

DISMANTLING THE MASTER(S) CLOCK(WORK UNIVERSE)

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Where is the master clock? Who watches it and who keeps time? If the master clock stops, does time stop?

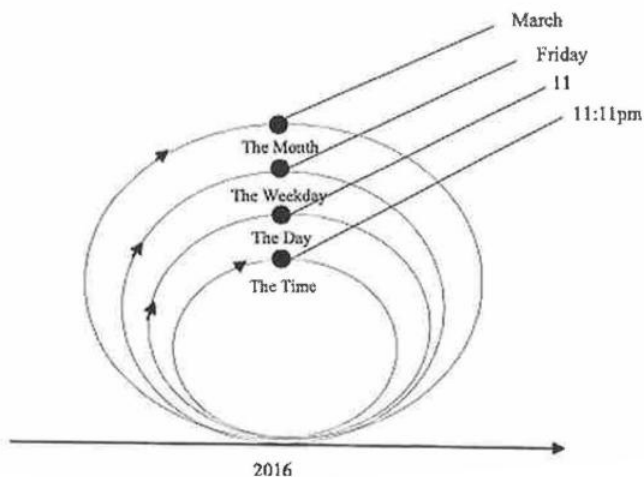
Most people take out their everyday experiences of time as a factual, unalterable facet of reality. There are clocks that chart the hours, minutes, and seconds; calendars that chart the march of days, months, and years; suns, planets, and stars that chart the ages, mapping out cosmic time. More subtle, however, are the ways in which time governs our social interactions, regulates our motions and movements, frames our worldviews, informs our politics, and leaks into our very consciousness. The ways in which we are situated in time are reflected in how we talk about, think about, and conceptualize the world around us. In America and many other places, natural time has been overthrown by Western linear time, where temporal orientation is facilitated by clocks, schedules, cell phones, and digital calendars.

Traditional European spatiotemporal consciousness, around and prior to the 14th century, saw time as flow and

inevitability. Early recordings of an abstract sense of time as a continuous duration arose during the 14th century, while the word "time" itself derives from the word "tide" or "tidiz." , which Tidiz has its etymological roots in the sanskrit word for "division," "to cut up," or "to flood" (as in, "the time of high water"). Within the European Judeo-Christian religious order, work and prayer times were heavily regulated by laws, and because of a belief in Biblical apocalyptic visions of the end being near, time had to be tightly regulated. In *"Time Wars,"* Jeremy Rifkin notes that "Western culture ... institutionalized its images of the future by way of religion and politics," making sure that "the future can be made predictable and controlled." (1987, 146,7).

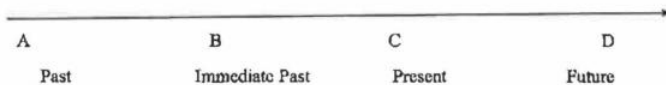
It is through religion and politics that a linear temporal orientation first came to be discerned, simultaneous to the development of Western culture. A linear, Western time consciousness stresses fixed events along a forward moving timeline, while events are seen as irreversible. The linear timeline is embedded within cyclical time - hours, minutes, and seconds in their abstract, numerical form, repeat. Events themselves, however, are unique occurrences that will never repeat on a progressive, linear timescale.

[Graph 1 – reenvisioned from Zerubavel’s Linear and Circular Visions of Time Graph in *Time Maps*, p. 24]



The structure of time eventually came to be organized discretely and causally into a past, present, and future, with fixed events set against a forward moving timeline—one that would eventually come to a climactic, chaotic end.

[Graph 2]



The increased building and usage of public clocks, and eventually personal watches and timepieces, further inscribed a mechanical order of time, impacting all aspects of the Western way of life. Zerubavel notes in *Time Maps* that “only in the last couple of millennia [...] did our uncompromisingly linear view of the past – symbolically captured in the modern relegation of ‘time travel’ to science fiction – actually come into

being.”

This progressive future, one that is unidirectional and that does not allow access to the past, was further forged through other significant events in science and technology. The laws of thermodynamics specifically, developed most significantly during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, reinforced the linear notion of time speeding into the future toward a chaotic end, where “energy was conserved, but cannot be reversed.” (Adam, 1990, 61). Other significant temporo-historical events—, such as the building of the first long distance railroads and the invention of the telegram—, allowed the future to be conquered through a compression of space-time. In *Time & Theory*, sociologist Barbara Adam notes how there was a shift in focus in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries “from quantity and timeless laws to change, growth, and evolution [occurring] almost simultaneously in physics, biology, astronomy, philosophy, and the arts.” (1990, 61). Many of these milestones intersect with, or are simultaneous to significant events of the Maaafa. One could sketch out a timeline of significant events in Black American history, such as the Civil War (1861-65), the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), or the last voyage of the TransAtlantic slave trade (1887) for example, and find them in close succession to, or overlapping, sociohistorical and temporo-historical events; such as the first long-distance railroads (1830), development of the second law of thermodynamics (approx. 1854), and the establishment of the four continental US standard time zones by the railroads (1883).

An accurate measurement of time became crucial to maritime navigation. Although you can measure latitude (north-south) by reading the sun, ship navigators had to guess in order to measure longitude, which often lead to grave inaccuracies on long voyages. A clock or timekeeping device was necessary to accurately measure longitude (east-west). Wikipedia notes:

“Since the Earth rotates at a steady rate of 360° per day, or 15°

per hour, there is a direct relationship between time and longitude. If the navigator knew the time at a fixed reference point when some event occurred at the ship's location, the difference between the reference time and the apparent local time would give the ship's position relative to the fixed location. Finding apparent local time is relatively easy. The problem, ultimately, was how to determine the time at a distant reference point while on a ship."

Stephen Kern writes of the relationship between "the future" and imperialism and colonialism, noting how the "annexation of the space of others" and the "outward movement of people and goods" are examples of "spatial expressions of the active appropriation of the future." (2003, 92). If this is true, then the outward movement of people *as* goods – chattel slavery – must be the most potent example of the appropriation of the mode of time known as the future. In the previous writing, *Sights and Sounds of the Passage*, Camae Ayewa explores speculative temporal narratives of enslaved Africans snatched from their homes, forced into the ships, and taken across the waters to other lands (page 9). The events that took place there comprised the first great Indigenous African Space-Time Splintering, a long wave form of trauma that continues to spread, touching upon the present day. This splitting bears a close temporal relationship to what Kodwo Eshun describes in "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism" as "the founding moment of modernity" (2003, 288).

The inscription of linear space-time came to be discerned in later boundaries on slave ownership.¹ 36°30' north is the parallel of latitude that divides where slavery was allowed and prohibited in America under the Missouri Compromise, the line that separated the United States from the Confederate States. In *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South*, Mark. M. Smith describes the process by which white southern slave masters adapted a mechanical clock time and corresponding linear time construct as the dominant temporal consciousness over that of nature-based

timekeeping methods. He notes in detail how this transition impacted the social order and reinforced values of discipline, economic gain, efficiency, and modernity.

In general, an indigenous African space-time cultural traditions time consciousness has been described as having a backwards linearity, in that when events occur, they immediately move backward towards what John Mbiti described as Zamani, or macrotime. In many indigenous African cultures and spiritual traditions, time can be created, is independent of events, is not real until experienced, and is often intimately connected to genealogical, astrological, and ecological cycles ecology. In his article *Time & Culture Among the Bamana/Mandinka and Dogon of Mali*, Kassim Koné provides examples of the ways in

1. *Although, truly, the notion of ownership over the space-time of millions of human beings cannot be said to contain boundaries, but there should be an implied artificiality and arbitrariness. It is important to note that temporal-spatial traditions and practices varied widely across cultures, countries, groups, and individuals across Indigenous Africa, but that the observations presented in this brief essay are based on extensive research on space, time, and spiritual traditions of a number of African cultures and groups that yield basic generalizations and assumptions. Many scholars have criticized Mbiti's work for what is considered inaccurate, or in some cases, limited observations. This author agrees with some of those criticisms; particularly, earlier versions of his work that represented Indigenous African time traditions as having no concern from the future. However, most agree that he was the first to articulate a detailed theory of time from an African-centered cultural perspective or worldview, and further studies of work on Indigenous African space-time traditions have reaffirmed the value of his work and generalizations. The use of his work in this essay is based on a later edition of African Religions and Philosophy that addresses critiques and clarifies the positioning of the future "no-time" as a realm of open possibility, and is not "faced in the same way in Africa as it is in the West." (Koné, 81). This notion will be studied in more depth in Black Quantum Futurism Theory & Practice Volume II: Community Futurisms (coming summer 2017)*

2 *It is important to note that temporal-spatial traditions varied widely across cultures, countries, groups, and individuals across Indigenous Africa, but that the observations presented in this essay are based on extensive research on space, time, and spiritual traditions of a number of African cultures and groups that yield basic generalizations and assumptions.*

which “the historical past and genealogies are conceptualized within contexts of space, place, totemic affiliation, and family names,” for example, as opposed to “exact chronology, recorded history, dominant figures, royal succession, centralized states, and international relations” like the West. (1994, 94-95).

From this time perspective, time is composed of events, while days, months, and years, as well as clock time, may be considered just a graphic or numerical representation of its events. The indigenous heritage of time “often made no sharp distinction between the past, present, and the future (yesterday, today, and tomorrow)” and generally “uninterested in the minutia of time,” according to Omari H. Kokole. (1994, 52). In his worksheet *A Comparison of the Western and African Concepts of Time*, Bert Hamminga notes “we have to compare the Western linear dead physical timeline (with ‘past,’ ‘future’ and a regularly moving ‘now’) with the African ‘living time’”. Koné points out that “from a Western point of view, African time can be said to be one that is socialized” in contrast to a Western regimentation of time which favors the alienation of other people’s space, place, and time by private individuals.” (1994, 83). Events are “situated in time as well as in context.” (1994, 95).

As noted above, Indigenous African notions of time in many traditions were generally connected to natural events, such as rainfall and the rising and setting of the sun, or saw time as a natural rhythm or pacing, such as the time it takes you to walk from one place to another. Koné points to the example of the Kòmò farming ritual of the Bamana people, which makes offering sacrifices to religious deities through various farming activities, with its primary significance lying “in its role in the social construction of time rather than as a ritual that sets in motion the farming season, as seen by the West.” (1994, 83). Such an experience of time has such features as “concern for details of the event, regardless of time required; exhaustive consideration of a problem until resolved; and emphasis on present experience rather than the past or future.” (Hamminga

worksheet).

Future events are situated in a potential time, until experienced or actualized. Those events do not depend on some specific clock time or calendar date for their manifestation. Instead, time depends on the quality of the event and the person experiencing it. Once the future event is experienced, it instantaneously moves backward into the present and past dimensions. Those two dimensions bear the most ontological significance, where “a person experiences time partly in his own individual life, and partly through the society which goes back many generations before his own birth,” according to Dr. Mbiti.

One potent example of the retention of the indigenous African spatiotemporal orientation during slavery is the use of the North Star to point North on the Underground Railroad. Other examples include naming children after their day of birth or after ancestors.

However, if but for survival purposes alone, enslaved Africans came to internalize some form of a linear time construct. Modern-day mechanical clock time and its ancillary linear, temporal rhythms were encoded into the enslaved Black African by means of the whip, and other forms of torture and physical violence, and enslaved Africans, through this violent force and torture, came to internalize some form of a linear time construct.

Simultaneously, they were forbidden any access to the future, in much the same way they were denied access to full humanity, both in vision and practice. In his essay *Time and Revolution in African America*, Walter Johnson notes that “one of the many things slaveholders thought they owned was their slaves’ time; indeed, to outline the temporal claims that slaveholders made upon their slaves is to draw a multidimensional portrait of slavery itself. Slaveholders [...] defined the shape of the day.” (Johnson,153). He goes on to

note how slave masters controlled enslaved Africans' biographical time, where they "recorded their slaves' birthdays in accounts books that only they could see; they determined at what age their slaves would be started into the fields or set to a trade, when their slaves would be cajoled into reproduction," and otherwise "infused their slaves' lives with their own time[...]through the daily process of slave discipline."

Masters further encoded a temporal order by use of sound; bells, horns, public clocks, chants, songs, speech patterns, and the like were used to regulate slave labor on the plantation. Temporal literacy and ownership of timepieces, was also for the most part forbidden for enslaved Africans, lest it be used as a tool by which to gain their freedom. Timepieces came to be seen as a symbol of status and progress, as well as symbolic of the conquering of time and space, like the train and the telegram.

Enslaved peoples both obeyed and resisted clock time as if it were an extension of the slave master himself. Both Smith and Johnson detail ways in which "time could be turned back upon its master," by utilizing such passive strategies as "working slowly, delaying conception, shamming sickness, or slipping off," (Johnson, 153) and explicit acts, such as mutinies, revolts, escapes, poisonings, magic practices, and other spiritual and religious practices. In Arica in America, Michael Mullin notes that:

"In the Caribbean [...] Christianization which inspired major resistance, was held up until the slaves themselves judged the traditional and dynamic sources of their rites and knowledge to be ineffectual. In Jamaica, slaves experimented with a variety of cults, including Christianity, as they struggled to find an antidote to the whites' power and magic. Consequently, religion, as contemporaries understood, was a far more important element in resistance to slavery in the Caribbean than it ever was in the South. (pg. 62)

The so-called emancipation of enslaved Africans from bondage

did not automatically free them of the Master's clock. At the point of emancipation, the Western, linear construct of space and time was already encoded into every aspect of the American way of life, social order, economy, transportation, and communication. Time continued to be used as another form of social control against oppressed communities. There would be no practical way to totally eschew linear temporal consciousness while remaining in this society. If seeking to integrate into it, or to at least peacefully co-exist (though that ultimately proved to be unsuccessful), compromises had to be made. A split spatiotemporal consciousness, one parallel to that of the Dubosian double consciousness, was thereby gradually developed in the emancipated Africans, what some have called Colored People's, or CP Time. BQF Creatives see the event as the second space-time collapse.

Present-Day Spatiotemporal Consciousness or "CP Time"

There is no past, or, rather where does the line between the past and the present draw? Was slavery simply over once declared? At what time did we become free? If time orders actions, when and where was the act of liberation, when did subjugation end? What time was it in the land my people were stolen from? How far away from slavery are we, when slavery as an institution was encoded into the dominant temporal order? In Temporalities of pre slavery, pre , and post-freedom superimposed, then collapsed into one/other.

"It's how we remember that which cannot be said."

Ntozake Shange

In *Physics of Blackness*, Michelle M. Wright cautions that "if we use the linear progress narrative to connect the African continent to Middle Passage Blacks today, we run into a logical problem, because our timeline moves through geography chronologically, with enslavement taking place at the beginning, or the past, and the march toward freedom moving through the ages toward the far right end of the line or arrow,

which also represents the present” (2014, 57). Black Americans today, bound to and by the linear progress narrative, are the stark embodiment of temporal tensions, a disunity between cultural notions of time, many of us occupying what Rifkin calls “temporal ghettos” (1989, 190) as well as physical ones. How we negotiate time and space in relation to the event(s) that forced us upon these shores, the transatlantic slave trade, provides context for the struggles that we continue to endure in the present. As Eshun notes, “It is never a matter of forgetting what it took so long to remember. Rather, the vigilance that is necessary to indict imperial modernity must be extended into the field of the future” (2003, 288). We were told that slavery ended, but if so, *when* remains the crucial question, particularly with the linear temporal-spatial history of the world fully intact but up for question.

That a community bound by particular events in space-time, such as enslavement, would experience overlapping and conflicting temporalities should be of no surprise. Zerubavel rightly points out that “Being social presupposes the ability to experience things that happened to the groups which we belong long before we even joined them as if they were part of our personal past,” and that “such a remarkable existential fusion of one’s personal history with that of the communities to which one belongs also helps explain the radiation of pain and suffering carried by American descendants of African slaves as well as the personal sense of shame felt by many young Germans about the atrocities of a regime that ended long before they were born” (2003, 3).

Theoretical physicist Alberto Hernando deCastro uses the laws of physics to study the ways in which communities retain social memories, finding a time-based, underlying logic in how communities develop and interact. , with a community’s growth

3 This notion will be studied in more depth in Black Quantum Futurism Theory & Practice Volume II: Community Futurisms (coming summer 2017)

being largely dependent on factors in that community's past. This research is useful in understanding how traumatic and post-traumatic events can connect or disconnect us from our pasts, and the ways in which human behavior, in the aggregate, can influence an entire community or city. It helps us to understand how historical events, such as slavery or war, transform our communities in such away that it displaces us completely from those events and its sources. The past is still with us, in contact with the present--not cut off along a temporal axis, like the block universe or the Master's clockwork universe.

CP Time is often seen and studied as temporal orientation of presentism in the Black community. Use of the presentism time orientation is class, and— by extension—, race -based. It has been recently reappropriated by New Age philosophy, and yoga, and meditation mantras; however, when a presentism time orientation is applied to Black people, it is often cited negatively, considered as lacking a sense of future and only concerned with present pleasures and immediate concerns. and It has been associated with laziness, indolence, and lateness.

These traits are, in turn, used to justify the Black community's disproportionate rates of poverty, joblessness, homelessness, disease, and the like. In studies on increased presence of heart disease in African Americans, for example, presentism time orientation is often cited as one of the causal factors. African Americans with a present-time orientation "may not see the need to take preventative medication or to finish antibiotics when symptoms disappear," or "may delay seeing a physician until symptoms are severe, and begin interfering with their work or life." (Cultural Diversity Training materials, ELDER Project, Fairfield University School of Nursing). Often, such explanations as culture -based fears of the hospitals and medical institutions due to decades of illegal medical experimentation on Blacks, or the inability to afford sustained medical treatment, go unconsidered.

LittleLess analyzed areis the ways in which, contemporarily, this temporal orientation is connected to class oppression, racism, white supremacy, and the legacy of slavery. Slavery was where time was inculcated into our very skin, where the ring of the bell or the tick of the clock regulated our fate, labor, birth and death, taking over the natural rhythms and spirits, spatio-temporal orientation and consciousness. (and I only speak here of temporal disorientation, but a spatial disorientation should be implied, to the extent that the fabric of the two are co-associated in an Einstein universe). CP Time has been both a defense mechanism, against Black communal trauma and post-trauma, under the conditions of class warfare and racial oppression, *and* a harkening back to a more natural, ancestral temporal-spatial consciousness and presentism.

Rifkin explains that the consequence of the linear progress narrative being applied to an oppressed people keeps them “confined in a narrow temporal band, unable to anticipate and plan for their own future, [...]are powerless to affect their political fate.” For those deprived of access to the future, the future becomes “untrustworthy [and] unpredictable” (1989, page 192). They become stuck only being able to plan for the present and limited time in the future, as the society around them speeds forward in illusory, linear progress. This narrow temporal band is used to penalize people on a daily basis. In the present day, we continue to be punished for not being “on time.” For being ten minutes late to an appointment, for example, you could lose your livelihood, children, home, or freedom. Hierarchies of time and lack of access to the future informs intergenerational poverty, in the same way that wealth passes down between generations in traditionally privileged families. Such a narrow temporal band is clearly distinguishable from the sense of presentism or “living in the moment” that is offered as an option for those tapping into or capitalizing off of so-called New Age techniques appropriated from ancient spiritual practices and spatiotemporal orientations.

Dismantling the Master ('s) Clock[work Universe]: Black Quantum Futurism Temporal Dynamics

“Now suppose that this high tech substitute of the ancestor worship is self-adaptive. I mean that the rules of this game (which we call natural laws) are not fixed forever but can change depending the participants’ creative output. So to say, we are co-creators of this world not just passive actors. Of course such a world view is strongly anti-Copernicean, contrary to the last century’s scientific mainstream, but I find nothing particularly impossible in it. In such a virtual reality the past is not fixed in every detail, otherwise it would be a foolish waste of computer memory. Backward causality is a natural thing in such a universe: some details of the past are fixed only when we pay our attention to them from the future.”

Z. K. Silagadze

How can we control our own time and create new cultural, healthier time orientations? How can we encode new temporal algorithms? What does it mean to dismantle the Master’s clock, physically, spiritually, psychologically, cognitively? How do we access and take back control of communal memory? How do we begin to map our return to our futures? There is a necessity to dismantle the master’s clock and reinscribe a CP Time, or, perhaps more affirmatively, to construct a new diasporic African spatiotemporal consciousness. There is a necessity to dissolve or dismantle the thermodynamic arrow of time and the arrow of progress. Mechanical time is not absolute time. The present moment is the ether, the absolute frame of reference.

It is unrealistic to expect that we can ever return to the time consciousness of our more distant ancestors, enacting a complete reversal to a pre-transatlantic slave trade spatiotemporal construct. In recognizing that it is not realistic to enact a complete reversal or return to an African spatiotemporal consciousness, we can instead incorporate

particular aspects of these time constructs as they parallel or overlap natural tendencies already encoded into the descendants of formerly enslaved Africans. We seeking to reconcile our bifurcated time consciousness by creating or adapting a time consciousness consistent with our experiences as diasporic, displaced Africans, living in communities that have by and large adopted a linear time construct.

There is a meaningful way to embrace the paradox and allow these two opposing temporal modes to co-exist, in the way that light co-exists both as wave and particle on the quantum level. This is done by crafting a unique time construct that takes account of a Western time mode and our own natural time tendencies, as inscribed in our DNA through biology, ancestry, culture, spirit, and natural rhythms. Such a time construct inevitably requires a new language, a way to speak of the past, present, and future without resorting to time hierarchies. Eshun notes that “by creating temporal complications and anachronistic episodes that disturb the linear time of progress, these futurisms adjust the temporal logics that condemned black subjects to prehistory” (2003, 297).

Black Quantum Futurism (BQF) is exploring and developing modes and practices of spatiotemporal consciousness that would be more beneficial to marginalized peoples’ survival in a “high-tech” world currently dominated by oppressive linear time constructs. In crafting new communal temporal dynamics that can function BQF is developing and enacting a new spatiotemporal consciousness. BQF theory, vision, and practice explores the intersections of quantum physics, futurism, and Black/African cultural space-time traditions. Under a BQF intersectional time orientation, the past and future are not cut off from the present - both dimensions have influence over the whole of our lives, who we are and who we become at any particular point in space-time. Our position from the present creates what that past and future looks like, what it means at every moment. We determine what meaning and what relationships both dimensions of time have to our present

moment.

The etymology of the word “future” itself admits of such this kind of a relationship. The word future, by definition, designates a time period or temporal space that is not now, one that is situated ahead (or before) us, and distinctive from times that lie behind (or before) the one we are currently situated in. Etymologically, future developed out of the Old French word *futur* in the late 14th century, and meant “a time after the present,” or “that which is yet to be.” *Futur* can be further traced back to the Latin *futurus*, via the stem “fu-,” (to grow or become), which is the future participle of the word *esse*, to be. Oxford Dictionary notes that “both *esse*, to be, and *futur*, to become, share “be” at their root.” This may explain why the word “be-fore” can both denote an event that has already passed and is now in the past, or an event that has not yet happened. This is one way linearity does not lie at the root of the words “before” or “future.”

The following principles of temporal dynamics should be coupled with BQF modes, principles, and practices outlined in *BQF Theory and Practice Vol. 1* (2015) and will be further developed in *BQF Theory and Practice Vol. II* (2017):

Retrocurrences -a backwards happening, an event whose influence or effect is not discrete and timebound -- it extends in all possible directions and encompasses all possible time modes.

BQF seeks to unravel the processes of how communal memory is seeded, how the collective memory spreads across time and space, reaching backward in time and forward in time simultaneously to include everything that has and will happen. This dynamic event process, which BQF coined a “retrocurrency,” takes on features and characteristics reminiscent of quantum matter, where time is naturally reversible and information can flow in both directions. Retrocurrences provide pathways of opportunity for seeding

new schemes of spatiotemporal consciousness.

Entangled Histories – the quantum physics notion of entangled histories was recently developed by nobel laureate Frank Wilczek and colleagues and tested experimentally. Entangled histories are “cases in which a single chronology is insufficient to explain the observed changes in the properties of a particle,” (1, 2015), meaning the history of a particle may be incomplete without consideration of the existence of multiple, intertwined timelines. The principle essentially states that such multiple timelines must be entangled, demonstrating the “many worlds” quantum mechanics interpretation. With entangled histories, Wilczek explains, “the separate chronologies are intertwined and eventually come back together.”

This suggests that timelines aren’t “lines” at all, but perhaps strands, or something less rigid and more flexible than a line. Entangled timelines invoke layered timescapes, overlapping circles of time. It suggests that one event can have multiple temporal perspectives, operating simultaneously.

For further inquiry: *How might retrocurrences apply to slave-time phenomenon? We (the present) are constantly injecting ourselves into the past. The gaze of history shapes it, crystallizes it, collapses it upon the linear timeline. How do we keep ourselves tethered to the narrative provided to us in history books? When and where do the ancestors speak for themselves? Adopting a similar mode of “potential time” as proposed by ancient Africa space-time practices is parallel to Quantum/Potential energy (meaning no definite space/location. Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle implies open future/open past. Nature is inherently indeterministic. What is the special role of time? Can we use the quantum eraser to erase the past and change the future?*

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