



## CRITICAL FABULATION: SOUNDING THE SILENCE OF BURNED ARCHIVE

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### Abstract:

The inquiry into the archive in an age of epistemic anxiety requires a radical ontological shift from the petrified document to the fluidities of the somatic *repertoire*. This research interrogates the burned archive, a site of spectral absence where the written trace has been systematically immolated by colonial and patriarchal hegemony, by situating the crisis of historical evidence within the liminal spaces of the African Diaspora. In this vein, the current study engages with the visceral textures of Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* and the archival interrogations of Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, two seminal works that navigate the aporia of the unrecorded. While Jones explores the transgenerational transmission of trauma through the blues-voice as a vessel for history when the physical record is reduced to ash, Hartman navigates the state's forensic remains to reclaim the subversive vitality of those rendered as mere data points. Although scholarship has extensively parsed these texts through lenses of trauma and intersectionality, a profound methodological lacuna remains regarding the specific mechanics of the aural trace as a rigorous historical foundation. This exegesis postulates that the epistemic anxiety of the present can only be resolved by acknowledging the song and the wayward gesture as legitimate archival deposits. Accordingly, the main interrogation that emerges is: How does the synthesis of critical fabulation and the aural repertoire reformulate the archive as a site of ontological resistance rather than a monument to erasure? To address this, the current analytical proposes to bridge the silences of the state record through disciplined imagination and narrative reconstruction. To do so, a comparative methodological framework anchored in critical fabulation is essential. This cross-textual instrument will contribute to examining the issues of historiographical recovery and somatic memory. Despite these significant roles, this method must be cautiously applied, as it risks the ethical peril of over-ventriloquizing

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the subaltern subject and blurring the boundary between empirical fact and speculative recovery. Consequently, this project unfolds across two analytical trajectories: Anatomy of Archival Violence and Resonance of the Repertoire.

**Keywords:** performance; somatic memory; epistemic justice; aural repertoire; historiographical erasure

## 1. Introduction

The contemporary epoch is haunted by a pervasive epistemic anxiety, a state of cognitive and historical restlessness born from the realization that the official archive is not merely a repository of facts but a localized site of systematic erasure. To engage with the archive in the context of the African Diaspora is to confront a Burned Archive, a landscape where the document has been immolated by the fires of colonial hegemony and the acidic silences of patriarchal structures. This analytical exercise interrogates the radical possibility of historical recovery through a comparative analysis of Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* (1975) and Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*<sup>ii</sup> (2019). In the former, the protagonist Ursa navigates a genealogy where the song becomes the only durable vessel for a history of trauma. The scholarly landscape surrounding this archival trace is vast, yet it remains fractured by the tension between empirical rigor and speculative necessity. A chronological and argumentative survey of this theoretical architecture reveals a progressive deepening of archival skepticism, tracing how scholars have reconfigured the archive from a physical building into a somatic, aural, and speculative repertoire.

This dismantling of archival stability begins with Michel Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), which first disrupted the archive's stability by defining it not as a passive warehouse of facts, but as the very system of discursivity that limits what can be said in a given era. However, his framework remains strictly Eurocentric, establishing a major lacuna by failing to account for the racialized silences inherent in colonial records. As the field progressed, theorists began naming the specific mechanisms of racialized and gendered violence operating within these dominant systems of documentation. Hortense Spillers, in "*Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book*" (1987), directly addresses the Eurocentric lacuna by exposing the violent bookkeeping of transatlantic slavery, arguing that the Black female body is trapped in a paradox where it is simultaneously over-documented as property, cargo, and labor, yet entirely invisibilized by the dominant legal and social lexicon. Jacques Derrida, in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1995), introduces a vital psychological dimension to this erasure, theorizing the archive drive as an internal contradiction defined by a frantic desire for preservation working alongside a quiet death drive toward destruction. Yet, while conceptually useful, Derrida remains trapped in the abstract psychic realm rather than engaging with the material-historical realities of colonial violence.

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<sup>ii</sup> For any other references to the corpus (*Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*), we will use *WLBB*.

The late 1990s marked a shift toward a distinct postcolonial archival ethics, anchoring archival skepticism back into concrete history to interrogate how state power actively manufactures historical absences. Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995) famously argues that silences are not passive errors but are actively baked into the very process of historical mention, creation, and assembly, though his focus remains largely restricted to political macro-events like the Haitian Revolution. Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection* (1997) bridges Trouillot's macro-critique with Spillers's focus on the gendered captive body, directly interrogates the structural violence of the archive itself, and reveals how the enslaved subject is repeatedly violated and objectified through the voyeuristic and cold language of the legal and carceral record. This is augmented by Achille Mbembe's "*The Power of the Archive and its Limits*" (2002), which adds a stark necropolitical dimension to this evolution by defining the archive as a physical and symbolic tool of state sovereignty used to determine who is deemed memorable and who is cast away as disposable dross.

By 2003, the field underwent a massive paradigm shift, moving away from textual dependence to locate alternative archives within the body, sound, and space. Brent Hayes Edwards's *The Practice of Diaspora* (2003) begins this transition by identifying *décalage*, the inevitable gap, discrepancy, or friction in translation and communication across geographies, not as a failure of history, but as a highly productive archival site where diasporic radicalism lives. Fred Moten, in *In the Break* (2003), shifts the analytical focus entirely to the acoustic realm, arguing that Black radicalism is structurally located in the phonographic resistance of the voice, using sound to disrupt and break through standard Western archival containment. Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003) formalizes this sensory turn by splitting historical transmission into the textually dependent archive and the performance-driven repertoire, establishing embodied practices and spoken words as rigorous historical methodologies, though her work occasionally underestimates the enduring, structural power that the written document continues to wield. Katherine McKittrick's *Demonic Grounds* (2006) spatializes this bodily turn by mapping the unique geography of Black women's experiences, arguing that because their lives are systematically unarchived in traditional brick-and-mortar institutions, Black women creatively produce entirely new spatial histories and geographies of survival.

In the last decade, the field has reached a fever pitch of sophistication, culminating in ethical frameworks that read colonial records against the grain to achieve radical historical recovery. Ann Laura Stoler, in *Along the Archival Grain* (2009), advances the methodology by reading colonial records for their internal anxieties, treating imperial paperwork not as a monument of absolute control, but as a site of vulnerability, doubt, and state fracture. Tina Campt's *Image Matters* (2012) expands this sensory toolkit by introducing the haptic archive, demonstrating that history can be actively felt and heard in the very texture, gaze, and material presence of vernacular photographs of Black Europeans. Alexander Weheliye's *Habeas Viscus* (2014) deepens this visceral critique by theorizing the flesh, as distinct from the legally sanctioned, Western definition of the body, as a primary site of archival memory that inherently precedes and resists state-

sanctioned definitions. Lisa Lowe's *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015) provides a sweeping global bridge to this somatic turn, linking disparate colonial archives across oceans to map the intertwined networks of capitalism and settlement, though her vast global macro-scope sometimes obscures individual, localized agency.

The apex of this ethical turn is reached through methodologies that directly transform the violence of colonial documents into the primary site of inquiry. Marisa Fuentes's *Dispossessed Lives* (2016) demonstrates the practical execution of these theories by modeling how to read against the bias of the carceral archive to reconstruct the lives of enslaved women. Alongside her, Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016) theorizes wake work as an ongoing ethical necessity, creating a conceptual mode of living with, defending, and articulating Black life in the ongoing aftermath of transatlantic slavery. Finally, Jessica Marie Johnson's *Wicked Flesh* (2020) pushes the field into its newest frontier, utilizing digital humanities and intimacy-based methods to reclaim the Black feminine archive in the early Atlantic world, though her work highlights a new contemporary tension by risking the limit of digital decontextualization, where fragments can become severed from their historical weight.

When organized chronologically, the theoretical arc demonstrates a profound paradigm shift in how humans know what they have forgotten. The scholarly trajectory has successfully wrestled the archive away from the physical, colonial building and reconfigured it into a somatic and aural repertoire. From Foucault's initial systemic questioning to Jones's preservation through song, and finally to Hartman's intimate reconstruction of carceral dross, the field proves that while the official document may be immolated, the history of the diaspora remains indelibly written on the flesh, in the voice, and in the speculative gaps of the wake.

As this foundational theoretical architecture matured, a parallel lineage of specialized literary and historical critiques emerged to grapple directly with the narrative mechanics of Jones's and Hartman's texts. Analyzing these targeted studies chronologically reveals how scholars have gradually shifted from structural evaluations of trauma toward complex structural, somatic, and environmental readings. Initial critical engagements with Jones's work laid the groundwork for reading the text as an intervention into the limits of historical documentation. Christina Sharpe, in "Gayl Jones' *Corregidora* and 'Days That Were Pages of Hysteria'" (2005), initiated this trajectory by examining how *Corregidora* engages with days that were pages of hysteria, demonstrating how trauma translates from a historical condition into a psychological syntax that challenges traditional slave narratives. Shifting the focus toward spatial and musical topographies, Tina Harpin, "L'horreur au cœur de l'autorité des mères: l'inceste dans *Corregidora* de Gayl Jones, révision et création" (2013), dissected the horrors at the heart of maternal authority and incest in the novel, highlighting how maternal legacy can twist into its own authoritative archive. This was expanded by María Rocío Cobo Piñero "Corregidora and Song for Anninho: Historical Revision, Female Diaspora, and Music" (2014), who positioned Jones's *Corregidora* and *Song for Anninho* within a broader geography of the female diaspora, highlighting music as a primary mechanism of historical revision.

By the current decade, scholarship on Jones expanded into property politics, encyclopedic categorization, and ecocriticism. Dhiffaf Ibrahim Al-shwillay, in "Property and Possession in Gayl Jones's Novel *Corregidora*: A Study in African American Literature and Literary Theory" (2021), interrogated the legal and ontological dimensions of property and possession in the novel, exposing how the legacy of commodification strains Black female subjecthood. Concurrently, Sharada Balachandran Orihuela's "Jones, Gayl" (2022) offered a comprehensive synthesis of Jones's broader oeuvre, mapping her unique contribution to contemporary American fiction through her singular focus on systemic violence and historical memory. Most recently, in her "(Re)Making Generations: Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* and Black Women's Ecologies" (2025), Carlyn Ena Ferrari opened an entirely new critical frontier by reading the novel through an ecocritical lens, analyzing how generational trauma is entangled with Black women's ecologies and physical environments. Collectively, these works illuminate the rich thematic textures of Jones's prose; however, they often treat the aurality of the blues as a metaphorical trope rather than a concrete, empirical alternative to the written record.

A parallel critical evolution marks the reception of Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*. Immediately following its publication, Eddie Bruce-Jones's "Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval" (2020) highlighted the book's capacity to render intimate histories of social upheaval, underscoring its disruption of conventional biographical forms. Scholars quickly began to deconstruct Hartman's unique subcultural topographies. Christopher J. Smith, in his work "Wayward Lives and Beautiful Experiments: Sex, Dance, Jazz and Gender in the World of the Pre-WWII 'chorus Girl'" (2022), focused on the specific spaces of sex, dance, and jazz within the pre-WWII World of the chorus girl, locating historical agency in Black vernacular movement. This methodology was soon mirrored in visual and narrative critiques like that of Marielle Tomasic ("Hall and Hugo Martínez' Wake: The Hidden History of Women-Led Slave Revolts," 2023), who read graphic narratives alongside Hartman's ethos to recover the hidden history of women-led slave revolts.

By mid-decade, international scholarship began to theorize the global and philosophical foundations of Hartman's approach. Olive J. Casey's "Imagining the (Extra)ordinary: History Without Archives in Saidiya Hartman's *Critical Fabulation*" (2025) contextualized Hartman's practice within German African Studies, analyzing how critical fabulation constructs a history without archives by elevating ordinary lives to extraordinary importance. Concurrently, Ariane d'Hoop and Nathalie Grandjean, in their work "Une histoire de la traite esclavagiste: dramatiser la perte, fabuler les vies perdues" (2025), extended this critique into the Francophone theoretical space, framing Hartman's work as a dramatization of loss that fabulates lost lives to counteract the structural absences left by the transatlantic slave trade. While these scholars successfully validate Hartman's poetic interventions, they frequently hit a wall: they celebrate the subversion of state records but stop short of providing a reproducible method for verifying the historical weight of these fabulations.

While the above works provide an indispensable roadmap, they collectively encounter a limit: They often describe the silence without providing a reproducible

method for sounding it without lapsing into pure fiction. This methodological aporia constitutes the problem of this inquiry: the persistent failure of traditional historiography to integrate the aural trace as an empirical foundation. Thus, the central interrogation emerges: To what extent does the comparative interplay between critical fabulation and aural resonance reformulate the archive as a site of ontological resistance rather than a monument to erasure?

The objective of this analytical investigation is to establish a decolonized archival protocol that validates the repertoire as a primary historical source. To achieve this, the present critical reflection deploys the method of comparative critical fabulation, a framework primarily rooted in the works of Saidiya Hartman (*Venus in Two Acts*, 2008) and Paul Ricoeur (*Memory, History, Forgetting*, 2004). Hartman provides the creative-forensic tools to bridge archival gaps, while Ricoeur offers the philosophical bridge between historical intention and poetic truth. However, this method must be cautiously applied, as it risks the ethical peril of narrative ventriloquism, where the researcher may inadvertently overwrite the silence of the subaltern with their own contemporary anxieties. As to the analytical trajectory, it is organized into two movements: the first section scrutinizes the Anatomy of Archival Violence across both texts, while the second explores the Resonance of the Repertoire as a sovereign counter-history.

## 2. Anatomy of Archival Violence

This stage is interested in demonstrating how Jones and Hartman map the void, not as a *tabula rasa*, but as a spectral, pulsating presence that dictates the very condition of the diasporic subject. The archive, far from being a neutral repository, functions as a technology of oblivion that thrives on what Michel-Rolph Trouillot identifies as the silences inherent in historical production. In his foundational work *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot posits that history is the fruit of power, but power itself is never so influential as when it is disguised as a silence:

*"The role [of the] historian is to reveal the past, to discover or, at least, approximate the truth. Within that viewpoint, power is unproblematic, irrelevant to the construction of the narrative as such. At best, history is a story about power, a story about those who won. The proposition that history is another form of fiction is almost as old as history itself, and the arguments used to defend it have varied greatly."* (Trouillot, 1995, 5)

By emphasizing that power operates most effectively when masked, Trouillot dismantles the positivist illusion of the historian as an objective excavator of empirical truth. He reveals that the historical apparatus functions as a highly selective machinery of triage, achieving longevity not merely through the loud celebration of victories, but through the quiet, systematic erasure of the subaltern's presence. Indeed, within the context of the Middle Passage and its long afterlives, this structural silencing means that the official record is inherently weaponized against the marginalized, rendering the traditional archive an untrustworthy site for recovering subaltern subjectivities.

When aligned with the literary and historical interventions of both Jones and Hartman, Trouillot's theoretical framework illuminates the precise narrative techniques by which the burned archive or the carceral file functions. Here, silence is not a passive omission, but an active weapon of subjugation. By applying Trouillot's insights to the narratives, the critic realizes that the gaps within the official record are not empty spaces awaiting empirical filling, but are aggressive expressions of sovereign authority. This philosophical underpinning is vital to deciphering the systemic management of the invisible, mandating a radical analytical shift toward a somatic and speculative engagement with the past. This violent dynamic is vividly crystallized in Jones's *Corregidora*. The deliberate incineration of plantation records by the patriarch Corregidora following the abolition of slavery in Brazil is a teleological maneuver designed to perpetuate the status of property by immolating the legal evidence of his crimes. This destruction forces a radical displacement of history from paper to the lived tissue of the subaltern, an existential condition captured by the maternal injunction that haunts the narrative:

*"They burned all the documents, Ursa, but they couldn't burn what they put in their minds. We got to burn out what they put in our minds, like you burn out a wound. Except we got to keep what we need to bear witness. That scar that's left to bear witness. We got to keep it as visible as our blood."* (Jones, 1975, 72)

Clearly, by framing the psyche and the womb as surrogate repositories for a crime stripped of material evidence, Jones's text illustrates how the somatic archive functions as the ultimate site of ontological resistance. The master's fire successfully purges the state registries of Imperial Brazil, yet it inadvertently converts the bodies of the Corregidora women into living testaments of exploitation, transforming a physical scar into an unyielding historical monument. The dialectic between the charred document and the resilient psyche thus becomes the primary site of sovereign struggle. Through the lens of critical fabulation, this text-to-body transference shows that the complete absence of empirical documentation does not result in a narrative vacuum, but rather in a haunting, spectral presence that dictates the rhythms of the present. The destruction of paper transposes the past into a visceral dimension, compelling Ursa to become the living archive of an unrecorded violence. Because the written word has been weaponized through its sudden, state-sanctioned withdrawal, the act of bearing witness is detached from Western jurisprudence and reinscribed within the blues performance and oral lineage. The traumatic scar becomes a highly visible, alternative text that refuses to be digested or erased by patriarchal flames. Obviously, these textual figures ensure that the memory of the crime survives the death of the document.

In a parallel methodological trajectory, Hartman, in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019), scrutinizes a distinct yet equally corrosive form of archival violence, that is to say the violence of reductive documentation. If Jones's book deals with the void through subtraction (the fire), Hartman's text depicts it through a saturated distortion fueled by the carceral gaze. Her work reveals: *"Everyone has a different story to share."*

*Fragments of her life are woven with the stories of girls resembling her and girls nothing like her, stories held together by longing, betrayal, lies, and disappointment"* (Hartman, 2019, p. 13). Notably, Hartman shifts the diagnostic focus of archival violence from the totalizing erasure of the flame to the suffocating saturation of the state-sanctioned gaze. This observation underscores that even when the archive exists, it is structured by an epistemic violence that recognizes the Black subject only through the lens of deviance, pathology, or commodity. The wayward life is thus suffocated by the taxonomic language of early twentieth-century sociology, which archives the body only to condemn the soul.

To counter this diagnostic violence, Hartman uses the methodology of critical fabulation, a practice that deliberately reads against the grain of the carceral file to imagine the rich internal lives of those otherwise cataloged as mere statistics. Where Jones must fabulate a history out of absolute material nothingness, Hartman must strip away the layers of institutional slander to rescue the subject's humanity from the very files that claim to document them. The longing, betrayal, lies, and disappointment that thread those fragments together are not the clinical findings of a sociologist, but the affective currents that Hartman uncovers by listening closely to the omissions and murmurs embedded within the official state apparatus.

In essence, the comparative nexus between both works is rooted in the management of the invisible, where the critic and protagonist are confronted with a fundamental impossibility of empirical capture. This aporia deeply resonates with Jacques Derrida's theorization in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, where he maintains,

*"The concept of the archive shelters in itself, of course, this memory of the name arkhè. But it also shelters itself from this memory which it shelters: which comes down to saying also that it forgets it. There is nothing accidental or surprising about this. Contrary to the impression one often has, such a concept is not easy to archive."* (Derrida, 1995, 2)

In other words, Derrida's deconstructive insights provide the critical vocabulary for analyzing the structural instability and self-consuming nature of the historical repository. When he discloses that the archive is fundamentally haunted by its own internal death drive (*thanatos*), he reveals that the very act of institutionalizing a memory implies a removal of that memory from lived experience, creating a reliance on an externalized substrate that is always already vulnerable to destruction and structural forgetting.

This philosophical aporia manifests directly in the structural anxieties that populate the works of Jones and Hartman. In *Corregidora*, the master's frantic burning of the documents perfectly exemplifies this Derridean death drive; the patriarch seeks to shelter his legacy by destroying the evidence of its violent formation, transforming silence into a totalizing law. Meanwhile, Hartman's engagement with the sociological record exposes the inverse of this dynamic, where the institutional effort to shelter social order results in the total erasure of the wayward subject's interiority. The violent



omissions encountered by both Ursa and Hartman's urban chorus are not accidental glitches in the system, but are instead the inevitable, destructive expressions of the *arkhè* trying to maintain its sovereign purity.

Further, an analysis of this violent anatomy requires a precise focus on how the silence of the carceral record is fractured by the reconstruction of gestures, glances, and the errancy of young Black women. Hartman outlines this speculative cartography during her own archival journey:

*"After a year spent looking at a colored girl, posed in the nude, on an old horsehair sofa, I decided to retrace her steps through the city and imagine her many lives. Following in her footsteps and in [those] of other young black women in the city, I made my way through the Black Belts of Philadelphia and New York, the neighborhoods and black quarters named after their inhabitants, Little Africa and Nigger Heaven, or their aspirations, the Mecca and the City of Refuge. I traced the errant paths and the lines of flight [that] in the decades from 1890 [to] 1935 would enclose the boundaries of the black ghetto. In the end, it became not the story of one girl, but a serial biography of a generation, a portrait of the chorus, a moving picture of the wayward."* (Hartman, 2019, 31)

This passage is representative of a definitive break from traditional historiography that transitions into a methodology that transforms a passive, voyeuristic artifact, a nude photograph in a police file, into a dynamic site of collective liberation. By refusing to accept the static, pathologized framing of the individual document, Hartman uses the concept of the chorus to weave together individual lines of flight. This narrative strategy contributes to reconstructing an entire generation's collective rebellion against the structural enclosures of the emerging Black ghetto. When placed in a comparative nexus, Hartman's invocation of the chorus functions as a precise methodological parallel to Ursa's blues performance in *Corregidora*. Both the blues and the chorus operate as sonic and kinesthetic counter-measures against the threat of documentary nihilism. In other words, they are expressive strategies designed to animate the spaces where the official record offers nothing but a blank page or a criminal indictment.

While Jones's text uses the singular, that of the intergenerational voice of the *Corregidora* women to shatter the patriarch's totalizing silence, Hartman brings together the fragmented footsteps of an entire urban generation to construct a moving picture that defies the static confinement of the carceral gaze. Here, critical fabulation becomes the shared analytical engine that allows both authors to transform the cold, clinical static of the archive into an intelligible, sovereign historical melody. To further anchor this phenomenology of erasure, the critic must invoke the thought of Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Indeed, Fanon's phenomenological critique diagnoses the profound psychological and existential consequences of the historical obliteration executed by the colonial matrix: *"The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man. Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself"* (Fanon, 1952, p. 110).

Significantly, Fanon maps the exact mechanism of psychic alienation that occurs when an individual's independent historicity is systematically dismantled by the colonizer. By stripping the colonized subject of their autonomous lineage and forcing them to navigate a world structured entirely by the dominant gaze, the colonial authority ensures that the subaltern is kept in a state of perpetual ontological minority, unable to assert a self-determined identity outside of the master's predefined categories. This Fanonian diagnosis offers an essential interpretive lens for understanding the deep-seated genealogical haunting that tortures Ursa Corregidora. The literal burning of the archives described by Jones is the material execution of the very de-historicization Fanon theorizes; it strips Ursa of any objective, institutional proof of her lineage, leaving her to navigate an existence where her very biological being is the product of an erased, state-sanctioned crime.

As a result, she is forced to exist within an agonizing split between the internalized trauma of the plantation past and the cold, uncomprehending realities of her post-abolition present. This obliteration is precisely what Jones's book describes when Ursa realizes her own existence is the product of a rape systematically erased from the annals of Imperial Brazil. The burned archive is not merely a pile of ash; it is a mechanism of de-historicization intended to maintain the subject in a state of perpetual ontological minority, deprived of the right to proof and lineage.

Archival violence must be perceived not as a failure of preservation, but as a triumph of domination. Whether through the purifying fire of the patriarch in *Corregidora* or the sociological surveillance in *WLBE*, the archive functions as a filter that retains the condemnation while discarding the humanity. The documentary void is a deliberate construction designed to induce epistemic anxiety, stripping the colonized subject of the artifacts of their own existence. However, by exposing these structures of erasure, this exploration leads naturally to an interrogation of the modalities of the surviving trace. If the paper burns and the file slanders, the truth of the subject seeks refuge within the flesh and the voice. The analytical trajectory must now pivot from the mechanics of destruction to the phenomenology of resonance, examining how silence itself, far from being a vacuum, becomes the crucible for a new, sovereign memorial repertoire.

### 3. Resonance of the Repertoire

This critical movement pivots toward the reclamation of the trace through a phenomenology of resonance. Here, the analysis moves beyond the charred remains of the document to theorize the repertoire, a concept that shifts the burden of proof from the externalized artifact to the internalities of the body and the sonic. In the wake of archival immolation, Jones and Hartman propose a haptic historiography. This means a method of feeling the past through the vibrations of the blues and the kinetic energy of the wayward gesture. This perspective shows that the aural and the somatic do not merely supplement the missing record; they supersede it by establishing a sovereign epistemic domain that is immune to the master's fire.

To theorize this shift, it is relevant to engage with Diana Taylor's foundational distinction in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. In illustrating the divergence between enduring textual materials and the ephemeral transmission of lived experience, Taylor posits that "*the repertoire, whether in terms of verbal or nonverbal expression, participates in the production and transmission of knowledge by stored, embodied memory*" (Taylor, 2003, p. 20). Through this assertion, Taylor operates a crucial epistemological shift that reconfigures our understanding of historical memory. By opposing the static nature of the archive with the embodied practices of the repertoire, such as orality, dance, movement, and song, she validates forms of knowledge that deliberately evade dominant institutional structures. The body thus becomes an active vessel, a dynamic repository where memory is not merely preserved but constantly reactivated and transformed through performance.

This philosophical pivot is essential for comprehending what can be termed the "Blues-Archive" in *Corregidora*. When the physical evidence of the patriarch's crimes is reduced to ash, the transmission of history is outsourced to the vocal folds and the rhythm of the song. The blues song functions from then on as a somatic phonography, where the haunting of historical trauma is inscribed directly into the biological and artistic practices of the subject. This exact tension between archival erasure and vocal persistence manifests in the testimony of Gayl Jones's protagonist. This dynamic is brought to light in a paradigmatic passage from the novel:

*"You carry more than his name, Ursa, Mama would tell me. And I knew she had more than their memories. Something behind her eyes. But she'd speak only their life. What was their life then? Only a life spoken to the sounds of my breathing or a low-playing Victoria"* (Jones, 1975, 103)

This quotation highlights the way the blues acts as the very repertoire Taylor describes, a site of memory staged and re-enacted through every breath and vocal performance. The memory of generational trauma under slavery is not confined to a legible script; rather, it is transmitted intergenerationally through vocal inflections and the immediate acoustic environment. History becomes an atmospheric, breathed presence, a shared vibration between mother and daughter that fills the void left by the destruction of official records.

Accordingly, Ursa's preoccupation with the mandate to make generations and her obsession with her own voice cease to be mere aesthetic choices, revealing themselves instead as urgent archival imperatives. Unlike the static document, which remains inherently vulnerable to incineration, the blues repertoire establishes itself as a fluid, invulnerable archive that moves across generations. This method of sounding the past successfully defies the silence imposed by the state; it transforms the traumatic void into a sovereign, resonant presence.

Besides, this notion of the vocal archive finds a profound philosophical companion in Fred Moten's *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Moten theorizes the phonographic nature of Black performance, suggesting that the break or the scream

in Black music carries a historical weight that the written word simply cannot bear. To elucidate the tension between technological capture and the irreducibility of live performance, he observes:

*"The video – the piece now 'caught' and transferred to the archive – further accentuates the spectators' discomfort when suddenly faced with the disturbing spectacle of people locked in cages. Several people I've watched the video with felt angry at the intrusive video camera that 'outs' spectators as closet colonists or dupes. Sprung on the viewers to understand what they're seeing and their role in it. Most of us know all about imperfect responses, painful pauses, or delayed witticisms. But though it had been the artists' intention to create a pause for reflection in the live performance, this is the space that the video does not allow for."* (Moten, 2003, 74)

Through this analysis, Moten reveals the violence inherent in the archive's attempt to freeze living movement into a visual or textual record. The camera, much like the colonial ledger, attempts to capture and objectify bodies, but in doing so, it eliminates the space for the pause, reflection, and unpredictability native to live performance. The spectators' discomfort when faced with the technical archive underscores the ethical and ontological distance separating lived experience from institutional recording. Applying Moten's thought to the novel *Corregidora*, the critic can discover that Ursa's blues is precisely the scream that persists after the master's ledger has been burned. This constitutes a radical historiographical method that prioritizes the acoustic frequency of trauma over the visual certainty of the record. Sound becomes the sanctuary where the irreducible historical truth of the subaltern subject takes refuge.

Transitioning to Hartman's *WLBE* (2019), the critic encounters a similar archival reclamation through the concept of the "Chorus." For Hartman, the archive of the wayward is not located in a singular, isolated biography, but in the collective, kinetic movement of young Black women in the urban North. Illustrating this difficult quest for existence against systemic oppression, the historian writes:

*"When the water in the building has stopped running, when even in her best dress she cannot help but wonder if she smells like the outhouse or it is obvious that her bloomers are tattered, when she is so hungry that the aroma of bean soup wafting from the settlement kitchen makes her mouth water, she takes to the streets, as if in search of the real city and not this poor imitation. The old black ladies perched in their windows shouted, 'Girl, where you headed?' Each deprivation raises doubts about when freedom is going to come."* (Hartman, 2019, 10)

This passage demonstrates how Hartman's chorus manifests as a direct realization of Taylor's repertoire. Memory and resistance are not written down; they unfold in the daily choreography of walking, in the refusal to succumb to material deprivation, and in the strategic occupation of the street. The shouts from the windows and the urban

wanderings form a tapestry of dissident desires that completely escapes the analytical grids of carceral sociology.

Moreover, Hartman's chorus thus functions as a haptic historiography, a history felt and lived through the flesh rather than read in official reports. This practice of inhabiting the streets becomes a living document that records a systematic refusal to be reduced to an object or a police statistic. This methodology aligns perfectly with Tina Campt's theorization in *Listening to Images*. Campt argues for a practice of feeling the frequency of the archive by listening to the quiet and the vibrations of those rendered invisible by the state. In explaining her method of analyzing neglected visual materials, Campt poses the following inquiry:

*"Do faceless images emit sound? If so, at what frequencies do they register? If not, what happened in and through their muteness? The quiet litany of the Gulu cutouts is, paradoxically, deafening. It resonates intensely as an effect of their seriality [...] I've been listening to images for years now. In Image Matters, listening to images meant attending to musical patterns, rhythms, and registers enacted in vernacular photographs of black European communities. My listening practices focused on the affective registers of black family photographs; on excavating the gendered narratives of diaspora captured in images of communities, often overlooked in many scholarly accounts."* (Campt, 2017, 23)

Campt's vital contribution lies in this paradoxical proposition: mute images and bodies relegated to the margins of history emit a sonic frequency that the researcher must learn to capture. By focusing on the vernacular rhythms and affective registers of family photographs, she proposes moving beyond simple visibility to engage in a deep listening of diasporic narratives. The silence of the archive becomes deafening to anyone who knows how to attune their ear to its serial resonances.

Along the same lines, Hartman's methodology in *Wayward Lives* is precisely this: she listens to the quiet and the unsaid of the archive, utilizing the rhythmic prose of the chorus to fill the gaps where the state record remains mute. In *Corregidora*, this haptic quality is rendered through the literal and metaphorical imperative of making generations. The female body establishes itself as the ultimate medium through which the archive is reproduced, materializing what Alexander Weheliye in *Habeas Viscus* (2014) calls the flesh as a site of archival memory, a repository of stories that the body-politic refuses to recognize. The memory of the *Corregidora* line becomes a spiritual and biological transmission, written into the very nerves and wombs of the descendants.

A comparative tension emerges between Hartman and Jones regarding the spatialization of this repertoire; while Jones's novel locates it in the internal resonance of the voice and the womb, Hartman's situates it in the external, collective choreographies of the city. Yet, both works fundamentally agree that the archive is a living thing, an echo that recalls Paul Ricoeur's distinction in *Memory, History, Forgetting* between *mnēmē* (passive memory that arrives unbidden) and *anamnēsis* (the active search for memory). Ricoeur posits that the poetics of memory is the only bridge to a past that has been

structurally erased, a poetics that both Hartman and Jones deploy to build a bridge across the burned archival void:

*"The distinction between mnēmē and anamnēsis rest on two things: on the one hand, the simple memory arises in the manner of affection, while recollection consists in an active search. On the other hand, the simple memory is under the dominion of the agent of the imprint, whereas movements and the entire sequence of changes that will be discussed have their principle in us."* (Ricoeur, 2004, 19)

By anchoring the "principle" of active recollection within the subject (*"in us"*), Ricoeur elevates memory from a site of passive trauma to an intentional, creative practice. For the African Diaspora, whose histories were violently expunged from the official state paper trail, relying on passive memory or the "agent of the imprint", which historically takes the shape of the slaveholder's ledger or the judicial transcript, is insufficient. Instead, Jones and Hartman deploy a deliberate poetics of memory as an *anamnesic* tool, meaning they do not merely wait for the past to inflict itself upon the present; rather, they actively search for it, transforming historical absence into a space of radical imagination and creative reclamation.

Furthermore, this active search manifests through a fascinating spatial divergence between the two authors that clarifies Ricoeur's distinction. For Jones, the *anamnesic* drive is deeply interiorized, localized within the sonic resonance of the blues voice and the biological lineage of the womb as an intimate, generational labor of keeping the "evidence" alive. Conversely, Hartman externalizes this practice, mapping the *anamnesic* impulse onto the collective, kinetic choreographies of the city streets so that the "principle in us" becomes a principle in *them*, a fugitive chorus reclaiming public space through movement and noise. Despite these differing geographies of memory, both authors bridge the burned archival void by proving that the past can be actively summoned and remade through the body. Nevertheless, it is essential to address a nuanced limitation to this conceptualization of the repertoire-as-archive, because as Diana Taylor notes, the repertoire remains inherently vulnerable to the passage of time and the physical disappearance of the performer:

*"The repertoire, on the other hand, enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing -in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproductive knowledge... The repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there,' being a part of the transmission. As opposed to the supposedly stable objects in the archive, the actions in the repertoire do not remain the same. The repertoire keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning."* (Taylor, 2004, 20)

Taylor's insistence that the repertoire "requires presence" exposes the inherent precarity at the heart of both *Corregidora* and Hartman's historical critiques. Because embodied knowledge resists the fixed, fossilized nature of "stable objects," it is

fundamentally dependent on the survival of the performer, functioning as a fluid mutability that allows the repertoire to “transform choreographies of meaning,” making it a dynamic tool for survival. However, this reliance on presence also leaves it dangerously exposed to the violent interruptions of history, as it cannot be stored on a shelf to be examined centuries later, but hinges entirely on continuous enactment and transmission.

Consequently, this vulnerability triggers the central crises in both texts, as seen when Ursa’s forced hysterectomy in *Corregidora* signifies the loss of her biological archival capacity and creates a profound crisis of *anamnesis*; she fears that without the physical “evidence” of a child, the history will vanish entirely. Hartman, too, acknowledges this fragile nature of the chorus, identifying it as a fugitive archive that exists only in the fleeting moment of its enactment. Therefore, this precarity suggests that while the repertoire provides a sovereign resistance to the state, it remains a haunted archive, always on the verge of slipping back into the silence from which it emerged.

Shortly, the resonance of the repertoire in the texts under consideration outlines a revolutionary historiography. It suggests that for the African Diaspora, the true archive is not held in the climate-controlled vaults of universities or government buildings, but is carried in the vibrations of the blues and the living chorus of the streets. By pairing Jones’s and Hartman’s creative art, the critic discovers a unified effort to sound the silences of history, proving that even when the papers are consumed by fire, the frequency of the past remains.

#### 4. Conclusion

The overarching trajectory of this inquiry was a teleological pursuit to reconfigure the archival apparatus from a site of static, petrified preservation to a dynamic, multidimensional field of ontological and historiographical struggle. By situating the pervasive phenomenon of epistemic anxiety within the comparative crucible of Gayl Jones’s *Corregidora* and Saidiya Hartman’s *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, this exegesis sought to delineate the transformative potential of Critical Fabulation as a foundational and rigorous methodology. The primary objective remained the subversion of the Burned Archive that state of profound documentary vacuity and spectral absence by validating the somatic, aural, and haptic registers as legitimate, sovereign epistemic deposits that precede and survive the written word.

Through the inaugural analysis of archival violence in the first section, the study unveiled a phenomenology of erasure where the void functions not as a mere passivity or simple lack of data, but as a deliberate architectural feature of colonial and patriarchal hegemony designed to induce a state of permanent historical homelessness. The findings suggest that the immolation of the document does not terminate the historical narrative; rather, it forces a radical transmutation of the trace from the paper into the very marrow and psyche of the subject. The transition from the void to the resonance in the second section demonstrated that the Black diasporic experience operates through a haptic historiography, where the repertoire, encompassing the blues, the collective scream, and

the subversive, wayward gesture, acts as a sophisticated, non-linear phonography. This investigation reveals that the archive is a living, vibrating entity, a chorus that persists within the static of carceral state records, thereby rendering the traditional, Eurocentric reliance on the building as the sole site of truth entirely obsolete.

The profound pertinence of the methodology used lies in its capacity to sound the silences that Trouillot, Mbembe, and Hartman identify as the deliberate graveyards of subaltern history. By bridging the structural aporia between the cold, forensic fragment of the official record and the disciplined, imaginative reconstruction of lived experience, this study demonstrates that critical fabulation is not a flight into fiction, but a commitment to a deeper, more ethical form of empirical truth. However, a rigorous critique of such a method has to acknowledge its inherent boundaries and ethical risks. The peril of narrative ventriloquism remains a formidable ghost; researchers, in their zeal to fill the archival silence, risk overwriting the historical subject with contemporary ideological desires, potentially committing a secondary act of epistemic violence by silencing the ancestor once more under the guise of recovery. Furthermore, the reliance on the repertoire introduces an archival precariousness, a fragility where the history is only as durable as the somatic performance itself, constantly threatened by the temporal erosion of memory.

Emerging from the above limitations are radical and highly innovative perspectives that promise to redefine the future of the historical discipline. This critical reflection encourages a shift toward bio-archival theory, which would explore the potential of epigenetic memory and the molecular trace as a site of historical transmission that remains encoded in the flesh, surviving even the most absolute physical destructions of the ledger. Simultaneously, the burgeoning intersection of digital humanities and critical fabulation offers a provocative frontier: the development of algorithmic waywardness to simulate the resonance of the chorus through computational frequency and pattern recognition of historical static. By moving beyond the binary of the paper and the voice, and embracing a quantum historiography, where the past exists in multiple states of potentiality, absence, and spectral presence simultaneously, the critic can finally dismantle the physical and conceptual building of the archive.

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### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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