

AN OBLIQUE BLACKNESS

AN OBLIQUE BLACKNESS: READING RACIAL FORMATION IN THE
AESTHETICS OF GEORGE ELLIOTT CLARKE, DIONNE BRAND, AND
WAYDE COMPTON

By JEREMY D. HAYNES, B.A.H.

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts

McMaster University Copyright by Jeremy D. Haynes, August 2013

McMaster University MASTER OF ARTS (2013) Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: An Oblique Blackness: Reading Racial Formation in the Aesthetics of
George Elliott Clarke, Dionne Brand, and Wayde Compton

AUTHOR: Jeremy D. Haynes, B.A.H (University of Guelph)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Daniel Coleman

PAGES: vi, 105

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how the poetics of George Elliott Clarke, Dionne Brand and Wayde Compton articulate unique aesthetic voices that are representative of a range of ethnic communities that collectively make-up blackness in Canada. Despite the different backgrounds, geographies, and ethnicities of these authors, blackness in Canada is regularly viewed as a homogeneous community that is most closely tied to the cultural histories of the American South and the Atlantic slave trade. Black Canadians have historically been excluded from the official narratives of the nation, disassociating blackness from Canadian-ness. Epithets such as “African-Canadian” are indicative of the way race distances citizenship and belonging. Each of these authors expresses an aesthetic through their poetics that is representative of the unique combination of social, political, cultural, and ethnic interactions that can be collectively described as racial formation. While each of these authors orients her or his own ethnic community in relation to the nation in different ways, their focus on collapsing the distance between citizenship and belonging can be read as a base for forming community from which collective resistance to the racial violence of exclusion can be grounded.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project is the result of the unyielding support and encouragement I have received from more people than I can thank by name. Firstly, I would like to thank Judy Trout for inspiring me with a passion for words, and Jim Haynes for inspiring me with the courage to speak them. I would like to thank Jordan Haynes for keeping my ego in check and making me smile, especially when I didn't think I could. A special thanks to Jaimie Hildebrand for her love and unwavering faith in my abilities. I would also like to thank Daniel Coleman, Lorraine York, and Rick Monture for their direction, encouragement, and enthusiasm and always suggesting the right book at the right time. Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank the staff of the department of English and Cultural Studies, my professors, my colleagues, and my friends—especially Robert Pasquini—for endlessly discussing my (often labyrinthine) ideas, often a little louder than was necessary.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Descriptive Note</i>	ii
<i>Abstract</i>	iii
<i>Illustrations</i>	vi
1) “Where are you from?”: Roots, Routes, and Race in Canada	1
2) <i>Testifyin’</i> : Tracing Africadian Aesthetics in the Poetry of George Elliott Clarke	15
3) “Longing for the Dissonance”: Dionne Brand’s Cartography of the Black Diaspora	42
4) Re-Mix: Wayde Compton’s Hip Hop Culture, Aesthetics, and Race Formation	68
5) “Oblique Kinds of Blackness”: Reviewing at the Mosaic	93
6) Bibliography	100

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1) *Shipping Out* By Jacob Lawrence 46

Figure 2) *Another Patrol* By Jacob Lawrence 47

Introduction

“Where are you from?”: Roots, Routes, and Race in Canada

*Everybody's a migrant.
Every body gyrates
to the global bigbeat.
It's sun
Down in the Empire, and as time has done
Gone by,
And multiculturalism can't arrive
By forgetting, but remembering
Every hectare taken, every anti-Asian defamation,
Because those who don't remember
Repeat.
(Wayde Compton, 2003)*

Migration is an essential part of Canadian history and culture. Official narratives of the nation romanticize migration as a source of communality despite historical evidence that ignores racialized peoples and the histories of Indigenous peoples. Why is migration so regularly tied to images of race while belonging is almost monogamously tied to whiteness? If, as Compton points out through his poem, everybody moves and migrates similarly, why are the racial demarcations between belonging and foreignness so stratified? If modernity truly means “sun / down in the [British] Empire” and multiculturalism has become Canada’s new Union Jack, why does the nation regularly forget “every hectare taken, every anti-Asian defamation”? Why do we continue to repeat these abuses?

Vancouver poet Wayde Compton’s allusion to the Chinese Immigration Act (1923) highlights a history of violence against racialized peoples in Canada that extends from, but is not limited to, slavery, exclusion, persecution, and

objectification. Rather than simply pointing at these historical abuses in an attempt to remind White Canadians of their own migrant and Johnny-come-lately roots, this project examines the multiple social trajectories that specifically make-up the process of Black “racial formation” (Omi and Winant 2) in Canada.

Compton, like prolific Black Canadian poet and critic George Elliott Clarke and decorated Caribbean-Toronto poet Dionne Brand, uses poetics to engage with the social politics of racialization.

“Racial formation” is a concept proposed by Michael Omi and Howard Winant in their book *Racial Formation in the United States*. Their thesis recognizes the “social nature of race, the absence of any *essential* race characteristics, the historical flexibility of racial meanings and categories, the conflictual character of race at both the ‘micro-’ and ‘macro-social’ levels, and the irreducible political aspect of racial dynamics” (Omi and Winant, emphasis added 4). Furthermore, this theory recognizes the immensity of the complex and often interrelated social and political interactions that combine to *form* race. Most importantly, Omi and Winant’s theory regards racial formation as a process, ongoing and fluid, which operates between and through differing racial subjectivities. Clarke, Brand, and Compton’s oscillating local, national, and global perspectives; their projects of racial commemoration and visibility; multi-regional, multi-ethnic consciousnesses; and awareness of the shaping influences of exterior socio-political forces all express a variety of experiences of racial formation in Canada. So why study racial formation? What can its wide range of

apertures tell us? The base of this project emerged from two interconnected origins: Firstly, my own experience of race and racial identity formation; and secondly, two critical articles that gave me the language to start orienting myself within critical race studies.

Growing up a White, middle-class male, I can count on one hand the number of times I was asked, “Where are you from?” I never felt the effects of racial marginalization and for a long time I naively internalized the symbols of what I believed to be Canadian-ness: multiculturalism, “Peacekeeping,” and the cultural mosaic. In school it was not difficult to see that categories like Asian-Canadian, Native-Canadian, and African-Canadian (to name but a few) all positioned race at a distance from the nation. As a person with more than seven traceable generations of British, French, and some Métis heritage, I found it difficult to articulate what was so unsettling about “belonging” in Canada, despite being the quintessential representation of Canadian whiteness.

As I started to look outside the centralized White canon of what gets labeled “Canadian Literature,” I read two critical essays by the prolific George Elliott Clarke: “Contesting a Model Blackness” (2003) and “Harris, Philip, Brand: Three Authors in Search of Literate Criticism” (2000). From these two essays—the first debunks a homogeneous Canadian blackness even as it distinguished Canadian blackness from American, and the second reprimands White critics for using Black poets to voice their own sermons against the evils of racism and bigotry (Clarke, *Odysseys* 254)—I realized that my research needed to address

African-Canadian literature aesthetically, examining individual works of art in detail and their connections to specific ethnic experiences. As Clarke, Omi, and Winant pointed out, “race” is an enormous social construct with continuously fluctuating definitions contingent upon changing social and political opinions. Due to the enormous scope that “race” demands, I found it more productive in my research to shift my observations through “ethnicity” as it denotes a community that may be considered racially homogeneous but has a specific historical and cultural heritage which makes it ethnically distinct. Ethnicity as part of racial discourse becomes a way of engaging with the enormity of race on a much more manageable scale. For example, “blackness”—the socially and politically constructed agreement of what constitutes “being Black”—in Canada is composed of a variety of ethnic communities that all express a unique racialized experience. Ethnicity, in this project therefore, is a means of deconstructing the enormity of race into smaller discussions of racial formation as they pertain to specific ethnic groups.

The decision to read racial formation through ethnicity lies at the crux of an on-going debate between native Maritimer George Elliott Clarke and Toronto-based critic Rinaldo Walcott. In Clarke’s “Treason of the Black Intellectuals,” he criticizes Walcott’s *Black Like Who?* (1997) for its pan-Africanist collapsing of Black experience and the dangers of Black Diasporic association based on “Blacker than thou” racial criteria (Clarke, *Odysseys* 188). Reading Walcott, however, I found considerable merit in his objection that Clarke’s desire to write

from a Quebecois-style regional-nationalism appealed too much to the recognition of the state (Walcott 20). To borrow the terminology of a Hegelian dialectic, Wayde Compton's assertion that "even within the conceptual bounds of the African Diaspora itself [...] looking to the margins rather than the centre" (Compton, *After Canaan* 13) seemed to be a kind of synthesis of Clarke and Walcott's thesis and antithesis. In Clarke's model, the Black Diaspora acts as a margin around a regionalist-nationalist centre. Walcott's model, by contrast, positions nationalism as the margin outside a Black Diasporic centre. Compton's synthesis credits both of these models, suggesting that a double centre and a double margin exist simultaneously as part of the poly-consciousness that characterizes racial formation in Canada. I believe my decision to read race through ethnicity works in conjunction with Compton's double-margin-double-centre model because it acknowledges a racial collective that is made up of a range of distinct ethnicities.

As Clarke's "Contesting a Model Blackness" argues, "African-Canadian consciousness is not just dualistic," but rather is informed by the diversifying effects of ethnicity, "geography, language, and faith," creating a "poly-consciousness" (Clarke, *Odysseys* 40). Contrary to one of the western world's most popular texts on Black racial experience, Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Clarke's commitment to a heterogeneous view of blackness in Canada resists Gilroy's homogenizing desire to create an Atlantic "Black Community." As Clarke points out, in Canada the range of regional, ethnic, historical, and

cultural backgrounds that constitute the nation's Black population cannot be so cleanly reduced to a "model blackness," a set of cultural politics that Gilroy singles out as founded in the slave experiences of the American South (Clarke 28). To Clarke, African-Americanism represents a homogenized model blackness grounded in the cultural politics and origins of the Southern United States. In Canada, Clarke posits, the diversifying effects of ethnicity make blackness much more variously self-defined. As we shall see in the following chapters, Black Canadian critics differ on how to engage with the discourse of the Black Atlantic within the heterogeneity of Canada's blackness.

In response to Compton's call for an analysis from the peripheries of the margin, my project explores how African-Canadian aesthetics—made-up of the many intersecting historical and artistic politics that emerge as identifiable aesthetics—express a heterogeneous sense of blackness which resists African-Americanism and ultimately supports Clarke's assertion that Canadian blackness is "multi-ethnic" (Clarke, *Odysseys* 40). Yet Walcott's criticism, which granted localized experiences of race but also acknowledged the Black Diaspora¹ as a body from which some idea of blackness could be derived, expanded this view of blackness outside local and national paradigms and moved it into the multiple social and political focuses of racial formation as a process.

Returning to the ethnic-nation, "African-Canadian," epithet itself, Clarke observes: "African Canadians question whether the 'Canadian' half of the epithet

¹ Potentially, the "Black Diaspora" could be seen as a pseudo-homogeneous "Black community" since ascription is based on a commonality of racial identification.

. . . is merely a convergence referring to [...] geographic residency, or whether it hints at an identity” (Clarke, *Odysseys* 40). Paul Gilroy’s use of W.E.B. Du Bois’s “double-consciousness,” formulated in an American context, highlights some of the precariousness of condensing citizenship and race into such an epithet:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* 7)

The “double-consciousness” which splits awareness between “American” and “Negro” can be applied to a Canadian context through the categories of nation and race; however, since Canadian identity is notoriously ill-defined, and Canadians often associate with more regional or ethnic identities, the “double-consciousness”—for the purposes of this project—limits the scope of these authors’ criticism. Since belonging in Canada is well-defined along racial lines and is generally exclusionary towards non-White peoples, the alternative identities these authors suggest requires a more diverse range of social and political elements that combine to articulate blackness as it is formed within and without varying national sentiments. For these reasons I have decided to use Franz Fanon’s model “third person consciousness” to highlight more explicitly some of the social and political categories that combine to form race in Canada. I will go into greater detail about the “third person consciousness” after the following explication of how the nation and race are made accessible through poetics.

Since the authors I study in this project all cite Western critical traditions as a part of their intellectual development, and since the progression of this introduction has been slowly increasing the gap between its primary focus on poetics and the present discussion of social politics, a discussion of Aristotle's meditations on these two subjects may allow us to rationally collapse this distance and reorient ourselves through the dialogue between aesthetics and politics. Aristotle posits in *Politics* that by virtue of one's ascription to a constitution, the citizen of a state is endowed with a sense of collective state identity (Aristotle I.ii.8). If Canadians can be citizens and not feel an inherent sense of identity—as George Grant's *Lament for a Nation* (1965), Dennis Lee's *Civil Elegies* (1972), and Robert Kroetsch's "Disunity as Unity" (1985) all observe—then Aristotle's definition of the state and its necessary objective are unrealized in a Canadian context. In *Poetics*, Aristotle explains that through mimesis poetic art represents elements of society that are flawed or disturbing, and rather than becoming repulsed by these topics, "men find pleasure in viewing representation [...] because it turns out that they learn and infer what each thing is" (Aristotle I.iv.14). Through the discourse of poetic representation, the process of "recognition," mediated through the mimetic allows art an indirect dialogue with politics (Aristotle I.xvi.1-50). In this way, the politics of recognition and identity formation can be accessed by artistic interpretation and the manipulation of poetics vindicating Dionne Brand's claim that through poetics "writers mean to change the world" (Brand, *Bread Out of Stone* 25).

Returning briefly to the poem at the beginning of this introduction, Dionne Brand's claim (above) is similar to Compton's lines: "multiculturalism can't arrive / By forgetting, but remembering." Both these poets highlight a meeting of poetics and politics in much the same way as Aristotle suggests. Commemoration is an essential part of belonging, and belonging is an essential part of the intricate social politics that make-up racial formation. Since the commemoration of specific ethnic and racial histories often falls outside the official Canadian histories, poetry regularly takes on the weighty task of renegade commemoration. Artistic commemoration is even a foundational part of official historical narratives that cite works of art as proof of a specific historical trajectory² that combine to make a national or cultural narrative. Reading poetics to critique politics is logical because it represents the median (transition zone) between cultural politics and state representation. In this way, we might read the work of these poets as a kind of politics, and politics as a kind of art, ultimately collapsible within the multiple socio-political vectors of racial formation. Brand's desire to "change the world" through her poetics thusly illustrates the collapsing of poetry and politics. Another notorious example repurposed in poetry is Compton's final lines from the epigraph above: "those who don't remember / repeat."

Returning to W.E.B. Du Bois's "double-consciousness," Franz Fanon provides his own adaptation of this idea, which he calls the "third person consciousness." This three-part consciousness in effect explodes the nation as a

² See "In Flanders Fields" by John McCrae

necessary location of identity and—given its grammatical formulation—fits the discursive collapse of poetics and politics by highlighting the social processes that make-up racial formation. Fanon, who had recently arrived in France from his West Indian birthplace, explains “third person consciousness” in *Black Skin, White Masks*: “I was responsible at the same time for *my body*, for *my race*, for *my ancestors* [...] I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency” (Fanon, emphasis added 84). Fanon’s transition from the West Indies to France is perhaps comparative to other narratives of migration that are shared by much of the Black Diaspora, moving from an environment of White minority to White majority and being forced to re-evaluate oneself through the White gaze. The “third person consciousness” highlights three simultaneous racial subjectivities from the above excerpt: the body (“my blackness”), ethnicity (“my ancestors”), and “my race”. These three subjectivities make up the “I,” “you,” and “they” positions, respectively, within the literary third-person perspective is representative of Canada’s habit of deriving identity from a variety of shifting ethnic, geographic, political and social locations. “I” represents a focus on the physical body, and an awareness of the differentiating characteristics of melanin; “you” represents the specific ethnic community of the individual, his or her ancestors, and cultural history; finally, the third person pronoun “they” indicates the socially created idea of a “race”, stereotypes of “tom-toms” and “cannibalism.”

Using Fanon's "third person consciousness" as the primary framework of my project, we can read the poetics of Clarke, Brand, and Compton for their aesthetics, for their observations of race, for their claims to the Diaspora, and still map their work within the conceptual geography of Canadian racial politics. This framework further allows for the examination of aesthetics as a means of accessing the authors' shifting global and local subjectivities through the historical and contemporary interactions of their own ethnic communities. Moreover, the "third person consciousness" highlights the interconnectivity of the social origins of race and the geopolitics that inform an awareness of the body from within the purview of an aesthetic community. For example, in the chapter examining Dionne Brand's work (Ch 2), I question how the sexual politics of different conceptual spaces informs a heterogeneous view of Canadian blackness and how these politics relate to belonging.

The historical and artistic roots that make up a community's cultural ethnicity are represented by the artists' aesthetic form. Aesthetics, understood within this kind of social-historical-geographical context, allows for a reading of these artists that sits at the nexus between the expression of a heterogeneous Black community and a commentary on how the interrelated vectors of racial formation contribute to that heterogeneity. To Clarke's question, "Does African-Canadian denote a geographic position? Or does it hint at an identity?" I argue that aesthetics illuminates both patterns between unique ethnic enclaves of blackness and similarities that suggest how blackness might be defined nationally.

Examining how each of these authors positions her or his subjectivity between the three possibilities of the “third person consciousness” allows for comparisons to be made across geographic communities while still acknowledging a unique sense of regionalism. In this way, parallel commentaries about the nation, racial formation, citizenship, belonging, and the Diaspora can be contrasted in order to map the ways race in Canada is oriented.

The questions that arise from my project's methodological positioning are relevant and prevalent in Canadian culture today: how do different aesthetic communities construct the Black body? How do different ethnic communities define and construct race? How do these aesthetic communities orient themselves in relation to the Diaspora? Finally, what do the similarities and differences between these aesthetic communities teach us about blackness and a wider sense of racial formation in Canada? Over the following three chapters I will explore how these three authors engage with some of these issues. I will examine each author's work from a positioning grounded in the historical and artistic traditions that make up his or her specific cultural aesthetic as well as how these authors orient their communities in relation to the nation and the Black Diaspora. In each chapter I will attempt to identify an ethnic aesthetic prominently displayed in the author's work and attempt to link this aesthetic to each authors' observations of the Black body, ethnicity, and race—amongst other relevant social and political areas—within a specific cultural and geographic context.

In my first chapter I focus on the aesthetics of George Elliott Clarke who grounds his own ethnic community in the blues and roots traditions of the Maritimes. Just as visibly, Clarke's poetry and criticism are marinated in the Baptist flavours of one of Canada's oldest Black communities. Through his book of poetry, *Whylah Falls* (1990), I trace an awareness of the Black body that has been tempered by the communal longevity of Black loyalists who have endured physical and systemic violence in the construction of Canada's national narrative. Clarke's larger cultural project, the founding of "Africadia," works to express a nationalistic ethnic consciousness and endow Black Maritimers with a distinct sense of blackness.

In my second chapter I examine the cartographical aesthetic of Dionne Brand's poetics, which focuses predominantly on bodies in transition. I trace how she shifts her focus between the city of Toronto and the Black Diaspora as a means of navigating and orienting the body, including the social body, in relation to the geopolitics of the Black Atlantic. Through her poetics I trace a keen desire to abandon an association with the nation and speak to race on a multi-ethnic, multi-national level. More specifically I use this aesthetic to make sense of her depiction of Toronto which downplays national affiliation and focuses on the self-definition of what a localized experience of race is between the physical and political geographies of the New World.

In my third chapter I examine how Wayde Compton, writing from the west coast, uses hip hop aesthetics to express his experience of blackness, the

Black body and the Black Diaspora, between oscillating contexts of his own local community and the nation itself. Through his aesthetics, derived from the expansive global Hip Hop community, Compton similarly focuses on Black bodies in motion (migration, dance, music, and racial transgression). Furthermore, this chapter explores how Compton critiques racial violence and a lack of official commemoration of black presence in the histories of the nation, as well as the function of this commemoration in the formation of racial, ethnic, and physical identities.

Each of these chapters highlights the similarities between the three authors I have selected to examine in this project. Racial formation is a complex process that intersects a wide range of social and political opinions and communities; for this reason, each chapter focuses on a variety of factors that can collectively be classified under the ethnic, body, and racial components of the “third person consciousness.” My objective in this thesis isn't to conclusively define a “Canadian blackness” but rather to illuminate the similarities and differences between how blackness is imagined, defined, and represented between three geographically, ethnically, and historically diverse Black communities that are all rooted in Canada.

Chapter 1

***Testifyin'*: Tracing Africadian Aesthetics in the Poetry of George Elliott**

Clarke

George Elliott Clarke's aesthetic highlights a meeting of history and art. His poetic style is marinated in the Baptist blues roots of his Maritime Canadian community. In his prose-poem "Responsive Reading" (Clarke, *Whylah Falls* 147-8), Clarke's character—the Baptist preacher Rev. J.R. Langford—highlights the intersections of Baptist and blues influences that are uniquely produced by Clarke's own ethnic community. The passage is significant to my argument and I quote in full:

To sing Nova Scotia, its epic heroes of Glooscap,
Champlain, Preston, and Howe, there must needs be howl an
angry train and sharp-toned voices of African Baptist
choirs, those Black saints swaddled in snow-white robes of
Glory, testifying to Ethiopia's gorgeous blackness.

There must needs roar *Freedom's* passionate urgency, the
revolutionary cry of the Atlantic's surf storming a barricade
of rock, and the revelation cry of Black angels, wailing for
Justice, scorching the heavens above Paradise!

Nova Scotia, sometimes I need to tremble!

There must needs be the soiled yell of the fisherman,
'Maaackerel, fresh maaackerel!' the earthy growl of the
greens man, 'I got cabbage and lettuce for pennies,' the
crooned lullaby of the midwife, 'Hush-a-by, doncha cry,'
and the loud moan of the mother, 'Who done shot my baby
down?'

There must needs be the shouts of house parties, the
whoop and cackle of folks too blue to cry. Angered by whip
and lash of joblessness, maddened by gun and jail of politics,
these souls clap hands and sing, 'What did I do / To be so
black and blue?'

Nova Scotia, God bless the child who got his own!

There must needs be the jazz swoon of joy, the river baptismal, the psalms of Easter and Christmas and wedding merriness and birth happiness, the immoral banjo and fiddle hymns—‘Skip to my Lou,’ ‘Ain’t Gonna Study War No More,’ and country-and-western rhythm and blues.

There must needs be, in the beginning and at the end, the barbed-wire spirituals of this stony peninsula – ‘Swing Low Sweet Chariot’ and ‘Farewell to Nova Scotia,’ a steelyard tune that Cape Bretoners chant in taverns from Moncton to Coquitlam.

We love you, Portia White!

There are the seeds of song, after the campaign bottles of rum, the liquored sentiments, the gospel-hurt sermons, the potato patch and hogfarm testaments, the coloured prophets and Beautiful Ones who kneel before the Atlantic to voice that endless chorus of fire, ‘I wish, oh Lord, I wish that *Truth* and *Liberty* might flower in this stony soil under these cold, hard stars.’ (Clarke, *Whylah Falls* 147-8)

The sermonic prose-poem style is mixed in this poem with a blues melancholy and a sharp political outrage. Much of the first two stanzas highlights Clarke’s own experience with the British canon and alludes to the kind of Romantic personification, the “cry of the Atlantic’s surf storming a barricade / of rock” for example, that regularly appears in the pastoral roots of Baptist rhetoric. Similarly, Clarke’s evocation of “Black saints swaddled in snow-white robes [...] testifying to Ethiopia’s gorgeous blackness” connects Clarke’s Maritime community to the African continental roots of the Black Diaspora, highlighting what Dionne Brand describes as the “the Door of No Return: that place where our ancestors departed one world for another; the Old World for the New” (Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return* 5).

Aside from the obvious inclusion of lines from spirituals, folk, and jazz songs such as “Swing Low Sweet Chariot,” “Farewell to Nova Scotia,” and

“(What Did I Do To Be So) Black And Blue,” Clarke’s references to blue-collar occupations like “greensmen” and “fishermen” sets the stage for another of his major aesthetic influences, the blues. Clarke’s lines in the fourth stanza evoke key blues tropes such as the irrational “whoop and cackle” of the blues holler, the melancholy feeling “of folks too blue to cry,” and the economic frustration that bites like a “whip.” While Nova Scotia is not traditionally thought of as a stronghold of blues music, Clarke uses these influences to navigate the diversity of his Maritime community by negotiating the folk, jazz, and spirituals (mentioned above) with blues which has its roots in slavery on the southern plantation (Oliver et al 39). In this way Clarke equates the historical Black traveling laborer with the vagabond bluesman of the South resulting in a poetics with a severity of tone traceable to the “fire and brimstone” rhetoric of the Baptist preacher. The interweaving of blues and Baptist forms fabricates an aesthetic that is representative of Clarke’s own ethnic origins, an aesthetic he has expanded to represent a specific Black consciousness within the geo-political bounds of what he calls “Africadia.” I will return to “Africadia” momentarily, but the historical and artistic components of Clarke’s work first require some grounding.

My examination of *Whylah Falls*, much like the above example, attempts to highlight the presentation of particular blues and Baptist forms as an ethnically specific part of racial formation in Canada. As Clarke asserts in his “Introduction to the Tenth Anniversary Edition,” the book was “born in the blues” and acts as

an attempt to “restore the verbal magic of African United Baptist sermons,”³ as a pillar of Clarke’s “Africadian” community (Clarke, *Whylah Falls* xi-xxiii). I selected *Whylah Falls* specifically because it so strongly exudes these Baptist and blues aesthetics while simultaneously interacting with the local and global politics of racial formation in Canada. Perhaps most importantly *Whylah Falls*—selected out of a survey of Clarke’s abundant published works—operates as a microcosm for his larger cultural project: the founding of “Africadia.”⁴

The term is an amalgamation of “Africa” and “Acadia,” and in effect, recognizes the two-hundred-year-old history of Blacks in the Maritimes (Clarke with Dominguez 189). My use of the term “Africadia” is meant to specifically demarcate the conceptual space in which Clarke has created as an ethnic community, endowed with its own history of identity construction, race, history, and aesthetics. Clarke’s “founding” of Africadia comes as a direct result of what he calls the “Africadian Renaissance,” the (re)collection, compilation, and conceptual construction of a Black “national” consciousness specific to the existing geopolitical boundaries that constitute the Maritime Provinces. For this reason, my use of the term “Africadian(s)” refers to those individuals who internalize a nationalistic consciousness from the conceptual space of Africadia. Clarke’s Africadia attempts to organize the history of Black people in the

³ As Nigel Thomas observes in “Some Aspects of Blues Use in George Elliott Clarke’s *Whylah Falls* “Clarke distills Africadian reality so its rituals fit around the secular and sacred poles of blues and Africadian Baptist rituals”(Thomas 4).

⁴ George Elliott Clarke, “The Birth and Rebirth of Africadian Literature,” *Odysseys Home*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. 107-125, Print.

Maritimes within a coherent national narrative and began with what Clarke regards in hindsight as the “Africadian renaissance” (Clarke with Moynagh 79).

The Africadian renaissance “beginning in the late 1970s and flowering into a more determined consciousness in the early 1980s” set in motion the conceptualization of a regionalist African-Canadian community. Clarke, and several other Africadians such as David Woods, Walter Borden, Edith Clayton, Maxine Tynes and Burnley Jones began to develop a body of Africadian artistic expression: during this time Clark published his first book of poetry, *Saltwater Spirituals and Deeper Blues* (1983) (Clarke with Moynagh 79-80). Further, in Volumes I and II of *Fire on the Water* Clarke began the process of anthologizing Africadian authors, developing a historical and contemporary African-Canadian maritime canon of literature that represents an Africadian history.

The compilation of a foundational collection of literature is a particularly significant part of Clarke's Africadia project. Since the conceptual geography of Africadia is based on the historical cultural development of real Black communities, looking at the works of these communities collectively brings the literatures of the past into the present and connects the art of the present organically to that of the past. The result is a “racial project” (Omi and Winant 2) which uses this regional consciousness to intentionally alter the racial formation of Black people in the Maritimes, on a multi-dimensional—artistic, political, physical, social, communal, conceptual—level. Clarke further explains the significance of his compilation:

We can call it a renaissance, because there has been...a need for retrieving the memories and cultural traditions suggested by that experience. And so much of the "art" has been about going back to, or going through the historical record, and dramatizing certain incidents in the life of the community. (Clarke with Moynagh 80)

Compiling a canon for Africadia might be read as a symbolically mimicking act.

Clarke's collection of these materials "dramatizes" the historical development of his own ethnic community which acts as a liaison between the nationalist boundaries of Africadia and the historical evolution of the community. As the founders of Black Nova Scotian communities began to navigate the Canadian cultural landscape, their language and dialect drew from, and appropriated, the language of the British, French, and American colonial powers. Clarke discusses his own process of writing, compiling, and editing the Africadian canon with a similar style of appropriation: "[I] sack and plunder all those larger literatures—British, American, Canadian, French, African-American, Caribbean—and [...] domesticate their authors and their most famous or noted lines" (Clarke with A. Compton 6).

Clarke's desire to "sack and plunder" manifests in an Africadian aesthetic which draws heavily from both the Baptist and blues roots of the community. For example, the four major parts of Clarke's first compilations *Fire on the Water Vol. 2* are "Genesis," "Psalms," "Acts," and "Proverbs;" and instead of an introduction, the book sports a "Confession" (Clarke, *Fire on the Water* 9). Further, the inclusion of "photographs in his books, the archival material, the recipes, the music, the newspaper clippings, the long lists of dedication and

acknowledgement... all indicate that Clarke sees himself as a figure charged with a near-religious, but definitely political, responsibility to collect, protect, and nurture the cultural artifacts of his community”(MacLeod 106-107). It comes as little surprise that Africadia is a commemoration of the “everyday,” and Clarke’s inclusion of archival material and aesthetic traditions pertinent to the history of his community, attempts to fulfill his goal of reclaiming Africadian culture from a space of benign nostalgia.

The aesthetics of Africadia, as described by Clarke, reflect a renaissance awareness of the political complications of the English language. As Trinidadian-Canadian scholar M. Nourbese Philip describes, English is “a language that was...etymologically hostile and expressive of the non-being of the African” (Philip 46). I believe Clarke agrees. Clarke insists that “while [the] Africadians will continue, in increasing numbers, to learn Standard English [...] education must not be won at the expense of our own native, stunning, and bluesy tongue” (Clarke, *Odysseys* 101). The approach that Clarke brings to his poetics is grounded in the belief that “[Africadia] is, then, a fragmented collective, one fissured by religious, ethnic, class, and length-of-residency differences” (Clarke, *Directions* 15), a microcosm of Canada’s multi-ethnic blackness.

Now that we have a sense of Africadia as a conceptual nationalistic space, my introduction to the history of Africadia, beginning with the Africadian renaissance, frames a history of Black communities in Nova Scotia within a narrative scope. Examining the history of Africadia—as opposed to the history of

Africville⁵ or other predominant Black communities in the Maritimes—is practical because it synthesizes the histories and artistic influences of a range of communities into a singular regional ethnicity; and as I described in the introduction, this ethnicity allows for a reading of aesthetics that is also critical of identity and race formation in a larger Canadian context. Both historical Africadia and the Africadian renaissance require a particular understanding of blackness on either side of the 49th parallel, and as Clarke describes in his essay “Must All Blackness Be American?” (Clarke, *Odysseys* 71), regionalism plays a particular role in understanding how the aesthetics of these two distinct Black communities can draw so heavily from a collective origin and still produce nationally distinct literatures.

It must be noted that traditional ideas of the divide between African-American and African-Canadian blackness tend to be positioned around respective relationships to slavery, and subsequently, how these related but distinct Black groups developed post-slavery on either side of the border. As Robin W. Winks describes, “Canadians [have] tended to view their neighbors in the midst of their racial dilemma with a certain air of moral superiority” (Winks qtd. in *Odysseys* 30). Perhaps it is best to first dispel this myth, since Canadians legally practiced slavery until its abolition by the British Empire in 1833, just over thirty years earlier than the USA. Despite the existence of slavery on both sides, life in British North America and the United States has been strikingly different

⁵ One of Canada's oldest centralized Black communities, Africville, Nova Scotia, was razed to the ground in the early 1960s.

since the American War of Independence. “African-American emigrations to British North America / Canada began in 1783 (The Black Loyalists), 1812-15 (the Black Refugees), 1850-65 (the fugitives)” (Clarke, *Odysseys* 33). Emigrants from the USA entered Canada under different circumstances, worked and lived in different climates, and developed in relation to a wide range of social, political, and spiritual factors that are regionally heterogeneous. Clarke notes how this regional difference has resulted in a Canadian “Balkanization” of blackness and subsequent removal of Blacks from the historical record (Clarke, *Odysseys* 28). Canadian regionalism recognizes the histories unique to the varied geographic, temporal, and ideological communities that call this country home. However, many of the Black segments of these regional histories are excluded from traditionally White national narratives.

The varying historical trajectories of Black communities on both sides of the border can perhaps be best understood as they manifest in the present. As Clarke described in an interview with Wayde Compton and Kevin McNeilly: “You are as black Canadian as you wish, more or less, in our context. And that makes for a far more heteroglot, far more diverse, far more democratic kind of community, I feel, and far more diverse community than you have with African Americans” (Clarke with Compton 57). Clarke’s advocacy for a heterogeneous Black experience in Canada ignores some of the more determinant effects of the White gaze; however, he alludes to a historical break that accounts for this kind of unique “Canadian Blackness” of which Africadia is a distinct part. This is not to

suggest that these two communities developed in isolation from one another. As

Clarke admits in an interview with Pilar Dominguez, Africadia is:

largely African-American in formation, and background and history, that's where most of our ancestors came from, the South, as escaping slaves, but not through the Underground Railroad, but rather through the two major migrations that occurred after the American Revolution and after the War of 1812. (Clarke with Dominguez 190)

The result of these migrations developed into what James W. Walker describes as “a unique society” which “belonged to a new way of life that began and grew in Loyalist Nova Scotia” (Walker, *The Black Loyalists* 85).

Life in 18th and 19th century Nova Scotia was particularly tough for Africadians; lands that had been promised to Black Loyalists were usually small, unproductive farms and many new migrants were obliged to go into (un)skilled labour, abandoning farming altogether (Winks, *The Blacks in Canada* 36-37). Socially, Black migrants met with the wrath of economically frustrated White inhabitants who regularly attacked Black settlements: burning houses and destroying buildings (39). This racial discrimination carried on through the migration after the War of 1812 and well into the present.

Historian Ian McKay describes in his book *In the Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (2010) a tourism poster printed by the Nova Scotia Department of Highways in 1936, which lists the “Native Types of Nova Scotia” as “English, Scotch, Irish, French” and “Hanoverian” (McKay 10-11). McKay is critical of the posters’ message because it divides ethnicities with close historical origins along racial lines: “As it turns

out, no such verifiable historical or personal ties of kinship, locality, or ideas bind these [five races] together. What unifies them is *whiteness*” (11). Further, McKay recognizes that “the montage omits...Afro-Nova Scotians, the longest-settled black population in Canada” (11). McKay’s book acknowledges not only the direct racism Africadians face, but also the systemic violence of historical erasure. Clarke recounts in an interview with Pilar Cuder Dominguez how “we have to be insistent about our historical reality, our historical presence, because that has shaped our population in certain ways, and it's something that we need to have recognized” (Clarke with Dominguez 191). To Clarke, the writing of history and the writing of literature are necessary parts of the recognition of the Africadian community. Similarly, the inhabitants of Africadia learned early on the necessity of collectivity as a form of communal support and resistance to racism. The church in particular became a hub of community collectivity, solidarity, politics, expression and subversion (Walker, *The Black* 79-80). It is from this communal sanctuary that we make our transition into, arguably, the most aesthetically (and simultaneously politically) influential institution in the history of Africadia: the Baptist Church.

As Henry Louis Gates Jr. explains, during the formation of the North American literary canon the Cartesian assertion that “reason” was the pivotal human characteristic meant that “writing, especially after the printing press became so widespread, was taken to be a *visible* sign of reason”(Gates 8). This was immensely important to the development of Black racial formation in the

New World, so “if Blacks could write and publish imaginative literature, then they could...take a few ‘giant steps’ up the chain of being” (8). For example, in 1772 Phillis Wheatley was called upon to give an oral defense of a group of poems she had written. Her examiners result stated: “[we] do assure the World, that the poems specified...were (as we variably believe) written by Phillis a young Negro Girl...She has been examined by some of the best judges, and is thought qualified to write them” (Wheatley qtd in Gates 7). As this example suggests, reason—and by extension humanity—was a quality testable by the gaze of socially dominant White people. Since humanity was a performable quality completed through the fulfillment of Cartesian notions of reason, other social activities closely linked to literacy and art could combine to resist the dehumanizing gaze of colonial whiteness.

To eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europeans another significant part of being a “whole” human-being was the observance of Christianity and the validation of one’s soul. The church gave the Africadian community a claim to recognizable humanity through which they could derive collective respect. The Baptist church was established by the earliest Black settlers of Nova Scotia and was established against considerable opposition during a time when even White Catholics and Presbyterians had to subsist under the rule of the Church of England (Clarke with Dominguez 190). For the early Africadians the church was an immense cultural asset; for the first time Black Nova Scotians had a community institution under their control, grounded in a collective faith (190). As Walker

notes, “Religion made them aware of race to a greater extent...it bound them together as a select all-black group against the encroachments of outsiders”(Walker, *The Black* 86). The immense significance—and by extension influence—of the Baptist church within the cultural development of Africadia carries a strong voice in Clarke’s poetics.

The poem sample included at the beginning of this chapter highlights some of the aesthetic traditions that emanated from the church. The rhetoric of sermon--“shouts, hollers, coos, cries, screams” (Clarke, *Whylah* xxiii)--all have a profound influence on Clarke’s poetic style. Similarly, the musical influences of spirituals, gospel, hymns, and by extension blues, characterize the shared “rhetorical style based not so much on grammar as on rhythm, one marked by biblically cadenced phrases and sentences and by the usage of such techniques as repetition, catalogues, and parallelism” (Clarke, *Odysseys* 100). The sense of collectivity fostered by the church is expressed by many Africadian writers, and Clarke’s poetry is reflective of the biblical impact of the church on the artistic development of the community. Clarke’s poetry attempts to reach, through literature, a similar sense of regional community grounded in collective institutions, such as the church.

In an interview with Anne Compton (1996) Clarke discussed the significance of music as a link between the community and his own artistic expression. As Clarke explains, the creation of art and music within the church resisted the encroaching racism of outsiders and proclaimed, “We have an

existence, and we have a means of defining our own existence for ourselves” (Clarke with A. Compton 7). Artistic expression represented the longevity of the Black community, and as a result, became the hub through which a range of musical and artistic styles developed. Blues, the other aesthetic expressed in Clarke's work, developed as a secular manifestation of spirituals, Gospel, and country, music influences: the term “blues” can be traced back to the “Blue Devils” signifying a state of melancholy or depression (Oliver et al 36-7). Clarke's own work reflects an attention to the instrumental influence music had in the development of Black expression. As he describes in an interview with Anthony Joyette:

The unprejudiced scholar will note that our heritage of hybrid tongues, avant-garde music (jazz and rap and reggae and calypso), bricolage theologies, and Métis cultural forms, not to mention our performance tradition highlighting the polyrhythmic, polyphonous, and metaphysical (insisting on wit, word play, and rhyme), grant us all the ingredients necessary to create a world-shaking literature. (Clarke with Joyette 85)

Clarke's summation draws particular attention to the role of the vocal, highlighting the music of the “polyrhythmic” and “performance tradition.” As we shall see, a focus on the auditory was not only influential in the development of community expression—such as with Baptist sermons—but further, widespread illiteracy made orality a foundational element in the cultural development of an Africadian art form.

Paul Gilroy observes in *The Black Atlantic* that Africans carried out of slavery a focus on music and orality which were some of the “few cultural opportunities...offered as a surrogate for the other forms of individual autonomy

denied by life on the plantations”(Gilroy 74). Gilroy further suggests that “Music becomes vital at the point at which linguistic and semantic indeterminacy / polyphony arise amidst the protracted battle between masters, mistresses, and slaves” (74). As in the statement from Clarke that I cited earlier, the emphasis on polyphony is a characteristic part of African-Canadian aesthetic traditions; similarly, Gilroy’s attention to music suggests an aesthetic tradition that predates the slave experience. Walter Pitts links Baptist aesthetics back to the African continent in his article “West African Poetics in the Black Preaching Style” (1988). Author of *God’s Trombones*, James Weldon Johnson recounts: “the sermon’s delivery depended on rhythmic speech and a manipulation of Black Vernacular English, interspersed with the language of the King James Bible, in order to replicate the ‘innate grandiloquence of the old African tongue.’” (Johnson 9, qtd in Pitts 137). Tracing the oral traditions of the sermon back to West Africa provides a framework that reinforces the role history plays in Africadian aesthetics. The church acts as a kind of conduit through which traditional West African vocal styles are disseminated throughout the Africadian community. Similarly, as Gilroy and Clark suggest, this dissemination and revival manifests in a polyphony of rhythmic styles. Clark affirms: “from our ancestors right down to the present: performance is important to us. Orality and music are important to us. I don’t want to be reductive, but it’s not a cliché, it’s not a stereotype” (Clarke with Dominguez 199). The sermon, therefore, manifests a continued aesthetic tradition (re)invented in the New World.

As Pitts notes in the aforementioned essay, the “*black folk sermon* refers to the Sunday verbal performance of the Black folk preacher who is not seminary-trained but called to the ministry by some visionary experience” (Pitts 137, emphasis in original). As opposed to the White Anglican sermon which is delivered, traditionally, by a seminary-trained, literate, minister; “the sermon employs not only [Black Vernacular English] as its principle code but also volume and pitch modulations” (Pitts 137). As Clarke notes, “African-Canadian literature springs also from *orature* and communal creativity” (Clarke, *Odysseys* 12, emphasis in original). This “communal creativity” perhaps derives from the interactive and informal nature of the Baptist sermon: “the black preacher manipulates the vernacular as a performance device to increase rapport and esteem in the ears of his listeners” (Pitts 138). The “call-and-response” pattern is characteristic of the Baptist sermon as well as its translation into spirituals and blues. *The New Grove Gospel, Blues and Jazz* explains this form in greater depth:

Qualities of vocal timbre, including the use of rasp and shrill falsettos, enriched the sound, and the shouts and interpolated cries of ‘Glory!’ and other words or phrases of encouragement or affirmation made the spiritual into performance. (Oliver et al 14)

The recurrence of the sermon as “performance” is indicative of a deeply rooted aesthetic form that translates forward and backward through history. This form manifests in the contemporary as Clarke describes a poetry reading in his home community: “[I read] ‘Love Letter to an African Woman,’ which is in *Whylah Falls* (58-59), and I read that, and they loved it. The people got quiet and they started to say, ‘Preach it! Testify! That's it brother!’” (Clarke with A. Compton 7).

The communicative properties of Clarke's performance highlights a meeting of content and form, wherein, the themes of the modern Africadian community are married to the performative elements of orature traceable back to West Africa. Clarke attempts to translate this highly performative oratory style to the page as he mixes Baptist rhetoric and form in the poems spoken by the character Reverend F.R. Langford.

In "A Sermon To The Undecided" (Clarke, *Whylah Falls* 138) Clarke employs a variety of Baptist mechanics that translates the power and resonance of the oral sermon to the page. Walter Pitts explains, "the black preacher's style derives from the same West African possession rites as those transplanted to the Caribbean and Brazil" (Pitts 138), and this historical resonance performs a connective function, weaving the historically prominent Baptist form into the modern poetics of the Africadian community. Langford's sermon uses the didactic rhetoric of many traditional preachers, alternating "occasionally between rhetorical and conversational speech, while alternating his prosodic features of speech rate, intensity, and sentence length as contextualization cues shaping the thrust of his argument" (Pitts 140). Similarly, Clarke includes the call-and-response pattern, as well as contracted words to perpetuate this feeling of church authority and community.

Langford's opening lines exemplify this rhetorical dualism: "Sinners, hear the loud sun cryin' awake with freight train howl 'cos it'll be a bit like that when great Christ come cleavin' the cloudy air to thunder love all over His precious

Creation”(Clarke, *Whylah Falls* 138). Langford's address, “Sinners,” evokes the communizing Christian doctrine that all humans are sinners in need of salvation, while simultaneously highlighting that the individuals of that community share a bond rooted in religion. The informal dialect, which Clarke translates in the dropped syllables of “cleavin’” and “cryin’,” reflects this communal atmosphere of the Baptist church. The attention of the individual sinners is compounded with the collectivity religion garners within the community; thus, the preacher's influence stems from the dual rhetorical power of religious and personal themes. The “call-and-respond” pattern is also represented in this piece as Langford cries “Preach out your Bible!” followed by the short line “You gotta feel love, live it, make it true” (Clarke, *Whylah* 139). Both exclamations raise the intensity of the sermon as “the preacher recites Bible verses and makes asides rapidly so as to steer the audience quickly through this important but secondary information” (Pitts 141).

The sermon builds to a crescendo as Langford begins the final paragraph, readdressing the congregation once again as “Sinners.” It doesn't take much imagination to hear him shouting the lines: “come home to King Jesus! Remember gold streets, sweet pastures, and doves by the river of waters” (Clarke, *Whylah* 139). Finally, “during the sermonic climax, the preacher ‘sculpts’ his lines into groups of alternating four and three-verse clusters, wedged between hummed breath-groups” (Pitts 145). Clarke's final lines are formed into a stanza and set out in italics apart from the body of the prose-poetry sermon. The

structure of these lines, their tone, rhythm, and cadence emulate the following transcription—provided as an example by Pitts—of the final lines of a sermon performed by Rev. Leanza Harris (hummed breath-group, pauses marked by “[*]”):

I got a place somewhere in God's Kingdom [*]
One of these days, no mo' suffering down here [*]
No more cryin' down here [*]
And No more lyin' down here [*]
(lapse into prosaic, non-chanted speech)
Everyday will be Sunday.
And Sabbath have no end. (Pitts 143)

Similar to the final lines of Langford's sermon in prose paragraphs, Harris's final lines raise in the kind of crescendo that I described above and then break into a “non-chanted speech” and the hummed breath groups once more disappear. Here are Langford's final lines:

*We're gonna shine in the fiery storm;
We're gonna dance on the starry shore;
We're gonna shout Christ's gloried name;
Praise God! None of us will be the same!*
(Clarke 139, emphasis in original)

Langford's sermon bears a striking resemblance to Pitts's transcription. Clarke's lines carry a similar cadence for the rhythm and the syllabic structures are very close to identical; and while one includes a decrescendo, they both highlight a moment of climax built up by a series of collective statements in the future tense. Clarke's “Sermon” draws clear ties to the Baptist roots of his community, and reproduces it with such detail that its historical significance is clear.

Much like the sermon, “black spirituals [are characterized by] the use of microtonally flattened notes. Sometimes identified as lower thirds, fifths and sevenths” (Oliver et al 13). The emphasis on rhythm in both sermon and spiritual reflects the interconnectedness of church influence and voice-music, both of which lend their meter and tone to Clarke’s poetry. As he describes it: “studying New World African literature, then, one must appreciate the inseparable union of text and voice music—as in transcriptions of spirituals” (Clarke, *Odysseys* 12). In poetry, Clarke utilizes a particular cadence and rhythm to emulate voice-music. Similar to the prose-poetry style of “A Sermon to the Undecided,” Clarke demonstrates how the Baptist aesthetic can shift between song and speech—a repeated feature of the sample poem “Responsive Reading,” included at the beginning of this essay—so that the line between prose and poetry, sermonic preaching and biblical aside, becomes nearly invisible. The historical significance of the “the religious overtones of [Clarke’s work] are obvious, and [he] has often drawn parallels between his own work and the New Jerusalem, city-on-a-hill thematic that runs through so much of America’s early puritanical writing” (Macleod 108). Through this perspective, *Africadia* as a conceptual/physical geography is clearly rooted in the dominant socio-cultural influence of the Baptist church.

It is also the case, however, as Clarke mentioned in his introduction, that “*Whylah Falls* was born in the blues.” The blues, like gospel and spirituals, emerges out of the musical knowledge of former slaves; and Clarke uses that

historical power to give Africadia its soul. The aesthetic form of the blues, however, is difficult to pin down as “blues is also a way of performing. To many it is the essence of the art; a singer or performer who cannot, or does not express blues feeling is not a ‘bluesman’” (Oliver et al 37). Capturing the sounds of the blues in text requires an attention to “certain qualities of timbre involving rasp or growl vocal techniques...and flattened and shaded notes that produce sad and mournful sounds” (Oliver et al 37). As Paul Gilroy notes in “It Ain’t Where You’re From, It’s Where You’re At ... The Dialectics of Diasporic Identification,” the opacity of these non-rational utterances is a manifestation of the “slave sublime:” the impossibility of articulating the historical pain of slavery as well as the ecstasy of overcoming it (Gilroy 11). Similar to the unexplainable definition of “blues feeling,” this articulation of the “slave sublime” exemplifies a way of reading even non-rational vocalizations as the manifestations of a historical thread. Clarke’s use of blues forms can, perhaps, be similarly read as derived from the historical and artistic expressions of Africadia, including their migration from The United States.

Similar to “non-rational utterances” is the role of improvisation and spontaneity as aesthetic indicators of the blues. The ethereal essence and individualism of the blues makes its representation in poetry difficult to achieve since “improvisation is an essential part of blues” (Oliver, Harrison, and Bolcom 37). The historical link between the blues and communal significance are clear, “symbolically, at least, the blues represents the struggle of black people to regain

their sense of pride and identity after the humiliations and sufferings of the African diaspora and 200 years of slavery” (Oliver, Harrison, and Bolcom 39).

While Clarke asserts that, in Africadia, spirituals and country may have been more influential than blues, Clarke's bluesy, free-verse, style highlights the rhythms of a blues guitar. As Clarke explains in the tenth-anniversary introduction to *Whylah Falls*, “I wanted to resurrect that lost time when poetry was lightning and rich rain, falling on a steel guitar” (Clarke, *Whylah Falls* xi). The “steel guitar,” an iconic sound in country music, is adapted to fit a blues sound. As *The New Grove Gospel, Blues, And Jazz* explains, “by favouring the guitar...second-generation songsters form a link between older song traditions and the blues” (Oliver, Harrison, and Bolcom 45). The dynamic fluidity of the blues—its ability to adapt to other historically popular instruments, cannibalize their style, their sound—means that its essence has within it a range of other distinct influences. As a result, blues aesthetics have a particularly resonant cultural prominence throughout the history of Black communities. The focus on the journey in blues, the traveling bluesman, ties the melancholy of the wandering musician into a symbol for the larger Black diaspora. The blues aesthetic in Clarke's work highlights the deep historical significance this musical form has to the national narrative of Africadia, and on a larger level Black cultural evolution throughout the past two-hundred years.

In his poem “To Selah”(Clarke, *Whylah Falls* 59) Clarke writes a standard verse poem in three stanzas of six lines which imitates a common variation on the

“three-line, 12-bar stanza” which “followed the 12-bar sequence but that consisted of a repeated couplet, the first sung within four bars, the second over eight”(Oliver et al 44). The final stanza of the poem:

Stars are drippin' like tears,
The highway moves like a hymn;
Stars are drippin' like tears, beau'ful,
The highway sways like a hymn.
And I reach for your love,
Like a burglar for a gem (Clarke, *Whylah Falls* 59)

The repeated couplets of “the highway” and “Stars are drippin'” imitate the blues variation (mentioned above) while the contracted “beau'ful” creates a syllabic count in the line “Stars are drippin' like tears, *beau'ful*,” that imitates the improvisational elements of blues music. The breaks in between each of the six-line stanzas, represents the potential space that would traditionally be filled by improvisation, “like a blues guitarist using a piece of glass to alter notes” (Clarke xi). Similarly, Clarke uses these spaces to let the natural cadence of the line “echo” afterward and transition into the next stanza. The connective properties of the poem's blues form is mirrored by the content: allusions to hymns and Baptist rhetoric link the historical content to the present through structure and form. Clarke's use of a poetic form that adopts the rhythm of a blues aesthetic is particularly powerful in calling forth the blues, despite the absence of actual music.

Clarke draws upon blues forms explicitly as well as implicitly. The titles of many of the poems in *Whylah Falls*: “King Bee Blues,” “Jordantown Blues,” and “Death Song,” explicitly identify the blues soul of the works. The standard

verse form of many of these poems reproduces the rhythms of blues music without allusions to instrumental accompaniment. Clarke's prose-poem "Four Guitars" uses a combination of the 12-bar structure (two common variations mentioned before) as well as descriptions of instrumentals, to evoke a blues aesthetic in content and form. Clarke's opening to this prose-poem alludes to the improvisational qualities of a blues aesthetic: "Pushkin, Othello, and Pablo gather in the livingroom coral reef, under a sea of sunshine, to perform improv music (no note knowing where the next is going to or coming from)" (Clarke 104). This introductory line explicitly engages with the importance of improvisation to the blues style; further, the ironic assertion that the following prose-poem is an act of "improv," perhaps makes room for a conceptual space between lines where the reader may carry the music of the lines into the silence of individual reading. However one imagines these spaces, silent or loud, Clarke at least makes an attempt to represent the wandering spirit of the blues musical experience. I believe, to a certain subjective extent, Clarke is successful in his attempt: the inclusion of "infernal hollers" relates the tone to the non-rational utterances partial to the "slave sublime;" the inclusion of the nursery rhyme "If All the World Were Apple Pie" acts as an intertextual foundation, and through Clarke's poetic manipulation, this structure can be followed (Clarke 104). These examples suggest that a focus on the auditory is an essential part of Clarke's aesthetic.

Clarke continuously manipulates and re-manipulates the pitch and tone of the poetry—going so far as to name the "*abb* rhyme scheme, the cadence of

decadence”(Clarke 104), mentioned above—so each line is prefaced with a series of modifiers that alter the conceivability of the stanza while maintaining its free-blues aesthetic. The prelude to Pushkin's stanza introduces “sedimentary notes laden with a sorrow” and “E or A notes pluck[ed]” like “luscious fruit, heavy with memory and tears” (Clarke, *Whylah* 104). The melancholy that resonates through the preceding lines shifts the tone of the stanza: “April rain snows white and cold, / I feel so goddamn scared” (Clarke, *Directions* 105), so the emphasis falls on the “snows,” the “cold,” and the “scared.” While the content sets the tone of the verse, the form of the stanza operates with the same blues mechanics as the modified 12-bar blues. This formal change distinguishes blues time so that the focus falls exclusively on the interaction between rhythm and form, since the tone has already been established in the previous lines.

This isolated and italicized stanza works in contrast to the lines included just below integrated into the prose: “‘Don’t do me evil / If you want the sun to shine,’ holding a breadknife against the throat of the guitar, forcing forth bastard slurs and mongrel fluctuations”(Clarke, *Whylah* 105). Clarke shifts the focus of these two lines of poetry away from their lyrical qualities; and instead, towards their position as vocal sounds in conjunction with the described music. This partnership between line and description acts as an exploded version of the rhetorical strategy Clarke employs in naming other songs—“Black Liquor”—or a certain artist: “the radio cantos of Ezra ‘Epopée’ Pound” (Clarke 105). Through allusion, Clarke is able to manipulate the tone of the prose-poetry to continuously

emulate a blues improv aesthetic. The collage style of lyrics, instrumental description, and blank verse creates a “bluesy” improvised style where the narrative of the prose puts a breadknife to the chords of the poetry, and the poetry enriches the depth of the prose.

Much of this essay has been dedicated to tracing the ways Clarke pulls artistic influence from the significant establishments of his community and transforms them into an ethnic regionalist aesthetic. The founding of Africadia stakes a historical claim to the narrative of Nova Scotia and reproaches the official historical narratives of the nation. The particular influence of Baptist aesthetics and blues influences roots Clarke's Africadia to a particular experience of race in Canada and recognizes that this experience shaped the way Africadians expressed their own sense of being. While a regionalist perspective presents a closed conceptual space, the process of tracing the relationship of modern aesthetics and cultural history highlights moments of shared aesthetic meetings. Further, a reading for aesthetics resists the historical influence of Post-colonial theory, with its focus on binary oppositions, and instead promotes a reading of these and other Canadian literatures on a foundation of artistic similarity.

In the following chapter we move away from our examination of aesthetics firmly rooted in musical traditions and examine the poetics of Dionne Brand's politics as well as the politics of her poetics. I trace her unique combination of local and global subjectivities which are less interested in national borders and more interested in the cartography of the Black Diaspora. Clarke's

poetic representation of racial formation in Canada draws in many different socio-political vectors. His aesthetics, similarly, highlight the meeting of different roots and routes into Canada, the range of ethnicities that make up even just the relatively small area of Africadia, and his attention to the internal and external forces that manipulate racial formation highlights a view of Canadian blackness that is regionally, ethnically, distinct. As we shall see in the following chapters, Dionne Brand and Wayde Compton (experiencing drastically different social and physical geographies) articulate not only Canadian blackness, but the Black Diaspora and Black Atlantic in differing ways.

Chapter 2

“Longing for the Dissonance”: Dionne Brand’s Cartography of the Black Diaspora

Dionne Brand’s poetics is a reflection of the multi-ethnic, multi-national, and multi-cultural composition of her Diasporic community in Canada and beyond. While her work reflects a variety of visual, auditory and rhetorical styles, Brand expresses an immense range of aesthetic influences from a wide breadth of cultures and mixes these with an urgent political consciousness. Whereas Clarke grounded the cultural consciousness of his “Africadia” in a specific geographic space, Brand writes from a social consciousness that cannot be restricted to any one nation-state. Rather, Brand’s aesthetics flow from the consciousness of the Black Diaspora, what Rinaldo Walcott calls “Diaspora sensibilities” (Walcott, *Black Like* 23). These “sensibilities” can be more specifically described as “the desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity” within the geographic area of the former Atlantic slave trade: North America, Europe, and the Caribbean (Gilroy 19). Ever-present in her poetry, fiction, and criticism is a longing to map the conceptual geography of the Black Atlantic and articulate the social, political, and sexual politics of that space. This cartographical objective is characteristic of the Black Diaspora’s search for home and is made clear by the political tone of Brand’s

artistic voice which calls for the social transformation of “here” to “Home” as a space of belonging.

Brand's focus oscillates between the Caribbean and Toronto and in both spaces expresses an awareness of the multi-national consciousness underpinning the roots and routes of the Black Diaspora in and beyond Canada. It is from this wider consciousness that Brand makes reference to a range of influences situated in both the West Indian archipelago and the densely multicultural demographics of Toronto. Her poetics reflect elements of jazz, calypso, and Dadaism; the critical voices of CLR James, Kamau Braithwaite, and Karl Marx; the poetics of Derek Walcott, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Aimé Césaire (Brand with Butling and Rudy 85). Inextricably bound to these influences is a sharp political consciousness marinated in the African liberation, Black Power, and Civil Rights movements of the 1960s. The relationship between the political and the poetic are essential aspects of Brand's work and repeatedly operate as a kind of artistic dyad that marks the artistic engagement of poetry as an inherently political act (Brand, *Bread Out of Stone* 25).

Examining the relationship between aesthetics and politics is essential to understanding the aesthetics of Brand's poetry. As she explains in her book, *A Map to the Door of No Return*:

I could develop that voice so full of cold address to beauty. I could with some self-defacement go about the business of making my living. I could say in that way that many do: oh, it's not so bad, your writing need not show your skin, it need not speak of trouble, history is a burden after all. (Brand, *Map to the Door* 100)

Brand's poetics express an aesthetic that is both sharp and beautiful; one that captures the physical landscapes of both Toronto and the Caribbean, and the conceptual geography of these spaces within the Black Atlantic. In this way, "Cartography is description, not journey. The door, of course, is not on the [African] continent but in the mind; not a physical place—though it is—but a space in the imagination" (Brand, *Map* 97). Cartography is an adept metaphor because it recognizes that there is an existing (meta)physical geography and that reading for aesthetics, while seeking to describe, must also acknowledge that which is structurally significant and also culturally implicit. Brand's assertion that "I don't want to suggest that my thoughts are typical of the Black Diaspora, only that they proceed from the experience" (Brand, *Map* 92) relieves her of the impossible task of speaking *for* a singular Black experience while simultaneously speaking *of* that experience as part of the Black Diaspora.

This chapter examines a range of Dionne Brand's works, including *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2001), *No Language is Neutral* (1990), *What We All Long For* (2005), *Bread out of Stone* (1994), and *Ossuaries* (2010) amongst others. In these works of criticism, poetry, and fiction, Brand's Marxist resistance to White capitalist domination overshadows her use of any one auditory or musical form; rather, her art is collectively interwoven with aesthetics that reflect the diverse community of the Black Diaspora living in the Black Atlantic. For example, her jazz influences are represented literally, regularly naming musicians such as Betty Carter, Ornette Coleman, and Charlie Parker; however, her use of

jazz to represent her multicultural community through the structural “mixed origins and... stylistic diversity” (Oliver et al 223) of the music might be considered a much more prominent representation of jazz in her work. Since the origins of jazz can be traced back to the polyrhythmic styles of West Africa, and then through the slave trade to the New World (Oliver et al 223-4), Brand’s use of the form is deeply connected to her Diasporic voice.

In *What We All Long For*, Brand has her character Oku describe Ornette Coleman’s song “The Jungle is a Skyscraper” in words that clarify the link between jazz aesthetics and the Black Diaspora: “when you can’t take it anymore, right, when you have had so much confusion, but it’s not confusion at all, you see...but anyway, then he gives you the melody, see, and guess what, guess what? Then in the middle of the melody, which you wanted, right, you find yourself longing for the dissonance” (Brand, *What We All Long For* 228). The intensely metaphoric title of the song reflects the meeting of the new urban landscape and the historical influence of jazz’s West African roots; the cadence of Oku’s lines mimic jazz scat and rhythm through onomatopoeia, which Brand then layers once more with the metaphorical imagery of Oku’s description. Furthermore, the commentary on the music itself is reflective of a kind of urban cacophony and also a more conceptual—collective—unrest or anticipation, evidenced by the lines interrupted with the repeated word “right.” In this way Brand layers meaning “so that language and words and sound and song can point to old, new and different

possibilities of worlds pushed up against each other” (Walcott qtd. in Gorjup and Valente 24).

Perhaps the best example of Brand's collapsing of the political and the



Figure 1. Lawrence, Jacob. *Shipping Out*. 1946-47. Tempera on hardboard.

aesthetic comes from the poem “ossuary XI.” In this poem Brand describes paintings from Jacob Lawrence's 1947 War series: “I cried with him, held his lovely heads, / his angular gentle faces as my own, his bodies, / driven with intention” (Brand, *Ossuaries* 81). In her poetic representation of

“Shipping Out” (Figure 1) Brand describes the composition of the art as well as its

implicit qualities: “who could not see this like the passage's continuum, / the upsided down-ness, the cramp, the eyes compressed” (Brand 81). Her description textually constructs the political voice of Lawrence's paintings which, inspired by the social consciousness garnered in the Harlem Renaissance, aimed to represent the history and experience of African-Americans in transition from the plantation to this new urban landscape. By adopting Lawrence's political voice from his paintings, Brand's poem ignores the borders of history and nationality to connect the experience of African-American social transition to her own experience of Toronto. To Brand, the experiences of the Black Diaspora cannot be confined to any one particular nation.



Figure 2. Lawrence, Jacob. *Another Patrol*. 1946. Tempera. The Estate of Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence.

Of “Another Patrol”

(Figure 2) Brand questions:

“what border are they patrolling,
/ the thin diagonal between then
and now, / and for whom their
determination to mount / the
fragile, fragile promise of

humanity, / their painter knew
the rimlessness of any hopes, /

the limitless vicinities” (Brand, *Ossuaries* 82-83). Her language captures the painting’s tone, its dark expressionism, but also its “thin diagonal” moving the eye up the makeshift gang-plank. Through her poetics, Brand bridges the gap between World War II, with its own politics of race—its hypocrisy of service, patriotism and belonging—to the modern politics of the Black Diaspora, the “diagonal between then and now.” However, this metaphorical temporal divide works in another way, connecting the painting’s subjects’ movement boarding the ship with the forced-march of slaves leaving West Africa. This description adds her own political voice questioning race, nationalism, citizenship and the inextricability of the artist as witness. Brand’s use of visual art, specifically from an African-American artist, reflects her desire to speak from the Black Diaspora, rather than be confined to a purely Canadian scope.

Cartography, in essence, is the creation of “worlds pushed up against each other,” the movement from a space of familiarity into the unknown, a meeting of the physical and the conceptual: paintings and poetry. Brand collapses the distance between the physical and conceptual geographies that make up the Black Diaspora's space in the Black Atlantic. As James W. Walker describes in his short book *The West Indians in Canada*, “Between 1961 and 1966 over 12,000 West Indians migrated to Canada” due, in part, to changes in the scoring structure of the immigration process propelled by the West Indian Domestic Scheme (Walker, *West Indians in Canada* 12). This “Scheme” opened immigration to West Indian immigrants between the late 1950s and mid-1970s in an attempt to fill low and un-skilled labour positions. As Walker notes, “As with all immigrants, West Indians experience insecurity and disorientation on first arriving in Canada...For West Indians there is the additional shock of finding themselves, for the first time, relegated to minority status in a white world that appears unwelcoming” (Walker, *West* 12). Canada's forces of xenophobia and economic necessity have never been in sync, and for many West Indian immigrants the culture shock of landing in Canada was a particularly extreme illustration of this imbalance.

In *What We All Long For*, Brand's character Fitz Barker, a middle-aged, first generation, West Indian immigrant, explains his memory of landing in the “white world” of Toronto: “Boy, when I come to this country, I didn't have nobody, you know!...You think is one time I wanted to weep here in this place? But I couldn't do that. Who would bother with me? I was a man. Boy, you hear

what I'm saying? I was a man" (Brand, *What We All Long For* 83). Brand captures the anxiety of Fitz's experience in his isolationist stance; suggesting that he "didn't have nobody," or asking rhetorically "who would bother with me?" As Brand has written it here, Fitz's monologue—while proud or even boastful in his reminiscence of overcoming socio-economic adversity—alludes to a sense of cultural and ethnic isolation typical of immigrants during this time. Similarly, Brand highlights how sexual politics are tied to, and altered within, the different conceptual geographies of the New World: "I was a man." This phrase, while short and visually simple, carries an immense amount of historic and cultural weight. The declaration "I was a man" can be read as an allusion to the calls for equality and recognized humanity that was part of the Civil Rights movement; just as possible, the statement might be highlighting the sense of emasculation that many West Indian emigrants feel under the (racially biased) social pressures of the Canadian economy. While Fitz's reminiscence highlights the connection between physical transition and social politics, it does not account for another essential element of the migration experience: multi-national consciousness.

In *No Language Is Neutral* Brand evokes a demotic to capture the bi-national nostalgia that accompanies the process of Canadian immigration. Her speaker negotiates the conscious ambivalence of arrival, as well as the anxieties that are inextricably bound up with the new urban geography:

Leaving this standing, heart and eyes fixed to a
skyscraper and a concrete eternity not knowing then
only running away from something that breaks the
heart open and nowhere to live. Five hundred dollars

and a passport full of sand and winking water, is how
I reach here. (Brand, *No Language* 25)

These lines evoke a mixture of the melancholy, fear, and anxiety that stems from cultural dislocation. The poem, reflective as it is, notes the imposing sight of Toronto's tall urban structures which fix the speaker's "heart and eyes." Similarly, the reflective voice notes the push-pull tensions, "running away" and "nowhere to live," that characterize the experience of migration. Finally, Brand collapses the physical reality of economic status in Toronto with the sadness of leaving a place that is one's familiar home. "Five hundred dollars / and a passport full of sand and winking water" are powerful images to capture the intensely ambivalent feelings that underline the transition from a space of emotional security and economic insecurity, to a space of cultural insecurity and economic opportunity (if it truly exists).

The final lines of the poem further demonstrate the ambivalence and romanticism that colour the transition between spaces of familiarity and unfamiliarity:

I did read a book once about a
prairie in Alberta since my waving canefield wasn't
enough, too much cutlass and too much cut foot, but
romance only happen in romance novel, the concrete
building just overpower me, block my eyesight and
send the sky back, back where it more redolent. (Brand, *No Language* 25)

In these lines Brand highlights how the speaker's bi-national consciousness is altered between the representation—and subsequent romanticization—of Canada and the actual experience of it. In just a few lines Brand acknowledges the

Promised Land image of Canada only to undermine it, “romance only happen in romance novel,” and also lament that “my waving canefield wasn’t / enough.” Brand represents a consciousness in transition and captures the ambivalent attitudes which characterize the speaker’s perceptions of these two distinct spaces. Part of this ambivalence is related to the disjunction between Canada as Canaan, and the reality of racial experience upon arrival. The result, by the final lines, is a rejection of the urban landscape that originally fixed the speaker’s “heart and eyes,” and she confesses that “the concrete / building just overpowered” her. In the final line of the page, “send the sky back, back where it more redolent,” the use of the word “redolent” is itself indicative of the way language can alienate or naturalize individuals in the New World. The word, meaning strongly reminiscent, stands out of the sentence similar to the way a new migrant’s dialect or vocabulary might mark them ; and in the context of the sentence, the defamiliarizing qualities of the word highlights a nostalgia for a language of home.

The collapse of physical landscapes and the politics that govern the different conceptual spaces of the Black Atlantic is a major part of what we might call a Brand aesthetic; in her “Winter Epigrams,” she reflects upon the shocking change in climate. The short lines “I give you these epigrams, Toronto, / these winter fragments /... because you mothered me / because you held me with a distance that I expected, /...because you gave me nothing more /... because you are a liar, / there is no other season here” (Brand, *Chronicles* 55) powerfully reflect an

incredulity toward both the physical and emotional state of displacement. While not mentioned explicitly, the poem alludes to a nostalgic alternative, a climate that is perhaps true when Toronto's climate is "a liar." Regardless, the language of the piece reflects an uneasy relationship between the speaker and the space of Toronto.

Brand's use of the past-tense verb "mothered" suggests that the personified urban space isn't a mother figure, per se, but rather "one who mothers;" and the distance at which the speaker is held, is evocative of an adoptive parent-child relationship. The result is a poetic consciousness that clearly situates the speaker in the uneven geography between "home" and "here," while similarly characterizing "here" as a possibly hostile space. As Brand notes in an interview with Pauline Butling, "home" is not a place of comfort, "it is a place that needs to be problematized. Home may not be a place where everything is going to be fine" (Brand with Butling 84).

The multi-national consciousness of the New World space is further complicated by the vestiges of colonial rule that still exist in the politics of the Black Diaspora. As Brand notes, there is an uneasy familiarity that subtends the consciousness of the New World and further complicates the conceptual geography necessary to locate oneself within Canada. In *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Brand recounts how she found the crossing into the United Kingdom more familiar than re-entering Canada: "The customs man was affable, not suspicious as are the ones in Canada, whose passport I held." She recalls how

there is a familiarity to knowing that she and her British customs agent both “marched into schools to the same classical music...wore the same uniforms...drank the same condensed milk...read the Brontes and Enid Blyton...we danced the maypole” (Brand, *Map* 76). This recollection highlights the role of “Empire” in the consciousness of the New World space. Brand’s recollection demonstrates an awareness of one of the more problematic elements of Canada’s conceptual geography: the “favorite child” syndrome of the post-colonial state, better known as the “British subject.” As Daniel Coleman describes in *White Civility*, as opposed to being “English”—which became exclusively associated with a particular space local to the British Isles—British subjects became grouped in such a way that allowed for distinction between citizen and subject. The consciousness of Empire is a result of Britain’s attempt to homogenize and simultaneously subjugate the bodies ruled beneath its flag (Coleman 85-6).

Brand alludes to this schizophrenic national duplicity that colours Canada’s (sub)conscious obsession with the idea of citizenship and belonging. She claims “in opposition to the calcified Canadian narrative [immigrants] read calcified hyphenated narratives, without exception, from all other groups in the nation that stand outside of that narrative” (Brand, *Map* 70). Brand’s description of crossing borders highlights a tension that further complicates the politics of Toronto as a New World space. Brand locates the Black Diaspora over the former nations of the Atlantic slave trade. This cartography highlights the complex

conceptual space that Black Canadians must navigate as bodies within the larger geography of the Black Atlantic.

The view of Toronto that Brand depicts through her poetics is congested and messy. The space occupied by Black people in Toronto, Brand suggests, is one of poly-consciousness and the shifting nationalisms of the Black Diaspora; simultaneously, this geographic area presents a socio-political minefield as treacherous as change in climate and landscape. Brand's view of Toronto reflects the complex social politics that are attributed to Black bodies living in this precarious environment. In *The Map to the Door of No Return* she writes: "The Black body is culturally encoded as physical prowess, sexual fantasy, moral transgression, violence, magical musical artistry. Much as one would use a tool or instrument to execute some want or need" (Brand, *Map* 36). Brand's poetics also question how the Black female body is constructed; how it is sexualized or neutralized; how its femininity, orientation, and strength is performed or manipulated in this space; these questions pull other bodies under scrutiny. The Black male body and its manipulation through colonialism and patriarchy becomes a part of understanding the conceptual landscape of the Black Diaspora in Canada. Further, Brand's cartographical poetics attempts to reflect how these bodies are translated between subsequent generations of Black Canadians. Through her depiction, critique, and reflection upon the Black body in the Black Atlantic, Brand attempts to locate where the Black Diaspora exists beyond the confines of the nation-state.

In the heteronormative politics of the Black Atlantic, Brand positions the Black female body outside of the clichéd taxonomies of the “motherly” and “virgin,” definitions which are rooted in representations of Caribbean sensibilities in media and culture. These archetypes, according to Brand, force individual women to become publicly invisible because they do not own their bodies. Rather, “In a world where Black women’s bodies are so sexualized, avoiding the body is a sexual strategy. So writing it in the most conservative terms, striving in the text for conformity to the norm of monogamous heterosexual male gratification” (Brand, *Bread out of Stone* 27). She recalls an example of seeing a woman waiting for a friend on a Toronto street: “she stood trying to be invisible against the street, she almost crouched, stooped, trying to attract only the attention of whomever she was waiting for...I saw her and recognized that look of not calling attention to your Black woman-self”(Brand, *Bread* 128). Being invisible is a strategy for survival, in Toronto—in the Black Atlantic—where the sexual politics are intertwined with history and race. Brand notes how between the city’s patriarchal minefield and the ethnic one, the Black female body is either sexual-public or privately owned.

As Brand’s fellow poet M. Nourbese Philip explains in her essay “Dis Place- The Space Between” the sexual politics of Black femininity in contemporary North American society is situated within the narrative of “the Black woman com[ing] to the New World with only the body. And the space between” (Philip, *Genealogy of Resistance* 76). In the context of the plantation

“the space between the Black woman’s legs becomes *The place*. The site of oppression” (Philip 76). The resulting management of sexuality, for the slave master’s requirement of reproductive qualities or the pleasure of male slaves, “harnesses the use value of the inner space to the use value of the outer space” (Philip 77). In “Canto III” from *Primitive Offensive*, Brand reflects the commoditization of the Black female body through an analogy between mineral wealth and sexual/social value. She writes: “diamonds / pour from your vagina / and your breasts / drip healing copper / but listen woman / dismembered continent / you are alone / see / crying fool / you want to talk in gold / you will cry in iron / you want to dig up stones / you will bury flesh” (Brand, *Chronicles* 8). Brand deconstructs the female body, itemizing the breasts and vagina and associating them with a mineral worth as well as a transformation in the Atlantic slave trade that Brand marks as the origin of the Black Diaspora. Similarly, she compares the difference in value from the woman’s desires as gold when compared with their received public worth, iron.

In response, Brand calls for the reclamation of the sexuality and pleasure of the female body for the “woman-self.” To this cause Brand evokes the figure of the “Zami, meaning woman-loving” (Brand, *Bread out of Stone* 48), in conjunction with another figure who stands outside of the heteronormative model of Black sexuality: “a jamette...the connotation being that not only [is] she a whore but also a lesbian and a brawling fighting woman” (Brand, *Bread* 47). Brand’s use of these two figures, one homosexual, the other sexually

promiscuous, highlights how the sexual politics of racial formation attempts to maintain the Black female body as motherly or victim, and that embracing the pleasures of bodies that exceed these stereotypes can be an empowering and liberating act. Within the Diaspora, movement outside of the heteronormative standards forces the “Zami” and “jamette” bodies to use violence as a form of self defense protection, garnering a reputation for ferocity and resistance that Brand taps into in her poetics (Brand, *Bread* 48).

In *What We All Long For*, the mother of one of Brand's characters embodies this strong female figure. “Jackie's mum” uses her body actively for her own benefit and becomes an inconsumable female figure.

Jackie's mum got in with some girls who had a rivalry with some West Indian girls. Saturday nights they would settle all scores in the women's washroom. The Scotian girls, and she was one, had a reputation for fighting. They would beat you like a man. Because their fathers beat them like men and their brothers beat them like men and their men beat them like men. So they beat each other and those West Indian girls like men. (Brand, *What* 95)

The division between West Indian and “Scotian”—what George Elliott Clarke would call Africadian—experiences of the Black female body alludes to her Diaspora sensibility which acknowledges differences in regional culture, or historical community, as mitigating factors in the Black female experience of the body. However, this perspective also highlights Brand's attention to the Diaspora sensibility, a willingness to represent these differences as a part of the larger experience of ascribing to the Black Diaspora within the varied conceptual geographies of the Black Atlantic. This position, therefore, highlights differences

in the sexual politics of spaces throughout the New World, motioning towards nuances of gender between “Scotian” and West Indian women that is nonetheless characterized by social violence.

Brand intertwines empowerment and violence as two critical elements in her strong female character. The gender politics that characterize Jackie's mum's strong figure, in this example, are inherently bound up with the sexual politics that culturally shape the Black male body, patriarchy, and masculinity. The complex political landscape she reflects suggests that within the family the politics of race and sex are regularly re-enacted.

In the novel Jackie's mum confronts Jackie's father after being called a whore: “‘cause if she was a whore, she wouldn't be with him, he should be glad she wasn't no whore a whore wouldn't have time with his sorry ass” (Brand, *What* 263). Brand is doing some interesting things with the stigma of “whore”; in one regard, she draws strength from the label—Jackie's mum suggests that there is a freedom to leave her man that comes with being a “whore”—it is empowering and falls in line with the potential of stepping outside the heteronormative. The “whore” moniker acknowledges “such sexual leakages as inconvenient, unseemly; they do not conform to the structures for complete control and exploitation of women within these classes” (Brand, *Bread* 48). The “whore,” “jamette,” “Zami” are all simultaneously empowered and socially ostracised figures. These women possess the characteristics necessary to disrupt the objectification of the female

body, and Brand motions toward that tension which ultimately exposes the sexual politics active in the New World space.

But what of the Black male body? How do the politics of the racial formation alter or disrupt Black masculinity, patriarchy, self-image? As we have seen in an early example with Fitz, Black masculinity is depicted as, in part, contingent upon economic success. Fitz's final lines, "Who would bother with me? I was a man. Boy, you hear what I'm saying? I was a man" (Brand, *What* 83), suggests that masculinity is bound up with economic independence. Given the complexity of Toronto's gender and race politics, equating masculinity with economic prosperity is overly simplistic. As Daniel Coleman notes in *Masculine Migrations*, the performance of masculinity in Toronto is based in old British models of respectability and reputation which require a range of social props and sets (Coleman, *Masculine Migrations* 35-6). However, this model which equates monetary wealth (by a "respectable" means), the possession of luxury items (also acquired by "respectable" means), extensive education for the man and his children, and a career deemed socially powerful (i.e. Law or Commerce) also presupposes "that you are white too" (Coleman 35-6). The sexual politics that disrupt the Black male body, therefore, are also politics of race.

True, Brand makes multiple mention of economics as a foundation for masculinity; however, she also reflects the strategy of the "hustler:" the Black man who—by other means—acquires the physical symbols of prosperity to create a "front," an image of prosperity, that circumvents the racial prejudice that bars

him from the “respectable” trappings of masculinity (Hudson qtd in Coleman 39). In some ways the front is representative of the sexual virility of the hustler and plays on the masculinity of the Black male body so that the “substance” of the hustler’s image is bound up with his ability to satisfy females (Hudson qtd in Coleman 39). Brand reflects the range of complex social stigmas that deconstruct the image of self in a pseudo-Lacanian encounter with the mirror. Oku describes an investigation of his own body: “he remembered only a few years ago, when he was a teenager, looking at his dick in the mirror and wondering if his father’s dick was the same length, the same shape” (Brand, *What* 88). In the plot, Oku’s wonderings act as part of a meditation on the sexual choices of the character Jackie, who is dating a White man. However, in the context of Toronto’s sexual politics, Oku is calling into question the qualities necessary for the performance of a successful masculinity. The complexity of Toronto’s body politics comes to bear on Oku’s query as he attempts to understand if the value of his father’s body is endowed with a greater degree of value than his own.

Despite being a well educated Black male, Oku still feels compelled to enhance his masculinity, “fronting” where “Life was all about getting the car, the bling-bling, the honey...You slapped a few bitches in the mall and faced down a few dickheads in the alleyways...You were dangerous. There was a kind of romance about that dangerousness, and Oku teetered at times in that alluring space” (Brand *What* 164). In this way Brand reflects the racial characteristics of the normative sexual politics of the Black body in Toronto. As Oku explains,

“fronting” becomes a strategy for endowing that body with a worth grounded in formidability and commercial success. The sexual politics of the Black body, depicted in these paradigms, suggests an immense interconnectivity that is layered over the existing politics of the Black Atlantic. In this conceptual geography the “slapped bitch” at the mall grows up and becomes Jackie’s mum, who grows up and interacts violently with other Black women; similarly, both the Black male and female bodies are empowered through violence. Brand’s representation of the sexual politics of Toronto, therefore, is grounded in the precariousness and compensatory hyper-assertion of self-identification, self-image.

As Brand discusses in *A Map to the Door of No Return*, the issue of the Black male body repeatedly comes down to valuation. She uses the example of Ben Johnson, who ran the 100m dash in 9.79 seconds and was celebrated as a Canadian celebrity—regardless of skin—until he was caught using steroids: “the nation fleeing his body like parasites...valued and cursed in 9.79 seconds” (Brand, *Map* 39). She further argues that “The Black body is a common possession, a consumer item...So that a young person in Azerbaijan or Texas or Istanbul or Stockholm can embody Michael Jordan with an innocence which belies but nevertheless witnesses the loaded narrative”(Brand, *Map* 40). As Philip traced the sexual commoditization of the Black female body, so too does Brand suggest that the Black male body, with its use value in popular culture for “physical prowess” and “sexual fantasy,” is indicative of the external signification of that body: defined by the sexual politics of the Black Atlantic.

An uncanny moment in Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return* exemplifies the meeting of all of these sexual/social politics which, carried forward, defamiliarizes "the trope of captivity" in representations of the Black body. Brand—succinctly—writes: "So dominant are these images, so compelling, that their affectations have been adopted by young people who wear baggy trousers which hobble their feet into the shuffle of chained prisoners in ill-sized clothing" (Brand, *Map* 36). Here she collapses style and foresight, trope and politics, the body and its manipulation, history—past and present—condensed, so that the style of the next generation of the Black Diaspora amplifies the politics of the Black Atlantic and makes clear the precarious position blackness occupies within the existing conceptual geography.

Brand's attempt to "map" the Black Diaspora is rooted in her own experience of the New World. As she claims in the opening of *A Map to the Door of No Return* the inability to trace her lineage back to Africa represents a "fissure between the past and present. That fissure represented the Door of No Return: that place where our ancestors departed one world for another; the Old World for the New...in some desolate sense it was the creation place of Blacks in the New World Diaspora at the same time that it signified the end of traceable beginnings" (Brand, *Map* 5). The question that Brand is exploring is one of belonging; in the Black Atlantic, "we are all implicated in this sense of origins...This country, in the main a country of immigrants, is always redefining origins, jockeying and smarming for degrees of belonging" (Brand, *Map* 64). But Brand doesn't equate

citizenship with belonging; she doesn't wish to know if she is Yoruba, Ibo, Ashanti, or Mandingo with the intent of acquiring a passport from Mali or Ghana (Brand, *Map* 3). Instead, her broad multi-national focus and repeated alignment with the Black Diaspora suggest that holding a Canadian passport makes you a citizen but it doesn't mean that you belong.

The issue for Brand repeatedly comes down to belonging, and understanding who represents the social, cultural, and ethnic criteria for being a “Canadian” as opposed to a hyphenated-“Canadian.” As Oku quips in *What We All Long For* “what is Canadian in 9.79 seconds and Jamaican in twenty-four hours? Ben Johnson” (Brand, *What* 214). This joke is characteristic of the kinds of underlying criteria that define the Black body as either naturalized or othered. A significant part of this criterion, Brand posits, can be traced through the media of Toronto. Through her examination of newspapers and public representations of ethnicity, Brand notes a variety of ways in which the Black body is placed outside the conceptual bounds of the nation.

In “Brownman, Tiger...” Brand strikes at the heart of the politics of belonging in her stream-of-consciousness critique of the Toronto media.

The newspapers said we live in a multicultural society, the newspapers said when people come here they just have to leave their culture behind and become Canadian, the newspapers said multiculturalism was costing too much money, the newspapers said soon there will be more people of colour than whites here, the newspaper said you had to be white to be Canadian. (Brand, *Bread* 103)

The newspaper (not so) subtly defines who does and does not belong in Toronto through racial representation in the media. The line “they just have to leave their

culture behind” suggests that there are certain, unlisted, qualities that one might embody to become “Canadian.” Similarly, Brand highlights the tension that surrounds these discussions of race and belonging in Canada: the balance between multiculturalism and whiteness. In both of these examples Brand parodies the relationship between race and belonging but also the subtlety with which it is implemented. Her lines suggest that there exists an economic threshold for ethnic inclusion, “multiculturalism was costing too much money,” and the most striking reflection of this ethnocentrism is expressed in the suggestion that “soon there will be more people of colour here than whites,” that “people of colour” must be less numerous than Whites. At the heart of this issue is a reflection of the deep anxiety about race that supplants citizenship as a criterion of belonging in the nation.

In *What We All Long For* Brand critiques the class division, race division, and corruption that make Canadian racism subtle. She writes: “Angie was a border crosser, a wetback, a worker in the immigrant sweatshop they call this city...she tried to step across the border of who she was and who she might be. They wouldn't let her” (Brand, *What* 212). As a reader, the initial question is ‘Who is they?’ The question itself highlights a major node of race anxiety in Toronto: the invisibility of its xenophobia. Clare's ode to Angie addresses the socio-economic lines that make Toronto's racism so subtle, in part because they are blurred by the lines of class, and also because they have been white-washed by

multiculturalism. Brand recalls an example of a boy in one of Toronto's "Level One" low-income schools.

Each day he cowered under his desk or the teacher's desk, his face powdered thickly in chalk dust from the blackboard...This already ghostly child knew both the lesson of his society and his inability to accomplish it—that 'whiteness' gives you grace, blackness plunges you into madness. (Brand, *Bread* 107)

This literal example of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* very clearly speaks to the racial inequality that Brand sees in Toronto. The lines speak to many of the issues of the Black Diaspora that Brand reflects in her art. The double standard of masculinity politics—with its material ties to status and presuppositions of whiteness—characterized by "the lesson of his society and his inability to accomplish it." Brand's essentialisms in the final lines of this example, "whiteness gives you grace, blackness plunges you into madness," highlights the racial double-standard of the White gaze. Fanon's "third person consciousness" combines the gaze, the social politics of the boy's ethnic background, and the social politics of Toronto, to illuminate racial formation in Canada as a process that requires the application of literal White masks. She qualifies her anecdote with essentialism: "superstar or a criminal" (Brand 105), the only two spaces, Brand suggests, where Black bodies are rationalized within the formative social politics of the Black Atlantic.

Similarly, Brand depicts the coldness with which the inhabitants of Toronto regard one another. To her there is no community; it is a fractured and unfriendly place. She writes in *Thirsty* "Here I could know nothing and live, /

harbour a dead heart, / slip corrosive hands into a coat” (Brand, *Thirsty* 20). Her language is representative of the social—and to a certain extent climatic—coldness of the city. People walk around, bundled in their coats, and separated physically from the urban landscape, never making contact with other people as if they had “corrosive hands.” Similarly, her line “I could know nothing” suggests that it is possible to live in Toronto without any greater awareness of its social politics. Perhaps these observations are more far-reaching and instead speak to the larger politics of place which run through the interactions of the Black Diaspora within the Black Atlantic. Further, Brand’s examination of the way these social protocols connote senses of belonging, naturalization and difference within the conceptual geography of the New World space is an essential part of her attempt to map the Black Diaspora from Canada’s cultural margin.

Dionne Brand’s artistic voice is a product of her culturally diverse community, and she represents that diversity through social geographies that run throughout her texts. She presents a view of the Black Diaspora grounded in an understanding of the social politics of that imagined space; the sexual and gender politics that govern the bodies that occupy it; and the way these bodies are manipulated and transmogrified by the nation-states that make-up the nodes of the Black Atlantic. Her art is grounded in the multi-national consciousness characteristic of the Black Diaspora and presents her observations of that experience with a keen Diasporic sensibility. Finally, her work attempts to listen to the voices of her community, their shared experiences; and from those voices,

Brand constructs a map—not of Canada—but of the Black Diaspora in the Black Atlantic. As a poet, novelist, critic, and most importantly cartographer, Dionne Brand illustrates that finding Home is secondary to locating a space of belonging.

Chapter 3

Re-Mix: Wayde Compton's Hip Hop Culture, Aesthetics, and Race Formation

In “Babylon Slim’s Song” (Compton, *49th Parallel* 157) Wayde Compton imagines a poetic (or perhaps literal) meeting between two characters representing two generations of Black people living in British Columbia (BC) (quotation marks used to differentiate between speakers within the poem):

“he says to *me*,
Babylon Slim,
and I quote:
 ‘you,
 my young brother,
 will never understand
 what it *really* means
 to be black. I
 was raised down south
 before all this bullshit
 before
 before
 before
 and you ain’t never gonna understand,
 with your X paraphernalia
 and your gangsta jive
 how you coulda been strung up
 for lookin at an ofay sideways” (Compton 159)

In this exchange the two characters are at odds about what an authentic representation of blackness is. The older man insists that authenticity is tied to a Diasporic history, which is most famously associated with the Southern United States, “you...will never understand / what it really means / to be black.” The older man cites being “raised down south,” where racism meant “you coulda been

strung up for looking at an ofay [(white person)] sideways” as part of the criteria for what it means to “truly” be Black. Contrarily, the younger Babylon Slim asserts “but shit. / it’s plain as day. / old nigga / got the same hard-on as me for those same blue as god-knows-what / mountains” (Compton 159). Babylon Slim’s rebuttal suggests that a local experience of race is not completely determined by past racial experience; rather, that despite how they independently construct their own racialized selves, their shared “hard-on” for the mountains—the local region— remains unaltered. Through this exchange we can begin to see how Compton questions the interrelation between local and global subjectivities as they influence racial formation.

Unlike Toronto and Nova Scotia, BC is not traditionally thought of as a place with a substantial Black presence. However, this reputation is unwarranted and “belies the fact that there are more blacks in BC than in Nova Scotia, a place where Canada rightly perceives... the contributions and presence of blacks” (Compton, *After Canaan* 114). In spite of this reputation, BC poet, critic, and DJ cum “Turntable-ist” Wayde Compton has published two books of poetry, 49th *Parallel Psalm* (1999) and *Performance Bond* (2004); a book of criticism, *After Canaan* (2010); and an anthology, *Bluesprint: Black British Columbian Literature and Orature* (2001), which all explore how race is experienced, constructed, and navigated in B.C. and how this construction corresponds to its formations throughout Canada and the Black Atlantic.

Compton's hip hop aesthetics highlights the multiple foci of his work. Compton's poetry uses a "dub" style, the conscious arrangement of words and stanzas to emulate the rhythms and auditory patterns of spoken word or performance (Gingell 220), but it goes further than that. Compton mentions in his essay "Turntable Poetry, Mixed-Race, and Schizophonia" how in performance he also uses a "dub plate," a pre-recorded voice sample used in for quick transitions in DJing, sometimes containing recordings of his own poetry (Compton 184). Because hip hop and its main elements, "DJing, graffiti, b-boying/b-girling, and MCing," have expanded globally to influence "fictional novels...choreography, paintings, and motion pictures" (Price 40-41), the fluidity of hip hop as an aesthetic allows Compton an artistic freedom to explore racial formation in oscillating local and global contexts. The parallels between the discourses of what Emmett G. Price III calls a global Hip Hop culture—Price capitalizes "Hip Hop" to distinguish the global culture from the genre "hip hop"—and the Black Diaspora are striking. Like the Diaspora, Hip Hop culture operates in perspectives of both the local, the "hood," and the global, "communities of all ages, genders, religions, economic classes, and races" (Price 1). In hip hop, marginality is performed and routinized as a counter point of the genre's rhetoric of defiance (Gilroy from Mitchell 3-4). As the individual DJ or MC or b-boy/b-girl must locate her or himself within these local and global spaces, so too does Compton explore racial formation between his local area of

Vancouver and the ways it develops in relation to larger racial trends on a national and international scale.

In the prose-poem “Diamond,” the character DJ Osiris explains how his name comes out of “Pan-Africanism, home, that’s where I’m coming from these days,” and then similarly explains how “I know, there’s a [DJ Osiris] in every city in North America, but whatcha gone do. Sounds too cool!” (Compton, *49th Parallel* 137). DJ Osiris fronts his identity from both a local subjectivity, being the only one in *this* city, as well as a global, historical, and mythological perspective. The ancient Egyptian Osiris myth⁶, which Compton’s character derives his street name from, has a similar focus to N.W.A’s “Straight Outta Compton:” (the Los Angeles County borough, not to be confused with the author) “Straight outta Compton, crazy motherfucker named Ice Cube / From the gang Niggaz With Attitudes” (N.W.A 1988). DJ Osiris’ explanation of “where [he’s] coming from these days” fits into the fronting of one’s origins, which is comparable to Hip Hop culture’s rhetoric of belonging.

The previous example highlights some of the ways the Black Diaspora uses hip hop to express individual and collective feelings of marginalization, much like blues and jazz. Firstly, DJ Osiris’ assertion that there is “one in every city in North America” voices a similar sentiment to George Elliott Clarke’s assertion that there exists a regional experience of race, and while there may be others expressing that experience, the specific circumstances of the local place

⁶ Osiris a god-king of Egypt is murdered and usurped by his brother Set who takes the throne until he is overthrown by the son of Osiris.

give it a particular form and structure. It is when DJ Osiris speaks in a “Pan-Africanist,” global, perspective that the anxiety of redundancy prompts his initial confession, “I know, there’s one in every city.” Similarly, the necessity of “coming from” somewhere, citing one’s physical and conceptual location within these local and global spaces, highlights the anxiety of belonging which is pivotal within the Black Diaspora.

It is worth noting at this point, given the historically racial register of Pan-Africanism, that “hip hop and rap cannot be viewed simply as an expression of African American culture; it has become a vehicle for global youth affiliations and a tool for reworking local identities” (Mitchell 1). Compton’s use of hip hop aesthetics similarly acknowledges the constructive power and utility of what hip hop has become, while remaining conscious of where it came from. In his aforementioned essay on “Turntable Poetry,” he describes his interest in “examining how hip hop evinces a shift in the Black literary tradition of connecting form to the people’s music” and exploring “hip hop’s facilitation and creation of new vernaculars” (Compton, *After Canaan* 190).

Through his art and criticism Compton explores the way hip hop aesthetics can interact with the shifting conceptual geographies, cultural demographics, and discourses that complicate the Black experience of Canada. Compton negotiates these shifting discourses, local and global perspectives, by focusing on the self and the context as equal parts of that experience. Since hip hop vernaculars and aesthetics have become “de-territorialized” with “Black American slang re-

wrought everywhere from New York to Accra,” Compton suggests that in “the global denaturing of hip hop and the Black experience itself in western Canada—a periphery of the Diaspora...an opportunity exists...to employ the inevitable and beautiful ‘inauthenticities’ that these conditions encourage” (Compton 190-91). What this means is that through the global dissemination of Hip Hop culture, smaller Black enclaves can still develop a collective racial consciousness that is not absolutely grounded in the local histories of their communities. The result is the creation of an image of self that is racialized as part of the Black Diaspora or global Hip Hop culture and one that is developed locally. The result is a racial self that may actually be at odds with the way race is constructed and manipulated locally as well as globally.

Compton is a mixed-race person who openly admits to having “more white than black biological ancestry” (Compton 108) and in light of this ancestry his art reflects a definition of race that is ultimately contingent upon these biographical facts. Rethinking the way race is constructed, based on context or “circumstance rather than in some transcendental quantum” (Compton 53), is important to a reading of Compton’s work, which acknowledges the changing self-definitions that influence racial formation. For example, Compton draws a parallel between Barack Obama’s experience “of growing up and piecing together his Black identity from a mix of popular culture representations, books, and fleeting encounters with other Blacks” (Compton 14) in Hawaii, and his own experience in BC.

In *49th Parallel Psalm*, Compton makes reference to a wide range of racial influences from outside of Canada that inform his speakers' performance of race. He highlights the defiant emotional tones of the Civil Rights era in the lines: "goose stepping even done to call and response , trying to call / Amiri Baraka Leroi Jones in my time of casting away stones / and gathering together, some / time after and above Watts" (Compton, *49th Parallel* 166). For many members of the Black Diaspora, the American Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s was a high point of Black self-realization and self-determination. Compton includes both names of the prolific African-American critic and revolutionary, the former "Leroi Jones," Amiri Baraka who changed his name when the Nation of Islam was hugely influential. Similarly, Compton mentions "casting away stones" in close proximity to the name Watts, which alludes to the Los Angeles riots which occurred within the same time period (1960s-70s) and then again after the Rodney King trial in 1992. Compton's explicit references to the Civil Rights Movement highlight some highly significant themes in the development of Diasporic consciousness and global Hip Hop culture: resistance and empowerment. The resonance of these themes continues to be a major influence in the cultural awareness of not only Black racial politics, but also in practices of civil disobedience and change.

Compton draws on other influential expressions of blackness that get articulated through Hip Hop culture. Similar to the way "Amiri Baraka and the Black Arts Movement used jazz as a formal influence," Compton's diverse range

of influences can be traced through the “re-mix culture” of hip hop which includes the “pervasive use of sampling” (Compton, *After* 190). The influence of reggae idol “Bob // Marley with the mic / in his palm like / the sword of the righteous swingin” (Compton, *49th Parallel* 150), comes through explicitly in these lines from “Sport of the King of Kings” (Compton 148). Compton includes both Marley’s name and a simile which speaks to his spiritual influence and fervor, setting up an image of Marley as highly influential among black British Columbians despite not being located in Canada.

Returning to the poem “Babylon Slim,” Compton develops the character of the young Black male through a collage of musical and pop-culture influences: “I drawl along the street bumpin / ‘Baby That’s Backatchya’ on my walkman. got / a Ph.D. in Black English, studied under Dr. Dre. / so I book / ... / north of nowhere, Babylon / late on CPT. coloured people’s time” (Compton, *49th Parallel* 157). Firstly, Compton notes Slim’s “drawl along the street” suggesting the use of a certain vernacular, “a Ph.D. in Black English” that signifies a level of erudition in ebonic language equal to a doctoral degree in the Queen’s English. Compton further explores this juxtaposition through Slim’s demotic voice: “wonder why I so loudly / signify? So you know / these streets be / mine” (Compton 158). He goes on to cite some musical influences in these lines as well; Dr. Dre of N.W.A he lists explicitly, the song title “Baby That’s Backatchya” by Smokey Robinson alludes to the rhythm & blues influence. Compton also includes slang, “on CPT. coloured people’s time,” and in the earlier exchange between Slim and the older

character he uses the word “ofay,” meaning “white person.” Hip Hop culture allows those outside of traditional Black centres, and even those outside the Black Diaspora, to access and internalize representations of blackness as a way of articulating local racial or marginalized experience.

In *Performance Bond*, Compton similarly cites a range of influences from the Black Diaspora as he develops certain characters. In the poem “Ghetto Fabulous Ozymandias” (Compton, *Performance* 155), the speaker can only see the embodied figure of the graffiti tag “Rev. Oz”—which alludes to a range of popular culture icons (*The Wizard of Oz*, Shelley’s “Ozymandias,” short-hand of “ounce”) amongst others—when he is fixed through the gaze of a camera. The use of the camera is significant because it highlights the constructed, performative nature of the racial self defined through a fixed frame. Personification of the “Rev. Oz” tag is largely symbolic of the interrelationship between Hip Hop culture and racial formation as Compton literally creates a character through the aesthetic form of his poetry. Through the lens of a camera—a medium consciously framed and easily modified—the embodiment of “Rev. Oz” uses pop-culture to define himself to the speaker:

‘Oz’ itself is short for ‘Oswalled.’
‘Okay, right,’ the narrator said, ‘that’s your last name: Oswald’
‘No, it’s ‘Oswalled.’
‘Isn’t that what I just said?’
‘No, and that’s my given name. My last name is Niépce.’
‘Nipsey? Like Nipsey Russell?’
‘No, ‘Niépce.’ And more like Richard Pryor.’

Compton makes reference to Nicéphore Niépce, an influential inventor noted for his work on the development of photography; Nipsey Russell, an African-American comedian and poet; and Richard Pryor, also an African-American comedian. Collectively these figures are significant to the creation of the racial self, as well as a larger Diasporic race consciousness. Niépce's work on photography, while important to the poem itself, is perhaps more influential in relation to the use of photographic media in the development of Hip Hop culture, the portrayal of race, the post-modern aesthetics of kitsch—popularized by Andy Warhol—and the mass production of art which has made global networks of culture more accessible. The tone of the poem shifts towards comedy when the speaker and “Rev. Oz” begin talking about Nipsey Russell and Richard Pryor. Compton's inclusion of these celebrities is important to the piece because it recognizes the necessity of individual, and collective, reflection “as African-American culture goes global, and white youths internalize Black abjection” and “Afrophilia and Afrophobia become harder to distinguish” (Compton, *After* 179). The narrator's reference to Pryor may be indirectly alluding to the wildly popular album *That Nigger's Crazy* which Pryor used to show how Black Power movements had made America's resident minorities “officially and irrevocably uppity en masse” (Compton 179).

The creation of a racialized self must undergo a similar kind of reflection as that of Pryor's album; and as Compton points out, the global dissemination of an image of blackness constructed through Hip Hop culture is problematic in local

racial contexts. In “Babylon Slim’s Song,” Compton creates a situation where two images of Black authenticity stand at odds with each other, and he then reconciles their opposition by focusing on how those images are resolvable locally.

Similarly, Compton includes space for the tension between local and Diasporic constructions of the racial self in the poem “Ghetto Fabulous Ozymandias” as the speaker can only see “Rev. Oz” when he looks through a camera. In this way the reader can see two simultaneous world views, one that is constructed and operates in a global discourse of photographic media, and one that acknowledges the locality of these two characters meeting, “The narrator was on Main, looking up / the slope between the two lanes / of the Georgia Viaduct, there between Union and Prior” (Compton 153).

Continuing within this exchange between the narrator and “Rev. Oz,” this exchange reveals a crossroads in Compton’s focus. His inclusion of N.W.A, Richard Prior, and Amiri Baraka in his poetry speaks to the Black Diaspora and Hip Hop culture’s ability to develop a performance of race that transcends geography, the world that exists through the lens of the narrator’s camera: the one “Rev. Oz” inhabits. This world *performs* blackness so well that, as Compton notes in the poem “Declaration of the Halffrican Nation,” “a white acquaintance of mine / thought the us population was half / black!” (Compton, *Performance* 15).

Outside the camera frame, “between Union and Prior,” the narrator is standing in what was once Vancouver’s only Black neighborhood, Hogan’s Alley.

Compton's literary and community work in commemorating the Black history of Vancouver can best be explained in three ways. First, Compton asserts that "recovering local Black history is no different from the greater, global, Diasporic urge. We seek to ease the anxiety of disruption and erasure" (Compton, *After* 107). To achieve this goal, Compton has attempted to commemorate the former Black neighborhood of Hogan's Alley, which was demolished in 1967 as a Canadian answer to the USA's urban renewal strategies which moved urban Black communities into housing projects and then used the free space to increase infrastructure in the downtown core (Compton 101). Second, Compton's anthology *Bluesprint* is a collection of Black authors', artists', and residents' work from British Columbia, many of whom are from the Hogan's Alley—Strathcona—neighborhood. Compton describes this anthology as an attempt "to get a sense of what is out there, to find the lay of the land. Because there's no foundation for what I'm doing in BC, I felt I needed to know what has come before. In terms of history, and also in terms of the writing" (Compton with Clarke and McNeilly 54). Thirdly, and perhaps most explored in his poetry, is the artistic and political task of demystifying the "Promised Land" mystique that was developed in the rhetoric of slaves and free immigrants alike, where Canada became synonymous with Canaan (Zion) (Compton, *After* 16). To Compton "a local claim on this space is intertwined with demystifying the symbolic order of those narratives, and rewriting a northern actuality" (Compton 16-17).

While Hogan's Alley remains a widely unrecognized historical site, the "Hogan's Alley" that Compton creates through "Lost-Found Landmarks of Black Vancouver" (Compton, *Performance* 123), and his community work around the former site of the community with the Hogan's Alley Memorial Project (HAMP), aims to physically and conceptually map a centralized Black history into the landscape of the city. In *Performance Bond*, Compton includes a series of photographs of older buildings around the area that, while not the actual historical buildings themselves, have been made to represent significant landmarks of Hogan's Alley. Through the use of fictional plaques temporarily fixed to buildings that resemble those that once stood in Hogan's Alley, the reader is toured around Compton's reimagining of the "Strathcona Coloured Peoples Benevolent Society of Vancouver, 227 Union Street," the "False Creek Moslem Temple, 315 Prior Street," "The Far Cry Weekly: Voice of the Negro Northwest (since 1957), 618 Main Street," and one of the original institutions of Hogan's Alley, "The Pacific Negro Working Men's Association, 221 East Georgia Street," which replaces the original Pullman Porter Club (Compton 123-131).

However, a series of references to no longer extant buildings is not a community. In "From *Portals*: East Vancouver Oral Histories," Compton writes the testimonies of two fictional cousins, Madoo Abdul Wahid and Geraldine Diamond, former Hogan's Alley residents. Compton uses these mock-recollections to breathe life into the otherwise static conceptual space of Hogan's Alley. These two fictional characters recount their roots and routes to BC and help

Compton contextualize Hogan's Alley as a historical space and rationalize it within the larger provincial record. In Madoo's testimony, Compton establishes the international political climate. Madoo recalls, "I came here in 1936. I remember because that was the year the Olympics was in Germany and all anybody could talk about was Jesse Owens" (Compton, *Performance Bond* 133). In just the first line the reader can deduce that it is the Great Depression, "I left home with seventeen cents in my pocket;" pre-World War II, "1936...the Olympics was in Germany;" and the first Black man to enter the Olympics had just won four gold medals, "That was a very big thing then" (Compton 133). Similarly, Compton establishes a sense of the political climate within Vancouver and—though not explicitly stated—elsewhere in Canada at the time: Madoo explains how "my cousin and her husband were Garveyites. They believed in going back to Africa" (Compton 133). He mentions Marcus Garvey and the "Back to Africa Movement" of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which Geraldine also mentions in her testimonial (Compton 140). Further still, Compton describes the religious and ethnic demographics of the area as Madoo goes on to explain how he became the founder of the aforementioned "False Creek Moslem Temple" which was more regularly attended by "a half-French, half-Lebanese guy" and "all these Orientals" (Compton 136), despite the fact that Madoo's refusal to exclude other racial members of Hogan's Alley ultimately prevents him from joining The Nation of Islam, which was steadily gaining power amongst Black communities in the United States.

Through Geraldine's testimony, Compton delves deeper into the racial climate of Hogan's Alley. Geraldine describes how she and her husband Eamon are able to move to Vancouver because a White man "was so impressed with this itinerant 'boy' who...could quote Milton and Dickens by heart" (Compton 139). Compton highlights how racial prejudice neutralizes the intellect of Black people during this time as Eamon—despite his intellect—is given the job as "the articulate negro gentleman who hands out tees at the golf club" (Compton 141). Similarly, Geraldine laments the irony of how "even though it wasn't to-the-letter segregated...at least back home I could have gotten a job teaching in a segregated grammar school, but in Vancouver I wasn't able to teach anywhere at all" (Compton 139). Compton constructs this pre-World War II Vancouver as a place with a very particular set of racial politics. Geraldine explains how "You used to see that sort of thing: Germans saying they were Swiss, or Chinese walking around with buttons that said they *were* Chinese, so nobody would think they were Japanese" (Compton 140). This kind of race performance highlights the "subtle" racism of the space, where not only must one be visibly different from the White population but one must also be careful to specifically perform one's race so as not to be misjudged.

From these examples it becomes clear that Compton's (re)construction of Hogan's Alley is closely tied to the local *and* international historical conditions of race and politics. He includes references to "Trotskyists"—one of whom Geraldine marries after Eamon's death—and "Garveyites," the ANC and the

NAACP, influential organizations and political groups that help establish Hogan's Alley as an imagined community⁷ rather than just a benign commemorative space. The development of Compton's imagined community comes from his research into actual figures integral to the development and history of Black community and expression in B.C. Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, "a successful businessman, politician, and community activist" (Compton, *Bluesprint* 23) who immigrated to BC in the late 1850s. Gibbs regularly experienced how the politics of race performance and authenticity trouble Black intellectual and political expression.

Mifflin Gibbs as a historical figure is important to Compton's (re)construction of Hogan's Alley because his work, and particularly its reception within the predominantly White space of BC, is indicative of the politics of racial authenticity that promulgate the not "to-the-letter" segregation Compton traces into the present. Because Gibbs wrote in "a kind of elevated standard English," which was a direct contradiction to the racial expectations of the White British Columbians during this period, it was common for White intellectuals and newspapers to associate "his speech with his race, repeating the notion that his language is *too* elevated" (Compton, *After* 70, my emphasis). The racist hypocrisy that comes from this sentiment is regularly explored in Compton's poetry and criticism.

⁷ "Imagined Community" is a term coined by Benedict Anderson in his 1991 book of the same title. The term denotes a community that is constructed through non-physical means, collective imagining, and ascription to the idea of nation through a range of artistic and social media.

49th *Parallel Psalm* features a Gibbs-like speaker in conversation with a White character. In the short script “Evening at the Colonial”—which Compton notes as “Victoria’s first (segregated) playhouse”—he uses “+” to indicate the speech of an eloquent “darkie” character who displays more melanin than “-,” which he uses to denote a White ticket clerk: one with less melanin (Compton 65):

- + (aggressively dignified.) one ticket for the parquette, *sir* (spat out.)
- listen, we’re not going through this with you people again: coloured seating...
- + ‘coloured seating,’ he says.
- ...is in the balcony. If you don’t like it, go back to the States. Or go back to Africa while you’re at it. but you ain’t getting a seat down front *no* how.
- [...]
- either buy a ticket for the balcony, or *exeunt*. Let’s go. I got real patrons waiting in line behind you.
- + (to a crowd, which has appeared like worms in unattended meat.) this, my fellow Victorians, is the rarest of the rare indeed. behold: a business based not on cash, but on ideas. watch this. (fans cash in the face of the wicket man.) not even a flinch or a lunge or a smacking of the chops. this is a business that has discovered the secret formula of industry, the fountain of youth, the lodestone of laissez-faire. (to the wicket man.) please decipher for me this miracle equation, this truth more elusive than Xanadu or the kingdom of Prestor John, this alchemy of mutable humanity: tell me how you run a business that requires not money from willing hands?
- (looking puzzled.) are you trying to wind me up?
- + I wouldn’t dream.
- (looking resolved.) this wicket is closed to you, coon. go sharpen a spear. (Compton 65-66)

In this exchange Compton makes a point of demonstrating how “+” doesn’t respond maliciously toward the wicket man, but instead uses his reason in a kind of mocking eloquence to make his point. In this way, the poet draws attention to a

well-educated and articulate Black figure who is scorned by the White authorities of Victoria for his race. “+’s” speech falls outside the performance of race that the wicket man expects, “are you trying to wind me up?”, and therefore reminds him that blackness in B.C. is expected to be intellectually equal to the hunter-gatherer practices that would require “+” to “go sharpen a spear.”

Compared to an actual excerpt of Mifflin Gibbs’s writing, “Many afterward sighed for former times, when Vancouver Island, proud beauty of the North, sat laving her feet in the genial waters of the Pacific, her lap verdant with beautiful foliage and delicious fruits” (Gibbs qtd in Compton, *Bluesprint* 23), one can see how—while a little ostentatious—Gibbs’ eloquence reflects an intellectualism and sophistication that would obviously upset the same social-Darwinist views that prompted a Boston panel to interrogate Phillis Wheatley nearly one hundred years earlier to see if black people were capable of writing poetry. Compton’s fictional exchange in “Evening at the Colonial” can be read, therefore, as a dramatic representation of the historical sentiments that discounted Black intellectual figures from being acknowledged because they didn’t perform White preconceptions of blackness. Conversely, Gibbs’s repeated inclusion in Compton’s poetics and criticism highlights a desire to draw attention to traditionally unrecognized areas of cultural and artistic resistance which anticipates the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance. In this way Gibbs becomes a lost/found forefather of a Diasporic event (the Harlem Renaissance) that bridges

the international and historical gap between modern racial formation in BC and the larger Diasporic community.

Compton includes in “Black Voices and Stately Ways: Isaac Dickson, Mifflin Gibbs, and Black British Columbia’s First Trials of Authenticity” a report from *The British Colonist* newspaper regarding a series of speeches made by Gibbs in his (eventually successful) bid to become a city councillor: “Mifflin W. Gibbs (colored) delivered a long-winded and flowery address , but many portions of it were well received and, although it had the effect to thin the house, taken all in all, it was a very creditable effort” (Compton, *After Canaan* 70-71)⁸. Compton further acknowledges how “while the author disdains Gibbs’s manner of speech, he concludes his brief description with the same backhanded approval” (Compton 71) that discounts the content of Gibbs’s speech as irrelevant because of his race.

Dramatizing the racist politics of White-defined racial performance, Compton’s art and criticism establishes a history of Black experience and expression in BC. His (re)construction of Hogan’s Alley uses the diverse range of socio-political interactions to map out the history of racial formation in Vancouver. Compton’s poetic reimagining of Hogan’s Alley is revelatory of some of the larger ways race is managed in Canada. Similarly, Compton’s attention to a diverse range of social and political factors such as the diverse interrelationships of other marginalized peoples, conflicting political ideologies and their implications on social life highlights some of the ethnic, racial, and physical

⁸ Gibbs is also the only speaker listed without the title “Mr.”

factors of racial formation as they are expressed through the “third person consciousness.”

In *Performance Bond* Compton alludes to and explicitly mentions a range of historical and contemporary events that defy the narratives of racial tolerance and celebration that are promulgated by official multiculturalism. In “Declaration of the Halffrican Nation,” he alludes to Canada’s history of racialized immigration based on economic demand for “entre- / preneurs only, no more slaves and railroad builders, / iron chinks or tempered niggers” (Compton 16). In the same stanza he explicitly recalls the Oka Crisis of 1990, “oka. all / I halfta do is spell it and the settled snow shivers,” and goes on to classify these events with other instances of racial apartheid: “south africans sang, palestinians sing; the tune / is boomin” (Compton 16). His stream of consciousness prose-poem “Illegalese: Floodgate Dub” is explicitly dedicated “for the Chinese maroons, British Columbia, 1999-2001” (Compton 31) who arrived as refugees in Vancouver and were detained in their ships. He recalls this specific example of official racism in conjunction with reference to the “Koma-Koma-Komagatamaru” (Compton 31), a Japanese ship carrying Indian refugees which was turned back to sea in 1914 by the Canadian government.

Hogan’s Alley commemorates the malicious destruction of Vancouver’s only centralized Black neighborhood—anticipating the destruction of Africville, Nova Scotia in the early 1960s, recalling George Elliott Clarke’s commemorative project discussed in chapter one—and actively resists the history of racialized

exclusion that has allowed Canada to be imagined as a Canaan or Promised Land. His similar work in *49th Parallel Psalm*, and the sixty pages he dedicates to Hogan's Alley in *After Canaan*, speak to this project of demystifying the nation and its history of racialized violence. But these examples are only a part of a whole, a larger project concerned with how racial formation operates in the meeting of local and global subjectivities.

Compton's obvious desire to acknowledge and celebrate historical Black figures and communities through this project is nonetheless contingent upon the larger social and political networks that define and influence racial formation through the differing racial, ethnic, and physical subjectivities of "third person consciousness." As Compton goes on to explain, "this predisposition to make the *viewed* responsible for what the *viewer* sees...locks together dangerously with prejudices already in play against mixed-race people, who are often seen as inherently destabilizing" (Compton 23). Compton's poetic attention to the subjectivities of racialized bodies, their ethnicity, and their race, helps unpack the complex process of racial formation as it operates in Canadian society.

As I have mentioned already, Compton's mixed-race heritage is no secret; however, it does appear to permeate his artistic work as a theme. In just the examples I have used thus far it is relatively easy to spot moments where Compton corrupts a word or phrase to include and acknowledge the marginalized position of being between race or mixed-race. Noted above: "*halfta*" and "Declaration of the *Half*frican Nation" draw attention to the "half" race metaphors

which raises the question: “half of what?” Similarly, the use of “+” and “-” in “Evening at the Colonial” evokes Compton’s other artistic attempts to challenge “the history of whiteness / performing as the watcher” (Compton, *Performance Bond* 43) passive and active, positive and negative, forcing the White centre to employ a form of self-consciousness.

In his introduction to *After Canaan*, Compton describes how “even within the conceptual bounds of the [Black] Diaspora itself [...] there are things to be learned from owning and exploring oblique kinds of blackness” (Compton 13). Geographically, B.C. is “outside the Diasporic master narratives,” where Black communities “developed beyond the sites of slavery [and] interracial families are the standard experience rather than an exceptional or suspect one” (Compton 14). From his self-described position of Diasporic and geographic marginality, Compton pens these lines:

If only being yourself was a simple trick.
But we are dressed in borrowed finery, here in the land of promises.
Africans from America, then Canada, wearing the Caribbean.
Anti-racists attacking anti-racists, clashing.
Bodies breaking against placards, dashing.
slogans against the shutter of the camera, wincing
as allies fight allies in utter confusion,
fighting over who owns the acting up. (Compton, *Performance Bond* 47)

At the root of these lines is an observation of the Diasporic discourse of Canada. He acknowledges, similarly to Brand, that the tracing of nations “Africans from America...Canada...Caribbean,” through the Diaspora is not a sufficient way to discuss Black experience and blackness in the Black Atlantic. However, this claim simultaneously calls into question the alternative: the question of race as a

criterion for belonging to the conceptual bounds of the Diaspora. George Elliott Clarke highlights the dangers of race-based ascription to the Diaspora, proposed by André Alexis, in “Treason of the Black Intellectuals?”: “‘Who is more black? Who speaks deepest for the Diaspora? For Africa?’” (Alexis qtd. in Clarke, *Odysseys* 197). The result of this tension between a national (or regionalist) focus and a racial Diasporic focus results in “allies fighting allies in utter confusion / fighting over who owns the acting up” (Compton 47).

In “Pheneticizing Versus Passing,” Compton explores the idea of “passing” which draws its roots from the “American ‘one-drop rule,’ the historical policy of segregation that defined as Black those who had *any* degree of known African ancestry—one drop of ‘Negro blood’” (Compton, *After Canaan* 20). “Passing” means “that an individual, when tested by an inquisitive viewer’s gaze, could get away with the crime of racial self-assignment” (Compton 21). This destabilization of racial ascription leads to some obvious questions about how race is used as a means of social, cultural, and Diasporic classification. Inevitably there are instances where a Black person might “pass” for White, or Indigenous, or Asian, or Southeast-Asian; however, the way the individual is classified within these groups once more belongs to the discretion of the viewer, not the person being viewed. Similarly, the context of that situation—as we have explored in local and global Hip Hop culture—can also define how race is perceived in a strange “Blacker than thou” way. For example, Wayde Compton may appear to be Black in the context of urban Vancouver; however, placed in Timbuktu, or

Kingston, or Berlin, this classification would likely change. This is the root of Compton's essay, that the contemporary frameworks of racial formation are untrustworthy.

Instead, Compton suggests a pseudo-taxonomical term "*pheneticizing*: Racially perceiving someone based on a subjective examination of his or her outward appearance" (Compton, emphasis in original 25), which sounds similar to "race" but removes the necessity of verification, denying the existence of a singular racial categorization. Compton removes the destabilizing gaze that results in a "third person consciousness." In this way it is possible for individuals to "transgress one's racial designation" (Compton 24), removing the anxiety of being any one race, while maintaining the formative influences of ethnicity and physicality as parts of a self-defined racial formation. "Pheneticizing" in Compton's essay is applied to a series of case studies, including one about renowned Canadian poet and critic Fred Wah. There are examples throughout Compton's poetry that equally engage with the experiences of "passing" and "pheneticizing" one such example comes from the book *Performance Bond*:

one
friend said she's white except
for having this brown skin and some-
times she forgets it until a mirror shatters
that conclusion casting backward glances side-
ways, askance processions of belonging, possession. (Compton 15)

These lines describe the breaking down of the image of self that "passing" connotes. The "friend" says "she's white except / for having brown skin" so when she meets a "mirror," and is caught in her "racial transgression" her image of self

“shatters.” A “pheneticized” reading of this meeting would suggest that her “brown skin” not necessitate a racial performance of “brown-ness,” neutralizing the destabilizing gaze of the “mirror.” The “double-consciousness” that Compton alludes to in this example is broken by removing the transgressive possibilities of exterior racial definition; instead, this passage suggests that phenetically race is constructed through the other two vectors of “third person consciousness,” ethnicity and physicality.

While I don't believe Compton is propounding a view of the Black Diaspora, or race in Canada, that should ignore history, I admire his decision to explore these concepts through the “re-mix” Hip Hop culture. His artistic project both takes stock of the politics of the present and remains wary of the past, exploring the complex issues that permeate the discourse of race through an aesthetic that has built-in multiple focuses, contexts, and vernaculars. So while Compton builds an imagined community similar to George Elliott Clarke's “Africadia,” and demonstrates an awareness of the conceptual geography of the Black Diaspora like Dionne Brand, Wayde Compton's art and criticism are grounded in a post-modern, heterogeneous, experience of race that is shaped by the histories, roots, and routes of his own Black community.

Conclusion

“Oblique Kinds of Blackness”: Reviewing at the Mosaic

In Chapter three, I quoted from Wayde Compton's introduction to *After Canaan*: “there are things to be learned from owning and exploring oblique kinds of blackness” (Compton 13). I believe this statement is a precise observation of blackness in Canada. As we have seen in the past three chapters, blackness is formed through the intersecting social and political vectors that make up racial formation. Each of the authors in the previous chapters maps blackness along different ethnic, historical, and practical lines that fluctuate between differing local and global subjectivities. In the way Robert Kroetsch observed Canadians demonstrating incredulity towards any singular national narrative, so too might this incredulity apply to any single idea of blackness in Canada.

In the past three chapters I have identified an author, grounded her or him within a geographic location in Canada, and connected this geography to a specific relationship with an ethnic community. As well, I have identified each author's relationship to the Black Diaspora, and identified her or his origins within or without the nation. From these different physical and conceptual subjectivities I have explored how each author's own ethnic community has shaped her or his poetic voice into a particular aesthetic. Splitting each chapter by author has, I fear, made the differences between these authors far more visible than her or his similarities; however, returning to George Elliott Clarke's question

posed in “Contesting a Model Blackness,” we can begin to see that the differences between these authors is in fact one of their greatest sources of communality. Clarke’s question “must all blackness be American?” is a poignant one, and I believe, offers a convenient space to review the findings of this thesis.

“Race” is a broad and fluid concept and its definition is articulated through a complex series of interrelated social and political opinions. Omi and Winant’s theory of “racial formation” reduces this expansive network of meanings and origins into a complex formative process. By looking at race as a process, it is possible to examine the artistic expression of race as part of a larger socio-political model. Therefore, Clarke’s question about blackness in a Canadian context immediately calls into question how blackness is constructed within Canada and how our own process of racial formation might or might not differ from the “model blackness” that Paul Gilroy bases in the slave experiences of the American South. Part of understanding how racial formation might differ between nations has a lot to do with “race consciousness.”

W.E.B. Du Bois’s theory of “double-consciousness” posits that blackness in the United States is split between an awareness of national belonging and an awareness of race. In Canada, conversely, national belonging is clearly defined along racial lines, making “double-consciousness” an ill-fitting lens through which to view race north of the 49th parallel. Frantz Fanon, adapting a version of Du Bois’s model to his own work in *Black Skin, White Masks*, divides race consciousness once more into a “third person consciousness.” Fanon’s grammar-

based term focuses on three interrelated consciousnesses: the body, race, and ethnicity. Unlike Du Bois's "double-consciousness," Fanon's model removes the nation as a source of inherent communality which makes it more representative of Canada's racial disjunction between citizenship and belonging.

So why examine poetry to explore social and political questions of racial formation? Recalling Aristotle's arguments in *Politics* and *Poetics*, artistic expression can itself become a mode of politics if the necessary function of the state—the endowment of its citizens with a sense of collective belonging—goes unfulfilled. Since Canada regularly divides citizenship and belonging along racial lines, such as how "African-Canadian" literally orients blackness outside of the nation, then I believe poetics can confidently be read as politics, and politics as a kind of poetics.

George Elliott Clarke, Dionne Brand and Wayne Compton are three authors who write from the conceptual margin that is African-Canadian literature. A singular model of blackness would suggest that despite the vastly different geographic, historical, and ethnic experiences of these authors, they would all be members of the homogeneous mass called "The Black Community." As we have seen, however, none of these authors articulate the three positions of the "third person consciousness" in a homogenous manner, suggesting that "The Black Community" is in reality far more heterogeneous than a singular view of blackness can articulate.

Ethnicity deconstructs the monolithic image of blackness into a mosaic of interconnected, yet distinct, communities that express racial experience through an aesthetic derived from their cultural own roots, routes, and histories. For example, in the first chapter we recognized how the strong Baptist roots of Clarke's Africadian community influenced the tone, rhythm and structure of his poetics. Similarly, Clarke's use of blues forms is highly reflective of the musical history of his community. Politically, these differences moved Clarke to found the conceptual nation of Africadia along the same nationalist lines as the Quebecois.

In chapter two we saw how Dionne Brand focuses on the cartography of the Diaspora, and her art (both critical and poetic) reflects most clearly a desire for belonging and an awareness of the social politics that have altered and changed the histories of her community. In the third chapter we saw how the physical distance of Compton's B.C. community from traditionally recognized areas of Black population produced an aesthetic grounded in global Hip Hop culture and shared feelings of Black abjection. The differences between these author's aesthetics are clearly visible in their art, but what's most interesting is the different ways these authors' aesthetics orient the different positions of the "third person consciousness" in relation to the nation.

George Elliott Clarke and Rinaldo Walcott, as you may recall from the introduction, maintain one of the major debates in African-Canadian literary criticism concerning the nation's relationship with blackness. This argument boils

down to how closely one orients one's position in relation to the nation or the Diaspora. Clarke clearly aligns his Africadia along regional-nationalist lines, downplaying the Diaspora and warning against the dangers of pan-Africanism. Walcott, instead, prefers association with the Diaspora over the dividing boundaries of the nation because it rejects the necessity of exterior nationalist recognition. The fact that neither author agrees with how blackness in Canada should be oriented in relation to these two sides is in many ways indicative of what Clarke calls a racial "poly-consciousness" where one can ascribe as little or as much to either body, and that disagreement itself is an inherent characteristic of Canadian blackness (Clarke, *Odysseys* 40). Compton suggests a synthesis which posits that having a double-centre and a double-margin is inherently productive because it offers opportunities to recognize and establish Black presence from new and unique perspectives.

Clarke clearly positions his Africadia within the existing geopolitical bounds of Canada; alternatively, Brand's multi-national perspective is more grounded in the stateless territory of the Black Atlantic and the Diaspora. Compton engages with global Hip Hop culture as part of the Diaspora but is equally focused on commemorating his own ethnic community's history in BC. Similarly, however, each author describes the social politics that influence the reception and formation of the Black body within these spaces—the conceptual Black Atlantic, the former Atlantic slave trade, the nation of Canada, or an eight block stretch called "Hogan's Alley—it is clear that each author does not position

the different perspectives of “third person consciousness” in the same way. So what does this prove? These observations are reminiscent of where this conclusion began: blackness in Canada is not homogeneous. What is blackness in Canada then? What similarities might we draw from these authors?

Despite all their differences, each of these authors is most concerned with the concept of belonging. While “Home” is the primary focus of the Diaspora, Brand is really most concerned with belonging to anywhere one might call “Home.” Clarke similarly embeds his own Africadia directly into the geography of the nation and attempts to rewrite the exclusion of Black history from the historical narratives of the nation. Compton, likewise, attempts to not only understand how race is constructed, but how to commemorate the repeated systemic violences of the nation so as to ground blackness more organically within his own home of British Columbia. While each of these authors articulates his or her experiences of Home differently, their focus on cultivating an environment of belonging in that space is alike.

I believe that these observations mark the beginning of a much larger project, one concerned with the shared focus of these authors: collapsing the distance between citizenship and belonging. As a White Canadian my initial progress in the project was hampered by a sense of racial transgression, which forced me to be more careful of the ramifications of my observations and claims. Therefore, my goal *was* to read objectively and listen attentively to what these authors were saying not just about race, but about the politics of racial formation

and identity construction within and beyond Canada. The result—and perhaps the least conclusive part —of this “conclusion,” is an apprehension about making definitive claims; instead, I propose a range of questions that I believe demand further attention: How do these different ethnic constructions of blackness translate in other areas of the country? Are these other ethnic communities concerned with citizenship and belonging? How does this discourse relate to the functions and objectives of multiculturalism? How can African-Canadian poetics resist systemically racist White national narratives and histories?

Racial formation in Canada is a complicated process. Canada's racism is subtle and it is easy to hide behind words like “multiculturalism,” “peacekeeping,” and “diversity.” I know because for a long time this was my own strategy. As a result of this project I have learned more about the power of these words, what they represent, their legacies, their histories of hypocrisy and violence. I believe that having an opportunity to question these ideas, through projects such as this, acknowledges that change is possible, and that we may still work towards making these symbols into realities.

Bibliography

- Bannerji, Himani. "On the Dark Side of the Nation: Politics of Multiculturalism and the State of 'Canada.'" *Literary Pluralities*. Ed. Christl Verduyn. Toronto: Broadview Press, 1998. 125-151. Print.
- Brand, Dionne. *Chronicles: Early Works*. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2011. Print.
- . *Ossuaries*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd, 2010. Print.
- . *Inventory*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd, 2006. Print.
- . *thirsty*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd, 2002. Print.
- . *In Another Place, Not Here*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 1996. Print.
- Brydon, Diana. "George Elliott Clarke's Othello." *Canadian Literature*. 184. (2004): 188-194. Print.
- Butling, Pauline, and Susan Rudy. *Poets Talk*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005. 63-88. Print.
- Clarke, George Elliott. *Directions Home*. 1st. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. Print.
- . *Odysseys Home*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. Print.
- . *Directions Home*. 1st. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. Print.
- . "Bio: Black Baptist I Bastard. (Poetry)." *Kola* 11.1 (1999): 36+. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 4 Feb. 2013
- . "Does (Afro-) Caribbean-Canadian Literature Exist? In the Caribbean?" *Directions Home*. 1st. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. 116-134. Print.
- . "Locating the Early Dionne Brand: Landing a Voice". *Directions Home*. 1st. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. 154-163. Print.
- . "Raising Raced and Erased Executions in African-Canadian Literature: Or, Unearthing Angélique". *Directions Home*. 1st. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. 78-90. Print.
- . "The Idea of Europe in African-Canadian Literature". *Directions Home*. 1st. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. 102-115. Print.
- . *Execution Poems: Tenth Anniversary Edition*. 2nd. Kentville: Gaspereau Press Limited. 2009. Print.
- . *I&I*. Fredericton: Goose Lane Editions, 2009. Print.
- . "The Career of Black English in Nova Scotia: A Literary Sketch." *Odysseys Home*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. 86-106. Print.
- . "The Birth and Rebirth of Africadian Literature." *Odysseys Home*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. 107-125. Print.
- . "Embarkation: Discovering African-Canadian Literature." *Odysseys Home*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. 3-24. Print.
- . "Contesting a Model Blackness: A Meditation on African-Canadian African-Americanism, or the Structures of African-Canadianité." *Odysseys Home*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. 27-70. Print.

- . "Canadian Biraciality and Its Zebra Poetics." *Odysseys Home*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. 211-237. Print.
- . "Harris, Philip, Brand: Three Authors in Search of Literate Criticism." *Odysseys Home*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. 253-274. Print.
- . *Whylah Falls*. 5th. Toronto: Polestar Book Publishers, 2000. Print.
- . "White Like Canada." *Transition*. 73. (1997): 98-109. Print.
- . *Whylah Falls: The Play*. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 1997. Print.
- . *Fire on the Water: An Anthology of Black Nova Scotian Writing Vol. 1*. Lawrencetown Beach: Pottersfield Press, 1991. Print.
- . *Fire on the Water: An Anthology of Black Nova Scotian Writing Vol. 2*. Lawrencetown Beach: Pottersfield Press, 1992. Print.
- Coleman, Daniel. *Masculine Migrations*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998. Print.
- . *White Civility*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006. Print.
- Compton, Anne, and George Elliott Clarke. "Standing your ground: George Elliott Clarke in conversation." *Studies in Canadian Literature*. 23.2 (1998): 138-164. Print.
- Compton, Wayde. *After Canaan*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2010. Print.
- . *Performance Bond*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2008. Print.
- . *49th Parallel Psalm*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1999. Print.
- . *Bluesprint*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2001. Print.
- . "Memorializing Vancouver's Historic Black Neighbourhood and the Wider Vancouver Black Experience." *Hogan's Alley Memorial Project*. N.p., 23 Nov 2011. Web. Web. 30 Jan. 2013.
<<http://hogansalleyproject.blogspot.ca/>>.
- . *Wayde Compton's Site*. Web. 30 Jan. 2013.
<<http://www.waydecompton.com/index.html>>.
- . "People's History of the Coast Salish Territories: Hogan's Alley." Vancouver Media Co-op. British Columbia, Vancouver. 25 Feb 2011. Lecture.
- . Prism International. British Columbia Nurses Union. British Columbia, Vancouver. 2011. Keynote.
- Compton, Wayde and Kevin McNeilly. "The Crime of Poetry: George Elliott Clarke in Conversation with Wayde Compton and Kevin McNeilly". *Canadian Literature*. 182.53 (2004): 53-65. Print.
- Dominguez, Pilar Cuder, and George Elliott Clarke. "On Black Canadian Writing: In Conversation with George Elliott Clarke." *Atlantis*. 23.2 (2001): 187-200. Print.
- Donnell, Alison . "All Friends Now? Critical Conversations, West Indian Literature, and the "Quarrel with History"." *Small Axe*. 38.1 (2012): 75-85. Print.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Simon & Schuster Inc, 2005. Print.

- Emery, Sarah. "Urban Scrawl: The Intersection of Graffiti Writing and Identity Production in *Performance Bond*, *What We All Long For* and *A Complicated Kindness*." *Masters Thesis*. Dalhousie University: (2008), 1-17. Print.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1952. Print.
- Fiorentino, Jon Paul. *Blues and Bliss: The Poetry of George Elliott Clarke*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008. Print.
- Gates Jr, Henry Louis. "Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes". *Critical Inquiry*. 12. (1985):1-19. Print.
- Gerard, Charley. *Jazz in Black and White*. 1st. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1998. Print.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic*. 3rd. London: Verso Ltd. 2002. Print.
- Gingell, Susan. "'Always a Poem, Once a Book': Motivations and Strategies for Print Textualizing of Caribbean-Canadian Dub and Performance Poetry." *Journal of West Indian Literature*. 14.1&2 (2005): 220-260. Print.
- Gorjup, Branko, and Francesca Valente. *Luce ostinata: Tenacious Light*. Ravenna: A. Longo Editore, 2007. Print.
- Grant, George. "From *Lament for a Nation: the defeat of Canadian nationalism*". *Canadian Literature in English*. Edt.Moss, Laura, and Cynthia Sugars. Toronto: Pearson Education Canada Ltd, 2009. 269-272. Print.
- Greenblatt, Jordana. "Something Sadistic, Something Complicit: Text and Violence in Execution Poems and Thirsty." *Canadian Literature*. 197.1 (2008). 80-97. Print.
- Gunning, Margaret. "Halffrican Look at Xanada." *January Magezine*. Dec 1999: n. page. Web. 30 Jan. 2013.
- Hamilton, Marybeth. *In Search of the Blues: Black Voices, White Visions*. 1st. London: Random House Group Limited, 2007. Print.
- Joyette, Anthony. "Anthony Joyette Shares a Moment with George Elliott Clarke, a Native Black Canadian Writer." *Kola*. 24.2 (2012). 76-96. Print.
- Kroetsch, Robert. "Disunity as Unity: a Canadian Strategy". *Canadian Literature in English*. Edt.Moss, Laura, and Cynthia Sugars. Toronto: Pearson Education Canada Ltd, 2009. 331-334. Print.
- Kyser, Kristina, and George Elliott Clarke. "George and Ruth: An Interview with George Elliott Clarke about Writing and Ethics." *University of Toronto Quarterly*. 76.3 (2007): 861-873. Print.
- Lee, Dennis. *Civil Elegies and Other Poems*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1972. Print.
- Levesque, Roger. "Africville Immortalized in Music; Joe Sealy pays tribute in magnificent mix of jazz, blues and gospel." *The Edmonton Journal*. (30 January 1999). C7. Print.
- MacLeod, Alexander. "'The Little State of Africadia Is a Community of Believers': Replacing the Regional and Remaking the Real in the Work of George Elliott Clarke." *Studies in Canadian Literature*. 33.2 (2008). 97-114. Print.

- Mason, Jody. "Searching for the Doorway: Dionne Brand's Thirsty." *University of Toronto Quarterly*. 75.2 (2006): 784-800. Print.
- Mitchell, Tony. *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001. Print.
- Moynagh, Maureen. "Mapping Africadia's Imaginary Geography: An Interview with George Elliott Clarke". *ARIEL*. 27.4 (1996). 72-94. Print.
- Mullins, Greg A. "Dionne Brand's Poetics of Recognition: Reframing Sexual Rights." *Callaloo*. 30.4 (2007): 1100-1109. Print.
- Nelson, Jennifer J. *Razing Africville: A Geography of Racism*. 1st. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008. Print.
- Oliver, Paul, Max Harrison, and William Bolcom. *The New Grove Gospel, Blues and Jazz*. 2nd. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986. Print.
- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1980s*. New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc, 1986. Print.
- Philip, M. Nourbese. "Echoes in a Stranger Land." *Frontiers*. Stratford: The Mercury Press, 1992. 9-25. Print.
- . "Publish + Be Damned." *Frontiers*. Stratford: The Mercury Press, 1992. 160-167. Print.
- . "The 'Multicultural' Whitewash." *Frontiers*. Stratford: The Mercury Press, 1992. 110-133. Print.
- . "Who's Listening?" *Frontiers*. Stratford: The Mercury Press, 1992. 26-46. Print.
- . *A Genealogy of Resistance and Other Essays*. Toronto: The Mercury Press, 1997. Print.
- . "The Absence of Writing or How I Almost Became a Spy." *A Genealogy of Resistance and Other Essays*. Toronto: The Mercury Press, 1997. 41-56. Print.
- . "Earth and Sound: The Place of Poetry." *A Genealogy of Resistance and Other Essays*. Toronto: The Mercury Press, 1997. 57-73. Print.
- . "Dis Place—The Space Between." *A Genealogy of Resistance and Other Essays*. Toronto: The Mercury Press, 1997. 74-112. Print.
- . "Father Tongue." *A Genealogy of Resistance and Other Essays*. Toronto: The Mercury Press, 1997. 128-132. Print.
- Pitts, Walter. "West African Poetics in the Black Preaching Style." *American Speech*. 64.2 (1989). 137-149. Print.
- Price III, Emmett G. *Hip Hop Culture*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO Inc, 2006. Print.
- Sanders, Leslie C. *Fierce Departures: The Poetry of Dionne Brand*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009. Print.
- Sherman, Johnathan Dale. "The Hip-Hop Aesthetics and Visual Poetry of Wayde Compton's Performance Bond: Claiming Black Space in Contemporary Canada." *Masters Thesis*. University of Saskatchewan: (2009). Print.
- Stanford, Ann Folwell. "'Firewater, that Lovers Pour for Prophets': Three African American Poets Poetic Penguins." by William Boyd; Lodestar and Other

- Night Lights. by Nagueyalti Warren; Whylah Falls. by George Elliott Clarke." *African American Review*. 28.4 (1994): 675-679. Print.
- St Louis, Brett. *Rethinking Race, Politics and Poetics: C.L.R. James' Critique of Modernity*. 1st. New York: Routledge, 2007. Print.
- Thomas, H. Nigel. "Some Aspects of Blues Use in George Elliott Clarke's Whylah Falls". *CLA Journal*. 43.1 (1999). 1-18. Print.
- Walcott, Rinaldo. *Black Like Who?* Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2003. Print.
- . "Caribbean Pop Culture in Canada; Or, The Impossibility of Belonging to the Nation." *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 9 (March 2001): 123-139. Print.
- Walker, James W. *The Black Loyalists*. New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1976. Print.
- . *The West Indians in Canada*. Ottawa: The Canadian Historical Association, 1984. Print.
- Wasserman, Jerry. "Whose Blues? AfriCanadian Theatre and Blues Aesthetic." *Theatre Research in Canada*. 30.1 (2009): 37-57. Print.
- West, Cornel. *Prophetic Fragments*. 1st. Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1988. Print.
- Winks, Robert W. *The Blacks in Canada*. 2nd. Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1997. Print.