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# Unsettling Racial Capitalism: Horror in African American and Native American Fiction

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by

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## RESEARCH AREAS

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ABSTRACT

Unsettling Racial Capitalism: Horror in African American and Native American Fiction

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"Unsettling Racial Capitalism: Horror in African American and Native American Fiction" develops a critical analysis of race and late capitalism through the reading of twentieth and twenty-first century African American and Native American literature and culture. I examine 'horror' as a hermeneutic through which these artists interpret and deconstruct the terms of order by which power rationalizes issues of race beginning in the late twentieth century. The Black and Native literary traditions hinge on oral narratives and non-Western ontologies that critique contemporary forms of what Cedric Robinson calls "racial capitalism"—a theory of power in which racial ideology and capitalism develop and continue to inform one another. The moments of horror brought to fruition in these texts, from scenes of graphic violence to instances of bodily terror, induce deconstructions of state-informed racial categories used to maintain the fixed stability of hegemonic discourse. At the same time, these ruptures create opportunities for Black and Native epistemologies to re-emerge as principal forms of knowledge.

Black and Native artists use horror's affective foci to unpack what as of yet has gone unlooked by recent scholarship: the subject of color's *experience* of racial capitalism.

Relying on what bell hooks refers to as the "authority of experience," the chapters unmask the mechanisms of racial capitalism via different experiential modes: time, embodiment, and space. The final chapter builds on the work of the previous three by re-reading violent, radical race narratives through a critical horror framework.

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"Under the moonlight
You see a sight that almost stops your heart
You try to scream
But terror takes the sound before you make it
You start to freeze
As horror looks you right between your eyes
You're paralyzed"

– Michael Jackson, "Thriller"

"Horror is a reaction; it's not a genre."

– John Carpenter, *Interview Magazine*

## Introduction

The garden party scene that occurs halfway through Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017), might—on paper—be recognizable in a number of white liberal comedies of the 2000s or 2010s: a young Black man, Chris Washington, accompanies his white girlfriend, Rose Armitage, to her wealthy parents' lavish country house, where he is subjected to the awkward and clueless racist questioning of her well-to-do but seemingly "progressive" relatives. These interactions range from one man's clumsy association of a discussion about golf to Tiger Woods—"Gordon *loves* Tiger"—to another man's bold declaration to Chris that "Black is in fashion" (*Get Out*). American popular culture is no stranger to mining comedy from similar takes on post-Obama white liberals desperate to perform their progressive ideals and terrified of reproducing the racist ideology that they both abhor and depend upon in order to perform their particular brand of whiteness.

That being said, Peele has little interest in re-creating the "micro-aggression" as a satirical jab at his white audience; rather, like much of *Get Out*, the garden party scene's interest lies in how to represent protagonist Chris Washington's *experience* as the sole ("sole" here reflecting the fact that the other Black party-goers are in fact "inhabited" by

white individuals) Black person at this elite, all-white gathering. As he relates to whom he perceives to be the Black housekeeper Georgina later: "If there's too many white people, I get nervous" (*Get Out*). Peele layers the party scene with ominous strings and cascading, atonal piano notes; whatever humor arises from these conversations does so as a by-product of the overbearing need to unsettle the viewer. To be racialized, to be identified immediately as an *other*, is, for Peele, a horrifying experience, and to say otherwise to is deny the very real impact of racist ideology.

Of course, the film's garden party is actually an auction. And it is in this realization, one that arrives in the film's third act and immediately necessitates a second if not third viewing, that *Get Out* makes clear its connections between racism and capitalism: in a time defined as "racially enlightened," the commoditization and discrimination of subjects of color comes disguised. Through this new lens, the partygoers' insensitive comments become examples of inquisitive possible buyers. The racialization of Black bodies goes hand in hand with the desire to fold them into a capitalist system made with the intent of buttressing white supremacy. The white relatives' awkward renderings of what they perceive to be race-positive representations of Blackness are in act fueled by a desire to purchase and own that same Blackness. As *Get Out* reveals, these individuals pay to inhabit the bodies of Black people in order to further their own privileged existence. This capitalist ideology manifests in other, more historically and culturally recognizable ways later in the film: Chris's girlfriend Rose trolls for future Black male victims by researching NCAA basketball prospects—an athletic association notorious for the appropriation and commoditization of Black bodies for profit—and Chris's own salvation from the hypnotic chanting seeking to paralyze him in advance of his own "un-bodying" comes in the form of the cotton that he digs from his chair.

Peele deploys recognizable signifiers of racist capital systems in the effort to present the Armitage estate as an allegory for the current racial order, one in which capital is policed according to the racial ideology of power—Cedric Robinson's racial capitalism—and matters of identity politics filter through the lens of the state. The selling of Black bodies under the Armitage's insidious auction replicates the peculiar institution of American slavery just as it also mirrors the disembodying process through which power registers and catalogues Black subjects according to dominant racial logic. In short, Peele's film attempts to hold a mirror to contemporary experiences of subjects of color under the regime of racial capitalism and by so doing reveals it for what it is: a horror show.

This dissertation project, entitled "Unsettling Racial Capitalism: Horror in African American and Native American Fiction," embodies a radical reading practice designed to lift the curtain on the experience of subjects of color in the later twentieth/early twenty-first century. Horror, an affective mode generally ignored as a feature of a "trashy" cinematic genre or the claptrap of the literary gothic, is the place to know the racial order of late capitalism. There is no mistaking why *Get Out* turned to horror to make insightful claims about the state of racism in the slice of denial known as post-Obama America; Peele's film is a "documentary,"[1] (@Jordan Peele) a current example of what is a long tradition of artists of color using horror as a critical framework through which to criticize white supremacy and imagine new futures of possibility. As the title insists, horror requires divergent archives and curated fears of both African American and Native American writers and filmmakers who see through their respective cultural traditions. These artists craft works that disturb through unsettling representations of Black and Native life that unpack the experience of racial

[1] Peele referred to his film as a documentary as a response to *Get Out*'s Golden Globe nomination under the category of "Musical or Comedy."

capitalism while, simultaneously, using its chaotic, destructive nature as a means of rupturing the logic of US hegemony.

When I speak of "logic," I am considering the way in which power seeks to instill so-called "order" to the chaos of history in a way that undergirds white supremacy. To that point, "Unsettling Racial Capitalism" considers the following as defining features of the late twentieth/early twenty-first century US hegemony: that in the years directly following the Civil Rights Movement, per Michael Omi and Howard Winant, the state embarked on a recalibration of racial logic allowing power to maintain control over the rationale of race;[2] and that part of this recalibration, as Jodi Melamed reasons, involved the co-option of anti-racisms and radicalisms in order to perpetuate the United States' status as a progressive leader in the global economy.[3] Both of these grasping features operate in the desire to sustain

[2] Part of the racial capitalist climate of the late twentieth century in which these Black and Native artists operate includes intention by power to mask or otherwise deny the existence of racism in the face of continuing white supremacy. While the periodization of my project gestures to Bonilla-Silva's theorizing of the years following the 1960s as one of a developing "colorblind racism," this idea that America is somehow "post-race" derives from the work of race theorists and sociologists who have directly engaged with the issue of race in the years following WWII. Omi and Winant theorize the period directly following the end of World War II as a racial *break*, a "recalibration" of hegemonic racial logic in which the outwardly racist legislature and societal values of Jim Crow were interpreted to better suit an emerging global market and increased scrutiny of the U.S.'s reputation as a true *democracy*. George Lipsitz sees the modest reform of the Civil Rights movement as one designed with specific intent to protect what he deems as the "value of whiteness" (22). Lipsitz reads the supposed progressive politics and legislature coming out of the Civil Rights Movement as always buttressing a white supremacist ideology even as it attempts to outwardly work to condemn racism. Linking both Lipsitz and Bonilla-Silva's arguments explains how racist ideology and legislature continues to thrive in the U.S. albeit with disguised rhetoric that masks the unabated intent to uphold white supremacy.

[3] The rise of globalized capitalism in part through the co-option of anti-racism by the U.S. white hegemony is another important development in the study of the "post-racial" myth. Melamed illuminates this connection by breaking down a succession of U.S. racial ideologies following World War II, racial liberalism, liberal multiculturalism, and neoliberal multiculturalism, that used the logic of globalism to abstract the concrete realities of racial discrimination. Melamed also sheds light on the importance of literature in promotion of a multiculturalism endowed to (white) university students following World War II in order to acquaint them with the issues of race without requiring them to actually face the realities of racial discrimination in the United States. Novels written by authors of color and concerning the issue of race, Melamed argues, were used to "initiate" the incoming white professional class with surface-level knowledge of racial issues to prepare them for a newly emerging globalized economy while simultaneously pushing the concrete realities of racial violence to the margins of the national discourse. Melamed's assertion that the "race novel" played a role in the white hegemony's co-option of anti-racism ideology informs my central thesis that writers of color during this historical period turned to the narrative elements of horror in partial response to such a co-option, to find new narrative strategies from which to speak to power that avoided assuaging the desires of the new racial order.

what Cedric Robinson describes as the *terms of order* offered by Western political thought. These configurations preserve societal allegiance to traditional authority structures and institutions under racial capitalism. A main characteristic of this late capital racial order includes the abstraction of market forces in the everyday experience and environments—from discriminatory housing zoning to real acts of racial violence—of communities of color. These features are the terms of order itself—dictated by property and exclusion—that the state sought to enforce in the second half of the twentieth century. Part of this enforcement involved an implied separation in the public sphere of the concrete effects of white supremacy from the hegemonic institutions and economic entities responsible for them in the first place.

"Unsettling Racial Capitalism" looks at the transition from the early 1960s into the twenty-first century, a period characterized as a watershed in the emergence of late capitalism. Late capitalism, as Frederic Jameson locates it, makes up the economic and cultural condition of postmodernity, a transnational, hyper-consumerist, highly automated, and all-together ubiquitous hegemonic system. The "late" of late capitalism, as Jameson avers, refers to "the sense that something has changed, that things are different, that we have gone through a transformation of the life world which is somehow decisive but incomparable with the older convulsions of modernization and industrialization, less perceptible and dramatic, somehow, but more permanent precisely because more thoroughgoing and all-pervasive" (Jameson xxi). This "less-perceptible" structure of capitalism breeds iterations of power so far-reaching that their mechanisms appear invisible. The "racial capitalism" in my title speaks in part to this same "invisible" dynamic of late capital, an era of hyper-consumerist, neoliberal politics. This is the late twentieth century turn that Melamed

identifies as the "new racial capitalism." Racial capitalism read here is a series of subjective experiences, knowings, and hurts that culminate in the systemic racialization of the Black and Native subject. While critics such as Robinson and, later, Melamed, have provided road maps to trace the historical repercussions of racial capitalism as the ordering logic of racism and its hegemonies, I read these theorizations in narrated scenes as abstract market forces play out in the everyday—embodied, witnessed, viewed—experience of the subject of color. It is one thing to be made aware of how the United States' appropriation of anti-racisms in the later twentieth century derived from a larger hegemonic project to gain control over the discussions of race and racism in post-WWII America. It is a whole other and intimately real thing to examine how such larger, historical forces impact the lives and *experience* of subjects of color. The narratives and sights that follow navigate a perspectival route through the world that racial capitalism hath wrought.

To deconstruct such dominant racial logic is not, however, a first step in erasing the bonds of identity and culture altogether. Rather, by relying on the affective foci of horror, the artists in this project re-assert the significance of experience and cultural tradition in the struggle to craft radical subjectivities in a period of being disappeared or assimilated. Such an emphasis on the experiential invokes and speaks from bell hooks' "Postmodern Blackness":

> Part of our struggle for radical black subjectivity is the quest to find ways to construct self and identity that are oppositional and liberatory. The unwillingness to critique essentialism on the part of many African-Americans is rooted in the fear that it will cause folks to lose sight of the specific history and experience of African- Americans and the unique sensibilities and culture that arise from that experience. An adequate response to this concern is to

> critique essentialism while emphasizing the significance of 'the authority of experience.' There is a radical difference between a repudiation of the idea that there is a black 'essence' and recognition of the way black identity has been specifically constituted in the experience of exile and struggle. (29)

hooks centers on experience as a way of arguing for the possibilities in postmodern critique to subvert distorting essentialisms. The Black and Native identities that become visible in this project are under the aegis provided by hooks, uninterested in adopting any essentialist authority or outside allegiance to blood quantum. "Unsettling Racial Capitalism" takes up this task of dismantling through the development of a critical horror framework.

While the texts discussed in "Unsettling" are not classified or shelved as horror in the generic or market sense, these African American and Native American writers and filmmakers repurpose fear-inducing strategies. This fear incorporates the horror genre and its ruptures disorient the accepted terms of order—comforting hegemonies—structured by racial capitalism. The public, rather prone to reading or not, is sensible to the elements of the horror genre. Even those who abstain recognize the induction: a sense of familiar fear induced by everything from violent imagery to shadowy atmospheres to the jarring manipulation of narrative perspective. These narrative strategies paralyze audiences with a moment of uncertainty or "hesitation," that, as Tzvetan Todorov theorizes, leaves narrative participants unable to separate the rational and explicable from the fantastic or outlandish, leading these observers or identifying watchers with a vertiginous sense of unknowable reality. This moment of "hesitation" offers African American and Native American writers the opportunity to deploy the horror mode as social critique. Ready to strike, these masters of narrative locate this opening into instability in form and perspective to attack through

stylistic innovation calculated to elicit a visceral response. This is an opened door for the hesitating reader, unmoored from what he or she has understood as "reality," a juncture to experience a sensorial shock that demands a reassessment of the normative political state.

While Todorov explains the critical impact of horror as a narrative strategy, his idea of the rupture echoes back to other motifs that unsettle and destabilize in order to project political horror within these texts. The writers of color that I analyze in "Unsettling Racial Capitalism" come from forced diasporic or, in the case of Native Americans, genocidally colonized populations with established and evolving cultural traditions. These communities as communities remain by self-definition and cultural exclusion outside of the white hetero-normativity through which mainstream definitions of horror derive. In fact, some of the most seemingly extraordinary images within these texts—the supernatural forces in Butler's *Kindred* (1979) or the painted-specter haunting Santa Cruz in Louis Owens' *Bone Game* (1994)—function as culturally specific signage for more profound origins of horror emanating from racism that bleeds into all sectors of Black and Native experience. The bodily dissection that constructs and figures dominance in Suzan-Lori Parks' *Venus* (1996) speaks to the racist discourse that informs the continued violence directed at Black bodies—e.g. police shootings, sexual assault, incarceration, and attempts at controlling Black reproductive rights through welfare reform, sterilization, and other drives toward annihilation; the nightmarish inferno that haunts John Edgar Wideman's *Philadelphia Fire* (1990) stands in for the brutal police bombing of the MOVE organization's headquarters in 1985, itself a reflection of the continued militarized efficiency through which the state constricts new iterations of race radicalism; the grotesque and seemingly "tribal" murders carried out by an unseen assailant in Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer* (1996) illustrate the

racial violence that Urban Indians endured in areas such as Seattle while gesturing to the radical, Native ideologies that these communities continued to look to in the close of the twentieth century. In each of these instances, the fictional horror comments on real acts of racism and racial violence that sculpts the national narrative of racial progress. By focusing horror on the concepts of temporality, embodiment, space, and revolutionary subjectivity, this project reveals the wide spectrum of minority experience situated both in and by a hegemonic order that practices racial control while openly denying the existence of racism.

"Unsettling Racial Capitalism" traces horror as a formal and stylistic strategy that resonates in complexity across both African-American and Native American literature and by extension across other ethnic literary canons. These African American and Native American communities, varied in themselves across this nation's fiction, represent a significant perspective from which to acknowledge the "cultural work"[4] of horror in late twentieth/early twenty-first century ethnic literature. As the "first and forced Americans," (Moraga xvi)[5] these multivalent and culturally identified communities have endured long histories of discrimination, including shared blights of slavery, rape, forced lingual colonialism, forced miscegenation, cultural genocide, and *de facto* as well as *de jure* segregation. Likewise, both have generated literary traditions that hinge on vital oral narratives and non-Western ontologies.[6] This commonality becomes particularly prescient in its directives—predictive and proscriptive—for the era of "colorblind racism" that obscures narratives of history and

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[4] I use this term in the tradition of Jane Tompkins in her work *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (1985).

[5] In a parenthetical aside to her foreword in the third edition of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (2002), Cherie Moraga attributes this description of African Americans and Native Americans to a friend.

[6] See Leslie Marmon Silko. *Yellow Woman and the Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today*. Touchstone, 1997 and Henry Louis Gates Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism. Oxford University Press, 1988.* Silko and Gates Jr. each make the case for how Native and Black literatures spring from unique cultural and oral traditions that distinguish them from the Western literary tradition.

conflates racial identities. This conflation parading as modernity perpetuates white supremacy while outwardly maintaining a veneer of social progress. To compare these specified and building canons offers a telling perspective into how ethnic literature has used the disruptive power of horror to cultivate a resurgent sense of cultural identity while illuminating the realities of racial violence.

**Re-thinking Horror**

Horror reaches beyond the boundaries of genre. I see horror as advancing a critical framework through which the bonds of normativity—held in place by the power of ideology and hegemonic manipulation—unbind in the face of shocking and unsettling viscera. To think through horror as these artists do is to produce a critical disfiguring that ruptures and deconstructs even as it opens up new pathways of being. If the terms of order under racial capitalism coheres history under the politics of the West, horror looks to disrupt that which is ordered, be it by menacing shadow, bloody apparitions, or butcher knife. By seeing and holding the frame as the narrative breaks frame, "Unsettling Racial Capitalism" discovers hell-bent and heartening possibilities of what a horror-based critique can accomplish. To break frame is to expand our existing framework for how and with whom to identify as threat passes beyond the seams of the seemly. This requires us to acknowledge where we stand as we read horror in works by contemporary authors of color.

As a comparative project that juxtaposes two ethnic canons with distinct literary traditions and histories that diverge as well as converge, this project breaks ground for a new perspective that appreciates the power of horror as a literary and narrative-induced response to the abstraction of the material fact of oppression. Simultaneously, "Unsettling" acts as a corrective to the time-honored view in which the high subjugates the low in culture

hierarchies. American critics have erred in favoring the Gothic as the dominant generic mode by which all literary texts that pertain to horror must be judged. This Eurocentric attachment to the Gothic perpetuates the presupposition of Western hierarchies and their influence over all other ethnic canons. A focus on castles and threatened virgins privileges white supremacy while stripping away agency from any writer of color to invoke the universal power of horror to get beneath the skin and make flesh crawl—in others words, to use horror for very different critical ends.

Early understandings of literary horror foreclose horror as the more gruesome and, therefore, lesser twin of the "terror-inducing" Gothic novel. Critical discussions covering the difference between "horror" and "terror" form a significant foundation to my project in two ways: they illustrate early, misguided understandings of "horror" as a paralyzing, purely physical force that can only serve the purpose of creating sensation, and they demonstrate the issues of scope under Western-bias that arise when horror is only viewed through the lens of the Gothic novel. An early entry into this debate came from the 19th Century British writer Ann Radcliffe, who sought to separate her own "terror"-inducing iterations of the Gothic genre from the grotesque and violent texts such as *The Monk: A Romance* (1796) by Matthew Gregory Lewis. For Radcliffe, "Terror and Horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates them." (149). Horror, for Radcliffe, does not just appeal to the lower faculties—it destroys them. Conversely, any attempt by the Gothic novelist to reach her reader on an intellectual level requires "terror," which stirs the mind while maintaining a safe distance from the physical and grotesque. Years later, in 1966, Devendra P. Varma would double down Radcliffe's contrast to aver that "terror… creates an intangible atmosphere of

spiritual psychic dread, a certain superstitious shudder at the other world," while horror, conversely, "appeals to sheer dread and repulsion, by brooding upon the gloomy and the sinister, and lacerates the nerves by establishing actual cutaneous contact with the supernatural" (130). Both Radcliffe and Varma connect the terror-inducing gothic with beauty and the Burkean notion of the sublime. Indeed, as Varma concludes, "[Radcliffe] knows, as Burke has asserted... obscurity is a strong ingredient in the sublime" (103). According to Varma and her centuries-before predecessor Radcliffe, the Gothic novel is only as successful insofar as it allows the reader to confront the awe-inspiring, which is both terrible and beautiful. And yet, referring to "horror" as a lesser Gothic form due to its inability to meet this requirement overlooks its key feature: its power is subcutaneous, its impact visceral and, by definition, physical. To sublimate horror though the logic of the Gothic novel, as Radcliffe and Varma proscribe, only serves to limit its critical possibilities.[7]

One mid-19th century example of Gothic sensibilities disallowing horror's more effective critical tendencies comes in the form of the changes that editor Lydia Marie Child makes to Harriet Ann Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Child's major editing idea was a strategy that warned readers and allowed them not to be faced with the body-horror inherent in slavery. She moved the particularly horrific scenes from Jacobs' narrative to the ninth chapter "in order that those who shrink from 'supping upon horrors' might omit them without interrupting the thread of the story" (qtd. in Yellin xxii). Child echoes Radcliffe here in her understanding of horror as a disruptive force that pulls the reader away from Jacob's narrative. Just as the terror-Gothic allows authors such as Radcliffe to

[7] To illustrate the influence of such a Gothic take on horror, one need look no further than the writings of Stephen King, who, in his treatise on the genre entitled *Danse Macabre* (1981), writes, "I recognize terror as the finest emotion and so I will try to terrorize the reader. But if I find that I cannot terrify, I will try to horrify, and if I find that I cannot horrify, I'll go for the gross-out. I'm not proud" (37).

maintain the reader's attention through subtle, atmospheric moves that avoid the distracting effect of horror, Child edits Jacobs's narrative to protect its more sensitive readership while keeping its "thread" intact. By doing so, she re-imagines the landscape of American chattel slavery as one filled with horrifying but escaped brutalities. If, as Mary Titus relates, "the bodily abuses collected in Chapter Nine were dispersed, they would further enhance the atmosphere of social illness and perverse governance that pervades the entire text, and connect more overtly with the abuse and illness of Jacob's body in particular" (203). Titus's criticism of Child's editorial moves and justifying comments illustrates the larger aims of "Unsettling Racial Capitalism." Horror is not a meal to be eaten or not. Horror and its ruptures are pervasive. Native and Black authors disperse moments of horror throughout their work as a way of representing post-Civil Rights America's own "atmosphere of social illness."

Robert Hume's retort to Radcliffe and Varma's criticism of the horror-Gothic serves as an important foretelling of later critic's attempts to restore horror's intellectual value. Perhaps most significantly, Hume credits horror as a superior form of the Gothic novel due to its ability to physically and psychologically involve the reader: "Terror-Gothic works on the supposition that a reader who is repelled will close his mind (if not the book) to the sublime feelings which may be realized by the mixture of pleasure and pain induced by fear. Horror-Gothic assumes that if events have psychological consistency, even within repulsive situations, the reader will find himself involved beyond recall" (285). By "consistency," Hume means the "succession of horrors" (285) that the horror-Gothic throws at the reader, thereby engaging him or her in a way that the slow and somewhat fleshless burn of the terror-Gothic cannot accomplish. Hume hints at the power of horror as a narrative strategy for its

ability to engage the reader at the psychic level through the physical body. Rather than merely destroying the senses, Hume posits that the physicality of horror induces a connection between subject and text that allows the reader to relate more closely to the morally ambiguous "villain-heroes" of the horror-Gothic. While important for its provocative take on horror, Hume's aim is still in service to the Gothic, which he argues "comes fully into its own" (285) through horror. By only theorizing horror as a new evolution to the aesthetic theory of Gothic novelists, Hume fails to recognize the greater critical and political implications of horror that he suggests here. Whereas with Radcliffe and Varma, horror was also second shrift to the "higher" form of the terror-Gothic, for Hume, horror's best utility comes as the Gothic's shining savior. In both cases, critics fail to see the wider importance of literary horror as a strategy of social and political critique that has the ability to reach beyond Western understandings of representation.

This failure has influenced later scholars in their attempts to analyze horror in work by authors of color. Moves to connect African American or Native American texts to horror have either been overly reliant on discussions of broader American fiction and the Gothic, as seen in the former, or absent all together, in the case of the latter. One reason for this misguided direction in ethnic literary scholarship is the continued reliance of "American" as an all-encompassing literary canon that collapses all other ethnic canons into its history. For instance, recent attempts to define the Gothic genre in America, although cognizant of the form's influence on societal norms of race and citizenship, have still made the misstep of attempting to bring all texts under the problematic moniker that is "American." Teresa Goddu argues, "once imported to America, the gothic's key elements were translated into American terms, and its formulas were unfixed" (4). Even as Goddu rightly argues the

American Gothic "unfixes" British Gothic elements, she fails to *unfix* the term "America" as a construction of power and whiteness. Even as she evokes Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* (1992), a work meant in many ways to destabilize past conceptions of "American" literature, Goddu relies on the manifest and nationalist label in order to buttress the critical narrative that celebrates the gothic in American literature. In the sweeping categorization that excludes by including, authors of color who incite horror in their readers stand to be credited with subversion or accused of appropriation. Maisha L. Wester's *African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places* (2012) sees any move by Black authors to horrify their readers through any type of dark imagery as proof that "there are far more African American writers of gothic fiction than critics typically recognize, and these writers make critical interventions into the genre" (1). Wester's work reflects a perpetuation of the idea that any representation produced by an American ethnic community is always a response to or deeply influenced by Western literary traditions. Such an argument assumes that minority canons that seek to disturb must always utilize the Gothic, even in acts of subversion. This compulsive shadow of the gothic overlooks and obscures what may be most feared: the capabilities of these same canons' literary traditions to channel and represent violence on their own artistic and body-based terms.

Looking beyond the Gothic novel as a critical framework, this project uses more contemporary criticism on the topic of horror in fiction and in other media in order to map out its power as a critical framework. Todorov's *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975), a seminal work in the field of horror studies, offers an explanation for how the horror novel, in its images of the "fantastic," incites its readers into moments of contemplation that allow a space for the formation of new perspectives. Todorov's text

defines the "fantastic" as "that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (15). This hesitation avoids the worlds of the "uncanny," that which is extraordinary but explainable, and the "marvelous," that which is clearly based in the imagination and detached from reality, by presenting a view of the world that eludes at all turns the audience's attempts at rationalization. In the novels discussed in "Unsettling Racial Capitalism," the reality which is *unsettled* is one in which all the problems of racism from the period following WWII have been solved, resulting in a new America free from the issues of race and cured of inequality.

Equally significant to my reframing of horror is the concept of lingering, of remaining on those scenes and bodies which hegemony compels us to marginalize. Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero, in her book *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence* (2009), seeks just such a term for naming violent atrocities or mass terrorist attacks that claim counted lives in random selection. Rather than the terms "war" or "terror," which she sees as focused on the soldier or perpetrator of violence, Cavarero coins the neologism "horrorism," which she argues strikes to the heart of these moments of extreme violence: "In an act that strikes at the human qua human, the butchers embrace horror with conviction. As though the repugnance horror arouses were more productive than the strategic use of terror. Or as though extreme violence, directed at nullifying human beings even more than killing them, must rely on horror rather than terror" (9). For Cavarero, the power of horror, once dismissed for its "annihilation of the senses," lies in its ability to speak to the bodily and psychic damage of violence, as well as its affective nature as an emotional response that countenances a focus on the body of the individual victim of that same violence. As Cavarero explains, horror involves a lingering, a frozen state in the face of violence or bodily destruction. My project

similarly sees the power of horror—as utilized by these authors—for its ability to rupture but also to *remain* on the act of violence. In an era where public attention too often evades likewise moments of racial violence or inequality, Native American and African American authors utilize horror to linger on the effects of racial capitalism.

**Affective Horror**

Intersecting with this discussion of how Black and Native writers use horror as a critical framework is the work of critics studying the utilization of narrative modes to evoke emotions from their readers. These studies of affect uncover what occurs as a text induces horror within its reader, the space between the text and what Varma call the "laceration of the nerves." Cinema scholar Linda Williams offers a reading of the horror genre that, similar to Hume's Horror-Gothic assertion, recovers some of the genre's critical value based on its ability to evoke visceral reactions in its audiences. Unlike Hume, Williams seeks to unpack the response of horror to uncover its reliance on gender—in particular, the female body-as-spectacle. Building off of work by Carol Clover, Williams places horror alongside melodramas and pornography as examples of Clover calls "body genres,"[8] types of fiction whose excesses (violence, sex, and emotion respectively) lead the public to deem them as gross and cultural deficient. Instead, Williams contends that "by thinking comparatively about all three 'gross' and sensational film body genres, we might be able to get beyond the mere fact of sensation to explore its system and structure as well as its effect on the bodies of spectators" (3). This "effect" manipulates the viewer into mimicking the excess emotion, a manipulation that erases the preferred distance of intellectual critics and their criticism. Williams argues that breaking down this mirroring effect reveals a structure reliant on the

[8] In "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film" (1987), Clover labels horror and pornography as the prime "body genres"; in her article, Williams posits the melodrama, or "weepie," as a fitting third example.

"sexually saturated" female body, made into spectacle. This female (or feminized) body represents the excess emotion in play—whether it be a moan, scream, or cry. By examining the relationship between the viewer and this female body, Williams demonstrates how past writings on these "body genres" have offered simplistic explanations for those who take pleasure in watching them, whether it be the sadist male viewer or the masochistic female viewer. Instead, she describes this relationship as sadomasochistic, hinting at an oscillation that unfixes gender identities for both the screen subject and the viewer. The point is not to comment on the positivity brought about by this unfixing—to redeem the "body genre"—but rather to "see what this new fluidity and oscillation permits in the construction of feminine viewing pleasures once thought to not exist at all" (Williams 9). Williams's discussion of horror as a "body genre" provides a crucial language for how to understand the affect of horror on the viewer/reader. Perhaps as important, Williams insists that horror can be a useful lens through which to uncover larger societal constructions, such as gender or, in the case of the project in hand, race. As she concludes, these genres all act as "cultural forms of problem solving" (9). Williams reverberates the works being analyzed in "Unsettling Racial Capitalism" who use horror to navigate the "problem" of racial discrimination in the new racial capitalism by lingering on the experience of the racialized subject. By doing so, these artists show how racialized economic inequality exists as a "body problem." That is, these authors transform the normally abstracted terms of neoliberalism into felt experiential modes that can be interrupted and replaced with new subjective registers.

While other works have tracked the influence of power through the intimate spheres of the body and felt emotion, my study in horror does so in a way uniquely suited to the often-violent means through which racial capitalism manifests in the lives of the subjugated.

Conversely, Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* (2005) looks into how said "petty" emotions, including envy, irritation, paranoia, and "animatedness" (Ngai's own creation), when recreated in fiction, represent a sense of "obstructed agency" in the face of the paralyzing affects of late capitalism. As such, the project of Ngai's book closely reflects my own; in both, affect becomes a useful way of both describing and responding to the abstracting power of late capitalism. However, Ngai sees emotions such as horror as too strong and well defined to comment on late capital society in the way that her "ugly feelings" can. She explains that these "dysphoric affects often seem to be the psychic fuel on which capitalist society runs" (3). These emotions that are, for the individual, hard to place or explain in a definitive way, reflect the often plural and obscure ways by which power in a capitalist society moves. Ngai accurately pinpoints the importance in how ways of critiquing neoliberal hegemony must evolve in the way that power does, but her reliance on these "petty" or slight emotions overlooks the ubiquity of racial violence as a lived reality for some. As individuals belonging to communities of color know all too well, hegemony moves in ways not only abstruse but also visceral. To disregard horror as a viable method of critiquing the alienating affects of late capitalism fails to see how horror plays off of the violence always moving, both invisibly and visibly, through society and turns it against itself.

Posing such a reading of racial capitalism also doubles as a re-configuring of the influence of history in the contemporary now. In each chapter of this dissertation, horror attacks the burial of national historic violence whose disappearance serves the greater narrative of US progressive politics. This usage of horror in the critique of history and nationalism derives in part from Adam Lowenstein's *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (2005), which addresses cinematic

horror to consider how global film directors in the later twentieth century have used the genre to exercise national traumas endured from World War II and the Vietnam War. Engaging with filmmakers such as Wes Craven and David Cronenberg, Lowenstein explores how these films "access discourses of horror to confront the representation of historical trauma tied to the film's national and cultural context" (9). By this, Lowenstein means these films "shock" their audiences into confronting historical traumas without providing the "comforting myths of national identity" (147). Lowenstein's larger intent is to find a representation of trauma that disrupts what he sees as a troubling binary composed of a fragmented mosaic, a modernist "working-through" interspersed with realist acts of denial. The consequence of such a binary is the perpetuation of certain un-representable traumatic experiences, a result that guards the authenticity of trauma survivors' experience while barring any "possibility of that experience shaping our contemporary world" (5). In Lowenstein's chapter, " 'ONLY A MOVIE': Specters of Vietnam in Wes Craven's *Last House on the Left*," Craven's film is said to unconsciously work through the trauma of the Vietnam War through gritty and often gratuitous depictions of violence. Written to engage larger critical discussions of cinema, Lowenstein's monograph makes a crucial advance in the positing of horror as a critical discourse capable of critiquing larger hegemonic narratives of national identity seeking to obscure history.

**Experiencing Racial Capitalism**

In addition to nuancing and expanding the critical powers recognized in horror, "Unsettling" responds to scholarship seeking to complicate how we consider the racial and economic hegemony of the late twentieth/early twenty-first century. By using racial capitalism as the frame through which to induce a diagnostic of power, my dissertation echoes those before me

unwilling to allow the study of racism and history to dissolve into theoretical abstractions. A racial capitalist framework, in other words, is a map of power from the ground up, a tracing of subjugation that locates and interrupts the rationale of white hegemony.

This refusal of abstracting, racially obfuscating studies of power has roots in Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983). *Black Marxism*'s critique of Marxism centers on its inability to account for the pivotal role of race in the emergence and expansion of capitalism. Robinson's consideration of political economy hinges on a reading of history that emphasizes experience and what actually occurred over agreed upon narratives serving to support Westnocentricism. In constructing a history of the Black Radical tradition removed from Euro-centric frameworks, Robinson explains, "Expropriation, impoverishment, alienation, and the formations of class consciousness and expression will be treated not as abstractions or the residual effects of a system of production but as living categories" (29). Looking past what he refers to as "ideological mists" and "historical simplifications," Robinson engages with more nuanced accounts of social conditions more capable of registering the at times intricate way that racialism impacts ideology and political economics.

In taking Robinson's critical methodology into account, I place myself within a lineage of critics not content with crafting critiques of neoliberalism writ large; rather, just as these scholars—Robinson, Melamed, Lisa Lowe,[9] and Felice Blake,[10] to name a few—have made pains to express, to write about power in the contemporary moment is to write about how a variety of complex racial and socio-economic forces impact our everyday experience

[9] See Lisa Lowe. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Duke University Press, 2015.
[10] See Felice Blake. "Global Mass Violence: Examining Racial and Gendered Violence in the Twilight of Multiculturalism, Ethnic and Racial Studies," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 40, no. 14, 2017, pp. 2615-2633.

in very unique ways and to different purposes. Just as these scholars have, from their unique intellectual perspectives, demonstrated, critiquing neoliberal hegemony necessitates looking beyond simple economic frameworks and market abstractions. The turn to frameworks such as critical race, gender, feminist, and disability studies encourages a critique of neoliberalism that avoids the at times over-generalizing theory of authors such as David Harvey while also re-centering marginalized communities in the discussion of systems of inequality. Tanja Aho renders the danger of Harvey-esque, neoliberal-centric criticism as such: "what is claimed to have been newly marketized under neoliberalism, and how democracy has supposedly been de-politicized in order to be economized, reproduces dichotomies that have been foundational for racial capitalism's dominance—such as the separation of the political and economic, the public and the private" (Aho). Aho, relying on readings of Melamed's own work, suggests a crip of color materialist reading that challenges the rationality of neoliberalism with its focus on "structures of exclusion, dispossession, and death, and their concomitant ideas of human worth, vis-à-vis delegitimating assignments of intensity, instability, and irrationality" (Aho). Aho's use of rationality is key here, for how it echoes both Melamed's own argument for how US hegemony shifted racial rationalities following WWII in order to support white supremacy and Robinson's conception of the terms of order. Like her crip of color materialist framework, my horror hermeneutics seek to irrationalize what neoliberalism has deemed rational in ways that challenge Western conceptions of humanity and difference.

**Methodology**

As a comparative ethnic project, this work explores the similarities and contrasts between these two canons as a way of bringing to light how both, within their own respective

intellectual traditions, continue to find breakthrough ways of representing experience and speaking truth to power. This is a call for a comparative ethnic framework that does away with overarching theories of criticism that collapse each canon into a broader term of "marginalized" or "disempowered."

To combat obliterating generalizations, this comparative framework relies on parallel notions of literary aesthetics as a stance to better understanding the collective struggle of non-European identities to attain equality. With its prospects grounded in unsettling, this project interrogates separate histories of discrimination to find common ground in how each canon speaks to the nationalist canon that has sought to render difference itself as a class rather than a coloring category. By seeing the patterns in fragmented national canons, by seeing each diverse and aggregate one as representing a unique experience of what is "America," this dissertation studies the many retreats inward in order to push onward. I call this framework a *parallel comparative* approach due to its insistence that matters of comparison should always remain cognizant of the differing ideological and cultural values that each emergent ethnic canon contains. A parallel comparative approach suggests that holding two different traditions apart and side-by-side upholds the intellectual agency of each ethnic canon while still benefiting from the broader, multi-cultural prospective that necessitates the comparative model. Native critic Greg Sarris, in *Keeping Slug Woman Alive: A Holistic Approach to Native American Literature (1993)*, illustrates the strengths of such an approach that points out the inherent divergences that arise whenever two cultural backgrounds are brought together.[11] This insight must be tribal as well as racial. To that end,

[11] Robert Allen Warrior represents another scholar who seeks a comparative framework that keeps separate cultural traditions and historical narratives in tact. In "*Lone Wolf* and Du Bois for a New Century: Intersections of Native American and African American Literatures" (2006), Warrior argues for the importance of a critical approach to comparing African American and Native American literature that keeps in mind the two very

I intend to rely on the critical traditions organic to each ethnic canon in order to analyze the African American and Native American texts discussed in my project. Aside from the critical strengths that such an approach provides, this framework embodies a larger political move from both complex communities to define their intellectual and cultural autonomy in the face of power.

Past comparative projects investigating the connection between the African American and Native American communities have, in one way or another, sought to focus on the points of contact between each population in the belief that such a history breeds deeper understanding of identity politics and future moves by the United States' government to police racial boundaries. These projects are fruitful for exactly these reasons, but their reliance on moments of historical overlap misses the opportunity to see how engaging with each history separately is equally as vital in deconstructing current notions of national and racial identity. William Loren Katz's *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage* (1986) attempts to uncover what he sees as a buried history of cooperation between American Indians and Black slaves. Apart from brief histories of both peoples, Katz's mainly emphasizes the figure of the "Black Indian," a mixed-raced subject that he locates in different historical moments of resistance to American imperialism. This racial inter-mixing, as well as other moments of alliance between Black and Native communities—e.g. the 1680 Pueblo Revolt where Black and Indian fighters fought together against Spanish rule in the American Southwest—demonstrates, for Katz, a complication of the history of slavery and systemic oppression that only looks at the two communities in relation to whiteness. By complicating this narrative,

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different histories and the divergent relationships of each community to whiteness. Warrior explains how directly overlapping the struggles of both communities on top of each other in an effort at direct comparison ignores the differing histories of each population, particularly in their relation to the US hegemony and their unique experience of discrimination.

Katz opens the door to future studies of how ethnic communities forge partnerships that allow them to circumscribe the need to appeal to the white population for help in achieving equality. While this argument is important, and Katz's text is often cited in later comparative histories of Black and Native communities, his framework influences future critics and historians to also approach these projects by focusing on the moments of contact between the two ethnic populations.[12]

Black and Native critics theorizing their respective literary aesthetics give key insight to the importance of taking each canon on its own critical grounds. Since the Native American Literary Renaissance that began in earnest with the publishing of N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* in 1968, Native critics have argued in various ways how best to approach the study of First Nations literature. Scholars such as Simon Ortiz,[13] Elizabeth Cook-Lynn[14] and Craig Womack, prominent members of a literary separatist movement in the field of Native Studies, have long held the opinion that tribal specific readings of texts by Native authors was the only way to ensure accurate analysis of the work while maintaining tribal sovereignty. Womack's *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (1999) remains an important influence for Native critics seeking to maintain a level of tribal intellectual autonomy. Womack makes the argument for indigenous tribes to

[12] Barbara Krauthamer's *Black Slaves, Indian Masters: Slavery, Emancipation, and Citizenship in the Native American South* (2013) exemplifies this influence through her emphasis on accounts of Choctaw and Chickasaw tribes who owned slaves. Krauthamer's primary goal is to break down the Black/white binary often associated with American chattel slavery. Most interestingly, Krauthamer traces the history of how emancipation forced a governmental decree that tribal nations release their Black slaves, an order that Native Americans saw as an infringement on their tribal sovereignty and a possible threat to their control over their own institutions (given the large number of Black individuals that would be made citizens in their communities). Once more, however, her study only offers the significance of both of these histories only as they come into contact with one another, the dangerous implication being that their histories are only as relevant as they are shared.

[13] See Simon Ortiz. "Towards a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism," *MELUS*, vol. 8, no. 2, *Ethnic Literature and Cultural Nationalism*, Summer 1981, pp. 7-12.

[14] See Elizabeth Cook-Lynn. "Who Stole Native American Studies?" *Wicazo Sa Review*, vol. 12, vo. 1, Spring 1997, pp. 9-28.

control their own "mental means of production"; for the Native scholar, this means allowing the specific tribal context of the work in question to dictate the critical framework through which the scholar reads. For Womack, this is the key to wresting control over the larger critical discussion of Native American literature away from the (white) Western academy.

Critical responses to Womack's book have, more often than not, come from non-Native scholars who cringe at the idea of any essential racialized identity in the fear that such an idealized view perpetuates colonial subjection that it purports to defy. Arnold Krupat, most prominently in his *Red Matters: Native American Studies* (2002) and Elvira Pulitano's *Toward a Native American Critical Theory* (2003) both offer counter frameworks that hope to blend the Native American canon into the Western's. Krupat's conception of three different frameworks to approaching Native literature—coined the "sovereign," "indigenous," and "cosmopolitan" approaches—makes the argument that analyzing literature through only one of these methods limits the possibilities of the text. While the first two center on issues of national identity and indigenous culture, Krupat's third approach, the "cosmopolitan" method, points to a desire to link the Native struggle for justice with other post-colonial discourses in order to produce a larger, blanket approach of ethnic literatures that favors accessibility over accuracy.

Pulitano follows in Krupat's footsteps by denouncing critics such as Womack and Paula Gunn Allen for their inability to notice how their calls for Native literary separatism mirror the stark binaries that colonialism relies on to maintain its power. Furthermore, Pulitano argues that since contact with the Western world, Native culture has undergone such close cultural contact with other cultures that a Native American critical approach not containing allusions to Western schools of thought would be shortsighted. What both of these

critics, Krupat and Pulitano, miss in their responses to thinkers such as Womack is the ability for Native American culture to evolve and permeate, borrow and transform, while still preserving tribal heritage. Womack himself posits the ability for Red to absorb White while still remaining Red. According to my own framework, to read Native conceptions of horror does not mean witnessing these writers subverting Western constructions of horror; rather it represents these authors tapping into a possible narrative strategy that, when put through their specific tribal and historical context, speaks best to the issues and reality that they wish to represent.

Debates amongst African American critics regarding the existence of a unique Black literary aesthetic have continued for far longer than that concerning Native literature—with a number of the larger contributions occurring in the first half of the twentieth century—and yet the conversations have mirrored each other in important ways. Of particular importance is the continued push from a collection of critics to insist that African American literary tradition, like the Native American tradition, was and always will be tied to the larger American canon because of its proximity. Since W.E.B. Du Bois's 1926 decree that it is "the bounden burden of black America to begin this great work of the creation of Beauty, of the preservation of Beauty, of the realization of Beauty" (22), African American critics have contested over the existence of a Black literary tradition outside of any larger, Western canon. Du Bois's concept of "Beauty" was the positive portrayal of African Americans in order to combat racist portrayals of Black characters that up to that moment had been prevalent. Later in that same year writers George Schuyler and Langston Hughes engaged in a public disagreement begun by Schuyler's "The Negro Art Hokum," an article that places emphasis on the "American" influence on Black artists as opposed to any racial aesthetic, a

term Schuyler saw as "the last stand of the old myth palmed off by Negrophobists… that there are 'fundamental, eternal, and inescapable differences' between white and black Americans" (26). Langston Hughes, in response, charts the specific aspects of Black culture and life that he views as integral to the Black artist: "his racial individuality, his heritage of rhythm and warmth, and his incongruous humor that so often, as in the Blues, becomes ironic laughter mixed with tears" (28). Along with these qualities, Hughes offers jazz as an essential element to the Black aesthetic for its ability to capture the gamut of African American life. Perhaps the most influential piece of Hughes's argument is its view that the Black aesthetic is shaped in part as a response to the experience of inequality at the hands of white America. Jazz, an element Hughes often wielded in his poetry, signals for the writer the "eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro Soul—the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world" (30). Hughes's championing of a unique Black tradition echoes the larger interests of my own methodology in its emphasis that the unique histories and cultural characteristic of a given ethnic community are key to the reading of these same communities' artistic output.

In the same way that Craig Womack sees cultural heritage as a major influence on how Native American literature should be understood, Houston A. Baker and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., two prominent contemporary African American literary critics, each make the case for key, defining features of Black culture that lead to a separate and unique Black literary tradition. The two critics base their theorizations on a similar frame of reference: the vernacular. Baker, in *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (1984), defines the blues as a "vernacular trope" that helps explain the uniqueness of Black expression. Looking past earlier attempts at defining Black literature based on a "peculiar subjectivity" located in the text, Baker contends that the blues, with its open, playful

structure and constant blending of other cultural forms, constitutes the "multiplex, enabling *script* in which Afro-American cultural discourse is inscribed" (4). Perhaps most significant to Baker is the blues' ability to adapt to changing conditions of oppression, a quality that allows for a constantly evolving manner of Black expression that is both familiar and never the same. Pushing forward with this "blues matrix" enables Baker to assert the importance of cultural and historical context in discussing African American literature.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., similarly, sets forth a theoretical framework for African American literature based on the African American folkloric symbol of the "Signifying monkey." Just as this folk lore character uses "double speak," or the treacherous pitfalls of language as signifier, in order to trick and humiliate the Lion, the Black vernacular practice of "Signifying" relies on a sort of verbal play that uses repetition with slight alterations. Gates locates this vernacular practice in both the oral and written African American traditions with a particular emphasis on how texts by Black authors interplay with one another via the usage of similar tropes with small changes. In laying out this larger network of tropes and meanings, Gates puts forth "how the black tradition [has] theorized about itself" (ix). One can hears echoes of Womack and the significance of the "intellectual means of production" in this sentiment of how Black literature itself contains the key from which to investigate the deeper meanings behind African American texts.

The similar shapes of both these critical debates demonstrate the scholarly anxiety that hovers over any criticism of the broader American canon. As more conservative voices in the "Culture Wars" illustrated in the 1970s and 1980s, to think of an ethnic canon as separate and significant for its own unique traditions and evolutions threatens the wider grip that such a national canon attempts to exercise over collective understandings of the

"American" identity. A parallel comparative approach, however, suggests that holding two different traditions apart *and* side-by-side upholds the intellectual agency of each ethnic canon while still benefiting from the broader, multi-cultural prospective that that makes the comparative model so appealing in the first place.

**Chapter Descriptions**

The organization of the dissertation looks past chronological or historical frameworks and instead relies on grouping the particular manifestations of hegemonic power encountered beginning in the second half of the twentieth century. The first three chapters follow authorial vantages on horror as a strategy to illuminate and disrupt the terms of order rationalized by racial capitalism in three separate arenas of experience: time, the body, and space.

A brief note on my archive: while my African American texts run the gamut from the early 1960s to the twenty-first century, one might rightly suggest that this project's Native American texts only really begin in the 1990s. In defense of this apparent gap of indigenous literature, I offer the following points: in choosing which texts to discuss, I emphasized the works that most strongly demonstrate the horror hermeneutics on which this project hinges. In doing so, I chose to eschew any traditional chronological order aside from my larger historic period of the late twentieth century. While I am interested in how these works respond in similar ways to a shared evolution of power, I am not invested in collecting and categorizing my archive in accordance to Westernized timelines that favor linearity. That being said, as my readings of these novels and their accompanying African American texts establish, to engage with contemporary Black and Native fiction is always to engage with history in some critical way. In other words, as these authors use horror to disrupt the ordered

terms of the new racial capitalism, they do so with respect to how the current racial hegemony exists as a product of prior systems of discrimination. In another way, the oral traditions from which both ethnic canons derive are by nature self-referential. Accordingly, though my Native American texts inhabit only a densely packed portion of the late twentieth century, the oeuvre of their horror historicism harkens back to earlier Native texts, from the violent pages of John Rollin Ridge's *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* (1854) to the stark realism and disturbing timbre of James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (1974) and the unsettling bodily violence at the heart of Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* (1988).

The first chapter, "Horror Historicism: Re-Configuring Dominant Time in *Kindred* and *Bone Game*," looks to how Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979) and Louis Owens' *Bone Game* (1994) use horror to rupture dominant temporal registers—what Mills refers to as *white time*. Both novels invoke horror-inducing images of violence and gore as they blur the lines between contemporary California and early-nineteenth century United States. Butler and Owens' novels utilize what I refer to as *horror historicisms*, historical projects that wield the visceral edge of horror as a way of animating time within the text; by doing so, these historical projects expose the white, Western temporal projects that confine parallel temporalities as anachronistic artifacts rather than vital and ongoing ways of experience. The horror historicisms of *Kindred* and *Bone Game* seek to rupture the power of hegemonic time in racial capitalism in an effort to seek new futures built on self-determination. In *Kindred*, Butler uses horror as a literal time travel device that allows her Black female protagonist to transport between 1976 Pasadena and the Antebellum South. By doing so, *Kindred* locates ties between the peculiar institution and contemporary Black life through the common thread of labor and capital. Avoiding the racializing register of *white time* that seeks to valorize

work while simultaneously perpetuating the economic gap between whiteness and people of color requires an ability to think and experience time outside the linear causality of Western historicism. Likewise, Owens' *Bone Game* adopts the skeleton of a horror serial killer narrative and repeated gruesome imagery in order to expose the lasting trace of attempted genocide in the California Mission system on current day indigenous populations. The novel's depiction of indigenous temporality based in land and the transmission of story, along with its use of horror as a disordering mechanism, leads to a radical historical project that sees past and present violence occurring simultaneously. By doing so, *Bone Game* makes crucial connections between Settler Colonialism and the new racial capitalism of the late twentieth century.

Following my discussion of horror and time, I turn to thoughts on racialization and the Black and Native body. More specifically, this second chapter, "Disfiguring Resistance: *Venus*, *Chancers*, and Body Horror," thinks of how body horror, a kind of horror aesthetic based on gruesome dismemberments of the bodily form, allows Black and Native artists to animate critiques of the objectifying and racializing visual grammar of the white gaze. The *disfiguring resistances* alluded to in the chapter title are instances in which bodily dismemberment becomes a critical tool through which to explore new ways of being outside of the visual. On a larger level, both texts challenge considerations of victimry by re-thinking what it means to represent fictive violence. I briefly discuss the history of the white gaze as a racializing and commoditizing process before turning to Suzan-Lori Parks' *Venus* (1990) and Gerald Vizenor's *Chancers* (2000), two experimental texts that mine the disturbing history of Black and Native medical dismemberment in order to craft stories built on the shocking power of body horror. *Venus* uses pseudo-scientific dissection in order to construct a critique

of Western historic and contemporary representations of the Black female body and sexuality. The titular character, based on real life figure Saartjie Baartman, undergoes a series of dismemberments, both at the linguistic and physical level; these bodily disfigurements destabilize Baartman as a knowable historic subject. In addition, Parks wields the disturbing element of body horror in order to disrupt the terms of order that is how we understand victimry and bodily violence: the more the text dissects the memory of the Venus, the harder it is to conceptualize her within a Western, racial capitalist framework. Vizenor's *Chancers*, similarly, uses images of body horror to subvert notions of indigenous identity reliant on bodily essentialisms. Commonly read more for its satiric comedy elements, *Chancers* continuously subjects its readers to scenes of torture and dismemberment—typically involving white college professors—that intend to recall the long history of Native scientific experimentation at the hands of Western academics. Like *Venus*, Vizenor's novel seeks to unbind Native ontology from the ocular-centrism of dominant racial logic; his disfiguring resistances suggest a form of self-identification non-reliant on the visual/textual registers of the state. The site of bodily destruction, for both authors, becomes the origin point for a way of being based in Black and Native knowledges and thereby, always in negotiation.

Building on these discussions of time and the body, this project's third chapter looks to the intersections between horror and space. More specifically, I trace what I call the *horror spatial imaginary* in a series of Black and Native works that use the rupturing power of horror to identify and ultimately break from the paralysis-inducing constriction of racialized space. Focusing on two state constructed sites, the Indian reservation and the inner-city ghetto, this chapter, "The Horror Spatial Imaginary: Black and Native Mappings of Racialized Space," posits that by emphasizing the nightmarish and monstrous nature of

racialized space, Black and Native authors illuminate how the mechanisms of racial capitalism manifest in the subject of color's experience of his or her surroundings. I engage in readings of two texts, Allison Adelle Hedge Coke's *Blood Run* (2006) and John Edgar Wideman's *Philadelphia Fire* (1990), for how both invoke horror as a way of animating the construction of racialized space by the state. Hedge Coke's intense and disturbing poetic pieces describing Western development of the sacred burial site known as Blood Run mark how state-backed geographies seek to alienate and control Native relationships to land. *Philadelphia Fire*, in turn, constructs a version of Philadelphia that resembles a rotting corpse and yearns to devour the Black community that populates it. Consequently, Wideman offers a depiction of experiencing racialized space that resembles bodily consumption; by giving in to the racial narratives of Blackness in the inner-city ghetto, protagonist Cudjoe experiences a crisis in subjectivity that matches the decay that surrounds him. Following these readings, I discuss two films, Chris Eyre's *Skins* (2002) and Ernest R. Dickerson's *Juice* (1993), for how they utilize cinematic horror tropes such as shadows and shocking violence in order to construct narratives of Black and Native resistance to dominant space. The horror working in each of these films serves to push the audience to new considerations of space outside of the state-manipulated definitions of the "rez" or the "ghetto"; instead, *Skins* and *Juice* envision an experience of space based in afro-diasporic and Native knowledge that hinges on community and self-determination.

The final chapter discusses how this conceptualization of horror as a hermeneutic for rupturing dominant racial logic sets the stage for emergent forms of radicalism. Entitled "Breaking Down the Door: Black and Red Horror Radicalism," this closing chapter looks at violent Black and Native narratives of radicalism for how they fuse the horror of violence

with depictions of resistance to racial capitalism. What, in other words, can the rupturing of racial capitlaism's terms of order tell us about how to re-think narratives of violent radicalism? Using close readings of Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer* (1996) and Haile Gerima's 1979 film *Bush Mama*, this final section examines the use of horrific radical violence as a critical methodology with which to break from racialized subjectivity. For both works, visions of violent rebellion become the way to escape the foreclosing antagonism of Blackness/Indigeneity and the state. In addition, the chaotic nature of horror allows us to re-evaluate both texts for how they hinge on futurity as opposed to gory annihilation. Alexie's novel invokes the "slasher" cinematic genre as it depicts a series of bloody murders and their effects on a racially divided Seattle. I focus my readings on central indigenous character John Smith's radicalization, which culminates in his kidnapping and mutilation of a white retired police officer and Smith's subsequent suicide by leaping off of a skyscraper. When examining this arch through the disordered and hesitance-inducing lens of horror, Smith's radicalization reads as a navigation of indigenous identity in the face of dominant representations of Native American culture. Smith's "death" represents the formation of an emergent radical Native subjectivity unrecognizable to power and capable of joining new communities beyond the reach of racial capitalism. Gerima's film also adopts horror tropes as it presents the radicalization of protagonist Dorothy in 1970s Los Angeles. *Bush Mama*'s continuous efforts to unsettle and disturb its viewers produce a cinematic space that unmoors the visual signifiers of social realism. As the film lurches toward the *fantastique* realm of horror, its representation of radical resistance—climaxing with Dorothy's killing of a police officer attempting to rape her daughter—comes to symbolize its main character's formation of a Black radical subjectivity. In Gerima's film, as with Alexie's novel, what appears to be

death or incarceration instead gives way to new possibilities of self-determination in the face of dominant racial logic. As a result, both texts demonstrate how horror allows Black and Native artists to overturn the narrative of victimry by granting them new possibilities of resistance outside of the master/slave dialectic.

My conclusion begins with a reiteration of my dissertation's main argument—that Black and Native artists use horror to disrupt the terms of order dictated by racial capitalism beginning in the late twentieth century—and a reassertion of the significance behind my parallel comparative methodology before looking forward to what a horror hermeneutic means for the future of scholarship on race and literature. I call for a reconsideration of the normative terms through which we come to understand the workings of power and subjugation, concepts born from Western intellectual discourse that ignores the material and historical impact of racist ideology. A critical framework that focuses on horror invokes a new reading practice that dismantles the reliance on Western thought in discussions of power and resistance.

**Conclusion**

Using Black and Native fiction as case studies for identifying hermeneutics of horror explicates the socio-economic structure of the United States following World War II and the decades leading into the twenty-first century. Late capitalism's reliance on invisible and far-reaching grids of power necessitates reading practices capable not only of registering those mechanisms of control, but also finding ways to overturn them. "Unsettling Racial Capitalism" stakes that possibility in the Black and Native fiction that dares us to turn away from the page or screen, scenes that seek to disturb even as they empower. Taken together, these works find a possible future in the chaos of incoherence, in the distance between the

subject and the abject. By choosing to stay our gaze onto these unsettling works, we engage in a crucial political project endeavoring to overturn the underpinnings of power.

## CHAPTER ONE:
## HORROR HISTORICISM: RE-CONFIGURING DOMINANT TIME IN *KINDRED* AND *BONE GAME*

"I see, I saw, I'm the future, the past, I'm me, I'm y'all
I'm the enemy, friend, and the law
The beginner then end-all"

– Freestyle Fellowship, "Inner City Boundaries"

"Erasure is a bitch, isn't it?"

– Deborah Miranda, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*

### Introduction

Part of the state's recalibration of racial logic in the late twentieth century meant an effort to re-order the narrative of American history and, consequently, police individuals' experience of time, all in the name of perpetuating white supremacy under the new terms of "racial progress." The wheels of this post WWII racial order, otherwise known as the new racial capitalism, turned to the same rhythm of older systems of discrimination while thriving off of the imposed temporal distance between past racisms and the present—a constant invocation of "that was then; this is now." The "now" of the post WWII racial order represents what Anne Allison and Charles Piot refer to as a "neoliberal presentism" in which "attachments to the present have intensified. Embedded in rhythms of truncated work, interrupted life cycles, and the arrival of foreign migrants or military incursions, imaginings are often radically presentist, collapsed or imploded into the immediacy of survival (especially in today's global peripheries and margins)" (4). Temporal coevalness under this regime of power marginalizes other cultures' temporal philosophies, thereby regulating communities of color as inconsequential to the gears of history and incapable of sustainable change in the future. That is, to be racialized under the logic of the new racial capitalism means to be enfolded into a dominant temporality whose very structure exists as a testament to hegemony. Breaking from

this temporal dominance requires a rupturing force, a chaotic agent capable of disordering both homogenized time and the allegiance to the present in favor of new radical temporalities informed by non-Western knowledge.

This chapter seeks such radicalized Black and Native temporalities through the power of horror as a form of remembering and as a way of opening up new avenues of experiencing time. Rather than submit to the "neoliberal presentism" that emphasizes *surivival now*, the authors of this chapter use horror to explode the present and, consequently, map out connections to the past and new roads for the future. This concept of a "horror time" takes seriously the sensorial-rupturing moment of horror as the opening of a space in which multiple temporalities become a distinct possibility. The texts discussed in this chapter seek out the moment when a subject breaks from a homogenized narrative of history in favor for a culturally specific temporality that promotes self-determination. This act of temporal fragmentation—the shattering of an experience of time set in place by hegemony as a fore-gone, natural conclusion—materializes through moments of textual horror, instances of violent deconstruction and revulsion. The sudden breaks from a present to a forgotten past, a temporal space supposedly far removed from the contemporary surroundings that the characters in these texts find themselves, represent a horror re-imagining of how to approach historic violence inflicted upon people of color. These time breaks become *horror historicisms*, historical projects that wield the visceral edge of horror as a way of animating time within the text; by doing so, these historical projects expose white, Western temporal philosophy that confines parallel temporalities as anachronistic artifacts rather than vital and ongoing ways of experience.

The novels of this chapter contain African American and Native American depictions of radical afro-diasporic and indigenous temporalities. The epigraphs of this first chapter originate from disparate sources and, yet, speak to just such a resistance to the homogenization of time that informs Black and Native horror historicisms. The first, from hip hop group Freestyle Fellowship's "Inner City Boundaries," references the time-bending abilities of the storyteller speaking from the center of the *rap cypher* while simultaneously existing outside of the flow of dominant time. The speaker rhymes from the present and past while hopping from one subjectivity to the next—"I'm me, I'm y'all" (Freestyle Fellowship)—while all the while subverting structural terms meant to constrict and police identity—"enemy, friend, and the law" (Freestyle Fellowship). The rhymer finds self-determination in his rejection of a temporal order seeking to regulate him to a "me" of the present. Likewise, Debra Miranda's somewhat flippant remark, taken from her *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, about Western erasure of indigenous tribes and culture denigrates the genocidal-objectives of Settler Colonialism by speaking from outside of its purview. That is, in order to speak of "Erasure" at all, Miranda declares herself as a Native subject impervious to its obliterating force. The question tag at the end of the sentence—"isn't it?"—furthers this resistance by both subjecting "Erasure" to interrogation and implying that Miranda is speaking as one Native person to another similarly familiar with the experience of colonial ideology. Both Freestyle Fellowship and Miranda communicate from a temporal stance outside of the ordered terms of power, a location deemed an ahistorical elsewhere by dominance and thus irrelevant to the national narrative of capitalist progress. These radical temporal positions allow both speakers to register plural temporalities, which, in turn, allow them to develop new subjectivities beyond the realm of power.

This chapter focuses on two novels whose deployments of *horror historicism* similarly allow them to subvert dominant temporality in favor of new ways of experiencing time based in their respective cultural traditions: Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979) and Louis Owens' *Bone Game* (1994). Both novels hold a similar objective: to construct threads between early nineteenth century iterations of Settler Colonialism and American slavery and late twentieth century Black and Native experience. At stake for both Butler and Owens is an ability to comprehend history in a manner that promotes self-determination in the face of a racial capitalism seeking to police identity categories and erase the historic continuity of white supremacy. Accordingly, *Kindred* and *Bone Game* use horror as a fragmenting force that breaks up the continuity of dominant history and the experience of time used to curtail social justice movements. Finding congruities in historic violence with their contemporary moment, the protagonists of these novels critique dominant temporal practices used to subjugate people of color while at the same time instilling narratives of possible healing through the re-alignment with alternative temporalities outside of what Mills refers to as *white time*. Both of these novels include protagonists who experience shifts in time that transport them to historic locations infamous for their racial violence. *Kindred*'s Dana, an African American woman from 1976 Southern California, finds herself in Antebellum Maryland and the peculiar institution of chattel slavery; Cole McCurtain, *Bone Game*'s main character, travels through time and subjectivities from 1812 Santa Cruz, often times living through both the past and his present—1993—simultaneously. But neither novel holds time travel as an abstract jump from one timeline to the next; rather, *Kindred* and *Bone Game* imbue their temporal leaps with the force of violence, both historic and current. This

partnering of time travel and violence results in narratives that paint temporal breaks as violent ones.

**Removing the Lock from the Door**

To help explain the necessity for horror historicism, we must examine how the state buries the horrors of the past in plain sight. The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles' *Becoming Los Angeles* exhibit includes an area devoted to the Spanish Mission era. As the beginning of Los Angeles' "becoming," this era of colonization sets the foundation for the city's—not to mention the state of California's—troubling balance between history and the present. One piece of this large exhibit includes a mission locking mechanism removed from its original door. The removal and subsequent exhibition of this mission lock represents Western historicism's efforts to soften the edges of historic violence in order to service a coeval, national narrative of progress. The lock hangs up in a glass case, accompanied by the following text:

> Franciscan missionaries initially used persuasion to bring Native Americans under their control, offering food, shelter and clothing to attract new converts. The missionaries then separated children from parents, locked young women away separately and required unrelenting hard work of the Native Americans. The most frequent form of resistance was to run away. Though thousands of neofitos (converts) fled the missions, only one in 24 successfully escaped confinement. Door Lock. Early 1800s. (Wall Text, "Door Lock (Early 1800s)

In multiple ways, this lock exhibit crystallizes the issues that arise in attempting to homogenize history as one shared temporal experience. That is, in wanting to build the

narrative of Los Angeles, the museum's exhibitors opt for a version of history that seeks to reconcile the state's continued celebration of California missions with their role in Native genocide. Part of these efforts to consolidate history derives from the exhibit's design. The lock's removal from the door in which it once functioned also serves to remove it from the reality of the violent acts that it made possible. It becomes an abstraction, a stand-in for the forced confinement and subsequent torture propagated upon Native peoples. And yet, by taking it from the actual missions, which continue to stand as educational centers and tourist attractions today, the lock also comes to serve as a vision of progress, a new future in which all doors to the missions are open, beckoning new visitors. The context offered by the accompanying description contributes to this show of progress by painting a blunted vision of mission history, one in which mothers and children were merely "separated" and the most frequent form of indigenous resistance was to "run away." Such soft language avoids the realities of sexual violence and attempted genocide, not to mention the long history of Native rebellions that arose in response to these violent acts.[1] These various elements work together to offer a vision of early Los Angeles that relies on the intervention and so-called "progressivism" of the West. In doing so, they congeal into a form of history that rejects the force of subjective memory and the experience of horror.

That an exhibit on the making of Los Angeles begins with an area devoted to the Spanish Mission era itself denotes a Eurocentric historicism that measures time in accordance to the movements and ideologies of Western civilization. In essence, Los Angeles' story

[1] See Molly Braun and Carl Waldman. "California Indian Uprisings," *Atlas of the North American Indian*, *3rd Edition*. Facts on File, 2009; Steven W. Hackel, "Sources of Rebellion: Indian Testimony and the Mission San Gabriel Uprising of 1785." *Ethnohistory*, vol. 50, no. 4, 2003, 643-669; Vincent Brook. "The *Ramona* Myth," *Land of Smoke and Mirrors: A Cultural History of Los Angeles*. Rutgers University Press, 2013. Two well-known examples of indigenous resistance to the *San Gabriel* mission specifically include an attack on the newly built mission in 1771 by surrounding Natives following the rape of an indigenous woman by Spanish soldiers and an unsuccessful 1785 rebellion led by Kumi-vit medicine woman Toypurina.

begins when missionaries set foot upon the continent and christen it the "new world." The entire *Becoming Los Angeles* exhibit underscores this reliance on a linear narrative beginning with the onset of Western modernity by giving the exhibit a literal path. As a way of visualizing the "flow of history," the museum hangs several parallel lines above the museum hall that travel alongside one another from one historical area of Los Angeles' story to the next. In order to accentuate specific moments that demonstrate the greatest impact on the city's history, the lines converge and flow towards the case of certain artifacts. The first such artifact to receive such historical relevance is a Spanish cross with the following description above it: "1769. The Spanish mission system changed the Native Californians way of life" (*Becoming Los Angeles*). It is worthwhile to note that unlike this "earth-shattering" symbol of contact, the mission lock receives no such attention. By accentuating specific points of this map as more influential than others, the exhibit directs its visitors towards an understanding of history more apt to look past the racial violence and attempted genocide that indisputably took place in and helped construct what we consider Los Angeles.[2]

This linear historical narrative denotes a Western historicism in which, according to Dipesh Chakrabarty, "the assumed universal applicability of its method entails the further assumption that it is always possible to assign people, places, and objects to a naturally existing, continuous flow of historical time" (74). Furthermore, "It does not matter if these [colonized] areas were inhabited by peoples such as the Hawaiians or the Hindus who, some would say, did not have a sense of 'chronological history'—as distinct from other forms of memories and understandings of historicity—before European arrival" (Chakrabarty 74). At

[2] Likewise, the museum includes only one brief photograph of a Japanese American family to represent the city's part in Japanese internment during World War II. Despite briefly mentioning the internment of Japanese families, the photo's text also highlights the ability for Japanese men to enlist in the army – a fact that avoids the complex narratives of nationalism and subjugation as illustrated in such texts as John Okada's *No-No Boy* (1957).

the base of these temporal marginalizations, in which non-European people are enveloped into a homogenous understanding of world history, lies a problematic belief [3] in the naturalization of time: "the code of the secular calendar that frames historical explanations has this claim built into it: that independent of culture or consciousness, people exist in historical time" (Chakrabarty 74). Similarly, The *Becoming Los Angeles* exhibit's collection of artifacts from various cultures, including some indigenous objects, all work towards a larger story of Los Angeles as cosmopolitan space, a city made up of various cultural pieces all working towards the singular goal of expansionism. To question the naturalization of time would be to throw the entire exhibit out of order.

*Becoming Los Angeles* represents a larger Western historic project that seeks to recognize marginalized peoples only as they come to serve in the larger narrative of white/Euro-American history. Los Angeles becomes a story of national progress, of Western expansionism told through local happenings. Collapsing all events into one nationalized timeline, however, foregoes the existence of a memory capable of critiquing the state for the violent acts that made its expansion possible in the first place. Glen Sean Coulthard, in writing on relations between indigenous tribes and the Canadian government, describes this project thusly: "The last thirty years of negotiating and attaining forms of recognition—whether it is through the state land claims process, through the state self-government process, or through constitutional recognition—have shaped indigenous identities in ways that have really blunted the sharp edges of colonialism and made it endurable" (Coulthard). Making

[3] See Norbert Elias. *Time: An Essay. Translated by Edmund Jephcott.* Blackwell, 1992. Elias' *Time: An Essay* argues against this notion of naturalized time by sketching the process by which social groups construct unique experiences of temporality. Elias explains that time "is not simply an 'idea' that appears from nowhere in the heads of individuals. It is also a social institution varying with the state of social development. In growing up, the individual learns to understand the time signals customary in his society and to regulate his behavior by them" (13).

some version of indigenous disenfranchisement by the mission system transparent (i.e. placed on display in a major history museum) makes the case for a national sense of progress by recognition. This homogenous grasp of history as one arch moving towards the ultimate goal of the capitalist nation-state leaves consequently marginalizes non-Western cultures as part of the past. As historian Walter Johnson explains, "Concepts like primitiveness, backwardness, and underdevelopment rank areas and peoples of the world on a seemingly naturalized timeline—their 'present' is our 'past'—and reframe the grubby real-time politics of colonial domination and exploitation as part of an orderly natural process of evolution toward modernity" (149). Placing these non-Western peoples in categories of antiquity leads to the ready assumption of forward progress by modern Western culture.

The exhibit also reconciles racial violence by placing it into the context of necessary labor. In such instances, the violence of history becomes the price for civilization. To locate this particular softening of colonial history, one need look no further than the objects placed directly alongside the mission lock, labeled thusly: *Adobe* brick (Early 1800s), Roof tile (Early 1800s), Trowel (Mid 1800s), and *Adobe* brick mold (Late 1800s). These objects of forced indigenous labor serve to redirect the potential violent history offered by the lock into a story of development. Their description reads:

> Native California converts were the main source of labor for the missions and built *Mision San Gabriel Arcangel*. They were engaged in carpentry, wine and soap making, and various arts and crafts production. Once converted, they were not free to leave. Confined to the mission, traditional social customs, trade and care of the land changed. The land outside of the missions, once carefully maintained, reverted to wilderness. (Wall Text. "*Adobe* brick (Early

1800s). Roof tile (Early 1800s). Trowel (Mid 1800s). *Adobe* brick mold (Late 1800s)

These adjacent artifacts mitigate the suspected violence of the lock by crafting a narrative of development and capitalist progress, one marked by organized labor. While the description does make mention of the change to landscape that occurs as a result of the mission Indians' forced confinement—a change that underscores a colonial narrative of structured progress in the face of wild and *other*-ed incivility—its placement alongside the lock underlines the ends of these acts of imprisonment as opposed to the means. In other words, the crafted products act as a response to the lock in that they represent the Indians' "contributions" to Los Angeles' "becoming." Whatever indigenous confinement was enacted in part so that these products could be made, products that in turn helped to contrast the missions that came to symbolize Western progress upon the wilderness of pre-contact California.

Furthermore, showcasing these objects imparts another kind of break between the indigenous crafts showcased at the exhibits opening—crafts set as "pre-history" and outside of the temporal flow that drives the rest of the rooms—and a modernized form of labor that helps build the progressive narrative of the city-state. The mission objects—the brick and its mold, the tile, and the trowel—are included in the exhibition's larger historical narrative due to their use-value as building blocks of Southern California's later, more extensive development. The pre-contact crafts stand outside of the main rooms because of their apparent lack of purpose in helping to build the infrastructure of Los Angeles. Such artifacts float outside of the main historical halls in part due to their inability to mesh with the homogenous timeline at work in the rest of the exhibits. They become symbols of a "precapitalist" labor that "speaks of a particular relationship to capital marked by the tension

of difference in the horizons of time. The 'precapitalist,' on the basis of this argument, can only be imagined as something that exists within the temporal horizon of capital and that at the same time disrupts the continuity of this time by suggesting another time that is not on the same, secular, homogenous calendar" (Chakrabarty 93). Additionally, these objects of "precapitalist" labor hint at "another time that, theoretically, could be entirely immeasurable in terms of the units of the godless, spiritless time of what we call 'history'" (Chakrabarty 93). The artifacts placed next to the mission lock, on the other hand, fall rightly into the post-contact version of labor that reinforces the connection between capital and progress.

My critique of the lock. its adjacent artifacts, and their collective place in the *Becoming Los Angeles* exhibit serves as an illustration of a larger incentive on the part of power to use its control over the "flow of time" as a way of domineering the narrative of race. By enveloping all subjects underneath one universal experience of time, power allows itself the opportunity to shape narratives built to perpetuate the supremacy of Western capital. The lock and its neighboring exhibits give one a window into the larger issue of how history comes to be understood on a wider, normative scale, one determined by hegemony and, therefore, meant to support the spread of nationalist progress. In the wake of this dominant narrative, racial identities become tied to the construction of the nation-state. Dominant time, in other words, requires static categories in order to support its narrative's coherence.

**Horror Historicism**

Horror historicisms operate separate from and in subversion to dominant time—what Charles Mills refers to as the *white temporal imaginary*, a term in part influenced by George Lipsitz's *white spatial imaginary*. For Lipsitz, the *white spatial imaginary* represents a hegemonic

control over the discourse of space that manifested through *de facto* and *de jure* segregation, housing markets, and other legislative tactics. Similarly, Mills envisions the *white temporal imaginary* as a discursive movement to enfold all communities under the Western historic project, a vision of time that seeks to displace notions of racial inequality by containing all of its subjects under a supposed non-racial temporality far removed from injustices of the distant past.

The authors of this chapter turn to horror in part because of the way it breaks and plays with time in order to unsettle its fictional realities and disturb its audiences. To discuss the *time* of horror means to discuss the way it surprises or fragments, therefore leaving open the space in which to re-navigate ones understanding of temporality outside of dominance. In each of these *horror historicisms*, horror disrupts homogenous *white* time via unsuspecting jumps or cuts; in addition, these temporal fragments fuse together with violent imagery that does away with the specter of historic violence in favor of a more active, always already there violence influencing both past and present. Linda Williams' theorizing of this horror temporality, from her groundbreaking "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess," locates the *time* of horror along a continuum of other body genres that, through their various tropes, repeat certain Freudian "original fantasies." Pornography, for example, posits, "a fantasy of desire coming from within the subject and from without. Non-sadomasochistic pornography attempts to posit the utopian fantasy of perfect temporal coincidence: a subject and object (or seducer and seduced) who meet one another 'on time!' and 'now!' in shared moments of mutual pleasure that it is the special challenge of the genre to portray" (Williams 11). Pornography's temporal dimension allows for its bodily impact. Horror, in much the same way, repeatedly acts out the original fantasy of castration, a sudden revelation of sexual

difference for which the subject is unprepared. Williams threads this connection between horror and castration by discussing the slasher film genre's repeating trope of masked killers murdering female victims at the moment of expected sexual encounters: "Some of the most violent and terrifying moments of the horror film genre occur in moments when the female victim meets the psycho-killer-monster unexpectedly, before she is ready. The female victims who are not ready for the attack die" (11). This surprising turn from expected sexual acts to violence, Williams reasons, forms a "symbolic castration" that "functions as a kind of punishment for ill-timed exhibition of sexual desire" (11). The "not ready!" dimension of horror as a genre contributes to one of its most popular tropes: the jump scare. This staging of suddenness works as a discomforting mechanism, disallowing the audience from the notion that anywhere in the film is safe. On a theoretical level, this unsettling technique plays out as a sudden recognition: "the key to the fantasy is timing—the way the knowledge of sexual difference too suddenly overtakes both characters and viewers, offering a knowledge for which we are never prepared" (12).

Williams' focus on timing as a key characteristic of horror's temporality gives us a frame through which to observe how Black and Native art deploy *horror historicism*. That is, much like how the surprised lovers of Williams' slasher films find themselves unprepared for the sudden appearance of masked murderer from the bushes, the Black and Native characters in this chapter's texts find themselves caught off guard by unexpected shifts in time; these abrupt temporal breaks imprint upon the subject the knowledge that the temporality with which dominance has presented them is in fact a construct. These horror historicisms are radical in nature because of their ability to disorder and reconfigure dominant temporal frameworks. To wit, horror's "not ready!" mirrors Walter Benjamin's "now-time." "Now-

time*"* refers to the revolutionary moment of rupture that Benjamin argues breaks up the homogeneity of the present. This rupture, he argues, contains a "radical orientation towards the past" (Benjamin 263), a recognition of the injustices of the present brought on by past oppression. Like "now-time," horror historicism seeks to break from temporal homogeneity by radically re-positioning past and present. This unprepared recognition's impact is two-fold: it impresses upon the subject the horror of being enveloped in a hegemonic temporality that works to alienate communities of color while suppressing the weight of historic racial violence on contemporary society while simultaneously awakening them to the fact of multiple temporalities, a plurality of ways to understand time. Horror both makes legible and subverts power's attempts to control time as a white, capitalist construct that oversees narratives of racial justice. The sudden knowledge of this temporal subjugation consequently leaves a space of renegotiation, where the subject contemplates time and the meaning of history outside of the white temporal imaginary.

To be clear, I use the term horror historicism as means of describing the similar way in which Black and Native fiction utilize horror to construct their counter-histories and unsettle the steady categories policed by racial capitalism. By doing so, I do not mean to argue that these projects are always identical to one another. Furthermore, this chapter does not aim to place horror as the defining feature through which Black and Native artists connect to the past or navigate the present. Instead, horror becomes the vehicle through which authors such as Butler and Owens can craft their complex critiques and responses to the stifling power of dominant racial ideology as temporally justified and historically necessary. Put another way, horror historicisms help reveal the mechanisms beyond temporal subjugation of people of color while simultaneously rupturing these same mechanisms,

leaving space for new configurations of time. Recognizing the means of temporal subjugation horrifies even as it empowers and presents new modes of resistance. And as we will see in both *Kindred* and *Bone Game*, resistance means pulling from Black and Native cultural traditions in order to envision a future marked by self-determination.

Arguing for how these Black and Native authors subvert temporal subjugation means explaining how the past remains locked in step with the present. That is, for Butler and Owens both, breaking through the monolithic force of *white time* requires illustrating how marginalized peoples relegated to the doldrums of dominant history instead survive and thrive under different conceptions of time. Such an idea echoes Henri Bergson, whose theory of *duration* broke from other conceptualizations of time in the early twentieth century for how it envisioned the relationship between past and present. Clocks, Bergson argues, only measure simultaneities: specific points in time that correlate to the movement of the clock hands at certain positions on its face. The nature of time, per Bergson, functions more as a continuous duration, a temporal experience that supersedes the abilities of the clock. Thinking of duration in this way changes how one prescribes the significance and overall nature of memory. Bergson writes:

> Memory, as we have tried to prove, is not a faculty of putting away recollections in a drawer or of inscribing them in a register. There is no register, no drawer; there is not even, properly speaking, a faculty, for a faculty works intermittently, when it will or when it can, whilst the piling up of the past is preserved by itself, automatically. In its entirety, probably, it follows us at every instant; all that we have felt, thought, and willed from our earliest infancy is there, leaning over the present that is about to join it,

> pressing against the portals of consciousness that would fain leave it outside. ("The Endurance of Life" 173)

Bergson's vision of memory remains locked in with the present. Rather than think of time as one chain that counts from one link to the next, leaving parts behind as it goes, he presents a temporal theory that refuses the separation of past and the contemporaneous moment. Bliss Cua Lim clarifies Bergson's duration as such: "The Bergonsian survival of the past requires that we desist from our habit of 'thinking in terms of the present.' We believe that the present is all that exists and that the past has elapsed and is gone. Resisting such presentism, Bergson insists that the past *is*: it has not elapsed; it is not over with. Rather it exists alongside the present as the latter's absolute condition for existing" (15). Duration gives us a new understanding of the present as always dependent on the past, an active sense of memory that continues to shape current experience. Lim makes the important step of connecting Bergson's ontological duration with Chakrabarty's ontological and historical argument regarding how power regulates certain cultures to the distant past. She posits, "Bergsonism's paradoxical view of temporality—'the past is contemporaneous with the present it has been'—resonates with Chakrabarty's insistence that older modes of being are never entirely surmounted" (15). Both Bergson and Chakrabarty, in other words, re-think the present as a collection of on-going temporalities as opposed to one singular experience. Horror historicism, as I define it, becomes a narrative tool by which to demonstrate duration. Put another way, the horror deployed in *Kindred* and *Bone Game* breaks up the singular present of *white time* in order to represent how the supposedly anachronistic Black or Native past is in fact very much active in the present and capable of new possibilities.

In addition to its connection with duration, Horror's accentuation of experience as a way of breaking open temporal discourse resonates with Bergson's belief of written language's inability to accurately translate time:

> In short, the word with well-defined outlines, the rough and ready word, which stores up the stable, common, and consequently impersonal element in the impressions of mankind, overwhelms or at least covers over the delicate and fugitive impressions of our individual consciousness. To maintain the struggle on equal terms, the latter ought to express themselves in precise words; but these words, as soon as they were formed, would turn against the sensation which gave birth to them, and, invented to show that the sensation is unstable, they would impose on it their own stability. ("The Idea of Duration" 74)

Man-made constructs used to measure time fail to account for the "unstable" nature of duration. Applying language to sensation, in other words, can only reflect a subject's desire to bring those same sensations to heel. The horror historicisms discussed in this chapter lean into the instability of duration as a viable path away from dominant temporality. To that point, the characters at the center of these texts shirk textual histories in favor of oral and sensorial modes of memory.[4] By inviting readings of their narratives that stretch beyond the scope of the sign, *Kindred* and *Bone Game* offer new spaces of possibility for their audiences. If the nature of horror, per Williams, is that it always arrives *prior to*, then the horror deployed by Butler and Owens purposefully leaves their readers unsettled and,

[4] See Diana Taylor. T*he Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Duke University Press, 2003. Taylor's text emboldens the power of the body to construct textual meaning in and of itself by tracing two at times interweaving modes of memory: archive and repertoire. The horror historicisms of this chapter underscore the at times imperfect nature of archival histories in capturing historic violence while offering representations of performance as ways to convey that same trauma by more corporeal means.

therefore, disjointed from the stable, chronologically coherent narrative rested in the "rough and ready word."

Throughout this chapter, I make reference to the Western historicism that these Black and Native authors respond to as *linear*. I do so not to over simplify categories as Western/other or linear/cyclical, binaries that Native American studies scholars such as Mark Rifkin[5] and Scott Richard Lyons[6] have critiqued in the past as re-affirming colonial discourse of difference. This chapter does, however, mark the new racial capitalist paradigm as relying on a progressive national history that makes certain historical connections only when convenient to building a specific narrative of the United States. Terms such as *modernity* and *national memory* are suspect as they relate to one version of temporality that has real consequences for how subjects experience time in the present. Any reference to linearity made in this chapter, therefore, does so in reference to the ongoing efforts of post-war hegemony's efforts to constrict the United States' understanding of time and historic racial violence to a narrative that supports the principles of capitalist growth. Rifkin himself, as he complicates linearity's place as the hegemonic understanding of time, notes that scholars seeking to subvert linear time's importance to the twentieth century "posit an inherently shared frame of reference—'national belonging' or 'modernity'—in and through which these varied times can be brought into meaningful conceptual and causal relation. While displacing linearity as such, then, these accounts posit a particular formation that serves as the background for thinking processes of becoming" (43). It is exactly this "particular formation" that Butler and Owens' deployment of horror aims to upset, allowing both authors' narratives to re-negotiate time and history via their own cultural temporal traditions. These traditions

[5] See Mark Rifkin. *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*. Duke University Press, 2017.
[6] See Scott Richard Lyons. *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Ascent*. University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

find new ways of making connections between past and present that in turn affect the way the novels' Black and Native characters comprehend the passage of time.

### *Kindred*'s Horror Time Travel

Octavia Butler's *Kindred* tells the story of Dana, an African American woman who, through unknown forces, finds herself transported from her home that she shares with her white husband in 1976 Pasadena, CA to a plantation in Antebellum Maryland. As the novel progresses, discovers her familial ties to the plantation, mainly in the figures of Rufus, the young son of the plantation's owner who eventually inherits it, and Alice, an enslaved woman. These ties dictate when she transports from her present to the plantation: whenever Rufus believes he is near death, Dana flashes to Maryland in order to save him and ensure her own birth nearly two-hundred years in the future. The novel's opening pages take place directly following Dana's final trip back to 1976, which ends with the loss of her left arm. This prologue also sets up the novel's bigger inquiry into the connection between race, horror, and history. While recovering in the hospital, she and her husband begin to look backward to her brutal experiences as a slave on the Weylin plantation. At one point, Kevin mentions to her the difficulties police are facing trying to piece together the cause for her many gruesome injuries: "'They're sure I did it, but there are no witnesses, and you won't co-operate. Also, I don't think they can figure out how I could have hurt you… in the way you were hurt.'" (Butler 10). At face value, Kevin is discussing Dana's now amputated arm, which we later find out was stuck, through the process of time-travel, in her house's wall, the implication being that he is not capable of inflicting that level of bodily damage. However, Kevin's comment also touches on a subtle irony working through *Kindred* that Butler uses to great effect as a critique of liberal anti-racisms: that the racist discourse of present United

States is far more progressive and less violent than the brutality of the peculiar institution of slavery. The line hints at the existence of an older form of violence far gone from the more modern and progressive ideologies of 1976 California. Dana's missing arm and lash marks label her as both present in 1976 and out-of-time, removed from the supposedly "enlightened" politics of the late twentieth century. Through the eyes of the police—and her white husband—Dana's wounds are themselves archaic and out of step with their just and ordered present.

These assurances of the temporal distance between the source of Dana's injuries and 1976 California wither when confronted by the facts of Dana's memory. Following Kevin's comments, Dana meditates, "I closed my eyes again remembering the way I had been hurt—remembering the pain" (10). The short line embodies, in a way, *Kindred*'s larger thesis statement regarding the force of history and remembering: sensation possesses a critical power in the act of memory. Whereas Kevin seeks to remove himself from Dana's injuries through temporal distance, Dana has no such luxury. She cannot remove herself from her own experience; therefore, her current wounded state stands as a product of an ever-forming present, a continuous process of racial violence as constant as it is brutal. This subtle but crucial turn marks the importance of horror as a form of history. For while Butler's novel operates in part by mining the continued horror of Black experience of slavery—the ever-present threat of death, the brutality of whipping and other forms of inhumane torture, the constant lurking of sexual violence—its larger utilization of horror derives from the felt reaction itself. As such, Dana remembering the horror of her painful torture pulls her back to that experience just as it places her directly into her current, wounded body.

At issue for Kevin and Dana is a difference in the understanding of time. That is, Kevin—as well as the police attempting to piece together the events behind Dana's missing arm—demonstrates an understanding of time in line with Mills' theorization of the *white temporal imaginary*. For both parties, the novel's movements to 1815 Maryland accounts to a distant journey both in time and space. Consequently, the culture, and subsequent racist discourse, at play in 1815 becomes a new found danger that threatens the supposed racial progress of the book's present. Dana, on the other hand, continues to experience disturbing moments of temporal fluidity that finds her at ease in the every day workings of 1815, a horrific turn in its own right that dares to overlay both time periods as mirror versions of the same violent, racist institution. Significant in these overlays is Dana's reliance on affect, on the *sensation* of experience the alleged past, in order to measure the two time-lines' similarities. The convergence of both 1815 and 1976 as it pertains to Dana's subjective experience induces a critical bridging between to the two timelines that closes any attempted temporal distance through the lens of affective horror. The text signals Dana's growing ability to comprehend these temporal conflations by her heightened sensitivity to time as it pertains to racial discourse.

Kevin and Dana differing abilities to register slavery histories and their connections to contemporary iterations of capitalism derive in part from their capacity to find continuity in fragmentation. For Dana, this means coming to grips with the unique temporality of the African diaspora and the trauma of the Middle Passage. To be clear, my reading of *Kindred*'s horror historicism necessitates an understanding of the African diaspora in relation to time, as well as an explanation for how Dana's journey through time reflects a unique African diasporic *tradition*. Beginning perhaps most prominently with Paul Gilroy's *The Black*

*Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (1993), considerations of the African diaspora have taken on temporal as well as spatial dimensions. More specifically, scholars[7] have suggested a unique measurement or rhythmic quality to diasporic communities, what Gilroy refers to as "syncopated temporality—a different rhythm of living and being" (202). The temporal nature of diaspora, then, refers to a subjective position against the grain to the "empty, homogenous" time of historical nationalism, a type of history that Gilroy characterizes as linear. In linear nationalist time, "slavery and colonialism…make no substantial impact upon African tradition or the capacity of black intellectuals to align themselves to it" (190). Here, Gilroy is critiquing Afrocentrism's inversion of racist discourse that embeds naturalized dominant/submissive roles to particular social groups as an unchanging fact that stands outside the course of history. At stake for Gilroy is a re-imagining of *tradition* that speaks to the on-going Black cultural mutations of the present rather than stays locked in a nostalgic past. This notion of tradition concerns the "nameless, evasive, minimal qualities that make these disaporic conversations possible" (199). Tradition becomes the space of possibility through which these various disaporic communities find cause to speak to one another. For the sake of Butler's *Kindred*, Dana's own invocation of tradition becomes a way to re-connect with both her ancestors and her own identity as a contemporary African American woman. Her *horror historicisms*, her disjointed trips to the past that invokes critiques of the present day, allow her to reconnect to the "syncopated temporality" of diasporic time.

In *Kindred*, Dana's re-negotiation of her diasporic identity gains her the ability to *conflate* times in a way that Kevin never does. This act of temporal conflation echoes Laurel

[7] See also James Clifford. "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 9, no. 3, "Further Inflections: Toward Ethnographies of the Future," August 1994, pp. 302-338; and Homi Bhabha "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," *The Location of Culture*. Routeledge, 1994, pp. 139-170.

Recker's work on Aimé Césaire, who, Recker argues, "reconsiders how the long historical trajectory of capitalist modernity, and especially the defining commerce of the transatlantic slave trade, shaped modernist thought" (25) by collapsing past and present on top of one another. Césaire's own temporal conflations "[serve] as a means to preserve what would otherwise become 'lost' histories, lost amidst the confluence of commercial interaction that formed the U.S. South and the Caribbean alike" (Recker 26). Conflating time becomes a method of comprehending the globe-spanning power of capitalism throughout history via the "microcosmic scales" of the text. Like Césaire, Butler envisions Benjamin's "shock" that triggers a reconfiguration of past and present; however, as Recker explains, this "shock" for both Butler and Césaire derives from the conflation itself between "modernity and the trauma of the Middle Passage" (31). The "unprepared revelation" of horror time here becomes the "shock" of past and present collapsing onto one another, blurring the boundaries between historic periods in order to illuminate slavery's influence on Modernity.

Butler accomplishes these temporal conflations by way of horror; more specifically, she uses Dana's moments of horror as moments of rupture for the boundary between past and present. The horror of time becomes a felt experience rather than something prescribed through language. The section's closing lines reiterate both Kevin and Dana's difficulty in putting into words the logic behind *Kindred*'s time-bending events, including Dana's loss of her arm:

> "I went to help you. That was when I realized your arm wasn't just stuck, but that, somehow, it had been crushed right into the wall."
>
> "Not exactly crushed."

> "I know. But that seemed to be a good word to use on them—to show my ignorance. It wasn't all that inaccurate either. Then they wanted me to tell them how such a thing could happen. I said I didn't know… kept telling them I didn't know. And heaven help me, Dana, I don't know."
>
> "Neither do I," I whispered. "Neither do I." (Butler 11)

"Crushed," in its innate physicality, fails to offer up the seemingly indescribable act of violence done to Dana's arm. The unnamable action mirrors the novel's sense of time that eludes its white characters' comprehension. Whereas as crushed implies a physical act with a beginning and ending and a discernable divide between attacker and victim, Dana's arm becomes crushed *into* the wall of her house, caught between the racial violence of 1815 she sought to escape and the alleged safety of 1976. The ambiguous violence denotes a violent animation of time, a physical iteration at once both threatening and illuminating. Like the ultimate fate of Dana's right arm, this deployment of time as horrific force avoids the fixity of language by residing in the uneasy space of affect. In other words, *Kindred*'s horror historicism combats the need to affix textual meaning to subjective experience by hinting at a portrayal of time located in the sensual, in the space beyond language.

*Kindred*'s fluid movements through history echo its ominous prologue by eschewing any physical mechanism of time travel for more affective methods. This unique method of time travel uses the frozen, paralytic nature of horror as a way of calling attention to the instability of Dana's temporal present. As Dana goes on to discover over the course of the book, her ability to move between 1815 and 1976 depends on the level of horror present in either herself or Rufus. Dana's first trip to 1815 Maryland emerges as an onslaught of physiological symptoms:

> I bent to push him another box full, then straightened quickly as I began to feel dizzy, nauseated. The room seemed to blur and darken around me. I stayed on my feet for a moment holding on to a bookcase and wondering what was wrong, then finally, I collapsed to my knees. I heard Kevin make a wordless sound of surprise, heard him ask, "What happened?" (13)

Critic Gregory Jerome Hampton reads Dana's dizziness and nausea as indicative of the sea-sickness a subject might have felt while been transported through the middle passage. In keeping with Hampton's reading, the temporal "passageway" which Dana uses to travel back to 1815 Maryland serves as another transport to the bonds of slavery, both spatially and mentally. As Hortense Spillers reminds us in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," the middle passage did more than merely take captured Africans to the United States: it sought to strip them of their pre-imagined identities, breaking down notions of humanity—not to mention gender—to make room for hegemonic definitions of each of these categories that better served the institution of slavery. Similarly, Butler sets up Dana's temporal excursions as sudden happenings that exact a physical toll. Her onset nausea implies an existing movement that neither the narrative nor the reader accurately registers. This invisible movement only makes itself known byway of its physiological impact. The moment of nausea implies a sense of whiplash, a bodily rejection of temporal homogeneity. Dana's sudden dizziness belies a beneath-the-surface and continuous sense of movement that pushes her between a dominant white time and an alternative temporality more capable of registering the ongoing relevance of the past.

Dana experiences the same physical effects on her trips back to 1976, again underlining the novel's time travel as one impacted by affect. After rescuing Rufus from

drowning in a river, she finds herself face to face with his rifle-toting father: “I turned, started, and found myself looking down the barrel of the longest rifle I had ever seen. I heard a metallic click, and I froze, thinking I was going to be shot for saving the boy’s life. I was going to die” (14). Butler’s usage of first-person narrative stands out here as a way to access Dana’s instant reaction to the threat of death. But her horror at being threatened escapes any direct mentioning; instead, the passage reveals her emotional state through a lack of movement: “I froze.” Adriana Cavarero links the state of horror with the moment of paralysis, the inability to turn and run from the abject other. Likewise, Dana’s horror disallows her from fleeing from her immediate danger. This stand off continues with further gaps in action: “I tried to speak, but my voice was suddenly gone” (14). Her loss of voice and bodily action contrasts with the surrounding environments sudden movement, which again leaves Dana “sick and dizzy. My vision blurred so badly I could not distinguish the gun or the face of the man behind it. I heard the woman speak sharply, but I was too far gone into sickness and panic to understand what she said” (14). In effect, horror freezes Dana in her place and allows her to witness the instability of her supposedly fixed experience of time. This “severing of the nerves” allows a textual space through which Butler shifts from either timeline.

In addition to the significance of the bodily processes at play as Dana begins her temporal leaps, her immediate incoherence both before and after her travels signals a desire to meld past and present into one simultaneous timeline. In doing so, Butler subverts the dominant desire to separate 1812 and 1976 with the safety of temporal distance. Accordingly, Dana’s sensorial slippage—her blurred vision and inability to hear—becomes a way for Butler to link 1812 and 1976 in a space belonging to neither. For example, directly following

Dana's first trip to Maryland, she appears back in her living room and faces a momentarily heated encounter with her husband:

> He spun around to face me. 'What the hell… how did you get over there?' he whispered. 'I don't know.' 'Dana, you…' He came over to me, touched me tentatively as though he wasn't sure I was real. Then he grabbed me by the shoulders and held me tightly. 'What happened?' I reached up to loosen his grip, but he wouldn't let go…'Tell me!' he demanded. 'I would if I knew what to tell you. Stop hurting me.'" (14)

The exchange, as well as the physical pain that Kevin unwittingly inflicts upon his wife, maintains the same level of hostile intensity provoked by Dana's stand off with the armed plantation owner. That being the case, the scene demonstrates how Dana and Kevin's differing experience of time and history impacts their comprehension of continuity. For Kevin, this aggressive encounter between husband and wife occurs after a momentary break, the brief but harrowing disappearance of his partner who then appears across room: "You were here until my hand was just a couple inches from you. Then, suddenly, you were gone. I couldn't believe it. I just stood there. Then you were back again and on the other side of the room" (16). Here, Kevin's conception of continuity fails to take into account the kind of temporal jumps that Dana accomplishes. In a very literal way, he cannot comprehend Dana's temporal state, cannot observe her movements.

*Kindred* offers its readers Dana's experience of time travel as one continuous sensorial thread. Shortly after this same first return home, during which Kevin interrogates her upon her whereabouts, Dana remarks, "I was shaking with fear, with residual terror that

took all the strength out of me. I folded forward, hugging myself, trying to be still. The threat was gone, but it was all I could do to keep my teeth from chattering" (15). The "residual terror" that still grips Dana in 1976 suggests a new form of memory, one that bridges seemingly disparate timelines through the experience of horror. To whit, Butler does little to suggest Dana's living room is a safe haven to the horrors of 1812 chattel slavery. That "residual terror" marks an overlap between times that stretches from Dana's personal affect to how others in the room are perceived. As a consequence, Kevin and the white slaveholders of 1812 become one and the same for the few moments that Dana finds herself *between times*. Significantly, these consolidations take place through her sensorial memory: "There was an ache in my back and shoulders where Rufus's mother had pounded with her fists. She had hit harder than I'd realized, and Kevin hadn't helped" (15). Though she has traveled over a hundred years into the future, Dana retains a bodily continuity. Her aches become sites of sensorial memory, spaces of injury that serve to actively remind. Rufus's mother and Kevin become linked through Dana's ache, a collapsing of two subjects that unhinges the supposed border between past and present. Butler does not make these connections between white characters as a way of generalization—as if to suggest that all white subjects are actually one in the same in the danger they represent to the Black individual. Rather, these episodes demonstrate the power of horror as a form of memory, a way to make active the supposed scars of the past and, by doing so, reassess present day configurations. Kevin's aggressive behavior and contribution to her wounds plant a seed of doubt within both Dana and the reader as to his ultimate intentions to her safety. That we are somewhat satisfied by novel's end that Kevin cares for her wife's well being makes no difference: the moment of

questioning, of unbinding what seems certain as a present-day fact, points to the effectiveness of Dana's "residual terror."

An additional example of this blurring between 1812 and 1976 that further incites a reconfiguration of the present comes in Dana's second return home, a return that comes on during a harrowing attack with a white patroller. During the initial confrontation, he says to Dana, "I guess you'll do as well as your sister… I came back for her, but you're just like her" (42). The patroller conflates Dana and Alice's mother as one person, producing a violence of identity on top of the physical violence of sexual assault. His fusing of the two women foreshadows Dana's own blurring between him and Kevin. Dana is ultimately able to render the patroller unconscious. Despite this victory, Dana undergoes another wave of horror that sends her back to 1976: "I dragged myself from beneath his heavy body and tried to stand up. Halfway up, I felt myself losing consciousness, falling back. I caught hold of a tree and willed myself to stay conscious. If the man came to and found me nearby, he would kill me. He would surely kill me! But I couldn't keep my hold on the tree. I fell, slowly it seemed, into a deep starless darkness" (43). Unlike the previous episode, which featured a striking continuity where Dana's incoherence caused Kevin and the white slaveholders to merge into similar forms as aggressors, this passage focuses on the fear of breaking from temporal continuity. With the patroller unconscious, Dana's own impending collapse threatens to leave her defenseless should he wake up. The narration tracks this rise in horror as she contemplates and repeats her anxieties—"he would kill me. He would surely kill me!" The threat of the loss of cognizance, of the ability to track experience and retain mobility, drives Dana to the point of horror that triggers her leap back to her own present. Her "fall" occurs both physically and temporally; the "deep starless darkness" becomes both her own crash to

the ground and a temporal break. That she mentions her fall *seemed* to occur "slowly" highlights the passage's temporal significance. Horror incites a temporal play that slows down or breaks up the subject in question's sense of time.

Dana's awakening following her fall into the "starless darkness" again incites a blurring between 1812 and 1976, where both the narrator and reader are meant to confuse Kevin with the patroller. This second return, coming after a far more dangerous encounter with chattel slavery, exemplifies Dana's evolving awareness of the connection between her comprehension of time and her ability to resist. Butler writes, "Pain dragged me back to consciousness. At first, it was all I was aware of; every part of my body hurt. Then I saw a blurred face above me—the face of a man—and I panicked. I scrambled away, kicking him, clawing the hands that reached out for me, trying to bite, lunging up toward his eyes. I could do it now. I could do anything" (43). Just as before, Dana's return is marked by the continuity of pain or aching, followed by the instinctual move to defend herself as she sees a male face above her. *Kindred*'s narrative play here provokes a crucial misreading on behalf of both Dana and the reader: the text gives no clues as to what time Dana has awakened in and, as a consequence, the identity of the man remains ambiguous. The "blurred" male face, which presumably, though not mentioned, is also a *white* male face, instantly becomes a threat. With this new unknown threat, however, Dana resolves to lash out physically. The *now* of "I could do it now" remains somewhat out of time—she is unsure of where or when she has awakened. And yet, its temporal obscurity marks Dana's refusal to adhere to any dominant sense of time or history: by remaining in her own *now*, she announces her intent to ignore other, more dominant temporal maps, ones that mean to keep her passive. The "not ready!" of horror invokes a need to prepare, to remain vigilant to how one's sense of time can

be manipulated or lost. In addition, Dana's revelation that she can now do "it" signals her developing capacity to defend herself against harm by any means. Dana's growing comprehension of the importance of keeping track of time, especially as it pertains to her own wellbeing, feeds into her new ability to use violence as resistance. Not only, then, does horror cause Dana to reconfigure what she takes for granted in the present, but it also provokes her to make new connections between time and action. The question here lies outside of violence as a viable means of resisting racism; instead, the episode posits an important relationship between temporal agency and ability to resist.

These early conflations between past and present develop into almost seamless transitions as the novel continues. From a narrative standpoint, *Kindred* trains its readers in how to experience time similar to how Dana readjusts her own understanding of how time passes. From these initial traumatic temporal leaps that result in moments of incoherence, Dana, and the readers comes to adapt: "I had been home for eight days when the dizziness finally came again. I didn't know whether to curse it for my own sake or welcome it for Kevin's – not that it mattered what I did. I went to Rufus's time fully clothed, carrying my denim bag, wearing my knife. I arrived on my knees because of the dizziness, but I was immediately alert and wary" (117). Dana's alertness represents a temporal dexterity likened to a physical reflex. The visual of Dana arriving on her knees, a symbol of submission, but "alert and wary" echoes her ongoing temporal education: she ability to conflate timelines and fragmented histories endows her with a new sense of readiness.

Outside of Dana's jumps from present to past, her experiences within the Antebellum South and the institution of slavery cause her to re-evaluate how her subjective grasp of time passing itself falls under a larger dominant discourse. Her slow realizations at this parallel

between her life as a temp in 1976 Pasadena and a plantation slave induce a form of revulsion that, while not as sudden and powerful as her moments of fear, similarly serve to show her ongoing temporal recalibration. That is, as Dana begins to realize how her temporal rhythms have themselves been informed by slavery's own efforts to subjugate and alienate Black subjects, she looks to new temporalities informed by the African American tradition. Kevin serves as a useful foil to help contrast Dana's temporal re-negotiation: their discussions regarding the proper way for both to exist and survive on the Weylin Plantation bring out their differing perspectives on how to *pass* time. After Kevin reveals that he was to acquire a job tutoring Rufus, Dana asks, "'What about me?' 'You?' 'Weylin didn't say anything about me?' 'No. Why should he? If I stay here, he knows you stay too.' 'Yes.' I smiled. 'You're right. If you didn't remember me in your bargaining, why should he? I'll bet he won't forget me though when he has work that needs to be done'" (79). Kevin's seemingly minor misstep at forgetting to include Dana as part of his room and board points to a larger contrast in either character's comprehension of the system of slavery's expectations of Black bodies. Kevin leaves out Dana with the assumption that he and his wife are granted the same temporal allotments under the peculiar institution; as Dana clarifies, however, she only becomes a subject of importance in the context of labor. Dana's grasp of the *time* of slavery crystallizes what Michael Hanchard refers to as an early examples of *racial time* within the peculiar institution: "For slaves, time management was an imposition of the slave master's construction of temporality divided along the axis of the master-slave relationship" (254). Comprehending how her experience of time relies on Kevin's ignorance at the reality of racialized time, that he could measure a day's experience in a form far different from that of his wife, points to the way in which contemporary discourse uses the *white temporal*

*imaginary* to erase matters of racial injustice. At play in this dialogue, then, is the attempt to overlap colorblind ideology onto the temporal map of slavery, which itself goes to become the blueprint through which subjects of color continue to be subjugated and marginalized. This contrast comes into greater focus as Dana continues to explain why it is necessary that work while on the plantation:

> "What's a slave for, but to work? Believe me, [Weylin will] find something for me to do – or he would if I didn't plan to find my own work before he gets around to it."
>
> [Kevin] frowned. "You want to work?"
>
> "I want to… I have to make a place for myself here. That means work. I think everyone here, black and white, will resent me if I don't work. And I need friends. I need all the friends I can make here, Kevin. (79)

Here, Dana's understanding that labor makes up her ability to find a "place" for herself at the plantation contrasts with Kevin's misreading that her need to work comes from a desire. "To want," in this case, implies a sense of leisure, of choosing how one spends their day. Dana corrects Kevin's use of "want" with "have." Her acquiescence to labor denotes Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan's claim that "Indeed, labor was so inseparable from life that, for most slaves, the two appeared to be one and the same" (2).

From Dana and Kevin's contrasting temporal imaginaries, *Kindred* goes on to mark the significance of keeping continuity in drawing connections between the present and the historic period of chattel slavery. Dana's horror-fueled leaps through time, which have allowed her to reconsider her present-day surroundings, go on to influence how she accepts her ever-ongoing experience of time itself. These moments of clarity, during which she finds

herself increasingly invested in the rhythms and manipulations of the time of slavery—both as a period and a system of power—leave Dana not only a savvier critic of temporal subjugation but also a more nuanced evaluator of the multiple levels of racial oppression. That is, Dana's travels to Antebellum Maryland become a troubling tutor in how to better understand the ubiquitous but near invisible pressures of contemporary racial capitalism. During one of her and Kevin's longer tenures on the Weylin plantation, Dana narrates:

> Time passed. Kevin and I became more a part of the household, familiar, accepted, accepting. That disturbed me too when I thought about it. How easily we seemed to acclimatize. Not that I wanted us to have trouble, but it seemed as though we should have had a harder time adjusting to this particular segment of history – adjusting to our places in the house of a slaveholder. For me, the work could be hard, but it was usually more boring than physically wearing. And Kevin complained of boredom, and of having to be sociable with a steady stream of ignorant pretentious guests who visited the Weylin house. But for drop-ins from another century, I thought we had had a remarkably easy time. And I was perverse enough to be bothered by the ease. (97)

The passage underscores the power of the manipulative temporal conditions through Dana's revelation of her and Kevin's easy assimilation into the plantation's day-to-day operations. On its surface, the quotation points to Dana's disturbing admission that she, a woman of the twentieth century, could entertain to any extant the normalization of life as a slave. Buried in her disturbance, however, is the sensation of familiarity that nods towards her life in 1976. Contributing to each contemporary character's acclimation to slavery, then, is its mirroring of

their present day rhythms, culminating in the disturbing effect of familiarity. The difference in the couple's sources of boredom—labor versus awkward social obligations—presents a racialized time wherein subjects of color experience time as bodies at work. Kevin, by contrast, experiences tedium abstractly; his struggles with the time of slavery derive from their excess of leisure. This temporal inequality echoes what Hanchard conceptualizes as "waiting time," which he defines as "the first effect of the temporal disjunctures that result from racial difference. Members from subordinate groups objectively perceive the material consequences of social inequality, as they are literally made to wait for goods and services that are delivered first to members of the dominant group" (256). In the context of the above passage, Dana and Kevin's unequal access to the resources and amenities of the Weylin plantation links to their different relationship to time and the process of "waiting": a "time structure that is imposed upon us" (Luckman and Schutz 48).

*Kindred*'s intent on mapping the *time* of slavery concurrently critiques contemporary wage-labor for its similarities to the peculiar institution, particularly in how it draws people in color into systems of temporal subjugation. Indeed, Contributing to Dana's "ease" into the Weylin plantation is her experience as a temp worker in 1976 Pasadena, CA. Butler relies on her novel's own re-occurring temporal rhythms in order to draw readers into directly overlapping slave and wage labor. Initially, Dana describes the "casual labor agency" as "just the opposite of slavery": "The people who ran it couldn't have cared less whether or not you showed up to do the work they offered. They always had more job hunters than jobs anyway" (Butler 52). The quote emphasizes the carceral aspects of chattel slavery—imposed immobility—that Dana rightly contrasts with the *laissez-faire* attitudes of the temp agency; however, as the second part of the passage suggests, the agency still enjoys a position of

power over its workers. Rather than merely draw a line between the inaccessible trauma of slave violence, *Kindred* makes connection through temporality as a way of unveiling the mechanisms of racial capitalism. As Dana goes to describe a typical day at work, the book sets up a pattern of temporal toil that her later experiences on the Weylin plantation reverberate:

> Getting sent out meant the minimum wage—minus Uncle Sam's share—for as many hours as you were needed. You swept floors, stuffed envelopes, took inventory, washed dishes, sorted potato chips (really!), cleaned toilets, marked prices on merchandise… you did whatever you were sent out to do. It was nearly always mindless works, and as far as most employees were concerned, it was done by mindless people. Nonpeople rented for a few hours, a few days, a few weeks. It didn't matter. (53)

The passages' list of tasks, labeled as "mindless" work, increase in tedium. Each job that Dana lists involves an undertaking with no true end: floors will always need more sweeping, dishes will always need to be washed, etc. Labor then becomes a way of passing time, of *being* in the world in a way that removes one from any agency over how they spend their time. It is this connection between agency and wage labor that Hanchard argues defined the post-emancipation era Black worker movements: "Temporal freedom meant not only an abolition of the temporal constraints slave labor placed on New World Africans but also the freedom to construct individual and collective temporality that existed autonomously from (albeit contemporaneously with) the temporality of their former masters" (255). By contrast, Dana's time in the temp agency prioritizes work for the sake of itself, an act to pass the time rather than a means to gain agency over one's life. This connection between wage labor and

slavery similarly arises within the work of Saidiya Hartman, who reasons, "The joyfully bent back of the laborer conjures up a repertoire of familiar images that traverse the divide between slavery and freedom. If this figure encodes freedom, then it does so by making it difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish the subjection of slavery from the satisfied self-interest of the free laborer" (135). Here, Hartman traces the systemic traits of slavery in the "self-making" and morally righteous discourse surrounding labor post-emancipation; however, the image of the "bent back free laborer" resonates with the "nonpeople" of Dana's temp agency. Just as Hartman troubles the line between the freed laborer and the enslaved subject, Dana's "nonpeople" become subjected to the same endless toil of the Weylin plantation. In both labor systems, "time passes." Kevin's remark to Dana during their first meeting in the present-day regarding her constantly exhausted state buttresses his own separation from this temporal subjugation: "Why do you go around looking like a zombie all the time?" (Butler 53). His curiosity as to her ongoing fatigue parallels his later questioning about her "desire" to work on the plantation: in both cases, Kevin's privileged place in society affords him a kind of temporal agency unavailable to Dana.

*Kindred*'s efforts to collapse the discussion of temporal subjugation, labor, and racial violence across timelines leads Dana incapable of removing herself from one or the other. She explains this temporal conjoining to Kevin by saying, "most of the time, I'm still an observer. It's protection. It's nineteen seventy-six shielding and cushioning eighteen nineteen for me. But now and then, like with the kid's game, I can't maintain the distance. I'm drawn all the way into eighteen nineteen, and I don't know what to do" (101). Here Dana references the identity politics of 1976 as a buffer of sorts for the harsh realities of slavery; however, her memory of 1976 fades only so much as it begins to blur into her experience of 1819

Maryland. Her loss of "distance"—the space between observer and experience that Kevin is allowed to maintain—speaks to her need to commit to labor as a measure of time. Dana's confession here, that she is losing her ability to remove herself mentally from the institution of slavery, is revelation of both horror and clarity. Her disappeared "cushion" from slavery's temporal ideologies concurrently signals a new sense of awareness, an ability to detect the mechanisms of dominant ideology.

Evidence of Dana's new grasp of temporality comes about most clearly during her time in 1976 later in the novel, before she returns for a final time to confront Rufus. Her experience of global current events takes on a new understanding of history and simultaneity, such as when she watches a news report about rioting in South Africa due to Apartheid: "South African whites had always struck me as people who would have been happier living in the nineteenth century, or eighteenth. In fact, they were living in the past as far as their race relations went. They lived in ease and comfort supported by huge numbers of blacks whom they kept in poverty and held in contempt. Tom Weylin would have felt right at home" (196). Dana's commentary, far from a political aside placed within *Kindred*'s narrative, performs a play with time as a way of critiquing contemporary systems of white supremacy. She first relates her previous belief that South African whites demonstrated antiquated forms of racism, ideologies that would have better served them in the distant past; however, the distant past, for Dana, is no longer so, which in turn impacts how she relates Apartheid with American chattel slavery. Referencing Tom Weylin, for example, reasserts how her newfound personal experience with slaveholders allows her to draw new parallels in the supposed "cushion" of 1976. At work then is form of temporal continuity capable of breaking through the attempted manipulations of the white temporal imaginary, a

comprehension of the ongoing system of slavery drawn by creative correlations of events across time and space.

*Kindred*'s now infamous final image of Dana completing her final trip back to 1976 with her left arm permanently plastered into the wall of her house completes her own arch as a subject newly aware of white supremacy's through-line from chattel slavery to her present. At its climax then, Butler's novel gives us one last moment of horror that exposes the racist realities of 1976. Butler writes, "Something harder and stronger than Rufus's hand clamped down on my arm, squeezing it, stiffening it, pressing into it—painlessly, at first—melting into it, meshing with it as though somehow my arm were being absorbed into something. Something cold and nonliving" (261). A number of critics have read the loss of Dana's arm as a physical scarring meant to serve as a marker for her interactions with slavery.[8] These readings, however, rely on Dana's traveling back into the Antebellum South as an attempt to re-write history. The missing left arm comes to stand as the present marking on the Black body that must now carry the stain of slavery in order to come to terms with the fragmented history of the peculiar institution. In contrast, my understanding of this scene again fixes on how Dana's sensation of horror attunes her internal dialogue to the other "marked thing": the wall of her house. Throughout the above passage, Butler relies on the present progressive tense in order to invoke ongoing action. Additionally, words such as "melting" and "meshing" invoke gradual assimilation rather than jarring fragmentation. This "painless" transformation mimics the arch of racist discourse post-Jubilee, an always-evolving racial order that thrives by masking its insidious intent. The "cold and nonliving" thing at the heart

[8] See Pamela Bedore. "Slavery and Symbiosis in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*." *Foundation*, no. 84, Spring 2002, pp. 73-81; Angelyn Mitchell. "Not Enough of the Past: Feminist Revisions of Slavery in Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*.'" *MELUS*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2001, pp. 51–75; Ashraf H. A. Rushdy. "Families of Orphans: Relation and Disrelation in Octavia Butler's Kindred." *College English*, vol. 55, no. 2, 1993, pp. 135–157.

of this transformation invokes the thread between slavery and post-war racial capitalism. Rufus's outreached hand becomes the wall of a house, which is meant to represent Dana's economic and physical security. The hand of the white slave-owner becomes the act of owning property. Just as her previous trips called into question both her relationship to Kevin and her belief in the progressive politics of a modern-day United States, this final experience of continuity across timelines upsets her very idea of home.

### ***Bone Game*'s Horror Stories**

Butler's *Kindred* gives us a window into how horror disrupts *white time* in favor of a syncopated but continuous temporality informed by African American diasporic tradition. What remains to be seen, however, is the way in which indigenous fiction differs in its deployment of horror as a way to break from temporal subjugation. In thinking through this difference, we return back to this chapter's opening image of the mission lock exhibited in the Los Angeles Natural History Museum and the question of how to come to grips with the violence of place across history. As my reading of the lock demonstrated, linear, progression-obsessed colonial historicism blunts the force of historical violence in order to widen the chasm between past and present. In doing so, this dominant historical project also seeks to reconcile for inhabitants the shared map on which these traumatic events have taken place. In effect, the exhibit opts from two definitions of Los Angeles: one that is meant to familiar and whose history is approved to fit into the long narrative that is the story of the city's becoming, and an anachronistic Los Angeles made to feel a apart and only useful as a contrast to our progressive and democratic present. Indigenous narratives opt for a third route: that the two are one and the same. To illuminate the method and significance behind these narratives, we must look north of Los Angeles to another California city with a

troubling mission history and the Native American novel looking to unpack it: Santa Cruz and Louis Owens' *Bone Game* (1994).

*Bone Game* begins with two seemingly disparate acts of violence placed alongside one another:

> October 15, 1812 Government Surgeon Manuel Quijano, accompanied by six armed men, is dispatched from the presidio in Monterey with orders to exhume the body of Padre Andres Quintana at the mission of Santa Cruz, La Exaltacion de la Santa Cruz. The priest is found to have been murdered, tortured *in pudendis*, and hanged.
>
> November 1, 1993. The dismembered body of a young woman begins washing ashore on the beaches of Santa Cruz, California. (Epigraph)

The two dispatches are based in fact. Padre Andres Quintana was murdered by fourteen Indians who had previously witnessed him violently beating Natives and learned of his future plans to instill lashings with an iron wire horse-whip. And while not in 1993, Santa Cruz in the early 1970s experienced a rash of murders perpetrated by two separate serial killers, Herbert Mullin and Edmund Kemper. In opening with these two reported incidents, Owens echoes the same museum project of the lock in the *Making Los Angeles* exhibit: other than the gore implied by the priest's having been tortured "*in pudendis*" and the woman's dismemberment, both passages can only allude to the actual horror located in both historical narratives. To that end, *Bone Game* opens with these dispatches encased in the glass exhibit of history without context. The horror of Owens' novel, manifesting both through the graphic and disturbing images of murder and torture in past and present and the ghostly apparitions that lurk throughout the Santa Cruz wilderness, materializes the concrete reality of these

opening epigraphs. Additionally, the novel's linking of the two events from 1812 and 1993 draws a crucial temporal and spatial constellation that conjoins both violent acts under the map of Santa Cruz. Rather than hold each event up separately or chain them via a linear, Western temporal narrative, Owens links both moments together into the space of Santa Cruz and by doing so, demonstrates how both acts inform one another.

The hidden-history that *Bone Games*' opening epigraphs/artifacts attempt to mask deals in part with the dual-role the Mission system played in the settlement of the Western US and in the attempted genocide of indigenous people. The novel's horror historicism pinpoints in part the relationship between the trauma of Mission violence and current efforts by the state to regulate national narratives of progress and indigenous history. As a result, Owens use of horror as a form of memory connects his characters to the past while also making crucial ties between a seemingly antiquated settler colonialism and contemporary racial capitalism. If the Missions exist today as foundational institutions on which the West was settled by Euro-Americans, its own development hinged on the enslavement and consequent subjugation of Native peoples. The sits of the missions themselves came as a result of the targeting of already successful indigenous civilizations. As Owen H. O'Neill comments, "[The Indian] located all of the Spanish Missions of California. The padres built where the Indians were established in greatest numbers. Most of the cities of the coastal region are built squarely upon Indian village sites" (qtd. in McWilliams 22). The reason for this influence, O'Neill explains, is the simply fact that "the Indians chose the most favored spot with a sure knowledge born of long experience in the region" (qtd. in McWilliams 22). Outside of the geographic settlement of the missions, the forced-labor of Mission Indians led to crucial systemic and infrastructural development. As Carey McWilliams writes, "Indians

furnished the labor power for the far-flung Mission enterprises. They cleared the ground, planted the first vineyards, constructed the irrigation ditches and canals, and built the Missions" (23). Similar to the role chattel slavery plays in the development of United States capitalist economy, Indian forced-labor occupies a crucial and brutal space in the story of California and the colonization of the Western US. The nature of the labor itself, wherein indigenous peoples were submitted to regularized working hours as opposed to the intermittent labor periods they practiced under a regular agricultural society, led to Spanish conceptions of the Indian as lazy and inferior (McWilliams). Despite his attention to the underappreciated impact of Mission violence, McWilliams himself cannot help but participate in the historicized disappearance of the Native subject: "While not a living influence, the dead hand of the Indian is everywhere upon the land" (23). The Native American, for McWilliams, is little more than a trace upon the now settled terms of order in the contemporary US. Owens' *Bone Game*, by contrast, unpacks this same crucial tie between Mission violence and current manifestations of racial capitalism by re-engaging with the "dead hand," and, as a result, unsettling the term "death" itself. Settler colonial influence, the novel argues, lives on in the current state rationalizations of race and Indigeneity through which *Bone Games* Native characters must navigate.

In the narrative to follow, protagonist Cole McCurtain, a Choctaw/Cherokee/Irish/Cajun professor of English at UC Santa Cruz, is tasked with solving the connection between these two opening incidents, all while coming to grips with his mixed-blood identity and his precarious relationship to the university. He is aided by a series of vivid dreams, his daughter Abby, and his Choctaw relatives Onatima, Luther, and Hoey. These dreams in particular become narrative tools by which Cole experiences the horror of

the Santa Cruz mission through multiple subjectivities, including mission Indian Venancio Asisara and Padre Quintana himself. *Bone Game*'s horror historicism allows for this re-constellation of Santa Cruz's violent past/present in a way that utilizes indigenous temporality while at the same time subverts Western narratives of Native disappearance. Western history serves as a force of erasure throughout the novel, including in the ideology of murderer Robert Malin, Cole's white teaching assistant who kills in order to satiate his own hybrid Native and Christian mysticism beliefs. Cole's converging of 1812 and 1993 becomes a way to contextualize Santa Cruz's violent history while also allowing him the agency of self-determination, the ability to tell his own story in a way that promotes Native futurity.

Owens' novel, then, uses horror in order to draw together what Miranda refers to as the *genealogy of violence*: the continued impact of the mission system upon mission Indians and their ancestors. Miranda traces contemporary Native American issues of domestic abuse and alcoholism to the influence of the attempted genocide of indigenous peoples by the missions. Likewise, Owens seeks to write an indigenous history of violence, one based in part on the significance of space and the power of *story*. Story, as Choctaw writer and theorist LeAnne Howe explains in "Tribalography: The Power of Native Stories," exists alongside and congruently with notions of history, fiction, and play. In the Choctaw culture, she relates, an *anoli* is "someone that does all of the above, relating all living things" (118). One result of this empowered deployment of story is its ability to interweave people and place beyond the constraints of Western time. *Bone Game*, likewise, fuses history and story in order to unlock a deeper experience of mission violence and Native survivance. The author himself remarked in an interview: "I wanted [*Bone Game*] to be a story in which all times

and all actions coexisted simultaneously. I felt that I couldn't convey the fabric of violence in that place [Santa Cruz] any other way" ("The New Millennium and Its Origins" 193). To that point, *Bone Game* converges two separate points of Santa Cruz's history into one simultaneous narrative, creating a sense of continuity against the attempted fragmenting power of colonial discourse. Mark Rifkin refers to this alternative concept of continuity as Indigenous duration, which "operates les as a chronological sequence than as overlapping networks of affective connection (to persons, nonhuman entities, and place) that orient one's way of moving through space and time, with story as a crucial part of that process" (46). These affective connections of story that Rifkin references come to bear in *Bone Game* through the moments of horror located throughout the novel. Horror's emergence brokers a space through which Cole re-orients himself to an experience of time marked by indigenous self-determination.

Before showing how *Bone Game* converges timelines through the experience of horror and the transmission of story, we must first understand how the novel sets up the problem of Western history. This dominant historicism becomes characterized as the nationalist narrative that, in somewhat linear fashion, constructs the emergence of the United States at the expense of Native populations. From mainstream mission history to the mythology behind Manifest Destiny, these narratives become predatory forces, violent ideologies that seek to disempower and manipulate Native subjects through temporal exclusion. Cole's friend and colleague Alex Yassie exposes this destructive history as he reads from a text covering the California missions: "'Here's what he says on the first page. *The entire history of human affairs relates to no adventure of greater ambition and deals with no task more utterly hopeless than the noble effort of the Franciscan padres of*

*California to raise a pagan Indian race to the white man's standard of living.*'" (Owens 178). The text from which Alex reads is John A Berger's *The Franciscan Missions of California* (1941), a text that also states, "Although the whole futile undertaking lasted only sixty-five years, the Mission Period gave California an historical background unsurpassed in interest and romance by the local traditions of any other section of this nation" (Foreword). Berger's text places the California missions as essential to the country's mythology. As Alex points out, this place of reverence in California and American history only comes with the exclusion of Native stories, particularly those that cover the racial violence of the mission period: "Can you believe this shit? Published in the nineteen forties? Did you know that in 1855 the good citizens of Shasta were paying five bucks for each Indian head brought in – man, woman, or child – and at Honey Lake the same year an Indian scalp was worth a quarter?" (Owens 178). Alex's role as Native historian comes to the fore here, as he interrupts Berger's historical text with oral interjections that expose racist discourse. His mentioning of the market value for literal Native body parts becomes an alternative story of California's Western/indigenous history that emphasizes the link between capital and violence. *Bone Game*'s use of historical texts such as Berger's serves as a window to the larger forces at play in attempting to distance the 1812 Santa Cruz from the one that Cole and his family inhabit. That is, Berger's text comes to symbolize the larger Euro-American academic project to soften the edges of historic genocide and calorize settler colonialism. In doing so, these historical forces—in service to the narrative of national progress and capital built into their foundations—seek to alienate Native subjects from their own traditions.

This fragmenting power also appears in *Bone Game* via Western historical discourse that promotes erasure. At multiple points in the novel, linear history becomes the horrific

force threatening to marginalize or otherwise disappear Native stories. Earlier in the text, Alex relates to Cole how the emergence of Western historicism invoked a deeper violence. In discussing the Ohlone tribe prior to Western contact, who, Alex explains, refused to say the names of their dead and destroyed all the belongings of those who had passed, he states:

> It meant there wasn't any history, Cole, no yesterday. There was only sacred time—the time of creation—and today, with nothing in between. And then the Spanish came and taught them history and death in a single moment. Just imagine it. All of their care and precaution meant nothing. In one generation it was over. After ten thousand years, one morning they woke up and the world was unrecognizable. They must have felt like they were the dead and the Spanish were the living. (54)

"Unrecognizable" here references the world-shattering impact of Western time. By linking history with death, Alex references the grouping of indigenous peoples into the temporality of colonialism that came along with Europe's "discovery" of the New World. The history and death that the passages names, in other words, are ones defined by European ideology. This rupturing of the Ohlone's comprehension of time becomes a forced entry into a new temporal grammar, one that labels them as anachronistic in relation to European settlers. To think of themselves as the "dead" and the Spanish as the "living" demonstrates the aims of hegemonic temporality: to remove marginalized peoples from the experience of "active" time. In a book filled with spirits, *death* comes to signify more than the literal end of life: it implies a kind of non-existence from normative society, a reckoning both at and persistence beyond the grave. It is only through the lens of the temporality introduced by the Spanish, however, that these specific terms of *death* and *history* come to bear.

This notion of death as removal from time manifests in how state recognition controls the conversation of race. Onatima, Cole's relative who travels to Santa Cruz in order to help him piece together the violent events unfolding around him, puts this Western historicism in context with regards to how it seeks to impact notions of Native identity. She explains to Abbey, "I see Indians all the time who are ashamed of surviving, and they don't even know it. We have survived a five-hundred-year war in which millions of us were starved to death, burned in our homes, shot and killed with disease and alcohol. It's a miracle any Indian is alive today. Why us, we wonder. We read their books and find out we're supposed to die. That's the story they've made up for us" (165). Onatima highlights story's duality as a force that can both subjugate and empower. The story she discusses in this passage echoes what critic James H. Cox refers to as the Euro-American tendency to craft narratives of Native disappearance. In these narratives, Native American subjects have either completely vanished or heading towards annihilation, a symptom of the West's colonization of the "New World." This discourse observes Native absence as a foregone conclusion, an ideology that as a result seeks to present Native culture as no longer relevant. David Treuer says of this tendency in Western literature, "It is not a question of whether Indians or Roman heroes will live, but when and how they will die. No one, to reach further back, really thinks Oedipus will ever be happy. And like Oedipus, what happens to Indians is the blossoming of hidden knowledge of the bloody past… Indians don't have the luxury of being haunted by someone else, they haunt themselves" (16). Treuer highlights the Western literary trope that sees the Native figure as irreconcilable to the progression of time and, therefore, fated to disappear. Such tropes function based on the same discourse that drove Manifest Destiny, which saw the

white-settlement of the continental US as foreseen by God. Onatima pulls from these larger historical forces to illuminate their effects on Native subjectivity.[9]

The violent nature of this temporal alienation played out by dominant historical narratives becomes embodied by one of the two flesh-and-blood murderers of the novel, Robert Malin. Owens bases Robert's character on real-life figure Herbert Mullin, who killed thirteen people in Santa Cruz during the early 1970s. By doing so, *Bone Game* overlaps the horror of Robert's murders with the violence at play in appropriating Native culture. Owens uses the motivations driving Mullin's killing spree—he believed his murderers acted as sacrifices that prevented a major earthquake from destroying California—as the basis for Robert, a white male character who, while enthusiastic about Native American literature, mistranslates Native culture to dangerous degrees. That is, behind his passion for Native culture lies a tendency to appropriate Native ideas of space and land to justify his overarching belief in an impending cataclysm, which he pulls from the works of Christian mystic Edgar Cayce. In effect, Robert becomes the personification of a Western ideology that puts forth a version of Native culture always already heading towards an imminent apocalypse. Part of this mischaracterization of Native culture propagated by Robert derives from his fixed notion of connectivity that, if interrupted, leads to catastrophic damages. In describing his beliefs to Abby, Robert explains, "That's what I've learned from Native Americans. Every minute element is interrelated inextricably with every other element, and if

[9] See Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart "Wakiksuyapi: Carrying the Historical Trauma of the Lakota." *Tulane Studies in Social Welfare*, vol. 21 no. 22, 2000, pp. 245-266. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart's work on trauma traveling across generations of Lakota tribal members illustrates the on-going effects of settler-colonialism on contemporary indigenous populations. She attributes the historical trauma of events such as the Massacre of Wounded Knee to a variety of mental and physical health issues. She writes, "Traditional Lakota culture encourages maintenance of a connection with the spirit world. Thus, we are predisposed to identification with ancestors from our historical past…Grief was impaired due to massive losses across generations and the federal government's prohibition of indigenous practices for mourning resolution. Hence, our impaired grief and our proclivity for connection with the deceased fueled historical unresolved grief, a component of the historical trauma response" (248).

we screw up one tiny part we screw it all up. Then we have to restore the balance somehow, make offerings, and propitiate the only forces that can help us, the way Native Americans have always known we must. The spirits guide us" (Owens 103). Robert takes from an indigenous knowledge of land that emphasizes interconnectivity but fuses it with system of fixed values. Consequently, he envisions a timeline always hurtling towards a foreseeable end and whose only chance at sustainability derives from violence. In response to his explanation, Abby replies, "'That sounds like Black Elk and the Old Testament stirred together, Robert.'" (103). Abby, like Alex before her, becomes the narrative's mouthpiece for critiquing the misappropriation of Native ways of knowing. Robert's conception of connectedness and indigenous tradition mirrors the damaging Western historicism commented upon by both Alex and Onatima. Both cases rely on a sort of coherence that falls apart in the face of fragmentation. When explaining to Abby later in the novel the reasoning behind his murders, Robert reiterates this problematic ideology in a way that highlights its reliance on structure: "Do you see *my* line of thought and endeavor? If I had not sacrificed thirteen times, we would all have tumbled into the trenches of the molten sea, like Lemuria, the lost continent. It is our responsibility. You're part Native American; you should know that in at least part of your soul." (237). Robert's complicated astrological calculus funnels Native spatial ideology into a Western-influenced narrative of apocalypse. His dependence on structuralism, on the enduring quality of a given space's system of natural connections, allows no space for what Native authors/critics such as Leslie Marmon Silko, Gerald Vizenor, and Owens himself have deemed the ever-evolving shape of Native tradition.[10]

[10] See Leslie Marmon Silko. *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today.* Simon and Schuster, 1996; Gerald Vizenor. *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*. University of Nebraska Press, 2010; Louis Owens. *Mixedblood Messages: Literature, Film, Family, Place*. Red River Books/ University of Oklahoma Press, 2001.

Whereas these scholars conceive of a Native culture whose strength lies in its ability to persist and thrive in the face of dominance, Robert's world-view demands static coherence from all of its elements. As he declares to Abby regarding his sacrifices, "We try to cheat by making substitutions, but that doesn't work" (237). "Substitutions," for Robert, refer to an inability to confront what he conceives as the essentialist order of all things in the world. In effect, Robert co-opts Native spiritual discourse in order to support his own colonial-dominance mentality.

As Robert's motivations confirm, in the world of *Bone Game*, the Western-influenced mistranslation of Native culture manifests as both cultural and bodily violence. Prominent in all of the book's mentioning of Western historicism is its lack of futurity; that is, Owens inserts examples of dominant historic narratives in order to highlight their ultimately destructive and foreclosed nature. The indigenous temporality working through *Bone Game* resists this coeval time by finding new coherence in the incoherent, new paths forward in the face of obstruction. Whereas Robert envisioned a universal apocalyptic time, the Native characters in Owens' novel imagine new futures. For example, as Venancio contemplates the child born out of Padre Quintana's rape of Venancio's wife, he reasons, "The baby stares westward, and the eyes are the color of the water. In the infant's eyes Venancio sees the end of a world, but he cannot cast his son into the sea… The bear is in the child now, and the blood of the priest, too, will fail" (166). Venancio's vision of "the end of *a* world" (emphasis mine) paints the mixed-blood Native infant as a symbol of Western culture's complete conquering of the indigenous population. European blood, here present in the blue-eyed child, represents a world-ending force that brings with it the coming of a new cultural normativity. However, Venancio's final refusal to throw the baby into the ocean rests in his

knowledge that the "blood of the priest, too, will fail," that the infant's ability to resist as a Native subject lies in his ability to invoke radical indigenous traditions rather than in any crass notion of blood quantum. In other words, to think in terms of racial essentialism is to be complicit with a settler colonial logic that sees time as homogenous and polices identity for the sake of valorizing racial purity. The end of this logic, as Robert's obsession with apocalypse denotes, is the ultimate disappearance of the Native American community. By choosing not to give in to this logic, Venancio signals a radical Native futurity that paints *Bone Game*'s horror historicism. The act of re-engaging with the bloody missionization of California as it relates to and co-exists with the current experience of Native subjugation allows Cole the capacity to imagine new pathways of being for the future. Just as Venancio rejects apocalyptic, coeval time, Cole's experience of parallel temporalities gives him the power to re-position himself outside of the *white spatial imaginary*. In order to build to this radical re-configuration, *Bone Game* illustrates new forms of continuity in the face of colonial fragmentation. Similar to how Butler converged past and present through Dana's own bodily experience, Owens uses the space of Santa Cruz as a temporal palimpsest that brings to the surface the affective connections that characterize Rifkin's *indigenous duration*. These connections subvert traditional chronology in order to draw a new kind of coherence to the experience and understanding of racial violence.

Cole's dreams—or nightmares—serve as narrative tools through which the text blurs the line between 1812 and 1993. The common thread running through both these timelines, other than Cole's experiencing of both through various subjectivities, is the horrific violence that draws both times together. Within Cole's dreams, multiple characters and events merge into one another. He is continuously beset with what he calls a "confusion of voices," a

barrage of inner monologues one after the other with few narrative clues regarding who exactly is speaking. For example, the early pages of the novel collapse several characters across timelines into the event of Padre Quintana's murder:

> He awakens and dreams again, crouching there: "*Bestes*." The orchard is a reek of shadows and he sees them, the Indians. "*Padre Quintana*!" they call, and twice he turns back, but he comes to them, and they hang him there. "*Gente de razon*" they mock in his foreign tongue and tuck him into bed and kill him once more. "*Los padres eran muy crueles con los indios*." (5)

There are several possible solutions for the identity behind the passage's "he." The most obvious, perhaps, is Padre Quintana, reliving his murder. The second option, which only becomes clear after reading through the entire novel, is Robert Malin. Painted in black and white and crouching in the Santa Cruz foliage, Robert has vivid visions of Padre Quintana's death that fuel his own murderous rampage. The third possibility is Cole himself, the dreamer forced to inhabit both Quintana and Robert's bodies. Still a fourth conceivable speaker is Venancio Asisara, one of Quintana's murderers and the painted black and white *gambler* spirit that haunts both Robert and Cole. Rather than clarify this jumble of speakers into any pattern with narrative clues, *Bone Game* posits that all four are possible and simultaneously true. As a result, the reader focuses less on *who* or *when* in these dream passages; instead, the episodes are meant to hone in on the experience itself. Owens removes any temporal context in favor of highlighting the sensorial viscera of violence, plucking it from the supposed safety of a linear timeline and presenting it as an omnipresent force.

This same fluid dreamscape allows Cole to experience the violence of the Santa Cruz missions through various subjectivities. At one point later in the novel, he hops between the

bodies of both Father Quintana and Venancio. The dream ends with Quintana brutally whipping Venancio, while Cole inhabits both men. Through Venancio's eyes, Cole sees "his skin curled like the bloody bark from the madrone under the wire whip" (66). At the same time, Cole also lives through Quintana, who "bends the curl and flash of the whip, scourging the bestial land while gulls wheel and shrill" (66). While this violent action plays out, a third figure enters the scene: Cole/Quintana/Venancio observe as "the waves rear back and hurl bodies from the sea—heads, hands, arms, and legs—and the painted gambler beckons from beyond the adobe wall, hands outstretched, a severed head in each palm" (66). The opening dispatch from 1993 of the woman's body parts washing to shore reappears here with the presence of the gambler, the spirit whose black and white painted appearance Robert Malin takes up as he commits his murders. The images of body parts washing up onto the city's shores resembles the fragmented nature in which Owens deploys his violent images; just as those dismembered appendages come together to make up part of the narrative of Santa Cruz, *Bone Game* finds order in the multiple violent scenes scattered through its narrative. What at first reads as a stream of incoherent images instead becomes a pattern of violence made comprehensible by collage. This mosaic like pattern echoes the structure of Miranda's *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, which "does not aspire to an untarnished coherence—one which glosses over any inconsistency, disturbance, or disruptions—but instead highlights the centrality of such productive disruptions to the poetics and formal grammar of her personal Mission project" (Dietrich 143). Similarly, Owens strives to link the horror of mission history by embracing its non-linear impacts on indigenous culture.

These multiple subjectivities represent *Bone Game*'s larger effort to enact indigenous duration. By playing with perspective, Owens' novel offers a way of connecting past and

present that accounts for the fragmenting impact of horrific violence. Later in the book, while describing his Quintana/Venancio dream, Cole comments upon the effect this example of indigenous duration has on his psyche:

> The strangest thing…is that I'm both of them. It's as if I'm everything and everyone at the same time. I'm the priest whipping the Indian's back to a bloody pulp, and I feel every second of it. And I love it. I want to kill them all and spread their guts out to dry… And it's me tied to the tree and getting my back cut to shreds, feeling like somebody's raking the flesh off my bones with steel claws and hating the priest and everything around me…And it's me standing above it all, seeing it like somebody watching a goddamned movie." (Owens 95)

Cole summarizes the at times confounding experience that is reading *Bone Game* as he attempts to describe his plural subjectivity during these dream passages. In each case, he emphasizes the sensation that accompanies each new perspective. Felt experience becomes the connective tissue through which Cole is able to thread together the disjointed violence embedded into the space of Santa Cruz. Horror's viscera no longer becomes a detractor in attempting to cohere trauma; instead, it becomes a unifying force that aids Cole in piecing together how his current alienation echoes past forms of Native subjugation. He contrasts this sensorial experience with a third perspective hovering over the scene and likened to "somebody watching a goddamned movie." This cinematic perspective brings attention to the act of reading itself, gesturing at the reader as implicit in recreating historic violence. All at once, in other words, Cole becomes both actor and observer, torturer and victim. The passage takes one moment of horror and explodes it out to its logical endpoint, a variation of

perspectives each attempting to make sense of the violence at hand. Rather than champion one narrative over another, Cole's dream underscores the impact of embracing horror's rupturing effect. His dream's simultaneity undermines the capacity of a single, coherent narrative to capture the impact of racial violence. Only by embracing his subjectivity stretching across multiple viewpoints can Cole comprehend the singular act of mission violence as part of a larger web of affective connections.

The sprawling sequencing of the novel's chapters, varying in length and at times lacking any context for speaker, year, or location, contributes to the narrative's temporal convergence. Chapter Fourteen, for example, concludes with a brief description of Cole walking through the forests of Santa Cruz: "The path is slick with leaves and soft with winter, and he ponders the possibility of turning around and going down the other side where the sun has laid a blade of red across the sea's throat" (76). Directly after this passage, Chapter Fifteen tells the brief story of "the Father"—presumably Padre Quintana—punishing an indigenous couple for the loss of their baby.[11] On top of ordering that the woman be whipped and forced to carry a "wooden doll" resembling a "recently born child," he "made the husband of that woman wear cattle horns affixed with leather. In this way they brought him daily to mass from the jail" (76). After this brief chapter finishes, Chapter Sixteen relates the discovery of the dead bodies of a family four: "Light from the burning house tumbled across the surface of the backyard pool where they floated, and the woman's long, dark hair

[11] See James A. Sandos. "Between Crucifix and Lance: Indian-White Relations in California, 1769-1848." *California History*, vol. 76, no. 2/3, 1997, pp. 196–229. In his article, Sandos explains this mission practice as such:
"If a [Native] woman suffered a miscarriage or if she did not conceive, priests, upon earning of these conditions, prescribed a dire punishment. The woman, after being flogged and having her shaved, would be forced to dress in sackcloth, cover herself with ashes, and carry a wooden image of a child or doll, painted red if abortion were suspected, as she went about her daily duties. At Sunday Mass she stood before the mission church to receive the taunts and jeers of churchgoers, including other Indians. Such punishment, which could last for months, was designed to make Indian women exercise a European-mandated control over their bodies that many of them lacked because of European-introduced illness." (201)

spread wide in the reflected fire, touching the arm of one child" (76). The pace with which *Bone Game* hurtles its readers through each of these images is startling. Within one page, three apparently distant and unrelated moments form a quilted pattern stitched together by violence and the shared map of Santa Cruz. Chapter Fourteen's final image incites a latent, violent aura embedded into the landscape. Following this image with a disclosure of mission Indian mistreatment highlights the violence working through each description. The gore invoked by Owens' characterization of the Santa Cruz sunset works back through the systemic torture and cultural violence at play in the Father's punishing of the Native man and woman. That Chapter Fifteen begins *in media res*, without the depiction of the indigenous woman's whipping, unites both passages as one simultaneous event. The sun's "blade of red" becomes the whipping that takes place before the Father has the wooden child created. Chapter Sixteen's recounting of the discovery of the family's corpses plays off of the previous scene of mission violence. Here, the previous scene of violence befalling one family—the indigenous couple—culminates in the contemporary family's graphic murder. The disturbing scene holds strands of DNA from the previous two chapters—the "light from the burning house" becomes the sunset of Chapter Fourteen while the mother's hair touching her dead child stands in for the woman carrying the wooden child. Stringing these descriptions together creates a new story of Santa Cruz that erases any temporal distance and interweaves each event together.

All of these temporal convergences culminate in Cole's final confrontation with the spirit of Venancio. The conclusion exhibits the power of story by demonstrating how the oral tradition imparts the same time bending properties that Cole's dreams have exhibited throughout the text. As Venancio approaches Cole and Abby, Cole speaks his name:

"Venancio Asisara" (241). The performative speech act serves as a type of signification, a way of facing Santa Cruz's violent mission legacy. Just as his dreams did before, speaking the spirit's name allows Cole to collapse timelines together. Miranda similarly highlights the act of naming in her letter to Vicenta Gutierrez, a mission Indian who was raped by a priest when she went to confession during Lent. In her letter to Vicenta, Miranda notes the significance of another Native woman, Isabel Meadows, using both Vicenta and the priest's name, Padre Reale: "[Isabel] used Spanish and a brutal English to make sure Harrington understood. Vicenta, she used the priest's *name*. 'Padre Real.' And she used your name" (Miranda 24). Part of telling Vicenta's story, for Miranda, lies in speaking names and making present those no longer physically with us. Miranda even notes that Vicenta's given Spanish name means "conquers," an active verb always already in motion. Likewise, Cole's naming of Venancio brings the past and present to a head. "Venancio" crosses timelines in order to speak to the legacy of missions violence on the present day. *Bone Game* saves this speech act for the novel's finale in order to illustrate *story*'s capacity for conveying the horror of violence across any chasm of time. Cole's experiences throughout the novel allow him to speak Venancio's name in a way that culls together both individuals into the shared space of Santa Cruz. Despite this temporal convergence, *Bone Game*'s conclusion stops short of exorcism: Cole's naming of Venancio is not meant to reconcile the past for the sake of the future. Instead, "Venancio" becomes a point of recognition that gestures to past and present for the sake of the future. Leaning into the fragmentation of mission violence and finding order in the incoherence of traumatic violence allows Cole to envision a future determined by himself.

**Conclusion**

Horror becomes the narrative vehicle through which these novel finds a path to self-determination, an understanding of time outside of the singular narrative of white supremacy that accounts for the persistence and resistance of indigenous and afro-diasporic populations. Resisting the temporal logic of the new racial capitalism, for Dana and Cole, requires re-ordering the very logic by which power conceives of time. The ruptured space of horror, often conceived as a moment of sensorial paralysis,[12] sparks a break from homogenous temporality from which new ways of remembering and thinking forward can spring. At the same time, Butler and Owens' novels rethink the state of victimry for Black and Native communities. Neither re-imagine slave or mission Indian violence in order to reinforce contemporary notions of Black or indigenous victimization; rather, these projects use contemplations of historic violence in order to forge more effective resistances to power in the contemporary now. Leaning into the unique temporal status of horror breeds this crucial reordering of the poles established by dominant time and racial logic.

But how do we account for the corporeality of these horror historicisms? After all, both Dana and Cole's journeys through time center on their bodily experience and hinge on excruciating images of bodily torture. In the next chapter, we will examine how the intersections of horror and the body offer similar opportunities for Black and Native authors to critique and think past dominant conceptions of racialized embodiment.

[12] See Ann Radcliffe. "On the Supernatural in Poetry." *New Monthly Magazine*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1826, pp. 145-152.

## CHAPTER TWO:
## DISFIGURING RESISTANCE: *VENUS*, *CHANCERS*, AND BODY HORROR

"We cannot say what new structures will replace the ones we live with yet, because once we have torn shit down, we will inevitably see more and see differently and feel a new sense of wanting and being and becoming."

– Jack Halberstam, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*

"It burns the thing
inside it. And that thing
screams."

– Amiri Baraka, "An Agony. As Now."

### Introduction

To be categorized under the terms of order dictated by late twentieth century racial capitalism indicates more than a forced assimilation into a dominant Western temporality: it signals an induction into a bodily grammar in which subjects are conformed and subjugated in accordance to visible signifiers of otherness—what Robyn Wiegman refers to as "economies of visibility" (3). These "economies" build stable signifiers through which the Black or Native body is policed and defined as a knowable entity. Cohering bodies under this dominant racial logic, Eva Cherniavsky argues, simultaneously dictates the subject's ultimate relationship to capital. Thus, the system of inequality that continued under post-World War II racial capitalism relies on racial essentialisms meant to fix subjects onto one grid of legible identities. The construction of this grid dates back to the racist marriage of African and indigenous bodily dissections and colonial discourse through which race was invented to justify European supremacy. In essence, the terms of order by which bodies become racialized belies a tragic history of violence and dismemberment in the name of "scientific" discovery.

Interrupting this system of physical categorization requires a critical framework that takes as its focus the site of bodily violence. In other words, to respond to a logic that seeks to mask the racial violence and brutal dissections that make up its point of origin, Black and Native artists in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century turned to the depiction of dismemberment. Cinema critics such as Philip Brophy recognize such depictions in the horror genre as *body horror*: horror that "tends to play not so much on the broad fear of Death, but more precisely on the fear of one's own body, of how one controls and relates to it" (Brophy 8). Body horror through the eyes of critics such as Brophy takes as its aim the frailty of embodiment—what M. Jacqui Alexander refers to as an entanglement of "body and memory" (297). When applied with a critical race framework, body horror defines a way of writing the dismembered body of color as a resistant agent to the racializing imperial gaze, a resistance that appears textually as a deconstruction of the written word. If the racial logic of hegemony assembles the Black and Native body via a categorizing system based on racist historic discourse and Euro/ocular-centric ideologies, then body horror deconstructs the dominant *sign* of Blackness and Indigeneity, freeing the Black or Native subject to new possibilities of self-determination and embodiment.

To think through body horror as I deploy it means to realize how texts dealing with bodily dissection or other forms of violence become sites of *disfiguring resistance*. Disfiguring resistance refers to textual acts that use bodily dismemberment as a method of deconstructing dominant racial logic. By doing so, the authors of this chapter reveal the violence underlying these racializations even as they seek to undermine them. The mutilated bodies that take part in these disfiguring resistances exist outside of a traditional threat of death. Rather, these bodies are undead in as much as they continue to act and deconstruct

dominant racial logic long after their dismemberments. In doing so, these texts subvert the influence of death as it figures into systems of power and offer windows of possibility into ways of being defined by afro-diasporic and indigenous ontologies as opposed to Western discourse.

In what follows, I trace these *disfiguring resistances* in works that highlight bodily violence. First, I locate a critical definition of body horror via a reading of Amiri Baraka's "An Agony. As Now." Baraka's poem provides a crucial window into the connection between the white gaze and the construction of the racialized body. Next, I turn to Suzan-Lori Parks's *Venus* (1996) for how it actualizes *disfiguring resistance* in its deconstruction of the historical Black female body. This deconstruction both frees real life figure Saartjie Baartman from the Western historicizing gaze that seeks to confine her to popular understanding and unbinds the cultural sign of the Black female body as commodity and spectacle. This dual disfigurement, occurring both at the level of the literary body and the written word, illuminates racial capitalism's reliance on Western historicization to reproduce its allegedly ahistorical, antiracist identity politics. Finally, I conduct a reading of Gerald Vizenor's *Chancers* (2001) in order to locate how it uses body horror to respond to issues of indigenous dissection at the hands of Western anthropology and notions of Native identity and blood quantum. Vizenor combines horrific scenes of bodily violence with his own brand of satire in order to produce a critique of the imagic; body horror becomes the critical vehicle through which he deconstructs essentialized notions of race, leaving space for a performance of what he deems the post-indian, who moves beyond the registers of racial capitalism.

**The White Gaze and Body Horror**

Understanding how body horror functions as a form of resistance to power requires examining the moment by which a body becomes categorized in the first place. To do so, we need to explore the subject of color's experience of the white gaze and witness what it means to speak from within this constricting system of race. When the thing from Amiri Baraka's "An Agony. As Now." screams, for example, it does so due ostensibly to the pain from the scalding armor that surrounds it, a contentious outer-shell that the narrator describes as "Flesh,/white hot metal" (15). The poem's depiction of Du Bois's double-consciousness gives us a window to the physical and psychological agony that is to be "inside someone/who hates me," (15) but it also invokes a particular aspect of horror that occurs at the level of the racialized body. The thing screams, in part, due to its recognition of its own thing-ness, its realization of the "white hot metal" (15) that surrounds and contests its very being. To be made a "thing" in the case of Baraka's poem involves a process of racial categorization that relies upon making bodies of color legible to the white gaze; accordingly, "An Agony. As Now." expresses the horror of the imperial gaze that seeks to enclose and constrict the body of color to a racial logic made to support the rhetoric of white supremacy.

For Baraka's narrator to be made legible to imperial vision implies not just a constricting of the body of color to a dominant logic of racial identity but also to a linguistic sign that relates back to a larger hegemonic grammar.[1] As the poem relates, "It is a human love, I live inside. A bony skeleton/you recognize as words or simple feeling" ("An Agony. As Now." 15). The racialization that encloses the "thing" does so at the site of the body as well as at the level of language. The "you" of the poem is meant to recognize the visual cues

[1] For further background on visuality's role in hegemonic discourse and stereotypes, see Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness*. Cornell University Press, 1985.

of the bony skeleton in the form of words that suit the universalist-paradigm of "human."[2] Vision becomes the vehicle through which bodies of color are subjugated and regulated to roles of support to the rhetoric of white supremacy. Homi Bhabha's work on the stereotype as it functions in colonialism re-affirms the role of vision, particularly of the imperial variety, in acts of subjugation. He refers to the stereotype as a meaning-making exercise by which colonialism shuffles the colonized other into its discursive fold. These stereotypes are hardly confident in their assertions, however; as Bhabha explains, the stereotype "is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" ("The Other Question" 95). This colonial anxiety structures Bhabha's later argument on the ambivalence of the colonial stereotype, but for our purposes, it also points towards a process of racialization that is always in effect. Part of this need for the stereotype's repetition comes from its connection to vision. Bhabha later writes that "colonial discourse produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and *visible*" (101). Fanon conceptualizes this imperial gaze as construing a "corporeal malediction" in which he experiences himself as a body always from the third person and in dialectic to the physical world. He explains:

> I know that if I want to smoke, I shall have to reach out my right arm and take the pack of cigarettes lying at the other end of the table. The matches, however, are in the drawer on the left, and I shall have to lean back slightly. And all of these movements are made not out of habit but out of implicit

[2] See Robert F. Reid-Pharr, *Archives of Flesh: African America, Spain, and Post-Humanist Critique*. New York University Press, 2016. Robert F. Reid-Pharr's *Archives of Flesh* ably critiques Western discourse's reliance on definitions of humanism that overlook the cultural impact of racism and the system of slavery. Reid-Pharr critiques Western humanism as a flattening force that ignores the ways in which racist discourse played into how dominant theories of the human came to be.

> knowledge. A slow composition of my *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world—such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me; it is, rather, a definitive structuring of the self and of the world. ("The Fact of Blackness" 258)

The outside manner through which Fanon views his physical self mimics the imperial gaze by which he is always *other*-ed and contrasted to whiteness. The ocular is central to Fanon's vision of the postcolonial physical self, a body always seeing itself from outside and separate from the world around it.

For Baraka's "thing" to be "knowable and visible"—per Bhabha—echoes Wiegman's sentiment that "the visible has a long, contested, and highly contradictory role as the primary vehicle for making race 'real' in the United States. Its function, to cite the body as the inevitable locus of 'being,' depends on a series of bodily fictions assumed to unproblematically reflect the natural meaning of flesh" (Wiegman 11). The problem, as Wiegman goes on to explain, is not in what the eye sees, but "the cultural training that quite literally teaches the eye not only how but what to see" (22). But if visuality represents a legibility to dominant racial logic, then to be without body, or to exist unattached to any physical enclose offers one escape from the fate of Baraka's entrapped "thing." To this point, Wiegman offers insight into how the "philosophical and political discourses of Enlightenment worked so hard to negate, crafting the white masculine as the disembodied norm against which a definitive body of difference could be specifically engaged" (48). To be disembodied, or more specifically *without body*, allows the white masculine to become symbolic of a "rhetoric of democratic citizenship that pivoted on an abstracted…quality"

(48). Conversely, the bodies of color that make-up the "definitive [bodies] of difference" become defined by their marked physical "particularities."

This history of opacity leads us back to Baraka's screaming "thing" and the question of how its horror of recognition signifies more than just victimry. That is, how can we conceive of horror as a rupturing force capable of deconstructing the dominant racial sign? In the realm of the visual, Baraka's "thing" incites the theoretical slippage between gazing at and standing within the racialized body. Rather than make the body of color a visual curiosity meant to be consumed and categorized according to dominant racial logic, horror can mark a site of departure that disfigures the body and obscures imperial vision. It is here that we turn to the nominal, torn asunder agent of Parks's *Venus*, whose disfigurement serves as resistance to visual processes of racialization. For Parks's play, to take apart the Black female body is to enact a critique of power's reliance on structuralism to enclose minority communities into a binding logic of racial capitalism.

**Body Horror and "Dis(-re-)membering" *Venus***

*Venus* is based on the life of Saartjie Baartman, a Khoikhoi woman working in South Africa who, in 1810, was convinced to travel to England to become a sideshow attraction based on her non-European body type—most notably, of which, was her enlarged posterior. The controversy surrounding *Venus* mainly centers on both Parks's representation of Baartman as a consenting participant in her own subjugation and the way in which the spectacle-inducing, carnival-esque tone of the production reifies the imperial gaze, leaving Baartman's body as an empty object of wonder. Critic Jean Young, in particular, criticizes Parks for framing Baartman as complicit "in her own horrific exploitation" (699), a decision that, according to Young, downplays the terrible realities of the racist discourse that eventually led to

Baartman's corpse being presented as an exhibit in French museums until 1976 (Baartman's body was only returned to Africa in 2002).[3]

Art, in particular political art, has its reasons, and provocation is central among these strategies of making viewers realize themselves as hidden in the confirmation of a normative audience. A number of critics have taken Young's critique to task; Harvey Young poses a reading of *Venus* that suggests, "The play is more complex than [Jean] Young's initial assessment" (125). Harvey Young locates the complexity of Parks's critique of colonial discourse in her use of language. He argues, "Parks takes her readers and audiences to the very ends of textuality. We can see this in the playwright's scripting of gestures and her stage directions, emphasis on nonverbal moments, and even the narrative history of the Hottentot Venus that fails to adequately represent the body of Saartjie Baartman" (128). According to Harvey Young, Parks's script pushes the abilities of language in order to illustrate the inadequacy of historical texts in recreating Baartman's life. Her use of "spells" (pauses written into the script for characters to physically gesture) and her purposeful alteration of English to re-enact the physical act of speaking represent attempts to instill language with physicality, attempts that, as Harvey Young explains, end in failure. But while Harvey Young's argument provides crucial understanding of the significance of language and its relationship to the body in *Venus*, he and Jean Young both fail to account for the role that horror plays in staging these linguistic failures. For if Parks's script contains a multitude of "signifyin'" acts that play with language and meaning in a way influenced by afro-diasporic

[3] Jean Young often plays the role of "straw man" in critical work seeking to engage with *Venus*, and while her article admittedly plays a similar function here, it is also pertinent to remember Young's criticisms derive in part from a very real history of black objectification upon the stage, especially for the benefit of white audiences. Additionally, as Harvey Young reminds us, Jean Young's critique also touches on Richard Foreman's direction, which has been criticized by multiple authors for its heavy handed-ness and tendency to distract from the script's own critique against colonialism.

culture, the question stands of how the stain of dissection, in all of its horrific imagery, interacts with these linguistic games?

*Venus* utilizes body horror as a way to animate the deconstructive properties of disfigurement. Parks illustrates the power of body horror to interrogate notions of identity beyond mere questions of the physical. Fictional depictions of bodily dismemberment provide intriguing space for *Venus* to explore possibilities of Black embodiment without the presence of the white gaze. Combating this gaze means locating a Black tradition of obscuration capable of blinding the imperial eye and seeking new modes of self-recognition. In *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (2011), Nicole R. Fleetwood interrogates the spaces of possibility left during theoretical moments such as Fanon's "Look! A Negro!" episode. While explicating David Marriot's previous scholarship on the Fanonian moment, Fleetwood comments, "Marriot emphasizes the body as being *disembodied* by image and the body's recasting through imago. This shadow or strain is what I understand as the residue that hovers, lingers, emanates, and circulates long after the moment of marking…has passed" (24). Fleetwood's explanation of Marriot's conception of the Black body's disembodiment and recasting via imago leads her to the possibility that such a shadow allows simultaneously for an obscuring from wounding vision that veils the body from the white gaze. She writes, "Opacity in the rendering of blackness and its attachment onto black bodies literally and figuratively clouds vision and produces ambivalence even in the most vociferous and decisive proclamations, as 'Look, a Negro!' (24). Part of what drives this turn in Fleetwood's argument is the work by Daphne Brooks, whose *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (2006) locates the resistance in Black performances via their deployment of "Afro-alienation acts," or a "specific strategy of

cultural performance" that "[renders] racial and gender categories strange" in order to problematize "cultural perceptions of identity formation" (5). Brooks' "Afro-alienation acts" represent the same opacity that Fleetwood discusses; both involve a subversion of the visual that opens up a space of possibility outside of the "powerful stillness" of dominant racial categories. Just as with Bhabha, "ambivalence" for Fleetwood and Brooks obscures imperial vision. The key here is the connection between agency and the inability to visually render the body, a version of what Éduard Glissant refers to as the "right to opacity" ("For Opacity" 189). The possibility of modality arises from the Western attempt to order and categorize the Black body, creating a moment of maneuverability.

The act of dismembering the body of color deconstructs the racially encoded body created by the gaze; in doing so, *no body* becomes *nobody*, a vanishing act that obscures or blinds imperial vision by rendering the Black subject unrecognizable. Doing so attempts to imagine a space apart from Western, capitalist modes of knowledge seeking to register and commoditize the Black body. Body horror becomes a pathway to fugitivity narratives. Jack Halberstam depicts fugitive flight as a way of refusing state categorization, a refusal he characterizes as a "break":

> We cannot be satisfied with the recognition and acknowledgement generated by the very system that denies a) that anything was ever broken and b) that we deserved to be the broken part; so we refuse to ask for recognition and instead we want to take apart, dismantle, tear down the structure that, right now, limits our ability to find each other, to see beyond it and to access the places that we know lie outside its walls. (6)

Rather than as a simple erasure or re-writing, this unbinding comes in the form of graphic bodily dissection, which creates a space for the imagining of a form of embodiment that does not rely on the visual and is free of the cathartic binary inherent in the racializing gaze. The body horror in *Venus* shares more with fugitivity than the active verbs "dismantle" or "take apart"; in effect, the same "break" Halbertstam defines as part recognition, part deconstruction takes place in the theoretical realm of body horror, in which bodily violence forces one to recognize the horrific truth of one's body as he or she witnesses its disfiguration. *Venus*'s body horror aesthetics push against the state's capacity for recognition in order to escape the visual and ontological economies set in place by Western culture. This fugitive path from dominant recognition is aware of normative historical narratives so far as they pertain to the racist discourse used to justify contemporary forms of subjugation.

Horror's viscera allows for a play filled with absences and blanks that break up, distract, and otherwise disrupt from any attempt to recreate the Venus Hottentot. The reality of bodily mutilation becomes an absent presence, a traumatic happening that haunts the entire production to the point that it seeps through the language and infiltrates our understanding of Baartman as a historical figure. In effect, Parks shows us horror's influence on our understanding of the history of slavery while simultaneously using it to deconstruct the socially assembled body of the Venus. In response to critics such as Saidiya Hartman[4] and Debra Walker King,[5] who both criticize the use of Black bodies in pain brought about as spectacles as reminders of slavery and racism, Parks intensifies the focus on the Black female body as spectacle and re-directs the affective power of horror onto the dialogue and staging. The result is a play about horror and powered by horror that seemingly involves little to no

[4] See Saidiya Hartman. *Scenes of Subjection: Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford University Press, 1997.
[5] See Debra Walker King. *African Americans and the Culture of Pain*. University of Virginia Press, 2008.

scenes of actual violent horror. The repugnance of body horror that Parks relies on to impact her audience becomes a new way to re-contextualize more seemingly mundane realities of bodily racism, including the distorted domestic relationship between the Venus and the Baron Docteur. In doing so, Parks responds to Saidiya Hartman's criticisms of historicizing slavery by providing an example of how horror and spectacle can speak to the everyday, that the socially constructed Black female body is at some level always operating as spectacle.

Parks's "remedy" for this distancing-creating spectacle is to deconstruct the racialized body and see what is left over. The various ways in which dissection informs Parks's *Venus* saturates the production with a sense of body horror meant to impact the audience even while the act of dismemberment itself remains just out of sight. Each dissection, while referencing in part Baartman's own autopsy, also provides a glimpse at the many iterations of Saartjie Baartman, historical figure. Parks's work has always seen history as integral in piecing together identity politics, particularly in examining dominant historical narratives and their influence on the marginalization of bodes of color. Philip C. Kolin writes, "In play after play, Parks keeps emphasizing that history is representation/show and that the costumes/props used to project an image have a crucial role in identity formation" (14). In relation to *Venus*, the "show" of Baartman's historical narrative contributes to the projection of Black female identity. In response to the powers of dominant history, Parks utilizes the critical power of dissection to *dismember* the historical body of Saartjie Baartman. By constantly re-creating the dismemberment of Baartman's body, Parks also re-enacts her historization until the two processes become one and the same. Parks neologizes this hybridity as "dis(re)memberment."

*Venus* is by no means an investigative recreation of the events that led to Baartman's death in France in 1815. Instead, Parks's fashions her play in the same manner as Baartman's dissection, which was done not to determine cause of death, but rather to aid in the justification of racist discourse placing African bodies in the same scientific category as apes. While death exists in *Venus*, and in fact opens and closes the play, it is not the ultimate source of horror meant to impact the audience viscerally. That Baartman dies of mysterious means (either from a sexually transmitted disease as the play insinuates or from another illness) is of little consequence to the production. The horror in *Venus* derives mainly from the fate *after* death, the dissection and subsequent refashioning that catalogues Baartman's body as museum curiosity.

Parks consistently blurs the line between *living* and *undead* in order to expose the consequences of violence beyond the threat of mere death. To this end, the Venus comes to resemble a living corpse rather than a living breathing character who fears for her own life. Her fate is assured with the play's opening, where, after a brief overture, the Negro Resurrectionist exclaims, "I regret to inform you that the Venus Hottentot iz dead" (Parks 11). The declaration's impact dulls in light of the fact that the Venus herself is on stage when it occurs, seemingly alive. The Brother, late the Mother Showman's later assurance that "There wont b inny show tonite" (11) further underscores the play's attempt to negate both the Venus as both a living being and a objectified spectacle. The character Venus's death, which has preceded the play's beginning, guarantees neither the end of her life as a circus performer or an object of curiosity for Western-European audiences. Not only does she continue to "perform," but the "show" that is the actual production of Parks's *Venus* goes on. With no reservations about revealing her tragic end, *Venus* encourages us to cease to view the

character Venus as a living embodiment of Saartjie Baartman and instead imagine her as Baartman's already dissected corpse.

Given the fact of the Venus's already-announced death and her status as walking-cadaver, Parks' play incites—via dialogue, staging, and plays with language—a series of dissections that figuratively dismember the Venus. Additionally, these narrative elements call attention to the way in which the visual racialization of her body contributes to the problematic construction of the historical Saartjie Baartman and the consequent racialization of the Black female body itself. *Venus* leans into the problematic legitimacy of historical narratives by offering one envisioning after another of the Venus from the eyes of various characters. The Venus's post-mortem plurality is best summed up by the Brother, late the Mother Showman's commentary:

> Behind that curtin just yesterday awaited:
> Wild Female Jungle Creature. Of singular anatomy. Physiqued
> in such a backward rounded way that she outshapes
> all others. Behind this curtain just yesterday alive uhwaits
> a female—a creature
> an out—of towner
> whos all undressed awaiting you
> to take yr peek. So you've heard. (14)

The Venus is described as a "female," "a creature," and "an out—of towner," all within close proximity to each other. These multiple attempts at encapsulating the Venus conflict with the earlier claim of her "singular anatomy." In fact, it is her "singular anatomy" that endows the Venus as an object from which to be defined from the outside, or, as the Brother, later the

Mother Showman puts it, from "behind that curtin." When taking this contrast in consideration, the later line that the Venus is "physiqued in such a backward rounded way that she outshapes all others" can be taken quite literally. To be "physique" recalls the way that dissection re-defines the Venus's body from the perspectives of science, history, and culture at large. As an action, "physiqued" becomes a way in which one is given a "physique," burdened with a societally influenced perspective of the Black female body that makes it a public spectacle. As a consequence, the Venus possesses the ability to "[outshape] all others." To "outshape" can here be taken to possess a larger amount of possible shapes than others, to be multiple where others are singular. That this anatomically singular—at least by Eurocentric bodily standards—body is a silent cadaver makes this re-writing of the Venus's identity all the easier: the Venus's body is "all undressed and waiting for you to take yr peek." "Undressed" not only implies the voyeuristic, psycho-sexual thrill of female nudity, but also the image of the Venus on the autopsy table, stripped not only of clothes but of identity as well. Parks's play with double entendre that provokes images of Venus as an already dissected body raises questions of how such a state leaves her memory vulnerable to manipulation. To be "undressed" from her identity ties to her literally "undressing" from her skin and body parts, as later hints at the terrible maceration of her body as pickled show.

Parks goes on to oversaturate her Overture with new definitions of the Venus via the act of looking. Similar to Fanon's "corporeal malediction," the imperial gaze also re-shapes the Venus's body to match whatever image the observer seeks out. For the Man, later the Baron Docteur, the Venus signifies a vague symbol of objectified romanticism: "I look at you, V/And I see Love" (14). Through the act of looking, the *you* that was the Venus – here verbally cut down to her moniker's beginning syllable – becomes the abstract Love.

Similarly, near the Overture's end, the Anatomist from the East declares, "I look at you, Venus, and see: Science. You in uh pickle on my library shelf" (17). In both examples, looking or seeing become ways through which the white male subject can reshape or project upon the body of the Venus. The Anatomist from the East's gaze foreshadows the Venus's ultimate fate as a natural history museum exhibit, and yet, the use of the present tense from both the Baron Docteur and the Anatomist from the East speak to the Venus's duality as living subject and already dead cadaver. Additionally, both new definitions thrust upon her—Love and Science—speak to two ways in which European culture desires and, finally, objectifies the Venus: as a hypersexual object and as a scientific curiosity.

The connection between looking upon the Venus and manipulating her identity continues past the Overture in ways that underscore her status as already-dissected cadaver, particularly to those characters representing the scientific community, as well as to the audience themselves. "Scene 12: Love Iduhnt What/She Used To Be" involves the Venus conversing with the Baron Docteur as he trains a group of anatomists on how to measure her body in preparation for her forthcoming autopsy. As the training commences, the Baron Docteur exclaims, "Gentlemen!/Time to practice Measurements!" (118). What follows is a series of measurements made by the anatomists and announced to the Baron Docteur as he calls for new body parts to be measured. At one point the Docteur orders, "To the middle fingers tip/the arm being extended from the side," to which the Chorus of Eight Anatomists reply, "32.1." Here, in the same way that the Venus became the abstract values of Love and Science to the white characters from the Overture, she takes on the abstract value of numbered measurements to the group of anatomists. As the scene continues, the anatomists' preparation for the actual dissection transforms into a dissection all its own as the Venus

becomes first a series of bodily segments ("*Vertex* to/the top of the shoulder" [118], "To thuh upper part of thuh *sternum*:" [118], "To the middle fingers tip/the arm being extended towards the viewer/full front:" [119]) followed by these segments' corresponding numerical measurements: "9.0," "10.5." and "32.1." That all of this happens as the Venus stands there unawares only enhances the horror that is her autopsy. At one point, the Grade School Chum, who is observing this measurement practice, says, "The measurements of her limb-bones/will of course/be corrected/after maceration, Sir?" (122). When the Venus asks what the word means, the Negro Resurrectionist informs the audience of its true definitions:

> Footnote #8
>
> Definition: Medical: *Maceration*
>
> (*Rest*).
>
> "A process performed on the subject after the subjects death. The subjects body parts are soaked in a chemical solution to separate the flesh from the bones so that the bones may be measured with greater accuracy. (122)

The gruesome image of amputated limbs being dipped into acidic solvent forces the audience to picture the dismemberment of Baartman's body even while she stands before them. The audience, along with the anatomists, participates in re-shaping the Venus's body to that of the already dead "subject" from the medical definition. With death more than assured, the aside incites horror from the idea that this mental dissection could occur without the Venus's knowledge, that she is ignorant of the violent dismemberment that awaits her, has already occurred, and is currently happening to her.

This forced psychic dissection that the Resurrectionist thrusts upon the audience becomes amplified in the moment directly following the informative aside, as the Baron

Docteur asks that his medical colleagues put their hands together for their lovely subject. The anatomists on stage simulate an audience via the act of applause, while the emphasis on "hands" highlights the language of dissection surrounding the Venus, even in the act of purported praise. Her "performance" befitting so much praise is in reality her possession of a body that will make a valuable cadaver for the anatomists. The entire short scene serves as a microcosm of *Venus* as a whole: the Venus "performs" by serving as a walking conduit for others to imagine dissection and dismemberment. That the body continues to exist on stage further accentuates the spectacle that was the Venus's post-modem existence, another reminder that death is not the horrifying presence here, but rather the dismemberment of the body that strips this former attraction of her identity. The audience is left with the implication that they are complicit in these dissection devices since they are a part of the crowd whose gaze has already transformed the Venus into a spectacle.

The apex of Parks's *Venus*'s attempts to reveal the audience's complicity in the Venus's multiple dissections comes during the play's intermission, which infamously features the Baron Docteur reading his notes from the Venus's autopsy to the audience, who he refers to as a group of his scientist colleagues. Labeled as both an intermission and "Scene 16: Several Years From Now: In the Anatomical Theatre of Tubingen: The Dis(re)memberment of the Venus Hottentot, Part I," the hybrid scene blurs the line between performance and reality by directly referring to the audience members as the Docteur's colleagues while the Venus is again verbally dissected via a gruesome yet sterilized lexicon. The stage directions that open the intermission explain, "*Scene 16 runs during intermission. House lights should come up and the audience should be encouraged to walk out of the theatre, take their intermission break, then return*" (95). The audience is only made privy of

these stipulations from the Docteur's own reassurances that they are no required to continue sitting:

> I understand that my yield is
> *long* in length
> And while my finds are complete compensation
> for the amount of labor expended upon them
> I do invite you, Distinguished Gentlemen,
> Colleagues and yr Distinguished Guests, if you need *relief*
> Please take yourselves uh breather in thuh lobby.
> My voice will surely carry beyond these walls and if not
> my finds are published. Forthcoming in *The Royal College*
> *Journal of Anatomy*. (95)

At first glance, it appears that the audience are suddenly transformed into "Distinguished Gentlemen" and "Colleagues" for the remainder of the intermission. However, the effect of having the house lights provokes an aura of revelation as opposed to transformation. In other words, the audience is exposed, not transformed, into complicit observers of the Venus's dissection. The revelation that the audience is integral to the Venus's subjugation lacks any strict audible tone of condemnation. Instead, the audience members are coaxed to take advantage of the intermission even as the Docteur reminds them of their contributing role in the intermission's gory proceedings. His comment that his voice will carry beyond the theater and into the lobby doubles as a stab as reassurance as well as a veiled threat that there is no escape from taking part in the dissection. In addition to his direct implication of the audience as colleagues/accomplices, the Docteur emphasizes "the amount of labor" behind both the

dissection and the reporting of his findings. His vague reference to this "labor," as well as later boasts of his own stamina that allow him to continue the hard work of announcing his autopsy notes ("Please, Sir, indulge yourself. Go take a break./Ive got strong lungs:" [99]), equates the actual dissection and the later dissection in Tubinden as physical acts with similar expenditures of energy. What begins as an apparent report becomes another new act of dissection. Similarly, witnessing this report becomes another physical act that requires "relief," further implicating the audience as active, embodied participants in the ongoing dissection.

The intermission's blending of the verbal into the actual extends to the (de)constructing of the body itself. Indeed, the only thing missing from the Docteur's audience-assisted dissection of the Venus is the Venus. And yet, the Docteur conjures a version of her body by cataloguing it in portions. Dissection becomes an act of parallel creation that results in a Black female body read through the lens of racist comparative anatomy. The body is described in four sections: "External Characteristics," "The Skin," "The Face," and "The Muscular System," all comprising the "more perishable soft structures of the body" (96). In effect, the Docteur recreates the Venus's outside features in order to be recognizable to racist bodily discourse. In describing the body's skin, he relates, "Prevailing color: orange-brown tolerably uniform in tint/on all parts of the body save the abdomen and thighs: 2 shades darker" (96). By accenting his remarks with subjective descriptors such as "tolerably" and "uniform," the Docteur's discussion of the absent body goes beyond simple description and into the act of creation: by explaining the body's skin tone, he effectively "colors" the cadaver. That those areas he deems non-uniform lie adjacent to the Venus's sexual organs quite literally highlights the Docteur's interest in her body as a sexual object.

This racially-biased re-imagining continues as he explains, "The Face: Remarkable for its great breadth and flatness/Presenting to me resemblances to Mongolian and Simian/(previously noted by several other scholars)" (97). The quote contains shades of the Overture and the notion that the Venus's anatomical singularity denotes her ability to "outshape" others: here, her face's dissimilarity to European facial norms makes it *re*markable, or capable of being marked over and over again. The allusion to past racist scholarly comparisons joining African to Simian anatomy encompass one such *marking*; the Docteur fills the space he finds in the face's "great breadth and flatness" with white supremacist justifications for African subjugation. He further describes the face's outline as "both pecular [sic] and characteristic/being broad in the *malar* region" (97). The Venus's peculiarity becomes a defining characteristic in a way that looks beyond the confines of her singular body and outwards to the larger dominant discourse on African female bodies in general.

Even as the intermission showcases the inescapable racialized construction of the Black female body via medical dissection, an interwoven narrative of desire alternates with the Docteur's notes as a way of paralleling the acts of sexual and scientific objectification. The Bride-To-Be, who stars in the play-within-a-play entitled "For the Love of the Venus" alongside The Young Man, reads letters from her beau at the side of the stage as the Baron Docteur performs his verbal autopsy. The segments that she reads all touch on the constructed-ness and artificiality of love that characterizes the Young Man's desire for her. Her opening reading, "My love for you, My Love, is artificial,/Fabricated much like this epistle" (95), echoes earlier examples of the Venus's own objectification at the hands of the Baron Docteur and the Anatomist from the East in which she takes on whatever identity the

masculinist gaze projects onto her. Consequently, the Young Man's "love" for the Bride-To-Be transforms her into his "Love." Love, when thought through the lens of the male, imperial gaze, turn out to be a matter of control and possession. The Young Man's desire and his bride become one and the same, nullifying her individual identity and re-imagining her body as a place-holder for his romantic wants. And what makes his love strong enough to attempt such a bodily re-imagining is its artificiality, its fabrication. The in-authenticity of a love based on performance and simulation as opposed to anything resembling experienced affect gives it a kind of power that, like plastic, allows it to exist outside of any vulnerabilities to forces of nature, a form of immortality touted by the Young Man as he boasts that his love, "constructed with mans finest powers/Will last through the days and the years and the hours" (98). This same artificiality gives the Young Man's "love" the ability to alter the Bride-To-Be to fit his perceptions, a violence levied at the Bride's agency to define herself. Producing and mastering the artificial, whether desire or body discourse, here points to the power to manipulate and control. The likening of his "love" to the epistle again parallels the Docteur's own collecting of separate body parts to assemble the Venus's racialized body. Much like the separate letters, each a fabricated piece of affect, the individual body parts, read through dominant discourse and pseudo-science, combine to form a larger body that is itself a type of pompous artifice.

The moments in which the Docteur and the Bride-To-Be's respective monologues integrate blurs the line between bodily dissection and desire as objectification to the point that they, despite their differences, converge. For example, in describing the Venus's breasts, the Baron Docteur explains, "The *Mammae*, situated exactly/Over the fourth and fifth ribs,/Were a full 6 inches apart at the inner edge of their bases./They were soft" (98). The

opening descriptions of her breasts, consumed with scientific diction that likens them more to structures ("of their bases") then body parts, gives way to a jarring aside of their softness, a comment based on the personal intimacy of living touch. Rather than signaling the Docteur's eventual transition from dissector to concerned lover, however, the interruption leads to the corrected progression of analysis that the breasts were "soft, flaccid and subpendulous/4 inches in diameter at the base" (98). The Docteur's moment of intimacy in recalling the Venus's breasts in a manner at once both sexual and maternal transforms into a detailed, scientific description of her cadaver's exterior appearance. The blending of flayings caught between dissection and intimacy reaches its climax at the intermission's conclusion, during which the Docteur remembers, "Her shoulders back and chest had grace./Her charming hands… *uh hehm*./Where was I?" (102). His slipping from medical dialect to humanizing descriptors of the Venus's back, shoulders, chest, and hands reveals the connecting tissue between her assemblage as a scientific curiosity and her role as an object of the Docteur's desires. Even in remembering these body parts as graceful and charming, the Docteur is only capable of doing so in pieces. As a consequence, dissection continues to dominate the language by which the Venus is desired and remembered.

Another dissection that battles with the sublimating of feeling reemerges in the moments of supposed intimacy between the Baron Docteur and the Venus. "Scene 9: Her Charming Hands/An Anatomical Columbus" opens with the following ominous stage directions: "*The Venus sits in a chair wrapped up to her chin in a large cloth. The Baron Docteur stands above her wielding a shiny and sharp pairs of scissors*" (126). Right away, we offered an image of the Venus's forthcoming autopsy at the hands of the Baron Docteur, from the cloth covering her body to the sharp blades that the Docteur wields. Only after these

two stage directions does Parks include, "*He is giving her a haircut*" (126). The three directions in succession of each other strike a comic and grotesque contrast, beginning with the horrific thought that the long promised autopsy has finally begun and will occur on stage and concluding with the relief of the mundane event that is actually occurring. In the scene that follows, what could be an intimate moment between the two immediately takes on a foreboding tone of the dissection to come, a sense that colors the dialogue between the two. The Venus's anxious comment that her hair could be cut too short is assuaged by the Docteur's declaration that he has the "steadiest hands in the business" (126). When complaining about her isolated lifestyle, the Venus complains, "Its always only you and me./You and me this room that table./We don't go out./No one visits./You don't want me seen" (127). Her mention of feeling stuck in "this room" with only herself, the Docteur, and the table again alludes to her autopsy. And her ironic declaration that he doesn't want her to be seen speaks to a tragic half-truth: it is not *her* that he wants seen by the world but her body. His reassurance that she is "seen enough at the Academy" (127) only furthers the sensation that the Venus's existence serves to prepare her for her dismemberment and a second "life" of subjugation to perpetual gazing.

Outside of the numerous examples of the horror of dissection bleeding into the production's staging and the way in which its characters relate to the Venus, Parks's play initiates the viscera of disembodiment at the level of language. This dissection, similar to the omnipresent figurative and numerically obsessed dissection that seeps through the entire production, serves as a reminder of the transformative power of disembodiment *Venus* harnesses in order to take up and deconstruct the historical, public body of Saartjie Baartman. Parks's abbreviations and use of dialect that she deploys in her dialogue, for example, cut

and disfigure words until they are almost unrecognizable so that the responsible of legibility falls onto the shoulders of the actor on stage reciting the lines. As Kolin explains, "No less than her dramaturgy, Parks's language is performance, a spectacle for the eye as well as the ear. It incorporates the elements of a show—myth, fantasy, history, pageant, theatre—from which she creates her scripts. In fact, one of her greatest achievements is making the visual and verbal work together" (16). These linguistic dissections outline the performative power of the utterance as well as the instability of the sign by relying on the subjective speaker to imbue speech with specific meaning as opposed to the word on the page.

For example, at one point in the overture, the Man, later the Baron Docteur asks the Negro Resurrectionist, "Dead?" (Parks 13). The Resurrectionist's reply "Deh-duh" splits the word in half while transforming it from a linguistic sign to a performative act, an utterance. Rather than affirming the Baron Docteur's question, the Resurrectionist responds with a fragmented, phonetic reading of the word "dead" that serves as both emphasis and dissection. For Parks, this splitting of language is always also an act of creation, of a state beyond the simple fact of "death." The death that the Venus experiences in *Venus*, the state of being "Deh-duh," always exists in the act of performance, in the act of the utterance. In that way, the Venus never rests in "death," but instead exists in a state outside of that normative definition of "to be dead." This syllabic breakdown lives in the mouth of the performer as opposed to the stability of the fixed page. "Deh-duh," in its attention to the motions of the tongue and the almost rhythmic qualities of the pronunciation itself, deconstructs the concept of dead as a linguistic sign and re-imagines it as a performance. That this utterance comes from the Resurrectionist specifically underscores the significance of the utterance: the Resurrectionist—part historian, part undertaker—imbues the syllabic deconstruction with a

new sense of "death" that looks beyond the Venus's life span and into her second life as a historical figure and unfortunate symbol of racist anatomical science.

Further abbreviated or creatively spelled words take on new meaning by mimicking the patterns of hurried or affected speech. The verb "to be" is written in several different forms in order to destabilize the notion of being as a fixed state. The two oft-repeated phrases in both the Overture and the Concluding scene, "Thuh Venus Hottentot iz dead" and "There wont b inny show tuhnite," involve a disfiguring of "is" and "be" that incites an elongation and shortening, respectively, of each word. In both instances, the actor's choice in how to perform the spelling leads to a type of improvisational space similar to Moten's "in the cut," where the performer dictates the sonic and emphatic performance of the word to present to the audience. That this word is the verb "to be," in both cases, reflects the creative potentiality disfiguration or dissection. The connective tissue between the "Venus Hottentot" and "dead" rests in the utterance of the performer, who in performing "iz" infuses the sentence as a whole of a meaning independent from the statically written phrase, "The Venus Hottentot is dead." Likewise, the shortening of "be" to "b" links it phonetically to the following word "inny" (a re-imagining of "any"). "Be" becomes dependent on the rest of the sentence in order to retain meaning to both the performer and, consequently, the audience. Cutting or shortening words provides space for playing with language in order to unfix signs; in both instances, *being* become a matter of subjectivity seen through the lens of violence.

Aside from Parks's attention to the dissection of language, *Venus* constantly plays with the plurality of words. Like the Venus herself, who is constantly being re-shaped and re-imagined through the violent act of the imperial gaze, Parks deploys certain words, particularly those with a connotation of bodily violence, to illustrate language's unreliability

and potential to incite literal and figurative violence. One such instance arises in The Brother's exclamation to The Venus, then The Girl, "Yd make a mint!" to which she responds, "A mint! A 'mint'./How much is that?" (26). The exchange centers around the plurality of "mint" as a word describing a large amount money, something newly created and in perfect condition, and an action in which coins are made by stamping metal ("mint, n.1"; "mint, v.2"; "mint, adj."). Given these multiple definitions, the statement "Yd make a mint!" insinuates that the Venus's body would be worth a large amount of money were she to agree to travel to Europe. The "Yd" in this translation implies "Your body would." Additionally, "mint" meaning a brand new condition echoes back to the Venus's malleability under the imperial gaze of the white characters around her. Under this consideration of the word, the Venus is always a newly minted being under the constant visual manipulation of characters such as the Man, the Brother, the Mother Showman, and the Baron Docteur. Finally, when using the definition of "mint" referring to the process by which money is made, the Brother seems to be referring to the Venus's eventual fate of dissection. With this meaning of "mint," the pressing of coins, which ultimately gives them value, the Venus's body only accrues worth through bodily violence. The unreliable multi-valence of "mint" comes into further focus in the Venus's reply to the Brother; as she contemplates his promise, she also contemplates "mint." Her meditation of "mint" and "'mint'" are very different things: the former refers to her initial understanding that her traveling to Europe will bring her a great amount of money. The latter reveals her uncertainty in the sign "'mint'" itself. Her unfamiliarity with the term marks her vulnerability to language that always refers to more than one thing, a multiplicity that requires interpretation and carries potentially violent consequences.

"Maceration," which played a role in "Scene 12: Love Iduhnt What/She Used To Be," arises again in "Scene 7: She'll Make a Splendid Corpse," when the Venus again probes the Baron Docteur on the word's meaning. Rather than ignore the question as he did the first time, he responds, " 'Macerations' French for 'lunch.'/'After Lunch' we also say" (Parks 141). As with "mint," the quotations offer a questioning of the sign "Maceration" that both illuminates the Venus's uncertainty regarding the unfamiliar language that surrounds her and allows the Docteur to manipulate its meaning without her knowing. Three separate definitions swirl around the Docteur and Venus's conversation, each adding a new layer of horror that pulls the audience into the Docteur's deception. That he explains away her question with the innocent reply that "Maceration" refers to "After Lunch" horrifies at the level that, knowing full well its darker definition, he would outwardly deceive the Venus. The dialogue's impact hinges on the audience's prior knowledge that "maceration" refers to a medical process by which the Venus's flesh will be separated from her bones. Additionally, the false definition adds a new dose of horror to the scene's proceedings by offering the image of the Venus not only being dismembered but also consumed by the anatomists in an act of ghastly cannibalism. *Maceration*'s additional usage as a technique in winemaking and food preparation injects the Docteur's deception with the new angle that the Venus's body represents to the Docteur and his colleagues bodily sustenance. Just as Cavarero muses on the horror of dismemberment deriving from the violence done to identity, the image of the anatomists completely consuming the Venus's cadaver horrifies for its threat of her complete erasure as opposed to any threat of her impending death.

The danger in words pervades not only from spoken by dialogue but also from the names of the characters themselves. One such example is the Negro Resurrectionist, whose

namesake can refer to a person capable of bringing things back to life, a believer in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, or, as the events of the play reveal, an individual who digs up corpses mainly to sell them to be dissected ("resurrectionist, n."). The term becomes even further complicated since the character often functions as the play's de facto historian, exhuming facts and historical documents that make up the conventional narrative regarding the real Baartman's life. The Resurrectionist becomes the purveyor of "Historical Extracts" that give dominant historical context to *Venus*'s plot. For instance, directly following the Girl's transformation into the Venus, the Resurrectionist explains:

> Footnote #3:
>
> Historical Extract: Category: Literary: From Robert Chambers'
>
> *Book of Days*:
>
> *(Rest)*.
>
> "Early in the present century a poor wretched woman was exhibited in England under the appellation of *The Venus Hottentot*. The year was 1810. With an intensely ugly figure, distorted beyond all European notions of beauty, she was said by those to whom she belonged to possess precisely the kind of shape which is most admired among her countrymen, the Hottentots." (Parks 46)

The Resurrectionist becomes a mouthpiece for dominant histories that, in their own way, dissect and pull apart the actual Saartjie Baartman to better fit their own purposes of controlling what histories are told and which are forgotten. In the case of Parks's *Venus*, the Resurrectionist attempts to resurrect the Venus from Robert Chambers' *The Book of Days: A Miscellany of Popular Antiquities in Connection with the Calendar, Including Anecdote,*

*Biography, & History, Curiosities of Literature and Oddities of Human Life and Character* (1864), as a Venus which reaffirms the African physical irregularity in comparison with Eurocentric understandings of the human form and beauty. Also pertinent is the fact that these asides come in the form of theatrical footnotes that break-up the productions recreation of Baartman's life. In this light, the Resurrectionist takes on the role of the author of Baartman's story, the one who controls her narrative and the order in which it is presented to the audience. In each of these readings of the Negro Resurrectionist's namesake—rather grave robber, historian, or writer—the power to manipulate behind the act of resurrection remains the one through line. In each of these incarnations, the Resurrectionist *resurrects* a new version of the Venus to serve the narrative at hand, whether it be the medical oddity from Chambers' text or the dissected corpse from the Baron Docteur's autopsy report. Just as with maceration, the Resurrectionist's plurality always points to both innocuous language (that Baartman can be brought back to life or recovered somehow) and acts that dismember or otherwise mutilate the body.

The deployment of staging and language informed by the act of bodily dismemberment allows for an understanding of dominant history and racist discourse as it is infused and served up through the power of body horror. To this end, the same issues of identity and embodiment attached to body horror and that have haunted the viewers as they watch the Venus hurtle to her tragic destiny inform the play's interest and increasing distrust in the plausibility of resurrecting Saartjie Baartman via historical documents. The fears attached to the loss of identity in dismemberment reoccur as *Venus* teases the implausibility of historical authenticity, particularly a history informed by racist notions of the Black body. The clearest examples of this connection between history and body horror come in the play's

final scenes, which tease but, ultimately, disappoint an audience expecting any sort of epiphany regarding the Venus's life. That *Venus* begins and ends in disappointment underlines its larger goal of de-stabilizing the historicized body of Saartjie Baartman. In both the Overture and the closing scene, "Final Chorus," refer to the Venus Hottentot's death along with the cast's resulting cries, "Gimmie gimmie back my buck!" (14, 161). The conclusion's mirroring of the Overture represents the play's frustrated efforts to make good on the writ of *Habeas Corpus,* the legal recourse which the Venus refers to during the staging of her trial to remain in Europe. "[I]n uh pickle," the only "body" which *Venus* can present is a fragmented entity composed of historical documents and gruesome medical reports.

The production's attempts to sum up the Venus's life in the final scenes only further buttresses the futility that is staged as the fugitive capturing Baartman's life through dominant histories. The third to last scene, "A Brief History of Chocolate," for example, brings to light the parallels between social uses and feelings toward the popular candy and the objectification of the Venus. The Venus recites, "The *cacao* bean, once used as money/becomes an exotic beverage./Chocolate was soon mixed with milk and sugar/and formed into lozenges which one could eat on the run./Chocolate lozenges are now found in a variety of shapes/mixed with everything from nuts to brandy" (157). The *cacao* bean's origins denote an accepted value in the object itself, significance uncut with any other ingredient or acknowledged usage. It is only in the nineteenth century that the "Aztec word *cacao* literally 'food of the Gods'/becomes *chocolate* and *cocoa*" (156), a linguistic appropriation that echoes the Venus's own "re-shaping" and re-evaluation at the hands of characters representing imperialism. From this appropriation, chocolate loses its inherent value and instead becomes regulated as an ingredient made to be *consumed* as a food of

leisure and comfort. That this value depends on its mixture with other, *white* ingredients accentuates the comparison between chocolate and the Venus's own historicization as a market delicacy by and for the Western world. Separate from the actual Baartman, the spectacle of the erotic Hottentot Venus is always a mixture of the Black body seen through a Eurocentric lens. The process by which *cacao* becomes *cocoa* reflects an act of violence at the level of meaning not dissimilar to the constant dissections levied at the Venus. History, in *Venus*, is always a question of discourse, which in turn is always a way to violence and re-appropriation. History is the maceration and pickling of life.

The penultimate scene, "The Venus Hottentot Tells the Story of Her Life," emphasizes this failure by providing a scattered if not uncertain summary of the Venus's life from the character herself: "I was born near the coast, Watchman/Journeyed some worked some/ended up here /I would live here I thought but only for uh minute!/Make a mint/Had plan to./He had a beard/Big bags of money!/Where wuz I?/Fell in love. Hhh./Tried my hand at French./Gave me a haircut/and thuh claps/you get thuh picture, huh?" (159). The fragmented micro-biography takes from portions of the play's events but fails to congeal those pieces into any legible narrative of Saartjie Baartman's life. As the final line insinuates, the Venus's life hinges on an individual's ability to piece together the parts for him or herself. The scene affords no agency to the Venus to tell her own story but rather mirrors the play's larger intents to destabilize the historical narrative surrounding Baartman's life. Consequently, the discourse surrounding Black female bodies that haunts Baartman's story also wavers by having its own social assemblage revealed.

**Sacrifice and the Imagic in *Chancers***

At the heart of Vizenor's *Chancers* is a battle over the "proper" way to relate to and perform indigenous identity. The novel enacts this debate through the many conflicts between two indigenous groups in habiting a fictional depiction of UC Berkeley: the radically violent solar dancers and the more free-loving round dancers. Over the course of the text, the solar dancers, a group comprised of Native- identifying students with varied backgrounds of pieced-together tribal heritage, enact a plan to avenge the exhibition of indigenous remains on campus grounds as well as an entire history of medical dissection of American Indians at the hands of Western scientists. This plan involves the kidnapping, torturing, and eventual dismembering of faculty and campus staff that the solar dancers feel best represents this history of racist discourse. In addition, the students use the skulls of these dissected individuals to complete a ritual that resurrects significant past Native American figures of significance such as Ishi, the last man of his kind, and Pocahontas, the sexually-commoditized, intermarrying and stolen Indian Princess.

The solar dancers' incisive method of resistance points to what they consider the key site for claiming indigenous identity: The Native American body. For the solar dancers, performing Native American identity is an embodied process that hinges on the visual and physical presence. That such a stance resembles hegemonic discourse as discussed by Robyn Wiegman is no mistake; to put stock in the totality of the Native American body is, according to Vizenor, to take up with claims of racial essentialism that counteract efforts of tribal *survivance*, Vizenor's portmanteau neologism of survival and resistance that references the ongoing survival of Native American culture as a form of active resistance.

*Chancers* uses the unsettling act of bodily dismemberment to de-stabilize the body as a site of meaning. Vizenor's targets both Western institutions and overzealous tribal affiliates

as complicit in perpetuating a racial discourse in which blood quantum and bodily signifiers denote Native "authenticity." To respond to these claims, Vizenor uses the misguided attempts of the Berkeley solar dancers as a means of bloody critique. Body horror as a narrative strategy emphasizes the body as a tricky site of controversy regarding issues of Native American identity. Like Parks, Vizenor conflates the mutilation of the body with the subversion of the sign. By relishing on these violent scenes of dissection, scenes that echo the disfigurement of Native bodies in the name of Western "science," *Chancers* highlights the vulnerability of the body as a site of categorization. In a disturbing but satirical twist, the murdered bodies of the white UC Berkeley faculty become proxies for a meditation on the nature of Indigeneity, a play on Western culture's usage of Native bodies as a means of securing the nature of whiteness. At stake in these violent dissections is the discovery of an indigenous resistance that rejects the racialized body. If racial capitalism registers and fixes the physical form in order to enfold Native subjects into its racial logic, Vizenor seeks a way of being that escapes the scope of power. This radical "no body" relies on the space of chance[6] or possibility, the moment before directed action that resists physical embodiment and therefore defies imperial categorization.

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[6] I use "chance" here to emphasize the "chancers" of Vizenor's novel, tribal figures that resist dominant culture's need legible physical manifestations of other-ness that allows colonial discourse to propagate. The titular term harkens to his past critical work on tribal discourse and *narrative chance*. Vizenor defines *narrative chance* as that which:

> teases that sense of a literary presence, that chance to summon any name, to scare, and to create in stories more than another terminal creed by mere victimry. Even in the most isolated acts of imagination a writer must create a language game of time, people, places, and season, and tease the obvious associations of history. The author must create a new bundle of metaphors in stories so that a narrative chance might be a presence in the book. ("Discursive Narratives" 82)

Chance counteracts cultural genocide and "terminal creed[s]." For Vizenor, narrative chance rejects the societally-constructed root metaphor for making sense of experience in favor of a tribal discourse that revolves around language play and the rejection of discourse that constantly paints American Indians as passive victims—what he refers to as *victimry.* Chance reflects a space of semiotic possibility, an already in-flux mode of creation wielded by those who Vizenor refers to as "postindian warriors."

To critique essentialized perspectives of Native identity, Vizenor connects an understanding of the racialized body with an allegiance to the static and unwavering sign. Native American critical theory offers similar instances of seeing as a form of imbuing racial identity, not to mention confirming the racial superiority of the one who sees. Early Western photography of Native Americans, for example, served both as a form of ethnography and a method of virtual tourism. Stereoscopic images became a significant medium for nineteenth century individuals to experience the "exotic" and "strange." Leon Gurevitch, writing on the stereoscope's role in Victorian era subject's relationship to empire, explains:

> Stereographs of exotic people and places on the imperial periphery operated as a functional continuation of imperial practice, allowing Victorian spectators to glimpse the places that they could not necessarily travel to… They also fulfilled the Victorian desire to understand, categorize and own both information about the world and, by extension, the world itself (ideologically at least). (244)

What Gurevitch explains about Victorian subjects applies readily to those white individuals in early America looking to experience the wilderness of the West via images (stereoscopic or photographic) of Native peoples. To this end, the Native American image became a signifier for the Western land yet to be explored. Carolyn J. Marr, while discussing the uses of photographs of Native American subjects in late nineteenth century Washington and British Columbia, writes, "The popularity of postcards and stereographs showing Indian women weaving baskets or digging clams attests to the preoccupation with nostalgia in regard to the Native Americans… The Indian came to symbolize America's lost youth, and his image commemorated that unspoiled past" (19). Both Gurevitch and Marr comment on

the imbued value of images of indigenous peoples to Western audiences; according to both scholars, the Western gaze evaluates and ultimately transforms the Native body in order to insert it into a Western visual economy that supports imperial values, such as national nostalgia and Manifest Destiny.[7]

Vizenor contributes a Native comprehension of obscurity based in the characteristics of the oral tradition. In doing so, he connects the power of "no body" to the resistance of the linguistic sign, a play on post-structuralism that fuels both his own and Parks's fiction. In *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (1994), he transposes the issue of dominant representations of Native Americans into the theoretical plane of deconstruction. In doing so, he maps out a tribal resistance that relies on absence. Vizenor links the Derridean term presence with the imperial gaze by highlighting the importance of *representation* to what he refers to as the "literature of dominance." Dominant representations of Native culture, he argues, represent an attempt to bring American Indians into the system of colonial signs that necessitate the flat image and eschew fluidity—what Vizenor thinks of as the calling card of Native oral traditions. He explains, "The representations of the heard are simulations, no more than nuances in the best translations. Representation, and the obscure maneuvers of translation, 'produces strategies of containment'" (*Manifest Manners* 70). Vizenor evokes Tejaswini Niranjana's *Siting Translation* (1992) to collapse representation

[7] Philip Deloria has also discussed how the image of the Native American as "wild savage" played a crucial role in constructing an emergent American identity in opposition to the wilderness of the New World. In *Playing Indian* (1998), Deloria traces the troublesome tradition of "playing Indian" throughout American history, from the American Revolution to the new-age movement of the 1960s. Important to this work is the image of Indian-ness, which changes in cultural value according to historical context but is always a reflection of the society from which it is constructed. Deloria writes, "To understand the identities of imagemakers, one has to explore not only the meanings of their images, but also the ways those images were assembled" (20). His focus on the assemblage of the Native American image highlights the importance in the Western visual of "Indian-ness" that allow for acts of Native costuming (e.g. the warpaint and feathers used during the Boston Tea Party). Native American visuals warped by a colonial lens created a theatrical vocabulary through which to understand Native culture and, more important, emerging understandings of national subjectivity.

with the act of translation: both acts, for Vizenor, require a subjective imperial gaze that assigns value in accordance to a colonial logic.

In contrast to the "literature of dominance" that relies on the fixed sign and representation, Vizenor introduces the concept of "trickster hermeneutics"—a Native interpretive device based on the oral tradition. For Vizenor, the symbol of the trickster, an often amoral and deceptive figure in tribal oral traditions, represents an always "at play," a constantly in-motion sign that resists imperial translation: "The trickster is a language game, a counter causal liberation of the mind, not salvation or the measure of representation or invented values" (*Manifest Manners* 77). It is exactly this love for the playfulness of orality that drives the trickster's ability to avoid comprehension by Western culture. Vizenor illustrates this ability by citing Andrew Wiget, a literary scholar who, according to Vizenor, "bears the worst of colonial historicism in his interpretations of trickster figuration in tribal literature" (*Manifest Manners* 76). Wiget's quote that Vizenor refers to reads, "To many Westerners reading these stories for the first time, it seemed at best a puzzling inconsistency and at worst a barbaric mystery that in many tribal mythologies this idiot and miscreant was in some unaccountable way also the culture hero" (qtd. in *Manifest* Manners 77). Wiget's reference to the trickster figure's "puzzling inconsistency" belies a tendency to play with linguistic signs and remain always on the periphery of imperial vision or understanding.

Vizenor's trickster narrator traces the solar dancers' problematic ties to racial essentialism to the way in which their radical ideology ties their art into the both the imagic and material. In effect, the students comprising the solar dancers exhibit these ties by way of their translations of Native myths and rituals that lean towards the literal and corporeal, a form of living, even if it is an imitation of life. Just as the static sign allows for the

perpetuation of the stereotype, à la Bhabha, Vizenor cites the indigenous myth practiced at the level of the visible and material as servicing an "ideology of victimry." The *de facto* leader of the solar dancers, Sergeant Cloud Burst, represents this troubled marriage of tribal discourse and Western structuralism in his own claims to an indigenous background: "He traced his unnamed Native ancestors to a sepia photograph. That imagic connection became a curse of Native coincidence, because his visions, solar torments, and *wiindigoo* execrations captured the imagination and spirit of seven lost, lonesome, and desperate students on campus" (*Chancers* 26). That Cloud Burst traces his tribal ancestry to the color-contrasted image of a sepia photograph invokes Vizenor's critique of the visual representation of *indian* presence. The solar dancers' creation hinges on an adherence to the legibility of the visual and concrete representation of Native identity. The narrator recalls these problematic origins elsewhere in his descriptions of the group when he states, "These students of animus and native rage became the new *wiindigoo* of the concrete, the ominous simulars of tradition who sacrificed the thieves and academic abusers of native bones" (26). Just as with Parks in *Venus*, Vizenor utilizes the duplicity of words to wield a double-edged critique of the solar dancers' essentialist ideology. While the phrase "*wiindigoo* of concrete" points to an "urban indian" realization of the *wiindigoo* myth—which itself is manipulated and shaped to fit the students' more radical and horrific intentions—the word "concrete" also comes to symbolize a static fixity, a tie to the imagic that, similar to Cloud Burst's photograph, insists upon the legibility and instant recognition of the visual representation.

*Chancers* continues illustrating the overlaps between the essentialism that insist on Native culture as a caught past in amber and the solar dancers by tying the individual members to Western thinkers that Vizenor critiques as notable proponents of Native

subjugation. Near the beginning of the novel, the narrator discusses one such figure, Antonin Artuad, and his influence on the solar dancer Bad Mouth:

> Bad Mouth was moved by Antonin Artuad and the Theatre of Cruelty. She acted out his miserable simulation of natives and erotic wars of the senses. The Tarahumara, he wrote, believe that those who live in cities are mistaken, but that notion became an ironic virtue to Bad Mouth. Artuad, the surrealist, and Bad Mouth, the solar dancer, wanted violence to come alive and words to hurt as much as wounds. One must be "made of the same substance as nature," he wrote in *The Peyote Dance*, not merely close to the words of nature. The Tarahumara once derived their "magical powers from the contempt they have for civilization." (29)

Artuad's Theatre of Cruelty, which itself calls for an application of language that aims for visceral, physical effect as opposed to meaning in and of itself, presents a blending of the verbal and the corporeal in a way that attracts Bad Mouth's solar dancer ideology; in both cases, language takes on an essentialist power that, in the sound of the syllable, possesses the possibility to inflict violence. The passage connects this essentialism with Artuad's problematic reading of the Tarahumara in his *The Peyote Dance* (1947), in which he describes the tribe as existing in an essentialized, prenatural state: "To watch them [the Tarahumara] unswervingly follow their course, through torrents, ground that gives way, dense undergrowth, rock ladders, sheer walls, I cannot help thinking that they have somehow retained the instinctive force of gravitation of the first men (4). Artuad's comment that one must be composed of the "same substance of nature" invokes an investment in the material that drives the solar dancers in their particular and peculiar performance of Native identity.

This racial materialism relies on visibility as opposed to the insubstantiality of invisible language. As the narrator explains, "Bad Mouth and the others were the *wiindigoo* of the concrete, the solar dancers of malice, the natives of a turgid consciousness who had returned to atavistic senses and the violence of nature in the city" (*Chancers* 29). In accordance with Artuad and the Theatre of Cruelty, Bad Mouth and the rest of the solar dancers find in Native cultural features an inherent violence that they seek to actualize through their ritualistic murders and plans for resurrection. Yet, in describing so, the narration accuses them of an affected naturalization, a put-upon performance of "Native-ness" created by what Vizenor refers to elsewhere in his critical work as "indian simulations."

*Chancers* discussion of the *anishinaabe* version of the *wiindigoo* beliefs further symbolizes the material and corporeal bent to the solar dancers relationship to Indigeneity. The text raises the figure of the *wiindigoo* both as a piece of *inishinaabe* cosmology and as an actualized monster possessing the solar dancers. At one point, Vizenor writes, "That thick, incredible consonance of cultural torments, dangerous visions, resentments, and low grades in required courses conjured the wicked *wiindigoo*, the cannibal monsters of *anishinaabe* stories" (26). The students' turn to Native [naïve] essentialism overlaps with the cannibalistic tendencies of the *wiindigoo*; in effect, their problematic ideology becomes a self-effacing end, an essentialist tactic based on Western notions of Native identity that defeats their purposes of Native sovereignty. At various other points, the narrative hints that the solar dancers' growing resentment to Western culture and their turn to ideologies embracing Native victimry make them susceptible to the *wiindigoo*'s influence. That this influence has, in the words of Western ethnographers, often been described as a type of *mania* does not

escape Vizenor's notice. To this point, the text includes a passage from George Nelson's *The Orders of the Dreamed*, a published account of his 1823 journals on Cree and Ojibwa myth:

> These Giants as far as I can learn reside somewhere about the *North Pole*; and even at this day frequently pay their unwelcome visits, but which, however, are attended with a complete fright only. It seems also that that they delegate their Power to the Indians occasionally; and *this* occasions that cannibalism which is Produced, or proceeds rather from a sort of distemper much resembling *maniaism*. (27)

Vizenor's inclusion of Nelson's quote—like the fact battered story of the historical Venus—hints at a long history of collapsing the *wiindigoo* turns as characteristic of mental illness in ways that promoting white supremacy and propagated and fed the mythic image of the Native American as a "savage cannibal" saved by death from his very self.

The *wiindigoo* legend has operated as a way for Western culture to employ ethnographic or pseudoscientific analyses that painted indigenous subjects as cannibalistic barbarians to be explained away by mental defects. Joe Lockard details the origins of this history through the writings of Father J. Emile Saindon, who, in a 1933 essay in the Catholic Anthropological Conference journal *Primitive Man*, coined the term "Windigo psychosis." Saindon's case study involving an indigenous woman he refers to as *F.*, who "did not want to see anybody but her husband and her children, because strangers became metamorphosed in her eyes into wild animals, - wolves, bears, lynxes. These animals are dangerous to life. To protect herself she was driven by the desire to kill them. But this was repugnant to her because these animals were human beings" (qtd. in Lockard 212). Saindon's depiction of *F.*'s behavior defines, for him, a racial-specific mania brought about by illogical superstitious

fears that he treats by suggesting that she attend confession and receive communion. His study exemplifies what Lockard calls "the most discreditable forms of cultural patronization and pseudoscientific racism" (212) in that they seek an explanation for *F.*'s behavior based on her racial identity and her inferiority to whiteness judged in the context, albeit Catholic, of Western culture. In doing so, he misses other possible explanations, "including that F's fears came true because Saindon and his carnivorous and soul-snaring missionary culture were the wiindigoo" (Lockard 212). Saindon's "Windigo psychosis" illustrates a Western pseudoscientific tendency to link the *wiindigoo* with the Native body rather than engage with how the *wiindigoo* stories informs discussions of cultural subjugation and tribal survivance. Lockard, instead, makes the case for how Vizenor's work contextualizes the *wiindigoo* in this same history of dominantion and tribal resistance: "In Anishinaabe tradition, the wiindigoo is a once-human who has become a cannibal, a destroyer of humanity; the survivance storyteller is a human who has refused either to join cannibalism or to be consumed by cannibals. It is that refusal and resistance toward transformation into the nonhuman that marks out survivance literature" (Lockard 211). In Lockard's example, the *wiindigoo* comes to stand as the manifestation of power that illegitimatizes or erases marginalized peoples to benefit white supremacy.

In *Chancer*'s depiction of the solar dancers, their violent tendencies derive from their subscription to a comprehension of the *wiindigoo* stories informed by historic narratives by Western ethnographers such as Saindon or Nelson. That is, their possession by the *wiindigoo* manifests literally into *destroying humanity*, a re-production of the West's mirroring fears of indigenous cannibalism. By playing into a radical ideology fueled by an obsession with the body, the solar dancers re-inscribe a representation of Indigeneity constructed by Western

history and colonial interactions. The narrator underscores this re-inscription as he states, "The native students, it seems to me, have their own fears of being devoured by giants, the academic *wiindigoo* on campus. So, the antidote was to become a solar dancer and devour the evil enemy. The stories were one thing, but the actual abduction and dissection of the faculty was another" (*Chancers* 27). The narrator introduces the contrast between the *wiindigoo* story as oral tradition and the replication of that same myth as physical violence. Devouring in the first sense refers to an erasure or essentialization of Native students that turns them into token symbols of Native American culture that Vizenor argues characterizes the literature of dominance. In *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (2011), Jodi Melamed refers to this same process as an example of the dangers of a liberal multiculturalism that used the university as a means to educate white students on racial matters while simultaneously salving their consciences and encouraging them to ignore the realities of racism taking place outside the classroom. To combat this initial devouring of cultural identity, the solar dancers step outside of the world of the figurative and into the literal destruction of bodies. This leap to the corporeal belies the cannibal narratives of Western ethnographers that used the *wiindigoo* myth to justify white supremacy.

*Chancers* ties this bodily essentialism brought about by the *wiindigoo*'s influence and physical violence to an adherence to the fixity of sign. Before abducting and murdering their victims, the solar dancers make sure to mark their targets with blue chalk forming the sign of the *wiindigoo*. During the novel's opening, the narrator alerts Provost Pontius Booker to the mark on his shoulder. In the provost's reaction to the mark, the narration accentuates the physicality of the sign and its relationship to the other bodies in the room: "He brushed his

shoulder and the blue character created a numinous, winter haze in the foyer. Several faculty members on their way to lunch paused to comment on the marvelous, shimmering ruins of the character" (5). The *wiindigoo* sign becomes a physical presence in the room; furthermore, Vizenor's insistence on describing its appearance—"numinous…shimmering"—accentuates its textured exteriority. Favoring the corporeality of the sign as opposed to the meaning behind the mark itself, which is debated by the many academics in the room, incites the text's ongoing critique of overemphasizing the body in matters of identity. As an exclamation mark to this critique, the narration concludes the blue chalk episode with the foreshadowing that the professor whose explanation of the symbol that provost accepts "had the good ear of the provost, but not for long, because the *wiindigoo* solar dancers had the actual head and heart of the provost that semester" (7). The figurative expression "had the good ear" transforms into the quite literal possession of the provost's body parts—his literal heart and mind – following his murder. Under the solar dancers' ideology, language becomes a conduit to the corporeal in a way that erases narrative's ability for creative and healing play.

These intersections between bodily violence and the fixity of language become far more pronounced in later scenes where the solar dancers actual dismember their victims. Calling on the literary prosthesis of body horror, Vizenor imbues these scenes with an over-accentuation of the physical. Accordingly, the solar dancers invest a power of creation to bodily violence that they neglect to afford to other, more narrative-based forms of discourse. And yet after the solar dancers completely erase the faculty bodies—by feeding the parts to wild animals or composting them by throwing them into vats of flesh-eating worms—there is still a body left over in the form of the resurrected Native figure brought about by the groups' resurrection ritual. This body-for-a-body calculus follows a Western-based logic of

corporeality and visibility that theorists such as Bhabha, Fanon, and Vizenor each argue contributes to colonial discourse.

One such merging of bodily mutilation and Native culture comes in the form of the solar dancers' recreation of the Sun Dance sacrifice. More specifically, the narrative's explanation for the groups violent ways originates from an anthropological misreading of the phase of the Sun Dance ceremony in which young braves pierce themselves as a form of self-sacrifice. Sun dances were practiced by a large number of Plains and Plateau tribes with varying tribal-specific characteristics and were, as Blanca Tovías explains, regulated by Western powers due to their perceived cult-like qualities. Despite these mores-based controls, Tovías makes the case that these regulations played a much deeper role in quelling the practice of Native culture and the spreading of non-Western ideals of property or narcissistic selfhood. But as Tovías explains, "no component raised more objections than the self-sacrifice ritual or 'piercing' that was a common feature of Plains sun dances" (22). Tovías, with help from research from David C. Duvall, describes the flesh-piercing sacrifice ritual:

> Cuts were made "through the right shoulder blade and […] on each side of [the supplicant's] breast then running a sharpened stick through the skin […] A shield was fastened to the stick in his shoulder blade while two ropes were fastened to the two sticks on his breast." After embracing the centre post, the supplicant "backs off until he comes to the end of the rope and starts to dance […] trying to break the skin which the ropes were fastened to". (22)

Tovías goes on to explain how this ritual became a sought-after spectacle for white spectators. It is from this inclusion of Western audiences at Wild West Shows that Tovías brings up a crucial misreading that informs *Chancers*' commentary on the solar dancers: "A misconception gained currency that the reciprocation ritual signified a rite of passage to become a warrior, therefore, in the official documentation of the era, 'taking the cut' is often referred to as the 'making of braves' (23). Tovías draws this misconception from the work of John Maclean, who in his own research on sun dances writes, "The chief attraction to the pale-face is what has been ignorantly termed 'making braves'" (qtd. in Tovías 207n24). The distinction between "taking" and "making" lies in the contrasted explanation for what the self-sacrifice is meant to represent. Tovías offers a general explanation for most sun dances in which "the offering…was in reciprocation for the favourable outcome of a warrior's vow, when seeking aid from Natosi at times of self-threatening danger" (22). In "taking the cut," a subject takes the incision as a reciprocative gesture linking the would-be warrior's body with the sun god at the center of the ceremony. "Making the brave," on the other hand, implies that the violence of the ritual is solely responsible for the construction of the brave's identity; in effect, violence to the body becomes the tortuous blocks from which the brave is built.

This materialist reading of the self-sacrifice ritual carries over to the solar dancers in both how they relate to the sun dance and how they choose to enact the process of sacrifice. In both instances, corporeality takes center stage in a ritual degraded here as a theater that showcases the body as the primary space in which Native American culture takes place. In regards to their sacrificial rituals, the text includes the induction ceremony of Token White, the solar dancer who excels at tribal archery and, as the novel's conclusion shows, is the only member of the group with the potential to create survivance narratives. Part of this ceremony

involves the same sacrifice ritual that Tovías describes in sun dances that both Token White and Cloud Burst take part in. What stands out in the text's description of this ceremony is the way in which the bodies of both characters become the narrative's focus. At one point, the narrator states, "Cloud Burst raised his arms, leaned back as he danced, and the taut laces hummed against his weight. Suddenly, the skewers tore holes in his thick, disfigured chest. The pole shivered, a blurred shadow on the concrete. Blood covered his great belly" (*Chancers* 37). Cloud Burst's body is described in grotesque detail, particularly in the depiction of blood covering his "great belly." And it is this grotesque scrutiny that takes precedent in the solar dancers' version of the self-sacrifice ritual. The violence in the act of piercing only goes as far as disfiguring Cloud Burst's body: any sense of reciprocation or spirituality meant for the ceremony is absent. Instead, the passage focuses on the weight of Could Burst's body, a weight that causes the pole to "shiver" and the laces to hum. The closing image of blood covering his body points to an essence of "making" much like the Western misconception of "making the brave"; the violence of the ritual transforms his outer appearance, via disfiguring and covering in blood, which in turn leads to his "becoming."

Token White experiences a similar "becoming" in her participation in the self-sacrifice ceremony. Following Cloud Burst's own piercing ritual, the narrator explains, "[Token White] was named a native in a tortuous dance, and then she was pierced with skewers and tied to the pole…Cloud Burst wailed and spread her warm blood on his cheeks and arms. We are here to defend mother earth and our nation, he shouted. Cloud Burst shivered with a strange sense of pain and glory" (38). Again, an over-attention to the physical processes at work in the ritual subvert any notion of self-sacrifice in return for a more self-serving ritual, in which the pain of piercing the body becomes a way to achieve a glory or

ecstasy as opposed to making any kind of offering. Sensuous experience distorts the reciprocation of the original ceremony, resulting in reading of the sun dance bent by Western ethnography fixated on violence spectacle and nostalgic visions of Native culture fueled by the "savage" body.

This same distorted take on sacrifice comes to play in the solar dancers' torture and murder of the provost, a scene that the trickster narrator of *Chancers* admits to including in his narrative only to please the non-Native readers of his work that he refers to as the "ethnic emissaries: "My world is of the word, as you know, and not the wounds of nature, but the ethnic emissaries wanted to know more about the actual, gruesome details of the crimes, and how the *wiindigoo* solar dancers created their own Theatre of Cruelty at the University of California" (29). The Western desire for spectacle fuels the provost's dismemberment scene, in which he is stripped, tortured, and eventually dissected in order to have his bones replace those of the Native Americans kept in the campus museum. The scene's language echoes the self-sacrifice ceremony from earlier in the novel, particularly in how the provost's body is described: "The solar dancers taunted the naked, pursy provost. His chest was narrow, but he had a great potbelly. Injun Time spread a sheet of black plastic on the floor in front of the fireplace and then pushed the provost into the center… [the provost] tried to hide his tiny penis by leaning forward, but the solar dancers pulled his legs apart and poked at his testicles" (48). The narrator emphasizes the provost's protruding belly in the same fashion as Cloud Burst's; in both cases, the naked body becomes a site of the grotesque as well as a spectacle. As one of the solar dancers pushes him to the black sheet, which itself forebodes the dissection to come, the provost's body becomes a site of disgust and curiosity comparable to the sideshow scenes in *Venus*. Injecting an element of bodily shame into the ritual re-

affirms the solar dancers' allegiance to a Western version of Native American culture that begins and ends with the body. The shaming scene transforms into a process wherein the provost's body becomes *knowable*, a process similar to how Vizenor and others describe the colonial gaze that played a role in Native population's subjugation.

But appropriating this gaze and fascination for the body only ends in perpetuating a racial logic fueled by bodies as signs. Shortly after Token White kills the provost by shooting him with an arrow, the narrative reveals:

> Bad Mouth decapitated and dissected the provost. His head was stored in a plastic bucket. Later his brain was removed, as you know, and his treated skull would liberate a native chancer in the museum. Cloud Burst and the other solar dancers bound the butchered remains of the provost in black plastic. The bloody chunks of flesh and bone were later thrown to the mountain lions and coyotes in the Charles Lee Tilden Regional Park. (52)

The retelling of the body's disposal uncovers the larger point of the murder: to reduce the provost to "flesh and bones," parts which the solar dancers can then use for their resurrection rituals. The act of ending his life plays little role in the final goal of replacing a Native skull with that of the provost. What matters is that it is his skull that replaces the Native American remains. Bones become signifiers to race in a way that allow the solar dancers to make the claim that they are evening the scales of bodily violence. The matter-of-fact way in which the body is dissected and butchered reverberates with Western methods of pseudo-scientific dissection that treat the body as a site of racial identity and discovery. And similar to the dissections discussed in Parks's *Venus*, the violence becomes a way of constructing a racial essence that the solar dancers use to resurrect those ancestors they feel have been violated.

The resurrection ritual wherein the solar dancers attempt to resurrect their ancestors further exhibits an understanding of race and the body where mere physical presence denotes racial essentialism. Again, violence becomes a way of making that matches up skull-for-skull: "they soon learned that resurrections were one head at a time, and that meant more sacrifices of the faculty" (73). Indeed, the resurrection ritual at all turns hinges on the placement and condition of the body—both the murdered faculty remains and the Native American skeletons. In one particularly gruesome scene, the solar dancers throw their three skulls into a cistern filled with *miskwaa moose*, red worms that clean the skulls clean of flesh. The narrator relates, "[The provost's] bloody body parts had been thrown to the mountain lions, and then the last mask of his misery was devoured by red worms. They slithered into his nostrils and ate out his eyes… The head of the provost, once packed with sixty years of memories and linguistic mappery, was eaten clean in minutes" (75). Just as with an earlier passage which played on figurative language to foreshadow the provost's dissection, the abstract concept of mental knowledge swaps with the visceral fact of the provost's head being devoured by worms. The violence at play in the worms eating the bits of flesh becomes a part of the ritual as important as the practical purpose that the worms serve. Put another way, just as the resurrection requires a swapping of skulls, the solar dancers' ceremony requires bodily violence to undo the past bodily violence done to the Native chancers meant to be brought back from the dead.

The final step of the resurrection ritual points to the realization that the method of bring back the Native chancers can only succeed at the level of the body, or the imagic. After rescuing the Native skulls from the museum, the solar dancers take them to the Mikawai Generator—*mikawi*, as one of the solar dancers explains, means "to regain consciousness" in

*anishnaabe*. The generator, which the narrator humorously says was "somehow connected to the resurrection of the native chancers" (74), creates bolts of lightning that strikes the skulls. As a result, "natural blue streamers shot out of the orbital bones of the rescued museum skulls. The chancers were raised by the light, an imagic moment of resurrection" (79). The resurrection at hand succeeds at the level of the imagic, a turn to the visual and present that operates under the logic of the body as racial signifier. The entire violent process, from the torture and dismemberment of the faculty to the rescue and resurrection of the Native chancers, only serves the corporeal.

The Native American figures that do in fact come back from the dead only do so in the way of physical presence. Just as Parks makes the point in *Venus* that any recreation of Saartjie Baartman can only exist as a translation of historical documentation of her life, the resurrections that take place in *Chancers* illustrate the troubled influence of Western history in imagic recreations of Native American subjects. One prime example is Ishi, the Native man who was once the subject of ethnographic study at UC Berkeley and whose brain was kept at the Smithsonian after his death. The Ishi brought back in *Chancers* speaks in broken English and is accompanied by Western historical figures Alfred Kroeber, Phoebe Apperson Hearst, Edward Sapir, Thomas Waterman, and Saxton Pope. This entourage speaks for Ishi at the Berkeley Native American graduation ceremony in a recreation of Ishi's time on the campus as a Western ethnographic discovery. *Chancers*' Saxton Pope, for example, speaks of Ishi in essentialized, nostalgic terms that define, for Vizenor, the literature of domination: "Ishi, he said, looked upon us as sophisticated children, smart but not wise. His voice was steady and strong. We knew many things, and much that was false. Ishi knew nature, which is always true. His soul was that of a child, his mind that of a philosopher" (147). *Chancers*

includes Ishi, but an Ishi accompanied by Western narratives of the figure that discuss him in naturalizing terms similar to the allusions to Artaud and *The Peyote Dance*. Ishi as "nature, which is always true," alludes to a depiction of the Native American as fixed sign of romanticized and "child-like" savage. The narration emphasizes this point by having Ishi's dialogue regulated to the first words of his recorded by Western ethnographers: "Evelybody hoppy" (147). The horrific sacrifices from earlier in the text produce a resurrected Native figure reliant on Western historical narratives to the point that they make up his entire ability to communicate. The depiction of Ishi concludes a larger critique of the West's representation of a fixed and stable indigenous identity, a racial categorization built off of historical narratives and static images curated by white, non-Native intellectuals.

Token White's connection to Ishi subverts the necessity of a physical resurrection of the historical figure's body. Shortly after Token White's "self-sacrifice" ceremony, she confesses to the other solar dancers, "Ishi is my brother, my spirit vision of the past, and he is always with me in my stories. I loved him more than anyone else in the world" (41). She makes this confession after relating a brief history of Ishi's life as if she experienced it with him. The other solar dancers, obsessed with presence, decry Token White's story with assurances that "Ishi was alone" (38) and "Ishi hated blondes" (39). Token White and the rest of the solar dancers display a sharp difference in how one relates to history and one's ancestors, a contrast defined by Token White's ability to envision her body across time in a way that subverts Western, textual representations of tribal history in favor for a relationship marked by spiritualism and stories. Such an ongoing connection to the past negates the need for resurrection, since one is always present even if physically absent.

**Conclusion**

The seemingly invisible mechanisms by which racial capitalism polices the boundaries of race and capital rely heavily on the body as the monolithic site of categorization. As Vizenor and Parks demonstrate in their texts, such a dependence on the corporeal has deep ties to the invention of race itself. To go about deconstructing such a system of recognition requires the rupturing power of horror; only by attacking the integrity of the body as the locus of race can Black and Native artists make way for new roads of being. *Venus* and *Chancers* destabilize the signifiers of race in ways both radical and violent. By doing so, they exemplify horror's ability to reposition subjects of color beyond the common dichotomies of master/slave or colonizer/colonized that too often become the basis by which Blackness and indigenous are defined. That is, both Vizenor and Parks utilize bodily violence as a weapon of resistance as opposed to a symbol of oppression. As a result, the Black or Native body ceases to exist as a site of mourning or a sign of vicimtry. Instead, these bodies exhume a radical tradition always in flux and based beyond the comprehension of the state.

Thus far we have discussed horror's work on the depiction of time and the body under the logic of racial capitalism. In both cases, Black and Native authors use horror both as a diagnostic of and weapon against state-manipulations of experience. The next chapter builds on these examinations of time and embodiment through the consideration of racialized space. Just as with these previous sections, space serves as an integral tool through which power strives to assert its dominant racial logic. In what follows, we will observe how horror allows Black and Native artists to uncover the realities of racialized space while mapping out new territories in the process.

## CHAPTER THREE:
## THE HORROR SPATIAL IMAGINARY: BLACK AND NATIVE MAPPINGS OF RACIALIZED SPACE

"If you are Black, you were born in jail, in the North as well as the South. Stop talking about the South. As long as you are South of the Canadian border, you are South"

– Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet"

"Help me, Phil. Let me free to be me! I'm an Indian morsel trapped in the guts of a cannibal called America who, for rabid religious reasons and a touch of trickle-down economics, has shoved a pickle past its tight sphincters. I don't want to drink. No I don't, so help me, Phil. Clinch your lust-mongering, liberal fangs upon that dill, Phil, and yank the mother out."

– Adrian C. Louis, "Earth Bone Connected to the Spirit Bone"

### Introduction

The ruptures that we have traced through Black and Native fiction in relation to matters of time and embodiment have led to crucial interventions to the terms of order provided by the racial capitalism of the late twentieth century. Discussions of history and the racialized body became enveloped into a dominant racial logic determined to police the discussion of racism under the protection of power, leading to the expressive radical practices of horror historicism and disfiguring resistance. But just as significant to the recalibration of racial terms was the matter of geography—the state-backed creation and cultivation of disenfranchised spaces meant not only to house African American and Native American populations but also to encompass fixed representations of Blackness and Indigeneity.

This chapter seeks out the *horror spatial imaginary*: horror located in the "elsewheres," the spaces constructed and manipulated by power to constrict subjects of color and render them immobile. The horror spatial imaginary becomes a way for Black and Native artists to re-imagine racialized space outside of its seeming totality, thereby allowing for the possibility of critical re-mappings. By making visible the marked narratives of power that seek to racialize space and thereby control racial logic, these horror spatial imaginaries

motivate subjects of color to negotiate new ways of moving about space. Horror helps to unbind these subjects from a state-controlled environment that threatens to absorb or otherwise mark them by a racial difference defined and perpetuated by hegemony. The experiential ruptures created by these horror imaginaries instead offer new ontologies defined by Black or Native traditions.

The spatial racialization to which these horror imaginaries respond derive from all too real histories of state-overseen actions to subjugate and disenfranchise Black and Native communities through the control of space. *De facto* and *de jure* segregation, forced displacements, and underfunding of particular areas all play as contributing forces to the continued racialization of specific geographies that, in turn, "confirm" dominant racial narratives on minority communities.[1] This chapter engages with two versions of racialized space: majority-Black inner-city neighborhoods and Indian reservations. David Delaney identifies these two spaces, alongside "the border" as "conventional geographies of race" (6). He explains that "these race-centered ideologies combine with other ideological elements – such as those centered on public-private, ownership, sexuality, citizenship, democracy, or crime – and with other axes of power to produce the richly textured, highly variegated, and power-laden spatialities of everyday life" (7). Such complex spatial formations, at their core, perpetuate the cyclical impact of tying minority communities to their immediate surroundings in such a way as to impede the progress of equality. In effect, these communities are blamed for both their inability to escape or improve their problematic

[1] A complete summary of these spatial discriminations would take far more space than this chapter alone, but a partial list of texts that begin to unfold this history include: Duane Champagne. *Social Change and Cultural Continuity among Native Nations.* Alta Mira Press, 2007; Russell Thornton. *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History since 1942*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1987; Neil Smith. *Uneven Development: Nature, Capitol and the Production of Space*. University of Georgia Press, 1984; Douglass S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Harvard University Press, 1993.

environments and for the creation of those same environments in the first place. As Charles Mills writes, these narratives insist, "you are what you are in part because you originate from a certain kind of space, and that space has those properties in part because it is inhabited by creatures like yourself" (*The Racial Contract* 28).

In what follows, I trace the use of the horror spatial imaginary in the unmasking and subsequent unsettling of the ordered spatial terms dictated by racial capitalism. In doing so, this chapter features two different stages of resisting dominant space: firstly, identifying the constructed-ness of racialized space under the terms of racial capitalism and, secondly, re-mapping those spaces under Black and Native geographies. Accordingly, after bringing into focus the relationship between horror, space, and race, I analyze two texts, Huron/Eastern Tsalagi poet Allison Adelle Hedge Coke's *Blood Run* (2006) and John Edgar Wideman's *Philadelphia Fire* (1990), for the ways they employ horror as a framework to understanding how racialized space becomes racialized in the first place. In each case, horror incites a particular spatial imaginary that uncovers the signs and hidden narratives behind dominant spatial constructions. Both Hedge Coke and Wideman inscribe the violence that dominant space incites on the racialized subject by allowing that same space to disrupt their narratives. In both cases, the text's inability to comprehend power's manipulation of space mirrors the affective experience of racialized space itself.

The second stage of unlocking horror's contributions to the resistance of racialized spaces involves narratives of re-mapping colonial spaces. I finish this chapter with a comparative look at two films, *Skins* (2002) and *Juice* (1992), from a Native American and African American director respectively. Each film uses its setting, an Indian reservation in North Dakota and the inner-city of Harlem, as a device by which to manufacture scenes of

horror in movies otherwise characterized as dramatic or suspenseful. *Skins* and *Juice* use horror to play with narratives of stereotypical Black and Native masculinity whose transformation into violent beings coincides with the nightmarish spaces they inhabit. Rather than allow these horror narratives to play out uninterrupted, and thereby confirming the white community's fear of these racialized spaces, both movies use the deconstructive force of horror to re-map their settings and invent new paths to Black or Native ways of being that deny the connection to dominant narratives of space.

**Horror and the Space of Race**

Before we examine how the horror spatial imaginary disorders the terms of racialized space, we need to clarify the connection between horror, space, and race. To depict one's surroundings as antagonistic, in other words, leaves implications for the way that power polices spaces for the sake of cohering racial logic. Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963), for example, animates the fear of space with the imagery of black birds threatening both to envelope a small town north of San Francisco and contaminate the whiteness of its denizens. Perhaps best representative of this horror mechanism is the schoolyard scene where Melanie Daniels—played by Tippi Hedren— comes to recognize that she and the children inside the schoolhouse are surrounded by an ominous murder of crows. Candace Waid refers to this scene as representative of white anxiety over the invading, racialized other, here exemplified by the literal Black bodies of the crows as they slowly fill the playground. Important here is not the menace of any particular bird but rather the volume of each Black body as they begin to fill the previously empty environ behind the character. The crows "pollute" the playground by invading a space that Melanie, based on her casual demeanor, marks as safe for her whiteness. In discussing geographies of exclusion, David Sibley explains this connection

between "pollution" and the spatial racialization between Black and whiteness as such: "With industrialization and the development of the class system under capitalism Black assumed wider significance through its association with dirt, disorder and the threat to the bourgeoisie posed by the working class. In the same system of values, whiteness is a symbol of purity, virtue and goodness and a colour which is easily polluted" (24). As the birds continue to accumulate, the mood of the scene begins to transform from one of presumed innocence (a woman sits idly on a bench listening to schoolchildren sing) to one of heightening horror. The amassing of Black filmic bodies insights a transformation of environs that upsets Melanie's previous navigation of the space around her. What was innocuous – an empty playground – at once becomes racialized and, consequently, antagonistic. The newly manipulated environ unsettles Melanie because it threatens to overwhelm and ultimately subsume her whiteness.

Waid's race-informed reading of Hitchcock's *The Birds* provides us with a crucial example of how narratives deploy racialized space to instill moments of horror. These environs unsettle because their nightmarish transformations threaten the integrity of the subjects that inhabit them. But Hitchcock only provides us with a way of thinking through horror and space from the perspective of power. In the case of Melanie, what makes the environs horrific are the racialized others that compose the space around her, thereby inciting her alienation and calling attention to the fragility of her whiteness as something capable of being obliterated. Sibley explains the dominant logic behind this fear as such: "There is a history of imaginary geographies which cast minorities, 'imperfect' people, and a list of others who are seen to pose a threat to the dominant group in society as polluting bodies or folk devils who are then located 'elsewhere'" (49). *The Birds* replicates this horror of

invading, "polluting bodies" as it pertains to the majority-white town removed from the urban space of San Francisco.

The horror spatial imaginary located in this chapter's texts hinges on the confrontation between the Black and Native subject and their direct environs. Just as body horror derived in part from the fear of how a subject related to their corporeal being, horror that originates from environs hones in on the connection between space and identity.[2] These rupturing moments allow the subjects to illuminate the ordered spatial terms of racial capitalism, instances of tactical spatial disenfranchisement parading as mere consequences of free market forces. The Harlem ghetto and Beaver Creek Reservation (standing in for the real Pine Ridge Indian Reservation) exist as testaments to historical power structures made to segregate and fix Black and Native populations. At the same time, the reasoning that these spaces are so disenfranchised due to "natural," "free-economic" causes buttresses what George Lipsitz defines as the *white spatial imaginary*, a prevailing geographic ideology that "idealizes 'pure' and homogenous spaces, controlled environments, and predictable patterns of design and behavior" and "seeks to hide social problems rather than solve them" (*How Racism Takes Place* 29). The relegation of Black populations to specific neighborhoods that in turn face severe underfunding, for example, results in a social myth wherein the Black community and disadvantaged urban neighborhoods become inseparable. As James Tyner explains, "Increased population densities, combined with institutional neglect, legal restrictions, and violence and intimidation, all contributed to the concentrations of African Americans in impoverished spaces…Black people lived in ghettoes; ghettos were the spaces

[2] See Jones, John Paul and Wolfgang Natter. "Identity, Space, and Other Uncertainties." *Space and Social Theory: Interpreting Modernity and Postmodernity*, edited by Georges Benko and Ulf Strohmayer, Blackwell, 1997, pp. 141-161. Natter and Jones's "Identity, Space, and other Uncertainties" states that "…subjects achieve and resist their systems of identification in and through social space" (149).

of blacks" (70). Similarly, the displacement of Native Americans to government-constructed reservations uproots tribes from Native lands and places them in poverty-stricken spaces with the underlining intent of forcing assimilation to Western culture. Part of this forced assimilation came in the form of the destruction of sacred Native grounds in favor for Western development in the name of *Manifest Destiny*. Mishuana Goeman, in *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations*, reasons, "Relocation was not only about a movement of bodies off reservation, but also about respatializing a consciousness and relationship to land" (97). In each of these examples of spatial discrimination against Black and Native communities lies power's determination to fix ethnic identity in accordance to these racialized spaces.

These attempts to fix or otherwise racialize Black or Native spaces have not been free of opposition. Theorizations of space and power leave open the possibility of resistance to these spatial hegemonies by turning to the impact of subjective experience. For example, Lefebvre's demarcation between *representation of space* and *representational space* points to an understanding of space as always in flux between representations of place as determined by dominant ideologies and the re-imagining of those same spaces by non-normative subjects. Lebefrve himself describes *representational spaces* as not needing to follow "rules of consistency or cohesiveness. Redolent with imaginary and symbolic elements, they have their source in history—in the history of a people as well as in the history of each individual belonging to that people" (41). For Lefebrve, representational space unsettles the supposed dominance of representations of space set in place by dominant discourse. He explains that space is "the product of competing ideas (discourses) about what constitutes that space – order and control or free, and perhaps dangerous interaction" (115).

Lefebrve's mentioning of "dangerous interaction" calls to mind Melanie's anxious paranoia at witnessing the black crows' intrusion to the schoolyard; in both cases discursive conflict brings with it the danger of a loss of order, the threat of an undefined space with no overseeing spatial coherence.

The turn to horror animates the concrete impact of racialized space on Black and Native populations while also creating new ruptures through which these communities can re-map their surroundings under new, self-determined terms. While Western thinkers such as Lefebvre theorize hegemonic space as always at odds with other discourses, their ideas of opposing spatial ideologies remain in the abstract. Furthermore, conceptualizing space as a map of contending discourses does little to illustrate the way that power specifically targets and subjugates particular ideologies for their potential resistance to hegemonic discourse. For example, a large reason why the US government sought to displace indigenous peoples from their original lands was to enfold them into a capitalist system, which their cultural traditions' very existence threatened. The possibilities inherent in conceptualization of space as produced by these ethnic traditions lends itself to unfixing these subjects of color from the racial, spatial logic that seeks to constrict them into identities and geographies legible to power. Horror becomes the point of dis-identification, the repulsive power that aides in unbinding these subjects from their respective dominant geographies and instead compels them to seek new ways of imagining their interaction with space. As a result, horror does more than document the effects of subjugation. Rather, it signals new spaces of flight from that same subjugation aided by the Black and Native imaginary. By doing so, the texts in this chapter take up David Harvey's call for "revolutionary geographies." Harvey envisions such a revolutionary turn in geography that "does not entail yet another empirical investigation of

the societal conditions of the ghettos," but rather takes up the "self-conscious and aware construction of a new paradigm for social geographic thought" (13). The new paradigms, in this case, are evolving forms of Black and Native spatial ideologies that allow subjects from these communities to envision spaces of possibility free from the racializing practices of white supremacy.

In realizing this subversion of dominant spatial order, the radical re-mappings of this chapter exhibit communities of color's capacity for resisting power in continually evolving and ingenious ways. These methods involve forging new forms of community and sovereignty in the face of segregation and economic disenfranchisement, a persistent challenge of dominant space that Gaye Theresa Johnson refers to as *spatial entitlement*. Spatial entitlement, Johnson reasons, refers to "a way in which marginalized communities have created new collectivities based not just upon eviction and exclusion from physical places, but also on new and imaginative uses of technology, creativity, and spaces" (x). In addition, as these collectivities offer "new articulations, new sensibilities, and new visions" surrounding place and solidarity between ethnic groups, they also reveal the inner-mechanisms behind power's attempts at policing the boundaries and logic of racialized space. Johnson's spatial entitlement is useful for how it represents radical re-mappings as both resistant to and diagnostic of the state as well as in how she depicts the Black and Brown communities' of Los Angeles' re-writing of a dominant racial logic that sought to separate and antagonize both populations. The horror spatial imaginary of this chapter likewise illuminates the trappings of dominant space in the ghetto and reservation just as it seeks out places of rupture through which Black and Native artists can enact their own re-mapping projects. And just as Johnson's argument details, these horror practices involve

"changing the meaning of existing spaces and creating new ones" (Johnson xii), a process here realized through the transformation of environs into monstrous, nightmarish, or otherwise threatening entities.

I contend that both Black and Native authors are responding to a shared experience of imposed immobility upon both their communities. At the heart of this paralysis lies the efforts of capitalism to imbue residents of color with the disenfranchised living spaces accorded to them by power. Racialized space constricts in the literal sense by depriving inhabitants with the financial or systemic means to improve themselves or their communities. Additionally, it constricts by imbuing its denizens with the discursive notion that their identities are directly tied and permanently forged to these nightmarish zones that surround them.[3]

The point of this chapter is not to argue for essentialist or otherwise romantic notions of Black or Native spatial ties that inform stereotypical discourse surrounding either community. Rather, this study aims to represent how both Black and Native artists counter the seemingly invisible racist control of space with traditions of mapping and environmental awareness born from their respective cultural traditions. As Goeman makes note, "Native relationships to land are presumed and oversimplified as natural and even worse, romanticized. In this, the politics of maintaining and protecting tribal lands drop out of the conversation" (28). Framing these horror mappings as political projects rather than nods to an

[3] Cheryl Harris, in her extensive "Whiteness as Property," traces the history of African American and Native American subjugation partially to the coordinated effort to exclude both communities from the right to property. Consequently, whiteness becomes synonymous with property ownership. Harris places the power of this racist ideology at the core of discourse that ties one's reputation or social status to the things one owns, a concept that found its origins in early concepts of property that encompassed things (such as land and personality), income (such as revenues from leases, mortgages, and patent monopolies), and one's life, liberty, and labor" (1735). In effect, Harris argues, property takes on the shape of one's reputation, which in turn becomes a form of property in itself. This maintained privileged access to property for the white community also meant a literally de-valuing of spaces marked for communities of color.

essentialized past avoids blunting the radical nature of these narratives. By radical, I mean that these artists use horror to envision a space unrecognizable to power and therefore outside of its control to manipulate in accordance to dominant discourse. Furthermore, I do not intend to conflate Black and Native spatiality to the point of obscuring the very different histories of Indigeneity and diaspora. I would be remiss, for example, to ignore the significance that land ties hold to Native tribes and the continuous fight for sacred spaces and spatial heritage in which recognized and unrecognized Native peoples engage to this day. The ongoing story of Native American tribes' fight for sovereignty is itself a story of how the US government uses nationalism to inscribe space and justify indigenous genocide. On the other hand, the history of Black migration in the United States holds an important alternative narrative to our country's fight against racial injustice. From the first migratory movement to the Northern United States at the start of the twentieth century to the mid-century movement of Black people to the West, these histories indicate both escape from areas of discrimination and the diminished hope that a more just space was possible. Now that we have considered the intervention horror makes in the policing and construction of racialized space, we can turn to the works of Aliison Adelle Hedge Coke and John Edgar Wideman for how both writers use horror in order to unmask the gears of racial capitalism in the creation of dominant geographies.

### *Blood Run* and Intrusions of Horror

Allison Adelle Hedge Coke's *Blood Run* (2006) derives from the poet's efforts to save a sacred burial site in the ancient city of Blood Run. As such, Hedge Coke structures her free verse play as a textual counterpart to the actual space of Blood Run. She accomplishes this task in part by textually recreating the interconnected relationship between indigenous

cultures and the land in which place and self are tied together. Leslie Marmon Silko, writing from a Pueblo tribal perspective, explains this relationship:

> So long as the human consciousness remains *within* the hills, canyons, cliffs, and the plants, clouds, and sky, the term *landscape*, as it has entered the English language, is misleading. 'A portion of territory the eye can comprehend in a single view' does not correctly describe the relationship between the human being and his or her surroundings. This assumes the viewer is somehow *outside* or *separate from* the territory she or he surveys. Viewers are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on. (*Yellow Woman* 27)

Silko critiques the Western tendency to separate the human subject as an observer of nature as opposed to an active piece of a larger environment. Hedge Coke underlines this pan-tribal sentiment by composing *Blood Run* with poems as told from the perspective of a number of characters—from skeletons to mounds to redwing blackbirds—that all compose parts of the larger ecosystem that is Blood Run. Just as Silko contends that a single view of territory fails to comprehend the larger ecological picture at hand, a single poem in *Blood Run* holds only one piece of a larger poetic whole. Hedge Coke composes this interlocking illustration of land as a precursor to the Western intrusions of Native space that she marks as both grotesque and horrific. As tractors and archeologists dig into the earth of Blood Run, they simultaneously cut into the body that is tribal culture. As such, *Blood Run* contrasts the reciprocity of indigenous spatiality with the horror of Western land development in order to argue for the significance of Native sacred space.

*Blood Run*'s interconnectedness plays out in the inter-textuality between poems, seen most clearly in the collection's second section "Origin." Within this section, the four poem suite of "Corn," "Redwing Blackbird," "Sunflower," and "Moon" tell portray a smaller narrative of interconnectedness and harmony that involves referencing previous poems and revealing intimate knowledge of ecological processes. "Corn," for example, concludes with an appeal for the reader to keep their gaze upward:

> Raise your faces,
> shoulders skyward,
> knees give, straighten,
> feet gentle touch—
> You can figure the phases of the moon
> by my sprouting tassels. (24)

The Corn that speaks through the poem brings the readers focus from the earthly matters at the beginning of the piece—"They took deer, elk scapula, scraped soil/just enough to loosen my path" (24)—to the conclusion that corn's impact on its environment reaches to celestial bodies as well—in this case, the moon.

As the readers gaze is already pointed skyward, the next speaker/poem, "Redwing Blackbird," addresses her audience with a narrative of reproduction and dissemination. From the opening verses, which detail the blackbird mulling between three possible male suitors, to the closing lines that depict the bird's migration, "Redwing Blackbird" invokes the replenishing effect of movement and exchange. In one such case, the speaker says, "Silver Maple samaras/wing wind, spread clusters/along with mine, renewing Prairie" (25), a depiction of seed dispersal in which the bird ("wing wing, spread clusters") serves as the

bridge between the rooted Silver Maple and the rest of the prairie. As a result, each image that the poem offers carries an ecological reaction. Poetically, this chain of reactions continues as the blackbird narrates, "As summer closes, I leave/dragonflies, damselflies, butterflies,/mosquitoes, moths, spiders, crickets for/grain, seed, Sunflower" (25). The closing lines, which ostensibly depict a seasonal dietary change, in fact link "Redwinged Blackbird with the ensuing poem, "Sunflower." Referring to sunflower as a proper noun serves as a way of writing each of these ecological pieces as active characters. "Sunflower," in return, gestures toward its own role in this larger system: "my yellow shawl fringe,/exposes seed, welcomes bee" (26). Sunflower willingly offers the same seed that Blackbird disseminates about the prairie. The two poems build a poetic economy in which the seed stands for a deeper connectivity shared between Blood Run's various organisms. As the final line of "Sunflower" reveals, "My seed plenishes" (26).

The final poem of the quartet, "Moon," calls back to the previous three in ways that bind the four as a series of networks that work within a larger system of reciprocation. Simultaneously, "Moon," foreshadows the invasion to come of forces that seek to disrupt and unbind the ecosystem that "Origin" has illustrated. The piece opens by declaring, "My children were buried 'neath altitude,/within masses of earth as their sisters mourned them/with painted faces resembling my spirit full" (27). Just as "Corn" ended with the move to pull the reader's gaze to the sky, "Moon" reciprocates by pulling their attention back to the earth and beneath it. Rather than provoking an affect of irreparable distance or alienation, the Moon's voice incites an intimacy underscored by the mourning "sisters" who paint their faces to resemble the full moon. Similarly, the final verse returns the reader's initial gaze at the end of "Corn": "remembering all those who look to me/for guidance, advice, revelations"

(27). The four characters each refer to each other as integral parts of a larger whole, Silko's vision of "landscape" that subverts a notion of "separate from" or "outside of." While completing the cyclical motion that the three prior poems cultivated, "Moon" also motions towards the horror to come, which in this case stands for the intruding forces that seek to corrupt the reciprocal community that inhabit Blood Run. Hedge Coke writes:

> Before stomping of milkweed, darkthroat shooting star.
>
> Trampling of prairie chicken nest eggs, downy phlox.
>
> loess cratering—plow, till, dozer, crane—
>
> Before tampering Blackbird's grain to poison. (27)

This verse alerts to a horrific poisoning of the land that, simultaneously, breaks up the symbiotic poetics that tied "Corn," "Redwinged Blackbird," "Sunflower," and "Moon" together. The hyphenated insertion of "plow, till, dozer, crane" mirrors its mechanical referents by cutting into the verse and interrupting the chain of natural occurring elements ("milkweed," "nest eggs," "phlox"). Horror transforms these machines into forces of murderous destruction by illustrating their violent impact on Blood Run's ecological and spiritual network.

A later poem, "Tractor," provides further evidence of the way *Blood Run* incites horror by recreating Western culture's disfiguring of Native spaces, a disfigurement that leads to a re-writing of the reciprocal relationship between Native subjects and the surrounding landscape. "Tractor" appears in *Blood Run*'s third section entitled "Intrusions." The "intrusions" that the section refers to are the disruptive Western forces that upturn the ecology seen at work between the Natives and the sacred mound space that comprises the ancient city of Blood Run. The disruptions at the heart of the "intrusions" induce critical

spaces of horror by way of their repugnance and abject relation to the comparatively peaceful and orderly ecology of poems located in the opening section, "Dawning." For example, the final two lines of "The Mounds," the poem proceeding "Tractor," reads: "Our People created us, cared for us, provided the most/esteemed existence in intricate esoteric societies, thus in return we cradled them" (52).

Facing directly towards the poem "The Mounds" on the opposite page, the opening of "Tractor" animates the mechanical entity both in movement and in destructive philosophy:

> It is my duty to plow, my work
> to turn earth to something
> my master thinks is precious.
> Least the weary rise.
> Let it not be said I
> judged this domain
> anything but worthy of
> my own steely blades. (53).

Just as with other pieces in *Blood Run*, the poetic rhythm of "Tractor" mirrors the actual movement of a tractor that upturns and re-shifts dirt, cycling out ground and, by doing so, obscuring whatever it unearths: "It is my duty to plow, my work/to turn earth to something" (53). The poem recycles the phonetic traits of "work" for "earth," a slant rhyme buried in the second line that invites the image of a tractor violently lifting and dropping earth. In the context of the poem, the word "work" *does* work on the word "earth" by attaching itself to the latter by way of phonetic similarity, thereby transforming "earth" into "something." Likewise, in the couplet "anything but worthy of/my own steely blades" (53), "worthy" at the

end of one line is upturned and transformed into "steely" in the line that follows it. Because of this textual animacy, the violent transformation of Blood Run's landscape in the world of the poem becomes violence to the text of the poem on the page.

The poem's conclusion calls attention to the subjugating nature built into the tractor's claims that its intrusions into Native space serve as a form of liberation:

> You were nothing to conquer
> nor contend.
> I was proud to take you
> under, rid you of your
> presence here.
> Hold no grudge to me.
> You should be grateful
> I have freed you
> from all that mounding
> they lay upon you.
> Worship me, know my truth. (53)

The horror of the mechanized beast that serves its "master" and wills the sacred mounds and the bodies buried beneath them to "Worship me, know my truth" (53) becomes a way of understanding how Western intrusions serve to re-write and re-think Native relationships to space and, consequently, themselves. Indeed, what serves to manipulate the environs that Black or Native subjects inhabit in turn works to manipulate the way these subjects identify themselves. That the tractor views itself as a savior provides us with a window to this logic of dominance that seeks to control and racialize space. The tractor's claim that the buried

Native remains should "be grateful/I have freed you/from all that mounding" directly contrasts with the closing of "The Mounds," in which the mounds "cradle" those who created them in a relationship based in reciprocity and balance. Paula Gunn Allen expounds on the interconnected binds between indigenous culture and land when she writes:

> We are the land. To the best of my understanding, that is the fundamental idea that permeates American Indian life; the land (Mother) and the people (mothers) are the same… The earth is a source and the being of the people, and we are equally the being of the earth. The land is not really a place, separate from ourselves, where we act out the drama of our isolate destinies; the witchery makes us believe that false idea. (119)

Allen underscores the conflation between the Native body and the landscape that transforms any act of land development to an act of disembodiment. Conversely, by the logic of the tractor—representative of Allen's concept of "witchery"—such a relationship to land only constrains the Native subject from accruing value under the "steely blades" of Western discourse. The tractor's truth derives from Western understandings of space that seek separation between the individual and her surroundings, a far cry from indigenous understandings that envision the landscape as subjects as inherently connected and reliant upon one another.

The link between horror and the physical manipulation/handling of Blood Run powers the contrast between another pair of poems in "Intrusions": "Skeletons" and "Jesuit." Whereas the quartet of "Corn," "Redwinged Blackbird," "Sunflower," and "Moon," signaled the visible and, at times, invisible links between varying entities, "Skeletons" and "Jesuit" juxtapose in their differing takes on the necessity of physical remains to denote continuing

presence. In “Skeletons,” the way to remember requires an attention to silence and stillness rather than physical objects: “She who hears, come know us./With stillness, walk among us./Without malice, note our presence./Glad-hearted remember us, our glory” (Hedge Coke 48). While skeletons denote physical remains of human beings, the speakers in “Skeletons” seek persisted presence through memory and story. Once unearthed, the “Skeletons” lose their disembodied presence and instead become catalogued objects in a system of signs: “Once numerous, now our scalp locks, occipital bones,/merely satisfy seekers, irreverent in a world/we should not know” (48). Whereas before presence came from an inherited stillness, the hint of archeological or otherwise Western intrusions transforms the speakers into fragmented remains of dead bodies. The horror of unearthing remains arises simultaneously with the arrival of a Western tendency to enfold the Native land—and body—into a system of recognizable signs.

Whereas “Skeletons” enacts a kind of survivance narrative in its portrayal of memory that perpetuates presence in the face of physical absence, “Jesuit” seeks out physical evidence of remains in order to fill the silence that “Skeletons” instructed to fill with the act of remembering. Hedge Coke writes, “What roams here in the twilight?/What harkens here twofold?/What essence was it made of/when the centuries turned cold?” (49). Essence, which when applied to “Skeletons” transformed the speakers into “scalp locks” and “occipital bones,” represents a way for the Jesuit to comprehend the Native space. Just as was the case in “Tractor,” the physical manipulation of land—probing the earth to uncover the remains of dead Blood Run inhabitants—couples with an ideological violence that displaces the burial grounds and re-imagines them as a potential site of Western expansion and religious assimilation. The Jesuit’s prediction that “Some fine day Blue Cloud Abbey/will invest our

mission role" (49) collapses the primes of land development with the violent persecution of Native Americans under the mission system. Hedge Coke alludes to the horror of missionization even as she illustrates the horrific effect of disturbing the Skeletons burial site via physical and ideological disfigurement. The poem's rhyme structure underlines this horrifying disruption with its traditional Western rhyme scheme, the only such scheme in the entirety of *Blood Run*. Both in the history and ideology that it plays to an in the poetic tradition from which it borrows, "Jesuit" intrudes into the ecological structure of Blood Run the space and *Blood Run* the collection. By doing so, Hedge Coke makes the horror of the disfigurement of Native space a felt experience, one that disturbs its poetic aspirations even as it buttresses the book's larger political aims.

### ***Philadelphia Fire*** **and the Horror of Urban Planning**

If the horror poetics at play between Hedge Coke's "The Mounds" and "Tractor" hint at the connection between the Native subject and landscape, the horror inducing imagery that runs throughout John Edgar Wideman's *Philadelphia Fire* (1990) points to a similar entanglement between the Black subject and urban space. Wideman's novel tells the story of Cudjoe, a writer who, after a period of self-exile from his former Philadelphia neighborhood, returns in order to find a young man who, years earlier, he witnessed running from the fire originating from the police attack on the MOVE Organization headquarters. Cudjoe's descriptions of his neighborhood rely on horror images alluding to bodily dismemberment, monstrous figures, and ghostly bloodletting. Just as Hedge Coke seeks to make the horror of disfiguring sacred space a corporeal experience, Wideman best demonstrates the racializing effects of urban planning in 1980s Philadelphia by visceral metaphor. Put another way, the horror that lies in the book's descriptions of the city uncover what Glissant refers to as "various kinds of

madness" (*Caribbean Discourse* 161), mechanisms of white supremacy that seek to induct Black subjects onto a Western cartographic grid that rejects Black subjectivity. This racialization of space in turn impacts Cudjoe's ability to access parts of his own experience, thereby tying him to his immediate space in such a way as to render him immobile. In "Dreams of the New Land," Robin D.G. Kelley ties together the capacity for movement with the ability of Black communities to imagine better futures for themselves: "Exodus provided black people with a language to critique America's racist state and build a new nation, for it's central theme wasn't simply escape but a new beginning. Exodus represented dreams of black self-determination, of being on our own, under our own rules and beliefs, developing our own cultures, without interference" (17). The novel showcases Cudjoe's inability to imagine himself as separate from the promise of death that his surroundings represent; the sensation of being consumed by the city leads to a violence to the imagination and, therefore, to Cudjoe's capacity to envision himself in a future tense. Near the beginning of the novel, and just as he returns to Philadelphia after a long absence, Cudjoe contemplates:

> If the city is a man, a giant sprawled out for miles on his back, rough contours of his body smothering the rolling landscape, the rivers and woods, hills and valleys, bumps and gullies, crushing with his weight, his shadow, all the life beneath him, a derelict in a terminal stupor, too exhausted, too wasted to move, rotting in the sun, then Cudjoe is deep within the giant's stomach, in a subway-surface car shuddering through stinking loops of gut, tunnels carved out of decaying flesh, a prisoner of rumbling innards that scream when trolleys pass over rails embedded in flesh. (Wideman 20)

The act of the city coming to existence in the first place denotes an act of violence, similar to Hedge Coke's tractor. The giant that smothers the "rolling landscape" and "all life beneath him" incites a vision of the urban space that whose very presence denotes an act of destruction. The passage contrasts imagery of a lush, green environment—"rivers and woods, hills and valleys, bumps and gullies"—with the bare, desolate nature of the city/rotting giant, creating a sense that the space is ill equipped to facilitate life and instead becomes fertile ground for cultivating social death. In another sense, the act of smothering the ground beneath him positions the urban giant as a socially flattening force. All topographies that existed before the creation of the urban space bow to the leveling-weight of the rotting corpse just as the power of urban development forces those subjects of color who populate it to submit to a universalizing sense of race and identity authored by dominant discourse.

In addition to characterizing urban space as an act of violence, Wideman's passage illustrates his protagonist's struggles to envision a sense of self apart from his decaying environs. In order to formulate his own position in Philadelphia, Cudjoe must first anthropomorphize the city to the extent that his traveling through the space is a form of violent consumption. Urban decay, representative of a lack of state-financed support to infrastructure, becomes literal decay of flesh, a collapsing of subject and space that punctuates the material violence that arises from state-neglect of minority communities. By imagining the city as a rotting corpse, Cudjoe envisions any movement through that space as a form of digestion. Put another way, to move about Philadelphia becomes an act of disintegration, a process of losing agency in order to assimilate into the narrative of decay and subjugation that makes up the space around him. The fact that the body that digests him is itself rotting only adds to the apocalyptic vision of the passage; digestion, a bodily act

meant to aid nourishment and promote life, only serves to mark subjects as part of an inevitable death narrative.

Cudjoe continues his extended metaphor of Philadelphia's inner-city with more horrifying imagery connected to bodily violence: "Cudjoe remembers a drawing of Gulliver strapped down in Lilliput just so. Ropes staked over his limbs like hundreds of tiny tents, pyramids pinning the giant to the earth. If the city is a man sprawled unconscious drunk in an alley, kids might find him, drench him with lighter fluid and drop a match on his chest." (21). Here again, Wideman envisions urban space as a product of violent torture or an act of cruelty. Also emerging from this description, however, is the condition of paralysis that permeates the urban experience. Cudjoe reimagines the rotting giant from the earlier passage as Daniel Defoe's captured Gulliver, now left to the mercy of a group of cruel inner-city children. Aside from equating the city with the condition of immobility—an inability to move that makes one constantly vulnerable to violence—Cudjoe's metaphor further entangles the body with urban space in such a way that it becomes difficult to separate the two. If the city is a body filled with bodies, does one's condition follow the other? In the face of such a question, Cudjoe takes his imagery of Philadelphia as a man lit aflame in an alleyway further down a stream of consciousness:

> He'd flame up like a heap of all the unhappy monks in Asia. Puff the magic dragon. A little bald man topples over, spins as flames spiral up his saffron robe. In the streets of Hue and Sargon it had happened daily. You watched priests on TV burst into fireballs, roll as they combusted, a shadow flapping inside the flaming pyre, You thought of a bird in there trying to get out. You wondered if the bird was a part of the monk refusing to go along with the

> program. A protest within the monk's protest. Hey. I don't want nothing to do with this crazy shit. (21)

The imagery of a body burning from self-immolation causes Cudjoe to fixate on the smaller bodies caught in the flames. Just as the earlier depiction of Gulliver tied down by ropes invoked urban paralysis, the fleeing birds point to the impossibility of escaping the condition of one's surroundings. Cudjoe remains unable to think of his space outside of the bounds of the body, which in turn leaves him unable to separate out that same space from those bodies that inhabit it. The image echoes the words of Ramona Johnson Africa, a MOVE member that Wideman quotes during *Philadelphia Fire*'s autobiographical second section: "If Move go down, not only will everybody in this block go down, the knee joints of America will break and the body of America soon fall. We going to burn them with smoke, gas, fire, bullets…. We will burn this house down and burn you up with us" (110). A city defined by horror and death creates bodies bound to those same forces. The novel underlines this link between social death and urban centers with Cudjoe musing, "When you choose to live in a city, you are also choosing a city to die in" (24).

But as Cudjoe goes on to show, "choosing to live in a city" does more than determine the manner of one's death: it impacts the way he or she registers experience. More specifically, Wideman depicts the urban space as a virtual text that imposes meaning onto its inhabitants. While waiting for his meeting with Maraget Jones, a woman who will hopefully give him information regarding the whereabouts of Simba, Cudjoe ruminates over the fact that his subjectivity must always run through a prism of spaces: "He will explain to Maraget Jones that he must always write about many places at once. No choice. The splitting apart is inevitable. First step is always out of time, away from responsibility, toward the word or

sound or image that is everywhere at once, that connects and destroys" (23). Wideman gestures towards a flurry of signs that overwhelm and fracture Cudjoe. Looking back to his earlier metaphor regarding Philadelphia as a "heap of all the unhappy monks in Asia" further confirms Cudjoe's problem with place: by being everywhere at once, he is unable to fully be anywhere. Put in a different way more attuned to the horror images that the book deploys freely, space haunts Cudjoe in a manner that renders him paralyzed. Wideman sums up the effects of this paralysis as it relates to a subject's ability to comprehend space:

> Sometimes I've thought of myself, of you, of ourselves, as walled cities, each of us a fortress, a citadel, pinpoints of something that is the inverse of light, all of us in our profusion spread like a map of stars, each of us fixed in our place on a canvas immense beyond knowing, except that we know the immensity must be there to frame our loneliness, to separate us as far as we are separate each from each other in the darkness. (120)

The passage makes clear the intended effect of racialized space: to not fix subjects of color in place and alienate them from each other. The continued collapse between city and body that arises in descriptions of gruesome consumption results in a bleak landscape of walled off subjects incapable of connecting to one another. To be digested by the great rotting corpse of Philadelphia looks beyond death and to an uncertain future void of possibility or community. The canvas's immensity belies a structure of power set in place long before the subject's existence and set to exist long after, a mythical presence that obscures the very real and knowable capitalist mechanisms working to oppress communities of color. As Lipstiz clarifies, "Racialized space has come to be seen as natural in this nation" (*How Racism Takes Place* 52), a power dynamic that Wideman echoes through the lens of Shakespeare's *The*

*Tempest* as he writes, "The saddest thing about this story is that Caliban must always love his island and Prospero must always come and steal it. Nature. Each stuck with his nature. So it ends and never ends" (122). The naturalization of power's control over spaces inhabited by Blacks removes the sense of agency and ability of self-recognition. The key to this dominance's perpetuation lies in its authorship from beyond the subject's immediate comprehension. Cudjoe himself identifies the lingering trace of this ideology, even as he struggles to grasp its characteristics: "Is someone in charge? From this vantage point in the museum's deep shadow in the greater darkness of night it seems an iron will has imposed itself on the shape of the city…A miraculous design. A prodigy that was comprehensible. He can see a hand drawing the city" (44). The shape of the city, itself imagined as a rotting corpse, relies on an unseen "iron will" that feeds upon Cudjoe and other inhabitants of Philadelphia's urban environs.

Any hope of grasping the logic behind the city's urban planning requires placing oneself outside of Black subjectivity: "Cudjoe decides he will think of himself as a reporter covering a story in a foreign country. Stay on his toes, take nothing for granted. Not the customs nor the language. What he sees is not what the Natives see… At best he can write the story of someone in his shoes passing through" (45). Cudjoe's solution to racialized space involves completely removing himself from his experience of the city, a paradox that illustrates the dominance of a white geography seeking to control Black subjectivity. The supposedly elegant solution echoes the universalist tone of geography scholars such as Nigel Thrift, whose "Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect" looks at the varying dynamics at work within city spaces that culminate in individual emotional experience. However, as Divya P. Tolia-Kelly says of Thrift's text, "This new 'politics of

affect' encourages us to proceed with an orientation through which the world can be felt, known, and understood and expressed, inevitably through text… One problematic of this textual encounter is that the pivotal cornerstones of this theory are based on a Westnocentric literary and sensory palette" (214). In order for Cudjoe to escape the nightmarish experience of Philadelphia, he must take himself out of his body and adopt a bird's eye view, a universal view removed from Black subjectivity and parading as non-raced.

Not only Cudjoe alone envisions a form of witnessing the city removed from its racializaing, horrific inscriptions on the Black body. J.B., the main narrator of the book's third and final section and another Black resident of Philadelphia, initially shares Cudjoe's tactic of objectivity:

> What we need is realism, the naturalistic panorama of a cityscape unfolding. Demographics, statistics, objectivity. Perhaps a view of the city from on high, the fish-eye lens catching everything within its dissertation… If we could arrange the building blocks, the rivers, boulevards, bridges, harbor, etc. etc. into some semblance of order, of reality, then we could begin disentangling ourselves from this miasma, this fever of shakes and jitters, of self-defeating selfishness called urbanization (Wideman 157)

Both J.B. and Cudjoe envision a structuralist urban perspective akin to the "hand drawing the city," a view that creates separation between the self and space. In effect, J.B.'s commentary calls for a way of witnessing the city that does not run through the Black body, and, therefore, creates a space of separation between the two. Again we are witness to the precarious situation that racialized spaces of horror to create: where the most viable tactic to remove the overlap between body and space comes in extinguishing the self from the

narrative altogether. The alternative, which J.B. relates only two pages later, does not read anymore hopefully: “Best to let it burn. All of it burn. Flame at the inmost heart” (159). Space through power’s terms offers two ropes: obliteration or death.

Both Wideman’s novel and *Blood Run* speak to the necessity for Black and indigenous spatialities dedicated to liberation and free from the fetters of subjugated subjectivity. To whit, the long critical history of Black and Native re-mappings demonstrates two spatial traditions that evolve within and outside the system of Western dominance. That is, both African-American and Native American subjects have sought ways of understandings landscapes that offered them exodus from the Western map of dominance; to do so, both turned to their cultural traditions that have always viewed space outside of the capitalist, expansionist drive of power. In relating both these critical conversations, I hope to find the space where horror’s spatial interventions open visceral cuts into the Western landscape, intrude on the intruders, in the effort to animate both of these re-mapping projects. By horror interventions, I mean the moment when space turns from the transparent to the metaphoric, when the invisible forces creating racial inequality in these areas are revealed as monstrous spaces that literally attempt to consume the Black and Native subjects that inhabit them. But by embracing these moments, artists from both traditions are able to enact crucial re-mappings; they unmask racialized space while provoking new ways of inhabiting the landscape under their terms. The reservation and the inner-ghetto, under the lens of horror, invoke both these spatial traditions of re-mapping by embracing the repugnant, unnerving sense of racialized space.

It is in the desire to better understand how these nightmarish spaces become re-imagined by the Black and Native subject that I turn to two films, Ernest R. Dickerson’s

*Juice* (1992), and Cheyenne and Arapaho filmmaker Chris Eyre's *Skins* (2002). Made within ten years with each other, these films take place in two highly racialized spaces, the inner-city of Harlem and the fictional Beaver Creek Lodge in South Dakota, which both inform their horror elements and motivate their respective critiques of Westernized environs. Whereas the previous literary texts used horror's repulsive powers to disrupt their own narratives, Dickerson and Eyre use the visual power of film to re-invigorate depictions of the inner-city ghetto and reservation with the horror spatial imaginary.

**Navigating Shadows in *Juice***

Ernest R. Dickerson's *Juice* saw release directly after a string of debuts by young Black male directors telling stories about the Black ghetto, a film boom that Ed Guerrero refers to as *ghettocentric*. 1991 saw a slew of movies from Black directors, including John Singleton's *Boyz 'n the Hood*, Matty Rich's *Straight Out of Brooklyn*, and Mario Van Peebles's *New Jack City*, that all saw critical praise for their social "authenticity" and ability to document life in the "hood." The need for such realistic portrayals derives from a larger national desire to inhabit these "at-risk" spaces without actually inhabiting them. For example, the lead to Leonard Klady's review of the Hughes Brothers's *Menace II Society* (another important release in the 1990s Black film renaissance) spouts: "A grim, nihilistic trip to the inner city is in store for the stout-hearted who enter into New Line's 'Menace II Society.' Fierce, violent and searing in its observation, the film makes previous excursions seem like a stroll through the park" (Klady). This insistence on promoting Black films set in the ghetto as documentary-realist representations inspired readings of these films focused on their accurate portrayal of inner-city violence.

In the case of Dickerson's *Juice*, its categorization as a true crime melodrama by mainstream critics inspired very real anxiety over what real life violence its release might manifest within urban movie theaters. In a *Los Angeles Times* article detailing the controversy, a representative from Mothers Against Gangs in Communities is quoting as saying that the film's "trailers show the action-packed aspects, not the other parts which are positive... Hollywood has learned that the best [advertisements] are the violent ones" (Fox). In response, the same article quotes Paramount Motion Picture Group President Barry London as defending the film on the grounds of its socially responsible and anti-violence message. The "positive message/negative violence" binary connecting both of these quotes reveals a critical need to view *Juice* through a lens of social responsibility and representative authenticity. A look at its reviews upon release reveals a similar mindset from critics, including a review from Janet Maslin of *The New York Times*, who hinges her critique of the film mainly on its inability to reconcile its "clear anti-crime stance" with its tendency to linger on the "flash, irreverence and tough-guy posturing to which the film's violence can ultimately be traced" (Maslin). Prevalent here is a desire from critics and community activists alike to draw a fine line between the political and the aesthetic in Dickerson's film. In particular, *Juice*'s resemblance of a violent genre film appears to create a dissonance with its supposed anti-violence, pro-future message. For the spokesperson from MAGC, the film's more violent, gang-related imagery represents a dangerous issue of representation that threatens to perpetuate the already rampant stereotypes of violent Black males pushed upon the public by the (white) Hollywood industry since cinema's early beginnings. Kelley, utilizing Guerrero's term *ghettocentric*, echoes this concern from the point of view of the Black cultural critic: "The construction of the ghetto as a living nightmare and 'gangstas' as

the products of that nightmare has given rise to what I call a new 'Ghettocentric' identity in which the specific class, race, and gendered experiences in late-capitalist urban centers coalesce to create a new identity—'Nigga'" ("Kickin' Reality" 208). Kelley laments this ghettocentric identity for its inability to think back any further than the racialized space from which it derives, meaning it is unable to imagine a deeper African past to Blackness.

To imagine a space free of these racial capitalist registers requires a spatiality capable of envisioning planes of existence free from the manipulation of the state: what George Lipsitz defines as the *black spatial imaginary*. He articulates first a brief history of cultural spatial practices that African slaves enacted in their new surroundings, including burying "their dead in African ways, decorating graves with household items, breaking plates, cups, and utensils to symbolize the ruptures between the living and the dead, between their North American present and their African past" (*How Racism Takes Place* 53). These practices recalled cultural traditions from before the middle passage in ways that simultaneously carved out spaces for African slaves in the American continent. The blurring of the line between the living and the dead helps inscribe a new meaning to the spaces taken up by Black subjects seeking to gain control over their environment. The same points of rupture that the broken items represent between life and death also point to a disruption of Western spatiality. Later versions of the *black spatial imaginary* equally upturned Western ideological structures meant to displace or otherwise alienate Black populations from each other and themselves. Lipsitz expounds on the Black spatial imaginary as a response to "the radical divisiveness of racialized capitalism with radical solidarity, that united the chitlin' eaters with the chicken eaters, that cared just as much about the town drunk as the town doctor" (57). The "divisiveness" of racial capitalism that Lipsitz mentions invokes an emphasis on the

individual over the larger community. Instead, Black communal gatherings saw "the public possibilities of privately owned places" (57).

Dickerson's *Juice* works through this Black spatial imaginary as it collapses the bonds of raciaized capitalist space. Dickerson achieves this task by painting raciliazed Harlem through the lens of the *fantastique*. In doing so, he reproduces the Black spatial imaginary's power of imagination in ways true to the African tradition of surrealism. When power restricts communal movement, the re-imagination of space provides opportunities for exodus that eludes Black subjects otherwise. By doing so, Black expression sees potential in the representation of urban space as outside the bounds of Western realism. Robin Kelley explains in "Keepin' It (Sur)real: Dreams of the Marvelous," that the African surrealist tradition, whose principles pre-supposed and influenced the Euro-centric tradition allows for the creation of spaces of possibility in which Black artists can work through and out of issues facing themselves and their communities. Kelley writes, "[Surrealism] is a movement that invites dreaming, urges us to improvise and invent, and recognizes the imagination as our most powerful weapon" ("Keepin' It (Sur)real" 159). He traces a Black surrealist tradition including artists ranging from Thelonius Monk to Richard Wright. In Black musician poets, Kelley locates surrealist critiques of capitalist systems that encourage wage-labor over artistic pursuits. He writes, "[Black musician-poets'] utopias are always free of 'work'—meaning low-wage, unfulfilling, backbreaking labor—and full of pleasurable leisure. This is not to suggest that people do not want to 'work,' but that the work they are forced to do is not fulfilling, creative, or enjoyable" (164). For Kelley, these surreal utopias shirked social realism in favor for imaginative spaces that reflected the equality that Black surrealists sought for their community. Black performance adopts these same surrealist tendencies in

order to re-direct the violent realities of the inner-city into more positive forces. To whit, Stephanie Batiste, in her article "Affect-ive Moves: Space, Violence, and the Body in *Rize*'s Krump Dancing," maps out the affective and critical space that Krump dancers create through their performances. In contemplating the surface-level violent tendencies in Krump dancing's movements, Batiste explains, "Rather than violence, the standing over and touching of one another through grabbing the arms and slapping the shoulders and back is a structure of love, not one of hurt and destruction" (210). The space created within the Krump dancers' cypher is one of possibility and re-imagination, where the semiotic sign of violence can be subverted and re-signified. For the dancers, this re-signification also re-writes the dominant narrative that urban spaces and violent Black bodies are inexorably linked. By using the control of space – the center of the cypher – as a means of re-writing the grammar of violence, the dancers enact a new version of the urban space set on their terms.

Batiste and Kelley both theorize an element of Black spatial re-mapping that comments on the experiential consequences of power structures. In the case of the Krump cypher, bodily violence becomes a new way to code physical intimacy. Black musician-poets capitulate capitalism as "backbreaking labor," forcing capitalist mechanisms into terms capable of being *felt*. In using these corporeal critiques in their surrealist visions, these Black artists demonstrate the very real significance of surrealism in resisting systems of dominance. Rather than merely serve as an escapist fantasy, these surrealist iterations make crucial connections between the lived everyday and the seemingly incomprehensible tentacles of power. The horror spatial imaginary reverberates these imaginative acts of resistance in that it seeks to connect subjective experience with the larger economic and political forces at work in the creation of these racialized spaces. Just as surrealism uses the bodily experience

of racism to fuel its critical fantasies, horror sees racialized space as a problem at the level of both the psychic and systemic. As a result, the white hegemony responsible for Harlem's racialized space are absent from *Juice*; instead, Dickerson plants the horrific trace of racist spatial disenfranchisement with the hungry street corners and abandoned buildings left in its wake. In doing so, he mimics the equally invisible gesticulations of a racial capitalism that clandestinely manipulates the racial logic of space.[4] The way that his characters interact with these made real forces of dominance provide illustrations of re-thinking urban space and achieving mobility in the face of racist paralysis.

*Juice* tells the story of four friends living in inner-city Harlem who make the decision to rob a particularly maligned store-owner's corner market, a decision that ends with the owner's murder at the hands of Bishop, played by Tupac Shakur. This initial act of bloodshed emboldens Bishop to perpetuate a string of violence, beginning with one of his three friends, Raheem, and leading to the film's final confrontation between Bishop and the film's protagonist, Q (Omar Epps). Dickerson tells this story, which has roots in traditional

[4] Horror's ability to connect these psychic and systemic iterations of racialized space also has roots in the Black spatial tradition, particularly in re-mapping spaces with both the social and the expressive in mind. Katherine McKittrick, in *Demonic Spaces: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, describes how Black geographies seek out both the concrete and the imagiNative in their mapping of space. To do so, she uses the work of Neil Smith and Éduard Glissant, two theorists that argue for both a material and metaphorical comprehension of spatiality to better understand the multitude of forces at work in how space becomes produced in the first place. McKittrick first discusses Neil Smith's conception of *deep space*, a theory of space that refers to "the relativity of terrestrial space, the space of everyday life in all its scales from the global to the local and the architectural in which, to use Doreen Massey's metaphor, different layers of life and social landscape are sedimented onto and into each other" (Smith 161). Deep space then consists of the multi-scalar forces interweaving through landscapes, from the architectural to the political and economic. For McKittrick, Smith's deep space invokes a destabilization of transparent space that allows for the examination of the "political, ideological, and economic ruptures pertinent to historical and contemporary subaltern lives" (16). In other words, space is never just what its surface-level characteristics signify, but rather a product of a plethora of historic, social, and political forces, all of which arise when considering the Black diaspora. The "crushingly real" nature of deep space contributes to its potential in helping McKittrick better define a Black geography. To help clarify her point, she sees both Western contact with the American continent in 1492 and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s as examples of the concrete effects of deep space: both historical moments involve the contestation of space – colonial expansion and desegregation – that also carried ideological conflicts. Smith's deep space provides a way of thinking about geography that expands beyond the mere contemplation of physical space: a trait that McKittrick argues allows for the analysis of those "unrealized, very real" Black experiences that are "critical of real spatial inequalities" (17).

crime narratives involving power, masculinity, and violence, through a slowly devolving Harlem landscape, which begins with bright colors and sunny streets and ends with decrepit rooftops and blue, alien light. At the heart of this narrative lies the temptation to attain "juice": the film's vernacular for reputation or street credibility. "Juice" compels Bishop to act out violently in order to grasp control over his environment, a desire that becomes apparent in the movie's opening moments where Bishop is confronted and outnumbered by a local gang. But whereas "juice" tempts Bishop into the world of violent crime, it serves as a kind of poison for the film itself. From the moment that Bishop murders the shopkeeper during the friend's ill-fated robbery attempt, the mood of the movie turns from upbeat—not to mention near comical—to menacing. This affective turn materializes most legibly in the depiction of urban space. As the film spirals further into a near-serial killer narrative—with Bishop attempting to pick off his former friends one by one—Harlem's street corners and alleyways take on near monstrous, nightmarish characteristics.

The critical power of *Juice*'s horror-turn comes from Bishop and Q's contrasted relationship to racialized space. Whereas Bishop gradually transforms into the stereotype of the young, Black emotionless assassin, Q's confrontations with Bishop have less to do with resisting his friend and more to with how he connects—or disconnects—with the narratives that racialized space lays ahead of him. Put differently, Bishop and Q's differing valuation of "juice" broadcasts their different takes on how to relate to the urban space around them. Bishop chooses to become racialized space, whereas Q finds a way to re-map Harlem via expression. While this narrative nods toward the melodramatic or socially real, Dickerson instead intensifies the contrast in spatiality with the horror spatial imaginary, heightening the stakes by imbuing the walls of Harlem with otherworldly menace. *Juice* visualizes what

Catherine McKittrick defines as Black geography by playing with the line between the metaphorical and the material: Harlem's demonic shadows become metaphor for the "crushingly real" social forces at play in disenfranchising the Black inner-city community.

Dickerson's attention to the deployment and absence of light indicates a deep knowledge of horror film cinematography. Before directing *Juice*, Dickerson served as Spike Lee's main cinematographer, working on *School Daze* (1988), *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *Malcolm X* (1992), as well as others. This prior work in cinematography informs the center-stage role that lighting plays in *Juice*, particularly as a way of invoking horror. In fact, as Mark A. Reid discusses in *Redefining Black Film*, much of Dickerson's cinematography signals the influence of Italian horror filmmakers, including Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) and Mario Bava's *Black Sunday* (1960). These horror influences are no accident; following *Juice*, Dickerson has gone on to become one of the leading directors in the horror genre, directing films such as *Tales From the Crypt: Demon Knight* (1995) and *Bones* (2001) and episodes of the television series *The Walking Dead*. He brings these cinematic influences to bear in the world of *Juice* by allowing each scene's lighting to transform the environment to match whatever affective turn the plot has taken. What Harlem's shadowy space reveals or hides from the audience becomes the unsettling force that endows *Juice* with its horror aesthetics.

These manifestations of horror help lead *Juice* away from any moralistic social narrative and into a larger exploration of Black identity in urban space. In order to illustrate the horror spatial imaginary at work in Dickerson's depiction of Harlem, I will close read three crucial scenes in *Juice* for how Bishop and Q respond differently to their immediate surroundings: Bishop's murdering of Raheem, the final confrontation between Q and Bishop

in a Harlem alleyway near the film's climax, and Bishop's death due to a fall from a rooftop. These three scenes encapsulate the horror aesthetics that drive Dickerson's film in that they blur the line between social realism and the imaginative. The director allows Harlem to mutate to match the harrowing narrative of increasing violence. In turn, the two characters at the heart of the story's morality play, Bishop and Q, duel more for how to exist in the space of Harlem rather than how to escape it. My argument for how Q chooses to re-map his environment lies in how he disconnects the hyper-violent performance of Black masculinity that drives Bishop in his murder-spree. Dickerson envisages this spatial conflict in by placing both characters in differing relationships to the lighted space around them. Whereas Bishop is either dissected or nearly consumed by Harlem's shadows, Q continuously attempts to avoid the city's darkened corners. The rejection of or induction to the racialized map of Harlem relies on either characters method to gaining mastery over their immediate space. For Shakur's Bishop, the control of space relies on Western models of maculinist expansion that champions the ownership of capitol over; in an earlier argument with Q, he exclaims "You gotta get the ground beneath your feet, partner!" (*Juice*). The phrase signals a mastery of space linked by violence, where physical dominance implies ownership over oneself. Q, on the other hand, finds the mobility to move between Harlem's shadowy corners by way of the hip-hop tradition of sampling and cutting. The film demonstrates this mobility during the DJ battle in which Q participates. His manipulation of the record aligns with his ability to command the crowd's attention and, more importantly, respect. Similar to Batiste's work on Krump dancers, record "cutting" and "scratching" re-frames violence into a form of Black expression. Violent poetics, under Q's DJ performance, becomes a way of re-mapping urban space outside of the dominant predilection towards violence present in "juice."

Directly following Bishop's shooting of the store clerk, the four friends flee to a dilapidated building, where a scuffle between Raheem and Bishop ensues for the murder weapon. Following the struggle, Bishop shoots and kills Raheem in the chest, after which the three remaining friends escape to another abandoned building. It is in this second building where hints of Bishop's future, violent self begin to emerge, first by his threatening of Q and then by bullying the upset Steel. Accordingly, the environment around the three characters switches to a shadow-filled, decaying room. Dickerson uses the traditional horror technique of shadow and obscuration to paint the spatial contrast at play in his two central characters. Just as the film's narrative switches to the horror of a group of friends violently turning on one another, the depiction of the characters' interactions with space take an unsettling turn. Dickerson's attention to where the characters stand in accordance to where the shadows and light cut into each actor's features creates an effect in which the room itself is slowly consuming Bishop (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

As Bishop careens between mourning Raheem's death and defending his own actions, the shadows of the room intermittently obscure his face. His revelry at the night's events

cause his form to slowly meld into the decrepit space until it appears as if his voice is emanating from the walls themselves. Bishop's consumption animates Wideman's metaphor of the slow rotting giant consuming the Black subject while simultaneously infusing the imaginative leap with the all too real reality of street violence. Important here is that Bishop's consent to a Western spatial ideology based in ownership and capitol—before running from Raheem's body, Bishop is sure to grab money from his dead friend's pockets—marks a shift from the film's earlier hints at realism to a more imaginative depiction of Harlem's inner-city. Rather than a sign of agency, Bishop's violent emergence informs the slow obliteration of his body into the same racialized space he seeks mastery over. By contrast, Q's arrival as the film's moral, nonviolent center materializes through his figure's avoidance of those shadows overwhelming Bishop (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

Q retains a clear distinction between himself and the room, a dissimilarity that echoes his divergence with the "juice" mentality. Metaphor and material converge in the two characters' differing relationship to the rotting room; Q's discomfort with the logic of street violence materializes with his contrast from the dark corners of the urban space.

Such a contrast finds its culmination at the film's climax, in which Q chooses to confront Bishop for a final time. Before the conflict, Q makes the decision to throw the pistol he acquired for self-defense into an adjacent river. The choice to do so comes after he nearly shoots a homeless man in an alleyway that he mistakes for Bishop ambushing him. As he emerges from the completely obliterating shadows of the alley, he muses, "What the fuck is happening to me?" (*Juice*). As he contemplates the pistol, Dickerson bathes the gun in an eerie blue light. When he throws the handgun into the water, the river takes on that same blue glow. The blue light becomes a symbol of the violent ideology pushed by racialized space. Q rejects the violent, masculinist narrative pushed by that same racialized space that insists that he must take up the same horrific performance of Black masculinity dictated by the decaying urban environment surrounding him. Paradoxically, his decision to get rid of the gun and make a last stand against Bishop demonstrates Q's mobility. Mobility here does not include the capacity for escape. Running away from Harlem is not an option for Q. Rather, mobility dictates his ability to evade the pitfalls of racialized space and the discursive iterations of Blackness that it propagates.

Bishop and Q's final confrontation includes a call back to this same alien blue light. The scene is shot with a close up of Q's face with a view of the alley behind him covered in shadows. From seemingly out of nowhere, Bishop steps into the frame and stealthily makes his way over to Q. His sudden appearance from the dark alley, coupled with an ominous and tension-building music cue, gives off the illusion that the character manifested from within the shadows themselves (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

If, as I argued earlier, "juice" works as poison for the film's narrative, then Bishop has become infected to the point of complete transformation. The supernatural aura only hinted at in earlier scenes comes to full fruition here, as Bishop completely enacts his assimilation into the racialized space of Harlem through almost paranormal omnipresence. He and the gun represent the same adherence to dominant logic that ties the ghetto with violent Black masculinities.

Bishop's death serves as a culmination of the nightmarish space's slow consumption of his character. The point of his aestheticized death is not to impose a didactic criticism of gangster culture as a "dead end street." While critiquing violence is definitely on the mind of *Juice*, the film's final scenes point more towards a larger critique of the system that creates the impoverished space from which that ideology grows in the first place. As Q struggles to hold on to Shakur's character, the camera offers a harrowing view of a Black abyss threatening to consume him (Figure 4). Rather than falling to the hard street below, Bishop

disappears into the abyss. His death lacks any realistic depiction of violence in favor of a more stylistic shot of Bishop disappearing into the shadows below.

**Figure 4**

The horror of complete obliteration trumps that of death. In the case of *Juice*, obliteration means to be lost to a performance of Black masculinity constructed by power. In the question of mobility, consumption equals a state of paralysis that swallows any notion of present or future. Bishop's many boasts that he did not care what happened to himself or others around him lead to his assimilation into the same streets that he attempted to dominate. Shakur's facial gestures register a fear of death that implies the facade that was his indifference to his or anyone else's death. While Q's earlier rejection of the blue-lit pistol symbolized his own ability to separate himself from the shadowy space of Harlem, Bishop finally realizes that his own fate is sealed. In the face of this obliteration, Q's survival by film's end signals a nod of possibility denied to his friend. Instead of a narrative that ends with Q fleeing the ghetto for the hopes of a brighter future outside of Harlem, the film ends with Q walking away from the abyss that swallowed his friend.

**Cutting Mount Rushmore in *Skins***

Chris Eyre's *Skins* similarly uses horror as a site in which to make present hegemonic spatial discrimination and re-map colonial territory through Native spatial ideologies. A large portion of this task comes in the film's setting, the fictional Beaver Creek Indian Reservation in North Dakota, which stands in for the actual Pine Ridge Indian Reservation populated by the Oglala Lakota Sioux. Eyre's film, an adaptation of Adrian C. Louis's 1995 novel of the same name (Louis also wrote the screenplay), plays on the horror of historic trauma captured in the reservation's space that the main character, tribal police officer Rudy Yellow Lodge, must navigate. After discovering the murdered body of a young Native man in an empty house and chasing after the perpetrators, Rudy falls and hits his head on a rock, which sets off a gradual transformation that leaves him as a violent vigilante of Native oppression. He attributes this change to the workings of Iktomi, the Lakota spider-trickster spirit, whose appearance Rudy takes by rubbing Black circles around his eyes. Rudy's vigilante persona leads him to commit a series of violent acts, beginning with the brutal assault of the two Native men responsible for the initial murder and ending with the symbolic defacement of Mount Rushmore. Like Bishop, Rudy assumes an identity akin to the shadowy figures associated with the slasher-film genre: they obscure their appearances – either by mask or by shadow – and stalk their victims mainly by night; however, while Bishop's transformation came as an adherence to a Western narrative of Black ghetto masculinity, Rudy's identity utilizes horror as resistance to spatial violence that shades Native life on the reservation.

Part of *Skins*' horrific power comes in its illumination of the historic trauma latent in the space of the Indian reservation. This exposure and subsequent re-mapping speaks to a pan-tribal spatiality invested in Native sovereignty. Mishuana Goeman, from her previously

cited *Mark My Words*, explains that the inability to recognize how space becomes racialized and tinged with Western ideology impacts the future of Native American sovereignty: "By replicating abstract space in Native nation-building, Native communities move away from imagining new possibilities beyond that mapped out for Native people in settler societies" (37). Here, Goeman is speaking specifically about the problematics of the nation-state model as a replicable mode for Native spatiality. Failing to realize power's role in the production of social space only perpetuates the chance that we continue to understand and re-produce spatiality through power's framework.

This process of re-mapping relies on a new reading of territory outside of the apparatus of the Western nation-state. Goeman writes, "Territory is not a simple artifact, impenetrable in the wave of economic and political power, but rather is constitutive of cultural, political, and economical practices" (34). The way to this re-conceptualization of territory comes via the power of story—more specifically, "stories—both contemporary and those, much, much older—that interrogate and complicate state-bounded territory by examining the social orders expressed and denied in its representation" (35). Native literature's attention to stories aide in de-stabilizing the supposed naturalization of racialized space in such a way as to create new openings of maneuverability for Native subjects. These new openings counter the Western ideologies that seek to lock Native spaces as historic or disappeared by "freeing them" (via Hedge Coke's tractor) from their indigenous cultural contexts. The power of story, the web of layered narratives that travel through past present and future and unfix static, dominant spatial narratives, speaks "to a storied land and a storied peoples, connecting generations to particular locales and in a web of relationships" (37). Goeman's conceptualization of story as a new way of navigating and analyzing space echoes

Cherokee scholar Jace Weaver's theory of *communitism*—a neologism combining "community" and "activism"—which involves indigenous literatures focusing on "communities that have too often been fractured and rendered dysfunctional by the effects of more than five hundred years of colonialism" and, as a response, "[participates] in the healing of the grief and sense of exile felt by Native communities and the pained individuals in them" (Weaver 49). Weaver sees the return to championing Native community as a way of reckoning with Native displacement; more importantly, he draws a direct line between community and individual in such a way that echoes Goeman's own claim that Native re-mappings rely on stories that connect individuals and generations via a shared sense of landscape.

This network of spatial stories extends to those traumatic or otherwise violent events that come to impact a tribe's history. For example, Leslie Marmon Silko relates a story of the mesa where Apache raiders once ambushed and killed two of her Laguna Pueblo ancestors. Silko explains how the mesa aided in the Apaches' efforts to sneak up on her relatives, who were herding their sheep in the supposedly safe plains below. The shape and visual dynamics of the landscape—the cover that the tall mesa provided the raiders versus the safety of the plains that allowed the sheepherders to relax their watch for danger—ties to Silko's own sense of history and ancestry: "For as long as the mesa stands, people within the family and clan will be reminded of the story of that afternoon long ago. Thus, continuity and accuracy of the oral narratives are reinforced by the landscape—and the Pueblo interpretation of that landscape is *maintained*" (*Yellow Woman* 35). Silko's emphasis on "*maintained*" echoes Goeman's own reminder that Native connections to land are products of hard-fought traditions and story rather than any essential, naturalized relationship. Equally important is

the way that Silko's conception of space and story comprehends the violent killing of her relatives as part of a larger narrative of her family's history. Rather than serve as a source of trauma, the integration between story, history, and landscape re-channels the event as a natural force that teaches lessons and serves to re-connect Silko to her family's history. As she explains, "Survival in any landscape comes down to making the best use of all available resources. On that particular September afternoon, the raiders made better use of the Swahnee terrain than my poor ancestors did. Thus, the high, dark mesa and the story of the two lost Laguna herders became inextricably linked" (35).

The power of this inscription of story in space, thereby swallowing horror and imbibing it into a larger system of history and tribal identity, derives particularly from its ability to evolve to suit the later twentieth century's onslaught of environmental violence masked as capitalist enterprise. Silko showcases this mapping adaptation by describing the continuously changing Laguna narratives surrounding the landscape now home to the Jackpile Mine in New Mexico. Unlike stereotypical Western depictions of Native Americans stuck in a distant past far from the comprehension of contemporary technological advances,[5] stories are never locked in a spatial past but rather continue to change in accordance to the landscape itself. Silko writes:

> Descriptions of the landscape *before* the mine are as vivid as any description of the present-day destruction by the open-pit mining. By its very ugliness and by the violence it does to the land, the Jackpile Mine insures that, from now

[5] A popular example of this racist history is the 1971 "Keep America Beautiful" advertising campaign starring Sicilian-American actor Iron Eyes Cody as a Native American chief crying at the sight of a now-ravaged by pollution American landscape. Goeman argues that this commercial – and other cultural products similarly flaunting a view of Native culture naturally linked to land and stuck in the past – "appeals to the realm of the emotional, rather than reflecting on the intellectual and critical work that Native people undertake to pass on these sets of relationships for generations and generations" (28).

> on, it, too, will be included in the vast body of narratives that makes up the history of the Laguna people and the Pueblo landscape. And the description of what that landscape looked like before the uranium mining began will always carry considerable impact. (44)

Horror does not sever or otherwise destroy the Laguna's ties to the land. Instead, it folds into the already-existent connections. The Laguna tradition of story envelops the horrific destruction of the Jackpile Mine and places it alongside earlier depictions of the land prior to contact. The "body of narratives" that she alludes to make up a larger corporeality of stories that include the dismemberment induced by the mining pit; the visceral cut of the mine's creation only adds to the overall system of knowledge. That the earlier state of the land remains just as impactful only speaks to the Native imagination at work: the land retains its power in the face of horror even as that same horror seeks to destroy or disrupt.

Part of the re-imagining framework put forth by critics such as Silko and Goeman relies on an ability to comprehend the spatial imaginary outside of the mere physical signifiers that make up surroundings. Likewise, other projects defining indigenous spatial imaginary have focused on its capacity for movement. Nicolas Rosenthal's *Reimagining Indian Country: Native American Migration and Identity in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (2012) unpacks the history of Native peoples moving, or being forcefully relocated, to urban centers. Re-imagining, per Rosenthal's history, involves the formation of Native American urban organizations, integration into post-industrial labor and higher education, and the continued emphasis on community and culture, even with the change to an urban backdrop. The central mechanism of relocation, such as the Indian Relocation Act of 1956, was an intent to force assimilation (read as "Americanization") upon the displaced Native

population. Underneath this racial and spatial logic lies the assumption that Western urban centers disqualify the possibility of a Native cultural resurgence, a postulation that Rosenthal puts to bed through his history of multiple tribes coming together to incite community and inscribe the city space with indigenous presence. Rosenthal gives us a vision of Native space whose mobility allows it to spread out and reimagine Western constructed urban sites as culturally significant sites of indigenous gathering. He explains, "Put more simply, federal officials were trying to erase the notion of Indian Country altogether through relocation. Native people meanwhile were building on the precedents established in the early twentieth century and more than ever reimagining Indian country to encompass both reservations and cities" (52). This same re-imagining takes up the project of envisioning the Indian reservation through the lens of the horror imaginary. The track house homes and presence of federal grocery stores (not to mention the outer convenience stores that, often beyond the boundaries of the dry reservation, sell alcohol to communities ravaged by alcoholism) represent attempts to bring urban, commercialized space to the reservation.

If Western development desires to break apart Native identities by disrupting Native space, then *Skins*' protagonist Rudy's trickster deployments of horror—violent actions that center on the power of visceral destruction—rejoins those same bonds between tribes and land. In each attack, Rudy deploys the repulsive powers of horror to incite his vengeance on the Western forces responsible for the fictional Beaver Creek reservation's financial and social decay. Most significant is how the horror acts that Rudy initiates break-up the film's realist portrayal of the reservation. Horror's emergence by vigilante action becomes a deconstructing agent that ruptures racialized space and leaves open the possibility for an indigenous geography.

Whereas *Juice* used horror to mark out sites of navigation through which the characters travailed through dominant, racialized space or became subsumed by its inscribed narrative of Black, male identity, *Skins* deploys horror upon racialized space, uses horror's disfiguring, repulsive powers to re-shape dominant space in accordance to Native spatiality. Eyre's attention to cinematic horror aesthetics marks creates sites through which Rudy uncovers the dominant forces at work in impoverishing the reservation. The film uses the horror of violence as a way of mitigating racialized space, using its destructive qualities to bring to the surface the historic legacy of massacre and displacement that helps construct the Beaver Creek Indian Reservation's spatial inequality.

Important to *Skins*'s horror narrative is the fact that the most egregious acts of violence relevant to the film have occurred off screen and before the plot even begins. To this point, Eyre shoots the Beaver Creek Reservation as a crime scene where violence has just occurred. The movie's opening shots include a documentary-style summary of the many struggles facing the Lakota people living on the North Dakota Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Located two miles north of the Nebraska border and adjacent to Mount Rushmore, the reservation is infamous for its impoverished and crime-stricken conditions, as well as for its historical relevance as the site of both the 1890 Massacre at Wounded Knee and the 1973 Wounded Knee Incident, a seventy-one day occupation of the reservation by the American Indian Movement which led to a violent stand-off with the FBI. Absent in any of these initial shots is any evidence of these atrocities, or of the political mechanisms that seek to disenfranchise the reservation. In their place, the film presents the traces of these seemingly invisible traumas. As the narrations details the Massacre at Wounded Knee, for example, the film depicts the now vacant site of the massacre (Figure 5). The lack of visible

signs of trauma buttress the force of the accompanying scenes of the Pine Ridge's impoverished condition: rather give witness to the actual Massacre of Wounded Knee, *Skins* demonstrates how that initial horror becomes reassessed, albeit in different forms, in the unsettling space of the Indian reservation. The powerful shot of the Wounded Knee Massacre sign with the empty field situated behind it carries the implication that the massacre the sign denotes is ongoing, that whatever horror supposedly buried by linear time in fact still remains.


**Figure 5**

Part of the work of the documentary-like opening then is to introduce the invisible nature of how space becomes racialized. We are only given the aftershocks of the many actions – tribal displacement, land desecration, lack of welfare – that led to the spatial equality present on-screen.

By contrast, the film's portrayal of violence, mostly by the hands of its protagonist, becomes a way of stripping back the invisible layers of racialized space. In other words, Rudy's deployment of horror—via brutal assault and masked vandalism—serves as a way to make the invisible horror of atrocity visible again, to bring the signs of Western oppression

into a spatial grammar dictated by indigenous knowledge. A key example comes during Rudy's discovery of his friend Corky's murdered body in an empty, moldering house (Figure 6).

**Figure 6**

The scene gives the viewer what the film's opening denied us: a body. The gory reveal of Corky's body makes present the previously invisible violence at work in the space of the reservation. Instead of a quick glimpse, Eyre allows the camera to linger on the corpse, establishing its presence within the room. Whereas the opening montage alluded to massacre, *Skins* intends to face the reality of Native violence directly. The horror of the murdered body becomes a way of defining and revealing the racialized nature of the house and, consequently, the reservation itself. That there are no discernable human perpetrators to the murder – we are only given the clue of one foot disembodied by shadow and containing bright yellow shoelaces – adds to the implication that the house itself murdered Corky. An empty house, before just a sign of the reservation's general structural decay, now becomes the medium through which embedded trauma finally manifests. The film later reveals that

Corky's death came at the hands of two other Native boys who beat him to death. The plot point share similarities with some of Louis's earlier poetry based on his own experiences, namely the poem "Another Indian Murder." Like Eyre's *Skins*, "Another Indian Murder" sees the Westernization of space as the impetus for violence:

> But, that bitter December night, the granite shadows
> of Lincoln and Washington descended the slopes
> and infected all that was good below.
> Two Oglala boys with baseball bats
> scrambled the brains of a drinking buddy
> and when they sobered
> they could not recall
> how they tried to plug the brain-seeping
> holes with Kleenex while they prayed
> to the Lord to let him live. (Louis 28)

Here, Western space, under the guise of the granite carvings of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington, serve as the main forces behind the two boys murdering their friend. The poem sees the violent inscription of the presidents' faces on stone—which itself is located in the sacred Sioux site known as the Black Hills—as symbolic of the hegemonic cultural and political forces that have infected the land, and therefore those indigenous peoples connected to the land. For Louis, infection represents the forced assimilation of Native peoples to the capitalist-consumer culture; in the case of Pine Ridge, where Louis previously lived, this capitalist culture materializes under white-owned liquor stores just outside the border of the dry reservation that market themselves directly to Natives. Cultural, spatial, and bodily

violence converge into one image of loss. Both Louis's poem and Eyre's filming of the revelation of Corky's body emphasize the connection between horror and violence.

While chasing the two assailants responsible for Corky's death, Rudy trips and hits his head on a rock. The moment sparks a brief montage of historical photos, including the famous photograph of the Red Cloud delegation and an image of the arrest of AIM protestor Leonard Peltier, interweaved with earlier scenes from the movie, such as Corky's own bloodied corpse. In one instant, Rudy witnesses the merging of past and present. The montage of images tells a story about past resistance and current day subjugation. At the heart of this story is the significance of space: In the case of Red Cloud and Peltier, their protests against the US government circled around the rightful control of tribal domains. On the other side, the images of a contemporary Native woman with a bloodied nose from domestic violence and Corky's dead body reveal the consequences of the Western control and racialization of tribal space. This story only becomes possible due to the violence of the rock. As a friend of Rudy's explains later in the film, Iktomi, often said to take the form of a spider, can also be take on the form of a rock. An Oglala Sioux reading of the landscape then incites a resistance narrative against the Western ideology that has, per Louis, infected the inhabitants of Beaver Creek/Pine Ridge.

Following Rudy's vision, he discovers by chance the two boys responsible for Corky's murder. In what follows, Rudy stalks the boys to an empty field where he proceeds to beat them both with a baseball bat. With echoes of Dickerson's use of shadows as way of animating space, Rudy's emergence from the shadows of the field into the glow of the boys' campfire gives the impression that he is emerging from the land itself (Figure 7).

**Figure 7**

In a field not unlike the space where the massacre of Wounded Knee occurred, Rudy, wearing the dark-eyed guise of Iktomi, surfaces as a personification of tribal spatial resistance. Instead of depicting this vigilante action as immoral or problematic, Eyre revels in its horrific bodily impact. We experience every bone-breaking blow to the boys' legs and hear the thud of each strike. As opposed to giving in to the temptation to critique Rudy's actions as a misappropriation of Western vengeance, the films uses violence a way to mark his tribal re-mappings of the reservation. Rudy's trickster persona, which attests to a kind of moral ambivalence, deploys horror to actualize the stagnant trace of historic violence. In doing so, he signals a rupture in the Western racialized map, which in turn opens space for the gradual re-introduction of an indigenous geography that thinks through space free of capitalist ideology.

*Skins*' finale marks the film's most actualized use of the cinematic imaginary as a means of portraying tribal re-mappings. In a tribute to his deceased brother Mogie, Rudy travels to the top of Mount Rushmore to deface the presidents' carvings. Before his death, Mogie requested that Rudy blow the nose off of George Washington's face. In response,

Rudy releases a bucket of red paint down the mountain's face, leaving the appearance of a bleeding cut down Washington's cheek (Figure 8). Rudy uses violence as a way of calling attention to the initial violence that was the cutting into the sacred Black Hills.

**Figure 8**

By doing so, he demonstrates an indigenous knowledge of space in which the land retains past action in order to tell the larger story of the Oglala Sioux. Similar to Silko's theorization of the Laguna Pueblo stories including the Jackpile Mine, Rudy reasserts an Oglala Sioux narrative of space that re-inserts the violence of Mount Rushmore back into the sculpted figures. The action then performs in two ways: at the literal site of the sculpted presidents that intruded upon tribal space and at the level of history, confirming the ongoing violent subjugation of Native peoples by the US government. The conjoining of time and space points back to Rudy's earlier vision after striking the rock. In both cases, a moment of violence signals a tribal consciousness that re-thinks dominant space. This indigenous knowledge breaks up the narratives written by power that seek to enfold Native peoples into a larger capitalist grammar by re-claiming land as both vital to Native identity and an adept tool in keeping tribal history. Horror's rupturing force allows for the re-inscription of survivance upon Mount Rushmore's face: the blood helps tell the larger narrative of tribal

presence upon the intruding faces of the American presidents. Rather than ignore the history of colonial violence, horror helps Rudy tell a new story outside of the boundaries of the reservation.

**Conclusion**

The project of the horror spatial imaginary, as this chapter has demonstrated, involves a critical re-mapping of dominant geography both sensitive to the role of state violence in the creation of reservations and urban ghettoes and capable of disordering the logic by which the state attempts to cohere space into racialized categories. As the works by Hedge Coke and Wideman illustrate, the experience of racialized space seeks to paralyze and otherwise silence Black and Native subjectivities from critically engaging with their surroundings in ways that promote futurity. The mixture of regulated funding, legalized segregation, and, in the case of indigenous populations, government treaties that help create these spaces also attempt to mask the violence, both concrete and psychic, that helps cultivate these dominant planes. And yet, as the two films by Dickerson and Eyre reveal, the project of re-mapping racist and colonial space allows alternative forms of spatial knowledge to take center stage, ways of moving through one's surroundings not reliant on the perpetuity of national capitalism and the racist discourse that accompanies it. By leaning into the horrific experience of such space and allowing the hidden histories of state violence to rise to the surface, these authors enact vital radical critiques of the white spatial imaginary.

As we have witnessed over the course of the last three chapters, horror's repulsive, chaotic critical power breeds moments in which the subject of color can interrupt the homogenization of experience and launch new radical visions of the future. But to trace horror's role in overturning the dominant narrative of time, the body, and space still leaves us

with the question of what this new consideration of horror means for the future of resistance to the new racial capitalism. The afro-diasporic and indigenous knowledges that have fueled this project's readings are themselves vital building blocks for a form of radical subjectivity capable of harnessing the violence of racial capitalism in order to formulate new modes of being beyond the scope of power. In the next chapter, we will see just what these radical narratives look like and how horror helps create their violent and hopeful narratives of rebellion.

## CHAPTER FOUR:
## BREAKING DOWN THE DOOR: BLACK AND RED HORROR RADICALISM

"All these battles coming up with these Black snakes coming across our lands, its important we start ripping the Black snakes apart, start preparing through ceremonies and pray the creator shows u the path u must take. We must all work together to kill all the Black snake and lay them out for the Wakinyan Oyate to finish them off."

– Standing Rock protestor, included in TigerSwan security firm situation report

"They don't hope to gain anything. They don't have any hope, anymore, they're convinced no one gives a damn about them and their problems. They're fed up with being ignored, pushed around, and taking crap and now they're kicking back."
"Revenge?"
"No, not revenge, retaliation; there's a subtle but important difference."

– Sam Greenlee, *The Spook Who Sat By the Door*

### Introduction

This project has, through the readings of several Black and Native texts, traced the usage of horror as a series of hermeneutics that register and respond to dominant racial ideology in the latter half of the twentieth-century. Through time, space, and the body, three different levels of experience governed by the invisible market forces of racial capitalism, we have observed the rupturing force of horror, both as a marker of state-discrimination and a disruptor carving new space for Black and Native epistemologies. A main objective in tracing this usage of disturbing aesthetics has been to forge a new way to read horror in racial narratives, one in which unsettling violence denotes more than destruction of the body and didactic, moralistic storylines.

This final chapter asks how we can take this envisioning of horror and imagine how its critical powers both of illumination and deconstruction come to bear on a crucial thematic in both African American and Native American fiction in the late twentieth century: radicalized violence. It is no mistake that these texts turn to horror aesthetics in their stories of radicalized action transforming a world shaped by power. Looking to political theory as

well as writing on the nature and possibility of violence, this chapter takes up Black and Native narratives of radical violent rebellion. More specifically, the texts of this chapter, Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer* (1996) and Haile Gerima's 1979 film *Bush Mama*, look beyond the horror narrative that is radical uprising via bloodshed, a vision of racial revenge that looks towards death. Instead, these narratives use horrific radical violence as a critical methodology with which to break from racialized subjectivity. Violence becomes the way to escape the foreclosing antagonism of Blackness/Indigeneity and the state. These narratives of violent, radical flight run counter to normative iterations of rebellion, which hinge on self-sacrifice and eventual failure and, as a consequence, only prove to reify the current hegemony. Contributing to this parochial take on radicalism is an understanding of horror—and violence more specifically—that is inherently destructive, leaving no room for the more creative and discursive deployments of horror we have seen in the previous three chapters.

The point of this final chapter is not to redefine the African American or Native American radical tradition. That task is a far greater one than the space of one chapter allows. Rather, I want to re-contextualize fictive depictions of radical action through a lens of horror in order to develop a better reading practice for understanding violent radical literature and cinema. My focus is on the possibility of *rage*, an affective mode normally reserved as one of mindless action and vengeance, violence without a purpose. One of this chapter's epigraphs, taken from Sam Greenlee's *The Spook Who Sat By the Door*, speaks to this characterization of radical action as self-negating. The novel's main character, Dan Freeman, answers to his white superior's questions following a riot in a Black neighborhood of Chicago with the warning that conceiving of Black rebellion as mere revenge overlooks the political intentions lurking beneath the surface. The "subtle but important difference" between revenge and

retaliation is one of self-determination, *sovereignty*. Revenge in the context of *The Spook Who Sat By the Door* plays as a matter of direct volleying, a one-to-one ratio that only serves to return violence with violence. Retaliation implies a mode of organization and a reliance on tradition that, as a result, reads as a far greater horror story to those in power. Greenlee's novel's retaliation, for example, ends with a series of Black radical cells beginning conflicts with the National Guard across America. In the case of *The Spook Who Sat By the Door*, the white leaders of the city conceive of rage as a temporary creature, a momentary break of social norms that only serves to reinforce the current system of dominance rather than break it open. By contrast, the rage of this final chapter materializes via horror aesthetics, and accordingly, offers a window to Black and Native fiction that sees the possibility in fictive violence and in using radicalism to conceive of new futures. These radical horror imaginaries use violence and unsettling aesthetic in order to trace the creation of a race radical subject capable of deconstructing the ongoing subjugation put in place by racial capitalism. If this project has sought to re-imagine racial capitalism as a manipulation of experiences dictated by economic and political manipulation, then the horror race radical uses fracture in order to plot new escape routes. By dictating the terms of these new routes, the authors of this chapter re-write the boundaries of death from a pre-determined eventuality for the radical subject of color to the formation of a new subjectivity altogether. In the case of Greenlee's *Spook*, Dan's death at the hands of his police friend occurs parallel with his movement's emergence in various national urban areas. Likewise, *Indian Killer* and *Bush Mama* play with the finality of suicide and incarceration respectively in order to produce rebellion narratives that appear to continue beyond the final page or frame and outside of the scope of power.

**"I'm picking the lock coming through the door blasting"**

In order to locate the horror imaginary at work in *Indian Killer* and *Bush Mama*, we first need to understand how these narratives respond to power's characterization of race radicalism as something to be feared. To illustrate this connection between fear and radicalism, I turn to an *MTV News* interview with Tupac Shakur in 1994 regarding the violent nature of some of his lyrics. Shakur's extended metaphor for the ideology behind the violent and radical rhetoric of his songs illustrates a deepening of the politics of *rage* from beyond mindless aggression. Following a screen flash of a newspaper article with the headline "The Rapper's New Rage," he relates,

> If I know that in this hotel room, they have food everyday and I knock on the door every day to eat and they open the door and let me see the party…throwing food around and they tell me they have no food. I mean, just throwing food around, but they're telling me there's no food. Every day, I'm standing outside trying to sing my way in: 'We are hungry, please let us in We are hungry, please let us in.' After about a week that song is gonna change to: 'We hungry, we need some food.' After two, three weeks, it's like: Give me the food or I'm breaking down the door. After a year you're just like: I'm picking the lock coming through the door blasting. It's like, you hungry, you reached your level. We asked ten years ago. We was asking with the Panthers. We was asking with them, the Civil Rights Movement. We was asking. Those people that asked are dead and in jail. So now what do you think we're gonna do? Ask?" ("2Pac - 1994 Interview.")

Shakur's analogy takes us through the continued changing of the "song" that is the different iterations of Black resistance to power. His "new rage" is a changing of the song that is no

longer content to "ask," or, more notably, to play by the decorum of resistance set in place by those sitting comfortably in the room. The analogy recognizes this radical act as part of a larger historical narrative where the Black struggle has continued to evolve alongside the ever-changing forms of hegemony.

And yet, Tupac's fable of the door also echoes a popular image of horror that speaks to the white fear surrounding those *others* at the door. For dominant ideology, race radicalism that presents itself as unfamiliar is already horrifying. Jack Nicholson's Jack Torrance breaking through a locked door only to chillingly announce to his terrified wife (played by Shelley Duvall) "Here's Johnny!" (*The Shining*). This iconic scene from Kubrick's *The Shining* (itself a loose adaptation of the Stephen King novel) plays off of the felt helplessness when confront with an intruder at the door, the terrifying paralysis of being cornered by a bloodthirsty *other*—even one who just minutes ago resembled your significant other. Bringing these two disparate images together—Tupac "coming through the door blasting" with Nicholson's murderous innkeeper—speaks to the white terror that re-shapes and defines race radicalism. From the eyes of the white inhabitant, the other figure breaking down the door intrudes from seemingly no where; a horrific figure removed from dominant history and whose tactics, therefore, seem grisly and threatening. Lovecraft's "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," similarly, features the white narrator hunted by charging others—in this case mutant fish people originating from an ancient civilization under the sea—trying to break down the door and enter his room. He writes:

> Without the least shadow of a doubt, the lock on my hall door was being tried—cautiously, furtively, tentatively—with a key.
>
> My sensations upon recognizing [sic] this sign of actual peril were

> perhaps less rather than more tumultuous because of my previous vague fears. I had been, albeit without definite reason, instinctively on my guard—and that was to my advantage in the new and real crisis, whatever it might turn out to be. Nevertheless the change in the menace from vague premonition to immediate reality was a profound shock, and fell upon me with the force of a genuine blow. It never once occurred to me that the fumbling might be a mere mistake. Malign purpose was all I could think of, and I kept deathly quiet, awaiting the would-be intruder's next move. (359)

The "vague fears" the narrator mentions derive from racist ponderings over the ethnic origin of non-white *others* and non-Western cultural artifacts. These subconscious anxieties, whose alien nature threaten the stability of the narrator's whiteness, become actualized with the "actual peril" of the twist of the doorknob. The moment encapsulates so much of the white anxieties to which this dissertation project has already spoken: the invasion of white space, the existence of a culture outside the Western sense of temporality, and the appearance of an *other* that rejects the dominant grammar of race signifiers. Indeed, it is this threat from the "outside" that characterizes so many of Lovecraft's monstrous figures. This reliance on "outside evil," King explains, is purposeful in its intent to draw out anxiety from the (white) reading audience: "And yet it is the concept of outside evil that is larger, more awesome. Lovecraft grasped this, and it is what makes his stories of stupendous, Cyclopean evil so effective when they are good… The best of them make us feel the size of the universe we hang suspended in, and suggest shadowy forces that could destroy us all if they so much as grunted in their sleep" (King 65). The "shadowy forces" that King locates in Lovecraft's writing stand in for non-white cultures whose long-standing civilizations and thriving

cultures strike anxiety in the Western subject that posit Western civilization as the center of the world. The implied "us" for both Lovecraft and King are white normative bodies surrounded by Western-centric knowledge that buttresses white supremacy. Any counters to this knowledge—the trying of the lock or the requests to be let inside—stand as threats to this same supremacy and, therefore, are characterized by power as "scary." Conversely, to be deemed "scary" legitimizes revolutionary action in how it measures effectiveness. As Roger Guenveur Smith—while performing as Huey Newton in his one-man play *A Huey Newton Story*—reasons, "I do not expect the white media to create positive Black male images. Positive Black male images are created through revolution, and I thank you for saying that I have scared you—I take it as a compliment, cause anytime that a Black man in America stands up against the slave mentality he's going to scare some white people and some Black folks too" (*A Huey Newton Story*). The task of combating dominant images of Blackness implies a needed fracture, a breaking from the normative that he frames as revolution. And this revolution, due to its intent on disrupting white supremacy, is deemed terrifying to those who benefit from racism.

I strike this unusual comparison of Shakur, King, and Lovecraft to make the case that white-narratives of race radicalism cannot escape this binary of us/them precisely because their formulations of ethnic radical traditions lack historical context. As I have argued in previous chapters, this same lack of historical context is what allows the mechanisms of racial capitalism to continue their subjugation of minority communities. The systemic racism behind this inequality perpetuates in part by its apparent ahistorical nature; in such a narrative, the *other* at the door appears as an intruder rather a radical agent. These depictions of intruding *others*, represented by the fiction of Lovecraft and King, highlight the empty,

violent nature of race radicalism with little to no accord for the organization and agency at work behind such movements. The two works featured in this chapter speak from the outside of the door, from the margins of dominant history but intruding inward. By doing so, they re-create the circumstances behind two self-annihilating gestures—the murder of a policeman and subsequent incarceration and suicide—so as to place each within a larger narrative of Black and Native radicalism. Horror becomes the narrative vehicle that drives each of these narratives, creating a textual landscape where reality becomes unhinged and radical aesthetics are capable of breaking through dominant holds over experience. In other words, horror crafts a textual world in which these radical re-imaginings are possible.

Part of this final chapter's aim is to re-think the question of violence in depictions of race radicalism. That is not to say I intend to make the case for how violence is a necessary and effective form of resistance to power. Quite the contrary, this chapter looks with suspicion at radical movements hinging on nationalist ideology that threaten to re-create the trappings of the nation-state. Cedric Robinson likewise identifies the problematic consequences of appropriating Western political theory rhetoric in defining Black and Native freedom movements. For Robinson, the "terms of order" that make up Western political science indicate a need to cohere all societal iterations under a larger umbrella of power and authority coherent to the lens of dominance. Such attempts at labeling "apolitical phenomena" with "political coherence" represents a denial of "metatheoretic and epistemological materials" that "substantiate the logic and possibility of such alternative constructions of reality and in so doing yield not only novel interpretative frameworks but also intimate conceptualizations which could be useful for rationalizing the erroneous system founded upon political authority and political order" (*The Terms of Order* 30). Robinson

locates this tendency as exemplary of "an historical consciousness, a consciousness which has emerged through the historical condition of the predominance of the state as an ordering instrument (35).

This scholarly penchant for projecting Western idealized patterns onto non-Western societies extends into critiques of violence. As such, I am interested in the way that criticisms of violent race radicalism simultaneously tend to re-affirm the perpetuity of the state and regulate actors of color to the margins of political reverence. One such critique of violent action comes from Hannah Arendt's *On Violence* (1969), in which she argues for the antithetical relationship between power and violence to the point that "violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it" (56). Some of the context from which Arendt makes this argument derives from the Black Power and Black student movement of the 1960s, whose formation she identifies as when "serious violence" entered American discourse. She looks to this Black student movement as partly responsible for the glorification of violence for the sake of demands she sees as "clearly silly and outrageous" (19). These demands, alluded to in an attached appendix statement, include the introduction of "soul courses" [a phrase she pulls from a *Daily News* article], and other "nonexistent courses" such as "Swahili" and "African literature." Arendt deploys Bernard Rustin as a racial smokescreen from which to make her larger argument over the Black student movement: by relying even partially on violence as a means of resistance, they delegitimize not only their movement but also the ideals and values that make up that movement's core ideology. In the wake of the Culture Wars of the 1980s, Arendt's critiques of the Black student movement's efforts to de-centralize Western culture in the university have not aged well. And while her larger argument about power and violence's antithetical relationship

holds weight in our own discussion about the need to resist in a voice separate from that of the state, Arendt's definition of violence still relies on the "terms of order" laid out in Robinson's work. More specifically, Arendt cannot visualize a form of resistance non-reliant on the trappings of the nation-state. If violence is, in fact, "utterly incapable" of creating power, it is also, through Arendt's logic, incapable of creating anything else.

I read Arendt's work on violence as myopic in its inability to perceive how critiques of violent resistance only serve to perpetuate the stability of the state. In addition, her labeling of various rebellions as either violent or non-violent overlooks the way that freedom movements often rely on both tactics.[39] The Black student movement's "clearly silly" demands were in fact looking to create an intellectual space in which students of color could develop consciousness beyond the reach of Western knowledge. Arendt's comments that such desires would only further disqualify Black students from the financial benefits of a Western, remedial education unmasks her argument's cooption of capitalist ideals in order to delegitimize the Black freedom struggle. Such radical tactics are unreasonable because they do not follow the reason of racial capitalism. *On Violence*'s critiques are not made in the fear of loss of life but rather in fear that such movements might actually succeed.

Looking deeper into Arendt's critique of violence reveals an on-going re-appropriation of Franz Fanon's writings on violent rebellion in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Reconsidering what role Fanon gives violence in the act of decolonization, as well as how critics such as Arendt continue to ignore his writings on the subject, allows us to better

[39] See Charles E. Cobb Jr. *This Non-Violent Stuff'll Get You Killed.* Duke University Press, 2015 and David Heath Justice. *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History*. University of Minnesota Press, 2006. Cobb Jr.'s text uncovers the significance of gun ownership in the Civil Rights Movement as a means of protection against the violence of the state. Justice, similarly, outlines the duality of Cherokee resistance to settler-colonialism via two separate but interwoven philosophies: the *Chickamauga* consciousness of resistance and the Beloved Path of Engagement. Both concepts, Justice argues, were deployed throughout the Cherokee's history after contact as a means of responding to colonial violence.

situate the radical horror aesthetics located in the texts of this chapter. *On Violence* uses Fanon's conception of de-colonization via violence only as a means through which to critique white theorists who later attempt to add to Fanon's work, the most famous of which being Jean Paul Sartre. Sartre's writing in his preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* that "irrepressible violence…is man recreating himself" (lv) becomes cannon fodder for Arendt's thesis that such glorifications of violence originate from a misreading of Marx and Hegel as promoters of violent rebellion. Lost in this discussion of Sartre, Hegel, and Marx, however, is Fanon himself. Arendt says in a footnote that she only includes Fanon's text because of its "great influence on the present student generation" while also noting that Fanon also saw the uncertainty of violent action. Her interest in discussing matters of decolonization lie primarily in the abstract: much like her discussion of the Black student activists, Arendt dismissal of *The Wretched of the Earth* belies a fear of Blackness willing to act on its own self-interest. By setting the limits of rebellion in accordance with the white, Eurocentric scholars before her, she re-ascribes the colonial state while allowing herself to perform the leftist progressive ideals of nonviolence. In reality, *On Violence* relies on the terms of power while simultaneously critiquing those agents seeking to overturn it.

What none of this critical discussion regarding violence considers is Fanon's interest not only in the literal act of rebellion but also in the deconstruction of the "Native" as an identity under colonial grammar. That is, using Fanon only as a means to critique or champion the "glorification of violence" fails to see how his writings also push for the formation of a radical subjectivity, one distinct from that subjugated identity capitulated by the state. At stake here is how Fanon's work on violence largely impacts the use of violent

radical aesthetics in subverting the presupposed antagonistic relationship between the subject of color and power. Fanon discusses such a relationship when he explains:

> [The settler and Native's] first encounter was marked by violence and their existence together--that is to say the exploitation of the Native by the settler--was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannons. The settler and the Native are old acquaintances. In fact, the settler is right when he speaks of knowing "them" well. For it is the settler who has brought the Native into existence and who perpetuates his existence. The settler owes the fact of his very existence, that is to say, his property, to the colonial system. ("On Violence" 35)

The settler brings the Native "into existence" by forcing him into a colonial system that subjugates through the threat of violence. Fanon is just as concerned with obliterating this colonized subjectivity as he is with dismantling the colonial system from which it originates. To decolonize is to "change the order of the world" (35) and "[transform] spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them. It brings a natural rhythm into existence, introduced by new men, and with it a new language and a new humanity" (35). Fanon's concern is not to legitimize violence as much as it is to define decolonization as a violent formation of a new subject. Violence, because of its role in creating this colonized subjectivity, is one of many "means to turn the scale" (36). The point is not the construction of a new state built from violence; instead, Fanon sees the destructive element of violence as key to the formation of "the new."

This creation of "the new" helps us to re-contextualize these fictive narratives of violent resistance as attempts to break from dominant ideology in order to seek new

possibilities. These narratives are deemed "dangerous" in how they seem to promote violence as a means of liberation, mainly because they fail to follow the formulaic self-annihilation that makes up so many Western depictions of radicalism. However, in following the theoretical underpinnings of the horror imaginary as we have discussed them, *Indian Killer* and *Bush Mama* lay out a blue print of radical Black and Native subjectivity reliant on fictive violence to symbolize its disruptive force. Both texts' violent climaxes lead to new beginnings as opposed to tragic ends. The horror of violence instead becomes a marker for "the new," for envisioning a mode of experience outside of the all-encompassing reach of the state. These radical horror aesthetics use the deconstructive properties of violence in order to make larger points about notions of community and modes of being outside of racial capitalism.

### ***Indian Killer*'s "Murderous Rage"**

*Indian Killer* is a dangerous novel in how it seems to purport the use of violence as a means of viable resistance. Alexie's novel uses horror as a way of distorting the American landscape and counteracting the flattening of experience that is universalism. It tells the story of a collection of murders in Seattle Washington perpetrated by unknown assailant come to be known as the Indian Killer. This murderer targets white men and kills in a manner identified by authorities as indigenous. While this mystery/horror makes up the skeleton of the novel, Alexie's text also interrogates the experience of the urban Indian, both through Spokane siblings Marie and Reggie Polatkin and John Smith. In a much larger sense, the novel depicts the creation of a new *ghost dance*. The *ghost dance* was a pan-tribal movement that spread in 1870 as a ritual that harkened the return of the dead in order to help clear the land of colonial occupation. These rituals were determined to be dangerous by the US

government, resulting in a series of military interventions including the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890. Alexie imagines the birth of a new *ghost dance* with origins in the forged radical subjectivity of John Smith. Smith's traumatic experience of the mundane produces a radical ideology that uses violence as a way of breaking from the Western hegemonic imaginary put in place to police indigenous identity. If Native life under the scope of racial capitalism is characterized at once by fear, then *Indian Killer* seeks a way to re-assert that fear into a usable Native radicalism. Alexie's fictive scenes of violence respond directly to the text's larger discussions about Native sovereignty separate from Western, capitalist power. The novel's playing with the tropes of the slasher film and crime thriller leads to a contemplation of race and identity: more specifically, these textual moments harness white fear as an instant of reversal, an unseating of dominant racial ideology that allows the Native characters space to negotiate new, non-capitalist futures.

Tracking John Smith's plan to "kill a white man" alongside the novel's debates over the sustainability of violent radicalism and Native identity highlights *Indian Killer*'s true interest in mapping out spaces of self-determination for the urban Indian. Seen through this light, the novel's supposed lionization of rage and murder becomes a less literal but just as potent interrogation of what radical ideology. Alexie uses horror as a way of amplifying racist discourse allows us to re-consider Smith's trajectory as one of negotiation and eventual flight. Once the veil of realism is ripped from *Indian Killer*, the book becomes much more about actual *experience*. I am interested in developing a reading practice that looks directly into what Arnold Krupat refers to as *Indian Killer*'s "murderous rage," an expression of violent aggression he claims as analogous to the *Black rage* of the 1940s and 50s. Alexie's novel, Krupat argues, "insists that continued violence directed by whites against Indians will

be productive of anger, rage, and a desire for murderous revenge that must be expressed, not repressed or channeled into other possible action, and this, I think, is indeed something new, and also something frightening" (103). That Krupat finds the radical politics of *Indian Killer* "new" and "frightening," I propose, is not insignificant. Such a reaction reveals a discomfort with Alexie's imaginings of a Native subjectivity free of the state. By referring to the novel's depiction of violence as "revenge," Krupat strips the book's Native characters of their political agency and instead imbues them as agents of *rage*. I am invested in how Alexie depicts rage as an animator for calculated radical action and as an impetus for the Native subject to break from the registers of racial capitalism. In learning how to harness and re-disperse the internal and ever-present violence inflicted upon himself and other Native people, John gains the ability to escape the yoke of state-recognition. *Indian Killer* uses violence and the horrific as a path out of mainstream respectability, a comfort with violent action that uses the fictive in order to imagine a radical subjectivity free of state manipulation.

Underlying the controversy of *Indian Killer*'s radical politics is a larger question of the relationship between indigenous resistance and the state. That is, Alexie's novel uses the unsettling space of horror to critique assimilationist tendencies when discussing Native radicalism. At stake is the viability of a Native resistance outside of the scope of the state and its defined racial categories. Critics such as Richard Lyons Scott and Dale Turner have made cases for Native movements working both outside of and within government recognition. Any lasting indigenous sovereignty, both authors argue, must heed both Native cultural traditions and Western intellectualism; at the head of these movements are those individuals versed in indigenous philosophies and Western knowledge, what Turner refers to as *word*

*warriors*. These word warriors engage with dominant culture and mediate indigenous sovereignty in ways that recognizes indigenous philosophy while also speaking the language of power. Lyons similarly envisions a reading of Native resistance outside of the binary of assimilation and nationalism—what he refers to as *x-marks*. Taken from the literal "x marks" that tribal leaders put down on treaties with the US government, Lyons sees this *x-marks* as a metaphor for the "Indian assent to the new," and "to things . . . that, while not necessarily traditional in origin, can sometimes turn out all right and occasionally even good" (3). Crucial here is Lyons' use of "new," which he openly defines via a Western lens of modernity. Lyons is making a larger argument about the over-reliance on ahistorical definitions of Native nationalism that, ironically enough, derive the influence of settler colonial discourse. That being said, neither he nor Turner can envision a Native resistance that does not recognize the hegemony of Western knowledge as a dominant way of being. Both seek sustainable forms of radicalism that rely heavily on these Western philosophies to give their concepts legitimacy; by doing so, both end up emboldening the very neoliberal racial order that they want to subvert, a structure of power that dominates the rationale over justice and race.

Perhaps the best critique of this assimilationist turn in Indigneous studies comes from Glen Coulthard, who takes Turner in particular to task for what Coulthard calls his "semi-Foucaultian use of the term *discourse*":

> I say quasi-*Foucaultian* because when he refers to the discursive practices of word warriors he assumes that these pack the 'power' necessary to transform the 'legal and political discourses of the state' into something more amenable to indigenous perspectives… The problem, however, is that Turner is less

> willing to attribute the same degree of power to the legal and political *discourses of the state*… When Turner speaks of the legal and political discourses of the state, he spends little time discussing the assimilative power that these discourses potentially hold in relation to the word warriors who are to engage them. ("*This Is Not a Peace Pipe*" 165)

Coulthard's critique of Turner's blindspot to the power of state discourse can extend to Lyons' cavalier use of modernity as a defining feature of viable forms of Native resistance. Neither Turner nor Lyons truly contends with the question of what it means to scope out a future of Native sovereignty partially defined by the terms and structures of the state. As Coulthard says in his own work, *Red Skin, White Masks*, relying on these problematic *politics of recognition* "form[s] promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous people's demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend" (3). Relying in part on a reading of Fanon, Coulthard instead seeks a Native resistance capable of overcoming the increasingly invisible forms of subjugation brought on by the new iterations of racial capitalism in the late twentieth century. He argues for "*self*-recognition," forms of indigenous-based "empowerment that is derived from this critically self-affirmative a self-transformative ethics of desubjectification" and that "must be cautiously directed *away* from the assimilative lure of the statist politics of recognition, and instead be fashioned toward our own on-the-ground struggles of freedom" (48). While *Red Skins, White Masks* makes ample use of Fanon's writings in order to map out the concept of "self-recognition," Coulthard pains to identify the problematics of what for him is Fanon's over-reliance on "the new" as a decolonial tactic as opposed to turning to older forms of culture. Indeed, Fanon expressed skepticism regarding the viability of what he referred to as

"exhibiting unknown cultural treasures under [Colonialism's] nose" ("On National Culture" 159). Coulthard, with the help of Mohawk political theorist Taiaiake Alfred and Anishinaabe feminist Leanne Simpson, alternatively suggests an indigenous *resurgence* by "[drawing] critically on the past with an eye to radically transform the colonial power relations that have come to dominate our present" (*Red Skin, White Masks* 157). While Fanon saw past cultural forms as origins of temporary empowerment, Coulthard envisions a decolonization that draws from the old with a critical eye on how to impact the present and shape the future; that is, "the new" only takes shape by way of the old. A true decolonial method must reject state discourse in theory and praxis; this desubjectification rejects state racial politics and strives for a self-determined indigenous sovereignty that refuses the capitalist ideology of the nation-state. As Coulthard plainly reasons, "For Indigenous nations to live, capitalism must die. And for capitalism to die, we must actively participate in the construction of Indigenous alternatives to it" (173).

In the world of *Indian Killer*, this transformation from living under state recognition to existing as a self-recognized, resistant subject materializes through radical violence. As such, Alexie's novel presupposes the critical debate over Native resistance via its portrayal of John Smith. John is a product of this tension between nationalism and assimilation told through the terms of power. His everyday is managed by a continuing list of micro-aggressions and Western-conceived images of Indigeneity, all of which the text transforms into nightmarish and haunting images. Horror stretches the normalcy of subjugation. Alexie makes real the violence that Fanon and, later, Robinson theorized as integral to the creation of the colonized/racialized subject by imbuing *Indian Killer*'s narrative with horror tropes and violent fantasies. If we consider Taikaiake Alfred's claim that within late twentieth

century colonialism, "oppression has become increasingly invisible" (qtd in *Red Skin, White Masks* 48), then *Indian Killer* exposes this same oppression by making the quotidian horrific. John Smith's resistance to these colonial mechanisms similarly turns to the horror of radical violence in order to aid in the creation of a new indigenous space. His fantasy of murdering a white man comes to symbolize a desire to envision a future for himself outside of the boundaries of racial capitalism, a futurity that he is only able to witness following his suicide by leaping off of a skyscraper to his death. The purpose of *Indian Killer*'s violent narrative is not to trumpet the impact of violence or the freedom of suicide, but rather to open discussion of radical fiction's critique of state-manipulated racialism. Instead of reverting to older, essentialist Native identity politics or Western-based images of Indigeneity, John Smith's final leap gives birth to a new Native movement based in indigenous knowledge and capable of constructing new futures.

*Indian Killer*'s first chapter, titled "Mythology," heightens state violence to indigenous communities to a surreal degree. By doing so, the novel's opening presents a world inhabited by outlandish—as well as faceless—power structures and Native subjects marked as passive victims and devoid of the capacity for self-determination. The "Mythology" mentioned in the title is John's own, a desire to find an origin point that leads him to reimagine his beginning via heightened affect that matches the horrific subjugation he experiences in his daily life. The chapter begins with marked uncertainty, as if being retold as part of a dream: "The sheets are dirty. An Indian Health Service hospital in the late sixties. On this reservation or that reservation. Any reservation, a particular reservation" (Alexie 3). Elsewhere in the opening pages, a Native woman giving birth—John's mother—is described as "Navajo or Lakota. She is Apache or Seminole. She is Yakama or Spokane" (4). Both of

these inconsistencies are drawn into focus, however, with the confession that John's mother's "dark skin contrasts sharply with the white sheets, although they are dirty" (4). This brief string of dream-like details, in which important characteristics change or transform constantly, still manages to find definition through racial difference: no matter what tribe his mother belongs to, she—and John—are marked by difference because of her contrast to the white hospital sheets, dirty as they may be. The unfixed nature of John's tribal fantasy, taking place in "any reservation" and containing "the same tribe as the last Indian woman he has seen on television" (4), reverberates John's troubled efforts to connect to what he considers his authentic indigenous self, efforts complicated by his upbringing by two white foster parents who surround him with Native traditions through the lens of white hegemonic ideology. The result is a cognitive dissonance that leaves John unable to pin down a specific tribal origin point; nonetheless, his upbringing in a white household allows him to imagine his mother's—as well as his own—difference from that of whiteness. Just as he feels apart from his foster parents, he can envision his birth mother's dark skin that separates her from the white hospital sheets.

John's inability to imagine his mother any deeper than her age and skin tone differentiates from his capacity to step inside the mind of the white doctor that delivers him. John relates, "The white doctor is twenty-nine years old. He has grown up in Iowa or Illinois, never seeing an Indian in person until he arrives at the reservation. His parents are poor. Having taken a government scholarship to make his way through medical school, he now has to practice medicine on the reservation in exchange for the money" (4). John's description of the doctor is rich with detail; whereas with his birth mother, he struggles to reach any definitive depiction that might help explain his current self, the doctor receives ample

backstory, including the financial state of his parents that leads him to his current role as the reservation doctor. Furthermore, both John and the doctor share a disconnection and admiration for Native people. John, through the eyes of the doctor, relates, "The doctor has fallen in love with Indians. He thinks them impossibly funny and irreverent. During the hospital staff meetings, all of the Indians sit together and whisper behind their hands… The white doctor often wishes he could sit with the Indians and whisper behind his hand. But he maintains a personable and professional distance" (5). As a storyteller, John identifies most closely with the doctor's yearning to connect with those indigenous subjects around him. Both the doctor and John desire to "whisper behind [their] hands," a double impediment to sound that forces his "mythology" to speak of indigenous culture in muffled, distant tones. Relating so closely with the doctor that delivers him matches the purpose behind "Mythology" as an opening chapter: in both cases, John gives birth to himself, an act defined by absence and dislocation. While we are never privy to where the scene occurs or to which tribe he belongs, we are able to witness that John's birth is defined by loss. "Mythology" becomes a kind of anti-origin myth, a re-creation of the beginning of his life that hinges the broad racial categories of dominant ideology.

As John is rushed away from his birth mother and off of the nameless reservation, "Mythology" re-imagines the trauma of removal as actual military destruction. Just as he is placed in a helicopter outside the hospital, the narrative turns: "Suddenly this is a war. The jumpsuit man holds John close to his chest as the helicopter rises. The helicopter gunman locks and loads, strafes the reservation with explosive shells. Indians hit the ground, drive their cars off roads, dive under flimsy kitchen tables" (6). The story of John's removal from his tribe transforms into a scene of massacre; the loss of community, of belonging, becomes

actual violence via the helicopter's decimation of the reservation with explosive shells. Just as with the white doctor before, John's maternal presence in this passage comes in the form of another colonial figure: the helicopter "jumpsuit man." Again, parental intimacy can only surface through the lens of the state. The horrific image of a reservation destroyed by gunfire interlocks with John's efforts to envision himself as a child being cared for. As the helicopter travels over Seattle, this desire for comfort in the face of removal produces a further affection with distance: "John can feel the distance between the helicopter and the ground. He feels he could fall. He somehow loves this new fear. He wants to fall. He wants the jumpsuit man to release him, let him fall from the helicopter, down through the clouds, past the skyscrapers and the Space Needle" (7). John's wish to fall derives from a need to find closeness in absence. The distance between the helicopter and the ground is the same distance between the doctor and the Indian nurses, between John and his non-descript birth mother. To fall would be to *feel* this distance, to become one with the gaps and breaks that define his brief life before his removal.

His struggle to conceive of a parental intimacy continues when the "jumpsuit man" finally brings John to his foster parents, Olivia and Daniel Smith:

> John cries as the jumpsuit man hands him to the white woman, Olivia Smith. She unbuttons the top of her dress, opens her bra, and offers John her large, pale breasts with pink nipples. John's birth mother had small, brown breasts and brown nipples, though he never suckled at them. Still, he knows there is a difference, and as John takes the white woman's right nipple into his mouth and pulls at her breast, he discovers it is empty. (8)

John's origin myth continues its obsession with absence, this time in the form of a breast unable to produce milk. While he characterizes brown skin as from a distance—the Indian nurses laughing behind their hands, his birth mother's fluid appearance—whiteness exists as a sterile, blank-filled presence that both envelops and rejects John. His birth mother's contrasted skin tone with the dirty hospital sheets re-emerges here in the comparison between the two mothers' breasts, one present but empty and the other gone all together. The chapter finalizes this system of racial difference with the closing act of the photograph: "Olivia and Daniel Smith look at the jumpsuit man, who is holding a camera. Flash, flash. Click of the shutter. Whirr of advancing film. All of them wait for a photograph to form, for light to emerge from shadow, for an image to burn itself into paper" (8). In a passage that echoes Vizenor's critique of the imagic from *Chancers*, photography imprints John's identity in a way that mutes the ability to evolve or re-negotiate. The burning of the new family's image onto paper becomes John's actual birth, the only fixed piece of identity provided to John. Only with this final scene do we realize that the entire re-imagining of his birth is in order to tell the story behind this photo, to re-create the picture's narrative that in some way also takes into account his removal from his original family and culture. As "Mythology" demonstrates, that story can only be told with the inclusion of horrific emphasis; his inclusion of the military-like assault on the reservation underlines the everyday horror of living under the racial logic of power.

The novel further establishes John's fraught relationship with Native and Western culture by recounting his adopted parents efforts to expose him to Native American traditions. These efforts are limited both by the adoption agency's refusal to divulge John's tribal affiliation and his adopted parents' Western-based understanding of how to frame

Native culture to their son: “Olivia spent hours looking through books, searching the photographs for any face like her son’s face. She read books about the Sioux, and Navajo, and Winnebago. Crazy Horse, Geronimo, and Sitting Bull rode horses through her imagination” (12). As he grows older, his parents take him to Native American events such as reservation basketball games, during which John observes the diverse crowd of Native people: “There were Indians with dark skin and jet-Black hair. There were Indians with brown hair and paler skin. Green-eyed Indians. Indians with Black blood. Indians with Mexican blood. Indians with white blood. Indians with Asian blood. All of them laughing and carrying on” (21). Here, *Indian Killer* sets aside any notion of “blood quantum” as indicative of Native American authenticity in exchange for the participation in community and the shared bond of experience. Again John views the laughter of Native people from a distance as well a communal aura that acts for him as a kind of betrayal in its contrast with the stoic, ahistorical Native figures from his reading. He becomes both colonizer and colonized, unsettled by the Natives’ “refusal to satisfy the colonizer's narrative demand” (“Sly Civility” 141). The point is not that John wants to exert authority over the Native crowd; rather, the passage illuminates his inability to view other indigenous peoples outside the lens of settler colonialism from which his idea of Indigeneity originated.

*Indian Killer*’s second attempt to re-tell John’s birth further solidifies his on-going internal subjugation that seeks to fix and splinter his Native identity. Later in the narrative, John relates the time when he became certain that he himself was pregnant. In this re-creation, John attempts to take on the mother-role that he lacked as a baby. He remembers, “No one believed him, so he had forced himself to throw up every morning to prove it. For nine months, he waited to give birth, surprised by how little his belly had grown” (Alexie

97). The lack-filled weight of "Mythology" looms over this later episode, which literally includes a body pregnant with absence. The episode predictably ends with John failing to give birth: "On his delivery date, John lay naked on his bed, waiting for the baby. He watched the digital clock. 7:51. 7:52. 7:53. But the baby would not come. John felt his stomach, wished for labor pains, and heard the music growing louder and louder. 'No!' he'd shouted. 'Don't cheat me! Don't cheat me again!'" (98). The "again" that John references is that same lack of heritage present in the "Mythology" chapter; here, just as with that opening episode, John reenacts birth in order to give himself the sensation of belonging. Alexie's imagery of male pregnancy beckons back to other Native American literary texts, namely Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*. In *Ceremony*, Silko opens with a creation myth linked to the generative act of storytelling:

> He rubbed his belly
>
> I keep them here
>
> [he said]
>
> Here, put your hand on it
>
> See, it is moving
>
> There is life here
>
> for the people. (*Ceremony* 2).

Silko's text sees story as an act of reproduction, a way to instill movement wit Native peoples that defies Western erasure. As character Betonie says later in the novel, "Things which don't shift and grow are dead things," (*Ceremony* 116). Conversely, John's "pregnancy" is marked by an inability to think in a future tense. While he shares the news with others, a decision he later comes to regret, the fantasy itself derives from his need to

give birth to himself, to actualize his own creation myth. John's conception of Native identity resembles the same "dead things" that Betonie mentions in *Ceremony*; as a result, John himself is depicted as the living-dead, unable to produce life and participate meaningfully in the world around him.

These examples of John's continuous subjugation at the hands of dominant culture lead the novel to contemplate paths of resistance. John embodies the effort of racial capitalism to control racial rationale, police history, and alienate subjects of color from each other. In response, *Indian Killer* harnesses the same *fantastic* aesthetics that actualized John's removal via brutal genocidal helicopter attack in order to envision resistance capable of breaking from that same dominant ideology. The violence of genocide and internal oppression re-emerges in John's epiphany that he needs to "kill a white man" (Alexie 25). Within this seemingly simplistic appropriation of settler colonial discourse that paints Native Americans as "bloodthirsty savages" lies a desire to remove oneself from the role of victimry. Violence becomes a maneuverable space in which John can navigate a new subjectivity free from state discourse. In the world of *Indian Killer*, violence serves both as a destructive and constructive act, capable of re-imagining and existing in an interstitial space beyond the scope of power. John's realization itself derives from the observation of action and reaction, captured in a white co-worker's swinging of a hammer:

> He raised a hammer and brought it down on the head of the nail. He raised the hammer, brought it down again. Metal against metal. John saw sparks. Sparks. Sparks. He rubbed his eyes. The sparks were large enough and of long enough duration to turn to flame. The foreman didn't see it. The rest of the crew didn't see it. Chuck raised the hammer again and paused at the top of his

> swing. As the hammer began its next descent, John could see it happening in segments, as in a series of still photographs. In that last frozen moment, in that brief instant before the hammer struck again its explosion of flame, John knew exactly what to do with his life.
>
> John needed to kill a white man. (Alexie 25)

The passage accents the space between movements, transforming the quick action of a hammer creating sparks into a series of still segments. The "brief instant" before the hammer strikes the nail a final time conveys an understanding of violence more concerned with the act than the consequence. The point is not the sparks themselves but that instant before of possibility, of breaking from the monotony of action that leads John to his declaration. His revelation points to *Indian Killer*'s larger depiction of violence as a transformative force rather than merely a destructive one. For John, "to kill a white man," means to disrupt the repetitive, subjugating force at work on his psyche everyday. The urge to kill coincides with his ability to manipulate the speed at which the hammer arcs into the nail. At the same time, the phrase itself—"to kill a white man"—echoes the cinematic Indians of the Western genre: the Native figures who make up John's childhood idealization of Indigeneity. The violent recognition's duality, as both an act of agency and a perpetuation of damaging stereotype, sets up the novel's precarious relationship both to John and violence as a whole: we are meant to be unsettled at the troubling effects of these acts just as we are also challenged to observe their consequential empowerment in the Native subjects who perpetrate them.

*Indian Killer*'s scenes depicting the titular character's own murders echo this same paradoxical conception of violence that both harms and empowers. In doing so, the narrative gestures at the possibility that John himself is the Indian Killer. More importantly for our

purposes, seeing as how the actual identity of the killer is never revealed, the similarities between the Indian Killer and John both work towards developing the text's larger philosophy on radical narratives. That is to say, both characters' contemplations of murder emphasize the action as a means to self-determination. The Indian Killer's first murder begins with a meditation on his own knife mirrors John's gazing at the hammer: "The killer believed in the knife, a custom-made bowie with three small turquoise gems inlaid in the handle, heavy but well-balanced, nearly long enough to be considered a sword…During those moments, with knife in hand, the killer felt powerful, invincible, as if the world could be changed with a single gesture. With the knife, the killer became the single, dark center around which all other people revolved" (49). Here, the knife serves as a means to take hold of one's surroundings. Alexie's narration hinges on the capacity for control rather than the mere act of killing, with the knife serving as the lynchpin for the killer's place in the "single, dark center." That "center" consequently de-centers the systems of power that press the novel's other Native characters. In that act of de-centering, the focus remains on the killer's ability of perception and his capacity to de-construct the privileged whiteness of Seattle: "Hiding that beautiful knife in the sheath beneath a jacket, the killer followed white men, selected at random. The killer simply picked any one of the men in gray suits and followed him from office building to cash machine, from lunchtime restaurant back to office building. Those gray suits were not happy, yet showed their unhappiness only during moments of weakness" (51). Possessing the knife centers the killer and allows him to look beyond the veil of whiteness and consumer-capitalism. "Gray suits" signify a neo-liberal gentrification that hinges on routine consumption and white-collar, upper-middle class salary. These "suits" reveal their "unhappiness" by "Punching buttons of a cash machine that refused to work.

Yelling at a taxi that had come too close. Insulting the homeless people who begged for spare change. A slight limp in uncomfortable shoes" (51). Every moment of weakness derives from a breakdown in the presupposed system of capital that makes up these men's performances of whiteness. Their inability to draw money from an ATM and the reminder of their proximity to those individuals from lower socio-economic classes serve as reminders that their identity is both constructed and reliant to the subjugation of others. Significant here is that the killer gains this insight by taking his place at the "single, dark center" of this same system of inequality. Hunting blends with criticism in such a way that his eventual murdering of one of these men, Justin Summers, serves as another "moment of weakness," another chip in the totality of white male hetero-normativity.

Taking a closer look at the way Alexie writes the Indian Killer's murder of Justin Summers signals how the novel means to use the unsettling aesthetics of horror as a site of indigenous radicalism. The killing re-creates an encounter between the "gray suits" and the racialized subject in a way that re-writes power dynamics. At once mirroring the slasher-horror genre, the scene forces the readers into the body of the killer, making them culpable spectators of the murder to follow.[40] Alexie's reliance on the slasher-film first-person perspective gives him the ability to re-write this moment of the white gaze in a way that reinvests agency with the racialized subject. The moment the killer confronts Summers, for example, subverts the narrative of the white gaze racializing and subjugating the subject of color: " 'Hey,' said the white man. 'Do I know you, man?' The killer took a step back,

[40] Perhaps most famously, this first-person perspective arises in *Friday the 13th*, particularly in that film's depiction of the killer (later revealed to be Jason Voorhees' mother) picking up and later killing one of the teenage female camp counselors. The scene plays out almost entirely from Voorhees perspective, from the initial moments of seeing the young woman on the side of the road to the actual moment of death in the woods after a brief chase. Just as with the scene from *Indian Killer*, this cinematic sequence forces the audience into the role of the aggressor; consequently, the killing serves as a moment of release for the viewer just as it does for the masked murderer. At the same time, this shift to first-person view continues to hide the identity of the slasher, instead relying on audience assumptions to fill in the gaps of the violent perpetrator.

knowing that anger would change a face. The killer had seen other people do it. Other people could change the shape of their faces at will. Through a trick of shadow and moonlight, or through some undefined magic, the killer's face did change. 'What's going on?' asked the white man, now really frightened by what he saw in the killer's face." (52). Anger, here acting through some "undefined magic," allows for the Indian Killer to transform himself into something unrecognizable to power. It is not *what* the man sees but what he *does not* see: as the killer's anger changes his face, he steps beyond the domineering racial logic of white supremacy. Important here is that his fear is interwoven with his whiteness. Alexie writes, "The killer saw the fear in the white man's blue eyes" (52). What makes the killer so frightening at first is exactly his ability to destabilize the man's white totality. He is confronted by a non-descript other who refuses carry the moniker of *other*. The actual act of murder, in which the killer stabs Summers in the stomach, occurs as a mere after-thought to this longer initial interaction. This underscoring of the white man's inability to recognize the Indian Killer as opposed to the murder itself exposes *Indian Killer*'s larger ambitions: to utilize the tropes of horror in order to re-write the lived horror of racial capitalism in a way that buttresses indigenous resistance.

The radical shifting of power running through this initial murder re-occurs during the novel's finale, when John actualizes his plan to kill a white man. His target, Jack Wilson, is his almost exact mirror image: a white, Euro-American male also raised in the foster system and seeking a Native American identity to give him the communal comfort missing from his life as an orphan. Wilson, however, has gone on to become a police officer and, after his retirement, a popular mystery novelist with a Native American detective, Aristotle Little Hawk, made up of the broadest of Native stereotypes and misappropriations. Alexie uses

Jack Wilson as a stand-in for actual novelist Tony Hillerman, who has similarly gained fame by appropriating indigenous culture in his mystery narratives.[41] On the whole, both fictional and real-life figures drive Alexie's curiosity in whiteness's obsession with Native spirituality, a version of cultural genocide that he likens to historic iterations of massacre and removal.[42] In the case of Jack Wilson, his desire for Native American authenticity pulls him into a performance of Native culture in line with the narrative's other problematic white liberal figure: Native American Literature Professor Clarence Mather. Like Mather, Wilson's comprehension of Native identity relies on the contours of his whiteness for support; in other words, both rely on neo-liberal institutions of financial stability—the university, law enforcement—while parading a false Native spirituality that resembles the flower child adoption of pseudo indigenous philosophy described by Philip Deloria in *Playing Indian*. In chastising the Indian Killer, Mather relates to his students:

> "If we compare the construct of the Indian Killer with Jack Wilson's fictional alter ego, Aristotle Little Hawk, we can begin to more fully understand the revolutionary nature of Mr. Wilson's mystery novels. The Indian Killer and Little Hawk are twentieth century manifestations of the classic Indian warrior. One, the Indian Killer, is wild and untamed, à la Geronimo, while the other, Little Hawk, is apparently tamed and civilized, a hangs-around-the-fort Indian, if you will, but is, in fact, actually working within the system in his efforts to disrupt it." (246)

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[41] Wilson's name also derives from one of the spiritual leaders of the 1890 *Ghost Dance* movement, Pauite Indian Wovoka (also known as Jack Wilson).

[42] Another example of this cultural appropriation as genocidal tactic arises in *Reservation Blues*, in which the musical band composed of the novel's central Native characters are ousted by their record label and replaced by two white female singers performing in "red face."

Mather praises Wilson's Aristotle Little Hawk as a revolutionary pragmatic; only by working from within a system of power, in other words, can the radical Indian hope to change it. The professor's lecture echoes Turner and Lyons in its reliance on state discourse as a means of resistance. The Indian Killer, by contrast, can only flail from the outside while the mechanisms of power continue to operate. Mather, and by extension Wilson, whose view of Native philosophy Mather relies on for his lecture, covertly co-signs Western knowledge as the only sustainable form of political ideology available to Native subjects. The "wild, untamed" Indian Killer/Geronimo radical remains unable to understand the full scope of power due to his inability to harness Western discourse as a means of resistance. Only by assimilation can the indigenous revolutionary gain sovereignty. Wilson himself reveals his own discomfort at the idea of a violent Native radical: "Wilson thought about the Indian Killer. A white man scalped, a white man disappeared, a white boy kidnapped. It was Biblical, David versus Goliath. But Wilson was disturbed by that. He wondered if a real Indian was capable of such violence" (178). Even as he questions the reality of a "real" Indian perpetrating violence, Wilson can only reason via the Western parable of David and Goliath. The Euro-centric analogy adds to Wilson's inability to conceive of Native American culture apart from his own lens of whiteness. As he assures himself, "He knew about real Indians. He'd read the books, had spent long hours meditating, listening to the voices of the past" (178). Just like John Smith, Wilson experiences Indigeneity as from a distance, both geographical and temporal. However, unlike Smith, Wilson fails to notice his own gap in experience from this upbringing. Rather, for him, a life spent immersed in the textual representations of Native Americans equates to ethnic legitimacy. From the perspective of this problematic Native knowledge, "real Indians" emanate passivity and non-violence. It is

this same passivity that allows Wilson to take up the guise of Native American identity in order to bolster his own specific brand of white liberalism. Just as with the "gray suit" that the Indian Killer murders, Wilson cannot recognize an Indian capable of violence because it exists as a direct threat to his own envelopment in racial capitalism. Again, white fear emerges in the face of Native self-determination.

Wilson and Smith's clashing perspectives of Native radicalism and agency fully come into focus during the novel's climax, as Smith finally enacts his plan by kidnapping the white novelist. The scene again echoes the climax of so many slasher-film narratives where the masked murderer reveals himself to the protagonist. To that point, this climatic scene does include John Smith's revelation of his own place in the Native community as well as his capacity to radically break from the racial capitalist place of experience seeking to fix him in place. For Smith, the confrontation crystallizes his own desire for self-determinacy and his actual flight from the control of the state. Just as with the murder of the "gray suit," this discovery comes in the exposure of white fear and Native experience, a moment of cultural contact in which the horror of racial capitalist subjugation is re-harnessed as a tool for Native liberation. And like that earlier scene, John's possession of the knife signifies a break from the passive victimry offered to him by dominant images of indigenous subjects. Alexie writes, " 'Don't hurt me,' Wilson said to John. 'I'm not a white man. I'm Indian. You don't kill Indians.'" (403). Wilson claims Indigeneity again, but this time in self-defense. Wilson's pleading to John relies on attempts to commiserate with the everyday micro-aggressions he identifies as making up the Native American struggle. He relates, "I was the only Indian cop on the force. The only one. Can you believe that? There aren't many now. But I was the only one then. And I'll tell you. It was hard work. They always gave me the shit jobs. Called me

Chief and Tonto and everything else. Man, it was awful" (397). Wilson's claimed experience of discrimination is also his only claim as Native American subject. That is, he can only take on the Native identity crafted to him by power, the same identity he appears to be lamenting in hopes to connect with John, his captor. The turn is a crucial one, in that it draws the clearest lines of the novel in turns of what it means to say about identity and resistance.

For John, his constant searching to connect with his Native origins leaves him nursing a gap within himself; and yet, the acknowledgment of that gap, the novel argues, is what allows him the ability to forge his own radial subjectivity, to finally take flight from the smothering hegemonic forces of Seattle. At one vital moment, John says to Wilson, "Please…Let me, let us have our own pain" (412). The line represents the first time John openly identifies himself as part of an "us"; more importantly, he labels his own suffering under racist hegemony and inherited trauma as "our pain." *Indian Killer* allows John's break from the perceived logic of racial capitalism to coincide with his realization of his own place in the Native American community, a place defined in part by experience. Directly after this quote, John precedes to mutilate Wilson's face: "With a right hand made strong by years of construction work, with a blade that was much stronger than it looked, John slashed Wilson's face, from just above his right eye, down through the eye and cheekbone, past the shelf of the chin, and a few inches down the neck" (411). Again violence emerges in the text as a way to represent the radical subjectivity at play within John Smith and his new relation to Wilson. Just as with the re-writing of the white gaze at work in the Indian Killer's murder of Summers, Smith is able to deconstruct Wilson's white liberalism and mark it into existence. The knife's blade, stronger in that John Smith himself is more purposeful in his actions, can make real the historic massacre and genocide hidden behind Wilson's performance of

Indigeneity. Horror, here played out in the gore of bloodletting, becomes the way of destabilizing whiteness.

This final deployment of violent action directly precedes John's leap off of the "last skyscraper of Seattle." What appears to be an act of obliteration in fact takes shape in the text as a form of flight from the state, a final re-connection to John's perpetually absent indigenous origins. His fall harkens back to his re-imagining of his removal from his mother, where he first feels comfort via the distance between helicopter and the ground. During his final fall, he feels a similar ease: "Falling, fallen, will fall, has fallen, fell. Falling. Because he finally and completely understood the voices in his head. Because he knew the heat and music left his body when he marked Wilson. John was calm. He was falling" (412). His leap to the ground stalls in mid-air, as if "some wind had risen from the ground to counteract the force of gravity" (412). Alexie's narration, likewise, stalls and lingers on the act of falling, played out in a series of verb tenses marking time but ending in the present progressive "Falling." Smith's suicide becomes less about the moment of impact but rather about the sensation of movement and transition. At the same time, his willful destruction of his corporeal self denotes a desire to destroy what he considers a construction of settler colonialism. His desire to "murder a white man" ends with him killing "John Smith," the white-propagated image of Indigeneity named after a European explorer and racialized in accordance to the logic of power. In thinking back to his recreation of his own origin story, the air between offers the freedom of self-determinacy that neither the state-held helicopter or the fixed earth below provide. In jumping from the building, John Smith finally enacts his own creation story. The actual impact results in John's separation from his physical self, a separation from the corporeal that allows John to earnest search for his birth parents. Alexie

writes, “John looked down at himself and saw he was naked. Brown skin” (413). Again, John re-writes “Mythology” in a way free of state-influenced racialized signifiers. His “brown skin” is no longer contrasted with the dirty white hospital sheets or the white skin of his adoptive mother. John’s plunge strips him of his body and allows him the critical space in which to perform his Indigeneity. This final scene, when read along with the other scenes of murder and violence that evoke horror tropes, utilizes the hesitative power of horror to help unmoor the Native subject from dominant racial ideology. Following his graphic disfigurement of Wilson’s face, the horrific image of John Smith’s body meeting the pavement unsettles even as it dares to offer release. Again, *Indian Killer* uses that which in other works might disturb or shock as moments of radical reformation. The climax’s narration hinges more on the revolutionary subjectivity forged from re-writing the racial contract then it does the physical violence portrayed in the text. In this act of supposed suicide, John Smith forges his own radicalized subjectivity. In doing so, he finally enacts his fantasy pregnancy by helping to give birth to a new iteration of the *ghost dance*. As the character Marie says near the end of the novel: “Indians are dancing now, and I don’t think they’re going to stop” (418).

The book’s final section, “A Creation Story,” depicts the gathering for this new *ghost dance* that centers on the building of community as a radical act. Just as with the original *ghost dance*, the danger to the state was less about the intended consequences—that white people be vanished from the Americas—and more about the political effects of allowing Native peoples to gather and organize. In *Indian Killer*’s closing radical vision, the titular killer begins this *ghost dance* in a Native cemetery. Here again, the site of death becomes a platform for a new beginning. The indeterminacy of John Smith’s opening re-imagining of

his birth in "A Creation Story" becomes the narrative of radical dissemination: "A full moon. A cemetery on an Indian reservation. On this reservation or that reservation. Any reservation, a particular reservation" (419). Helping this pan-tribal growth is the Indian Killer's adoption of a "new song that sounds exactly like an old one" (419), a paradoxical concept based in *survivance*. Just as Smith finds the freedom of flight in his own free-fall, the novel's dream of a radical future finds possibility in making the old new. Joining in on this new/old song are "a dozen Indians, then hundreds, and more, all learning the same song, the exact dance" (420). Alexie's depiction of this massive Native gathering re-thinks the popular "coming home" narrative of a number of early Native American Literary Renaissance works, including Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (which she herself re-writes in her later, much less praised *Almanac of the Dead*) and N. Scott Marmaday's *House Made of Dawn*. In those novels, which featured a solitary Native figure coming back to the reservation to re-discover culture, the impetus is placed on the healing of the individual. *Indian Killer*, instead, uses John Smith's violent "coming home" as a spark for a larger radical movement, an opportunity for all Native people to "come home" together. The ending is a new beginning, born in bloody, horrific fashion but awash with new possibility.

### ***Bush Mama*** **and the Killing of the State**

Like *Indian Killer*, Haile Gerima's 1979 film *Bush Mama* (shot in 1975) tells a story of radicalization that—while outwardly reflecting violent militant revolutionary fantasies—looks for the discovery of *the new* in places of horror. The film follows Dorothy, a Black woman with a teenaged daughter who struggles to secure her welfare checks in the wake of her recently discovered pregnancy, which the welfare office advises her to terminate. Additionally, Dorothy's recently returned Vietnam veteran boyfriend T.C. is arrested and

incarcerated for a crime he did not commit. *Bush Mama* tracks both Dorothy and T.C.'s political awakenings in the face of a racial capitalism that uses the prison, welfare, and healthcare systems to collectively disenfranchise and alienate the Black subject. Gerima captures the reach of racial capitalism via his intimate portrayal of the city of Watts, CA. Its urban decay and impoverished inhabitants are constantly framed by the institutions failing them. We are immersed in the Black experience of Los Angeles via these same institutions, from the constant soundtrack of welfare questionnaires layered on top of one another to the violent police presence that manifests through a series of police shootings of Black men. The sum of all of these forces is an urban space constructed by and operating on the assemblage of horror. Animating this horror is an underlying critique of state addiction, which H.L.T. Quan explains leaves:

> us dependent on the state for means of expressions and terms of engagement…The state's memory becomes our own memory. Just as Orlando Patterson's social death thesis fallaciously endows racial capitalism and white supremacy as cultural progenitors of Black life, so state analytics such as necropolitics render life *sans* state, more often than not, chaotic, miserable and inauthentic. (178)

Quan identifies agents of state addiction as a parallel to the same Western political scientists critiqued by Cedric Robinson in *The Terms of Order*. In both instances, relying on state registers means conceding to definitions of Blackness determined by the constructs of power. Gerima, conversely, structures life under the state as a carnival of horrors, periods of unending oppression capitalized by moments of extreme violence. We witness these horrors alongside Dororthy; in addition, we observe how these moments create critical spaces in

which she begins to craft her own radical subjectivity. This radicalization culminates with Dorothy's killing of a police officer attempting to rape her daughter.

The narrative leading up to that violent climax makes constant use of horror aesthetics. From the disturbing use of first-person perspective to the shocking inclusion of violence in unexpected moments, the film unsettles its audience and leads them to question their grasp of in what reality the story takes place. Put another way, Gerima invokes what Todorov, in defining the literary *fantastique*, refers to as readerly "hesitations," forays into the surreal meant to destabilize the pre-conceived reality of the narrative. *Bush Mama* forces the viewer to re-imagine the inner city through a lens of horror, a nightmare-scape constructed by the negligence of the state. As a response, the film's final act of violence, Dorothy's killing of the officer, represents the need to counteract that horror. Dororthy's final declaration that her "wig is off her head" (*Bush Mama*), a reference both to her literal removal of a cosmetic object meant to conceal natural, curly Black hair and her rejection of a state-mandated Blackness, speaks to her new capacity to recognize the forces working behind the *phantasmagoria* that was her experience in Los Angeles. Gaining such perspective, in the cinematic grammar of *Bush Mama*, requires violent transgression. If Amiri Baraka sought "poems that kill" ("Black Art" 302), Gerima seeks a Black cinema that kills the state through the awakening of the Black radical subject.

*Bush Mama*'s first images begin the film's gradual collapse between social realism and the fantastique landscape of horror. The film opens with an all too familiar scene: members of the LAPD stopping and frisking two Black men in broad daylight in Los Angeles. The camera captures the scene from the safety of distance while the two Black men, revealed to be part of a film crew, are placed against the police car and searched by the two

officers (Figure 9). The audience is immediately voyeur and witness, a participant and testifier to the repeated subjugation of the Black Los Angeles community at the hands of the police state. As we watch the men being searched by the police, we hear the welfare office questionnaire that haunts Dorothy through the movie. Just as the men are questioned by the police, we the viewers are likewise probed by a droning list of bureaucratic inquires, all determined to place the interviewee on a specific socio-economic tier.

**Figure 9**

The film closes the gap between audience and text: we are culpable in this film whether we like it or not. It thrusts the viewer into the world of *Bush Mama*, one where Black subjects must traverse an experiential plane marked by racial capitalism and littered with the many mundane horrors of discrimination and poverty. Making the opening all the more significant is its true origin: the footage actually captures Gerima and his cameraman being frisked by the LAPD for looking "suspicious" while holding camera equipment. The doubling at work is almost dizzying; we are watching the director living out the realities of a world where he is always being watched, a surveillance state being surveilled by the shadowy figure in the

distant foliage. The documentary-like footage of Gerima's own encounter with the police state bleeds into the heightened affective plane that main character Dorothy must navigate throughout the film. Any line between the fictive and the real disappears, albeit unconsciously, in ways that make the later images of racial violence all the more unsettling. The filmmakers themselves, this opening scene argues, cannot escape the nightmare Watts depicted in *Bush Mama*.

By playing with this ambiguity, Gerima emphasizes *experience* over realism. Perspective becomes the way to induce affect unavailable to the reach of mere numbers and figures. That is, by placing his audience at an unknown position far away from the site of the "stop and frisk," the director forces viewers to witness directly the Black experience under the police state. At the same time, the audience's voyeuristic point-of-view encapsulates how the rest of *Bush Mama*'s cinematic perspective will enfold: as a shadowy, barely there observer, who watches the characters from around street corners or from the dark portions of hallways. This predatory entity watches and, as the film's climatic scene featuring a police office sexually assaulting Luann represents, eventually attacks those individuals on the screen even as it captures Dorothy's experiences in Watts. And yet, this opening also hints at *Bush Mama*'s radical purview: while the police stop Gerima in his efforts to capture the workings of power, another unnamed observer manages to capture those same workings in action. By inhabiting the disturbing entity that haunts and stalks the characters of *Bush Mama*, the director locates a radical, if not dangerous, positionality always just beyond the scope of racial capitalism.

The film's first portrayal of real violence coincides with its first depiction of radical consciousness, albeit in a form unrecognizable to Dorothy. As she waits in the welfare office,

a stir erupts at the arrival of a man approaching the building wielding an ax (Figure 10). This same man, we are told, has previously been denied checks and has, by all appearances, come to collect by physical means. We watch as the ax-wielding man stands off with police, who quickly open fire and kill him. Again, Gerima positions the camera as a distant observer; some foliage obscures the right side of the frame in order to imitate a witness watching from down the street. Significant here is the emphasis on the man's inexplicability; no one in the office, least of all Dorothy, can conceive of the man's state of mind. And yet, the scene, which shocks in its abrupt arrival and bloody conclusion, represents an early break from the trappings of the state, albeit one that ends with the police reinforcing the terms of order. As a horror allusion, the episode recalls the famous climax of George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), in which protagonist Ben (Duane Jones), an African American man and the lone survivor of a group of people battling the undead from a country farmhouse, emerges from his hiding spot in the cellar only to be mistaken as a zombie by the white men outside, shot, and burned along with the rest of the undead. While Romero has since downplayed the ending as an allusion to racial violence,[43] the image of an armed Black man being shot by white vigilantes and burned nevertheless recalls a long American history of lynchings and police shootings. Just as with Ben's death, the ax-wielding man of *Bush Mama* dies because of the police's failure to codify him within the context of his surroundings. In both cases, killing the incoherent Black figure represents a return to "normalcy," that is, one dictated by power. Also important is the fact that both men's incoherency to their white killers derives in part from their being armed. As both Ben and the man outside the welfare

[43] As Romero divulged in Joe Kane's *Night of the Living Dead: Behind the Scenes of the Most Terrifying Zombie Movie* Ever, "Duane Jones was the best actor we met to play Ben. If there was a film with a Black actor in it, it usually had a racial theme, like 'The Defiant Ones.' Consciously I resisted writing new dialogue 'cause he happens to be Black. We just shot the script" (Kane 31).

office navigate their respective dangerous environments, their need to arm themselves denotes a capacity of self-defense—of any *action* whatsoever—that power immediately identifies as a threat.

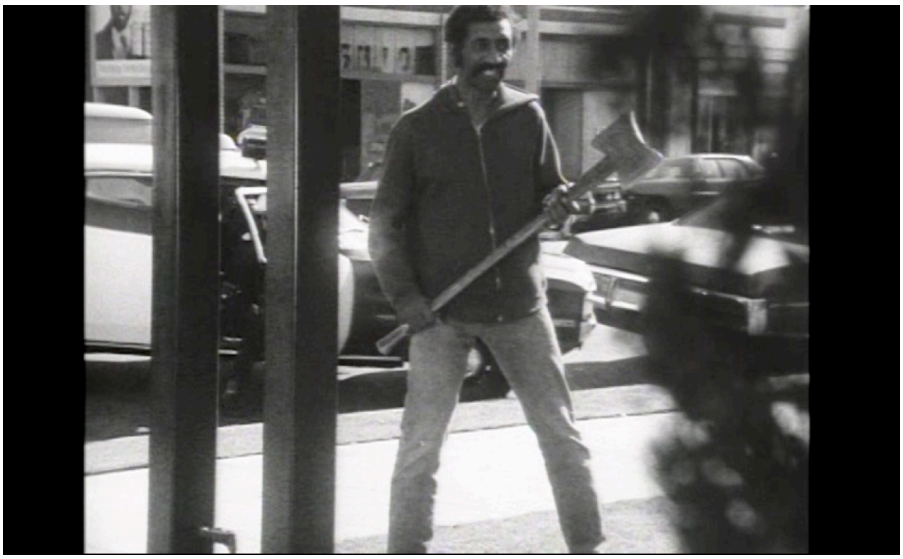

**Figure 10**

The man serves as an early radical figure in his refusal of these same terms, a manifested subjectivity outside the boundaries of power's racial logic and therefore dangerous to its stability. By lingering on his body after the shooting, the film hints at the true site of horror: we are meant to fear the arm of the state rather than the radical agent himself. In effect, the emptiness that persists from where the man once stood with his axe indicates a return to the on-going subjugation of Watt's Black inhabitants, a re-turning of the gears that work the machine of power. The horror here derives from the realization of the everyday violence necessary to perpetuate the ordered logic of racial capitalism. What appears as invisible here materializes as violent spectacle. The episode marks the film's intentions to use state violence as a way of manifesting the invisible arms of racial capitalism. Here, in the killing of a Black subject refusing the "racial contract" of late

capitalism, we observe the violent consequences of the policing of capital. What would have been a murderous, slasher-figure in another film in *Bush Mama* becomes an early figure of possibility. That this rebellion is short-lived speaks to Dorothy's own inability to conceive of the systems at work in her and the ax-wielding man's subjugations.

*Bush Mama* continues to use unsettling imagery as early figurations of Black radicalism in its depiction of T.C.'s incarceration. In one famous scene, T.C. recites to the camera his letter to Dorothy. The tracking shot moves from T.C.'s cell down the cellblock row, stopping momentarily from one Black inmate to the next. One cell, however, contains a Black figure standing in the far corner, veiled in shadow (Figure 11). The image is haunting: at once, we as the audience are both unsettled at the almost-ghostly figure lurking just as out of sight and intrigued at his ambiguity. This use of shadow recalls a long tradition of horror and lighting that Philip Rose, a member of the UK lighting practice Speirs and Major, traces as beginning with German Impressionist horror films such as Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (1920) and F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922). *Nosferatu,* in particular, depicts vampire Count Orlok stalking his victims via the projection of his shadow upon the wall. The use of the silhouette to unsettle relies on the manipulating the audience's perception of absence: we cannot directly see Orlok move up the staircase, but the shadow implies his menacing presence all the same. In the same way, Gerima's shadowy prisoner disturbs because of his inability to be perceived, his refusal of observation. The entity contrasts with T.C.'s own placement directly in front of the camera, declaring his own newfound political consciousness. And yet, it is the shadowy figure that best depicts the radical subject-hood that T.C. attempts to describe in his letter, an iteration of Blackness that resists surveillance, even in the space of incarceration.

**Figure 11**

Many critics, including Frank Wilderson, have commented on the film's mirroring of T.C.'s interment with Dorothy's impoverished existence, cluing in on the similarity between shots of the former from behind prison bars to images of Dorothy staring outside the barred windows of her apartment. Wilderson sees this blending between home and prison as symbolic of the "fact that 'Black Home' is an oxymoron because this notion has no structural analogy with a notion of White or non-Black domestic space. The absolute vulnerability of Black domestic space finds its structural analogy…with that domain known as the slave quarters: a 'private' home on a Master's estate" (127). What Wilderson sees in the film's desire to depict "captivity" as a "constituent element of the characters' live" (127) disallows him from observing how such a need to find an analogous relationship between Blackness and whiteness denotes the same state addiction that the film is critiquing in the first place. Buried in this scene of captivity is the same fugitive presence that Robinson identifies as central to the Black Radical Tradition. The shadowy figure's opacity in the space of incarceration symbolizes a capacity for resistance even in the belly of the state. In other

words, what Wilderson erroneously sees as a "Black Home" in fact is a space constructed by the state to contain the Black subject, a project made difficult when the subject refuses to recognize the same authority that causes Wilderson to capitalize "Master" as a legitimate marking of power. None of this is meant to disregard the concrete horror of mass incarceration; there is no victory in imprisonment. However, *Bush Mama*'s early depiction of haunting Blackness showcases the radical possibility of evading the eyes of the state, to lurk in the same way that power does on the streets of the film's version of Watts. To respond to the horror of racial capitalism, one must become their own agent of horror, to make themselves their own "home."

Dorothy's early signs of radicalization come from her interactions with a poster image of a female African freedom fighter holding a baby and an assault rifle. The poster comes to represent the international Black radical tradition where she locates a sense of community. Similar to the two previous scenes of the men being searched by the police and the ax-wielding man being gunned down, Dorothy's contemplation of the poster centers on the act of watching. The scene involves Dorothy pacing back forth in the room as she gazes at the woman, tightening her features in ways that match the fighter's own countenance (Figure 12). The woman on the poster, both revolutionary and maternal figure, represents an iteration of Black femininity previously unavailable to Dorothy. Her examination of the image is less a desire to imitate the woman, as it is an allowance for her to interrogate her own radical capacity.

**Figure 12**

In a city where Black subjects are the constant victim of state surveillance and capitalist subjugation, Dorothy's predatory gaze symbolizes a refusal of victimry; while the camera observes and stares, she begins to stare back. In the middle of Dorothy's stare down, a noise from the street brings her to the window. What follows is a second disruptive moment of violence that crystallizes her burgeoning radicalization: a police officer struggles to lead a handcuffed Black man down the sidewalk; after some light resistance on the part of the handcuffed man, the officer pulls out his sidearm and shoots him several times. While careful to depict the entire episode as one unbroken sequence, *Bush Mama* is far more invested in Dorothy's reaction to the shooting. In a stark contrast to her earlier intimidating gaze, one constructed after a series of facial contortions and careful study of the radical poster, her eyes widen in abject horror at the murder that takes place in front of her (Figure 13).

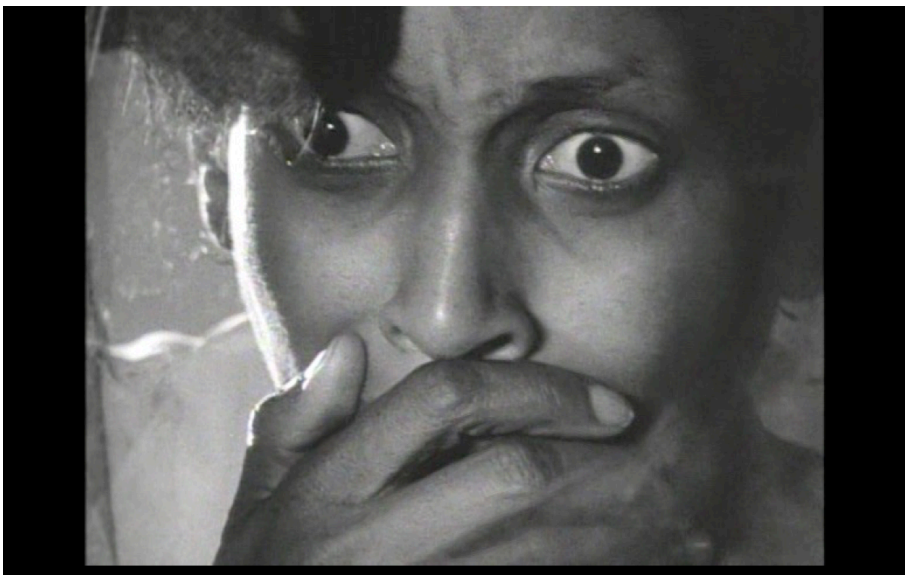

**Figure 13**

The moment is crucial in its depiction of horror as both recognition of racial capitalism's oppressive tactics and a possibility for re-negotiating radical subjectivity. Dorothy's horrified expression represents a break from her previously anesthetized countenance, which, earlier in the film, caused some more progressive Black community members to suggest that she suffered from brain damage. Her shocked expression marks her own ongoing radical transformation. In this moment of horrified epiphany, Dorothy finally faces the realities of the state's brutality; while the scene shocks her, she refuses to turn away. In addition, the fact that this shooting occurs concurrently with her new interest in the revolutionary poster signifies the film's interwoven understanding of violence and radicalism. In order to approach the latter, one must first face the former.

As mentioned previously, Dorothy's radicalization actualizes with her killing of the police officer trying to sexually assault her daughter Luann. *Bush Mama* forecasts this fateful moment, however, with an earlier allusion to Luann being stalked by an unknown presence. Directly following T.C.'s arrest, we observe Luann running out of her apartment to greet

Dorothy. The one-shot sequence follows her from the doorway, down the hallway, and into the stairwell. The handheld camera imitates the film's previous uses of perspective; we track Luann through the building methodically, almost hiding around corners so as not to be seen (Figure 14). This careful stalking, alongside the scene's shadowy cinematography, denotes an unsettling affect of pursuit. Gerima treats the camera as a voyeuristic eye that stalks as it records. In thinking back to Wilderson's reading of *Bush Mama* as a narrative concerned almost solely with captivity, this scene of foreshadowing speaks more to the movie's interest in depicting racial capitalism as a predatory presence. The difference lies in the target of critique.

**Figure 14**

For Wilderson, *Bush Mama* speaks to the impossibility of Black domesticity under the stain of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In this reading, Dorothy and Luann are never free because of their inclusion under the sign of Blackness, which is, in its definition, antagonistic to the privileges of ownership and agency afforded to whiteness. In reading this scene as parallel to the horror trope of the killer watching from the shadows uncovers the seemingly desirable

entitlements accompanying the domestic space as dangerous in and of themselves. Luann is stalked by the inequalities inherent in the system of capitalism itself. The decaying apartment building itself becomes the monstrous figure seeking out the unaware victim. Rather than relying on a comprehension of Blackness based on the presupposition of power, *Bush Mama* puts into question what comforts the state provides in the first place. The problem is not in the possibility of Black Home but rather in the idea of Home under the eye of the state. Luann again encounters the camera's predatory gaze in *Bush Mama*'s final moments; this time, however, the unknown presence is revealed to be a police officer questioning her as she waits for Dorothy to return home (Figure 15). The parallels to the scene above underscore the film's intentions to frame racial capitalism as an assemblage of horrific affect.

**Figure 15**

The voice questioning Luann reverberates the welfare questionnaire that haunts both the film and Dorothy's psyche. In the case of this final scene, the voice manifests as a physical presence, that of the police officer. By doing so, the episode serves as a kind of reveal: the

gaze that has accompanied nearly every moment of violence thus far exposes itself as an arm of the state.

When Dorothy walks in on the officer forcing himself onto Luann, she immediately opts to defend her daughter by any means necessary. Consequently, she viciously stabs him repeatedly with an umbrella. The entire sequence plays out in heavy shadow; in doing so, it alludes to the shadowy figure of the prison cell. Killing the police officer denotes Dorothy's own rejection of the passive subjectivity bestowed upon her by power; instead, she harnesses the same agency hinted at in her contemplation of the freedom fighter poster. Like that figure, Dorothy acts as both mother and revolutionary; in protecting her child from the state, she performs a radical self-hood capable of breaking from the trappings of racial capitalism.

At first glance, the act of violence seems to reinforce the earlier warning of a female Black radical lecturing a younger man. During this lecture, which Dorothy overhears at a nearby table, the woman relates the importance of organizing: "You know, I could get me a gun and go out there on the top of one of those hills out in Hollywood and rip me off some of them white freaks…but check this out: would that do any good? That's not big enough! That's not good enough! That's not what we want! We want something bigger than that. We want a big hunk of Uncle Sam's pie. We don't want no small things" (*Bush Mama*). In the wake of this monologue, Dorothy's own violent act appears uncalculated, a "small thing." To wit, the scenes both before and after the killing depict her incarceration, the state's intention to frame her for murder, and her being beaten to the point of miscarriage by her arresting officers. Such horrific events seem to reify the power of the state over the Black female body. And yet, the final freeze frame of Dorothy's face, foregrounding the Black revolutionary poster on the wall behind her, speaks to a bigger change at work within the microcosm of

killing the officer (Figure 16). While the film makes larger allusions to the significance of "togetherness," of the effectiveness of calculated action, under it non-literal grammar of violence, Dorothy's final radical act serves more as a moment of awakening than acquiescence to power. Gerima plays with the trope of the female Blaxploitation figure made popular by actresses such as Pam Greer in the 1973 film *Coffy*. In this film, where Greer's titular character emerges victorious from her killing spree, which included both drug dealers and corrupt politicians, the act of violence did in fact serve as a glorified moment of empowerment. In the titillating aesthetics of Blaxploitation cinema, the violence itself acted as the moment of release. *Coffy* reaffirms this fetishization by emphasizing violence as a visual aesthetic: the film's use of bright red blood and explicit violent symbolism—Coffy literally emasculates her traitorous lover with a shotgun to close the film—make up its radical grammar.

**Figure 16**

*Bush Mama* similarly includes a moment where Dorothy herself fantasizes about smashing a social worker's head with a glass bottle. In that sequence, the moment of impact repeats several times, as if to imitate Dorothy's own desire to silence the worker by force. In this

fantasy, just as with the entry of *Coffy*, Black agency derives from an immediate need for revenge, to deploy violence in methods mirroring that of the state. That being said, whereas *Coffy* remains in the bloody aftermath of revenge, the Black and white world of *Bush Mama* depicts and draws horror from violence while masking its true graphic detail with shadow. As a result, Gerima's film looks past the mere deployment of violence as empowerment and instead investigates the changes in the violent radical agent. The emphasis here lies in power as opposed to ideology. For example, *Bush Mama*'s climax hones in on the moment directly following the killing, in which Dorothy takes on the visage of the revolutionary without staring back at the poster. This image recalls *Bush Mama*'s ongoing obsession with the gaze and of observing. Whereas before her contemplation resembled a careful study, an inner interrogation of her radical capacity physically represented in her facial contortions, Dorothy no longer needs the poster as reference.

Rather than foreclosing on possibility, *Bush Mama* closes with looks to the future. Just as with the conclusion of *Indian Killer*, violence creates rather than destroys. Alexie and Gerima respond to the experience of racial capitalism with a vision of Black and Native radicalism capable of registering racial horror while fostering the capacity for imaginative resistance. Both cases lend themselves to concrete action rather than abstract pondering: in *Indian Killer*, the new version of the *ghost dance* brings forth a transnational indigenous movement operating beyond the boundaries of the state; meanwhile, Dorothy's radical awakening comes in light of her identification with the African freedom fighter of the poster, a symbol of her re-connection with a global Black resistance that stretches outside the scope of power. The termination of pregnancy figures into both narratives as well: John Smith's terminated false pregnancy and Dorothy's forced miscarriage each predate their eventual re-

birth as radical Native or Black subjects. The horror of killing, in John Smith's torture of Wilson and subsequent suicide and Dorothy's murdering of the police officer, leads into a new birthing narrative, one in which both characters give birth to themselves through the killing of the state. That is, in the disturbing representation of death, *Indian Killer* and *Bush Mama* forge new, hopeful narratives of life. Both texts seek out and discover "the new" through the utilization of the horrific, in the breaking with a reality meant to subjugate Black and Native subjects. These "new" iterations emerge from these bloody visions as figures both old and innovative. In referring to the experiential—time, space, and the body—these radical figures plot out new routes of freedom non-reliant on the logic of dominance.

**Conclusion**

The discussion of where violence fits into radical ideology all too often occurs based on the terms of power and in ways that alienate and disempower communities of color. Once we decide to read violence as a piece of horror, we unlock a new way of reading radical narratives from Black and Native artists that seeks rupture in order to construct the new. In these new horror terms, death fails to become the putative end of resistant consciousness but rather serves as the emergent point of a new subjectivity.

In order to see the threat of such a subjectivity based in non-Western knowledge, one need only to study the history of how the state responds to and categorizes African American and Native American radicalism. A 2017 FBI report warning about the terrorist threat of "Black Identity Extremists" represents a contemporary example of a long tradition of federal bodies seeking to eradicate race radicalism in the name of maintaining the status quo of national racial logic. While the existence of this particular extremist group really only applies to the pages of the FBI report itself, the monster that the state imagines within its pages

speaks volumes about what really threatens the dominant racial order. The invention of the "Black Identity Extremists" moniker in the first place denotes a state anxiety regarding any group of Black individuals laying claim to a "Black identity" separate from that handed to them by the terms of racial capitalism. By criminalizing such race radicalism, power seeks to ensure that the general Black population refrains from considering what possibilities lie in setting their own terms of Blackness. The language of the FBI report echoes this anxiousness in how it characterizes the organization level of the BIE: "The FBI assesses it is very likely that Black Identity Extremist (BIE) perceptions of police brutality against African Americans spurred an increase in *premeditated, retaliatory* lethal violence against law enforcement and will likely serve as justification for such violence" (F.B.I. Counterterrorism Division, emphasis mine). The report's language reverberates with the Greenlee quote that opened this chapter: the danger of such race extremists lies in their capacity to organize and premeditate, to use violence in a way that denotes control as opposed to mindless rage.

If the content and stylistic traits of the 2017 FBI report on "Black Identity Extremist" groups represents new iterations of power's efforts to criminalize radical movements, then the state and corporate response to the indigenous-protest of the Dakota Access Pipeline demonstrates the lengths to which hegemony will go to snuff out organized, culture-based action. As a 2017 article from the news publication *The Intercept* reports, a mercenary firm referred to as TigerSwan, which emerged as a counter-terrorism group operating mainly in the Middle East, received a contract from Energy Transfer Partners in order to observe and sabotage the Water Protectors (Brown, et al.). That such a counterterrorist group was deployed in effort both to protect the capital represented by the Dakota Pipeline and to subvert an organized movement dictated on indigenous sovereignty illuminates the way

racial capitalism uses the discourse of security as a form of self-perpetuation. In addition, the way in which the security firm discusses the indigenous movement parallels the FBI's efforts to familiarize race radicalism under the logic of the state. One TigerSwan intelligence report, organized by TigerSwan Chief Secuirty Officer John Porter and shared with local and federal law enforcement, characterized the anti-DAPL protesters as a terrorist insurgence group: "What the anti-DAPL protestors have called an 'indigenous decolonization movement' was, essentially, an externally supported, ideologically driven insurgency with a strong religious component" (Porter). In effect, the communication attempts to drain the movement of any indigenous cultural foundation in order to re-categorize it under terms predicated by the state. The difference between an "indigenous decolonization movement" and an "externally supported, ideologically driven insurgency with a strong religious component" lies in the valley of state recognition. By decentering the "indigenous decolonization" tactic, which, as this project has sought to demonstrate, goes hand-in-hand with Native religious and cultural knowledge, the TigerSwan report places the anti-DAPL movement under the familiar terms of federal counter-terrorism. As a consequence, the new becomes old again. To whit, this same internal communication goes on to pathologize the Water Protectors in accordance previous terrorist groups: "…as it generally followed the jihadist insurgency model while active, we can expect the [anti-DAPL activists] who fought for and supported it to follow a post-insurgency model after its collapse" (Porter). By likening the Water Protectors to past jihadist movements encountered in the Middle East, TigerSwan operatives create a state discourse by which power can register and, more importantly, predict the movements of race radical groups.

These contemporary examples of how power's response to radicalism relies on the politics of fearing the unknown underscore the significance of texts such as *Indian Killer* and *Bush Mama*. These works, separated by decades and working on different mediums, encapsulate the possibility of radical subjectivity that steers towards, rather than strives to avoid, the critical rupturing power of horror. By doing so, Alexie and Gerima imagine new planes of existence in which Black and Native subjects can remove themselves from positionalities always under subjugation of power. These narratives avoid the terms of victimry by re-staging the act of violence and sacrifice outside the scope of Western political discourse. Horror opens their stories to the "chaos" of non-Western political theory, a landscape dictated by alternative forms of knowledge and latent with new possibility.

# CONCLUSION:
# THINKING HORROR

"It is key that we begin to treat the sense of being out of place that many of us confront as not simply some *horror* to be bemoaned, but instead as one of the structuring—and generative—realities underwriting the most potentially productive of our efforts."

– Robert F. Reid-Pharr, *Archives of Flesh* (emphasis mine)

Over the course of this project, we have observed how Black and Native writers find possibility in deploying horror as the lens through which to represent their experience. The at-times distorting image of life that these pieces present the audience—distorting in that they fail to match what we might call a normative, universal reflection of the world writ large—make real the myriad of invisible forces seeking to sublimate the traces of racial violence that compose the current system of inequality. Thinking horror as a hermeneutic through which the invisible becomes visible is not as simple as a process of reversal; instead, horror as I have defined it allows for the ruptured space through which Black and Native artists might conduct their own renegotiations of experience and identity. Horror resists the weight of representation, of reflecting life of the subjugated in ways that only capture the bleak existence of living under white supremacy. Instead, the horror depicted in this dissertation disrupts—in ways sometimes brutal or shocking—with the intent of forging something new.

At its center, "Unsettling Racial Capitalism" argues for the re-appraisal of horror as a critical framework, as a mode of thought capable of addressing the complications of experience and thought in unique and relevant ways. Relegating intellectual work surrounding horror to the mere discussion of genre underserves those artists and scholars using the form as a medium to express larger, critical ideas. That is to say, all too often the scholarly discussion of horror reads as a half-hearted "defense" of lowbrow media that reifies

the arbitrary lines between high and low art. Such discussions mainly serve to bring horror back to the center, to make apologies for its violent and gratuitous characteristics by insisting on its other, more critical values.

Rather than re-reading horror films or novels for the sake of academic novelty or as a justification of low culture, this project has asked the question of what it would mean to take horror seriously as a hermeneutic. Doing so means thinking beyond a "defense of horror" and instead positing how the work of horrific art has and continues to inform other forms of expression. Such an interpretation simultaneously re-ascribes agency to those Black and Native artists that deploy shocking aesthetics in their work: horror ceases to become a Western genre one can re-appropriate and instead becomes a critical tool capable of being utilized within culturally unique expressive traditions. This shift in thinking carries radical possibilities. For example, developing a new reading practice of disturbing and shocking media produced by authors of color invigorates old discussions surrounding issues of race and resistance. To wit, as this dissertation has demonstrated, once we read work for its deployment of horror, we allow for new understandings of concepts such as violence and agency, terms that power uses in order to dictate conditions of subjugation. While this project has used this de-ordering mechanism to respond to the terms of racial capitalism, other kinds of over-arching categories and borders of knowledge remain to be interrogated. To that point, "Unsettling" sets the stage for future re-configurations of ordered-terms as dictated by hegemony, such as gender, sexuality, and disability. In every case, the de-stabilization of power's rationale allows for the amplification of those voices previously silenced or otherwise made to feel irrelevant.

The comparative nature of this dissertation has likewise sought to re-think how we as scholars normally approach the discussion of multiple ethnic canons. My parallel comparative framework finds meaning in holding both the African American and Native American canons side by side as individual traditions. This is not to refuse the significance of examining the cooperative relationship that Black and Native communities have shared at various historical moments with both each other and other American ethnic groups. That being said, this project has sought for an ethical comparative framework that rejects the at times tokenizing, minimalizing gesture that is multiethnic studies. The determination to study these works as uniquely African American and Native American texts promotes the intellectual means of production for both communities. The Black and Native canons cease to be defined through their marginalization or dependency on a larger, American—read as white—canon; they stand as expressive forms with their own traits and histories. Such an approach contrasts with the state's efforts to commoditize what it conceives of as "diversity." The watered down study of Minority literature as a totalizing category only serves to reify the means of subjugation these projects supposedly criticize. Observing how separate canons approach the problem of racial capitalism in ways both similar and distinct gives the window to freedom struggles that, while in conversation with each other and others, develop and progress by their own intellectual means. To study these canons is to honor how these traditions persist in the face of subjugation and find new ways to represent experience.

Finally, "Unsettling Racial Capitalism" encourages scholars working in the field of ethnic literature to recognize the impact that the normalized terms of order might have over their own projects. With each chaotic rendering of experience under racial capitalism, the texts of this dissertation have reminded us of the plethora of ways that power seeks to control

the rationale through which the general public comes to understand issues of race. In that same vein, we as critics must approach with skepticism any argument that seeks to limit the radical capacity of subjects of color by placing them into an irreconcilable antagonism with society. These intellectual movements fail to see the possibility of a Black or Native-led resistance due to an inability to imagine a world free of the same capitalist plane of existence these arguments claim to be railing against. This failure of imagination leads to visions of radicalism that lack any visualization of the future. For example, Afro-pessimism's declarations to tear down the societal structures that, it argues, have fixed the Black body as an ontologically dead subject ring hollow, if only because these projects choose to write from within that same structure and its Westnocentric definitions of the human in order to come to their conclusion. Consequently, their calls for a mass deconstruction come off more as surrender than as a call to arms. We see the same issue materialize in texts arguing for an assimilation-based indigenous movement that prioritizes partnerships with those state institutions responsible for their subjugation. These critics pose as anti-essentialist pragmatists vying for sustainable indigenous social action. Ultimately, however, these projects overlook the tradition of radical ideology and futurist practices that serve as the foundation of indigenous knowledge. All of these critics, working from within their respective cultural fields, reject the viability of resistance to racial capitalism and, as a consequence, find themselves as unwitting examples of power's successful efforts to secure the rationale of race. The development of radical reading practices—such as the one I have posited in "Unsettling Racial Capitalism"—is a necessary component to achieving truly sustainable gains in the struggle for freedom for all communities.

**Coda**

The first horror film I remember watching with any real clarity was director Ernest R. Dickerson's *Tales From the Crypt Presents: Demon Knight* (1995), a pulpy send up of zombie and supernatural movies with echoes of both George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* (1981). I recall the tingling sensation of dread I felt as I watched bloodthirsty minions of hell creep up a decrepit staircase and close in on a group of human survivors. I also remember viewing most of the film from behind the palm of my hand, which I threw up in self-defense any time the sound of rising violins signaled a new threat. I can hear my sisters entreating me to watch, still feel my mother's tapping on my shoulder to inform me when it was "safe" to look again.

I also remember trying to sleep that same night, alone in the pitch-black of my room. My fear of the dark was tied to the near-certainty that those same flesh-hungry creatures of *Demon Knight* were just below the foot of my bed, waiting for my defenses to fall before they grabbed and pulled me under. Every creak from my family's house was just another piece of evidence that the horde of demons was lying in wait, patient and unrelenting. My imagination was able to paint upon the blackened space of my bedroom a variety of misshapen, threatening bodies lurking in every corner and just behind every surface. The only saving grace I had was the mile-long dash to the light switch by my door, where, no doubt, any hand or claw would be waiting to pull me into a dozen rows of sharp teeth. On that particular night, the realm of possibility that horror revealed to my young mind paralyzed me. It was only much later that I began to interrogate that paralysis and seek out its utility in the struggle of equality.

There, in that pitch black, I was frightened of the indescribable, of that lurking just beyond the scope of recognition. I am not afraid of those things anymore.

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