" recalls the refrain, repetition in song and lyric, and the Greek dramatic chorus. Hartman reminds us that the Greek etymology of *chorus* means "to *dance within enclosure*" (Hartman 2019)(347). In Classical Greek drama, the chorus was a group of actors who narrated and commented on the action of the play with song and dance and often represented the polity's hopes, fears, and judgments: "their judgment is the verdict of history" (Britannica 2020). The chorus in Greek drama could be interpreted as impartial while their commentary could foreshadow events. In this way, the chorus could travel through time; their song resonates and narrates the past often by predicting the future. In *Wayward Lives*, lyrical and filmic vignettes break up historical and biographical narratives like songs, echoing the style of Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) or Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923). These segments function as the chorus in several senses of the word.

In Hartman's "Note on Method," which opens the book, it is explained that italicized phrases mark "utterances from the chorus" and "all the others hovering about" her subjects and narrative (Hartman 2019)(xiv, 33). Throughout the book she quotes from various authors, poets, musicians, social-cultural theorists, and from state archives, weaving, crossing, and combining temporalities and genres. In this way the text becomes collaged and palimpsestic. Some of the voices of the chorus serving as "supportive" texts include those by scholars Hazel Carby, Hortense Spillers, Sylvia Wynter, Christina Sharpe, and Tina Campt; writers and poets Audre Lorde, Lucille Clifton, Zora Neale Hurston, and Gwendolyn Brooks; blues musicians Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Trixie Smith; and historical "ancestresses" Ida B. Wells, Sojourner

Truth, and Harriet Tubman.

The book is also structured by and in many ways modeled after several paratexts. It seems to position itself in critical or ambivalent response to, as mentioned, Du Bois's *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899) in addition to his later work, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (1935), in which Du Bois argued that slaves during the Civil War staged a "general strike" resulting in the Union's success (therein positioning African Americans as historical actors) (Du Bois 1935). In *Black Reconstruction* he also discusses the psychological constructedness of white identity. Hartman also writes in response to the ideology of "racial uplift" and the pessimism surrounding African Americans' migration to the city characterized in Paul Laurence Dunbar's essay "The Negros of the Tenderloin" (1898), in which Dunbar lamented the wave of southern black migrants to the city who mistook it "for a place where [they] might thrive" (Hartman 2019)(55). "What is to be done with them, what is to be done for them," Dunbar wondered, "if they are to be prevented from inoculating our civilization with the poison of their lives?" (264, 267) cited in (Hartman 2019)(9).

In Hartman's portrait of Du Bois, "An Atlas of the Wayward," Hartman calls him "the guilty Victorian," who "could regard wayward colored girls as nothing more than the victims of a long history of violation and destined for the trade" (Hartman 2019)(120). Hartman writes counter to the logic of overwritten victimhood and refuses to continue the story that destines black girls to defilement and dispossession. "Colored girls, too, were hungry for the carnal world," she writes, "driven by the fierce and insistent presence of their own desire, wild and reckless. Most were determined not to sell anything, but content with giving it away" (120). *Wayward Lives* similarly stages a confrontation with Oscar Micheaux's "race films" by plotting their re-writing. Hartman imagines if the plotline of *Body and Soul* (1925) had not been driven by a black mother's failure. She also sketches a film Micheaux never (and would never have) made – the life of queer performer Gladys Bentley. In addition, the book's paratexts include conventional historiographies of anarchism and black radicalism, and of course the archival materials – photographs, newspaper articles, and prison case files – Hartman encounters in her research. These texts all contribute to the book's "chorus." Weaving in "utterances from the chorus" is a technique beyond intertextuality; it is a practice of recontextualization through a "performative ethic of citation" (Nyong'o 2018)(10).

Following her note on method, readers are presented with a Cast of Characters and list of Locations, supporting the idea that the book is modeled after the dramatic

structure of a play or at the very least frames the text as a performance, further complicating the fact/fiction divide. Following this, the book is broken up into Three Books (Acts) divided into smaller chapters (Scenes). As Hartman explains, all three books follow an errant path of the building of the community toward a collective strong enough to transform the world or bring about "the end the world" as we know it (Hartman 2019)(63).

Book One is comprised of individual stories of mostly newcomers to the slum and chronicles experiences of failure, disappointment, and exploitation; there are many false starts and ruptures in community in these scenes. However, there are also moments of pleasure, friendship, and unexpected connection. Book One highlights the persistence of hope deferred and describes the beginnings of communities forming in the ghetto and the ward. Book Two describes the flowering of a racially and ethnically heterogeneous community (particularly in Harlem) amidst intensifying police repression and violence. These scenes specifically focus on the growing community of "sexual variants." Hartman describes how the crisis of categories is slavery's legacy and how social reformers' "project of racial uplift" often centered around regulating sexualities and gender roles and limiting freedoms on how (and with whom) people lived. The subjects of these stories reject norms and practice "a politics of refusal" by refusing that which has been refused to them (Hartman and Moten 2016). Additionally, these stories show how openings were created for a variety of gender performances, open queer and/or lesbian relationships, and alternative living arrangements, which were always followed by various forms of repression and repudiation. Book Two explores living as performance and art and discusses how queer black women were catalysts in a cultural revolution. Book Three opens onto the backlash and criminalization of young women in the city. In response to tightening laws, there was always resistance. In these scenes Hartman highlights unconventional and minor histories of anarchism and sexual deviancy and describes the organized and noisy rebellions and riots which occurred on the street and in the ward. The chorus in the cabaret continues to dance within these enclosures and carries the reader through this more cohesive and tightly woven community of stories and subjects. By the end of Book Three, lives are interlocked and in step, while retaining their specificity.

The following section will dive into each of these inner books and examine them more closely as I map some of *Wayward Lives*' key inter and paratexts, including photographs and objects extracted from the archive. Due to the limits of space and of the format of the thesis, I have chosen to skip through the book in order to focus my attention on scenes that exemplify Hartman's affective readings within the archive and practice of fabulation. I intend to illustrate those moments when Hartman most

clearly utilizes "close narration" and expresses her desire for an alternative "better story" (Georgis 2013). I acknowledge that another writer might have made different choices.

2.2 Fabulating the Space of "*Might Could* Live"

> "The scene pivots around the breach and the wound and endeavors the impossible – to redress it. The beauty resides as much in the attempt as in its failure. What it envisions: life reconstructed along radically different lines. The chorus elaborates and reconstructs the passage, conjures the deaths in the fields and the death on city pavements, and reanimates life; it enables the felled bodies to rise, plays out in multiple times, and invites all to enter the circle, to join the line, to rejoice, and to *celebrate with great solemnity.*" (Hartman 2019)(197)

The epigraph to *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* is taken from Nella Larsen's 1928 novel *Quicksand*: "She was, she knew, in a queer indefinite way, a disturbing factor" (Larsen 1928)(7). Before discussing the novel and its parallels to Hartman's book, I want to analyze the quote "pre" contextualization. Firstly, Larsen's line reveals that a female-identified subject knows something about herself and is aware that she produces an effect on her surroundings. She is conscious of the fact that she is a "disturbing factor" or, in other words, an element of a larger whole – an environment or community – and disrupts the homogeneity of that whole. She is a part that *stands apart*, and her difference *disturbs*, meaning that she interferes with the normal arrangement of things. Like water disturbed, she might have a rippling effect. We order those who clean our rooms for a living, "do not disturb." She might come unannounced, at an inopportune time, on her own time, noisily "disturbing the peace." "Disturb" comes from the Latin *disturbare*, from *dis-* meaning "utterly" and *turbare* from *turba* for "tumult". Her presence brings a rupture, a tumultuous break; she bothers or perhaps makes others anxious. She was, furthermore, disturbing "in a queer, indefinite way." She *knew she was queerly* and *indefinitely* interfering in the order of things. Her disturbance was odd and could not be easily defined; she was mysterious and capable of rousing suspicion. Possibly she was dangerous. It is particularly these qualities of Helga Crane, whom the quote describes, that parallel the subjects of Hartman's text and makes both books resonate. *Quicksand* functions

as a paratext framing *Wayward Lives* in ways similar to *The Souls of Black Folk* and *Cane*; *Quicksand*, however, is narrated by a woman.

The epigraph is pulled from *Quicksand*'s first chapter, in which Helga sits alone in her bedroom, thinking about her current employment as a schoolteacher at a black southern boarding school called Naxos, based on the Tuskegee Institute and built on the philosophy of "racial uplift"; black improvisation and individualism are discouraged. Helga feels like she is "an insignificant part" and longs to refuse the work that "smudge[s] out" her personality (Larsen 1928)(1, 5). Her colleagues view her as an outsider and regard her love of nice things as evidence of her vanity. Helga knows she "disturbs" but is ambivalent about her so-called faults. She hesitates to quit the job because she depends on the money and is not willing to give up her possessions, the books and clothes and furnishings which provide her a sense of security and fulfil her desire for a beautiful life. At the end of the chapter Helga goes to bed, leaving things unresolved in her head and her room messy "for the first time," her "startling green and gold negligee dripping about on chairs and stool" (9).

The scene summarizes much of the inner struggles, complexities, and transformations experienced by the women in *Wayward Lives*. "Beauty and longing provided the essential architecture of [their] existence ... genius was exhausted in trying to live" (Hartman 2019)(60). Though the time periods of both books nearly overlap, there are several obvious key differences between their main characters. Helga works as a schoolteacher in the south, a job denied to black women in northern cities. Though Helga (of "mixed-race") works in a black school, she is an outsider in her community. Most of the women in *Wayward Lives* are of course outsiders to the city as southern newcomers, but their stories are insider-stories. Hartman frames these women as members of a growing community and as possessing knowledge that outsiders, such as the reformers, hope and fail to capture. Furthermore, *Wayward Lives* is written in ways counter to the "tragic mulatta" trope arguably utilized in *Quicksand*: rather than stereotypically depressed victims in a hostile world, the women Hartman describes are resilient, dynamic, and multi-dimensional (114).

2.2.1 Beauty and the "Shadow Archive"

Under the title of *Wayward Lives*' "Book One," "She Makes an Errant Path Through the City," sits a black-and-white photograph of three black women walking down an alley underneath hanging laundry. They walk in the direction of the camera, but

their faces are wholly obscured as they are backlit by the sun.[4] The first "scene" of this section, titled "The Terrible Beauty of the Slum," addresses the reader from an insider's perspective. Here readers encounter the narrator's "ekphrasis," or detailed vivid descriptions of images real or imagined, used formally by Hartman to "inhabit" the space of the ghetto and tenement (Hartman 2020). The narrator amid sense-heavy description of the street and soon-to-be dilapidated "slum" or "Negro quarter" introduces us to characters who will make a more explicit appearance in the coming pages – namely, the voyeuristic social reformers who "fail to discern the beauty, ... missing all the ways black folks create life," and "she" who dwells here, who "escapes notice as she watches them" or "remains mystery and blur" in their photographs (Hartman 2019)(4-6).

Hartman's method of critical fabulation has been criticized for how it serves to "fictionalize" or even "romanticize" contested histories. In one review, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2019) writes that Hartman "is not romanticizing the margins, though she suggests that we can find romance – the implacable pursuit of freedom – within the margins' constraints" (Taylor 2019). How does Hartman's re-reading of the beauty of the "dark ghetto" avoid romanticization? Similar to her appropriation of the term "wayward," Hartman's reading challenges the terms that structure normative conceptions of "beauty." Writing beauty into the image of the black ghetto is one way in which she demonstrates a refusal to accept "the system of values" set up to judge what is beautiful, defies the mechanism of representation that writes the dwellers of the slum as "social problems," and abjures the white gaze that routinely yields pleasure from images of black pain and suffering.

> "It was an age when Negroes were the most beautiful people, and this was no less true of her. It's hard to explain what's beautiful about a rather ordinary colored girl ... In some regard, it is to recognize the obvious, but that which is reluctantly ceded: the beauty of black ordinary, the beauty that resides in and animates the determination to live free, the beauty that propels the experiments in living otherwise." (Hartman 2019)(33)

Foregrounding the potential of pleasure and possibility of beauty in the "ordinariness" of economic precarity and social repudiation displaces "the received or authorized account" that destines black women to defilement and lives of misery.

[4]Though the particular images Hartman discusses in her book are in black and white, it would also be interesting to read them next to the long history of color photography's "racial bias," through which darker skin tones have been chemically obscured in attempts to best represent white people.

"Shadow" *shades* and complicates the picture. "Even in the daytime, the shadows are too dark and too deep to capture it" (22).

Tavia Nyong'o (2018) writes that "fabulation is ... not so much imagination as it is imagination's shadow" (Nyong'o 2018)(42). Against "gradual revelation" and "perfect restoration," shadowy strategies, he writes, "offer us an alternative I want to call – invoking a long, subterranean tradition of black escape and fugitivity – 'dark fabulation'" (49). Shadow can be "cast over ... reason," camouflage tactics of resistance, and refer to practices of refusing "hegemonic demands" for "legibility and transparency" (14-15). Hartman's mode of fabulation, in this sense, can be viewed as a way through which to narrate the "shadow archive" of the captive, marginalized, or subaltern that is "darkened" and obscured through the logics of the archive (11). "How might we begin to make sense of the paradoxical vibrance of a form of life endangered, or even erased, by efforts at documentation and representation?" asks Nyong'o (3). "Shadow" figures importantly in *Wayward Lives*, I argue, as a metaphor for enigma and reticence, and for the refusal of representation through a normative system of values.

While I will discuss next instances where those who are photographed "gaze back" at the camera, it is important to note the fact that Hartman reads other photographs and images in *Wayward Lives* counterintuitively for the possibilities opened by "shadow" and always through an attention to the contexts in which photographs were taken. Sometimes, Hartman writes, the subject of the photograph "eludes capture" (Hartman 2019)(7). Hartman's subjects are often able to avoid being photographed by the social reformer and journalist who desire to use these images as "evidence" of squalid homes and immoral behavior. But if her subjects *are* photographed, they might "avert[...] their gaze or rush[...] past" and become blurs, "cluster[...] at the edge of the photos," turn away, slump shoulders, make "side-eyes" or look mean (17-18, 35). In another example, in Hartman's portrait of W.E.B Du Bois ("An Atlas of the Wayward"), she opens with a scene of the sociologist observing two women walking holding hands and looking in shop windows: "His eyes settled on them, but they paid him no mind" (81). They elude his gaze by ignoring him. In this way, Hartman saps the assumed power of Du Bois's expert gaze and instead redirects our attention to women's gaze directed toward the objects for sale in the window, objects that they read toward imagining a "world so much better, so much bigger" (83).

2.2.2 Annotating the "Compelled Image"

Hartman's reticence to "revisit the scene of subjection" (Hartman 2008)(4) is made apparent in "A Minor Figure" in which she figures herself as the researcher examining "compelled images" of anonymous black girls. In this scene Hartman narrates her encounters with the archived images of prepubescent girls photographed naked in white men's studios, such as those of Herman Moens and Thomas Eakins. She attempts to reread the photograph through new terms and values in order to describe what the photo "makes plain" – that "her body was already marked by a history of sexual defilement, already branded as a commodity" (Hartman 2019)(29). Though "this necessary and routine violence defined the afterlife of slavery" (29) and so structured and structures the world and "present past" in which we read the photograph now, Hartman strives to imagine the experience of the photographed girl to eventually work against dominant readings that she will be lost and obliterated as a result of her anonymity and nonconsent.

> "The photograph is small enough to be cradled in the palm of your hand. ... It is a compelled image, an image taken without the permission of the sitter; it is an image intended to classify, isolate, and differentiate. ... The rigidness of the body betrays the salacious reclining posture, and the girl's flat steely-eyed glare is hardly an invitation to look. She retreats as far away from the camera as possible into the corner of the sofa, as if seeking a place in which to hide." (Hartman 2019)(24-5)

In discussing the "odalisque"-styled photograph, Hartman refuses to see the child "posing" as she lays on the sofa; she similarly rereads the child's "direct gaze at the camera" (27). Unlike the gaze of a black performer who might doubly abjure and solicit the external gaze (Nyong'o 2018)(3), Hartman writes, this is "not a solicitation of the viewer" nor "an appeal for recognition" – it is not "an invitation to look" (25). "Her body is exposed, but she withholds everything" (27).

The image itself is reproduced as faded and hard-to-make-out behind Hartman's text. Other photos in this section are also cropped, so that the girls' bodies are less exposed. These acts of redaction and attempts at annotation are not only signs of Hartman's reticence but also the tension of narrating "incompossible" stories. Hartman's ample use of questions in this scene operate to, as Katherine McKittrick (2013) writes, reread "black dispossession as a 'question mark'" (McKittrick 2013)(42). The interrogative, according to Jennifer Morgan (2016), is "a kind of poetics that, together with the fictive imaginary, stand as counterweight to the struc-

tural binds of ... the slaveholders' bookkeeping" that in this case is reproduced through the violence of the white male gaze (Morgan 2016). Hartman wonders, "What knowledge of the world did she gain that afternoon?" (Hartman 2019)(25). Rather than see the girl "as tragic or as ruined," Hartman attempts to view the image otherwise, to create a more nuanced and generous reading that refuses the girl's reduction. Hartman asks, "Was it possible to annotate the image? To make my words into a shield that might protect her, a barricade to deflect the gaze and cloak what had been exposed?" (26).

Here and elsewhere in the scene, Hartman cites Christina Sharpe's proposed method of "annotation and redaction," discussed in her book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016). Sharpe also invites onlookers to study a photograph of a black child, who was rescued from the devastating 2010 earthquake in Haiti. A piece of tape is affixed to the child's forehead reading "Ship," possibly signaling her next destination and inevitably recalling histories when Africans were labeled cargo and commodity. Sharpe asks, "What is the look in her eyes? ... What can one see beyond the word that threatens to block out everything else?" (Sharpe 2016)(118). In an act of redaction, Sharpe cuts up images of Delia and Drana, two enslaved women Louis Agassiz photographed nude for his "racial studies." Only their eyes remain after the redaction, "to focus their individual and collective looks out and past the white people who claimed power over them and the instrument by which they are being further subjected" (118).

Like Sharpe, Hartman attempts to "recover" the photograph of the anonymous girl from the violence of the "external gaze," but in the service of imagining another kind of story.

> "[T]he look is in service of an intramural labor that yearns to produce a different account of the document. In looking at the girl, – we must bear the burden of the gaze with her, be situated by its violence, defeat its logic, look so that she might be covered, no longer captured in the frame. The photograph of the nude girl on the arabesque sofa pivots on the matter of how we look, and the hope and the risk is that a look might be a way of tending to or caring for one another." (Hartman 2020)

Continuing to acknowledge that without a name she may never "exhume" the particular girl in the photograph, Hartman writes, "What mattered was that she was a placeholder for all the possibilities and the dangers awaiting young black women in the first decades of the twentieth century. In being denied a name or, perhaps, in refusing to give one, she represents all the other girls who follow in her path.

Anonymity enables her to stand in for all the others. The minor figure yields to the chorus" (Hartman 2019)(15-17). In other words, Hartman repurposes these photographs toward the goal of retracing "her steps through the city" and to "imagine her many lives" (30). Similarly, Smallwood (2016) discusses how in Hartman's essay "Venus is Two Acts,"

> "Venus represents millions more: the twelve-and-one-half million counted in quantitative studies of the slave trade; and the 'Sixty Million and more' to whom Toni Morrison dedicated the novel *Beloved*, those 'who didn't make it from there to here and through.' She embodies the immeasurable weight of black lives made barely knowable by the violence of racial slavery, and 'which are visible only in the moment of their disappearance.'" (Smallwood 2016)(119)

In the photograph of the girl in the studio, similarly (but arguably more hopefully), Hartman imagines other, anticipated "but not yet located" images of the girl through which we may "glimpse the terrible beauty of wayward lives" and through which "it is easy to imagine the *potential history* of a black girl that might proceed along other tracks" (Hartman 2019)(30, emphasis mine).

In this scene Hartman refers to Tina Campt's book *Listening to Images* (2017) in which Campt deploys methods of "listening" to identity photographs from state archives. Her close readings of these "quiet" photographs re-energize them as "affective remainders" (Georgis 2013)(15). Campt distinguishes "quiet" from "silence," because "quiet registers sonically" and so requires careful and focused listening (Campt 2017)(6). She invites readers to attend to photographs "by way of the unspoken relations that structure them" – both in the event of the photograph being taken and subsequent archival encounter(s) (7). Hartman's description of an identity photograph of Alice Kennedy, or "inmate 4501" at Bedford Hills Reformatory (from a later chapter "Riot and Refrain"), makes evident her aim to reattune her senses to enable more affective readings of quiet photographs, a readjustment that resists the reiteration of the violence that arrested Alice Kennedy's body and aimed to reduce her agency through (de)identification:

> "She stares blankly ahead, steely-eyed, withholding everything, owning nothing. ... Even a century later, reading through the materials assembled in the case file and poring over her letters, I am prohibited from calling her name, less to protect her than to guarantee her disappearance. The state never releases her but claims forever this part of her

> past as its property. The photograph, which was intended to classify, measure, identify, and differentiate, offers no clue about the riot or her role in it, *but I am unable to look at her face without anticipating it, without straining to hear its music.*" (Hartman 2019)(264-65, emphasis mine)

Hartman perhaps illustrates the prohibition "from calling her name" by choosing not to include it into the main text. (Alice's name is only retrievable from the List of Illustrations closing the book.) Nevertheless, "each photograph bears traces of the catastrophe and is susceptible to becoming a noncatastrophe" (Azoulay 2013)(571). Ariella Azoulay (2008) similarly argues for photography's ability to be read otherwise by a reoriented, reattuned spectator, who she proposes may "watch" a photograph rather than "look at" it (16, cited in (Campt 2017)6). This action dismantles the logic that seeing means knowing if a spectator must become active through "watching" (or "listening") and suggests that "the event of photograph is never over" (Azoulay 2011, 77, cited in (Campt 2017)120).

The "quiet" image itself may thereby be reread as "active" when we consider Rancière's (2009) description of the "pensive image," or the image that contains an "untold thought that cannot be attributed to the intention of the person who produces it and which has an effect on the person who view it without her linking it to a determinate object" (107). The "pensive image" "signals a zone of indeterminacy" (Rancière 2009)(107) in which a "counterintuitive" spectator can read an image against or outside of the photographer's intention for "an affect of indeterminate effect" (104). Along with Hartman and Campt, Azoulay suggests that what is necessary is not only a careful, critical reading, but also that photographs be repositioned in new contexts whereby they may be charged with a different power. This action works toward undermining the "scopic regime" that attempted to capture the photographed with the intention to regulate, confine, limit, and classify (Azoulay 2013)(571).

Hartman acknowledges that the girl's lack of a name threatens the possibility of her recovery, but then repositions the "name" by calling it a "fiction" that would only "postpone the question: Who is she?" (14).

> "Without a name, there is a risk that she might never escape the oblivion that is the fate of minor lives and be condemned to the past for the rest of her existence, remaining a meager figure appended to the story of a great man and relegated to item number 308, African American girl, in the survey of his life or work. ... In a compelled photograph, a girl's

> name is of no greater consequence than her desire for a different kind of likeness. (The only thing I knew for sure was that she did have a name and a life that exceeded the frame in which she was captured.)" (Hartman 2019)(15)

She attempts to reposition the photograph in a new context, protected from the external gaze, in the service of imagining another kind of story that "discern[s] the glimmer of possibility, feel[s] the ache of what might be" (30). Continuing to acknowledge that without a name she may never find the particular girl photographed, the girl comes to stand for others. Ambivalently, this reading in the "shadow" of a new method opens rather than closes off possibility through the repetition of an ethical witnessing that privileges the question.

2.2.3 Speculating a Complex Hunger

Book One moves deeper into the archive and its limits with the section, "An Intimate History of Slavery and Freedom," which tells Mattie Nelson's story based on but exceeding her extensive case file at Bedford Hills. The section starts, as Hartman explains in the endnotes, prior to Mattie's arrest following an accusation of prostitution made by her neighbor. Hartman begins by imagining Mattie's reasons for leaving her home state of Virginia for New York City and the hopes she held during the journey on the Old Dominion steamer (Hartman 2019)(45). The narrative speculates that Mattie, like many other black girls, was attempting to escape the "*house of bondage*" with its "taint of slavery" by migrating north: "Neither Mattie nor her mother or her grandmother had chosen the kitchen or the washtub; they had been conscripted there" (47). Mattie knew she "wanted something else. It was simple and elusive, as vague and insistent as that" (46). In New York, however, Mattie becomes a maid at a boarding house and then a "laundress," since the shops and factories do not hire "colored girls, especially girls as dark as Mattie" (55).

The most powerful and speculative part of Mattie's narrative centers on her sexual relationship at "not yet sixteen" with twenty-five-year-old Herman Hawkins (56). The narration refuses one version of the story of their encounter, acknowledging the impossibility of assuming there was love, pleasure, consent, or nonconsent in their meetings. "Whether her lover valued her as a prize or took advantage of a gullible young woman matters less than what Mattie discovered in that room – what she wanted might actually matter" (59). Embracing ambiguity, Hartman makes the

choice here to read Mattie's love life against the grain. Instead of assuming she was a victim, helpless to the advances of Hawkins, or that she felt little feeling when they were together or numbed herself out, Hartman imagines otherwise: "It is possible that Mattie experienced this opening of her desire as a refusal to all that kept her fixed in place, stuck at the laundry, chained to an ironing board, suffocating and without possibility of change" (59).

In constructing the inner, complex life of Mattie prior to her arrest and imprisonment at Bedford (where the archive begins), the reader has met Mattie through an intimate narrator – a loyal confidante and co-conspirator, a sister or a friend who can be trusted to keep Mattie's secrets safe. In this way, Hartman sets the reader up with a new critical lens through which to read Mattie's case file, which would work to dehumanize and attempt to deprive her of the possibility of desire and a beautiful, freer life. "Mattie was a hunger artist wasting away before the eyes of the world for lack of opportunity while everyone gawked and watched. *And like any artist with no art form, she became dangerous*" (Hartman 2019)(59-60). Quoting here Toni Morrison's novel *Sula* (1973) in which a passionate girl named Sula Peace disrupts life-as-usual with her open defiance of social conventions (Morrison 1973), Hartman speculates on Mattie's desire for an outlet for her expression and performance of her sexuality.

In Mattie's narrative Hartman transforms "a deed of no import" into something larger: "just an everyday act of fucking [which] would not have been noticed had it not been part of greater social upheaval" (59). Minor acts in *Wayward Lives* are consistently present amidst a wave of repression and confinement and the nosiness of neighbors, landlords, and cops who wouldn't just let black girls *be*; minor acts become integral to a "terrible" movement and revolution of black girls "swarming" together, desiring better lives and wanting "something else."

> "Mattie's restiveness and longing and the free love practiced in a private bedroom rented by the week were part of a larger ensemble of intimate acts that were transforming social life and inaugurating the modern, which was characterized by the entrenchment and transformation of racism, emergent forms of dispossession, and the design of new enclosures, and by a fierce and expanded sense of what might be possible. Girls on the cusp of womanhood, young colored women like Mattie, were at the center of this revolution in a minor key." (Hartman 2019)(59)

The bedroom is redefined as a grander space: a "laboratory for trying to live free" (59). This bedroom echoes Helga Crane's, where alone she would imagine living

a different life. Mattie, like Helga, also loved beautiful things. She "loved cashmere sweaters ... and the cool slip of silk undergarments against her flesh" (60). Hartman's use of sensory detail redirect and reorient our attention. The narrative emphasizes touch and feeling, dissolving the boundaries between physical sensation, thought, and emotion: "if she could feel deeply, she could be free" (60).

In the context of the book overall, Mattie's story serves to illustrate how ordinary black girls participated in community reorganization and revolution by living outside of heteronormative arrangements and by refusing to subject themselves to uncreative work. Hartman casts them as creators of space and of an "outside" within the enclosure, not only of the ghetto and their economic precarity, but of the boredom and monotony of lives as domestic workers and servants.

> "Few guessed that Mattie was trying to make something of herself, however uncertain she was about *what might be* and however desperate to shake loose the expectations and demands of others, which always boiled down to drudge and whore. Better an errant path than the known world. Better loose than stuck. If it is possible to imagine Mattie and other young black women as innovators and radical thinkers, then the transformations of sexuality, intimacy, affiliation, and kinship taking place in the black quarter of northern cities might be labeled *the revolution before Gatsby.*" (Hartman 2019)(60-1)

According to Hartman, before the black communists stepped up the pulpit and prior to the Harlem Renaissance, the "*reconstruction of intimate life commenced*" (61). She writes, "After the slave ship and the plantation, the third revolution of black intimate life unfolded in the city" via experiments made on and through mind, body, and soul in such ordinary settings as "the hallway, bedroom, stoop, rooftop, airshaft, and kitchenette" (61). Social projects abounded at this time, so breaking laws and social norms was not unusual except, "hardly anyone imagined that young black women might be involved in this project too" (60). Thus, Hartman makes clear one aim of the book: to destabilize and amend the history that has left black women and girls out or regulated them to the margins.

Hartman explains that in contrast to narratives like Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* that focused on "deviance and pathology," in her project she set out to annotatively describe "the way in which the particular formation of black social life yielded radically different forms of intimacy and kinship and association" (Siemsen 2018). In Book One Hartman focuses on the stories of new arrivals in the northern city and their excitement and accompanying disillusionment. These stories narrate economic

precarity and other difficulties facing families, as well as tales of sex and love matters breaching moralist and "lawful" codes. They are stories describing instances where desire meets the necessity to live otherwise, and stories speculating ways of living "outside" within enclosures, suggesting the building of a possible community inside the confines of the ghetto in the weather of the criminalization of black life.

2.2.4 Narrating through a "Queer Optic"

Book Two, "The Sexuality of the Black Belt" focuses more explicitly on the potentialities and dreams of living in the gap outside of heteronormativity and describes queer experiments in refusing and performing gender otherwise. This "Act" tells stories of creating community outside of straight coupling, particularly through performance and art, alongside the development of the Tenderloin, San Juan Hill, and Harlem as racially and ethnically mixed communities in New York. Young couples clash with the law and get swept up in violent riots as more women and girls are sent to the reformatory. Sexual "variants" are documented and studied, but other living arrangements and open lesbian relationships persist and defy prying eyes.

Gladys Bentley's story, imagined as an Oscar Micheaux film never made, is the most speculative section in Book Two and is a brief but rich scene encapsulating strategies of evading a monotonous life of servitude. La Bentley or Bobbie Minton, as he was known, was a performer in the cabaret – "a star in Harlem's Jungle Alley, one of its high priests" – whose life offstage garnered as much if not more attention than his onstage performances (Hartman 2019)(197).[5] "Mistah Beauty, the Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Woman, Select Scenes from a Film Never Cast by Oscar Micheaux, Harlem, 1920s" describes the queer filmic representation of Bentley, who "trashed the gendered norms and family ideals central to the project of racial uplift – self-regulation, monogamy, fidelity, wedlock, and reproduction – and scoffed at the moralism of the latter-day Victorians, the aristocrats of uplift" (200). Hartman's sketch, according to her endnotes, is based on Bentley's autobiographical essay "I Am a Woman Again" published in *Ebony* magazine in 1952, in which Bentley describes his hormone treatment to become a woman "again," implying, Hartman says, Bentley's abandonment of "the categories of *woman* and *female* decades earlier" (384).

[5] I choose here to follow Hartman's use of the pronoun "he" to refer to Bentley, which, Hartman explains, is a choice made "to respect his masculine identification" (394). Hartman's sketch and my description of it cover a period of time preceding Bentley's transition to "become a woman again," discussed in Bentley's *Ebony* magazine article (1952).

“Bentley was abundant flesh, art in motion,” writes Hartman (197). He performed wearing men’s clothes, always in a tuxedo and top hat, and would march down “Seventh Avenue attired in the threads of a Harlem sheik and usually with a pretty chorus girl hanging on his arms” (197).

> "He thrived on the fact that his ’odd habits’ were ’the subject of much tongue wagging’ because he lived and loved as a man. He wasn’t a radical, but a brilliant performer, one smart enough to make the corporeal male diction of black and mannish into a kind of costume that delighted, aroused, and solicited others. ... The appreciation and the laughter of onlookers crowded in the cabaret domesticated the danger of La Bentley, but he conceded no ground. There was nothing feminine about him; it was more than glamour drag, more than a woman outfitted as a man, as several of his wives, both white and colored, could attest." (Hartman 2019)(198-99)

Hartman describes Bentley as “a modern surface” and “an exemplary architecture of black possibility” (199). Bentley’s body becomes the site for his resistance, his manner of walking subverting expectation, defying and remaking knowledge of what could be.

Since he lords over the club and cabaret, where “black virtuosity is on display,” Hartman’s treatment of Bentley’s life as a film centers on this space (96). The chorus line is of course *en scène* and comes to stand in as the symbol of movement and the beauty of excess:

> "[T]he dancing bodies are arranged in beautiful lines that shift and change as the flourish and excess of the dancers unfold into riotous possibility and translate the tumult and upheaval of the Black Belt into art. ... Bentley’s life refracted through Micheaux’s cinema is the wild, deregulated movement that refuses the color line and flees the enclosure of the ghetto. The bodies in motion, bodies intimate and proximate, recklessly assert what might be, how black folks *might could* live." (Hartman 2019)(196-97)

Hartman explains that in a Micheaux film, La Bentley would always be cast as a villain who would “meet a bad end”; there was never enough room in these kinds of “race films,” even those directed by a black director, for the survival and exaltation of the queer black hero or anyone else resisting the normative terms of respectability or “good morals” (200). In Hartman’s cinematic treatment, La Bentley “dies” but not

by bullet or car crash but rather "self-immolation" (201). In the film's "brutal twist," Bentley's "last act of self-renunciation" is an act "motivated by state repression and declared in a coerced confession": "The beautiful husband [is forced] to assume the role of wife, signaling his defeat" (201). Hartman references here the repressive conditions in and under which the *Ebony* article was published; the "moral panic" and anti-homosexual campaign known as the "Lavender Scare" paralleled the era's anti-communism (McCarthy was coincidentally re-elected the same year as Bentley's renunciation of her "manliness"). Hartman quotes Bentley's words at the end of the scene, claiming these are "lines from the deathbed": "I inhabited that half-shadow no man's land which exists between the boundaries of the two sexes" (Hartman 2019)(202).

After reading Bentley's "death" scene, I was compelled to investigate what Hartman calls a "coerced confession." The article in *Ebony* was easily found online. Its subtitle reads, "Fabulous entertainer tells how she found happiness after medical treatment to correct her strange affliction" (Bentley 1952)(93).[6] In the "exposé" Bentley reveals the "miracle" that made her a woman again – "I found a man I could love and who could love me" (94). Bentley claims that she discovered that she had suppressed her "womanliness" ever since childhood because her mother had always wanted a boy. Deciding she wanted to marry a man, she visited a doctor who told her that her "sex organs [were] infantile" and recommended injections of female hormones (98). A few photographs show Bentley engaged in domestic tasks at home: "Turning back cover of bed, Miss Bentley prepares to make homecoming husband comfortable ... Taste-testing dinner she has prepared for husband J. T. Gipson, Miss Bentley enjoys domestic role which she shunned for years" (94). Despite her happy and "normal existence" as a married woman, Bentley reveals that she is "still haunted by the sex underworld" and decided to tell her story to "help others who are trapped in its dark recesses" (94): "If I can steer some unknowing youths – tempted by the lure of something different – from succumbing to the snare and instead turning to the path of righteousness, I would feel some redemption from my sins" (98).

The "queer optic" through which Hartman narrates the film of Bentley's life enables one to imagine the gap in which Bentley exists however he likes, not as a woman nor perhaps as a man (Gopinath 2018)(8). It is significant that the "film" though based on Bentley's article largely digresses from it and that Hartman chooses instead to elaborate and reanimate Bentley's queer life; the scene "endeavors the impossible – to redress it" (Hartman 2019)(197). In this narration, readers are encouraged

[6]I adopt now "she" to mirror Bentley's own use of the pronoun throughout the article.

to think through the ways in which "womanhood" as a form of "personhood" has been historically made impossible for those with a variety of bodies in a society that privileges cis men and bodies read as male. The scene invites us also to consider the ways in which the lives of people read as female have been made unlivable, and how sexualities have been delimited contingent on historical, geographical, and cultural factors to varying degrees. Hartman's fabulation opens a terrain in which to also consider the ways in which "womanhood" has been made into an impossibility especially for African American and other racialized women, especially during slavery and its afterlives.

2.2.5 The Vagrant's Noisy Protest

After "wayward lives" have been introduced in Books One and Two, in Book Three, as the title "Beautiful Experiments" suggests, the narrative shifts to focus on experiments in living otherwise and forms of protest in the street and the reformatory. This section's scenes tell of the increasing criminalization of young women amid their struggles to create community, and the ways in which freedom and refuge were sought through art and performance. Despite the obstacles and laws forbidding it, these women assembled, lived communally, and practiced mutual aid. In several ways Book Three rewrites the history of an American anarchist movement, which has ignored the masses of colored girls who fought against exploitative conditions at work and in the home, refused domestic labor, and "troubled the marriage plot" (Hartman 2019)(91). Within the enclosure of the lock-up, they would also strike, riot, and find ways to articulate their demands for better and more beautiful lives.

Book Three opens with an image titled "Photograph of Silent Protest Parade: Race prejudice is the offspring of ignorance and the mother of lynching" (421). The photograph shows a city street full of rows of black girls wearing white marching hand-in-hand. The Negro Silent Protest Parade was a silent march along Fifth Avenue in New York of roughly 15,000 African American men, women, and children on July 28, 1917 (in record-breaking heat) (Newman 2017). The march was organized by the NAACP to protest lynchings, mob violence, and attacks on black laborers, communities, and neighborhoods, as well as to promote black causes and social welfare. At the first black-only protest parade in New York, women and children marched wearing white as men dressed in black followed behind. They marched in silence, which was common practice for peace parades at the time, but likely also in solidarity with black communities who had fewer opportunities for public protest.

Some of the most recent and violent mob massacres had taken place in Texas, Tennessee, and Illinois, and the East St. Louis Massacre, which occurred roughly fifteen miles from Ferguson, Missouri where Michael Brown was shot by police in 2014, is understood to be a catalyst for the parade (Newman 2017). Regardless of the silence of the protest, the marchers' placards made their message clear: "Give us a chance to live" and "Suffer Little Children and Forbid Them Not." Other signs (not visible in this photograph) read: "Your hands are full of blood" and "We Are Maligned as Lazy and Murdered When We Work" (Newman 2017).

Following a sketch illustrating the hysteria around black women's sexuality as a "growing menace" and concurrent criminalization of young women judged "wayward," comes the scene "The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner" containing the story of Esther Brown. The title of the scene borrows the phrase "assembled in a riotous manner" from an incendiary speech made by the governor of New York in 1787, in which he proclaimed that authorities must "take all methods for the seizing and apprehending of all such Negroes found to be assembled and if any of them refuse to submit then fire upon them, kill or destroy them" (Hartman 2019)(398). Hartman makes it clear how this proclamation was a continuation of the violence and restriction of the southern plantation, on which "no more than three slaves could meet together on penalty of being whipped not more than forty lashes" and twenty lashes for "playing or making any hooting or disorderly noise" (248).

Hartman thus initially frames the story of a young woman's criminalization and participation in prison "noise strikes" against the backdrop of a long history of antiblack violence and struggle. Reminding readers of the history of the labeling of "black noise" as dangerous and criminal, Hartman makes clear not only how history is "incomplete" but also the commingled ways in which black being – walking, assembling, associating, dancing, singing, and making noise – has attempted to be managed, controlled, and criminalized by racist authorities.

> "In the twentieth century, the unregulated movement and assembly of black folks remained a matter of public safety. Gatherings that were too loud or too unruly or too queer – or venues like hotels and cabarets that welcomed black and white patrons; black-and-tan dives frequented by Chinese men and white girls or black women with Italian paramours or women who preferred dancing with each other – were deemed disorderly, promiscuous, and morally depraved. These forms of free association and open assembly threatened the public good by transgressing the color line and eschewing the dominant mores." (Hartman 2019)(248)

In Book Three Hartman reframes instances of criminality, such as "errancy" and "vagrancy," as forms of living rebellion: "What the law designated as crime were the forms of life created by young black women in the city" (236). Alongside the revolts she brings to life in the reformatory, on the street, and in the cabaret, Hartman once again highlights "ordinary forms of gathering" and "practices of subsistence and making do" that followed refusals to accept unjust, degrading work in exchange for meager pay, labor that promised to suspend life and replace freedom with servitude (236).

Mirroring her method in Mattie Nelson's sketch, Hartman speculatively describes Esther Brown prior to the creation of her Bedford Hills case file, drawing from Esther's own statements taken from patient and staff notes and state commission investigations. Within this narrative, Hartman recontextualizes quotes from Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Emma Goldman, and Peter Kropotkin to "misread" anarchist tracts because "Only a misreading of the key texts of anarchism could ever imagine a place for wayward colored girls" (Hartman 2019)(231). Hartman attests that Kropotkin left out black women's societies and choruses in his famous 1902 anarchist essay *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution.* "Untested militants and smug ideologues ... failed to recognize that *experience was capable of opening up new ways, yielding a thousand new forms and improvisations*" (230). Esther Brown's "way of living was nothing short of anarchy," but though they walked the same streets of New York, she and Emma Goldman "failed to recognize each other" (230); Hubert Harrison, the lecturer on "free love," overlooked Esther's presence too. Unsurprisingly, "Esther Brown's minor history of insurrection went unnoted until she was apprehended by police" (232).

Before her arrest, however, Esther refused to work as often as she could. She preferred idleness, her "only luxury," or liked "strolling along Harlem's wide avenues ... losing herself in cabarets and movie houses":

> "Esther Brown hated to work, the conditions of work as much as the very idea of work. Her reasons for quitting said as much. Housework: Wages too small. Laundry work: Too hard, ran away. General housework: Tired of work. Sewing buttons on shirts: Tired of work. Dishwasher: Tired of work. Housework: Man too cross. Live-in service: I might as well be a slave. ... She ran the streets because nowhere else in the world was there anything for her. ... She had several lovers to whom she was bound by need and want, not by the law. ... With the support of her sister and grandmother and help from friends, lovers, dates, and consorts, she didn't need to work on a regular basis. She picked up day work when she was in a pinch and endured a six-week stretch of "Yes,

> Missus, I'll get to it" when coerced by need. . . . Why should she toil in the kitchen or laundry in order to survive? Why should she work herself to the bone?" (Hartman 2019)(232-34)

It is important here to point out again Hartman's use of the interrogative, utilized heavily in "A Minor Figure" and throughout *Wayward Lives*. Instead of focusing on how Esther's refusal to work was read by the authorities at Bedford Hills, these questions illustrate Hartman's own reading. "Why should she work herself to the bone?" punctuate Manichean readings that perpetuate antiblack violence post-plantation. Questions also operate to reread Esther's and other captives' dispossession of their autonomy and futures as a "question mark" (McKittrick 2013)(5). As a counter-historical poetic gesture, Hartman's questions work against the logics that read Esther and her friends as criminals. Like the subjunctive mood, I would add, Hartman's questions point to the author's work to emplace and involve the reader as a potential narrator of the historical text.

"Fiercely intelligent," Esther chose "an errant path [that] cut through the heart of Harlem in search of the open city, *l'ouverture*, inside the ghetto . . . Wandering and drifting was how she engaged the world and how she understood it; this repertoire of practices composed her knowledge" (Hartman 2019)(234-35). According to the endnotes, *l'ouverture*, meaning "the opening," is both a reference to "the revolutionary practice of the enslaved" (i.e. François Toussaint Louverture was a former slave and leader of the Haitian Revolution) and "another way to think about tumult, upheaval, and the radical practice of everyday life" (395). Esther's drifting mirrors Mamie Shepherd's, described in an earlier scene: "Roaming about unloosened a wild something that made her feel alive, a sharp pang of want that caused her to tremble. The black city at night was alive with possibility" (137). Hartman moves between Esther's unregulated and improvised wandering and the movement of all those in the "city-within-the-city," shifting between time periods and registers (235). She riffs in the following excerpt on Michel de Certeau's "long poem of walking" and writings by Du Bois, among others (394):

> "*An everyday choreography of the possible* unfolded in the collective movement, which was headless and spilling out in all directions, strollers drifted en masses, like a swarm or the swell of an ocean; it was a long poem of black hunger and striving. It was *the wild rush from house service on the part of all who [could] scramble or run.* It was a manner of walking that threatened to undo the city, steal back the body, break all the windows. . . . What might be was unforeseen, and improvisation was the art of reckoning with chance and accident." (Hartman 2019)(234)

Hartman then returns to Esther, who at seventeen-years-old was, “a threat to public order and moral decency”; she was “quick to anger because of too much pride” and had “a bad attitude” (235). “Excessive liberty had ruined her. The social worker concurred, ‘With no social considerations to constrain her, she was ungovernable’” (235).

Across the limits of the archival trace, Hartman brings Esther’s longings into relief, imagining this young woman and her desires among those of many in a still more expansive and inclusive chorus. Again, parallels are drawn between Esther and Mamie when Hartman conjures a scene of Mamie watching moving images and being transported by fantasy: “The world was so vast and she had seen so little of it ... With ten cents she could buy an excursion to the beautiful places she would never visit, experience lives she would never inhabit except in a darkened auditorium, yet it all seemed more real to her than the three-room flat in which she lived” (137). In the following, Hartman puts Esther in relation to Gwendolyn Brooks (1953) (quoting from *Maud Martha: A Novel*) and Lucille Clifton (1993) in her poem “won’t you celebrate with me”:

> "Esther Brown longed for another world. She was hungry for more, for otherwise, for better. She was hungry for beauty. In her case, the aesthetic wasn’t a realm separate and distinct from the daily challenges of survival; rather, the aim was to make an art of subsistence. She did not try to create a poem or song or painting. What she created was Esther Brown. *That was the offering, the bit of art, that could not come from any other. She would polish and hone that.* She would *celebrate that every day something had tried to kill her and failed.* She would make a beautiful life." (Hartman 2019)(235)

Hartman’s choice of complementary quotes from Brooks and Clifton are not of course random. Brooks’s book describes the inner transformation of a woman who is initially disheartened by the bleakness of her kitchenette apartment and then begins to see a new potential in her cramped quarters: she imagines “green drapes for the windows,” and thinks, “it was small, but wonders could be wrought here” (Brooks 1953)(22). Hartman chooses Maud Martha to accompany Esther Brown because both women (like Helga Crane, Mattie Nelson, and Gladys Bentley) practice the art of the refusal, determined to live other lives, stylishly and beautifully. Hartman’s use of Lucille Clifton’s concise poem narrates the process of fashioning a self-aware life. It continues the story of a person “both nonwhite and woman” who makes a self in the face of surviving that which “has tried to kill [her] and has failed.” Clifton writes, “won’t you celebrate with me / what i have shaped into / a kind of life? i

had no model" (Clifton 1993).

Hartman puts Esther's arrest for vagrancy also in the context of historical vagrancy laws, stretching back to the 1390s in England when there was a shortage of workers following the Black Death: "Its aim was clear: to conscript those who refused to work" (Hartman 2019)(242). Adopted in North American colonies and eventually expanded in the aftermath of Emancipation, vagrancy laws functioned to reintroduce "involuntary servitude in guises amenable to the principles of liberty and equality" (242). "Vagrants" were without proof of employment and propertyless, typically "the deracinated – migrants, wanderers, fugitives, displaced persons, and strangers" (245). These laws affected countless urban women of color like Esther. "Vagrancy was an expansive and virtually all-encompassing category; *like the manner of walking* in Ferguson, it was a ubiquitous charge that made it easy for the police to arrest and prosecute young women with no evidence of crime or act of lawbreaking" (241-42). Hartman's recontextualization goes further, extending from Esther's present into ours, by illustrating how the law continues to enforce ways of being today, acting to control, criminalize, and often extinguish Black Being. The italicized phrase above is pulled from a municipal code that is routinely used today to harass black residents in a St. Louis suburb. Eighteen-year-old Michael Brown was shot and killed in 2014 by Ferguson Police Officer Darren Wilson, who stopped Brown supposedly for violating the ordinance by walking in the road. Importantly, Gail Lewis (2019) points out how Hartman in *Wayward Lives* not only calls attention to the recurrence and repetition of this type of violence historically by interweaving past and present experiences, but also vitally makes clear the differences too, so that we avoid simply replaying old strategies of survival, or perhaps, rework and revise those strategies continually (Hartman, Lewis, and Leslie 2019). I would add, echoing McKittrick, that making clear the differences serves to avoid reading or writing "black futurities" as (fore)closed (McKittrick 2013)(5).

The narrative continues with the story of Eva Perkins crossing two scenes – "The Arrested Life of Eva Perkins" and "Riot and Refrain." In the latter, Eva participates in the "noise strikes" at Bedford Hills in December 1919 to protest gratuitous abuse and appalling conditions. According to Hartman, there was nothing unusual about riots and protests at prisons or at Bedford; however, it was rare for the press to report on them. *The New York Times* called the uproar a "sonic revolt" and the "din of an infernal chorus" (Hartman 2019)(279). In this scene Hartman casts the "vocal outbreaks" as forms of organized revolt by the chorus: "Songs and shouts were the instruments of struggle ... the soundscape of rebellion and refusal" (279). Though "the chorus spoke with one voice," she describes individual participants, speculating on their motivations and experiences, and reinforces links between these

women, Esther Brown, and others whose stories she tells: "A month after Miss Minogue put her in a chokehold, beat her head with a set of keys, and pummeled her with a rubber hose, Mattie Jackson joined the chorus. Thinking about her son and how he was growing up without her made her wail and shout louder. . . " (279-80). Loretta, or Mickey as her friends called her, who was sentenced at fourteen years old to "an indeterminate sentence" at the reformatory, "beat the walls" and "was proud to have been the cause of considerable trouble during her entire time at Bedford" (281).

In contrast to the silent protest, the noise strike drums up unstoppable force.[7] It deafens the ears of all those who refused to listen. It is a form of refusing all that which has been refused – peace and quiet, comfort and security, a good night's sleep. Release comes through shouting, screaming, howling, crying – a letting out of all that which has made one feel bad, of all the ways one was made to feel bad. The noise was accusatory and broke all rules.

> "The noise conveyed the defeat and aspiration, the beauty and wretchedness, which was otherwise inaudible to the ears of the world; it revealed a sensibility at odds with the institution's brutal realism. What accounts for the utopian impulse that enabled them to believe that anyone cared about what they had to say? What convinced them that the force of their collective utterance was capable of turning anything around? What urged them to create a reservoir of living within the prison's mandated death? What made them tireless?" (Hartman 2019)(286)

The reader here is invited to wonder with Hartman at this seemingly interminable reservoir of energy that allowed these women to carry on. The noise enabled those inside the enclosure of the ward to "break out" momentarily through the resonance of their voices. And, as Hartman writes, they "channeled . . . the hopes of the ones who loved them, . . . the nightmares about children stolen away by white men in the back of wagons or lost at sea" (286). Hartman suggests here that the collective utterance connected these women's experiences in their present to the past, and to not only the experiences of their ancestors, but also to those of the ones to come. It was this reservoir which existed before them that gave the girls at Bedford the

[7] Hartman's description of this form of revolt recalls a similar scene of collective, discordant assembly imagined by Ulrike Meinhof in the film *Bambule* (1970). As a journalist Meinhof investigated Germany's *borstals*, "reformatories" serving as detention centers for young women, and she wrote the film *Bambule* to expose the abuse the girls suffered and their strategies of resistance. In the film's culminating scene, the girls hold a "noise strike," tearing up their rooms and banging incessantly on the walls, doors, and windows. "Bambule" is a term appropriated by German prisoners, referring to the act of banging hard objects against the bars of a prison cell. The word derives from *bamboula*, the name of a drum and an accompanying dance originating in Africa and popularized in Haiti and New Orleans (Meinhof 1970).

capacity to shout, and the impulse they had to continue promised that future strikes would be possible. In this way, Hartman's use of the interrogative again ties the noise strikes at Bedford Hills to other locations, with other actors at different times when love, outrage, and longing had already and promised again to incite and sustain resistance.

2.3 Choreography of a Plural Subject

"*So how do you keep on?* She can't help it. ... The struggle is eternal. *Somebody else carries on*" (Hartman 2019)(348). Another structure of assembly, the swarm of blackbirds, is a configuration of the energy propelling the chorus which now returns and "opens the way" (345). The noise of the chorus leads us out to a more open space in Hartman's narrative, into the "free zone" of carnival and the cabaret. The chorus line on Coney Island provided Mabel Hampton and her friend Mildred Mitchell options beside husbands, landlords, and "missuses," an "exit from servitude": "the stage was the free territory. Dancing and singing fueled the radical hope of living otherwise, and in this way, choreography was just another kind of movement for freedom, another opportunity to escape service, another elaboration of the general strike" (299).

Like Mattie Nelson in the bedroom and Esther Brown walking the city, Mabel Hampton found an escape through choreography, through performing movement. In this refuge she would find like-minded friends and lovers and form an "outside" – a circle in which she could be herself, shielded to a certain degree from the weight of heteronormativity and the color line. La Bentley would become one of her acquaintances. "In the music hall, when the lights illuminated the stage, you became someone other than yourself, and this person guided how you moved, directed your gestures. The chorus was transformed from a line of separate dancers into a shared body ... And this body moved as one, erasing the borders of the bounded self..." (303) Yet, Hartman writes, Mabel felt even more comfortable than on the stage at friends' private parties in Harlem where there were no white people "observing her like she was a rare specimen" or men forcing her to dance with them; "Most of her friends were theater people, and half of them were women lovers and in the life" (304). Among affective descriptions of the dancer's varied romances and her love of music, the scene is dotted with photographs of Mabel with friends and lovers recovered from the Lesbian Herstory Archives. Mabel was a rising star, seeking freedom

through dance and new interracial, social arrangements. She would appear in the *Blackbirds Revue of 1926* at Harlem's Alhambra Theater (343).

Wayward Lives closes with a photograph of blackbirds flying in a swarm. Photographer Lukas Felzmann's image, as discussed earlier, represents the power of collective organization and the beauty of its free improvised character. This swarm of blackbirds echoes another photograph which opens this last scene ("The Chorus Opens the Way") of young black girls laughing and dancing in a line, mimicking the chorus line (344). Hartman reminds us that the "chorus" means to "*dance within an enclosure*" (347). "What better articulates the long history of struggle, the ceaseless practice of black radicalism and refusal, the tumult and upheaval of open rebellion than the acts of collaboration and improvisation that unfold within the space of enclosure?" (347). The chorus serves as a metaphor for the long history of assembling unlawfully, of dreaming despite the odds, of living beautifully within the slum, of making an "outside" within the "city-within-the-city." "Unable to fashion the world in their own terms, they could, at the very least, resist the world imposed ... No one else imagined anything better. So it is left to them to envision things otherwise; as exhausted as they are, they don't relent, they try to make a way out of no way, to not be defeated by defeat" (108, 347).

The chorus is also, Hartman writes,

> "the vehicle for another kind of story, not of the great man or the tragic hero, but one in which all modalities play a part, where the headless group incites change, where mutual aid provides the resource for collective action, not leader and mass, where the untranslatable songs and seeming nonsense make good the promise of revolution. The chorus propels transformation." (Hartman 2019)(347-48)

By structuring her narrative around the chorus, individual stories resist a single narrator or temporality. As woven stories, they inflect each other; each individual, included the anonymous girl in the compelled photograph, retains her realness and singularity, yet her experience is one of a multitude of different stories which are simultaneously versions of the same story. Put another way, every story becomes multiple and shared. Their stories are our stories, now.

> "A fugitive text, a wayward method, a Black feminist poetics is not a plea for recognition, but a plan for abolition. ... So I have labored to create the kind of narrative able to excavate the beauty of a wrong

> turn and regard the forms of social life opened by refusal. I have tried to think as hard as Mattie Nelson or Esther Brown did about the kind of life that can be lived when unfreedom is the normative condition." (Hartman 2020)

Hartman's method of threading the writings of others into her narration obscures discrete voices as it flattens time. She has attempted to write "inside the circle" or as one member of the chorus among many. All this, it would seem, continues along the lines of her concern with resisting and refusing "the imposition of a certain regime of the subject ... so fundamentally defined by property" (Hartman and Moten 2016). Outside of the western liberalist discourse of rights and so-called liberties, she has been interested in highlighting other articulations and configurations of freedom.

I have aimed to show how through her mode of fabulation, based on reading the archive through an affective register, Hartman creates an opening for the participation of a self-aware and re-oriented readership. Nyong'o writes that he "call[s] upon afro-fabulation to do the work of narrating the angular socialities of the present, the incompossible histories that we draw into our now, and the cryptic futures in which our deaths are seeded" (200). Nyong'o borrows here from Torok and Abraham (1994) who describe the "crypt" as that which "lives inside the body (as a result of an unnamable loss or wound) and that 'lives the body as the double of another'" (cited in (Nyong'o 2018)200). Perhaps the "crypt" inside the body can also read as a figuration of the chorus – a sense of living in the "singular plural" or the porousness of ourselves.

The plurality of the chorus calls back to the concept of "adjacency" – a proximity that makes you vulnerable in the face of something affecting someone else, the gamble (that is not empathy) of sensate feeling across difference (Campt 2019). I read the swarm of blackbirds (a symbol of perfect bodily organization without hierarchy that defies interpretation or explanation), or the performativity of the chorus embodying this relation, as the "better story" of adjacency. The dance within enclosure is a "full-body" refusal exceeding words that demonstrates "the capacity of the body to be a source of continuous pleasure over and against routine alienation" (Gabriel 2020). What does this better story do? In "Venus in Two Acts" Hartman cites Veena Das (2007) who tells the story of the father who "wills his daughter to live" even after she has died by brutal violence: "He creates through his utterance ['My daughter is alive – my daughter is alive.'] a home for her mutilated and violated self" (39, 47, cited in (Hartman 2008)3). A fabulated "fiction" (a fiction we need until perhaps it is "fiction" no longer) serves to help us carry on and resist however it is possible to.

3. PRELUDE: "GOD KEEP ME FROM WHAT THEY CALL *HOUSEHOLDS*"

While Emily Dickinson apparently took some pleasure in baking ("Twin loaves of bread have just been born into the world under my auspices – fine children – the image of their *mother*"), she hated to clean (Murray 2010)(L36, 73). In a letter to a friend, she complains of her sister's willingness: "I don't see much of Vinnie – she's mostly dusting stairs" (L176). In another letter she laments,

> "Mother is still an invalid tho' a partially restored one – Father and Austin still clamor for food, and I, like a martyr am feeding them. Would'nt [sic] you love to see me in these bonds of great despair, looking around my kitchen, and praying for kind deliverance ... My kitchen I think I called it, God forbid that it was, or shall be my own – God keep me from what they call *households*. . . !" (L36)

Her poem "How many times these low feet staggered" (238) registers more somberly the heavy-as-steel burden of housework on women's lives and bodies:

> "How many times these low feet staggered -
> Only the soldered mouth can tell -
> Try - can you stir the awful rivet -
> Try - can you lift the hasps of steel!
>
> Stroke the cool forehead - hot so often -
> Lift - if you care - the listless hair –
> Handle the adamantine fingers-
> Never a thimble - more - shall wear -
>
> Buzz the dull flies - on the chamber window
> Brave - shines the sun through the freckled pane -
> Fearless - the cobweb swings from the ceiling -
> Indolent Housewife - in Daisies - lain!" (Dickinson 1998)

While *something* can be said to resonate between Emily Dickinson's and Esther Brown's loathing of housework, as Saidiya Hartman's study makes clear, the social, personal, and psychic meaning of domestic labor significantly differed and continues to signify differently for black women in the U.S. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries all women sought, fought for, and gained greater freedoms through resisting housework (the freedom to work outside the home and earn money accompanied greater independence from fathers, brothers, and husbands, and release from motherhood, along with more time and energy for creative, social, and political pursuits). However, black women's labor outside their own homes and in those of white middle and upper-class families revealed how "emancipation" from the captivity of slavery continued in new but strikingly similar guises. Hartman writes, "The continuities between slavery and freedom were underwritten by black women's domestic labor," and an expanded mode of subjection was called "freedom" (Hartman 2016)(170). Tera Hunter (1997) adds that black women's "success or frustrations in influencing the character of domestic labor would define how meaningful freedom would be" (cited in (Hartman 2016)170). As Hartman's *Wayward Lives* tell us, black women's refusal to work resulted often in destitution, social exile, and imprisonment rather than liberation and poetry.

Though Mrs. Dickinson and her daughters often worked alongside the hired help in the family home, Emily Dickinson had the privilege to rely on domestic workers to do the majority of the housework which allowed her greater time and creative energy to write. Margaret O'Brien, an Irish immigrant, worked for the Dickinsons for about a decade until she was married. In the years between O'Brien's leave and a new hire, Emily's writing output seemed to decrease, which Dickinson researcher Aìfe Murray suggests was a result of the loss of regular household help (Murray 2010). In 1869 the family hired another Irish immigrant, Margaret Maher, who worked for the Dickinsons for thirty years.

Murray argues that Maher, whom the family called Maggie, had an immense influence on Emily Dickinson. Not only did she relieve the poet of the housework, but it is likely that the two women shared writing and even poems with each other. Maher's bilingualism (she likely spoke Hiberno- or Irish English) may have had an effect on Dickinson's linguistic and syntactical experiments. Murray also hears in Dickinson's playful or macabre attitude toward death traces of "the Irish take on death – laughing death down" (O'Neill 2017). Lastly, it is known that Emily Dickinson stored her poems in her maid's trunk, and upon her death asked Maher to destroy them; Maher refused. While sister Lavinia destroyed many of Dickinson's correspondence, Maggie Maher saved the poems.

4. A POTENTIAL HISTORY OF A "WAYWARD PURITAN"

How does Howe's book function as a potential history similarly or differently to Hartman's *Wayward Lives*? In the previous chapter I discussed Hartman's book as a potential history in the ways in which it describes and refigures the past counter-historically. Hartman asks the reader to occupy a space between belief and skepticism, a suspended position that she also assumes in her research. She is on the one hand doubtful that if there is "truth" to be found in the archive, the researcher or writer has the capacity to access, interpret, or *listen* to it. On the other hand, she is hesitantly hopeful that we may re-attune ourselves to hear the "silence that is not silent" (Reed 2014)(47). Howe similarly asks the reader to occupy a suspended state, but rather than being transported into the narrative, like one might while reading *Wayward Lives*, the reader of *My Emily Dickinson* must pause often. In the following chapter, I will attempt to show how Howe invites the reader to join her in re-imagining the archive and re-mapping the possibilities of a historical documentary poetics. Howe engages and reorients the reader as an active participant at the level of discourse, proposing that words themselves, saturated with wayward spirits and undervoices, may be the keys through which we access and activate a potential history.

In the previous chapter I discussed how Hartman writes with and against W.E.B. Du Bois's work, conventional histories of American anarchism and black radical thought, and various aesthetic productions including the race-films of Oscar Micheaux and Nella Larsen's novel *Quicksand*, whose epigraph opens the book. In *My Emily Dickinson* several paratexts serve as important frames. Howe's ample use of epigraphs, to open the book and several sections, as well as quotations throughout the text, generally make these frames highly visible. In her dissertation, "The Feminist Imaginary in the Early Writings of Poet/Critic Susan Howe" (2003), Candace Stockton-Bleakley extensively covers the influence of texts she culls from the poetic epigraphs and titles opening each of *My Emily Dickinson*'s three main parts. According to her, these poetic paratexts are used "as an extended analogy to round up the diaspora of [Howe's] meditations" (Stockton-Bleakley 2003)(31). Part One quotes John

Keats's poem, "On sitting down to read King Lear once Again," to send readers into "the old oak forest" (or "forest of words") along with Howe and to remind the reader of Shakespeare's and Keats's influence on Dickinson (31). Part Two ("Childe Emily to the Dark Tower Came") and Part Three ("Trumpets Sing to Battle") open with the same theme, borrowing their titles from Robert Browning's poem "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" (another reference to *King Lear*). These sections "function allegorically to illuminate ... Dickinson's struggle, her quest as poet," paralleling that of Browning's, "to create out of destruction" (34, 42). According to Stockton-Bleakley, Howe "reconstructs Dickinson as a proto-postmodernist, not only in technique, but also in her themes of desolation and refusal to accept complicity in a comforting vision of the world" (42).

In addition to these paratexts, others underlying each part of the book are made evident through Howe's pulled quotes and references. These include historically situated texts from Dickinson's geographical home in New England and the larger world of letters that influenced the poet. "The Puritan consciousness of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) shadows and prefigures that of Emily Dickinson," writes Howe, though Edwards's Western Massachusetts differed significantly from Dickinson's, "where polite Victorian respectability and the occasional excitement of another religious revival capped the slow dissolution of an agrarian community" (Howe 1985*a*)(47, 54). Texts that paint the literary world in which Dickinson wrote include what Howe calls those of "American Mythology" (42), mainly including captivity narratives (a popular, religious genre of the novel narrated by women kidnapped and "rescued" from native tribes) and frontier and war narratives (like James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*). Howe also briefly discusses the possible impact of abolitionist tracts and articles on Dickinson, especially those by critic Timothy Higginson, with whom she corresponded intermittently over twenty years. The bulk of Howe's study, however, is dedicated to Dickinson's reading history and direct influences, which included Shakespeare, Keats, Charles Dickins, George Eliot, Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the Brontë sisters, Henry David Thoreau, and R.W. Emerson, quotes from whom Howe weaves throughout the book.

Stefania Heim in her dissertation "Dark Matter: Susan Howe, Muriel Rukeyser, and the Scholar's Art" (2015) writes that structurally Howe's book is most directly indebted to poet Charles Olson's *Call Me Ishmael* (1947), a work of poetic literary criticism exploring Melville's influences when he wrote *Moby Dick* (Heim 2015). Olson focuses on Melville's Shakespearean influences, particularly *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, and closely reads Melville's copies of the plays and hand-written notes which Olson then traces into the manuscript of *Moby Dick*. In Howe's 1987 essay "Where Should the Commander Be?" she writes about Melville's indelible impact

on Olson's writing:

> "It took thirty-five Augusts for this passionate, ambitious, conflicted man to draw the hero-poet out of himself. ... Life opens onto work. Through long study and great love for another author, Olson reached his own – 'I am.' There, shed of enticings, he stood free of, and contemporary with, his Soul's cold fire-father, a Captain among hunters, an 'original aboriginal' mediator-Moses, the author of the book called *Moby-Dick*. ... Delicate perceptual intuition, apparent from the beginning, forced its own integrity of precision on a naturally omnivorous consciousness. ... At the threshold of academicism and poetry – sympathy is passionate morality. *Call Me Ishmael* is SPACE in which Charles Olson, an outcast from the world of art in name only, integrates Melville into himself." (Howe 2015)(184-86)

Olson's integration of Melville mirrors Howe's integration of Dickinson through writing *My Emily Dickinson*. Howe continues, "Without Melville's study of Hawthorne, Olson's study of Melville would be inconceivable" (193). Apart from the style of integrative research Howe adopts and locates in Olson's study of Melville and Melville's study of Hawthorne, Howe uses Hawthorne's story "The Birth-Mark" (1843) as a parable of the editorial violence on the feminine non-conformist literary voice, figured as an "almost fearful distinctness" (Hawthorne 1843)(2). Howe spends considerable time in *My Emily Dickinson* discussing the damage wrought by the unimaginative editing and publication of Dickinson's poems and letters (discussed at length in the Introduction). I revisit and add to my analysis of this gesture to counter editorial authority in the next section in the context of Howe's counter-historical subversion of *My Emily Dickinson*'s "wider" paratexts.

4.1 Counter To?: "Historical Imagination Gathers in the Missing"

In my discussion of the differences between Hartman's and Howe's archives in the Introduction, I discussed Howe's critique of the editorial negligence characterizing publications of Dickinson's writing and Howe's interventions against this literary authority representing "patriarchal language" (Ma 1994)(725). In addition to Dickinsonian editors Thomas H. Johnson and Ralph W. Franklin, and the editorial logic that imposes order on feminine nonconformity more generally, counter to which his-

tories is *My Emily Dickinson* a counter-history? To broach this question more fully, I continue to consider the paratexts hovering around and structuring Howe's study, but specifically those Howe counters through a strategic method of incorporation and subversion. Howe's critical response to these texts in particular, I argue, reveal the ways in which her project is shaped similarly to how the accounts of sociologists and reformers, racial uplift fantasies, and conventional narratives of resistance shape *Wayward Lives*. Particularly, both Hartman's and Howe's responses to these narratives articulate a concern to include forgotten or occluded histories of women's private and public participation in cultural rebellion.

Adding to my examination of *My Emily Dickinson*'s paratexts, and departing from Stockton-Bleakley and Heim, I would first draw attention to two texts (or groups of texts) Howe explicitly cites and that I argue frame Howe's intervention and study as a whole. Howe opens the book with an epigraph from William Carlos Williams's classic text of historical essays, *In the American Grain* (1925), which I quote in full:

> "It is the women above all – there never have been women, save pioneer Katies; not one in flower save some moonflower Poe may have seen, or an unripe child. Poets? Where? They are the test. But a true woman in flower, never. Emily Dickinson, starving of passion in her father's garden, is the very nearest we have ever been – starving. Never a woman: never a poet. That's an axiom. Never a poet saw sun here." (Howe 1985*a*)(6, quoting Williams)

In these lines Williams seems to doubt the existence or possibility of a "true" woman poet, referencing the "anomalous" female poets recognized by Edgar Allen Poe (Howe 1993)(169). Williams then specifically cites Emily Dickinson as a prime example of the impossibility of a real female poet. Williams calls the postulate "Never a woman: never a poet" an "axiom," which on the one hand could mean that it is an established, self-evident rule that requires no proof. More likely, however, Williams is throwing into doubt the rule's self-evidence and/or its ability to be proven. In the "sun" of the here and now, Williams could be remarking on the impossibility of proving the possibility of a woman poet, which then transforms the epigraph into a critique of the context that disallows the flowering of a woman poet. In Howe's brief Introduction, she states her relation to Williams's lines: "My book is a contradiction of its epigraph" (Howe 1985*a*)(7). After calling Williams's statement a regrettable "false configuration," Howe proposes that he perhaps "says one thing and means another" (7). She claims that in saying "Never a woman: never a poet ... Never a poet saw sun here," Williams's meaning opens; on the one hand, we may

understand that never has a woman poet come out of obscurity fully into literary maturity and/or societal, literary recognition. On the other hand, Howe states that the poet is "never just a woman or a man": "Every poet is salted with fire" (7). Thus, Howe situates *My Emily Dickinson* as written both against the idea that a true woman "in flower" is impossible while in support of the idea that the poet defies gender as normatively imagined and prescribed. By writing then "a contradiction" to Williams's ambiguity, Howe situates her own work as rooted in ambivalence and contradiction.

The second wider paratext(s) I would name would include several works of literary criticism, including those by feminist critics. In Part One Howe draws parallels between Dickinson and Gertrude Stein, two poets she names as "the most innovative precursors of modernist poetry and prose" who have been ignored by canonical critics such as Harold Bloom (Howe 1985*a*)(11). *My Emily Dickinson* would first most obviously be an exercise in demonstrating Dickinson's rightful place among other literary pathfinders (which I discuss more below). But Howe also interestingly criticizes the rigidity of feminist literary scholars such as Hélène Cixous, who, Howe says, celebrates the male experimentalist (for example, James Joyce) while ignoring the female (Stein), and who seems to argue for an essentialist feminine voice (12). Howe argues that Cixous's "plan for what women's writing *will* do ... too quickly becomes a *must*" (12). Howe also harshly critiques Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's now canonical work *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (1979), in which, Howe argues, the authors rely on John Cody's 1971 "reprehensible biographical psychoanalysis" of Dickinson: "*After Great Pain* is the rape of a great poet" (24). Howe argues that these works spend more time reducing Dickinson to the facts of her life (her sex, class, and agoraphobia) than exploring her "gestures of intention" and the subtleties of her poetry (24). In addition, Gilbert and Gubar, according to Howe, claim that "a writer may conceal or confess all, if she does it in a logical syntax": she counters, "Emily Dickinson suggests that the language of the heart has quite another grammar" (13).

In an interview with Lynn Keller (1995), Howe discusses the problematic "ghettoizing" of women's poetry, an anxiety I read in Howe's counter-historical gesture toward the above paratexts: "I think that women who take a theoretical position are allowed to take a theoretical position only as long as it's a feminist theoretical position, and to me that's an isolation..." (Keller 1995)(21). Throughout her career Howe has crossed disciplinary boundaries; *My Emily Dickinson*, in which Howe "trespasses" into Literary Criticism, American History, and American Studies, is one early example. In an interview with Edward Foster in 1989, she also expresses this early wariness of the "separation" of academic disciplines such as "Women's Studies"

and "African-American Studies": "It seems to me only a further way to isolate texts that should be known by everyone. But then it may be a temporary necessity" (Howe 1993)(170). She continues, "I am troubled by some feminist criticism because in its stridency it is only another bias. And in a strange sense it's still a male bias. Instead of questioning the idea of power itself, many women want to assume power" (170). Howe explains that her hesitation to support a certain kind of feminism in academia has to do with a deep suspicion of canonization in general and her frustration that female genius is usually seen as an anomaly: "Yes, Dickinson is in the canon. But she is treated as an isolated case, not as part of an ongoing influence" (168). This connects back to Howe's contention in *My Emily Dickinson*'s Introduction that "a poet is never just a woman or a man" (Howe 1985*a*)(7). In this way, her gesture reveals itself as a more radical refusal of the terms, especially gendered terms, by which a writer can be rendered a subject.

Works not explicitly mentioned in *My Emily Dickinson* but to which Howe responds in her study include examples of classic literary critique: in F.O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* (1941), Dickinson is "allotted a short paragraph" (Weinberger 2007)(vii). According to the critic, Dickinson mirrored Emerson in her "tricks of phrase," but "does not seem to have any of his range as a social critic" (vii). In addition, D.H. Lawrence fails to mention Dickinson in his 1923 *Studies in Classic American Literature* as does Ezra Pound in his anthology *From Confucius to Cummings* (1958). The "once-important Georgian poet" Harold Monro stated in 1925 that Dickinson was "intellectually blind, partially dead, and mostly dumb to the art of poetry"; he goes on, "Her tiny lyrics appear to be no more than the jottings of a half-idiotic school-girl instead of the grave musings of a full grown, fully educated woman" (vii). Allan Tate compares her to John Donne in 1932, but claims, "She cannot reason at all. She can only see" (viii).

I read Howe's book therefore as written in contradiction to the reductive tendencies of male-dominated subjects and disciplines (especially history and poetry contemporary to Howe's early work) as well as "psychological" literary criticism and feminist revisionist gestures contemporaneous with her study of Dickinson. In Eliot Weinberger's Preface to the 2007 reprint of *My Emily Dickinson*, he writes,

> "Against the cliché of Dickinson as some sort of Rousseauian natural spirit, producing quirky, unlettered effusions, Howe's Emily Dickinson is an erudite, and she tracks the poems through a vast amount of reading: Shakespeare, the Brönte s, the Brownings, Spenser, Shelley, Keats, Blake, Ruskin, Thoreau, Emerson, James Fenimore Cooper . . . the company in which, from the distance she did not perceive as a distance, Dickinson

> thought she was writing. Against the isolated neurotic, Howe's Dickinson is fully aware of events, including the Civil War, in the world outside." (Weinberger 2007)(xi)

Howe attempts to write a text accountable to Dickinson and her experiment, which Howe situates not as an anomaly per se but within a tradition of feminine innovation, stretching back to Puritan "proto-feminists." To do this, Howe rigorously dives into the history and reading that informed Dickinson's "poetics and praxis" and takes the poet "at her word" rather than pursue normative grooves of thought informed by her biography and popular techniques of women's life-storying (of the 1980s). Recognizing that poetry was a "scholar's art" for Dickinson (borrowing the phrase from Wallace Stevens), Howe argues that Dickinson's poetry deserves a scholarly reading, not only of the historical sources and literature that inspired her, but also of her writing process (Howe 1985*a*)(15).

Parallel to Hartman's choice to cite instances when black radical thought historically refused the ideological fantasies of racial uplift, Howe looks to an archive read otherwise as the site to locate historical examples of a radical imagination. Howe's scholarly approach necessarily depends on close archival readings. Her relationship with archives, like Hartman's, can be characterized as ambivalent; it is deeply critical while simultaneously very open. Framed in contradiction to the paratexts discussed and counter to an American literary tradition of silencing nonconformist poetics and praxis through the (male) editor, *My Emily Dickinson* is a response to the many "silly" publications that ignore this poet's working method, continue unapologetically to "vulgarize" her life, and underestimate her legacy (24). In doing so, Howe illuminates the poet's omnivorous scholarship, her appropriations, intentions, and ambiguities, her synthetic, polysemous play, and her intellectual eccentricity in resistance to imposed linguistic, generic, and cultural hegemony. She names Dickinson as one of many experimenters who have been dismissed, ignored, and misunderstood. Through the work of *My Emily Dickinson* Howe calls for an immediate overhaul in Dickinson scholarship based on the original manuscripts and more broadly a serious re-consideration of women's literary innovation.

4.2 Inhabiting a Critical Openness

> "Of course, I know that history can be falsified, has been falsified. Still, there are archives and new ways of interpreting their uncompromising details. I am naïve enough to hope the truth will [come] out. History may be a record written by winners, but don't forget Nixon taped himself for posterity. If you are a woman, archives hold perpetual ironies. Because the gaps and silences are where you find yourself." (Howe 2015)(158)

In the above quote Howe recognizes the falsification of history. However, she concedes her "naïve" faith that archives can contain and reveal "the truth." In this quote I hear Howe's hesitant but "hopeful" hope. The statement on the one hand resonates with the view that archives are sites housing historical information that can be extracted by adept researchers. At the same time, Howe concedes that the archive is structured by "winners," after which she circles back to express a "naïve" belief in the truth's inevitable exposure: the truth will come out, in time, in different and more opportune circumstances – perhaps, fortuitously, by accident.

I am struck by the forgiving quality of the word "ironies." It conjures for me the image of a researcher combing paper files in search of her ancestor; she expects to find some trace of her – maybe she was the daughter of so-and-so who accomplished this or that. Yet, surprisingly for the researcher, her ancestor fails to appear, or her presence is marked only by an absence. She was the one to whom letters were addressed, for example, but whose side of the correspondence has been lost. For Howe, this type of absence nonetheless tells us something about the missing woman – Howe finds her in the gap. Hartman, on the other hand, hesitates to embrace this possibility because to do so might obscure the violence of the erasure. To focus instead on the impossibility of locating her not only serves the purpose of exposing the violence wrought by the archive but also possibly presents more openings for new narratives, identities, and representations.

This section begins with a look at Howe's "hope" because it is worth reiterating an ambivalent point at which Howe's and Hartman's approaches to the archive seem to meet and diverge. Clearly, Hartman has less reason to be "hopeful" in her archive and few opportunities to be "naïve": as discussed, if her subjects show up at all in the archive, they are conscribed by captivity and criminality, which speaks directly to their racialized sub-statuses in the U.S. Thus, Howe and Hartman confront different

archives within often, ironically, the same archive – Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, located a short distance from where Howe calls home in Guilford, Connecticut. What Howe calls "ironies" Hartman would likely call "failures," as there is slim to no chance her subjects will show up in narratives that are "true" or could in any way be construed as accountable to them. Thus, Hartman's attempts at rescue must be made through unconventional means.

Howe, on the other hand, also enacts irregular rescue operations. She reads and writes most often about other writers, and, aside from *My Emily Dickinson*, she often finds her subjects by chance – they are usually anonymous or semi-anonymous figures that history has tried to banish or completely obscure. In *My Emily Dickinson*, the violence of the archive specifically culminates in the editing and "false" publication of Dickinson's work, which has operated to tame or erase the poet's innovation. In addition to this, Howe situates Dickinson in a larger community and tradition of rebels and nonconformists; thus, Dickinson ceases to be an "exception." Howe's rescue is attempted through a reimagining of Dickinson, who Howe argues purposefully refused to publish to avoid destroying her textual experimentation; next to this, Howe recognizes in close readings of Dickinson's work, especially her handwritten facsimiles, her writing's resistance to de-complication, interpretation, or domestication. Rather than accept the description of the poet as a spinster or madwoman, Howe highlights Dickinson's "antinomian" gesture, her refusal to participate in a debilitating culture set on destroying creativity. Though Howe recognizes that Dickinson herself was aware of the ways in which she was restricted in her life and choices, Howe performs a "counter-historical" gesture by refusing to reduce the poet to her gender or biography, preferring instead to read her through her work. "I think Emily Dickinson's inability to get her work published during her lifetime had almost nothing to do with the fact that she was a woman and everything to do with her originality" (Howe 1993)(168). Further, Howe contends that Dickinson was aware of the danger her poetry faced if she chose to publish, and proof for Howe is in Dickinson's poetry.

Though Hartman researches in "the weather" of antiblackness that pervades the historical present while Howe confronts "hurricanes of facts" (Howe 2015)(89, quoting Dziga Vertov 1926) (some of which may be useful and liberating), both see the archive as a "departure point" rather than a site for answers (Morgan 2016)(186). Like Hartman, Howe sees that the archive and "History is a record of winners. Documents were written by the Masters" (Howe 2015)(179). She points to the problematic collaboration between archives and academic scholarship.

> "I am drawn toward the disciplines of history and literary criticism but in the dawning distance a dark wall of rule supports the structure of every letter, record, transcript: every proof of authority and power. I know records are compiled by winners, and scholarship is in collusion with Civil Government. I know this and go on searching for some trace of love's infolding through all the paper in all the libraries I come to." (Howe 1993)(4)

She critically reads the archive, while at the same time entering the archive *open* – to being haunted and changed, available to what or who seeks her out, willing to see the possible fruits in failure and embrace the risks of following associative "breadcrumb trace[s]" and trails (VanderHart 2012)(16).

What is normally emphasized in Howe scholarship is her openness in archives, discussed by W. Scott Howard (2019) in his analysis of Howe's *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* (1987), which contains her poetic meditation on the banished minister Hope Atherton's incoherent narrative. In 1676 the reverend was separated from the local militia he accompanied, who were on a mission to massacre the Algonquian natives gathered at the Peskeompscutt fishing grounds near Hatfield, Massachusetts (Howard 2019)(100-6). After wandering four days in the woods, Atherton returned home to tell a story that "Many people were not willing to give credit suggesting that he was beside himself" (Sheldon 1896 (Howe 1987), cited in (Howard 2019)129). In Howe's poem-sequence "Hope Atherton's Wanderings," she attempts to "articulate[. . .] the sound forms" of his discredited language finding in the gaps of his narrative a space for the poet's investigation and experimentation (Howe 1993)(180). What is useful in Howard's discussion of the poem is the way he highlights Howe's often overlooked critical reading of this archived history: "Howe's readers instead have surprisingly taken her dynamic collage of archives and artifacts as a relatively straightforward summary of events, as if their reconfiguration were not also a mode of deft disruption. . . " (Howard 2019)(99-100). As Howe reminds us, "Historical imagination gathers in the missing" (Howe 2015)(143).

Howard's analysis is also useful for my discussion because within "Hope Atherton's Wanderings" Howe cites many of the textual artifacts woven within *My Emily Dickinson*, including the captivity narratives which serve as framing devices. Howard writes,

> "[N]o one has yet considered *Articulation* as a critical reading of Atherton's involvement in the garrison's attack . . . upon a peaceful gathering of Native Tribes. . . : Why indeed was the Rev. Atherton there at all?

> How and why has his true relation of events been adapted, edited, and re-published? And by whom, when and why? Furthermore, why has Howe given us particular artifacts and documents from those contested, nested captivity narratives (and their historiographies) as framing devices for the poem's disjunctive sequence?" (Howard 2019)(101)

Howard articulates the questions that drive Howe's investigation. In that Atherton is "more than just an anomaly or a contradiction" (Howe expresses that the reverend's "experience and legacy live 'In all of us'"), her "poetics and praxis ... invokes the ongoing work of restorative justice as a constitutive, co-creative agent in the poem's openwork sequence of reading/writing against the grain" (Howard 2019) (101) citing (Howe 1993)(172).

Can a similar critical approach to historiography be located in the disjunctive narrative of *My Emily Dickinson*? Can this book be considered a "restorative" or reparative work? Howe closely, critically reads Dickinson's manuscripts as a poet reads another poet to embark on her study to write against reductive mis-readings and man-handlings of Dickinson's poems and letters. In this way she contributes to the reparative work of correcting false perceptions that overlook and intentionally obscure Dickinson's experiment. Howard's interpretation of Howe's poem on Atherton can tell us something about her approach more generally to archives, documents, and discourses which suggests that *My Emily Dickinson* is more than just a "revised history" of Dickinson's life in letters (Ma 1994): it is a potential history of antinomian counter-voices, one of which was Dickinson's.

4.2.1 Trespassing on an "Errand into the Wilderness"

Howe's interest in bringing to light counter-histories is important to acknowledge, again, because so many Howe scholars have focused on her "telepathic" open method within the archive. Focusing on the way in which she lets diverse documents lead her associatively, they have based their descriptions of this technique on the assumption that she interprets what she locates in the archive to be uncompromised historical artifact. Howard quotes critics who have concluded that Howe "appropriates her source texts 'as a space for the writing of her own journey'" (Howard 2019)(102, quoting Reinfeld). These critics also argue that "'Howe has no desire to send us back to her sources, or, indeed, to encourage us to read them;' that Howe ... 'must have [only] stumbled across' such documents 'while searching for information' ... because ultimately 'the work is not about history,'" (103, quoting Nicholls, Back, Gaffield).

In short, Howard makes a strong case for Howe's persistent critical approach and rigor of research. While it is true that she listens for chance encounters in the archive, this method does not override her attention or commitment to close reading; in fact, if I understand Howard's argument correctly, it is through her practice of reading "against the grain" that she is able to follow counter-paths of silenced or muffled voices and that she is able to attend more *thoroughly* not only to the recovery of counter-histories but also to the workings of conventional historiography. Her open practice enables her to more critically study the archive.

This, to me, resonates with Hartman's practice of reading the archive otherwise (Saunders 2008*b*)(8). Both researchers attune themselves to looking for and sensing what has been obscured. In *Wayward Lives*, for example, I discussed how Hartman focuses her attention on the eyes and the posture of the girl photographed in the studio; she studies the women who evaded capture by the sociologist's gaze by ignoring him. In this reoriented attention, new possible narratives become available, some which supplement and many times contradict official historiography. Opening the Bedford Hills files, Hartman unsurprisingly found dehumanizing accounts and sorrowful statements by inmates; sometimes, however, she also found accounts of furious rebellion and unanticipated hope. Like the roaming "cormorant," Howe similarly spots what she is and isn't necessarily looking for, especially in Dickinson's careful handwriting. Her close reading betrays a clear critical approach, revealing that she does not take for granted the normative narratives laid out by and for the historian within an archive whose systematic order privileges certain texts and artifacts over others.

In various essays Howe describes her fraught relationship to libraries and archives, guarded places she has been lured to since her youth. These accounts tell the story of an early education in disciplinary and scholarly exclusion. Howe, the daughter of Harvard Law School professor Mark DeWolfe Howe, would accompany her father to the library: "During the 1950s, ... I was already a library cormorant. I needed out-of-the-way volumes from Widener Library. My father said it would be trespassing if I went into the stacks to find them. I could come with him only as far as the second-floor entrance. There I waited while he entered the guarded territory to hunt for books" (Howe 1993)(18). Howe remembers her childhood sheltered and shadowed by Harvard academic circles that were, of course, "very privileged [and] so male" (159). Rising stars in History and American Studies F.O. Matthiessen and Perry Miller were friends of the Howe family:

"The Matthiessen book [... *American Renaissance: Art and Expression*

> *in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*]: an intellectual and poetic Renaissance minus Emily Dickinson. Minus Harriet Beecher Stowe. Minus Margaret Fuller. Of course, Frederick Douglass as well. Women weren't the only ones subtracted. It's these kinds of contradictions that get me. ... I can't quite so simply say I grew up in a false community – a community that fancied itself as liberal. ... But you see, it was false if you were a girl or a woman who was not content to be considered second-rate." (Howe 1993)(159)

Howe recalls Perry Miller as "a lecherous character":

> "To us daughters of professors, he was the object of great scorn because we knew that if he was at one of our houses, he would quickly get red-faced and then his hands would start wandering ... While Matthiessen leaves out women, Miller leaves out Native Americans. How could he have written so many books and essays, one of them called *Errand into the Wilderness* and have left out the inhabitants? ... It wasn't a wilderness to Native Americans..." (Howe 1993)(161)

DuPlessis (1984) writes that "Howe plays on a basic myth of the hero, or the father – something from which the searching daughter feels alien, something for which the searching daughter feels desire" (DuPlessis 1984)(124). As Howe recounts her memories of those figures of her childhood (Miller, a Puritan scholar like her father, "always wore white socks and black shoes ... the skin on his ankles ... like polished porcelain"), she affectively links her feelings of vulnerability and gendered exclusion to the noticeable absences within their publications and silences within their disciplines more generally: "This place I want to come home to [Cambridge and academia] was false to women in an intellectual sense" (Howe 1993)(161).

Howe's description of navigating the maze of Yale's Sterling Memorial Library in her poetic essay "Frame Structures" (1995) points to her persistent discomfort with the archive's categorical logic and her continuing sense of trespassing. Searching for a particular periodical, she is directed to the Franklin Collection Room:

> "Here Yale University's custodians of early American culture sequester whatever back issues of periodicals, local histories, antiquarian studies, bibliographies, even obliquely concern Benjamin Franklin or Philadelphia I'm not sure which because ... The materials are arranged according to a certain scheme of order I couldn't make out. A librarian, seated near the entrance at a desk piled high with papers and catalogues, asked me

> to produce credentials i.e., write my university affiliation on a list along with my reason for being there. ... It was a hot midsummer day the Benjamin Franklin Room doesn't have air conditioning and the librarian looked impatient..." (Howe 2015)(162-3)

She compares archived documents in the same essay to "bourgeois Victorian women," shut in by the walls and the logic of the library:

> "Documentary histories, registers, ad catalogues, often lovingly gathered by local amateurs, tend to be filed, boxed, and sheltered: shut up. What is it about documents that seems to require their relegation to the bedroom (a private place) as if they were bourgeois Victorian women? Honored, looked to for advice, shielded from the rabble by guardians of 'tradition' / 'aesthetic taste,' available only to particular researchers (husbands or bachelor machines) and caretakers (librarians cataloguers secretaries) so long as they are desirable (readable not too tattered) capable of bearing children (articles chapters books) rearing them (aiding research), they remain sheltered at home (museum collections libraries)." (Howe 2015)(162)

Thus, the documents become, in this sense, victims of the archive, "sheltered from the public gaze" (163).

Within the archive's conformist order, Howe paradoxically returns again and again to the theme of the "wilderness," which, though she criticizes its one-sided usage, she sees as a "necessary emblem" (161). The wilderness is one way she often describes the archive – its open riddle and potentially feminine darkness. "Sterling houses books that aren't used often, so it has an aura of death. ... The lights are off. In silence and semidarkness, it's mysterious" (Howe 2015)(167). For Howe, and as I argue for Hartman, within the constraint there exists the possibility of openness and potentiality. "I wished to speak a word for libraries as places of freedom and wildness," she writes (54). In the repeated failure to directly access, navigate, and possess information, a potentiality opens through trespass to indirectly "occupy" history. Next to the concession that Hartman's "trespass" differs from Howe's, I postulate that for both scholars an opening is created through their exclusion which facilitates reading the archive otherwise.

This early exclusion from the scholar's territory made the archive mysterious, ambivalently loathsome and desirable to Howe. "What is forbidden is wild" (Howe 1993)(18). The library for Howe is "wild" because of her placement consistently, permanently "outside" of it. "The stacks of Widener Library and of all great li-

braries in the world are still the wild to me. ... I go to libraries because they are the ocean" (18). Inducing awe, they pull her, tide-like, in certain directions. The archive's architecture not only complements the exclusionary and intimidating structuring/structural logic that vows to admit exclusively credentialed scholars, but also creates a "sheltering" space for memory:

> "The Beinecke was constructed from Vermont marble and granite, bronze and glass, during the early 1960s. The structure displays and contains acquisitive violence, the rapacious 'fetching' involved in collecting, and, on the other hand, it radiates a sense of peace. Downstairs, in the Modernist reading room I hear the purr of the air filtration system, the rippling sound of pages turning, singular out of tune melodies of computers re-booting. Scholars are seated at wide worktables bent in devotion over some particular material object. ... Here is deep memory's lure, and sheltering. In this room I experience enduring relations and connections between what was and what is." (Howe 2014)(43)

(One of these scholars could be Hartman herself.) As a semi-credentialed scholar, traces of exclusion mark themselves in and on Howe's body. When she enters the scholar's territory, she recalls wondering whether "her clothing [is] possibly a violation of Harvard research decorum" (Bruns 2009)(47-8): "[A]nd I have a new monogrammed black leather Coach briefcase my husband gave me for my birthday because we knew I was making this trip and it seemed professorial. Neither of us has a college degree so we have that feeling of failure in common and are always at war with what we wear" (Howe 2003)(122, cited in (Bruns 2009)47). Gerald Bruns adds, "And then there is the question of how to sound. Told that the Dickinson materials are not available, and asked to show proof that she has a right to inquire after them, Howe thinks:

> "I have driven up that day from Connecticut and booked into the Howard Johnson Motel, my pencils are sharpened, notepaper ready. I have waited weeks for this moment. I think of the disarming of the Antinomians in 1637, coinciding with the founding of Harvard College in Cambridge, a provincial village of mainly British immigrants. ... As a half-Irish or half-Anglo-Irish woman, I know an audience will always react to the materiality of the voice as a sign. Deepness of timbre is preferable to shrill. I am feeling a sense of humiliation and angry despair. I know my reaction is extreme. I can hear my voice running into its irksome high pitch, jostling genteel decorum. The librarians are feeling its ugly assault." (Howe 2003)(126) cited in (Bruns 2009)(47)

The extended point I wish to make here is that Howe writes of her experience in the archive always ambivalently (cold, frustrating exclusion transforms into peaceful shelter and back again); additionally, interactions with librarians as the archives' keepers simultaneously recalls for Howe an American tradition of silencing nonconformist voices and sends her back to troubled childhood memories. Thus, her failures of access are ironic in that they open possibilities for affective affiliation through memory and imagination.

4.2.2 Listening for "Love's Infolding"

The method of "listening" that Hartman borrows from Tina Campt (2017) and utilizes in *Wayward Lives* resonates with Howe's approach. Howard writes that "Howe's poetics and praxis emphasizes attentive dialogic close listening to archival materials" (Howard 2019)(115), and Bruns highlights that as Howe experiences herself as "an alien presence" in the archive, she sees "ghosts as familiars" (Bruns 2009)(47). Howe's approach to "listening" in the archive has elsewhere been called "mediumship" (Heim 2015)(112). Howe describes her experience in libraries as one in which her spirit is moved and the dead may speak through her:

> "Often walking alone in the stacks, surrounded by raw material paper afterlife, my spirits were shaken by the great ingathering of titles and languages. This may suggest vampirism because while I like to think I write for the dead, I also take my life as a poet from their lips, their vocalisms, their breath. So many fruits, some looked firm in spring and seemed to be promising, now amassed according to an impervious classification system." (Howe 2015)(54)

Though Howe is hesitant to speak of "voices," she ambivalently situates herself as using and being used by, or calling or being called by, the energies that meet her in the archive. Similar to Campt and Hartman, Howe foregrounds senses beside sight, also fusing them in new ways: "No, no. I don't hear voices (though I'm always scared I might). You don't hear voices, but yes, you're hearing something. *You're hearing something you see*" (Keller 1995)(33, emphasis mine). In this way, her description of researching might be reminiscent of dreaming, in that when we dream the background or "margins" of our sight or other senses often become heightened or foregrounded. Howe also listens, she says, to "another language another way of

speaking so quietly always there . . . extra-marginal . . . Documents resemble people talking in sleep" (Howe 2015)(62).

In many ways, Howe seems to view herself as a vessel that can be occupied by spirit, though she often describes herself as the one haunting libraries. Kathleen Crown (1998) writes, "For Howe, historical inquiry is always a kind of invocation of and intimate communion with the dead" (491, cited in (Heim 2015)114). Heim adds,

> "The implication is that such intimacy is real communion, therefore dangerous and transformative. Writing of her own work on Emily Dickinson, Howe describes the process of giving voice to the dead as "a kind of fusion" (BM 158). In *The Birth-mark* she asks, 'Can any words restore to me how you *felt*? / you are straying, seeking, scattering. Was it you or is it me? . . . Who or what survives the work?' (4, emphasis original). . . . Howe becomes intertwined – emotionally and actually – with the historical subject she pursues. Closely following the suggested confusion between selves ('Was it you or is it me'), the question 'Who or what survives the work' suggests that the poet's historical inquiry might have repercussions for her own safety." (Heim 2015)(114-15)

Heim expands off Devin Johnston's analysis of the poet H.D., who through her developing occultism, used "writing as a mode of transcending the limits of the self" (115). Similarly, Howe seems to "leave" herself or embody other selves or spirits in her writing. In a poetic manifesto delivered at the Vancouver New Poetics Colloquium, she cites Creon's statement to Antigone: "Go to the dead and love them" (Howe 1985*b*) cited in (Heim 2015)(112). For Howe, "Archives are not threats. They are invitations" (Pad.ma 2010). When Howe says, "For something to work I need to be another self," she speaks of a type of transmutation, or what Heim calls a "dangerous intersubjectivity" (Howe and Thompson 2005, cited in (Heim 2015)112-15). Invocation and communion occur through close examination of handwriting because for Howe "texts are pneumatic – inhabited by the ghosts of their authors" (Bruns 2009)(28). Intersubjectivity becomes her textual strategy through which she creates works as "textual site[s] for collectively mourning unrealized possibilities" (Irzık 2019)(436).

Attending to and transforming through marginalized voices is ever more possible for Howe by paying close attention to the stray marks, gaps, "physical details of the page" that unsettle order in the archive and are part of the "fictitious real" (Howe 1993)(142). She focuses on highlighting the marginalia that appear in the documents she encounters toward rescuing "an echo of an undervoice that was speaking from

the beginning" or uncover "some truth that had been edited out of our history" (Howard 2019)(15, citing Howe 1990, 1996). She articulates the transmutation that happens in her archival research onto the pages of her own books through what she calls "factual telepathy," "collagist-typographic polyvocal gestures" in which she borrows textual artifacts, which are overlaid, rearranged, and combined poetically toward "recaptur[ing] someone something somewhere looking back" (Howe 2015)(1, 27); (Howard 2019)(15). Factual telepathy, more broadly speaking, also describes Howe's general process of being summoned by "font-voices" in the archive, which she reconfigures to recuperate and rejuvenate marginalized histories. Through invoking Dickinson, writes Howard,

> "We are called upon, as if from a mythic realm ... to search through the linguistic and material ruins of history for voices and artifacts, ghosts and gifts on the brink of oblivion that could repair personal and collective traumas ... May these enigmatic lines mean anything we would wish for them, or do they signify more precisely? How far across centuries and through cultures of literary and historical discourse might these words resonate? Whose stories and which sources are most relevant?" (Howard 2019)(75-6).

Thus, Howe's communion seems to extend the resonance of Dickinson's words, so that Howe's poetics is figured as praxis, or something that *does* something in the world.

> "If I were to read aloud a passage from a poem of your choice, to an audience of judges in sympathy with surrounding library nature, and they were to experience its lexical inscape as an offshoot of Anglo-American modernism in typographical format, *it might be possible to release our great-great-grandparents, beginning at the greatest distance from a common mouth, eternally belated, some coming home through dark ages, others nearer to early modern, multitudes of them meeting first to constitute certain main branches of etymologies*, so all along there are new sources, some running directly contrary to others, and yet all meet at last, clothed in robes of glory, offering maps of languages, some with shining tones ... " (Howe 2015)(56, emphasis mine)

The act of resuscitating the trace of the linguistic artifact, rather than a lost or non-existent narrative, can be compared to Hartman's personal interest and investment in the traces that can show up (to be lost again) in the photograph.

In *Lose Your Mother* (2006) Hartman tells the story of locating her maternal great-great-grandmother Polly in a volume of slave testimonies in Yale's library. Yet years later, she finds instead in the same volume an interview with her paternal great-great-grandmother Ella Thomas. "Had I confused one great-great-grandmother with another?" (Hartman 2006)(16). Scouring once more her notes and multiple volumes, she is unable to locate Polly again. "It was as if I had conjured her up," she writes. "Was my hunger for the past so great that I was now encountering ghosts? Had my need for an entrance into history played tricks on me, mocked my scholarly diligence, and exposed me as a girl blinded by mother loss?" (16). Hartman characterizes this experience as representative of the slavery archive's "slipperiness and elusiveness." On her journey to study Ghana's slave routes she does not aim to unearth her family history because to her that was an impossible task. "There were no survivors of my lineage or far-flung relatives of whom I had come in search, no places and people before slavery that I could trace. My family trail disappeared in the second decade of the nineteenth century" (17). The question then that fuels her journey is, "How does one write a story about an encounter with nothing?" (16-17).

Howe recounts a similar but different story about finding (or failing to find) her paternal grandmother, Fanny Quincy Howe, in a book published by The Feminist Press in 1977 which became popular "in sociology and women's studies departments" (Howe 2015)(169). *The Maimie Papers*, a book of correspondence between Fanny Howe and "reformed prostitute" Maimie Pinzer in the 1910s, "provides a sociocultural record of that historically inarticulate subculture, or so the editors say," writes Howe (169). The book interestingly overlaps with *Wayward Lives* as an urban women's history privileging a marginalized voice, but it resembles in other ways the archive Hartman contests. Howe is first concerned with how *The Maimie Papers* contains only letters Maimie wrote to Fanny because those Fanny wrote "must have been lost or thrown out by Maimie or someone in her family":

> "The introduction swiftly provides a standardized version of a 'proper Bostonian' before hastening on to the 'multi-dimensioned' persona of Maimie. Ruth Rosen, one of the editors, says 'Mrs. Howe became a diary for her.' What wounds Fanny had ever received, what the two women might have had in common; the courage they might have built in each other isn't the point the editors of this correspondence hope to make. 'How did working-class women live during a period of history characterized by great industrial exploitation and institutionalized sexism,' is what Rosen and her fellow editors are after. 'The Maimie Project,' as it was called at first, intended to address this question." (Howe 2015)(169)

The story of Howe's relation to this publication is interesting because it tells us about something personal Howe lost in the archive. Despite her grandmother's status as a white, wealthy writer and philanthropist, she, surprisingly, *doesn't* show up with Maimie. Howe conceivably wishes to know what her grandmother Fanny had written about to Maimie over these years of correspondence, a desire likely intensified by the fact that the letters are published and shared throughout women's studies university departments. Despite the fact that Howe may desire the side of the story from the subject who would normally be located more easily, Howe's real interest seems to be in how *the relation between the two women* ("what the two women might have had in common") is not only obscured by the missing letters, but also by *the framing of what is present*. Howe suggests that Fanny loses dimension as she comes to represent "respectable bourgeois female society" in convenient contrast to Maimie, who is similarly flattened to a "Jewish one-eyed ex-prostitute" whose supposed destitution made her "transformation" so inspiring.

In this brief anecdote Howe criticizes the possible frameworks, namely crafted by editors in this case, that would close off readings and other possibilities, with or without Fanny's side of the correspondence. There is resonance between Howe's and Hartman's attention to these dynamics. Howe, like Hartman, longs for stories about women in relation to each other. When discussing the fact that Mattie Nelson's letters are missing from the Bedford Hills case file, Hartman wonders: "What stories were shared in all the letters lost and disappeared, the things whispered, and never disclosed? Is it possible to conjure the sentences and paragraphs and poems contained in that lost archive? Or find a way to Mattie's self-expression?" (Howe 2015)(75). Why did Maimie and Fanny write to each other? How did they feel about each other? Where is "some trace of love's infolding" (Howe 1993)(4)? What could we (have) possibly learn(ed) about these women (during this time, in this place) from a consideration of their relationship in letters? Could wider or deeper gaps in the archive be remedied? Howe is interested in crafting the conditions in which these types of questions might be broached which simultaneously serves to critique editorial acts of "muffling" that attempt to erase the imperfections, contradictions, and "counter facts" that fall outside the archive's logical frameworks.

4.2.3 Fabulating to Recover the "Stutter"

As mentioned in the Introduction, Howe finds a powerful metaphor for editorial violence in Hawthorne's story "The Birth-mark" (1843) in which the scientist Alymer

attempts to remove a birthmark from his wife Georgiana's check because to him it is an intolerable deformity on a "specimen of ideal loveliness" (2). Alymer tells his "Dearest":

> "I have spent much thought upon the subject ... I am convinced of the perfect practicability of its removal. ... I feel myself fully competent to render this dear cheek as faultless as its fellow; and then, most beloved, what will be my triumph when I shall have corrected what Nature left imperfect in her fairest work! Even Pygmalion, when his sculptured woman assumed life, felt not greater ecstasy than mine will be." (Hawthorne 1843)(4-5)

Georgiana, having "learned to shudder at his gaze," agrees to allow her husband to try to remove the birthmark even though she knows she is unlikely to survive the process (3). Howe writes, "He has grappled with the mystery of life Georgiana's difference represents, and the punishment is her death" (Howe 1993)(178). To Howe, the birthmark represents the "stray mark" she locates through close and careful readings in Dickinson's archive (specifically, her facsimiles).

In her essay "These Flames and Generosities of the Heart" (1993), Howe composes a mock editor-critic's manifesto:

> The production of meaning will be brought under the control of social authority ... [for the editors] the conventions of print require humilities of caution. Obedience to tradition. Dress up dissonance. Customary usage. Provoking visual fragmentation will be banished from the body of the 'poem proper.' Numbers and word matches will valorize these sensuous visual catastrophes. Lines will be brought into line without any indication of their actual position. An editor edits for mistakes. Subdivided in conformity with propriety. A discreet biographical explanation: unrequited love for a popular minister will consecrate the gesture of this unconverted antinomian who *refused* to pass her work through proof. Later the minister will turn into a man called 'Master.' ... Poems will be called letters and letters will be called poems. 'The tone, a little distant but respectful and gracious, claims few prerogatives' ... Now she is her sex for certain for editors picking and choosing for a general reader reading." (Howe 1993)(140, emphasis mine)[1]

[1]In another rhetorical gesture, Howe cites R.W. Emerson, who commented on the homogeneity of the editor's voice: "I am very much struck in literature by the appearance that one person wrote all the books; as if the editor of a journal planted his body of reporters in different parts of the field of action, and relieved some by others from time to time; but there is such equality and identity both of judgment and point of view in the narrative that it is plainly the work of one all-seeing, all-hearing gentleman..." (cited

One of Howe's concerns is to grant Dickinson the possibility of agency and intentionality she has been historically denied by reading her work generously, with attention to form as and alongside content with the inclusion of all "stray marks." She reproduces and counter-edits Dickinson's poems and letter fragments in deliberate counterpoint to Johnson and Franklin:

> "In translating Dickinson's handwriting into type I have *not* followed standard typesetting conventions. I *have* paid attention to space between handwritten words. I *have* broken the lines exactly as she broke them. I *have* tried to match the spacing between words in the lists at the end of poems. ... Dickinson's frequent use of the dash was noted in the Johnson edition, but he regularized these marks... Emily Dickinson had enough humor to read [the word variants in some books] as found poems. She was her own publisher and could do as she liked with her texts..." (Howe 1993)(152)

An important site to locate Dickinson's agency for Howe is in her refusal to publish (this refusal has been interpreted widely as "failure" or "fear"). Howe quotes a poem by Dickinson that seems to speak to the poet's awareness that the integrity of her writing would be compromised upon publishing:

> "Publication- is the Auction
> Of the Mind of Man [...]
> Thought belong to Him who
> gave it–
> Then- to Him Who bear
> Its Corporeal illustration-
> Sell / The Royal Air- [...]"
> (Howe 1993)(136-37)

Though Howe doesn't choose to translate these lines, within them one can read the poet's anxiety around selling "the Mind" to the editor and commercializing poetry's corruption: "Into [print] will I grind thee, my bride" (Howe 1993)(141).[2] Howe contributes in disjunctive aphorisms: "Use value is a blasphemy. Form and

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in (Howe 1993)141).

[2]Howe plays with a line here from Washington Allston's "The Paint-King" (1809), quoted in R.W. Emerson's essay "Nominalist and Realist" (241). "The evil Paint-King woos the Queen of Fairies by threatening fair Ellen with a most peculiar death": "Ah me!" cried the damsel, and fell at his feet, "Must I hang on these walls to be dried?" "Oh, no!" said the fiend, while he sprung from his seat, "A far nobler fortune thy person shall meet; Into *paint* will I grind thee, my bride!" (Monthly Anthology and Boston Review 7, 391-95, emphasis mine).

content collapse the assumptions of Project and Masterpiece. Free from limitations of genre Language finds true knowledge estranged in it self" (137). Howe postulates that Dickinson's choice not to publish was a radical refusal to stifle her feminine enthusiasm and put a "use value" on her work: "I think she may have chosen to enter the space of silence, a space where power is no longer an issue, gender is no longer an issue, voice is no longer an issue, where the idea of a printed book appears as a trap" (170).

Howe reads Dickinson's poems themselves as refusing to be limited or controlled. They exceed convention and mock conformist desires for order and reduction. "[P]oems with so many lists of words or variants that even Johnson, who was nothing if not methodical, couldn't find numbers for such polyphonic visual complexity. What if the author went to great care to fit these words onto pages she could have copied over? Left in place, seemingly scattered and random, these words form their own compositional relation" (Howe 1993)(141). Howe gently mocks "*An editor's query*": "You need to give the reader some thoughts about making use of the words at the end of the 'poem proper' ... Are we to attach these words as alternatives to certain words in the 'poem'?; i.e., *Where does 'too' go? What am I to do with it?*" Howe adds that the word "too" denotes "excess" (137-38). She suggests next to Johnson's decision to read these word lists as "alternatives" the possibility that they can be considered poems in themselves (138).

She notes that whereas critics have focused on Dickinson's style of capitalization and use of dashes (which Howe plays with herself), her attention is directed more toward Dickinson's margins and space left on the page (often between words and even letters). Howe writes, "Maybe margins shelter the inapprehensible Imaginary of poetry" (Howe 1993)(29). Even though Johnson placed Dickinson's "variant" words at the end of her poems as Dickinson had done, Howe writes, "he couldn't leave it at that. This textual scholar-editor, probably with the best intentions, matched word to counterword, numbered lines as he had reduplicated them, then exchanged his line numbers for her crosses" (139). She again mocks his "best intentions" to give room for Dickinson's own while simultaneously leaving open the possibility that her intention to defy interpretation was an "antinomian" gesture. "Codes are confounded and converted. 'Authoritative readings' confuse her nonconformity. In 1991 these manuscripts still represent a Reformation" (139).

According to Howe, Dickinson's work "complicate[s] ... criteria for a poetic order":

"This visible handwritten sequence establishes an enunciative clearing

> outside intention while obeying intuition's agonistic necessity. These lines move freely through a notion of series we may happen to cross – ambiguous articulated Place. ... Deflagration of what was there to say. No message to decode or finally decide. The fascicles have a 'halo of wilderness.' *By continually interweaving expectation and categories they checkmate inscription to become what a reader offers them.*" (Howe 1993)(136, emphasis mine)

Howe recognizes an opening in Dickinson's "ambiguous articulated Place," a gap for the reader and for possibility, free space allowing room for reorientation for and towards imagining, what Rancière might call, a different "sensory fabric" (Rancière 2009)(56). Howe's writing of Dickinson's "enunciative clearing" replicates the poet's self-contradictory mode:

> "Emily Dickinson almost never titled a poem.
> She titled poems several times.
> She drew an ink slash at the end of a poem.
> Sometimes she didn't.
> She seldom used numbers to show where a word or a poem should go.
> She sometimes used numbers to show where a word or a line should go.
> ... Sometimes letters are poems with a salutation and signature.
> Sometimes poems are letters with a salutation and signature.
> If limits disappear where will we find bearings?" (Howe 1993)(143)

Poems, words, letters, and line breaks defy definition and interpretation, overflow with contradictions, and disrupt "common sense." "Rilke writes, in one of the *Duino Elegies*, 'Strange to see meanings that clung together once, floating away / in every direction –.' This is always the way with Dickinson. She is always somewhere else ... She abolishes categories" (Howe 1993)(157). If our bearings disappear or become irrelevant, there may be new wheres, new whens, new bearings, and new ways to break them down. Always movement in the opening.

Howe, similar to Hartman, is enthused by the possibilities in loss and failure, the failure to grasp and hold. Both writers share a resistance to meeting the past through "knowing" it or restoring an impossible original. They share a vision of the possibility in the impossibility, a belief in possibility *only* in impossibility. At the same time, Howe yearns in many ways to recover our losses; she re-publishes Dickinson's poems "as they were written ... with very few and superficial changes" (Howe 1993)(144). She resists, however, the quest for an "original truth" or version, because there is no "going back" to an "untainted" original: "the poet's manuscript books and sets

had already been torn open. Their contents had been sifted, translated, titled, then regrouped under categories…" (144). "If we could perfectly restore each packet to its original order, her original impulse would be impossible to decipher," Howe writes. "The manuscript books and sets preserve their insubordination" (143).

In an antinomian gesture, against editors and male academic authorities that Howe has been battling since childhood, Howe enters "another way" and takes on the responsibility of being accountable to the poet. Having been refused ease of access into the panopticon of the scholar's vestibule, she refuses what she has been refused and seeks (like Dickinson) a home in poetry, trusting (like Dickinson) in poetry:

> "HER INTELLECTUAL CONSCIENCE
>
> Must never be underestimated. A tear is an intellectual thing. Dickinson ignored the worst advice from friends who misunderstood the intensity of her drive to simplicity, and heeded the best, culled from her own reading. Her talent was synthetic; she used other writers, grasped at straws from the bewildering raveling of Being wherever and whenever she could use them. Crucial was her ability to spin straw into gold. Her natural capacity for assimilation was fertilized by solitude. The omnivorous gatherer was equally able to reject. To find affirmation in renunciation and to be (herself) without. Outside authority, eccentric and unique." (Howe 1985*a*)(28)

Howard writes that in this passage we see "not only Howe's reflection upon her own inter-/intra-textual methods, but also her keen affection for intellectual iconoclasts" and her "devotion to the life and work" of Dickinson in the "vitalist materiality" of her manuscripts, works that "confront us with artistic and scholarly difficulties that provoke the most imaginative and rigorous of responses" (Howard 2019)(45). Howe writes, "One of Dickinson's abilities is to escape everything. If you think you can explain a poem, she quickly shows you there is a way out of that interpretation. I think I have the best intentions when it comes to reading *The Manuscript Books*, but I often wake up in the night and think, No, I am wrong. She would not agree. *She would be angry with me*" (Howe 1993)(170, emphasis mine). As Howe strives to stay personally accountable to Dickinson, she continuously doubts and hesitates, refusing the comfort and knowability of static self-assuredness.

We can see here again how Howe's and Hartman's archives differ in one major respect. Whereas Hartman critically approaches the archive in its absence of material, I have tried to illustrate above the ways in which Howe goes beyond a critique of the supposed "unintelligibility" of content the archive holds in plenty. In other words,

"one of the greatest poets who ever wrote in English ... of the order of Shelley and Holderlin" is denied a serious editorial project in part because she is a woman poet ("an axiom") and in larger part, according to Howe, because she "disturbs the order of a world" (Howe 1993)(19-20). There are crucial ways in which Dickinson's voice and perspective are obscured in the archive and in the publications of her work. In *My Emily Dickinson* Howe is interested in culling the "gold" from the "straw," performing a careful extraction of the poet's influences, experiments, and their possible motivations without compromising the integrity and elusiveness of the work. Operating as a careful critic, she pulls the poems, fragments, words, syllables, and meanings apart with the purpose of lovingly reconstructing recombinant versions and reviving the vital thing about the work. Her regenerative purpose, admittedly "vampiric," is driven by the idea that there is something living and un-interpretable through the codes that we're comfortable with in the work of a woman writing over a hundred years ago, something that can help us now.

4.2.4 A Feminine "Antinomianism"

In *My Emily Dickinson* Howe aims to situate Dickinson in a feminine (or feminist) tradition of nonconformist "breaks in world-historical reason" (Beckett 1989)(20). The thread that runs through all of Howe's work, in its earliest and "clearest" articulation in *My Emily Dickinson*, is her interest in and commitment to articulating "antinomian" (or "enthusiast") thought. In another sense, this can be described as the thought and expression that doesn't "fit" normative histories and their narratives. Howe's method in articulating this unorthodoxy produces counter-historical (anti)narratives, which are "never got engaged with the archive, however fraught that engagement might be" (Smallwood 2016)(120). Howe describes herself as an "interloper" since she is a poet entering history's "enclosure," crossing between disciplines and challenging the boundary between "fact" and "fiction":

> "I have trespassed into the disciplines of American Studies and Textual Criticism through my need to fathom what wildness and absolute freedom is the nature of expression. There are other characteristic North American voices and visions that remain antinomian and separatist. In order to hear them I have returned by strange paths to a particular place at a particular time, a threshold at the austere reach of the book." (Howe 1993)(2)

Before explaining further Howe's strategies to craft enthusiastic counter-histories, I will explain how Howe positions Emily Dickinson within an antinomian tradition.

"Antinomian" here refers first to the New England antinomian controversy (1636-38), which was based on a disagreement between the Puritan majority, who preached righteous behavior or "good works" toward spiritual salvation, and the Antinomians, who argued in favor of the "covenant of grace" or that one's outward behavior did not affect one's spiritual condition. Under the influence of Anne Hutchinson, an "early American female preacher and prophet" (Howe 1993)(1) who held public meetings at her house, the Antinomians claimed they had personal spiritual revelations that should be read as equal in importance to Scripture, and so argued that the Bible had no precedence over personal communion with God. According to Enikő Bollobás, Hutchinson contested the spiritual and political authority of the Puritan patriarchy, and in rejecting the idea of a "national covenant ... [she] came to be seen as opposing the very idea of America" (Bollobás 2009). Bollobás writes, she "usurped the territory of men" by refusing her designation as a "non-intellect" and was punished for acting "unwomanly": "For knowing the law and constantly citing it; claiming to have a conscience, relying on her conscience when matters of faith needed to be decided, and daring to find truth in her conscience" (Bollobás 2009). Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony John Winthrop convicted Hutchinson for "being a woman not fit for our society" and compared her opinions to "monstrous births," making coarse reference to the supposedly congenitally deformed children born in the Colonies between 1637-38 who were believed to bear the mark of "Mrs. Hutchinson's errours [sic]" (Bollobás 2009).

Anne Hutchinson was charged with heresy and sedition, excommunicated, and banished from the Colonies. Though she was banned from telling her own story, traces of her account can be found in her trial records and Winthrop's journals. Howe relates Hutchinson's experience to that of Mary Rowlandson, a Puritan woman who was compelled to narrate her experience of kidnap and release by the Nipmunks and Narragansetts (Howe 1993)(95). Rowlandson's narrative helped usher in an incredibly popular new genre of "frontier literature": "captivity narratives," which were usually narrated by women but "increasingly structured and written down by men," became a vehicle by which to impart Protestant lessons of suffering and deliverance and were a powerful Puritan metaphor for the process of religious Conversion (89). "Rowlandson's vivid account of the eleven weeks and five days she spent as a prisoner of the Narragansetts ushered in what was to become a major stream in American Mythology"; "Mythology," writes Howe in *My Emily Dickinson*, "reflects a region's reality" (Howe 1985*a*)(42-3).

Though Rowlandson's narrative follows the typical pattern of a burgeoning Christian-American, white supremacist, patriarchal order, Howe reads between the lines of Rowlandson's account. "[I]n writing," says Howe, "Language advances into remembering that there is no answer imagining Desire. Remembering a wild place where there is no forgetting" (Howe 1993)(124). Howe is particularly interested in the openings created by Rowlandson's way of marking time while with the Narragansetts. "Time is no longer marked for her in minutes, hours, and days, but in a series of formed Removes, away from civilization deeper in the heart of the wilderness that is an emblem for Babylon" (42). "Each Remove," writes Howe, "is a forced march away from Western rationalism, deep and deeper into Limitlessness, where all illusion of volition, all individual identity may be transformed – assimilated" (96). In "The Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson," an essay in which Howe expands her reading of the narrative, she remarks on how while Rowlandson has been criticized for her "lack of curiosity about the customs of her captors ... and her narrative has been blamed for stereotypes of Native Americans as 'savages,'" Rowlandson has herself been stereotyped as a "passive cipher" (Howe 1993)(96). Howe writes, "Already in 1681, the first narrative written by a white Anglo-American woman is alive with rage and contradiction. She is a prophet. She speaks for us now, and the same way that slave narratives do. She says our sin. I think she has been an unacknowledged undervoice in Thoreau, Melville, Dickinson, Hawthorne, though I can't prove it..." (167). Howe reads Rowlandson's "Removes" against the grain for "lapses" of rhetoric: "Each time an errant perception skids loose, she controls her lapse by vehemently invoking biblical authority" (100). For example, "she interrupts the homeward direction of her impending restoration with a list of specific criticisms of colonial policies toward her captors" (who never harmed her and "shared what little they had with her"): "'Before I go any further,' writes Rowlandson, 'I would take leave to mention...'; then she stops her slide into Reason's ruin by pushing her readers back to the imperatives of Wonder-Working Providence. 'Help Lord, or we perish'" (100-1). Howe attests that Rowlandson's narrative is in many ways "a contradiction of orthodox Puritan history" (127). In describing the experience of researching to write about Rowlandson's account of her experience, Howe says, "it is hard to explain the urgency I felt" (Howe 1993)(167).

It is *urgent* for Howe to rearticulate the "fractured syntax, the gaps, the silences" in Rowlandson's account and the way in which it "moves in and through the cut" to present time "in a layered or folded manner that suspends historicity" (Howe 1993)(180); (Nyong'o 2018)(8). Howe's work is driven by the urgency to articulate the "stutter" that for her sounds the "uncertainty" in American literature (Howe 1993)(181). In retelling Hutchinson's and Rowlandson's stories among others, Howe

re-enacts the "stutter" to make the case that these stories are part of Dickinson's intellectual and spiritual ancestry. Hutchinson's staunch belief in the authority of her personal communion with Spirit and Rowlandson's narrative gestures away from Reason are combined for Howe in Dickinson, whose "religion was Poetry" (Howe 1985*a*)(48). Divine messages travel to Dickinson through words, their sounds, and their elusive meanings. The poet's unconventionality in language was a form of feminine lawlessness.

Howe claims, "The antinomian controversy in New England (1636-38) didn't leave Massachusetts with its banished originator," and she locates in antinomianism the "primordial struggle of North American literary expression" (Howe 1993)(4). Hutchinson's trial "is not unrelated to the editorial apprehension and domestication of Emily Dickinson":

> "The issue of editorial control is directly connected to the attempted erasure of antinomianism in our culture. Lawlessness seen as negligence is at first feminized and then restricted or banished. ... For me, the manuscripts of Emily Dickinson represent a contradiction to canonical social power, whose predominant purpose seems to have been to render isolate voices devoted to writing as a physical event of immediate revelation. ... The antinomian controversy continues in the form, often called formlessness, of Dickinson's letters and poems ... It continues with this nineteenth-century antinomian poet's gesture of infinite patience in preferring not to publish. Her demurral was a covenant of grace. The antinomian controversy continues in the first reordering and revision of her manuscripts according to a covenant of works. ... It continues in the current magisterial control of her copyrights and access to her papers..." (Howe 1993)(1-2)

Issues of control and ownership over Dickinson's writing, which is "still being tamed for aesthetic consumption" in the canon, mirror for Howe the ways in which male authorities attempted to control Rowlandson's narrative and shape its moralistic, cultural influence (4). Yet, something always doesn't "fit": counter-memories or counter-facts "escape," and Howe labors to pick up their signals. "While the [captivity story] seems to conform to Puritan models of prayer and autobiography ... the narrative seems to work against itself" (Nicholls 1996)(590). "The idiosyncratic syntax of Mary Rowlandson's closed structure refuses closure" (Howe 1993)(126). Attempting to locate the thought outside the scripture and narrative formula, Howe urgently works to mark the resonance of this antinomian spirit "outside law."

4.2.5 Writing Personally through "Historical Figuration"

Howe's study of antinomianism or tradition of nonconformism is driven by the search for "a continuous peculiar and particular voice in American literature" (Nicholls 1996)(588): "What was this voice? ... Certainly not a simply self-expressive one" (588-89). She proposes that the "antinomian vision in North America is gendered feminine," thus linking conventional history and literature's efforts to control, rewrite, or erase unorthodox gestures and stubbornly original expression (Howe 1993)(4). Her close readings of texts to locate these "signal escapes" align with her open approach in archives (Howe 1987). In the text, which can be a "wilderness" "outside" historical narratives premised on "exclusion and erasure," Howe seeks "trace-stories" as opposed to origins, according to Nicholls (Nicholls 1996)(588). Howe's research on Dickinson and her precursors, would "draw her deep into American history ... the next decade" (588). Adjacent to a new historicist tradition, Howe shares "an interest in recovering lost and marginalized voices" but also "a passionate commitment to forms of unintelligibility and disruption...," continuing throughout her publications to study writers' unsettlement of language and resistance to interpretation (588).

For Howe, history and fiction have "always been united": "In my writing, I have often explored ideas of what constitutes an official version of events as opposed to a former version in imminent danger of being lost" (Howe 2015)(91). She listens, like Hartman, for a silence that is not silent: "Poetry brings similitude and representation to configurations waiting from forever to be spoken" (Howe 2015)(181). Ma writes that Howe's "fusion of history and poetry, carried with increasing emphasis to the point of interdependency or mutual identification, functions to reposition the power relations between the two by providing poetry with an entry point into history, into what hitherto has always been the sealed authoritarian discourse of history":

> "In this readjusted relationship, history is transformed into a flawed text yet to be examined by a sensibility that, 'read[ing] a past that is a huge imagination of one form,' pulls a different text from it ... While history as traditionally understood and defined ceases to be definitive, poetry, or the writing of poetry as a present, continuous praxis, acquires a new political and historical status." (Ma 1994)(719, citing (Howe 1985*a*)106)

Her creative, political ambition is to lift undervoices she locates in the archive through counter-historical writing crafted through an attention to "counter-facts"

and marginalia to which she affectively and emotionally responds: "Voices I am following lead me to the margins. Anne Hutchinson's verbal expression is barely audible ... They walk in my imagination and I love them" (Howe 1993)(4).

This affective listening is a personal journey for Howe; she narrates these stories, Dickinson's in particular, as though she is recording an "inarticulate" history that is her own. Howe's goal, as discussed, is not to "explain" the silence or undervoice, but rather to meet it with writing. Howard calls this Howe's "historical figuration" (Howard 2019)(65), or, as Heim puts it, Howe's "rootedness in lives" (Heim 2015)(3). As in the archive, Howe opens herself in her writing to be fused with others.

> "It seems to me that as writers they were trying to understand the writers or people ... not to explain the work, not to translate it, but to meet the work with writing – you know, to meet in time, not just from place to place but from writer to writer, mind to mind, friend to friend, from words to words.[3] That's what I wanted to do in *My Emily Dickinson* ... Not just write a tribute but to meet her in the tribute. And that's a kind of fusion ... a book of love." (Howe 1993)(158)

Howe "immerses herself in long study of a thinker in order to adopt and adapt his structures and habits of mind in constructing her textual experiment," or what Charles Olson calls a "saturation job" (Heim 2015)(29, 55). Heim writes that she "circles, stalks, and refigures the project of life-writing, creating texts that perform her effort to comprehend and embody characters of compelling interest to her" (111). "'Collecting the lives of the dead' is no sheer act of objective biography," (115, quoting Muriel Rukeyser). Heim writes that "[Howe's] strict and disciplined commitment to historical particulars and documents finds its expression in artistic, dramatic processes" (112). Howe compares her style of "life-writing" to theater: "I try to understand all aspects of the person ... the way a playwright or an actor might ... the only way for me to reach them, or for them to reach me, is through the limited perspective of documents (and material objects)" (111, citing Howe and Thompson 2005). Her combination of the factual with fantastic recalls Hartman's "critical fabulation": Howe similarly produces narratives that expand from biography and "exceed the archive," not in attempts to "set right" what history "got wrong," but to change the conditions in which these stories can be told, retold, or untold.

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[3]Howe is referring here to Charles Olson's *Call Me Ishmael*, D.H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature*, William Carlos Williams's *In the American Grain*, Simone Weil's essay "The Iliad, Poem of Might," and Jack Spicer's *After Lorca* (Howe 1993)(158).

More than embodying the characters of history, Howe's "historical figuration" is, according to Howard, "a dynamic fusion of historical discourse and poetic figuration that amplifies the constitutive tropological agency of metaphoric transference. This formulation amplifies the synergy that Hayden White articulates among myth, fiction, and historiography ... 'In other words, just as the contents of myth are tested by fiction, so, too, the forms of fiction are tested by (narrative) historiography'" (Howard 2019)(65 [footnote 109], citing White 1987, 45). In Howe's historical figuration, "language is confronted with its origins" so that historical narratives as Howe reconfigures them not only change writers and readers but "history" itself through a deconstruction of the false fossilization of words and their meanings. Stories refuse to be frozen in time. "How do you turn fact into narrative so it can move somewhere?" (Alcalay 2013, cited in (Heim 2015)84).

The past and the present converge when Howe writes in and of the language that travels and resists one "true" interpretation. DuPlessis interestingly calls Howe an "annotator" in that she is a "writer of notes on margins of canonized texts," reinterpreting while also reading the canon through new, unexpected combinations (DuPlessis 1990)(128). For example, Howe weaves excerpts from *King Lear* into Mary Rowlandson's narrative, "evoking the genre of the powerless and the genres of the educated – folk genres and literate genres": "Intermingled, tangled, disentangled, claimed as female textual ground. So to reanimate the genres, to claim major intertextual ties with classic works, and to watch, to follow the wraithe [sic] on the margins into her centers that are dispersed and profound, taken together as strategies show the depth and power of Howe's ambition, her omnivorous, intelligent allusiveness" (129). Howe's weaving, like Hartman's, deauthorizes the text, or at least makes evident its polyvocal multi-authorship. In many ways *My Emily Dickinson* reads like a book written by a "reader" rather than an "author," yet it retains the quality of being Howe's "personal" history.

In Hartman's interview with Patricia Saunders, she describes herself as the "bridge" (Saunders 2008*b*)(10). I locate a similar positionality in Howe's book. Howe moves back and forth between providing details of Dickinson's life or historical context and her subjective, emotional responses to the poetry. "If we understand Susan Howe as a sign, as an interpretant along the continuum of sign-relations she puts in motion here, we experience her as central, essential to the various relations that together constitute [the work's meaning]"; "the self is made through, in, by relation ... connections are made through, by, in selves" (Heim 2015)(81). Subjects affectively enter Howe's life through research as she works to write new histories accountable to them. To do this, as a historian and a poet in the face of institutions and histories that have been "false" to women intellectually, Howe "must negotiate a different

path to truth" than Johnson or Franklin, Miller or Matthiessen, or Gilbert and Gubar (Heim 2015)(136). For example, in the following, Howe describes *her* Emily Dickinson:

> "Perry Miller said that Jonathan Edwards' understanding of behavioral psychology, as evidenced by his careful documentation of the process of Conversion, anticipates American empiricism and William James. I saw that Emily Dickinson took both his legend and his learning, tore them free from his own humorlessness and the dead weight of doctrinaire Calvinism, then applied the freshness of her perception to the dead weight of American poetry." (Howe 1985*a*)(50-1)

In another section, Howe claims that Dickinson (with Emily Brontë) anticipated Nietzschean philosophy, echoing Hartman's "counter-historical" claims throughout *Wayward Lives* that young black women created a cultural "revolution before Gatsby" (Howe 1985*a*)(62); (Hartman 2019)(xv).

These claims highlight the "struggle over the terrain of truth and its uses" (Heim 2015)(100). Yet, both Howe and Hartman don't follow the normal protocol of a historian out to overturn her predecessor's hypothesis. Howe firstly distinguishes her study of Dickinson from others' in her title: *My* (that is, *her*) *Emily Dickinson*. Howe nods in her title to a letter Dickinson wrote after learning of George Eliot's death: "The look of words as they lay in the print I shall never forget. Not their face in the casket could have had the eternity to me. Now, my George Eliot" (L710, cited in (Howe 1985*a*)19). Howe makes clear that hers is a "subjective" study yet does not seem to agree that this designates it as less rigorous or "truthful." Howe's Dickinson, she writes, is not a "madwoman" like Gilbert and Gubar's: "I really was concerned to show that she didn't write in a rapturous frenzy, that she read to write..." (Howe 1993)(157). Where does this concern come from? Wolfgang Iser (1997) contends that "If a literary text does something to its readers, it also simultaneously tells us something about them." Literature, like our dreams, is "a divining rod, locating our dispositions, desires, inclinations, and eventually our overall make up," which is why our relationships with writers and their work can feel personal, "an affinity bordering on ownership" (Iser 1998);(Curtis 2017). "Ownership" in this sense should be linked to "care," as in caring for, "mind to mind, friend to friend" (Howe 1993)(158).

Heim contends that Howe's "search for documentary evidence did not oppose, but rather corresponded to and tracked her turn toward personal response – these two impulses in her work are ... central and braided" (Heim 2015)(104). In *My Emily Dickinson*, as in *Wayward Lives*, "history" is written as a personal history between

narrator and subject, yet Howe avoids writing biographically about Dickinson. For Howe, care was taken to avoid overwriting Dickinson's "intellectual conscience" with the details of her biography; for example, she notes critics' obsession with pinpointing the identity of the recipient of Dickinson's famous "Master" letters over attention that should be paid to the letters' structure and repurposed imagery culled from the poet's reading (Howe 1985*a*)(25). "Emily Dickinson took the scraps from the separate 'higher' female education many bright women of her time were increasingly resenting, combined them with voracious and 'unladylike' outside reading, and used the combination" (21).

As mentioned, Hartman is, on the other hand, interested in creating the conditions for her subjects to have historical biographies, yet she also avoids the impulse to write life-stories of individuals. Hartman's subjects avoid reduction paradoxically by their integration into a chorus. Individuals are rescued in this process and also strategically avoid capture as Hartman works to emplace them in new contexts that won't obliterate their agency. Howe avoids essentializing Dickinson through her biography by considering "what constitutes a speaking subject on the page" (Keller 1995)(32). She prefers to situate Dickinson in a longer history of antinomian thought, confusing the boundaries between individualism and community. Keeping the work personal but non-biographical allows Howe to "return[. . .] feeling to the fold without reifying it as the precious cargo of individualism" (Heim 2015)(80). In addition, Howe strives to keep Dickinson's writing "infinitely open" so that "her poems and . . . letters encompass whatever I want to bring to them. Need to bring to them" (Howe 1993)(155). She writes that "Dickinson's pen-eye aims at the conquest of mechanical reproduction. It seems after reaching the age of consent she refused to be photographed" (Howe 2015)(126).

Through the act of writing histories that are personal and accountable, Howe like Hartman produces a poetics of mourning that proliferate connections between the past and present. According to Howard, Howe produces "works of mourning that resist transcendent forms of consolation and closure in order to shape conditions for positive social change" (Howard 2019)(71). Howe's "collision or collusion with history" through poetic historical figuration engages words as soundscapes that cross time. "Such a poetics and praxis recovers, remediates, and releases . . . languages and lives without elevation/transcendence or cancellation/oblivion . . . dispels teleological, universal narratives . . . celebrates the heterogeneousness of 'what one might know, which in turn is always less than what language might say' (Hejinian)" (Howard 2019)(94). Howe's method resonates with Hartman's open work of "choral" fabulation, which invokes voices communing across texts and cross-contextually.

I have previously discussed how Hartman must *necessarily* fabulate and re-imagine the lives of minor figures due to their absence in the archive or because they only "show up" as captives and criminals. Hartman repurposes various utterances to craft these stories; thus, they are not stories of individuals but of the collective (or chorus). Her aesthetic mode of critical fabulation through this chorus is, first, a strategy to counter conventional history's claims to "truth" (through the exposure of the fiction inherent in personal and historical narratives), and, second, a means through which she opens space for readers to imagine otherwise and to "intervene" in history by telling new or "better stories." Though Howe's historical figures show up often more readily in the archive, she explains how they are or have been presented historically as either "exceptions" (the woman poet) or as on the verge of oblivion and under threat of erasure (antinomian histories) (Howe 1993)(168). She similarly recontextualizes textual "utterances" toward strategically "fictionalizing" history.

Against the idea then of history "foreclosed," I argue that Howe's book is an adjacent potential history to Hartman's. Howe similarly plays with temporality through grammar. In the previous chapter I discussed Hartman's use of the subjunctive mood and interrogatives which operate to reread "black dispossession as a 'question mark'" (McKittrick 2013)(5). Howe deftly uses the interrogative while weaving past and present tenses. "Emily Dickinson ... conducted a skillful and ironic investigation of patriarchal authority over literary history. Who policies questions of grammar, parts of speech, connection, and connotation? Whose order is shut inside the structure of a sentence?" (Howe 1985*a*)(11). Howe's questions can be read like Hartman's as "a kind of poetics ... stand[ing] as counterweight to the structural binds" of, in this case, that "patriarchal authority over literary history" and history more generally, whose authorities contend that "the past is past" (Morgan 2016)(202); (Howe 1985*a*)(11). I venture that Howe's heavily aphoristic style has a similar effect. Aphorisms may be read against the grain as word forms that time travel; as language fossils (short, easy-to-remember, seemingly ahistorical sayings), they are repeated texts used and reused in varying contexts. Howe, like Dickinson, may also write in aphorisms as a form of trespass, as a serious satiric gesture through which "SHE" assumes the authority of "HE" through "word rules." She turns "rules" into poems and throws them forth into the future.

4.3 An Enthusiastic Practice

Howard writes, "Howe's poetics – that is, her reading/writing against the grain of history – ultimately celebrates a long-standing notion of praxis, one that underscores the artist's social responsibility as activist and maker, reformer and visionary dwelling in the midst of contradicting forces, 'splitting nature's window / splitting the world' (Howard 2019)(65-6). In her collage poetics, Howe participates in the artist's tradition of crafting histories of the practical past that echo Hartman's work. As Gayatri Gopinath (2018) claims, this kind of aesthetic practice enacts "a practice of reading" that rearranges "hierarchies of value" (Gopinath 2018)(9, 16). Similarly, Howe's historical poetic practice "reattunes" and suspends the reader in the gaps and slippages of the archive.

Hartman's historical narration of how young black women "dwell[ed] in Possibility" at the edge of an urban "frontier," re-inventing concepts of beauty, freedom, modernity, and subjectivity, resonates with Howe's retelling of Dickinson's feminine literary experiment: "In this unsettling New England lexical landscape nothing is sure. In a shorter space (woman's quick voice) Dickinson went further than Browning, coding and erasing – deciphering the idea of herself ... Really alone at a real frontier, dwelling in Possibility was what she had brilliantly learned to do" (Howe 1985*a*)(76). In discussing Howe's orientation toward words' potentiality, Ma proposes that, "Howe's targeted monotheism ... seems to be patriarchal language" (Ma 1994)(725). M. NourbeSe Philip's and Howe's methods also resonate: "the words suggesting how to work with them – I look at them and certain words leap out at me, asking me to choose them ... eyes skimming the text for phrases, words, feelings, as one would cast one's eyes over the sea looking for bodies" (Philip 2008)(195). If the library and the text is a wilderness for Howe, so is language: "Exiles, they wander a wilderness of language formed from old legends, precursor poems, archaic words, industrial and literary detritus" (Howe 1985*a*)(70). The strategy through which she "summons" Dickinson (and all the voices and polyphonic sounds that make up Dickinson's writing) is an "elaborate weave of quotation" (Nicholls 1996)(589). On this collaged, intertextual "stage," Howe shifts between pronouns and uses wordplay to invoke Dickinson's experiments. This entering of the writing lives of her subjects, foregrounding various, variant senses, challenges linear readings. In Howe's poetry "marks" express feeling "physically" on the page when lines cross and cut each other. "Vertically jagged" sections may represent violence in/of history and its reiterations: "I would try to match that chaos and violence visually with words" (Keller 1995)(8). In *My Emily Dickinson* "jaggedly" combined words,

definitions, quotations, and fragments confuse beginnings and endings, chapters or segments, temporalities and even subjects.

Howe names Dickinson an "enthusiastic" voice with her "force of desire which unsettles the 'wilderness' of language" (Nicholls 1996)(591-92). Eschewing the role of narrator, Howe directs her attention to marginal notes, both what is physically found in the manuscripts (dashes, "accidents", lists of word variants) and the "excess" of words and their combination. She speaks of the way words sound and echo, and notes the reverberation even in a word's "look": "The look of a word is part of its meaning – the meaning that escapes the dictionary definition, or rather doesn't *escape* but is bound up with it" (Keller 1995)(6-7). The concept of marginalia can be tied to "enthusiasm" through the theme of "excess" – that which doesn't fit (like the counter-fact) and which urgently crosses boundaries.

Noah Webster, Howe tells us, defines an "enthusiast," among other things, as "One of elevated fancy or exalted ideals" (Howe 1993)(11). While Howe searches for ambiguity in this definition, she remarks that "fancy is frequently feminized" and affiliated with "the lower aggregating and associative power of the mind" (11). "'Fancy' is an irredeemably feminine word for most Americans. In our democratic culture men are not encouraged to display elevated fancy or exalted ideals. Webster says it is contracted from fantasy. Fancy: false notion, caprice, whim" (12). For Howe, "fancy" calls to mind collage, aggregation, association, and favoring "chance" over logic. The religious antinomian is defined as an "enthusiast" with "flights of fancy," and is thus feminized. Howe appropriates "fancy" in similar ways to how Hartman appropriates the term "wayward." Like "wayward," "fancy" denotes that which exceeds the limits. "The story exceeds the words, the verses" (Hartman 2019)(346). Johnson wrote that during the 1860s, "[Dickinson's] creative energies were at flood, and she was being overwhelmed by forces which she could not control'" (cited in (Howe 1993)149). Howe contends that what he refers to is "female excess" and a lack of restraint, control, or conformity. Dickinson's restraint, resistance, sacrifice, and conviction are all written off as her fear or lack of composure. If her poems show a lack of control, *she* is read as lacking this inner faculty. Higginson, Howe notes, also described Dickinson as having "an excess of tension, and [leading] an abnormal life" (145).

Counter to this, Howe recognizes in the failure to limit her "excess" Dickinson's enthusiastic practice of refusal of the boundaries that defined her "effusions" as such (Howe 1993)(149, citing Johnson). According to DuPlessis, Howe replicates this refusal in *My Emily Dickinson* by adopting the "excessive genre" of the "ode":

"...which lifts things to limitlessness, whose main debate is between overwhelming boundlessness ... and some vulnerable boundary which may compromise ultimates of song, of bliss, of void. In Howe one feels the loft, the heft, the debate of the ode, the apostrophes of power, of self-questioning. The persistent ground of 'alterity, anonymity, darkness.' All concepts coded feminine. As the ode, as genre, may be – the ode, as the genre symbolizes poetry in its ecstasy, its poetic diction, its excessive, overblown, portentious [sic], mellifluous scale. The ode's appeal to the sublime, its sense of boundaryless dissolutions, its febrile outcries are also coded feminine: hysteria, emotionalism, exaggeration, the sense of an ecstatic dance on the boundaries of the sensible." (DuPlessis 1990)(126)

This enthusiastic, excessive "boundlessness" may be read next to song, cry, and "noise" with its constituent movement and desire. Sylvia Wynter in *Black Metamorphosis* writes, "Enthusiasm and exaltation are the uncolonized flow of desire that expresses liberation from societal codings" (549, cited in (McKittrick 2016)90). McKittrick (2016) adds, "Enthusiasm ... radically refuses the dominant order: the feeling of exaltation, emerging as a form of knowledge that is necessarily collaborative praxes, cites and sites black joy and love" (90). Enthusiasm, then, can be re-coded as the "black noise" of the swarm, "the mutters and oaths and cries of the commodity" that hit at "utopian" "aspirations" (Hartman 2008)(12). Recall the wildness of *Wayward Lives*' "riot and refrain" (Hartman 2019)(263).

Hartman also, like Howe, "exceeds" the archive and its framing of "legitimate subject[s] of history and scholarly writing" (Haley 2020). When she writes, "The only thing I knew for sure was that she did have a name and a life that exceeded the frame in which she was captured," Hartman "at once reveals the magnitude of the unknown and reflects the consequential character of a certainty that grounds [her] narration and analysis: the *only* thing I knew *for sure*" (Haley 2020) citing (Hartman 2019)(15). Similarly, Howe, writes DuPlessis, "is the female speck in the history of texts. And she is the scout of its presence. The roaming vagrant one, the errancy ... thrown out, but thorough and pertinacious": "Howe is driven to hear the condensed and impacted operas of the Others, the ones about whom few orators speak, the ones few encyclopedists commemorate, the ones massacred, the ones of smoke ... Operas of rage could be made. What genre is adequate to this discovery – that there are holocausts of the destroyed? Should the page be black? How then is one 'a writer'?" (DuPlessis 1990)(127). Hartman asks an almost identical question in "Venus in Two Acts": "What are the kinds of stories to be told by those and about those who live in such an intimate relationship with death? Romances? Tragedies? Shrieks that find their way into speech and song? ... How does one revisit the scene of subjec-

tion without replicating the grammar of violence?" (Hartman 2008)(4). And more recently, "What is required to tell a historical story for those who endure the long durée of dispossession and the seemingly interminable and unalleviated condition of fungibility? How does one emplot ongoing and recurring violence?" (Hartman 2020).

When Lynn Keller asks Howe what the canvas of her poetry would look like, Howe responds, "Blank ... a white canvas. White" (Keller 1995)(7). Does a desire for "blank" or "white" reflect Howe's desire for a space for the feminine? DuPlessis interprets "blank" desire as the resonant, reticent acknowledgement of inevitable failure or falling short of a "poetics of responsibility" – what constitutes the paradoxical Possibility in the "blank" gap:

> "To write: to be caught in hopeless joy between black and white, said and unsaid, between the overwritten and underwritten, between desire and obliteration. Divided in language, but speaking the language ... The ground can never be cleared of the prior. It saturates us – political powers, social places, duties, infusions of norms, irruptions of protest. Thus the sign is never empty ... it is full, fused and jostling, an active 'stage for struggle' (Bakhtin says, somewhere). Howe's innovations on the page, her sculptural sketches of signs, make a poetics of responsibility to and in this multiple struggle." (DuPlessis 1990)(127-28)

Howe's sense of responsibility is articulated in *My Emily Dickinson*: "How do I, choosing messages from the code of others in order to participate in the universal theme of Language, pull SHE from all the myriad symbols and sightings of HE" (Howe 1985*a*)(17-18)? Like Hartman, she looks to others, the forebearers and ancestresses, for signs of the scaffolding. Marking her debt to Dickinson, Howe writes:

> "She built a new poetic form from her fractured sense of being eternally on intellectual borders, where confident masculine voices buzzed an alluring and inaccessible discourse, backward through history into aboriginal anagogy. Pulling pieces of geometry, geology, alchemy, philosophy, politics, biography, biology, mythology, and philology from alien territory, a "sheltered" woman audaciously invented a new grammar grounded in humility and hesitation." (Howe 1985*a*)(21)

5. CONCLUSION

Through their individual and spirited interrogations of history's grammar and critical orientations toward the archive, I have proposed that Saidiya Hartman and Susan Howe are not only interested in attending to what Patricia Williams (1988) might call the "ignore-ance" of the archive but also in putting forth a method for how scholars might approach historical research and writing that pays careful, affective attention to a past haunting the present and unsettling the future (Williams 1988).

In *Wayward Lives* Hartman cites Campt's (2017) method of "listening" to "quiet" and "quotidian" identity photographs (produced for various state regulatory purposes) as "practices that give us access to the affective registers through which these images enunciate alternate accounts of their subjects" (Campt 2017)(5). Her close readings of these photographs resist reduction to their instrumentality. Campt considers the capacity of the "listener" to "attune [her] senses to other affective [and lower] frequencies" (9). Hartman and Howe, I have attempted to show, do not necessarily desire "better representations" of contested histories, but rather "hearing the better story in [those] representations" (Georgis 2013)(18). Specifically, Hartman listens for the better story in archives of criminalization and captivity that attempt to overwrite and obscure the social experimentation and everyday resistance practiced by young black women. Howe listens for the better story in the archives negligent of Dickinson's and other feminine antinomians' nonconformism and innovation. To what end, though, is "listening" for the better story or desiring to interpret the affective remainders? "And what do stories afford anyway?," asks Hartman (Hartman 2008)(3). "A way of living in the world in the aftermath of catastrophe and devastation? A home in the world for the mutilated and violated self? For whom – for us or for them?" (3).

In Christina Sharpe's (2016) conception of "wake work," she discusses the affective, aesthetic labor that attends to living "in the wake" of slavery, violence, and dispossession (Sharpe 2016). Reading history otherwise through an affective register is "wake work" necessary to build the ground from which we construct our better

stories. Sharpe highlights examples of "wake work" that thwart repetitive and inevitable readings of black suffering by "seeing and reading otherwise ... in excess of what is caught in the frame" (117). Wake work for her includes aesthetic productions employing "Black visual/textual annotation and redaction," which I discussed in Chapter 2 (117). "Annotation," Sharpe explains, is a method of carefully, counterintuitively approaching images in order to ask, "What can one see beyond the word that threatens to block out everything else?" (118). Acts of redaction focus our attention by blocking out that which threatens to obscure, instrumentalize, and further subject the individual or collective captured by the image or frame (118). Marianne Hirsch (2012), who similarly investigates transgenerational trauma passed down as "postmemory," examines the possibilities of what Eve K. Sedgwick (2003) terms "reparative" readings of artifacts that, especially in their imperfections and incongruities, call forth "alternate discourse" and "opening[s] in the present to something in the past that goes beyond their indexicality or the information they record" (Hirsch 2012)(245) citing (Sedgwick 2003). In contrast to what Sedgwick calls "paranoid readings," in which the researcher employs her knowledge as a "retrospective witness" to see violence obscured in the artifact, a "reparative reading" leaves questions unanswered and "ambiguities unresolved, providing an expanded context for more affective knowing" (Hirsch 2012)(247).

Dina Georgis wonders, "What if aesthetic experience offers not compensation for suffering but a return (and reparation) of suffering?" (Georgis 2013)(13). Hartman in *Scenes of Subjection* speaks of "the event of captivity and enslavement engendering the necessity of redress, the inevitability of its failure, and the constancy of repetition yielded by this failure" (Hartman 1997)(77). "Redress" in this sense seems related to the "compulsive repetition of trauma" through which "futures become implicated in the past" or the "compulsion" wherein the past interferes in the present (Georgis 2013)(12). Redress, according to Hartman, is not compensation but instead "itself an articulation of loss and a longing for remedy and reparation" (77). This persistence and continuity of longing for reparation is also articulated by Howe: "I write to break out into perfect primeval Consent. I wish I could tenderly lift from the dark side of history, voices that are anonymous, slighted – inarticulate" (Howe 2015)(181). "Understood as the persistent remains of the past," writes Georgis, "affect is the past's legacy on the present" (12).

"The implication of transference on history is paradoxical. It both resists knowledge and allows us to have an experience with what we do not know. ... The truth of the story is not found in the literal content of representation, but between the lines. In story, we enter the space of the other's wounds and become ethically implicated in an encounter with suffering" (Georgis 2013)(12). Affective, enigmatic

encounters with painful histories can be "emotional occasion[s] for learning" and ethical interpretations not premised on "knowing" (16). This learning would seem to rearrange what Jacques Rancière (2009) calls the "sensory fabric" of what we know or the ways in which we make "sense" of our stories (Rancière 2009). Reading "between the lines" has the potential to affect the "dispositions of the body and the mind" of readers or spectators by changing our gaze or the "landscape of the possible" (Rancière 2009)(105). This learning is also emotional, dynamic, and relational: it "is not *about* but *from* representation," writes Georgis (Georgis 2013)(17). "Whereas learning about an event or experience focuses upon the acquisition of qualities, attributes, and facts, so that it presupposes a distance (or, one might even say, a detachment) between the learner and what is to be learned, learning from an event or experience is of a different order, that of insight" (Britzman 1998, 177, cited in (Georgis 2013)17). "Learning, in this sense, is the crisis of not being able to hold on to what you think you know and bearing it enough to make way for insight" (17).

Campt's (2019) recent theorizing on "adjacency" resonates with this form of ethical learning across distance or "insight" through affect. She defines "adjacency" as "the reparative work of transforming proximity into accountability; the labor of positioning oneself in relation to another in ways that revalue and redress complex histories of dispossession" (Campt 2019). A "quiet yet arduous labor," adjacency is positioning oneself in "proximity and vulnerability" to another and "requires us to feel beyond the security of our own situation, to cultivate instead an ability to confront the precarity of less valued or actively devalued individuals, and doing the ongoing work of sustaining a relationship to those imperiled and precarious bodies" (Campt 2019). Adjacency is not empathy, Campt explains, because it does not allow one to "put oneself in the place of another" or "presume you share the pain or suffering" of another; rather, it is "recognizing the disparity between your respective situations and working to redress it": "It is the work of feeling *done* both in spite and because of these differences, and choosing to feel across that difference rather than with or for someone in very different circumstances" (Campt 2019). Jean-Luc Nancy (2000) describes "compassion" similarly, "not as ... a pity [but] the contagion, the contact of being with one another in the turmoil ... not altruism, nor is it identification; it is the disturbance of violent relatedness" (Nancy 2000)(xiii). I read Campt's adjacency as an expansion on the quiet practice of "listening" to images or to "a silence that is not silent" (Reed 2014)(47). This listening is also labor in the sense that we must "quiet" ourselves in order to hear across difference, and not "talk over" or write our desires onto another's (Campt 2019). Listening in this sense assumes the humility of not knowing what one will hear if one is able to listen and hear the other. Howe writes, "If history is a record of survivors, Poetry

shelters other voices"; of Dickinson, she says, "I write quietly to her. She is a figure of other as thin as paper" (Howe 1993)(47).

The "ethical imperative," writes Georgis is "to see fiction even in facts and perhaps facts in fiction" (Georgis 2013)(9). It is to see feelings as "relevant" – which the "facts" devoid of fiction tend to leave out (9). I have attempted to illustrate the ways in which Hartman and Howe fabulate "potential histories" of an unending past affectively felt. Their stories embody "multiple stories," none of which "are arbitrary nor without meaning and significance" (Georgis 2013)(7). But to what end are Hartman's and Howe's fabulations?

Nyong'o (2018) considers how moments of fabulation, which are ephemeral and unexpected, "live on through performative and narrative strategies and tactics"; indeed, the politic behind fabulation and re-enactment is to maintain and renew the "feminist and queer repository," or counter-archive, of "stratagems for aesthetic oppositionality" (Nyong'o 2018)(6). "A corrective response to the limits of history, poetry becomes the rewriting of 'its material . . . the raw materials of a society, a collective of practices [and] avowals [and] disavowals, governed by discourse' (Andrews 29)" (Ma 1994)(719-20).

> "A Vengeance must be
> a story
> Trial and suffering
> of Mercy
> Any narrative question
> away in the annals
> the old army
> Enlightened rationalism" (Howe 1990)(64)

We may perhaps figure fabulation similarly to how Hartman defines "beauty" in *Wayward Lives*, as "not a luxury [but rather] a way of creating possibility in the space of enclosure, a radical art of subsistence, an embrace of our terribleness, a transfiguration of the given" (Hartman 2019)(33). Beyond a disruptive or "corrective" operation to the archive, fabulation is utilized in order to revitalize the "wild ideas" and tactics through which the status quo has and continues to be challenged.

Hartman's fabulation in *Wayward Lives* is part of her larger project to narratively challenge the "progressive teleology of bondage to freedom" and map the afterlives of slavery post-emancipation. She writes, for example, how the "ghetto" was systematically homogenized and that "segregation was not natural selection"; she writes

of the beauty of the slum. She credits young black women with shaping radical thought and social revolution through practices of refusal and imagining otherwise on the stage, in the street, the tenement, kitchenette, and hallway, and maybe above all in the bedroom. She writes the stories of how young black queer women and men (and those who refused to be either) defied heteronormative kinship arrangements and rejected moralistic narratives, refusing "involuntary servitude" in and outside the home. She writes that the "wild idea" or fabulated, incompossible "fiction" that animates her book is that young black women were (uncredited) radical thinkers, and through doing so she radically redefines radical thinking. She reads history-as-written "against the grain," "disturbing and breaking open the stories [the documents] told in order to narrate my own" (Hartman 2019)(34). She tells a "better story." Georgis proposes that "choosing between fact and fiction [may] lead ... us away from hearing the better story" (Georgis 2013)(7). The "repository" of better stories and stratagems is for the purpose of learning how to sustain the refusal to reiterate violent historical silencing, marginalization, and dispossession. Fabulation is a practice of unlearning and re-learning, and a repetitive refusal of a history that repeats itself.

The "wild idea" animating *My Emily Dickinson* is that Dickinson was engaged in a practice of refusal concomitant with a history of feminine, antinomian nonconformism via "the Word." Howe speculates that Dickinson found an "outside" in her segregation from society through her private enclosure within which she participated in a literary community through reading and correspondence. Howe refuses the terms of the popular question: Was Dickinson a "spider artist" or a "madwoman in the attic" writing "poetry as embroidery?" (Howe 1985*a*)(14-17, citing Gilbert and Gubar 1979). Howe refuses normative readings of madness like she refuses to gender the poet. She proposes the intelligence of a "woman-poet" and claims the authority of a poet to interpret poetry, and yet next to this she refuses to participate in the activity of reading "coherency" into Dickinson's experiment. She suggests that just as history cannot be reduced to a coherent string of logical events and unambiguous individuals, literature cannot be translated without harming it. She situates herself in the "line break," leaving room in her writing for the reader to imagine with her some radical incoherencies.

If both works can be considered fabulated "potential histories," then how are their "better stories" told? Despite fundamental differences between their archives, the conditions for their subjects' "subjecthoods," and the stakes of their poetic refusals, I have argued for a resonance not only in the contours of Hartman's and Howe's methods, but also between how they position their subjects. Through an ethics of adjacency and politics of recontextualization, both writers envision a poly or

multi-subject, unconfined by normative bounds of the subject or linear temporality. As discussed, Hartman's narrative method in *Wayward Lives* of weaving in others' utterances and writing in relation to the paratexts framing the work, conjures a communal, phenomenal space unbound to a past, present, or future. Sarah Haley calls the "chorus" a "theory of time" (Haley 2020). Within this space, Hartman puts the narrator, her "characters," and others (e.g. Du Bois, Spillers, Morrison, Lorde, and Campt) into affective relation – into an intertextual "chorus" arranged by the text. As stories echo across texts, boundaries between fact and fiction blur. The "chorus" invites the reader in too, to enter and exceed the archive with Hartman. Howe, on the other hand, recontextualizes "utterances" from Emily Dickinson and all those around not only Dickinson's work but Howe's as well. For example, she weaves in the voices and stories of feminine antinomian Anne Hutchinson and captive narrator Mary Rowlandson, women she figures as related to Dickinson's spiritual nonconformist lineage. In addition, the words of literary innovators Emily Brontë and Gertrude Stein contribute to the textual chorus.

In structuring the narration of their texts in this way, both writers enact a "performed fabulation" through a textual rendition of artist Wu Tsang's practice of "full body quotation," a technique in which performers "re-speak" voices from dialogue fed to them through in-ear audio. Though in the context of live performance, this method of troubling or de-essentializing "the relationship between voice and speaker" resonates with Hartman's "close narration" and Howe's "historical figuration" wherein the utterances of a multitude are recontextualized and re-appear through a "performative ethic of citation" (Nyong'o 2018)(8-10). As Nyong'o explains, this practice is a way of "locating new aims for past goals" (8). Not only are fabulated (and fabulous) resources and stratagems located in the historical record that threatens to obliterate them, but they are recontextualized relationally in the service of rendering a "tenseless time" (10), or what Hartman calls the "present-past" (Hartman 2019)(6). This is done toward recovering experiments and revitalizing a "radical imagination" (xiii).

The fabulist, according to Deleuze, wishes to call out to "the people who are missing," and has "a profound desire, a tendency to project – into things, into reality, into the future, even into the sky – an image of himself and others so intense it has a life of its own" (cited in (Nyong'o 2018)17). Fabulation stems from an aspiration of sociality and a collectivist imaginative vision of adjacency that can map "a road out of here" (Nyong'o 2018)(18 [footnote 47]). Nyong'o writes, "The desire of the fabulist, Deleuze insists, is directed toward a life that is not singular or individual, but a life lived in the singular plural" (18), citing (Nancy 2000). Considering only the books' titles, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social*

Upheaval would seem to narrate social histories for and about the collective while *My Emily Dickinson* promises to be one writer's personal relation to a poet actually famous for her *remove* from society. I have shown that what both books narrate turns out to be vastly more complicated: we see how Hartman focuses her attention on narrating the intimate experiences of individuals despite the fact they must often stand in for the multitude due to archival absences. Howe places Dickinson not only in a cross-temporal literary community via her reading and correspondence but also in "ghostly" or affective communion with poets (i.e. innovators, antinomians, enthusiasts) of the past and future. Howe adds that it is through Dickinson's (albeit privileged) social "remove" that she is able to fabulate a connection to this chorus.

"The better story as the principle of creation and surviving difficult experience is also the principle of how people collectively share a story to survive better," writes Georgis (Georgis 2013)(13). Subjects in both texts are situated in long history of nonconformism, within a tradition of resistance and refusal of the terms by which subjecthood, representation, and intelligibility have been written and narrated. Hartman writes a "serial biography" of the wayward toward articulating forms of fashioning an "outside" within constraint (Hartman 2019)(31), as Howe conducts "a skillful and ironic investigation of patriarchal authority over literary history," for her a necessary intervention in a slew of biographies that continue to discount not only Dickinson's experiment, but historical, feminine experimentation in general (Ma 1994)(735). Howe contends, "Words are slippery":

> "Questions of audience, signature, self and other will be answered later by historians, genealogists, graphologists, handwriting experts, who need to produce a certain rationalism for this unstable I-witnessing, uncovering relation. Can all the professional intermediaries ever since reimagine this finite-infinite commingling communion? Trammels of identity. Revelation approaches as a mystery." (Howe 1993)(66)

Howe's and Hartman's resonant projects have reimagined new narratives of resistance and ethical testimony that loosen our definitions, transform the terms of survival, expose the limits of our dispositions, and add to the enigmatic an-archive of "a femininity messily imagined" (Georgis 2013)(23).

This thesis is predicated on the risk of comparing these two works, that could even perhaps be called "incompossible" histories. I have read these texts for the ways in which their incompatibilities open onto their resonant affects and their authors' adjacent desires to hear better stories. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* and

My Emily Dickinson as aesthetic practices express a commitment to refuse the terms through which subjecthood has previously been inscribed as an (im)possibility. At the same time, both writers experiment with what literature does and *can* do toward describing other (incom)possibilities. "I hope my sense of limit is never fixed," writes Howe. "A poet is a foreigner in her own language. I don't want to stay inside" (Beckett 1989)(27). "Literature," writes Hartman, "was better able to grapple with the role of chance in human action and to illuminate the possibility and promise of the errant path" (Hartman 2019)(93). Central to hope is preservation of the enigma, the ambiguity Georgis proposes may be the "ethical imperative" (Georgis 2013)(9). Hartman attests, "I can't think hope without hesitancy" (Hartman, Campt, and Weheliye 2018). I propose that Saidiya Hartman and Susan Howe, by refusing teleological readings and writing hesitantly and uncertainly against affect-less logics, make a space in which we may expand our "sensible dispositions," our capacity to learn and listen, and our ability to be ethical witnesses to the way "stable" stories and, more importantly, our desire for them *give way.*

6. AFTERWORD: AN "INCOMPOSSIBLE" COMPARISON

When I encountered Saidiya Hartman's writing (first through *Lose Your Mother*, followed by *Wayward Lives*), it triggered a revisit to Susan Howe's *My Emily Dickinson*. Mainly, at first, Hartman's narrative reflexivity felt to me akin to Howe's. Though to another it might have made more sense to compare *Wayward Lives* to one of Howe's texts more overtly focused on an anonymous figure, through the course of my research I have found that the many of the underlying themes in Howe's later work are first developed in *My Emily Dickinson*; namely, I find that her concern for the voice of uncertainty and the spirit of a "feminine" nonconformism started with her personal study of Dickinson. My hope is that this thesis preserves the integrity of my initial encounter with these authors in relation to each other because my study has been driven by the "serendipitous" feeling of resonance I sense between them and the ways in which I feel each haunts the other's work. Avery Gordon suggests that "we will need to invent other forms of curiosity to engage those haunting moments" (Gordon 1997)(41). I have attempted to follow the threads of my curiosity between Hartman's and Howe's "chance" encounters and how their "texts allow travel through time" (Creasy 2015).

In this thesis I have tried to focus on a study of both writers' research and compositional methods. I have traced how both writers entered the wilderness of their archives to write potential histories through an affective register. In many ways, I have set out to prioritize connections over disjunctions, aiming to build bridges between their methods, but a longer study might also have considered the digital turn in archival research. Admittedly, there is much more to be said about how these writers confront or engage with the physicality or virtuality of their archives. A wider discussion of these writers might also have included other voices from the "chorus." By limiting my focus to Hartman's and Howe's modes of research and writing, I hope, however, to have presented a more comprehensive analysis of their particular texts. In putting these writers specifically into conversation with each other, I have also sought to perform my own literary interdisciplinarity in the spirit of their affiliative works crossing genres, disciplines, and traditions, as well as decades.

Why argue though for the resonance between Saidiya Hartman's and Susan Howe's projects specifically? Why propose that these writers could be in adjacent "choruses"? This project has been inspired in part by Gayatri Gopinath's (2018) "collisions" between seemingly incommensurate aesthetic texts (Gopinath 2018). Though Gopinath discusses the political, ethical importance of a theory of potentiality in similar ways to Ariella Azoulay (2013), Gopinath more closely examines how and why very different texts resonate. As "curator" she positions divergent aesthetic "texts" or "practices" across modes and genres in order to analyze the unexpected ways in which bodies, histories, geographies, temporalities, or styles meet in affective affiliation. In doing so, she aims to show how divergent aesthetic practices may excavate submerged histories through a shared or resonant "queer optic, which allows us to apprehend bodies, desires, and affiliations rendered lost or unthinkable within normative history" (Gopinath 2018)(8). The "queer optic," she writes, "brings into focus and into the realm of the present the energy of those nonnormative desires, practices, bodies, and affiliations concealed within dominant historical narratives" (8).

Gopinath pays particular attention to aesthetic practices that aim to transform archives through nonnormative readings and excavations of "small acts and everyday gestures" (8). She writes that the value of minor histories "lies in their ability to demand that we look beyond the main event and instead become attuned to submerged and forgotten modes of longing, desire, affiliation, and embodiment that may in fact allow us to envision an alternative present and future" (8). This enactment of a "queer mode of critique" demands "a retraining of our vision and a reattunement of our senses" (8). Similarly, I have argued that *Wayward Lives* and *My Emily Dickinson* have the capacity to rearrange readers' sensibilities by pressing us to perceive affectively "the promiscuous intimacies of multiple times and places" (18). According to Gopinath, this is the path by which the aesthetic may "perform new histories" (Gopinath 2018)(18). By bringing "glimpses of past desires, longings, and articulations of alternative social and political worlds" into our present realm, we may consider how the past resonates today (18). As our reality of our present shifts, so too the horizon may be perceived differently.

The aesthetic, she writes, may enact "a practice of reading" across disciplinary, academic boundaries, temporalities, and geographies that produces new readings of archives "through the minor, and for their gaps, slippages, and erasures" (16). These readings perform a rearrangement of "hierarchies of value" in their close attention "to the regional, the everyday, the personal, and the discarded" (9). In this way, aesthetic practices can be "modes of emplacement" that situate the reader into past narratives, disoriented and reoriented, "in a state of productive suspension"

(16). "Being suspended," she writes, "need not be the same as being trapped or in perpetual stasis; rather, it may be a temporary temporal and spatial respite. ... Suspension as both a spatial and temporal category ... may allow for a momentary vantage point from which to envision an alternative to the here and now" (17). Thus, Gopinath says, aesthetic practices have the potential to "do things in the world"; "the aesthetic *enacts*, *produces*, and *performs* ... affinities and affiliations rather than simply rendering (new forms of relationality) apparent" (Gopinath 2018)(16).

These occasions for rupture are enacted through Gopinath's "queer curation"; she considers aesthetic practices "that may seem discontinuous or unrelated" because her goal is "to reveal not coevalness or sameness but rather the co-implication and radical relationality" (Gopinath 2018)(4). Though I initially considered Hartman's *Wayward Lives* next to Howe's *My Emily Dickinson* due to a vague sense of their resonance, I chose to stage this in-depth encounter between them *because* of their apparent incommensurability. It is in this "gap" that I argue it is perhaps most valuable to examine their affiliation and relationality despite their differences, taking seriously "the ways in which the aesthetic is bound up with ethical and political questions" particularly through questions of "ethical" representation (Matthews and McWhirter 2003)(xx). The gap I read between Hartman's and Howe's texts expose to me an imposed silence, a silence in large part shaped by genre differentiation and disciplinary "non-affiliation" which is assumed to reflect their political or ethical incompatibility. What can be heard within that silence? Is it, in fact, silence? Despite my argument for the usefulness of connecting these works, I have tried to illustrate also how moments of resonance may mark more precisely the nuanced, structural differences between their practices as well. In these chapters I have attempted to illustrate Hartman's and Howe's methods for constructing potential histories through multi-genre writing that is historical poetics meets biography meets feminist literary criticism. My aim has been to try to enter an interdisciplinary, relational space in which to discuss how these works resonate despite their differences.

In doing so, I have tried to bear in mind Gopinath's warning of the risks. She writes that to give attention to how "incommensurate texts" resonate across time and space risks flattening their specificities (Gopinath 2018)(30). I have previously pointed to the fact that Hartman and Howe often share a common archive (Yale's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library). I make this observation not in order to deemphasize the differences between their subjects of research. Rather, I have asked, What does the simple fact of a common archive imply for comparing their incommensurate projects? Next to the comparative wealth of the archive of Dickinson's own writing, I have discussed how the lives Hartman seeks to find are more often than not "undiscoverable." Hartman's subjects "enter history" through an archive

that conscribes their lives through anonymity, criminality, captivity, fungibility, and death; they live in the wake of slavery and the plantation and in the "weather" of antiblackness which relentlessly attempts to foreclose Black life, histories, and futurities (Sharpe 2016).

Adjacent to these differences, I have tried to compare the ways in which Howe and Hartman both try to "unsettle what's settled" and to examine the questions that drive their creative scholarship. I mark a resonance between the ways they attempt to articulate an "incomplete" past counter to "settler narratives" (Hartman and Wilderson 2003), and the ways in which they write toward redressing a North American psychic inheritance of injury.

> "There is real suffering on this little planet. I mean we can discuss whether the Hittites believed in chronology and history before Herodotus, and in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, this month, a young African-American man was murdered by a gang of Italian-American teengers. Where did the poison of racial hatred in America begin? Will it ever end? Why are we such a violent nation? Why do we have such contempt for powerlessness? I feel compelled in my work to go back, not to the Hittites but to the invasion or settling, or whatever current practice calls it, of *this* place. I am trying to understand what went wrong when the first Europeans stepped on shore here." (Howe 1993)(164)

Both Hartman and Howe, I have tried to show, seem "aware of the difficulties and traps of identification" and insist on "the impossibility of ... accessing the past through ... conventional historiography" (Gopinath 2018)(128). Hartman's and Howe's books also share an "attention to the limits and possibilities of the visual" (12), and, I would add, the "intelligible." While they both stage critical confrontations with the archive, they also write of being haunted within them, communicating an interest in foregrounding other sensory possibilities for reading memory and history's narratives. "They gesture to realms outside and beyond [the visual field], suggesting instead the sensorial and the affective as alternative modes and conduits for apprehending the intertwined nature of seemingly discrete historical formations. They allow us not only to see, but also to sense, the proximity of these histories and their contemporary instantiations" (12). I have attempted to address and examine the resonant proximity of the "new histories" performed by these projects, and the stakes of these archival re-readings toward the work of sketching "new histories" but also *real* horizons.

I wish to propose that for these two writers the "real" is not divorced from dreams,

"fiction," or the "untrue." Howe says,

> "I think there is a truth, even if it's not fashionable to say so anymore ... I believe there are stories that need to be told again differently. I believe with Walter Benjamin that the story is in danger of being lost the minute someone opens one's mouth to speak; but you've got to open your mouth to speak, and there is a story, and it's probably going to be lost anyway, but whatever that story is, whether you call it fact or fiction, or an original version, it's something *real*." (Keller 1995)(30-31, emphasis mine)

Hartman similarly writes of the "realness" of a wayward girl's dream, of the "beautiful places she would never visit [...] lives she would never inhabit [which] all seemed more real to her than the three-room flat" (Hartman 2019)(137):

> "Most days, the assault of the city eclipses its promise: When the water in the building has stopped running, when even in her best dress she cannot help but wonder if she smells like the outhouse or if it is obvious that her bloomers are tattered, when she is so hungry that the aroma of bean soup wafting from the settlement kitchen makes her mouth water, she takes to the streets, as if in search of the *real* city and not this poor imitation." (Hartman 2019)(10, emphasis mine)

As Hartman tells Patricia Saunders, her projects are about discussing "home" as "making" rather than inheritance (Saunders 2008*b*)(13). The errant girls leave the south due to the lack of livable options only to meet another space of enclosure in the north and fewer options. Yet they persistently imagine the promise of thriving.

> "[A]ll spaces of 'home' and dwelling are shot through with contradictions and fissures ... there is no going back, no return to an unsullied past, no secure space of safety. In light of this knowledge, these aesthetic practices reveal how those who were subjected to the violent legacies of colonial modernity contest this violence by finding imaginative and pleasurable ways to dwell in the wake of forced containment and forced mobility. They thus act as a resonant, alternative archive that records everyday forms of dwelling in the context of containment, displacement, and dispossession..." (Gopinath 2018)(15-16)

I propose that Howe similarly emphasizes Dickinson's attempts to create an "out-

side" through a "wild interiority" and make a space of belonging within her religion of poetry (Beckett 1989)(6). Counterintuitively, she reads the poet's "self-imposed exile, indoors" as a means of self-ownership and freedom *from* representation, an attempt to escape the confines of her culture, family, class, and gender (Howe 1985*a*)(13). Dickinson the poet as imagined by Howe, adjacent to the wayward in Hartman's stories, resists the "imposition of a certain regime of the subject" and dwells in a home of her making (Hartman and Moten 2016).

With this discussion of their relationality, I again do not lose sight of the differences. Howe's writing mirrors Dickinson's in going to the limits of intelligibility that is in many ways counter to how Hartman aims to make intelligible the "impossible" or "unthought" and add nuance to the archive's "shorthand." Toward rearranging the disposition of the reader, I wonder, can we glean something from Howe's deconstruction of language and experiments merging prose and poetry that may be utilized to "better" read or be better readers of *Wayward Lives*? How might *My Emily Dickinson* be read through an optic oriented to the "sensory experience," imagine more descriptively, for example, the poet's "outlaw passions," or place her lawlessness within a re-edited chronicle of poetic anarchy (Hartman 2019)(xiii-xiv)?

Hartman's and Howe's narratives, I argue, "bear witness to the end of a traditional way of life," embracing a "radical hope" which is "basically the hope for *revival*: for coming back to life in a form that is not yet intelligible" (Lear 2006)(95). The dream is the "incessant turning over of the ground beneath our feet that is the indispensable preparation for the radical overturning of the ground that we are under" (Moten 2013)(779); it is to "meet settlement with unsettlement" (Hartman and Moten 2016). Hartman writes that her "fugitive text ... is not a plea for recognition, but a plan for abolition" (Hartman 2020); Howe considers Dickinson's manuscripts to be "Drawings in motion. Blueprints in motion. Plans for the future" (Howe 2015)(126). Both writers share a commitment to the realness of the "dream," to the articulation of "true things in fictions, and of fictions in true things," and to creating "a thought of the outside while in the inside" (Duncan 1968, 54, cited in (Heim 2015) 94); (Hartman and Moten 2016). Robert Duncan writes, "the poetic imagination faces the challenge of finding a structure that will be the complex story of all the stories felt to be true, a myth in which something like the variety of man's experience of what is real may be contained" (6, cited in (Heim 2015) 28). Hartman's and Howe's refusal of violent epistemes articulates the hope of "radical unsettlement": "the content that is approached is approach, itself" (Moten 2013)(750). Through methods of ambivalence, they privilege the question that "cannot be answered but can only be unasked" (756).

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