

The Past isn't What

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What happens if we consider recollection not as an act of gripping history, but as a political, performative act of doing the world anew? In her recent book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*, Saidiya Hartman re-enacts the lives and ways of young black women in urban United States around the beginning of the 20th century.¹ She finds her characters in an archive of newspapers, trial notes, prison reports, social workers' writings and interviews with psychiatrists and psychologists. In these official records, their stories are often reduced to depictions of criminality, helplessness or anonymity. Through a close narration, shifting between different focalizers, Hartman writes back what else these lives might or could have contained. Her "critical fabulation"² offers a way of making history that recreates lost or silenced stories. This also opens up the field of history to literary studies, making fiction and the study of fictionality essential to understanding the past. In this article, I show what this might mean specifically in terms of making new histories of protest, and what such histories can do to our conceptualizations of resistance.

The urgency of this scrutiny spurs from strains of contemporary feminist and postcolonial theory, which emphasize the necessity to conceptualize political being and doing in

terms of historical consciousness.³ While many of us want something else from the world than what has been given so far, the "break" with the past itself has recently been under scrutiny in feminist revolutionary thought. Theorists have pointed out how the idea of the singular, revolutionary Act tends to reinforce masculinist and colonialist imaginaries.⁴ This one revolutionary Event, performed by the singular (usually male) revolutionary subject, re-centers the very self-sufficient, liberal subject that much critical thought has tried to surpass.⁵

This article aims to conceptualize resistance in ways that stay attuned to the historical-political conditions of bodies in this world, yet still contain capacities of imagination. By accentuating Hartman's re-memorization through feminist ontologies of relationality, I attempt to formulate revolution away from the idea of the single Act. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* shows us how, if we recollect the past differently, we might remember new gestures of resistance.

The past isn't what it used to be

Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments practices the writing of "critical fabulation".⁶ Critical fabulation, for Hartman, is a methodology at the intersection of fiction, critical theory and archival research. Hartman explains how it is

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an "impossible writing which attempts to say that which resists being said (since dead girls are unable to speak). It is a history of an unrecoverable past; it is a narrative of what might have been or could have been; it is a history written with and against the archive".⁷ She argues that every historian writing the history of the subaltern needs to face the limits of the archive. What and whose stories were seen as worth keeping? Hartman proposes that the keeping of the past has left out other pasts.⁸ Furthermore, archives do not only contain histories of the past, but also dictate the practices of the present. If Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's classical essay asks: "Can the subaltern speak?"⁹ working towards a negative answer, Hartman departs directly from the impossibility: dead girls cannot speak. Though Hartman does not refer to Spivak, other scholars have made connections between the subalterns' Spivakian silence and the archival gaps conditioning critical fabulation. In a recently published dossier on "Afro-Fabulations"¹⁰ in the critical journal *Social Text*, Alex Pittman asks: "Can the Subaltern Fabulate?" and connects the practice of critical fabulation to Spivak's investigation of truth claims.¹¹ As this dossier demonstrates, Hartman's work in critical fabulation is both influencing, and a part of, a grander movement of contemporary critical black thought wrestling with telling new, forgotten or unimagi-

nable stories without again fixing the truth.¹²

For Hartman, this issue is framed around the question of how to fabulate stories that are on the verge of the un-fabulatable. She reasons that "[n]arrative restraint, the refusal to fill in the gaps and provide closure, is a requirement of this method".¹³ The struggle is to write about histories of violence without again closing the doors of what lost lives could/might have contained. *Wayward Lives* is thus not a correction of the past taking stage as the new ultimate truth. Rather, Hartman keeps certain possibilities alive for her protagonists. Her writing is filled with ambivalences and gaps, occupied with the would-bes, could-bes, might've-beens. Though Hartman cannot know exactly what was going on in the minds of her protagonists, her critical fabulation has another claim than a rigid true/false approach to history making. To declare to know the precise trajectories of her protagonists' lives, she would have to disallow what other possible lives they might have lived. Thus, her strategy is not to do away with the unimaginable, but to write close to its margins.

More important than to what extent the thoughts of Hartman's protagonists are rendered again precisely as they once were (which is not to say that they are not, but to say that we can "only" imagine), is that if these narratives were imagined away by previous historians, they can also be imagined back. Although what

has happened has happened, with Hartman, the past is not what it used to be.

Tending to matters of the past, what Avery Gordon would call ghostly matters, is not only to pay respect; it is to perform a vital, political consciousness.¹⁴ As Gordon puts it: "[t]o be haunted is to make choices within those spiraling determinations that make the present waver. To be haunted is to be tied to historical and social effects".¹⁵ Similarly, Christina Sharpe claims that thinking needs to remain "in the wake" of imperial, trans-Atlantic slavery.¹⁶ Here "the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present".¹⁷ The ongoing "afterlife of slavery"¹⁸ gathers up as a set of conditions that Sharpe names the Weather: "it registers and produces the conventions of anti-blackness in the present and into the future".¹⁹ This is a climate bound up with the past, following previous patterns of social history. At the same time, Sharpe's Weather also "necessitates changeability and improvisation; it is the atmospheric condition of time and place; it produces new ecologies".²⁰ If the Weather, and antiblackness as climate, undeniably transform the possibilities for black being, "the shipped, the held and those in the wake also produce out of the weather their own ecologies".²¹ Tending to this (re)production is what Sharpe calls wake work, an ongoing labor of (re)creation. A wake is at work in *Wayward Lives*, in the fabulation of (un)imaginable, lost, but once lived, lives.

Hartman's own project – imagining otherwise – also passes through the characters in several places. In one sequence, Hartman reads through a correspondence between a young couple living in Harlem in the early 1920s, Eva Perkins and Aaron Perkins. One night, as Eva is returning alone to their home, she is approached by police officers asking her to disclose information about a man she does not know. She does not give the officers what they want and they decide to charge her with the tenement house law; in "Harlem, the police snatched you first and found an excuse later".²² The Tenement House Act from 1901 addressed housing

conditions and was supposedly designed to ensure a minimum quality of the houses of the poor. However, the laws legitimized a surveillance of domestic life, as quality housing was associated with a certain lifestyle, while social unrest, crime and weak morals were associated with poor housing conditions. Thus, Hartman states that "[t]he Tenement House Law was the chief legal instrument for the surveillance and arrest of young black women as vagrants and prostitutes".²³ Eva's fate is intertwined with this surveillance tool. She is arrested and sent to a reformatory ("which was what you were supposed to call it, but she was a prisoner")²⁴ for 22 months. However, as Aaron is living in a rented room, not judged a "proper home", she is not allowed to return home after serving her time, but is sent to work as a domestic servant in upstate New York. Eva runs away, is caught after a few months, and ends up back at the reformatory. As she finds herself locked up again, Hartman revisits the letters from Aaron, fabulating how "if Eva resigned herself to the cruelty and deprivation and risked becoming complacent, an irate letter from Aaron reanimated her rage".²⁵ In their writings, the couple dreams of another future to come, "an elsewhere they would soon experience".²⁶ Hartman states that they were brave to still hope and love, while facing a world working against them. But she also speculates as to whether they could have found a way to imagine an escape away from the reformatory (or at least its logic), had they been able to stretch their fantasies of elsewhere even further. In Aaron's letters he states "I am going to get the house and I do not need any help [...] It will be a home for you. I will do this because it is my duty as a man."²⁷ However, not even a marriage certificate, the authorization of their (gender) relationship, allowed them to be together. Hartman points out how the domestic life of the white bourgeoisie was not designed for poor, black people, and suggests that even if Eva and Aaron imitated the white world's gestures, the white world would not spare them. Instead, she wonders, "[m]aybe if they could find their

way beyond this language of being a man and being a woman, this grammar of the human that regarded them both as monsters and deviants, and break free of a scheme never fashioned for them".²⁸ After all, Eva was arrested returning home late at night, underscored by the perception that it is inappropriate for women, especially young, black women, to stroll the streets alone at night. Eva and Aaron were resistant, wildly in love and with an unbending refusal to accept the injustices done to them. Yet, Hartman is wishing for them to dream of a more radical elsewhere. In this particular example she questions the white, bourgeoisie model of two sexes, where the man buys the house and the woman is saved into it. Hartman thus uses Eva and Aaron's story to question the task to assert human-ness (or fulfilling one's duty as a man), if inscribed in the human of liberal humanism there is already whiteness. She writes: "Hadn't they spent the last centuries asking: Am I human flesh? Am I not a man and a brother? Ain't I a woman?"²⁹ "They" is still grammatically referring to Eva and Aaron, but through these questions the couple is also tied to a genealogy of black resistance, extending back in time to the abolitionist motto and to Sojourner Truth's inquiry of womanhood. Hartman's proposal is to not demonstrate an affirmative answer to these three questions, but wishes for Eva and Aaron to, like some of her other protagonists do, "refuse the categories".³⁰ *Wayward Lives* does not tell of what happened next in the story of Eva and Aaron, if and how they were reunited. Presumably they disappeared from the archive. However, her critical fabulation still retells a part of one of their possible past, while simultaneously speculating about another. Thus, Hartman reaches back into the past, and into the past's past, to find other stories as well as to make claims for the need to further imagine.

The I is not that I anymore

Like Eva and Aaron is connected to a genealogy of black resistance, so is the rest of Hartman's

protagonists. Throughout *Wayward Lives* italicized phrases and fragments have replaced traditional footnotes, creating what Hartman names a "chorus" of poets, theorists and activists from different times. At the UK release of *Wayward Lives*, Hartman explained her chorus as the result of thinking about how her own writing is enabled by a range of previous writings; how "we are never alone on the page".³¹ It places her characters in an ensemble of radical voices. Furthermore, it accentuates how the possibility of speaking is always depending on preceding speech. According to Judith Butler, we come into subjectivity through the act of "speaking back" after having been spoken to.³² This foundational interdependency is also attached to an unavoidable touching and being touched, the possibility to affect and be affected.³³ Like speaking is indebted to foregoing speech, body language is indebted to foregoing gestures. For Butler, this constructs a vulnerability that has to do with an essentially relational subject, one created in inextricable entanglement with other(s). Butler's ontology is constructed around a from the start given over-ness, the incapacity of existing and growing without support. However, bodily vulnerability can only be understood in social and material relations, and any essential, ontological hurtability is entangled in architectures of sociality.³⁴ The I cannot appear disjointed from the social world, but is from the start and onwards inevitably tied to other(s). The I, then, is not that I anymore.

If the embodied subject acts within a set of social, political, historical, material as well as ontological and linguistic conditions, and its possibility to act depends on these, its acting is rather a kind of re-action. Butler argues that "even the most punctual and seemingly spontaneous act implicitly depends on an infrastructural condition that quite literally supports the acting body".³⁵ She proposes this idea against the masculinist, liberal idea of autonomous will, where change will be brought by a "singular subject of revolutionary

power”.³⁶ Through Hartman’s chorus we can emphasize the communality of action, more precisely protest action; Hartman’s being part of a movement that she adds to and twists, but that started before her and that surpasses her.

The chorus is also celebrated in Hartman’s chapter “The Beauty of the Chorus”, where the talented Mable Hampton joins a cabaret. Before joining, an affective experience of watching a performance spurs new possibilities in Mable. Hartman writes:

It was the ache of being alive in every part of her body and overtaken by this rush of sensation, by the awakening of perception. At that moment, she thought: I want to be up there. I can do that. It was a tangle of emotions hard to settle. Intuitively she knew that she was slipping into another arrangement of the possible.³⁷

Here, Hartman charges Mable with a wild kind of desire. As Mable slips “into another arrangement of the possible”, through the choreography of a collective of black performers, both the aesthetic and the affective dimensions of a better elsewhere appear. Mable’s reaction to the performance can be read as an acknowledgment of how (re)coordination happens fundamentally collectively. When she joins the cabaret, Mable flourishes with the multiple bodies in synchronized movement, which she experiences as a freedom kind of dance, the “*changing-same* of collective movement, the repetition, the improvisation of escape and subsidence”.³⁸ Improvisation of escape and repetition are placed together: what Amiri Baraka called *changing-same*. Mable watching the performance seems like another way to understand coming into being through meeting another, how the possibility to “improvisation of escape and subsidence” depends on collective, duplicatable choreographies of change.

Repetitive change appears also in Lisa Baraitser’s still times. She investigates what it means

to be in temporalities that seem still or stilled, modes of “waiting, staying, delaying, enduring, persisting, repeating, maintaining, preserving and remaining”.³⁹ She argues that “[n]ewness is neither breach nor rupture nor flash but the quiet noticing that something remains which is the permanent capacity to begin again”.⁴⁰ This too, is theorized against the notion of change as a singular, masculine Act of rupture. At the same time, repetitive or still modes of changeability might not have an antagonistic relationship with rupture – depending on how we understand rupture. Butler puts Baraitser’s suspended times together with the utopian glimpses of José Esteban Muñoz. Though Muñoz convincingly argues that we need new spatiotemporal ways of organizing the world, his not-yet potentialities can be glimpsed from within the here-and-now, as “the utopian is an impulse of the everyday”.⁴¹ Butler extracts from Muñoz the idea of “communicable excitation”,⁴² something which “holds the potential for solidarity in the service of utopia that is not an end to be realized, but an open-ended experiment in reconfiguring time and space”.⁴³ Communicable means extendable, repeatable, and thus grounds a staging that can take place, with iteration, again and again through time. Closing the gap between Muñoz’s glimpsing and Baraitser’s suspension, Butler claims that “maybe rupture is itself a form of repetition”.⁴⁴ Such a rupture-in-repetition can be explored through Hartman’s wayward women, and the riots that might have followed in their wake.

Other riots will follow in its wake

All young women in *Wayward Lives* are related through a shared trait of politically imposed vulnerability, and, relatedly, through a shared trait of beauty. This beauty “is a way of creating possibility in the space of enclosure”.⁴⁵ It is a utopian beauty, constructed through the achievement of existing in a world that makes hard

efforts against you. It is thus a beauty connected to an imposed vulnerability, the "terrible beauty of wayward lives" which acknowledges, paraphrasing Audre Lorde, "that *we were never meant to survive*, and yet we are still here".⁴⁶ However, Hartman also points out how politics of vulnerability are connected to politics of policing. Her protagonists live in a time when mainstream (white, non-poor) consensus was that "[t]he seduction of 'unprotected' girls had reached epidemic proportions, so extreme measures were required".⁴⁷ Furthermore, "common sense" assumed that black girls were at the highest risk to be seduced into decadent sexual behavior, or lured into prostitution.⁴⁸ This precise construction of black girls as sexual victims played a huge part in the rationale with which white governmental presence forced its way onto black girls' lives. A wayward minor was officially a girl in the age between 16 and 21 years old behaving "immorally" or associating with "dissolute" people.⁴⁹ "Wayward minor laws", supposedly put in place to protect young girls, disproportionately targeted black girls and made them vulnerable to arrest.

Vulnerability, understood as partially but substantially socially produced, can thus be used as a tool by authority to impose biopolitical control. At the same time, Butler argues that "vulnerability, understood as a deliberate exposure to power, is part of the very meaning of political resistance as an embodied enactment."⁵⁰ Though Butler exemplifies with assemblies on the street, this is also true of the potency with which some of Hartman's heroines protest together with other locked-up women in a prison riot. Several of Hartman's protagonists, like Eva Perkins, find themselves incarcerated at the Bedford Hills Reformatory for Women, where inmates were often aggressively assaulted. In one chapter, drawing from newspaper articles, Hartman tells of how the women in Lowell Cottage, a part of the prison reserved for black internees, revolted. She describes how

[c]ollectively the prisoners had grown weary of gratuitous violence and being punished for trifles, so they sought retribution in noise and destruction. They tossed their mattresses, they broke windows, they set fires. Nearly everyone in the cottage was shouting and screaming and crying out to whoever would listen.⁵¹

The togetherness of the protest is emphasized, as their riot acts are enabled as well as enhanced by the shared exposure to institutional violence. Obviously, the women put themselves at risk of further violence, still their amassed fury unleashes in a riot: a vulnerability gone wild. Hartman writes "[t]he chorus spoke with one voice. All of them screamed and cried about the unfairness of being sentenced to Bedford".⁵² Though sometimes Hartman's chorus is polyvocal, here it speaks "with one voice", underlining both the absoluteness of the injustice and the absoluteness of the communal claim to freedom. A particular, politically constructed vulnerability, the being acutely exposed to authorial violence, join the women. Refusing to reconcile with it, a moment of disobedient, unified revolt materializes. We can read with Muñoz throughout this sequence to find in the collective uproar a utopian glimpse of a shared dream of – and demand for – freedom.

Still, this moment is perhaps not momentary, but extended. Hartman makes a point of the riot not being a singular exception. "This riot", she writes, "like the ones that preceded it and the ones that would follow in its wake, was not unusual. What was unusual was that the riot had been reported at all".⁵³ Pointing out again the silences of the archive and the lost pasts, Hartman emphasizes the continuity of riot, even when it is also spontaneous and hazardous. She connects it to the chorus, which passes through generations, and points to its repeatability, how other riots "would follow in its wake". The very last, persistent sentence of the chapter lets the riot linger on: "These sounds traveled through

the night air.”⁵⁴ What travels through the air travels with the wind and like the Weather, it takes unforeseen shapes. The women’s riot, in its repeated/repeatable nature, could then be understood as “the ways in which vulnerability can be an incipient and enduring moment of resistance”.⁵⁵ This is how vulnerability can be both momentarily disruptive – the force of the revolt “touched everyone on the grounds of the prison and as far away as the tenements, rented rooms, and ramshackle lodging houses of Harlem, Brooklyn, and Staten Island”⁵⁶ – and totally ongoing, as a continuous, citable act, blown into life again by next generation inmates, by Hartman, and by the wind in ways we cannot map. Who did all the sounds touch, what did it stir up – perhaps this riot is still ongoing? We can understand Hartman’s heroes as both rupturous and continuous. In terms of Baraitser’s suspended temporalities, Hartman’s girls then fit into them ambiguously. Some of the wayward women, in fact the majority of them, are not at all still but moving, making, blasting. Perhaps we need not to give up on the disruptive potential of drastic movement – especially when coming from subjects the state tries to still, lock up, and silence. Perhaps we can instead situate it in a continuous moment, leaking into bodies from previous embodied resistances, spilling out from prison windows to streets and book sheets. It is through relationality, and the indebtedness of (re)action to previous action – through the chorus – that we can understand the speech and body acts of Hartman’s protagonists not as isolated Events, but ongoing rupture; not masculinized, singular, revolutionary Acts, but a series of protests,

fundamentally embodied, yet also cutting across individual bodies and generations.

Conclusion: not yet

In this text, I have tried to consider in what ways the “critical fabulation” in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* functions as a critique of the idea of the revolutionary gesture as a single, masculinized Act. The anarchy of collective movement shows how “everything depends on them and not the hero occupying center stage, preening and sovereign”.⁵⁷ If, like feminist ontologies of interdependency and vulnerability insist, acting depends on past bodies’ acting, the way we remember the past conditions also future (re)actions. Hartman’s re-imagining of these riotous lives is a persistent intervention in the revolutionary inventory. If we always access the past through certain layers of fiction, critical fabulation approaches memory-making and memory-keeping as political processes possible to disrupt. It thus demonstrates the use of literature and literary studies in the field of history and demonstrates the value of jointing both the fields and the modes of writing.

Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments tells, rather than of a moment of revolt, about a revolution that unites rupture and remaining, a resistance that works through wild vulnerability and interdependency. However, this article has far from exhausted all the promises of wayward living, or all the ontological rejections to linear time. I conclude instead with the suggestion to keep querying the tempo-spatial organization of bodies-in-resistance: an ongoing search for a not-yet, that might have started long ago.

Notes

- 1 Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), ePub.
- 2 Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small*

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- 3 Avery Gordon, *Keeping Good Time: Reflections on Knowledge, Power, and People* (London: Routledge, 2004). José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruis-*

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- 5 Butler and Baraitser, *Judith Butler and Lisa Baraitser*.
- 6 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 11.
- 7 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 11.
- 8 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, introduction.
- 9 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988): 271–313.
- 10 Though Afro-Fabulation here is referring to the concept developed by Tavia Nyong'o, Nyong'o's practice is thoroughly informed by Hartman's critical fabulation, see Tavia Nyong'o, *Afro-Fabulation: The Queer Drama of Black Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), introduction, ePub.
- 11 Alex Pittman, "Can the Subaltern Fabulate?," *Social Text*, January 28, 2020, https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/introduction-can-the-subaltern-fabulate/.
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- 13 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 12.
- 14 Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
- 15 Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 120.
- 16 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, chap. 1.
- 17 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, chap. 1.
- 18 Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Macmillan, 2008), 11.
- 19 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, chap. 1.
- 20 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, chap. 4.
- 21 Sharpe, *In the Wake*, chap. 4.
- 22 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, book 3, chap. 4.
- 23 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, book 3, chap. 3.
- 24 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, book 3, chap. 5.
- 25 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, book 3, chap. 5.
- 26 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, book 3, chap. 5.
- 27 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, book 3, chap. 5.
- 28 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, book 3, chap. 5.
- 29 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, book 3, chap. 5.
- 30 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, book 3, chapter 7.
- 31 Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives Beautiful Experiments*, in *Conversation with Saidiya Hartman*. [Podcast] (2019), accessed 8 August 2019. <https://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2019/05/wayward-lives-beautiful-experiments-in-conversation-with-saidiya-hartman/>.
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- 35 Butler, "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance," 19.
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- 37 Saidiya Hartman, "The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner", *South Atlantic Quarterly* 117, no. 3 (2019): 404.
- 38 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, book 3, chap. 5.
- 39 Lisa Baraitser, *Enduring Time*, ii.
- 40 Butler and Baraitser, *Judith Butler and Lisa Baraitser*.
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- 42 Butler and Baraitser, *Judith Butler and Lisa Baraitser*.
- 43 Butler and Baraitser, *Judith Butler and Lisa Baraitser*.
- 44 Butler and Baraitser, *Judith Butler and Lisa Baraitser*.
- 45 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, book 1, chap. 2.
- 46 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, book 1, chap. 2.

- 47 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, book 3, chap. 1.
48 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, book 3, chap. 1.
49 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, book 3, chap. 1.
50 Butler, "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance," 22.
51 Hartman, "The Anarchy of Colored Girls," 481.
52 Hartman, "The Anarchy of Colored Girls," 481.

- 53 Hartman, "The Anarchy of Colored Girls," 481.
54 Hartman, "The Anarchy of Colored Girls," 486.
55 Butler, "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance," 25.
56 Hartman, "The Anarchy of Colored Girls," 481.
57 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, book 3, chap. 8.

Summary

The Past Isn't What It Used to Be: Critical Fabulation and Remembering Revolt

Critical feminist theorists have pointed out how the idea of the singular, revolutionary Act tends to reinforce masculinist and colonialist imaginaries. In this essay, I argue for the need to elaborate other ways of revolting. Through a reading of Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, I explore ways to consider the relationship between embodied acts of resistance and past bodies' gestures, as a strategy to reformulate resistance away from the single Act, often enacted by an autonomous, male subject. In *Wayward*

Lives, Beautiful Experiments, Hartman merges archival research with fictional storytelling, giving voice to young, black women in the United States in the early 20th century. I argue that, when reading Hartman's text through feminist ontologies of interdependency, acts of revolt appear as collective gestures, re-appearing through time, rather than as singular events. Thus, this reading of *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, demonstrates how we can rethink the singular Act of resistance.

Keywords: critical fabulation, resistance, feminist temporalities, revolutionary acts