Book Reviews

Jeffrey Hogrefe and Scott Ruff, with Carrie Eastman and Ashley Simone, eds. *In Search of African American Space: Redressing Racism.* Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2020. 256 pp.; 129 color illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. €30.00 (paper).

The search for African American space is not a search for specific building types, places, or geographies. Rather, as the contributors to *In Search of African American Space: Redressing Racism* deftly argue, Black space is best understood as a practice—the practice of refusal. Refusal is practiced in and through space, but it also requires the capacity to imagine other worlds and the decision to live differently. These important points are laid out by Tina M. Campt in the foreword to this volume that includes essays written by an array of artists, architects, historians, educators, and scholars of media, literary, and urban studies. Campt emphasizes that living differently is not about grand gestures; nor must one create alternative space or change locations. Rather, it occurs through "everyday practices of disorder and rebellion, and furtive acts of pleasure and joy that unfold in quotidian spaces" (13). Living differently, as a practice of freedom, refuses the subjectivities and containments attached to Blackness. It refuses what Saidiya Hartman describes as the afterlife of slavery.

Hartman's conceptualization of the afterlife of slavery is the most important thread running through and connecting the chapters that make up *In Search of African American Space.* In his introduction to the book, Jeffrey Hogrefe explains the afterlife of slavery by quoting Hartman, stating it is "a still unfolding narrative of captivity, dispossession, and domination that engenders the Black subject in the Americas."[1] It is this captivity, dispossession, and domination that Black people refuse in creating Black space—through imaginations and constructions of refuge and delight, and by performing opposition as people out of place. All of these forms of refusal are taken up by each contributor in one way or another.

These imaginaries, material productions, and oppositional performances make violence, past and present, visible. Violence is thus another important theme linking the chapters of this book. Anti-Black violence is regularly and literally enacted on the bodies of Black people. These everyday acts that lead to suffering and death often remain invisible despite renewed demands by Black activists and their allies to see and stop what can only be understood as modern-day lynchings of Black people across the United States. As the contributors to this book make clear in different ways, violence is also carried out through acts of mistelling, disregard, and erasure. In response, *In Search of African American Space* is a "project of visibility" that seeks not only to reveal, remember, and redress bodily, social, spatial, and economic violence against Black people, but, more importantly, to center radical practices of refusal in response to that violence (17). Black space exists in the interstitial spaces between violence and refusal.

[1] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 75.

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The book is organized into three general categories of spatial analysis: discourse, production, and art practices. The editors drill down further by specifying a theme associated with each category. As with any curated project, the objects of curation do not always fit neatly into overarching themes, and there are many overlaps and slippages across the three sections. These overlaps highlight the methodological complexity and interdisciplinary nature of any study of space and spacemaking, especially when the study acknowledges the analytical importance of the afterlife of slavery. Although the organization of the essays is helpful in terms of identifying forms of spatial analysis, it could be argued that any of the chapters could make sense in any section of the book.

"Discourse: Politics Without Proper Locus" includes three chapters concerned with spontaneous and mundane practices carried out by Black people in different locations, primarily in the antebellum United States. As each author makes clear, these practices relied heavily on spatial imaginaries regarding who belongs where and the heightened visibility of out-of-place people. Each of the discussed cases resulted in instantaneous and latent political agencies and ephemeral yet enduring spaces of performance and refuge. Although understood by African Americans as important to their survival and resistance, these practices and spaces unsurprisingly were not recognized as such by white society, nor were they ultimately remembered. For this reason, they pivot around "improper" loci. In her chapter "The Terrain of Politics: Race, Space, and Vernacular Citizenship," historian Ann Holder highlights a politics of visibility employed by Black Richmonders when they claimed the city's streets, sidewalks, and public square on the day Abraham Lincoln visited to commemorate the Union victory and the legal end to slavery in the United States. Bringing about a shock to the white establishment, the collective show of joy in the face of an oppressor, the "unauthorized" occupation of public space, and the disruption of everyday commerce and activities were, and remain, effective acts of refusal.

Connecting visibility and refusal to representation, filmmaker and historian of material culture Radiclani Clytus uses the work of nineteenth-century journalist William J. Wilson to illuminate how Black writers employed public discourse to represent a nuanced understanding of Black life. In "Black Visuality in Antebellum New York," Clytus argues that Wilson's writing did not just respond to tropes and images that depicted Black people as inferior, as they were perpetually represented in pamphlets and periodicals of the day, but it also subverted the interracial gaze such that Black New Yorkers could see themselves "as they [were]" and "recognize their social and aesthetic role in an ever-evolving representative democracy," even if others would not (83). Wilson's critique of, and participation in, the six o'clock promenade—the bourgeois practice of dressing in high fashion and strolling down the genteel side of Broadway—reveals a calculated and satirical understanding of visibility, performativity, and the agency of space.

The third chapter of "Discourse: Politics Without Proper Locus," entitled "Cultural Translations and Tropes of African American Space," takes a particularly innovative and productive approach to spatial analysis. Scott Ruff uses W. E. B. DuBois's framework of double consciousness, Booker T. Washington's concept of pragmatic industriousness, and Saidiya Hartman's theorization of the performance of opposition to comparatively consider typologies of African American space (the slave ship, the slave cabin, the plantation, the shotgun house, the porch, and the stoop, for example) in relationship to the design of the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC). While this is a lot to tackle in a single chapter, Ruff agilely moves between theory and form using these three critical lenses to connect spatial and symbolic meaning across generations and continents, and to assess the phenomenological experiences of the NMAAHC site, building, and spaces. Although Ruff briefly expands his critical analysis to Thomas Jefferson's antebellum design for his Monticello plantation, this chapter is mainly focused on contemporary museum design and therefore would have fit more comfortably under the heading of production.

"Production: Materializing Memory" continues many of the questions taken up by the preceding section. It is particularly concerned with addressing and redressing the violence of erasure, both theoretically and through design. Each of the three chapters highlights the processes, intentions, and perceived successes of specific built projects as told by the designer(s). The section begins with architect Rodney Leon writing about two of his completed projects: the African Burial Ground Memorial, where the remains of at least 15,000 Black people were paved over by development; and the Ark of Return, a space and structure commemorating the transatlantic slave trade in the United Nations Plaza. Incorporating his personal narrative, Leon designs from the important understanding that African American history was, and continues to be, dematerialized.

He views his work as utilizing "the power of architecture to return to us our context. If it cannot return what was stolen, it can establish a memory of loss and pay tribute to resilience" (115).

A concern for loss, rematerialization, and resilience is carried into the last two "production" chapters, which fall under the combined heading "Weeksville Revisited." Both chapters focus on the same built project—the Weeksville Heritage Center in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York—but are written from the perspectives of the landscape architect and the coarchitects. The original community of Weeksville was a self-determined place of refuge and delight built by and for formerly enslaved people. It existed as a vibrant town from the mid-1800s to the beginning of the twentieth century and was eventually swallowed up as part of the Crown Heights neighborhood. While only two buildings and a few traces of Weeksville's physical grid remain, the social forces that created the original community still reverberate throughout the present-day neighborhood. These include the vitality of African American life and culture and the creative resiliency that follows in the wake of a forced diaspora; however, the ongoing afterlife of slavery is also evident in the lives of many Crown Heights residents who suffer the consequences of generational poverty and institutionalized racism. Throughout the research, design, and building processes for the center, all three architects wrestle with these paradoxical conditions in their efforts to find, remember, and rematerialize Weeksville.

The themes of containment, erasure, remembrance, and refusal continue in "Art Practices: Recording Erasure." The first two chapters describe participatory installations designed to call out and utilize *performances of opposition* that pivot around the captivity and freedom that are constitutive of Black space, geographies, and typologies. All three chapters in this section rely heavily on the intersections of personal narrative (of each author) with collective and historical oppositional practices. Artist Marisa Williamson's essay, "Seeking Sally Hemings," concludes the section and the book and provides a powerful representation of Hemings, the enslaved woman who bore six of Thomas Jefferson's children and was the half sister of his wife, Martha Wayles Jefferson. As Williamson states, "The conflicting duality of Hemings's identity as a Black woman—a privileged possession, and herself in possession of some relative privilege—is an extreme and dramatic forebear to the complexity of contemporary Black experience" (218). Through her ongoing multiyear project, which includes multiple types of performances and reproductions of clothing, objects, and spaces, Williamson seeks to "inhabit" Hemings and her story and casts herself into Hemings's fantasies as though they are simultaneous to her own. As Williamson makes clear, she is retracing Hemings's journey, but she is also making space for her in the contemporary world. This space connects precarious and captive bodies across time, and it gathers radical acts of resistance that, even today, prefigure future manifestations of freedom, agency, and self-possession.

The editors and contributing authors of *In Search of African American Space* collectively illustrate why the afterlife of slavery is an imperative lens for not only finding and interrogating Black space, but for understanding any built environment, past, present, and future. This is an important methodological intervention, but it also calls for a shift in how we think about everyday places, practices, and experiences as contingent on historical and contemporary modes of racemaking. This shift of thinking is particularly radical for the disciplines of architecture, urban design, and planning, where practices of spacemaking and placemaking and metrics of "good versus bad" space still rely heavily on traditions steeped in white European male heteronormativity. Even more radical to the design disciplines is the inclusion, not just recognition, of people whose experiences of suffering and joy, captivity and freedom bear witness to an afterlife of slavery lived out in and through space. This is what Christina Sharpe, whose lecture at Pratt Institute helped spark this book project, describes as "wake work." Here the use of the term "wake" encompasses the full spectrum of its meaning—as a remembering, a trace, a disturbance, and a consciousness—and asks the question, "How do we memorialize an event that is still ongoing?"[2] In addition to Sharpe's work, and that of Saidiya Hartman discussed previously, the authors of all the chapters rely heavily on Black women thinkers, including Hortense Spillers, Katherine McKittrick, Mabel O. Wilson, Toni Morrison, and Octavia Butler. This is an obvious intervention in the traditionally white supremacist and patriarchal practices of citation, but the centering of Black women is also a practice of refusal that refuses to adhere to highly policed disciplinary norms, especially the norms of design discourses.

In addition to the design disciplines, *In Search of African American Space* intervenes in scholarly work and creative practice focused on visual, material,

[2] Christina Sharpe, *In The Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 20.

and narrative culture. While these inherently interdisciplinary approaches typically incorporate critical theory in ways that reveal and argue for alternative views of history and "truth," the *work of space*, as it relates to producing, maintaining, and redressing white supremacy, is often absent or marginalized. For this reason, the insistence on an expanded notion of space, as *a practice*, and the view of space as both a means and a focus of analysis, are important contributions toward spatializing historical and social scientific research. I therefore recommend this book for students and scholars across disciplines, in addition to those outside of academia, who are interested in refusing anti-Blackness.

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Susan Falls and Jessica R. Smith. ***Overshot: The Political Aesthetics of Woven Textiles from the Antebellum South and Beyond.*** Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2020. xvii+176 pp.; 38 black-and-white illustrations, 16 color plates, notes, index. $32.95 (paper).

The shifting status of overshot coverlets in the United States from the early nineteenth century to the present is the focus of Susan Falls and Jessica R. Smith's ambitious book, the first book-length critical study of this type of woven textile. Typical overshot coverlets are distinguished by geometric patterns created by supplemental weft threads that "float" over more than two warp threads; the ways in which a weaver reverses, expands, or repeats twill lines forms the basis for overshot's characteristic optical effects, like pulsating curves or undulating lines. What holds the authors' main interest in the book, though, is the relationship between overshot and its makers, consumers, and advocates within different "artpolitical environments" (12). As laid out in the book's introduction, this concept is borrowed from philosopher Crispin Sartwell and addresses the way political systems inhabit and feed one's material and sensory surroundings. In *Overshot*, the authors turn the equation around, seeking "a study of the aesthetic by way of the political" (12). In a departure from instructional manuals and collection catalogs that populate the shelves on this genre of weaving, Falls and Smith approach overshot coverlets as semiotic signifiers that bear significant implications for defining boundaries of race, class, and gender, and they foreground the ways in which overshot "acts as an avatar for makers positioned within an ever-expanding world of commodity capitalism" (16). The authors' ultimate ambition is to use overshot to "help us to think and feel our way through past, present, and future conditions of making, interpreting, and being" (22).

In the subsequent five chapters, Falls and Smith investigate the cultural significance of coverlets in different historical contexts that proceed roughly chronologically. "Said to Have Been Made by Slaves" focuses on overshot coverlets made in the early nineteenth century and how they are positioned in histories of the antebellum South. In reading accession records and historic house museum displays against WPA slave narratives, diaries, and textile history, the authors demonstrate how overshot coverlets have been uncritically linked to production and use by enslaved individuals. A dangerous consequence of these oversimplified accounts of antebellum history, the authors argue, is how they bolster Lost Cause narratives, presume a cast of historical characters solely comprised of white planters and enslaved Africans, and erase the brutalities of slavery. In "Plain-Style People," Falls and Smith lay out a corrective history, situating nineteenth-century coverlets within "well documented, long-standing practices of artpolitical yeoman weaving" (63). In particular, they place overshot in the hands of white yeoman women, members of a class of middling farmers and artisans who chose to weave as a performance of self-sufficiency vis-à-vis a globalized economy of imported cotton goods dominated by a planter class. Here, the coverlet constitutes a "counter-hegemonic material culture" (85). "Pioneer Sisters" and "An Optical Art" examine late nineteenth- and twentieth-century overshot weaving and its cultural currency within colonial revival thought (in which homespun crafts are symbols of patriotic virtue), the arts and crafts movement, and early discourses of folk art that revered authentic artisanship in the face of commodity production. Final sections of the book take up the opticality of geometric overshot coverlets in relationship to modern art, notably Bauhaus and op art, and include the work of contemporary artists like Stephanie Syjuco and Liz Sargent to expand the discussion of weaving's critical potential for cultural disruption. In Falls and Smith's final analysis, the power and enduring intrigue of overshot coverlets resides in how this class of objects confounds binaries of art/craft, primitive/modern, aesthetic/functional, and rural/cosmopolitan (142).

Coming from their respective disciplines of anthropology and art practice, Falls and Smith harness an impressive range of source materials and guide the reader mindfully with them. Their investigative tone and almost ethnographic approach to