A POETICS OF THE CONTEMPORARY BLACK CANADIAN CITY: CHARTING THE HISTORY OF BLACK URBAN SPACE IN FICTION AND POETRY BY BLACK CANADIAN WRITERS

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses literary depictions of the Canadian city in representative contemporary (twentieth- and twenty-first-century) English-Canadian short fiction and poetry by black Canadian writers Austin Clarke, Wayde Compton and Dionne Brand. Although their generic and aesthetic approaches as well as the specific historical contexts out of which they emerge vary considerably, the works in this study each exhibit what Édouard Glissant, in his eponymously titled book, calls a "poetics of relation" between the past and the present (42). Their work challenges our understanding of the contemporary city by drawing attention to and dismantling enduring hegemonic and homogeneous representations of the Canadian metropolis and by rearticulating the city through a black gaze and sensibility. Clarke's, Compton's and Brand's representations of black city spaces, places and peoples probe the entrenched historical and ideological systems and legacies that continue to influence black urban geographies and the ways they are portrayed in and by various media, institutions and the collective imagination. Their politically charged and socially relevant literary inquiries lead to complex, layered, hopeful and often contradictory, ambivalent and vexing visions of the contemporary Canadian city. Each depiction of the city confronts and complicates the ongoing material and theoretical erasure of black urban spaces and places in the nation and the national literary corpus that helps define it. Importantly, these idiosyncratic fictional and poetic portraits both invoke and dispel dominant notions of black city dwellers, black spaces and black places as socially and culturally monolithic harbingers of violence, disorder, disease and death and thus ask us to re-evaluate our own assumptions about contemporary Canadian metropolitan life.

The present analysis approaches the topic of the contemporary black Canadian city in literature through a compelling theoretical perspective that argues for a direct, ongoing and contiguous relationship between the colonial plantation and the contemporary metropolis. Specifically, this project examines literary representations of the contemporary city under the rubric of "plantation futures"—a spatial-temporal conceptual device that reads contemporary black urban spaces through and against the history of the colonial plantation and the distorted logics that arose from the perverse culture of plantation slavery (McKittrick, "Plantation Futures" 2).

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PROLOGUE

In 1985, while working on the pilot phase of a larger project aimed at teaching school children in Ontario about archaeology, archaeologist and historian Karolyn Smartz Frost and her team unearthed remnants of early black life at a downtown Toronto site. Under the yard at the Sackville Street School on Sackville Street and Eastern Avenue, in what is now known as the Moss Park area of the city, Smartz Frost found broken pieces of tableware, various personal ephemera and the relics of a homestead which pointed to the land's previous residential use. City records named black former slaves Thornton, a “cabman,” and his wife Lucie Blackburn as the residents of the home and out buildings at 70 Eastern Avenue but there was little other extant documentation about the couple who had occupied the house (Smartz Frost xi). Over two decades of painstaking archival and anecdotal research in the United States and Canada yielded a fuller account of the Blackburn's role in plantation slavery in the American south, their decision to navigate the treacherous route to freedom in the North via the Underground Railroad and the significant social, cultural, political and economic contribution they made to the city they called home for more than fifty years.

Smartz Frost's meticulous and detailed biography of the Blackburns, *I've Got a Home In Glory Land: The Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad*, recounts the tale of their harrowing slavery-to-freedom journey from Louisville via Detroit to Toronto using the disguises, forged documents and clandestine meetings with sympathizers that characterized their stepwise trajectory to Canada. But as Smartz Frost reminds us in her Introduction to the biography, the Blackburn's story was first literally “written ... in the soil” of the city of Toronto where “fragments of pottery and bits of broken glass” from their home along with the material-biological

remains of Thornton, who died in 1890, and Lucie, who died five years later in 1895, attest to their presence and mark out the space they created together in their adopted city. In 2002, simultaneous ceremonies in Louisville, Kentucky, and Toronto, Canada, to commemorate the Blackburn's journey from slavery in the American plantation system to freedom in the Canadian city via the Underground Railroad, culminated in the erecting of matching plaques memorializing the Blackburn's lost story which was "recover[ed] from the ground" almost half a century after their deaths (351).[1] Smartz Frost modestly claims that she and "the archaeologists at the Blackburn site made no shattering revelations, discovered no priceless treasure, and certainly unearthed no gold" (350). However, their invaluable discovery points to rich theoretical grounds because the narrative that "lay peacefully ... [in the earth beneath the city of Toronto] for almost a century" has its roots in the Louisville plantation, the history of which constitutes the first chapter in the Blackburn's story (350). As Smartz Frost's archaeological and biographical work demonstrates, examining the plantation past is an important first step to understanding the workings of the metropolitan present and how black people occupy space in the contemporary Canadian city today.

Notwithstanding the spectacular nature of their escape from slavery—along the way they used forged identity documents, wore disguises, escaped from prison and incited a riot—the Blackburn's lives in Toronto were equally spectacular for the significant contribution they made to the city. Although photographs of the couple were never found, their names were included on the boards and records of attendance of several social, cultural, political and economic committees that saw to the welfare of the growing African Toronto community.[2] As Smartz Frost notes

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[1] See page xxiv of the Introduction to *Glory Land* for a detailed retelling of what Smardz Frost calls "a very emotional weekend" when the Blackburns were commemorated both in Canada and the United States.

[2] See pages 272-273 for further information about the anti-racism efforts in 1800s Toronto.

in *Glory Land*, members of the black community "took very seriously their responsibility to care for their families, their friends, and the community at large" (272)—a luxury denied them under the metrics of dispossession in what Charles Wagley calls "Plantation-America" ("Plantation America: A Cultural Sphere" 3), a system he credits for creating the legacy of a "'weak, divided, and amorphous [black family unit and] community'" (qtd. in Beckford 77).[3] In fact, in an act that underscores the importance of family, Thornton returned to Kentucky in 1837, despite the threat of recapture, "to rescue his mother" Sibby out of slavery (Smartz Frost 275). Thornton, in particular, was an active participant in various social and political protests, organizations and meetings aimed at abolishing slavery in North America, creating better conditions for black people in the developing city of Toronto and working to legislate permanent residency for black former slaves and African Americans in Canada.[4] As invisible as they attempted to be during their treacherous border crossing to evade the ruthless "slave catchers ... [who were] paid to capture slaves and return them to their owners" (157), the Blackburns were highly visible, engaged and entrepreneurial in their Toronto lives. For example, historical documents credit them for starting Toronto's "first taxi business" in 1837, christened "'The City'" (267). In an interesting and theoretically germane turn, "[t]he Toronto Transit Commission [still] uses the Blackburn [cab company's] logo colors of red and yellow for its streetcars and buses to this day," a move that underscores the continuity and linearity between the plantation past and the city present (268). Smartz Frost writes that, in fact, "the city where they had made their home for more than a

[3] See Beckford's *Persistent Poverty*, page 18, for a detailed description of Wagley's term "plantation America."
[4] See Smartz Frost, pages 272-273, for a description of Thornton Blackburn's involvement in joint Canadian-US protest movments.

half-century acknowledged them ... [at the end of their lives] for the contributions their entrepreneurship had made" to urban life in Toronto (345).

Two direct consequences of the existence of the Blackburn's taxi company are especially relevant to the present study. First, the taxi business led to the early-to-mid nineteenth century "map[ping] of the city ... [in] concentric circles radiating out from the ... taxi stand on Church Street" in Toronto's downtown core (268). The Blackburn's involvement in the inaugural mapping of the city is perhaps the most compelling instance of black people—long assumed to be "ungeographic" during and after plantation slavery—as fully geographic beings and intimately implicated in the cartographic history of urban space in Toronto (McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds* x). Their involvement in that cartographic endeavour is a sound repudiation of the notion "that subaltern populations have no relationship to the production of space"; rather, "[b]y defining and constructing the world they inhabit[ed]" the Blackburns "challenge how we know and understand geography" (92). They were, to borrow one theorist's terms, "viable geographic subjects who live[d] and negotiate[d] the world around them in complex ways" (x) that allowed them to redefine themselves as independent and savvy business owners whose innovation left an indelible mark on the cityscape and "ensure[d] them a permanent place in the city's history" (Smartz Frost 267). Second, because the horse-drawn open-air carriage was the contemporary method of locomotion, Thornton, who "rode up top" in plain view, and his "cab soon became ... familiar site[s] on Toronto streets" (268). After years of seeking freedom from the plantation system through various invisibilizing acts, Thornton Blackburn could finally "claim the right to look" and, in the Derridian sense, the right to be seen by the other (Mirzoeff 473). In an ironic inversion of roles and from his vantage point atop his cab, Thornton, former slave-become-prominent-

Canadian-citizen, became the “overseer” of the burgeoning metropolitan core of the nineteenth century city of Toronto (475). Along with the outwardly “radiating” taxi routes, hope for a better, decolonial future for black people fleeing the colonial plantation system to the city also spread outward into the larger metropolis from the central point of the former American plantation slave's cab company on Church Street in mid-nineteenth-century downtown Toronto.

Chapter One: Introduction: "Giving Canada a Black Eye": Seeing, Recovering and Reconstructing the City in Contemporary Black Canadian Fiction and Poetry

> …black writers (and by extension black people) do not see the same city white writers and people see, because their experiences are not the same.
>
> —Donald B. Gibson, "The Harlem Renaissance City" 41.

The Prologue that introduces this study and recounts the story of the recent discovery in downtown Toronto of the remains of former American plantation slaves, Thornton and Lucie Blackburn, serves two key purposes: first, it situates my reading of Austin Clarke's, Wayde Compton's and Dionne Brand's texts within an emerging body of compelling research that shows a direct, theoretically rich and analytically productive relationship between the colonial plantation and the contemporary city; and second, given that the Blackburns escaped to and lived, died and were buried in the Canadian city with the biggest black population, it grounds the present study in a distinctly black Canadian urban context. The theoretical linking of the ostensibly dichotomous geographies of the plantation and the city helps bring into focus the complex ways colonial plantation histories continue to influence the manner in which black diasporic peoples produce, negotiate and attend to geography in contemporary urban settings. I use the word "geography" here and throughout this study as Katherine McKittrick does in her seminal book *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, to mean "space, place, and location in their physical materiality and imaginative configurations" (x), while also noting the developmental trajectory of spatial theory from Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault to Edward W. Soja as well as the tide of spatial theory articulated through the lens of other critical disciplines, including feminist geography and race theory. For instance, this project relies on Lefeb-

vre's theory that "([s]ocial) space is a (social) product" and that space produced through social forces—like the plantation produced through the colonization process—functions as "a means of control, and hence of domination, of power" (*The Production of Space* 26). Many of the spaces and places in the texts I discuss are "other" and "othered" spaces / places in the way Foucault conceives of space and place in his article "Of Other Spaces." I am mindful of Foucault's idea of "heterotopias of deviation" or, in different terms, places where the inhabitants' "behavior is [perceived as being] deviant in relation to ... [a] required ... norm" in my discussion of some of the radical spaces of black otherness that the authors in the present study deconstruct and reconstruct (5). Finally, I am also alert to Soja's work on "spatiality" and "thirdspace," a conceptual extension of the work of both Lefebvre and Foucault, in my discussion of the nature of some of the spaces Clarke, Compton and Brand produce and / or gesture to in their work. Of course, feminist geographer Doreen Massey's argument that "'space and time … [are] intimately connected,'" also informs my entire study (qtd. in Warburton). The foregoing notions about space are fundamental to the work McKittrick does in her important article, "Plantation Futures." The article's central organizing principal, "plantation theory," is the lens through which I analyze the three primary texts in this study. In the following paragraphs, I examine "Plantation Futures" in some detail and explain why I apply "plantation theory" to my reading of Clarke's, Compton's and Brand's city writing.

In "Plantation Futures," McKittrick uses the example of the African Burial Grounds in downtown Manhattan in the city of New York, where the corpses of thousands of black slaves were discovered in 1991, to posit that the biological and material remains of buried black slaves and the artifacts interred with them that were lost to history through nineteenth century urban

development and subsequently found in the wake of twentieth century urban redevelopment, signal a "spatial continuity between the living and the dead, between science and storytelling, and between the [plantation] past and the [city] present" (2). This assertion is possible, McKittrick argues, because those black bodies and material remnants and the particular histories and memories they carry with them through space and across time are still "*there*" occupying space in the geography of the contemporary North American city (2, italics in original). Therefore, "[t]he geographies of slavery, postslavery, and black dispossession" are not only theoretical or historical and thus somehow completed or past or finished geographies with no apposite relationship to the present; rather, they are ongoing spatial and temporal sites that continue to resonate *here* in the contemporary metropolitan present. The discovery of the corpses of former black slaves in the course of archaeological or urban redevelopment projects irrevocably connects the plantation and the city making it "impossible," McKittrick argues, "to delink the built environment, the urban, and blackness." The New York discovery also adduces Foucault's argument in "Of Other Spaces" that every space has a history and that "it is not possible to disregard the fatal intersection of time with space" (22). The exhumed remains of escaped slaves turned city denizens, Thornton and Lucie Blackburn, in downtown Toronto, assert the same "fatal" time-space relationship and thus encourage us to contemplate, scrutinize and question the way the connection between the (Louisville) plantation and the (Toronto) city, slavery and freedom, colonialism and capitalism, the past and the present informed the Thornton's lives and continue to inform the lives of other black people living in the context of the contemporary Canadian city today.

In “Plantation Futures,” McKittrick defines “plantation theory” as “a conceptualization of time-space that tracks the plantation toward the prison and the impoverished and destroyed city sectors” (2). Two central ideas arise from this description: the plantation's mobility—both as a theoretical concept and a material fact/spatial reality tied to geography—and the persistent nature of the behaviours and beliefs that define or characterize its institutional mandate. In response to her central question—“what kind of future can the plantation give us?” (12)—McKittrick suggests two related but opposing possibilities: “a decolonial future” or “future-misery” (5). Briefly stated, McKittrick's subsequent discussion argues that despite its enduring brutalities, the plantation—and its current necropolitical expression of cruelty, institutionalized racism and urbicide—does not have to “lead to a totalizing future of brutality” (4). Using Sylvia Wynter's essay “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation” and Dionne Brand's long poem *Inventory*, McKittrick argues convincingly for the former outcome, proposing that “a poetics that envisions a decolonial future” (5) in which black bodies are no longer the objects of violence, oppression and antiblack racism; where “black-*life* [i]s anticipatory” (11, italics in original); and where black urban spaces become “geographies of survival, resistance, creativity, and the struggle *against* death” (14, italics in original) is possible. Thus, in her reading of “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation” and *Inventory*, the plantation is deployed subversively to “Plot,” “Plan[t]” and “*Inven[t]*” innovative strategies that intervene in and undermine the teleological inevitability of its trajectory. Both texts, McKittrick posits, articulate the substance of “decolonial futures”: “Wynter's essay asks that we seek out secretive histories” (11) that do not reproduce the violence of the plantation or its distorted racialized reasoning and Brand's long poem “demands [our] ethical engagement” so

that we can read past racial violence to reach "a different register" that does not replicate the brutalities of the plantation in the present (14).

McKittrick's reading of Wynter's and Brand's articulations of ethical-human black space in "Plantation Futures" contains echoes of her analysis in *Demonic Grounds* of the spatial politics of the cramped attic in Harriot Jacobs'/Linda Brent's slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*. Some of these reflections help to better understand why the authors in my study approach and represent black people's relationship to the city in their respective texts. Naming the attic where Jacobs/Brent hid from her slave master for seven years a "paradoxical space"—simultaneously jail and "retreat"—McKittrick asks us to contemplate and interrogate the boundaries between freedom and slavery, refuge and prison, insisting that the hiding place "gesture[s] to several different geographic possibilities and experiences" that refuse the racialized-sexualized violence of the plantation and speak to Jacobs'/Brent's agency, humanity and freedom within the geographical and temporal space of slavery (41). In Jacobs'/Brent's case, McKittrick posits, "the geographic workings of slavery simultaneously produce spatial boundaries and subject-knowledges that can *subvert* the perimeters of bondage" (40, italics added). Thus, what Jacobs/Brent herself calls "'her loophole of retreat'" becomes an ambiguously decolonized spatial zone within the colonial geography of the American plantation system; in other words, the attic is a space that, like the spaces Wynter and Brand create in their writing, *anticipates* a "decolonial future" despite its location in / at the spatial-temporal apex of American colonial plantation slavery (qtd. in *Demonic Grounds* 37). Using Soja's terms in *Thirdspace*, we might refer to Jacobs'/Brent's "'loophole'" as a "thirdspace" where "the knowable and the unimaginable, ... [and] everyday life and unending history" merge and thus "change the spatiality

of human life," on the one hand and, on the other hand, inveigle us to think differently about space and blackness (57).

What stands out in the three examples I site above (Wynter, Brand and Jacobs/Brent) are the individual texts' insistence on being read through a decolonializing lens and each authors' / speakers' deep commitment to rethinking and reimagining the ways in which black people and spaces might resist the ideological workings and skewed logic of colonialism and plantationism to forge more humanly workable relations and futures. That is to say, each text discussed in the preceding paragraphs "*envisions ... a future where a corelated human species perspective is honored*" (McKittrick "Plantation Futures" 11, italics in original). Although Clarke's, Compton's and Brand's texts are similarly informed by the conceptual plantation-city connection McKittrick elaborates in "Plantation Futures," unlike the works I mention above, they do not all uniformly articulate a way forward or a hopeful, decolonial future for black people in the contemporary diaspora. Some of the primary texts I examine seek to dismantle the imperial language through which Canada's colonial history is maintained and Euro-white hegemony is re-asserted as a matter of course. Others acknowledge the city's "battlegrounds" but insist that the growing presence of an increasingly diverse population transforms these zones of combat into more hopeful, humane and decolonial spaces ("Plantation Futures" 7). Still others reproduce in the contemporary city the landscapes of misery bequeathed by the plantation; these latter are a version of what Lefebvre refers to as "'the homogenized, hierarchized, and fragmented spaces of capitalist modernity'" (qtd. in Brenner and Elden 223). The contrasting urban portraits that my primary authors produce lead to the following questions: How does the plantation-city connection illuminate our understanding of the trenchant, imaginative and sometimes vexing portraits of the

Canadian city in contemporary poetry and prose by black Canadian writers? How might this range of representations of the urban help us better understand our colonial past and our present complicity in maintaining a status quo that is no longer workable for the vast majority of black city-dwellers? What can texts whose representations of the contemporary city simultaneously decolonize and recolonize black urban spaces and places tell us about the intractability of the colonial plantation system and its culture? And, finally, how do these texts help us understand the various and varied ways in which the plantation-city connection impinges upon representations of the Canadian urban?

In his analysis of the destructive, extensive and lingering socio-economic impacts of plantation economies on black people in his book, *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World*, economist George L. Beckford identifies two overarching areas where the legacy of the plantation is most acutely felt. First, he argues, economies that owe their prosperity to transatlantic slavery created a state of "persistent poverty" and "persistent underdevelopment" for black people and black geographies despite the wealth their labour generated for the local and global economies (xxii). Second, Beckford suggests, the poverty and underdevelopment of black people in plantation economies contribute to their continued deprivation in the consumer economies of the western world—what he calls the New World or the "North Atlantic" (xxii)—to which many black people were transported during slavery and subsequently immigrated and migrated post-emancipation. Beckford's "plantation thesis," which he refers to interchangeably as the "plantation economy thesis" in *Persistent Poverty*, calls attention to the economic interdependence of plantation and metropolitan economies and, in so doing, underscores the connection between historical and contemporary inequalities based on racial differ-

ence and dominance. Although Beckford's analysis of underdevelopment in plantation economies focuses primarily on its economic impacts, he also carries out a more holistic interpretation of its effects—psychological, social, cultural, and so forth—because, as he argues, the plantation exercised "control over *all* aspects of the lives of people within its territory" (9, italics added) and was "fully integrated in the economic *and* social order" of life (15, italics added). Because the principles of the plantation influenced every facet of black life and because "the black presence in the New World derives from the plantation," it makes sense, Beckford insists, "to approach the study of black dispossession in the New World through the medium of plantation economy" (18). Although his untimely death prevented Beckford from completing an analysis of black privation in urban contexts in the western world, elements of that work have been taken up recently by other scholars, many of whom I include here—chiefly McKittrick in her article "Plantation Futures."

Building on Beckford's plantation economy thesis and the work of several other theorists writing in the field, most notably Achille Mbembe, Clyde Woods, Charles Wagley, Paul Gilroy and Nicholas Mirzoeff, McKittrick clarifies and refines the mutually dependant relationship between the plantation economies of the Americas, the growth of western metropolitan capital and ongoing black poverty and anti-black racism in contemporary urban contexts, both in "Plantation Futures" and, to a lesser degree, in "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place." In these theoretically linked pieces, McKittrick argues that both the material and the geographic contingencies of black poverty, underdevelopment and anti-black racism that took root and flourished in the economies of the plantation persist in various forms and to varying degrees in twenty-first-century urban contexts. There are, McKittrick proposes, "longstanding links be-

tween blackness and geography" that "brin[g] into focus the ways in which racial violences … [still] shape … black worlds" ("On Plantations" 947). Further, she insists, this temporal and "spatial continuity between … [plantation] past and [city] present" perpetuates itself through a distorted way of thinking about black people and black space that has become naturalized and diffuse ("Plantation Futures" 2). This "protracted colonial logic," as McKittrick calls it, infiltrates every aspect of the ways in which contemporary post-colonial spaces, systems and institutions are configured and accounts for—in large part—the vexing and persistent undervaluing of black life and black space in urban contexts today (3). If, as McKittrick convincingly argues, "the plantation is migratory," then its entrenched ideological positions and complexities inform not only our encounters with blackness at the institutional and systems level but they also, importantly, influence the nature of our everyday interactions with and understandings of blackness at the personal level in the here and now (3). Since "the plantation notably stands at the centre of modernity," McKittrick points out in "On Plantations," it follows that "[i]t fostered complex black and non-black geographies in the Americas and provided the blueprint for *future sites* of racial entanglement," in urban centres across continental North and South America (949, italics added).

Central to both Beckford's and McKittrick's writing on the plantation-city connection are two related objectives. The first is to fully account for the origins of black dispossession by demystifying the deliberate, sustained and sanctioned historical assault on black life and black space via colonial practices that persist in post-colonial contexts. Beckford does this primarily through an economic lens, arguing that black economic disenfranchisement is endemic to, and thus necessary for, the financial success of the plantocracy and, by extension, the capitalist me-

tropolis. McKittrick's focus deconstructs the socio-political and human costs of the "incongruous racialized economy" of the historical plantation on the North American urban geographies inhabited by black people today ("Plantation Futures" 3). Both Beckford and McKittrick insist that, despite the seemingly intractable nature of the colonial plantation economy and the post-colonial problems created by and through the historical plantation, it is possible—and indeed urgent—to "reimagine its future" in order to change the grim reality of black poverty, dispossession and anti-black violence (McKittrick "Plantation Futures" 5). Beckford argues that nothing short of "a virtual revolution" will change the dismal trajectory of black lives in the post-colonial context (xvi). His thoughtful and revelatory writing on the topic—especially in *Persistent Poverty* but also in his essays in *The George Beckford Papers*— proposes that a greater understanding of the genesis of the complex and intertwined elements that constituted and help maintain the plantation system might serve to revolutionize contemporary relationships and arrangements in ways that end the devaluing of black people and black space. Similarly, for her part, McKittrick argues that because the plantation is not an anomalous and contained historical paradox but rather an ongoing regularized system that underwrites and maintains contemporary race-based inequalities, the historical plantation might be the key to conceptualizing, and indeed materializing, "*a corelated human species perspective*" of the future in which the lessons of the plantation enable the growth of a mutually productive and fully equitable human(e) existence for black people living in the twenty-first century Canadian city ("Plantation Futures" 11, italics in original). In other words, by querying the plantation, we might notice that the everyday "spaces of encounter" ("On Prisons" 955) in the city conceivably "hold in them useful anti-colonial practices and narratives"

that might produce what Dionne Brand calls black "life [that] may make sense to itself" ("*Ars Poetica*" 64).

Keeping in mind the important theoretical groundwork of Beckford's extended early study of the economics of the plantation, and looking through McKittrick's more current theoretical frames on the indissoluble connection between the historical plantation and the contemporary city which extend, invigorate, and assemble the work of Beckford and other theorists writing in the field, this study endeavors to make a contribution to the discussion about the ways in which the material, social and psychological aspects of plantation economies, systems and geographies are central to literary representations of the contemporary urban by black Canadian city writers. In other words, I argue, the plantation continues to function as a palimpsest of the city in the poetry and fiction of all three writers in this study. In "Plantation Futures" McKittrick argues that the strategies black people use to contend with anti-black racism, violence, and systemic and institutional inequalities in present-day urban contexts reflect creative historical black responses to the plantation, such as resistance, compliance, escape, suicide, and so forth. Taken in this light, the plantation can serve not only as an archived locus of normalized racial terror that continues to haunt and that also reminds us of the danger of reproducing the conditions that allowed it to flourish but also, importantly, as a cipher for decoding contemporary urban geographies in order to produce more liveable conditions in the present and to envision a future where black life has intrinsic, as opposed to only extrinsic, value. It follows, then, that literary representations of black life in the contemporary city might also reflect this tension or binary. This study argues that, while some representations of the city in the urban writing of black Canadian writers "cut out a space toward a description of [fully] *being* in the diaspora" (Brand "*Ars Poetica*" 59, italics

added), others "follow our late modern necropolitics of the present into future-misery" ("Plantation Futures" 5). In other words, and given the plantation system's tenaciousness, reach, and distorted logic, some literary representations of the urban portray the contemporary city as a space that rehearses this disturbing praxis, suggesting that a Beckfordian "revolution" is impossible; others, however, reference the plantation as a way to attenuate it. Since the logic that conceived of, established, and maintained the plantation was thoroughly internalized by those who lived within its boundaries and since, as McKittrick argues, the plantation is both mobile and dynamic, it follows that literary representations of the city—and the writers who conceive of them—continue to grapple with black life and black space. I am interested in how the logic of the plantation is employed, differently, by Clarke's, Compton's and Brand's characters and/or speakers to produce and re-produce black space and place, keeping in mind that, as McKittrick argues in "On Plantations," "[a] black sense of place is ... tied to fluctuating geographic and historical contexts" (949). My analysis is also aided by the theoretical work of several other scholars. For instance, I use Achille Mbembe's theorizing of the plantation as a "state of exception" in his essay "Necropolis"; Charles Wagley's writing on American "cultural spheres" in his essay "Plantation America: A Cultural Sphere"; Nicholas Mirzoeff's article on the "politics of looking," "The Right to Look"; and Frantz Fanon's theorizing on internalized inferiority in *Black Skin, White Masks*, to name a few. The history of the plantation also opens discussions of contemporary black subjectivity and space in two more recently published works which I gesture to that help situate the arguments in this chapter: Paul Barrett's *Blackening Canada: Diaspora, Race, Multiculturalism* and Winfried Siemerling's *The Black Atlantic Reconsidered: Black Canadian Writing, Cultural History, and the Presence of the Past*. Other theoretical analyses of the plantation, colonialism,

anti-black racism and related issues produced by these and other writers complete my framework and inform my reading of *Free and Young*, *Performance Bond* and *thirsty*.

Despite the fact of its longstanding existence, black urban Canada continues to occupy a precarious, vexing and often un-visible place in our national literary cannon and collective imagination. Paradoxically, the city is currently experiencing a renaissance. Interest in the city as both a conceptual literary figure and a socioeconomic, political and cultural engine is at a contemporary zenith. The renewed attention to the urban also suggests that, in many ways, the city has begun to eclipse our longstanding national preoccupation with the North, the wilderness and the village as the central defining features of Canadian character, identity and geography. Increasing birth rates and life expectancy coupled with growth in both migration and immigration to major urban centres have dramatically changed the size, diversity and dynamics of our cities. "At its heart," writes Jonah Letovsky in *Spacing: Canadian Urbanism Uncovered*, "Canada is an increasingly urban nation … [whose] … demographic, financial, and creative systems revolve around cities" (39).

Underscoring this renewed interest in the city is a 2002 *Maclean's* magazine cover story on the state of contemporary urban Canada that dramatically proclaims that "Cities are suddenly hot" (Janigan 22). In more restrained but no less definitive terms, Justin D. Edwards and Douglas Ivison argue in their Introduction to *Downtown Canada: Writing Canadian Cities* that "in recent years, there has been an interestingly visible 'turn to the city' in public and critical discourses in and about Canada" which has led to "a tradition of urban writing within Canadian literature" (8). An early example of this critical engagement with the urban and with city issues in the literary context is the special issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature* called "Writing Canadian Space."

In their Introduction to the issue, entitled "Mapping the Ground," editors Linda Warley, John Clement Ball and Robert Viau assert that "the palimpsestic layers of city-space exhibit its historical and contemporary multiplicity—the competing visions and discourses that formed it, as well as the many modes of habitation and use that still jostle within its porous boundaries" (Warley). More recently and echoing the sentiments of the editors of "Writing Canadian Space," one critic optimistically insists that "the new Canada is being forged in our multi-racial, multiethnic, [and] multi-linguistic cities" (qtd. in Edwards and Ivison 8). Bolstering this assertion about the increasing racial, cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity of our urban centres is a 2013 *Toronto Life* magazine cover story titled *The End of White Toronto: How a new generation of mixed-race kids will transform the city*. The article includes the photographs and stories of a dozen "indeterminately ethnic people" or, as author Nicholas Hune-Brown colloquially refers to them, "mixie[s]" (36). Although Hune-Brown hints at "a utopian post-racial future" for Toronto and other major Canadian cities, he concedes that the promising outlook he envisages for many "mixie[s]" is invariably thwarted for those whose skin colour—black—and social class—downwardly mobile—trap them in the dystopian present of their raced and classed subjectivity (41). Since, as Hune-Brown reminds us, "class … remains stubbornly tied to skin colour" in most North American contexts, many black city dwellers are, still, overwhelmingly excluded from both the present and future spaces that the article's title points to: the waning but still politically and economically dominant white city and the waxing and increasingly influential mixed race city being created by "upwardly mobile" "mixie[s]."

Notwithstanding the foregoing insights and the changing attitude toward the city and urban diversity that they signal, mainstream critical theories on space and place and archival, his-

torical, literary, media and even anecdotal accounts of the Canadian urban have generally ignored, misinterpreted, criminalized or erased black people, spaces and places in the metropolis. Sociologist Evelyn S. Ruppert's exhaustive investigation into the mid-1990s redevelopment of Toronto's Dundas Square in *The Moral Economy of Cities: Shaping Good Citizens*, is a compelling case study of the various techniques used to racialize and criminalize black people (and other marginalized sectors) as a way to justify their removal from desirable and economically generative urban spaces like the tourist mecca at the crossroads of Yonge and Dundas streets. The efficacy of these strategies is succinctly captured by the term sociologist Scot Wortley uses in a discussion on police "carding," the controversial national interrogation practice that has disproportionately targeted young black urban males, especially in Canada's major metropolitan centres, for impromptu and ostensibly benign street checks to collect and subsequently archive personal data. Perceptually, Wortley argues, the difference in the numbers of black people versus people of other ethnic and racial backgrounds being spontaneously carded by police can be explained by the fact that black bodies are still considered to be "'out-of-place'" on an implied Euro-white / Canadian urban landscape (qtd. in Rankin). The attitude Wortley gestures to and the seeming ubiquity of its expression across certain state institutions, agencies and systems suggests that "[t]he urban problems we face [with regards to race, place and space] are persistent, complex, and entrenched" (Robinson, *Spacing* 41). The precariousness of black bodies, spaces and places in contemporary Canadian cities and the historical origins of this persistent instability and pervasive anti-black mentality are, then, central to any study of the meaning and effect of black urban writing in terms of how we define ourselves, our cities and the nation.

Speaking to this point, Rinaldo Walcott begins the Introduction to the second, revised edition of his ground-breaking book *Black Like Who?: Writing Black Canada*, with the bleak declaration that, despite the passage of six years since its initial publication in 1997 and some hopeful signs of progress in that intervening period, "[w]riting blackness is *still* difficult work" (11, italics added) because of "the continuing ambivalent place of black peoples in the national imagination" (12). Despite its claims of wholeheartedly accepting the philosophy, policy and practice of multiculturalism, Walcott argues, the nation's dominant narrative "is the continuing story of the difficult terrain that blackness and black people in Canada must occupy" (12). The formation of contemporary social movements like the Black Lives Matter coalition that advocates on behalf of black people subjected to violence from the state, underscores the continued precariousness of black life and space in urban Canada (and elsewhere) and the urgent need to change the relationship between the state and its black residents. Thus, articulating a black urban poetics is a fraught endeavor because, as McKittrick suggests in "Nothing's
Shocking: Black Canada," the evocatively named penultimate chapter in *Demonic Grounds*, Canada is "a nation that erases and demolishes black places and spaces and refuses to acknowledge the long-standing history of black peoples within its borders" (94). In a context where the idea of black urban lives and spaces is, even now, invariably greeted with what McKittrick calls "surprise … and wonder" that they should even exist in Canada let alone *be* Canadian, the task of writing the contemporary black Canadian city takes on an added social and historical significance that goes well beyond its aesthetic and literary value (92). As Diana Brydon puts it in "Metamorphoses of a Discipline: Rethinking Canadian Literature Within Institutional Contexts," such literary work involves "not [just] transcending nation but resituating it"

so that it reflects the truth of its origins and the "multiscaled visions of place" being created by new and diverse voices and perspectives (15).

In his recently published book, *Blackening Canada: Diaspora, Race, Multiculturalism*, Paul Barrett explores the ways in which three black Canadian writers—Tessa McWatt, Dionne Brand and Austin Clarke—articulate, envision and determinedly "occupy" urban space "in a bid to unsettle the Canadian imaginary that excludes them" (5). Their writing, Barrett argues, provides a glimpse of the "sobering" reality for black people living in one of the most multicultural nations in the world that is still "corroded by systemic racism and deprivation" (5). To use Brydon's terms again, in writing the contemporary black Canadian city, black "writers unravel the integrationist texts [and discourses] of the nation" that depict Canada as racially, culturally and ethnically homogeneous or unproblematically multicultural and which, as a consequence, have neatly overlooked the presence of black Canadian people, spaces and places, the challenges their representations of the urban pose to ideological-official diversity and multiculturalism and the varied contributions black peoples have made and continue to make to the nation (14). They and other writers and theorists in and outside of the present project are engaged in a literary tug-of-war with what Daniel Coleman, in "From Canadian Trance to TransCanada," calls "Canadian literary scholarship [that] is deeply invested in the project of civility [,] … the sharp edges and striations of … [which] have been most consistently and explicitly drawn along the borders of race and ethnicity" (28; 32). At the limit, then, these kinds of texts are implicated in a broader, critically trenchant and politically resonant project that involves what Silvio Torres-Saillant, in his essay "Trials of Authenticity," terms "the outright shattering of Western paradigms … [through] poetic systems that deny … [their] centrality" (699). As such, we might consider con-

temporary black Canadian city writing like that I discuss in this study to be amongst what Brydon labels the "truly dissident literary texts" engaged in bringing to light, complicating and challenging prevailing ideologies, myths and essentialist and distilled interpretations of black city-dwelling people and black urban places and spaces in Canada (8).

The urban geographies of black Canada that Austin Clarke's short story collection *When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks*, Wayde Compton's book of poetry *Performance Bond*, and Dionne Brand's long poem *thirsty*, reference, reveal and (re)create work on several different levels. Each text's literary engagement with the city offers what McKittrick calls "a spatial terrain that makes available a place—and places—to produce and/or underscore varied responses to geographic domination" (*Demonic Grounds* 95). While they each acknowledge the ways in which the colonial past impinges on the spatial and racial politics of the urban present, Clarke, Compton and Brand have very different literary responses to spatial authority and tyranny. Their representations of the contemporary city often "de-cente[r] colonial and national geographies," to use McKittrick's words, while at other times they reproduce the colonial at the centre of the contemporary Canadian urban as a way of depicting and critiquing the complexity, longevity, transferability and seeming inevitability of the imperial project in the lives of black people living in the diaspora (95). As Angel David Nieves puts it in his paper, "Memories of Africville: Urban Renewal, Reparations, and the Africadian Diaspora," "[t]he making of place by marginalized or subaltern groups in Canada, and their subsequent erasure due to race-based governmental heritage policy, are significant forces: they allow us to understand how the nation has inscribed its colonial rule in spatial terms" (87). It is no wonder, then, that, as Walcott argues, despite "insistently mak[ing] Canada home even with all its difficulties ... black people across the

country ... refuse to place all their hopes and dreams in the nation" (12). Clarke's, Compton's and Brand's city writing speaks to the reasons why black people cannot, to this day, be confident that the nation will uphold the promise it made to them (and all other citizens) via the Multiculturalism Act. But their poetry and fiction also, to varying degrees, suggests an alternative and more enduring urban vision and carries an appeal to readers to actively engage in helping to achieve it.

Referencing Lefebvre's work on spatial theory, the editors of "Writing Canadian Space" note that "space is not a neutral background nor an empty container against which or within which human activity occurs" but that, rather, "space is produced through signs" that include the "visual, gestural, architectural, [and] literary" (2). Clarke's, Compton's and Brand's literary representations of urban space in the contemporary Canadian city take up and respond to the issue of "geographic domination" and "colonial rule" by examining the intersection of the plantation—one layer of the palimpsestic structure of the contemporary metropolis—and the city and by investigating how the plantation past has and continues to inform the city present. Each literary portrait strengthens our understanding of the power of our shared imperial past, the tenaciousness of colonial history and the complex workings of the twentieth- and twenty-firstcentury Canadian city where race, racism and anti-black violence still figure prominently in keeping black people "out-of-place" within the nation. While their literary and aesthetic projects differ in fundamental ways and the visions they articulate of black people, places and spaces in the Canadian city often develop in remarkably different directions, Clarke's landscapes of misery, Compton's urban simulacrum and Brand's complex bipolar metropolis are equally influenced by the colonial plantation and its inscrutable logic. Their representations of the city disrupt our assumptions that space is ahistorical, innocent and transparent.

A Poetics of the Black Canadian City offers a reading of a set of texts whose literary representations of the contemporary Canadian city can, I argue, be illuminated by being examined through the lens of "plantation theory" or "plantation economy theory." This study does not claim to represent a comprehensive examination of black urban writing or a geographically representative sample of texts or cities; further, it does not set out to offer an exhaustive historical survey of the socio-cultural, political and economic workings of the colonial plantation and slavery. Rather, by using "plantation theory" as a framing device, this project contributes a unique perspective to the mounting body of scholarship and other cultural endeavours that seek to provide a discourse that acknowledges the long history and multiple contributions of black people living in urban Canada. Taken together, the three primary texts in this study form a rich, diverse, compelling and often unexpected and troubling engagement with the contemporary black Canadian city and the nation. The contribution these texts make to the field of literary urban writing affirms the idea that, as Cheryl

Teelucksingh insists in the Introduction to *Claiming Space: Racialization in Canadian Cities*, "Canadian cities are important spatial contexts in which to analyze how racialized power is produced, represented, and challenged" (3). McKittrick persuasively argues that, "by defining and constructing the world they inhabit, black subjects challenge how we know and understand geography" (*Demonic Grounds* 92). Thus, "by seriously addressing space and place in the everyday, through the site of memory and in theory and text," works like *Free and Young*, *Performance Bond* and *thirsty* "also confront sociospatial objectification by offering a different sense of how geography is and might be lived" (92). In their literary observations of and responses to the ways in which black people inhabit urban spaces and places in the cities of Toronto and Vancouver,

Clarke, Compton and Brand offer strikingly divergent but illuminating interpretations of the contemporary urban and offer important insights into the connections between blackness and colonial and post-colonial geographies, systems and ideologies.

In more specific terms, my rationale for selecting these three texts is fourfold. First, each of my primary texts focuses on black urban space in a sustained way. Each author's corpus contains several other literary works that demonstrate their ongoing interest in and focus on the city which allows me to integrate key elements from some of their other city texts into my analysis of the three primary texts. These secondary works include but are not limited to Clarke's *Toronto Trilogy, Choosing His Coffin: The Best Short Stories of Austin Clarke* (2003), *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack* (1980) and *More* (2008); Compton's *After Canaan: Essays on Race, Writing, and Region* (2010), *Bluesprint: Black British Columbian Literature and Orature* (2001), *49th Parallel Psalm* (1999) and the Hogan's Alley Memorial Project (HAMP) website; and Brand's *What We All Long For* (2005) and *Inventory* (2006), in particular. Second, although the literary representations of the city in each primary text are influenced by the plantation-city trope, which is the central organizing device of my theoretical framework, the authors' contrasting socio-cultural and lived experience—Clarke was born in Barbados in 1934 and died in 2016; Compton was born in Vancouver in 1972; and Brand was born in Trinidad in 1953— inform their divergent and often contradictory portraits of the city and influence the nature and weight of the historical issues that give each literary representation its character, substance and tenor. This variety underscores the richness and diversity of black urban experience. Third, while Clarke's and Brand's texts depict versions of the same city, their temporal settings and, as I will argue, their constructed spatial settings are so different as to render their respective portrayals of Toronto al-

most unrecognizable one from the other. Thus, along with Compton's depictions of the city of Vancouver, the three texts convey the impression of representing three very different cities and three different ways of engaging with the urban. As Walcott reminds us, "in a multicultural society we all don't sound [or see] alike" (*Black Like Who?* 12). Finally, in his book, *When Words Deny the World: The Reshaping of Canadian Writing*, critic Stephen Henighan asks where "the big, synthesizing cities' big, synthesizing fictions" are to be found in our national corpus (208). Although Brand's novel, *What We All Long For*, may come closer to meeting that standard than any other recently published fiction, the content and form of the primary works in this study militate against "synthesizing" and thus reframe Henighan's question. What, my texts ask, are the factors that continue to impede the production of urban space in Canada that will not terrorize, antagonize, marginalize, disorganize and dichotomize people and geographies along racial and social lines? Two of the three primary texts in this project offer moments of socio-cultural synthesis and one seeks to create "a qualitatively different, socialist form of sociospatial organization based upon what ... [Henri Lefebvre] ... terms 'the right to space'" (223); however, in all three cases, the substance of their representations of the city and their formal qualities— Clarke's loosely linked short stories, Compton's radically hybrid and often archival-like poems and Brand's sectionalized long poem—challenge, respond to and elevate the ideological assumption at the core of Henighan's query.

The first installment of Clarke's Toronto Trilogy—which includes the novels *The Meeting Point*, *Storm of Fortune* and *The Bigger Light*—was published in the late 1960s and, with some notable exceptions like *The Polished Hoe*, most of his subsequent short and long fiction, including *Free and Young*, is set in Toronto and concerns itself with urban issues like multiculturalism,

systemic and institutional racism, police brutality and social and economic inequality. His position as the first widely-read and broadly-published black Canadian writer made Clarke what Siemerling, in "Writing the Black Canadian City at the Turn of the TwentyFirst Century: Dionne Brand's Toronto and Mairuth Sarsfield's Montreal," has called "the forerunner" of a growing body of city writing by black Canadian authors (110). Siemerling goes so far as to credit Clarke for being at the helm of "a dynamic development of Caribbean Canadian writing that was to change the course of Canadian literature decisively" (110). Thus, gesturing to Clarke's first collection of short stories in this project anchors my study at the beginning of the tradition of black Canadian city writing to which Siemerling refers. Further, both author and text provide a compelling perspective and historical moment against which to compare and contrast the change in representations of the Canadian city in the other two texts in this study which are part of the "dynamic development" Siemerling argues is currently underway in black Canadian writing. In addition, although Clarke's black Caribbean immigrant characters inhabit the city somewhat differently in his later work, the clarity and shape of the troubling relationship between black people and the city that the author describes in *Free and Young* persist right up to his last work of city fiction, *More*. Finally, Clarke's literary career in Canada, which spanned more than half a century and includes the publication of eleven novels, eight short story collections, six memoirs and two books of poetry, and his sustained literary meditation on the city of Toronto make the inclusion of his text in this discussion a vital one.

The 2014 publication of Compton's inaugural short story collection, *The Outer Harbour: Stories*, adds a fifth work to the Vancouver-born writer's rapidly growing corpus which includes two books of poetry, one collection of non-fiction essays and two anthologies. As one of the few

black Canadian writers to focus much of his writing, research and social-political activism on the little-known former black urban community of Hogan's Alley, which was located in the Strathcona area of east end Vancouver, British Columbia, Compton's work injects a fresh perspective into the burgeoning body of black Canadian city writing which has, until recently, tended to focus primarily on black Caribbean or Haitian diasporas in the major metropolitan centres of Toronto, Montreal and Halifax. His second poetry collection, *Performance Bond*, offers compelling insights into a community and an historical moment that have received comparatively little scholarly or literary attention to date. In addition, as I mention briefly above, Compton's radically hybrid book (the collection includes concrete poems; visual poems depicting graffiti tags and religious symbols; a dub-spoken word compact disc; and fabricated archival photographs, newspaper articles and first-person testimonials, for example) reflects the deeply urban nature of his poetics and the urban and hybrid character of the black spaces, places and people he portrays in the collection's wide-ranging poems. Moreover, the parallels between the destruction of Hogan's Alley in BC and Africville in Nova Scotia, allow for a broader discussion about the nation's use of urban renewal and urbicide as instruments in an arsenal of tools employed to control, disperse and eradicate black places, spaces and people in Canada. Compton's focus on a still-unfamiliar black urban space that was demolished more than four decades ago asks readers to consider their own response to Canada's racialized spatial politics and contemplate the far-reaching consequences of the colonial legacy of anti-black violence on the history, topography and geography of the nation.

(Re)mapping black space is also a recurring idea and strategy for rearticulating the city in Brand's writing, a corpus that includes ten books of poetry, five novels, seven works of nonfic-

tion, two anthologies and several documentaries. Her long poem, *thirsty*, first unequivocally declares the city's seductiveness then proceeds to inventory the features that make Toronto, simultaneously, a desolate, joyless place. What becomes apparent is that *thirsty* describes two contrasting visions of the city which the speaker holds in tension through the formal device of alternating sections and speakers. As is characteristic of Brand's poetic and ethical *modus operandi*, readers are asked to consider the impact of their daily personal decisions and actions not just at the local level but also at the collective and global levels. Like the other primary texts in this study, *thirsty* charts the effects of colonial violence and domination on the lives of black people; typically, though, in the wider context of Brand's writing, this text is also deeply concerned with the human condition in more general terms, the notions of inclusivity and heterogeneity, and the individual's responsibility for creating regenerative, humane spaces in the city. The long poem's deliberate thematic bipolarity—the city is portrayed as simultaneously beautiful and ugly, hopeful and hopeless, freeing and ensnaring—functions as a gesture of openness; in other words, *thirsty* refuses to "fix" the city as being fundamentally one thing or another. Since immigrating to Canada in 1970 at the age of seventeen, Brand has listened to and translated the "murmuring city" (*thirsty* 34) of Toronto for her readers in order to "overwrit[e] … the narratives of non/being in the diaspora" (Brand "An *Ars Poetica* from the Blue Clerk" 59). My analysis of Brand's text endeavours to parse her translation of the city against the theoretical background of the plantation-city trope.

In the first chapter of *A Poetics of the Contemporary Black Canadian City*, I analyze the representations of 1960s-1970s inner-city Toronto in Austin Clarke's first collection of short fiction, *When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks*. Of the ten stories in the col-

lection, seven are set in Toronto and concern the black Caribbean immigrant characters' struggles to create a life in the city. While the racism, anti-black violence, relentless poverty and alienation they encounter sour their experience of the city and impede their ability to thrive, the greater challenge to attaining the success and freedom they imagine awaits them in Toronto stems from the legacy of the Caribbean plantation society whose perverse and distorted values, behaviours and logic they have unconsciously internalized. Clarke's bleak depictions of black urban spaces and black life in the city suggest that his characters are unable to "free ... [themselves] of the arsenal of complexes that ha[ve] been developed by the colonial environment" (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* 30). Thus, the theoretical and material relationship between the racial geographies of the plantation past and those of the city present is critical here, to the extent that it helps account for what I am calling the "landscapes of misery" Clarke's characters (re)produce and inhabit within the city of Toronto. Because they cannot break free of the ideological shackles of the plantation culture into which they have been socialized, Clarke's characters exist in an intermediate or liminal state of social, economic and geographic uncertainty and precarity. Drawing on Fanon, Barrett, Beckford, Siemerling and McKittrick, amongst others, I explore migratory plantation characteristics and contemporary "landscapes of misery" in *Free and Young*. I argue that, in their entirety, Clarke's stories end up suggesting that black people cannot exist in Toronto and that, in fact, where his characters are concerned, the Toronto of their desires and fantasies does not exist. To be sure, there is no sustained nostalgia for the past in Clarke's short stories; indeed, several characters reflect on their lives in the Caribbean with contempt for its corrupt social and political institutions, its grinding poverty and its engrained class/race-colour system based on the British colonial model. Finally,

I suggest that Clarke's representations of black urban life in this collection are part of the scaffolding that supports what will become the central literary preoccupation across his entire Toronto oeuvre: black Caribbean immigrants continue to inhabit the plantation despite their geographical location in downtown Toronto, a city from which they are figuratively and sometimes literally erased.

In Chapter 2, I consider Wayde Compton's imaginative (re)creation of the former black enclave of Hogan's Alley, located in what is now the Strathcona area of downtown east Vancouver. The desire to "retro-speculative[ly]" experience a historical past that those who lived through it consider "the least of ... [their] achievements," exists in tension with an equally strong desire to dismantle the imperial emblem that literally marks the province of British Columbia as colonial space (*After Canaan* 116). Thus, I consider a key moment in Compton's hybrid collection of poetry, *Performance Bond*, in order to investigate the ways in which the author's imaginative-poetic gestures respond to and defy the nation's urbicidal impulse when dealing with black spaces, places and people within its geographic borders. Imaginatively (re)creating Hogan's Alley depends on and then underscores the ignorance or unknowing of readers who are unaware of Vancouver's black history and mistake the "fake" poetic artifacts of the demolished city the author creates for authentic archival traces of the real place. Compton's playful gesture opens a more serious conversation about what constitutes a community and about disappearing black spaces and communities and how they refigure Canadian urban landscapes and histories, keeping in mind that a pristine urban landscape presents the nation with the opportunity to "forget" its complicity in producing a blackless past. What interests me here is the tension Compton creates between the poetic acts of, on the one hand, dismantling the colonial project and, on the other

hand, recreating a black urban space that, for those who inhabited it, represents one of what McKittrick calls the "spatially evident ... sites ... that are inhabited by impoverished [black] communities" ("Plantation Futures 7). If, as the razing of Hogan's Alley in the late 1960s by government, business and industry forces suggests, its former inhabitants were "liv[ing] in the unlivable" geographies created by anti-black systems like the historical plantation and slavery, what is at stake in recreating those "unlivable" urban spaces, literally and literarily, in the present (7)? Is the author's admittedly problematic nostalgia for and imaginative recreation of an erased black urban space an assertion of a black politics that opens up a way to reimagine and reinsert black spaces and places into the nation? Does the creative act of giving voice to fictionalized former residents of Hogan's Alley change the ways in which we understand our collective history and a location that is seldom connected with blackness? And, finally, can that "fake" black history—which mimics the equally fabricated homogeneous history of Canada—provide a new way to articulate a real and sustained decolonial future?

In the third chapter, I examine the ways in which *thirsty* produces a heterogeneously populated urban space that is simultaneously receptive and hostile to black bodies but is also a place capable of renewal and full of promise for the future. *thirsty* goes the furthest in producing an urban space in the twentieth-century city that honours the human and thus gestures to a hopeful future outside of the various inherited violences of the plantation system and indigenous forms of racism and anti-black violence. Characteristically, though, that future space is contingent on the participation of her readers in both acknowledging and bearing witness to the past and helping to envision a more liveable future. Thus, Brand's long poem as well as Compton's poetry collection

and Clarke's short stories ask us to engage with the difficult but crucial concerns they raise in their depictions of the contemporary Canadian city.

Despite the differences in the ways in which the urban landscape is engaged and rendered fictionally and poetically in Clarke's, Compton's and Brand's work, each reasserts a black presence and reinserts a particular perspective of black history and black life back into the narrative of Canada. Whether the work depicts a primarily black community that no longer exists, an insular black collectivity within a larger multicultural community or a heterogeneously populated city marked by its cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistic and social diversity, each text contests the practice of writing blackness out of local and national narratives of collective identity by bringing to light histories, communities, peoples, spaces and places that have been neglected, destroyed, displaced or erased from the urban and literary landscapes of Canada.

Chapter Two: "Landscapes of Fear": Reproducing the "Past-Tense Village" in the Present Tense City in Austin Clarke's *When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks*

"In all truth, in all truth I tell you, my shoulders slipped out of the framework of the world, my feet could no longer feel the touch of the ground"

—Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 138.

"The interlocking workings of human worth, race, and space demonstrate the ways the uninhabitable still holds currency in the present and continues to organize contemporary geographic arrangements"

—Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," 6.

In the Introduction to his third collection of short fiction, *Nine Men Who Laughed*, Caribbean-born Canadian writer Austin Clarke writes that the eponymous laughing black Caribbean-Torontonian immigrant characters—who are, Clarke insists, "in a metaphorical sense, me" (3)—"could be aboriginals, maoris, coloured, [or] native peoples" (2) who only "happen to be in Toronto" (1) but could just as easily "be in London, Paris, New York or Moscow." Critic John Clement Ball interprets Clarke's admittedly perplexing comment as "a universalizing gesture" (11)—an "attempt by Clarke to broaden his work's referentiality" (10). Given that, for the most part, Clarke's entire literary corpus focuses on the plight of the black Caribbean immigrant in the city of Toronto, Clement Ball's comment is a reasonable interpretation of Clarke's statement. Read another way, however, Clarke's assertion opens up a more critically productive, historically significant and timely discussion about the author's often vexing depictions of black Caribbean immigrants and their desultory lives in 1960s-1970s downtown Toronto.

Rather than take Clarke's comment in *Nine Men* as an attempt to generalize a specific experience as a way to assuage or appeal to a broader (white) audience and sensibility or to "trans-

lat[e] Toronto into New York or one immigrant's story into a racially different immigrant's story" (11), I argue that Clarke's statement actually points to the central ideological struggle that he grapples with in his first collection of short stories, *When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks*, and throughout his entire city corpus. In the collection's seven Toronto-set stories, Clarke uses his characters' actions and attitudes toward life in the city of Toronto to suggest that all colonized racial subjects unconsciously internalize the colonial systems into which they are socialized and subsequently—and often unconsciously—reproduce those colonial systems in the cities to which they immigrate. Thus, on the one hand, Clarke implies, race and place are extraneous for his nine laughing men—and other racialized people—since they "exist on the periphery" (1) of the city and are perceived by those at the political, social and economic centre as an amorphous, undifferentiated group of nameless foreigners who are both, paradoxically, simultaneously "unvisib[le]" (Barrett 91) and "hyper-visible" (Walcott *Black Like Who?* 45). Oppressed, persecuted, subjugated and tyrannized people who have immigrated to metropolitan centres of the world to escape a colonizing regime are bound to undergo and articulate a similar kind of experience, Clarke's observation suggests. Of course, the specificity of race and place are germane here since, as Clarke himself often concedes, the fate and sociopolitical and migratory trajectories of his Caribbean-born short story characters are closely aligned with his own. Since both Clarke—in his memoirs, essays, interviews and editorials on the Canadian experience—and his characters continually reference race (mostly blackness) and place (the Caribbean plantation and the Canadian city), it makes sense to interpret the author's statement in *Nine Men* not primarily as an attempt to make their experience fundamentally like those of other colonized and marginalized immigrants living in the global diaspora but rather to suggest that the lives of all racial-

ly-ethnically suppressed and oppressed people living in major cities around the globe are, still, governed by state structures and institutions that take their inspiration from the racially hierarchized systems, strategies and processes of ideological imperialism's most ruthless expression: colonialism. Taken in this light, Clarke's comments in *Nine Men* point to his desire to insist upon the universality and tenacity of the colonial plantation experience in the lives of black people rather than to the conscious deployment of a literary strategy aimed at appealing to a broader reading or critical audience.

I begin this chapter with an analysis of Clarke's personal comment in the Introduction to *Nine Men* because it helps to contextualize and situate his fictionalization of the colonial system's strength, reach and longevity in the city lives of his black Caribbean-born immigrant characters in the *Free and Young* stories and, indeed, in his entire body of short and long fiction. I also start here because the reflective socio-political quality of the author's comments about his fictional characters' lives resembles an attribute in his articulation of the persistent residue of colonial thinking in his own city life in Toronto. Indeed, Clarke's biographer, Stella AlgooBaksh, perceptively notes that "[t]here is a constant interplay between his life and his work" which, over the last five decades has probed, interpreted and chronicled the Canadian experience of black Caribbean immigrants as they confront the poverty, racism, violence, and isolation of life in the city of Toronto (8).

Clarke himself emigrated from Bridgetown, Barbados, to Toronto in 1955 to study at the University of Toronto, assuming that his prestigious Harrison College education (at the time, a private boys boarding school modeled after the UK's elite Eton College) and the "English tastes he had acquired in Barbados" would pave a direct path to economic success, making the transi-

tion from one colony to another relatively seamless (34). In fact, in an interview he gave at the beginning of his literary career, Clarke claimed that "'[c]oming from one colony to another is an easy step'" (Fagan 60). But his experience as a black Caribbean immigrant in mid-twentieth-century Toronto belies that presumption since, as Algoo-Baksh writes, "his relationship with Canada ... occasioned Clarke difficulty" on many fronts, not the least of which were the persistent and systemic anti-black racism, exclusion from the labour and housing markets, social isolation and the unrelenting poverty he endured for several years as he struggled to establish himself as a writer (35). This early negative experience in and of the city "prompted the birth of an ambivalence" about Toronto, the city he both "'love[d]'" and "'hat[ed]'" that grew into a central thematic preoccupation in his fiction (35). I raise these biographical issues here because of Clarke's widely-known and frequently-acknowledged literary strategy of using key elements of his own immigration experience—and those of his fellow Bajans and other West Indians—in his fiction. As a case in point, in a 2013 interview with Camille A. Isaacs, Clarke said: "'I am an autobiographical writer. I deal with what is around me'" (13-14). That recent disclosure echoes a statement the author made more than three decades ago which suggests that neither his process nor his preoccupation changed significantly over the course of his career. "'I regard myself as a sponge,'" Clarke explained to Algoo-Baksh, "'in the sense that I soak in all that I see happening around me, to be reordered, organized, and then put back on to the readers'" (36). Michael A.

Bucknor makes a similar point in his article, "'Voices Under the Window' of Representation: Austin Clarke's Poetics of (Body)-Memory in *The Meeting Point*." Here, Bucknor calls Clarke "a writer who often crosses the border between autobiography and artifice, history and fiction" (160). Arguing that "Clarke's content is always being mediated by the expressive re-

sources available to him, by his memory and by his imagination" (158), Bucknor suggests that, "[r]ather than discounting Clarke's memories and versions of history by way of the mirrors of mimeticism," we might better understand what he calls "Clarke's disruptive and performative creative composition" (159) through the lens of "body-memory poetics [which] recuperates memories in their distorted and disharmonious manifestations" (158). The questions that have been at the centre of both Clarke's writing life and his everyday life are the inescapable West Indian colonial history, Canada's treatment of black Caribbean-born immigrants and their difficult adjustment to city life once they arrive in Toronto. Thus Clarke's own memories, sentiments and experiences find an echo in many of the characters in *Free and Young* for whom Toronto is also both "a terrible place" ("Waiting" 30) and a "big-able" place ("Bells" 17). Given what Algoo-Baksh calls "the constant interplay between his life and his work" that lends a documentary sense to his writing, we might safely infer that many of the fictional characters from the short stories in *Free and Young* emerge from a similar (but not exact) Caribbean plantation background and thus share in the plantation history and the psychology it engendered in those who experienced its irrational nature firsthand. The ambiguity or interstitiality both
Clarke and his characters express is a symptom of what Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin*, *White Masks*, calls the black man's "situational neurosis" or, in other terms, an unease or anxiety caused by the circumstances in which they find themselves (60). The primary expression of Clarke's characters' "situational neurosis" is their unconscious reproducing of the attitudes and attributes of the colonial plantation in the contemporary Canadian city.

Algoo-Baksh suggests that Clarke's "work is often an attempt to secure self-knowledge and to come to terms with the contradictory nature of his own experience of 'growing up stupid',

leading him repeatedly to examine such elements as alienation, emasculation, and loss of identity that seem inevitable features of the black experience in both colonial and white societies" (8). The formative and persisting nature of the author's experience of growing up in poverty under the racialized colonial plantation system in Barbados is apparent in the title of his first memoir, *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack*. In "Lies and Grace," his review of the memoir, Keith Garebian points to the Du Boisian "double-consciousness" (*The Souls of Black Folk* 3) or Fanonian "self-division" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 17) that Clarke experienced during and after what Garebian calls Clarke's "'Union-Jacked'" Harrison College days where he "adopted English customs and attitudes" that eventually "caused him to become split down the middle by the paradox of being a 'black Briton'" in the colonized Bajan island of his birth (Garebian 136). As economist George L. Beckford reminds us in *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World*, education in plantation societies "often served to further acculturate black people to the culture of the dominant white class" (64). For black people, Beckford clarifies, social mobility was tied to "the extent to which they could succeed in divorcing the culture of black people and assimilating that of the whites" (64). A solid British education in the colonial system was often the most direct way for black people to move between the hierarchized social strata of colonial Caribbean society. Those who succeeded in assimilating, Beckford argues, "play[ed] important roles in the creation of political parties and trade unions which served eventually to transfer constitutional power from the European Crown back to the colonies" and constituted a professional class of black lawyers, judges, doctors, politicians, educators and so forth (78). However, as Beckford points out, "today[,] throughout the West Indies we find government administrations comprised of black people who essentially exercise authority and con-

trol on behalf of their financial backers—the white-planter, commercial, and industrial classes that remain for the most part in the background of political activity." Quoting R.T. Smith, Beckford argues that this black professional class or "'creole élite'" eventually "'came to believe themselves to be *qualitatively* different from the other non-Europeans by virtue of their refinement'" (41-42, italics in original). These "deculturated blacks," Beckford further claims, "have as much contempt for the 'unrefined' masses of black people as the dominant [white] group" (78). Although most of Clarke's characters are from the labouring class, he explores the phenomenon of the "deculturated blacks" or "creole élite" in several of the *Free and Young* stories, most notably through the extravagantly-named supercilious protagonist, Jefferson Theophillis Belle, in "Four Stations in His Circle" and the arrogant but abject protagonist, Enid Scantlebury, in "Waiting For the Postman to Knock," both of whom I discuss below. The narrative effect in both stories is established through the protagonists' torturous missteps, presumptuousness and, at the same time, deep sense of personal inadequacy tied to their blackness—a trait they share with the working class characters—which result in their increased social isolation and psychological decline.

In his writing on the psychological effects on black people of living in a white, colonial world, Fanon theorizes that "[e]very colonized people" bears the burden of "an inferiority complex ... created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality" and that, further, "[h]e becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle" (18). The idea of competing loyalties and divided sentiments is one Algoo-Baksh touches on when she insists that Clarke's early writing "reveals traces of the duality of [the author's own] psyche" (30). Algoo-Baksh's insights about Clarke's internal dilemma evoke W.E.B. Du Bois's theorizing in his seminal 1903 tome,

The Souls of Black Folk, on the "duality," "double consciousness," or "two-ness" that he argued black people experience living in a white world and which he defined as the "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" (2). Since, as Algoo-Baksh has identified, there is a continual interchange between Clarke's writing and his personal experiences, it makes sense that the black Caribbean immigrant characters in his stories also exhibit the Du Boisian trait of having "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideas in one black body" (3).

As I mention above, Clarke's characters do not, for the most part, represent the "[r]elatively small numbers of the black [Caribbean] population [and their descendants that] were able to acquire ... skills through the educational system" in the period after slavery; rather, they are mostly fully assimilated, precariously employed or unemployed labourers who immigrate to Canada in search of a better life (Beckford 39). Assimilation, the stories suggest, exact a grim toll on Clarke's labouring characters. At the end of his review of *Growing Up Stupid*, Garebian rightly predicts that Clarke's subsequent writing would "show how his colonial stupidity began to wear off" (137) under the growing awareness that he had been, in Algoo-Baksh's terms, "the classic colonial, inferior in status, limited in prospect, and drawn away from his roots by his immersion in a culture introduced from abroad" (8). Although his ambivalence about the nation lingered, Clarke would go on to "lay claim to the space of the multicultural nation in a bid to *unsettle* the Canadian imaginary that excludes" members of the black diaspora (Barrett 5, italics added). From his vantage point "'outside [the West Indies] it was now possible for ... [Clarke] to look at the "world inside" the world where he was born' ... [and] examine with more urgency ...

the world he had left behind" and its continued stranglehold on the lives of black people living in the Canadian city (Algoo-Baksh 36). In the *Free and Young* stories set in Toronto, Clarke repeatedly casts his gaze back to "that blasted past-tense village in Barbados" in order to explore the ways in which his characters' "colonial stupidity" *does not* diminish but, instead, persists and undermines their ability to live differently in the Canadian city than they did in the colonial plantation society of their birth ("They Heard A Ringing of Bells" 20). As Isaacs puts it, "[i]t appears that some of his characters cannot shake the very colonialism and conservatism that entrap them" (4). Although, like Clarke, they are also geographically located "outside" of the Caribbean, in most ways Clarke's characters still inhabit the "world inside" the colonial world of their origins and, to their detriment, function according to the distorted principles of the plantation despite their physical location in downtown Toronto. In the *Free and Young* stories Clarke goes back to "the world he had left behind" to reveal, through the troubling lives of his characters, what Paul Barrett, in *Blackening Canada: Diaspora, Race, Multiculturalism*, calls "the continuities between the spaces of the plantation, colony, and the [metropolitan] nation" (96). Indelibly and detrimentally shaped by the historical slave settlements of the colonial period they, in turn, shape the city of Toronto into a contemporary version of the plantation. Reading Clarke's *Free and Young* stories through the lens of Katherine McKittrick's writing on plantation theory and George L. Beckford's work on plantation economy theory opens a new and theoretically rich way of understanding representations of the black city in Canadian fiction and poetry. If, as McKittrick suggests in "Plantation Futures," there is "a spatial continuity between ... past and present" we can use Clarke's characters' colonial Caribbean plantation past—which they repeatedly recall, reference and denounce in the stories—to help make sense of the miserable conditions of their

present lives in the city of Toronto (2). Further, since, as McKittrick posits, “the plantation uncovers a logic that emerges in the present and folds over to repeat itself anew throughout black lives,” the troubling and often self-defeating actions and behaviours Clarke's characters exhibit can be understood in the light of the incongruous racialized plantation system and its aftermath (4). Thus, even though his characters “may cross national borders and continents [to get to Toronto], they remain trapped within” what Barrett calls “an immobilizing Fact of Blackness” (96). In his discussion of (im)mobility in Clarke's 2005 novel, *More*, Barrett employs Fanon's thesis in the titular fifth chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks* to draw a parallel between the cascading effects on black people of Caribbean colonization, on the one hand, and Canadian capitalism, on the other hand. Whereas, Barrett posits, Fanon's work argues that “the colonial subject's psychic immobility is 'a direct result of colonialist subjugation,'” Clarke “transpose[s]” this formula to the contemporary Canadian urban context to suggest that his characters' “psychic immobility is a direct result of the social order *of Canada*” whose systems, structures and policies marginalize, exclude, erase and brutalize—or “immobilize”—members of the black diaspora (96, italics added). Barrett's compelling thesis leads directly to another related hypothesis. Given that, as McKittrick argues in “Plantation Futures,” colonial “plantations are *linked* to a broader global economy that thrives on the 'persistent underdevelopment' and 'persistent poverty' of black life” and that “the plantations of transatlantic slavery underpinned a global economy,” it follows that what Barrett calls the exclusionary “social order of Canada” is a contemporary extension or expression of the global colonial project (3, italics added). Thus, while the economic, social, physical and psychic stagnation Clarke's characters experience in Toronto and to which Barrett rightly calls our attention, is exacerbated by endemic expressions of Canadian anti-black racism,

those systemic and institutional practices have their genesis in the old colonial project of plantation slavery. While the inhospitable anti-black socio-political and economic climate Clarke's characters encounter in Toronto is, to be sure, a significant and protracted aggravating factor in their lives, "the psychic immobility of the colony and the plantation persist despite the promises of independence, multiculturalism, and citizenship" proffered by Canada precisely *because* they still inhabit the "world inside" the world of the Caribbean; in other words, Clarke's characters still occupy the plantation despite their location in Canada (Barrett 97). For Clarke and his characters, then, Toronto is the metropolitan capital of the colonial Caribbean plantation.

Clarke, along with other contemporary Caribbean-Canadian writers like Dionne Brand—whose long poem *thirsty* is the subject of the third chapter in this study—is widely recognized as a Toronto writer by those who read and study his work; indeed, he spent his entire adult life in the economic capital of Canada and, with few exceptions, wrote primarily about black life in the city of Toronto. Unlike Brand, however, for whom Toronto is a central and often embodied character in her city work and to whom she frequently writes in the spirit of the metaphorical lover to the beloved (even when the love affair leaves her feeling jaded), Clarke's Toronto is mostly an antagonist in his fiction—an utterly inaccessible object of both desire and disdain, love and hatred; the uninterested, dismissive, unattainable and often hostile object of the lover's desire. Even though seven of the ten stories in the *Free and Young* collection are geographically located in Toronto, most readers would recognize that, with some notable exceptions, the city rarely intrudes into the spatially and psychically delimited space in which Clarke's characters exist. Indeed, despite the invoking of iconic Toronto landmarks like the "Paramount Tavern" ("Four Stations in His Circle" 51) and the "Silver Dollar" (54), for example, when the city is discussed, it is

almost always considered in adversarial or unfavourable terms as a "'white man country'" ("Bells" 24), a "'terrible place'" ("Postman" 28), "stil[l] and ... steri[l]" ("Bells" 23), "rough" ("Postman" 45) and "'damn uncivilized'" ("A Wedding in Toronto" 82). Although some critics have argued that Clarke's fiction "stage[s] the life of Caribbean Torontonians" (Siemerling "Writing the Black Canadian City" 110), that his Toronto is "rendered with an attention to detail that locates scenes in particular neighbourhoods and streets" (Clement Ball 11), and that his writing "blackens" Toronto (Barrett), Clarke's characters do not possess what Leslie Sanders has called "denizen-citizenship" in their adopted home; in other words, they are not *of* the city and Toronto is neither a central character—unless it is a villain—nor a principal concern in *Free and Young* other than for the ways in which it resembles a plantation (*Chronicles* viii). This factor helps explain the curiously uni-cultural city Clarke depicts in his stories.

In a review of his final memoir, *'Membering*, published in 2015, the year before Clarke's death, Rabindranath Maharaj notes that Clarke has spent his literary career writing against books in which "[t]he streets of Toronto ... were always fictionalized to present monochromatic models" of the city (Maharaj). The Toronto Clarke presents in the *Free and Young* stories is, however, also largely "monochromatic" but its homogeneousness reflects two key ideas. First, Clarke's black immigrant characters have reproduced the racially stratified hierarchy of the plantation where white people occupy roles of authority and rarely interact in meaningful, prolonged or humane ways with black people. This model of the city is a version of the representative spiritual community in "An Easter Carol," which I discuss below. Second, the Toronto Clarke creates in the short stories argues that anti-black racism in the city isolates black people (and other racial minorities) from white people, creating the racialized or

"monochromatic" urban enclaves Clarke so often depicts in his fiction. Thus, the "fictionalized" streets of Clarke's Toronto represent an other(ed) version of the city as it appears through the gaze of his isolated and racialized black characters. Barrett's "blackening" trope, then, operates at two levels: the spaces Clarke's characters occupy literally "blacken" the city; and, Clarke's articulation of institutional and systemic anti-black policies "blacken" or tarnish the city's reputation as "Toronto the Good." As I argue in the remainder of this chapter, the black Caribbean immigrant characters in Clarke's *Free and Young* stories do not actually inhabit the newly multicultural 1960s-1970s Toronto of the collection's temporal and physical setting; rather, they exist within a space and place I am calling here, "plantation Toronto": a socio-economic, political and spatial simulacrum of the plantation in which black lives are subject to economic, social, racial and cultural violences and hardships; black family and community are attenuated by systemic practices that undermine cohesion; black people engage in damaging practices of selfdestruction, policing and overseeing; and the unrelenting material and psychological misery of black city life leads inexorably to isolation, illness, madness and, in some cases, death. These literary cityscapes or landscapes of misery populate the stories in this collection and, indeed, in most of Clarke's subsequently published long and short Toronto fiction.

The first and penultimate stories in the *Free and Young* collection—"An Easter Carol" and "Leaving This Island Place," respectively—are set in Barbados and form a thematic scaffolding that situates and supports my theoretical approach to the seven intervening Toronto narratives. (The collection's final eponymously titled, stream-of-consciousness story is not examined in this study.) "An Easter Carol" ends with the unnamed young black protagonist standing barefoot on the grass outside the Cathedral of the Church of England in his Barbados village as the

church bells ring in the background. The narrator notes that “as ... [the boy] peered through the West Window ... the choir pass[ed] the multitude of people of all colours: the black, the brown, the light-skinned, the light-brown, and approach[ed] the front pews of the church, where the Governor and the white people and the rich black people always sat” (14-15). The narrator goes on to describe the nameless boy “fighting with ... [his tight] shoes ... trying in vain to get them back on ... [his swollen] feet” (15). His failure to do so causes him to be late for the Easter Sunday service and thus to miss the opportunity to sing a coveted solo in the choir. From his position on the grass outside the church he “peer[s] through the West Window” (14) and, through his tears, sees his friend Henry “step into the middle of the aisle” to take his place in the choir and then his “mother, standing at the entrance of the gate, waiting” (15) and, like “the Cathedral itself ... unapproving” (13).

The ending of “An Easter Carol” offers two important insights into Clarke's literary project. First, it succinctly establishes the complex hierarchy of the protagonist's colonial Caribbean plantation society in terms of race, colour or shade, social standing, political influence and economic status and firmly situates the protagonist’s (outsider) position or status vis-à-vis the various categories in that colonial system. Significantly, from his position outside the church, the boy—whose namelessness makes his dilemma more widely available—imagines the empty white space of the deserted aisle that runs between the village's politically influential white people and rich blacks, on the one side, and the poor indigenous black Caribbeans, on the other side, as “a swath of a canefield” (15). This evocative colonial spatial image affirms the boy’s marginal location and the wider community’s ingrained racial hierarchy based on the racialized plantation model. Clarke returns repeatedly to the idea of the colonial Caribbean hierarchy and its relation-

ship to his black characters' relative position or rank in it and in the Canadian society they emigrate to in the misguided belief that they can escape their rank. Second, through the metaphor of the protagonist's ill-fitting shoes, the ending underscores the restrictive, outdated and irrational nature of colonial authority against which the young boy, who is coming of age in the years before the Island gained independence from Britain in 1966, increasingly chafes. The protagonist's mother's inability to adapt her way of thinking and behaving to the context of her son's increasing desire for self-determination represented through the image of the confining shoes (she purposely buys shoes that are too small for his feet because she wants to make him fit into her idea of an appropriately attired black British boy), further underscores the idea of the inherent inflexibility and willful blindness of the colonial system and those who, through the process of socialization, maintain it. Although the rationale for immigrating to Canada is suggested by the symbol of the restricting shoes, the entrenched socio-political and racialized system Clarke's characters flee is the very structure they unconsciously reproduce in the city of Toronto. This suggestive closing scene anticipates the beginning of the collection's second story—the first of the seven set in Toronto, which I discuss further on in this chapter. Where "An Easter Carol" concludes with the young protagonist's disillusionment with the plantation system but inability to escape it, the protagonist in the story that serves as the matching narrative bookend—"Leaving This Island Place"—escapes the Caribbean plantation by, as the title indicates, literally taking flight. "Leaving" suggests a rationale for fleeing the colonial West Indies by underscoring the toll the colonial system exacts on the colonized and, examined as I do here, non-chronologically, serves as a foreshadowing of the kind of life Clarke's black immigrant characters might expect to live in the

British commonwealth of Canada. The central thematic concerns Clarke touches on in these parenthetical chapters are borne out in the intervening stories.

The themes of disillusionment, disappointment, poverty, and segregation endemic to plantation society that Clarke explores in "An Easter Carol" are articulated with more certainty and consequence in "Leaving This Island Place" through a similarly poor, nameless black Caribbean protagonist who takes his friend's advice to "'leave the dead in this damn islan' place" and immigrate to Canada (138). The "dead" in this case is the protagonist's dying father whom he cavalierly leaves behind to perish alone in an "almshouse" (131). The domestic drama at the centre of the story gestures both to the notion of plantation society as an unsustainable, black-death-producing system as well as to the weakened family ties and black poverty the plantocracy creates. The protagonist's allusive language reinforces that point. The dying father, long estranged from his son, is described alternately as resembling a "soldie[r] on a battle field" (131), a "talking skeleton" (132) and "a pile of old rags thrown around a stunted tree" (134)—images that strengthen the association between black death and the colonial system. Despite the son's anticipation of attaining a better life for himself in Canada than the one his father has had in Barbados, the story suggests that the son's hope is false; necessarily, the story argues, life for black people, whether living in the commonwealth of Barbados or the commonwealth of Canada, will resemble a "battle field." Clarke comes back to these concepts with regularity in the intervening stories. The partial history depicted in these two parenthetical narratives of colonial Caribbean plantation society and the struggles of the "'unrefined' masses of black people ... [that constitute] the dominant group" from which most of Clarke's immigrant characters in the Toronto stories origi-

nate, gives texture to the intervening stores that constitute the primary focus of this chapter (Beckford 78).

As I contend above, the tolling church bells at the end of the first story, "An Easter Carol," signal the nameless, shoeless protagonist's literal and figurative position on the periphery of the colonial society whose rigid hierarchical structures he no longer fits into and yet cannot—given his young age—escape. The collection's second story, "They Heard a Ringing of Bells," begins with the three black adult protagonists marvelling at "some damn man ... playing hymns on bells" in a church where they sit on the University of Toronto campus (17). The university, initially controlled by the colonial Church of England when it was founded in 1827 by royal charter, functions here as the Cathedral does in "Easter Carol"; that is to say, the university is a colonial signifier of the abject, impoverished, colonized black body which is, as in "Easter Carol," determinedly located outside of the institution to which, "Bells" suggests, there is little likelihood of access. Like the nameless young protagonist in "Easter Carol" who finds himself literally—and, increasingly, philosophically—shut out of the religious institution responsible for creating and perpetuating a British socio-spiritual sensibility and community, the three friends in "Bells"—Sagaboy, Ironhorse Henry and Estelle, Sagaboy's recently-arrived girlfriend—are also, intellectually and physically, excluded from the academic institution that could conceivably change their lives for the better. Importantly, however, as their subsequent behaviour and attitudes indicate, they have already absorbed an ideologically British educational-intellectual ideal. Clarke's characters' internalization of colonial intellectual standards is evident in Henry's (a different character with the same name as that in "Bells") instinctive mimicking of the lyrical style of the Romantic poets in his ludicrous attempt at love poetry in the story "What

Happened?"— discussed later in this chapter—suggests. Thus, the imagery of the church bells in the first two stories and the sentiments, memories and conversations they evoke connect their geographic settings—Barbados and Toronto—and thereby expressly link the past and the present, the plantation and the city. Although the church bells initially produce a sense of "joy" (13) in the young protagonist in "Easter Carol," and a similar feeling of "wonde[r]" in Estelle in "Bells," neither character has access to the political, religious, intellectual, economic or social power at the heart of the colonial spaces outside of which they are both literally and theoretically located (17). The homologous imagery in these stories both underscores the unfulfilled promise of peace, freedom and love inherent in the chiming church bells and the spatial and temporal continuity between the two geographic spaces.

In her musings on finding herself sitting on the grass in Toronto with Sagaboy and Henry, Estelle unwittingly articulates the central problem that governs their city lives—and the lives of the other black characters in the collection—when she surmises that the grass she and her friends are sitting on outside the university is "'the *selfsame* grass as what ... [they] left back in Barbados ... but only *different*. And it is different only becausing it situated in a different place. A different, but a more better, more advance place'" than the Caribbean (17, italics in original). Estelle's same-but-different analogy links the colonial space of the Caribbean—literally the soil and sod, the *terra firma*, of the plantation—to the contemporary space of urban Canada and thus hints at the inevitably bleak destiny that awaits the friends in Toronto. Her comparison also underscores a geographic history that, while she may not fully understand it, is responsible for her current dilemma. The loam and grass Estelle refers to are, in McKittrick's terms, part of the "uninhabitable … landmasses occupied by those who, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, were

unimaginable, both spatially and corporeally … [and] were cast as barbarous and irrational" ("Plantation Futures" 6). Since, as both McKittrick and Beckford argue in their writing, the plantation is an ideologically transferable concept, it makes sense that black people whose ancestry can be traced back to those "unimaginable" geographies must, necessarily, carry with them across space and time the burdens of that freighted history. Examined in this context, it is no wonder that Clarke's characters themselves and their struggles to exist in Toronto are often derogated, at best, and, at worst, unseen by those who surround them. As Clarke writes, the three protagonists "'exist in a worser life [in Toronto] than what ... [they] was accustomed to back home'" where they lived in "'rags and lice and filth and misery'" under "'the blasted British'" (18). Their Toronto lives are "worser," the text suggests, because their expectations of success are higher, despite the fact that they conduct themselves in their Toronto lives the same way they did in the Caribbean. Because Clarke's characters have unconsciously absorbed the colonial system and subsequently reproduced it in the city, they produce the same results in Toronto as they generated in the Caribbean. As a former territory of the British Empire, Clarke's late-to-mid twentieth century Canada—and the city of Toronto specifically—is as ideologically Eurocolonial as the colonized West Indian islands that his characters flee. As though to reaffirm this point, Henry reiterates Estelle's incipient sense of familiarity between the two spaces by also observing that "'sitting down here in Canada, pon the grass, ... is the *same thing* as when we was little boys back home'" in Barbados ("Bells" 27, italics added). Unlike Estelle, who imagines that in Toronto she will be able to savour a "'[l]ittle good living that only the white people and the rich black people back home does enjoy'"—the same class of people that fill the front pews of the hierarchically structured church seating arrangements in "Easter Carol"—Sagaboy's more

extensive experience of Canadian racism, poverty, violence and *de facto* segregation has quashed any dreams of accessing a better life in Toronto and extinguished the notion that Toronto is, as Estelle initially enthuses, "'more better'" and "'more advance'" than the Caribbean (17). Estelle's analysis may hold true for European and other non-black immigrants to Canadian but Clarke's characters are clearly just as or perhaps more economically, socially and psychologically destitute than they were in the Caribbean. For Sagaboy, the same sensation he felt at home of being "'lost ... like I wasn't worth nothing'" also "'overpower[s] ... [him] in th[e] blasted fivedollars-a-week rat-trap ... [he] lives in, on Spadina, right here in this kiss-me-arse advance country'" of Canada (28). Thus Estelle's, Henry's and Sagaboy's feelings link the sense of inadequacy, inferiority and hopelessness they feel in Toronto to the socially stratified, economically disparate and racially segregated colonial plantation society of their birth—a social economy invented and sustained by the demands of metropolitan capitalism.

Although the narrator in another story, "Four Stations in His Circle," suggests that "*[i]mmigration* transformed" the protagonist into the avaricious man he becomes, Clarke's characters' actions and statements here and in the collection's other Toronto stories actually suggests that they are irretrievably transformed in fundamental and lasting ways by the skewed logic of the plantation system *before* they immigrate to Toronto. This argument finds support in Fanon's insistence that the cultural specificities of the colonized often cannot survive the overwhelming imposition of the ideas, values and principles inflicted upon them by the invading country (*Black Skin, White Masks* 18). In the case of Clarke's short story characters, they simply continue to live in Toronto according to the incongruous values and beliefs that comprise the "cultural standards" of the Caribbean plantation system which is rooted in the capitalist desires

of the metropolis and sustained by racial, social and economic inequality (5). The internalized principles of what Sagaboy calls the "'topsy-turvy world'" of the plantation system are what impede Estelle's, Henry's and Sagaboy's ability to reinvent themselves or thrive in the city of Toronto ("Bells" 18). Throughout *Free and Young*, and across his city corpus, Clarke's characters' inability to escape their own internalized colonial thinking interferes with their ability to access a better life and forms the foundation for Clarke's literary construction of the city of Toronto as a thinly-veiled Canadian version of the colonial West Indian plantation. Here, and elsewhere in his city corpus, I argue, Toronto functions as the colonial capital of the Caribbean wherein Clarke's characters' lives unravel as though they are still living on the plantation despite their location in the Canadian city.

Clarke further extends the connection between the colonial plantation and the capitalist metropolis by evoking the Middle Passage through the story Estelle recounts in "Bells" of her father Nathan Sobers' drowning death. As tears roll down her face, Estelle explains to Sagaboy and Henry that she is "weeping [not] only for ... [her] father, but for *all the fathers* that was ever killed by the cruel hands of the waves in the sea" (20, italics added). Evoking the Middle Passage and transatlantic slavery makes it impossible for both Clarke's characters and his readers to look at the black Toronto diaspora through an ahistorical lens or to think of Canadian blackness as a recent phenomenon disconnected from the historical legacy of slavery. The clarity of Estelle's allusive reference to black death in the Caribbean sea summons images of the Atlantic slave trade in black people from Africa to the Caribbean and from Africa and the Caribbean to the so-called New World of the Americas—including Canada—and underscores the historical relationship between "[t]he geographies of slavery, postslavery, and black dispossession" in urban envi-

ronments (McKittrick "Plantation Futures" 2). In Christina Sharpe's configuration, Estelle's synecdochal reference to the "cruel hands of the waves of the sea" points to "the paradoxes of blackness within and after the legacies of slavery's denial of Black humanity" (14). Naming the central paradox "the wake," in her recently published book, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Sharpe suggests that the polysemic figure of the wake (wave patterns created by a ship, a vigil for a deceased person, an emerging from a state of sleep, and so on) serves as "a means of understanding how slavery's violences emerge within the *contemporary* conditions of spatial, legal, psychic, material, and other dimensions of Black non/being" (14, italics added) and as a vehicle through which black people "inheri[t] the non/status, the non/being of the mother[land]"; a status which is, Sharpe argues, "apparent *now* in the ongoing criminalization of Black" people (14-15 italics in original). It is Sagaboy, whose name belies his shabby, tubercular condition, who fully articulates the theoretical concept that functions as the central premise across Clarke's corpus. In his response to Estelle's expression of gratitude to God for the opportunity to sit on the grass on the downtown campus of the University of Toronto, Sagaboy passionately proclaims that:

> "It ain't no wonders of no blasted God, woman! You have just start to live like you should have been living from the day you born. But instead, you been spending your lifetime down in Barbados, the same way as your forefathers and foremothers been spending it ... in the kiss-me-arse canefield, and in slavery. Down there you didn't ... comprehend the piece o' histries involve in that kinda life, till one morning, bright and early, Satan get in your behind, and you look round, and bram! your eyes see that topsy-turvy world down there, and you turned round and look at yourself, and you didn't see nothing but rags and

> lice and filth and misery and the blasted British ... [s]o … [y]ou pull up stakes and run abroad. You come up here in a more progressive country, but you still going exist in a worser life than what you was accustomed to back home." (18)

Sagaboy's mini history lesson serves to articulate the multiple and complex ways in which the colonial Caribbean plantation system continues to shape and undermine the lives of black people across time and space. It also offers an explanation for the troubling idea that their lives in the city are, paradoxically, worse than their lives in the Caribbean. Sagaboy's disquisition on plantation history suggests that black colonial subjects unconsciously assimilate the skewed logic and culture of the colonial system and that their internalized inferiority and self-hatred, which are, in Clarke's stories, often mixed with an irksome arrogance, causes them to reproduce plantation-like conditions and relationships in the city, despite their desire for a better life. For instance, Estelle's gratitude for a fleeting moment of respite on the university campus despite having no access to the opportunities a university education might give her, speaks to the extent to which she has internalized the colonial fiction of her own racial, social and intellectual inferiority. Their city lives are "'worser'" not only because of the Canadian poverty, racism, segregation and isolation they encounter in Toronto but because, as they discover, the values of the capitalist city where they expect to achieve their dreams of a better life are the same as the values of the colonial plantation where they know a better life is an impossible dream. Since "imperialism in modern world history was executed by metropolitan governments," it makes sense that the governing institutions, systems and policies in metropolitan centres around the globe today still reflect the ideological philosophies and orthodoxies that envisioned and gave birth to the plantation in the first place (Beckford, 110). Thus, just as the grass they sit on is both the same and different be-

cause—whether located in the Caribbean or Canada—it grows out of the seeds of the colonial project, their lives are simultaneously the same and different, in the negative, because they are in Canada where the commonly-held expectation is that life will be better but the reality is that it is not. The ideological congruencies and continuities between the geographies of the plantation and the city reinforce "the protracted colonial logic of the plantation" (McKittrick "Plantation Futures" 3) and, because they do not yet "'comprehend'" this philosophical principle, Clarke suggests, his characters continue to function in Toronto as though they are still living in "the 'world inside' the world where ... [they were] born"; that is to say, his characters here and elsewhere in his city writing act as though they are still living in the discordant world of the colonial plantation system: plantation Toronto (Bonhomme 35). In his article, "The Racialization of Space: Producing Surrey," Gurpreet Singh Johal proposes a theory of the spatial politics in British Columbia's Surrey and Lower Mainland areas using South African theorist David Theo Goldberg's definition of "periphractic space" as "space that is rendered peripheral, hence marginal, to the body politic" (180). In that formulation, Singh Johal argues, periphractic space is "space that does not require the absolute displacement of persons to or outside city limits, [or] to the literal margins of urban space'" (181); rather, Singh Johal writes, "'periphractic space *implies* dislocation, displacement, and division ... [and] ... has become the primary mode by which the space of racial marginality has been articulated and reproduced'" (181, italics added). As such, then, periphractic spaces exist "within the city but nevertheless ... [are] not *of* the city" (180, italics in original). Further, Singh Johal posits, "periphractic space does not require that people be banished to a distant location" (180) like a camp, a residential school, a ghettoized site or any geographically removed area, for instance; instead, he insists, this kind of space "limits the access of

those who reside in it to services and corridors of power" (180). Certainly the "five-dollars-a-week rat-trap" ("Bells" 28) rooms and basement apartments in run-down boarding houses located in the downtown core where many of Clarke's characters live "physically isolates" (Singh Johal 181) them and, in Singh Johal's terms, makes them "'stick out'" and become targets to be "easily policed" (181). This is the case for the character Jefferson in "Four Stations in His Circle," who is beaten up by two police officers who mistake him for a burglar because he "sticks out" on the white suburban landscape of Rosedale. Similarly, the black revelers in "A Wedding in Toronto" who are unceremoniously kicked out of a wedding party by police officers summoned to the apartment building by disapproving and demonstrably racist white neighbours are perceived as being "out-of-place" in white Toronto; their unique cultural celebration of the wedding between Henry and Agatha is interpreted as dangerous and un-Canadian to their conservative white neighbours just as Jefferson was "read" as threatening by his Euro-white neighbours. Importantly, as Singh Johal reminds us, periphractic space is not only physical-architectural but can also be "'*symbolic*'" space (181, italics added). The troubling intellectual, behavioural and discursive practices of Clarke's black immigrant characters help create both the "material … [*and*] symbolic" periphractic spaces in which they exist within the larger city of Toronto (181). As I previously argued, because Clarke's characters never attain "denizen-citizenship" in Toronto, they are never fully *of* the city. Barrett makes a similar point when he contends that "Clarke's depiction of the periphractic space and endemic immobility of black life in Canada reveals the continuities between the spaces of the plantation, colony, and the nation" (96). After all, as Beckford reminds us, the Caribbean plantation economy "involved control over the movement of slaves in space *and* [in] status" (64, italics added). In that economy, black people's movements

were strictly monitored and circumscribed and their ability to engage in the capitalist economy that their labour helped establish and maintain was implausible given their status as chattel or, as Beckford writes, “as cattle” (38). Even though “[t]he income generated from plantation production served to promote industrialization and development in the metropolis[es]” that underwrote slavery and the plantocracy, when they immigrate to the Canadian city, Clarke's characters are still (largely) unable to access and / or maintain the goods or lifestyle related to the growing urban economy that their poorly-compensated labour and the forced labour of their enslaved predecessors helped bring about (Beckford 45). In the context of “the new imperialism of the twentieth century” (110), Beckford suggests, little has changed and “the basic structure of the plantation society in the New World today remains much the same as that of the slave era” (65). Clarke's characters cannot engage in the capitalist economy of the metropolis because they perceive of themselves as chattel; when they do attempt to participate in North American consumer culture and make even small advances—like Jefferson in “Four Stations” who buys a house in Rosedale and Calvin in “The Motor Car” who purchases a “red Galaxie … motto car”—the consequences to themselves and others are both disturbing and tragic (99). As Barrett reminds us, since “the colonial space is configured to enforce social and physical immobility” amongst the enslaved and oppressed, the acquisition by economically struggling black immigrants of an expensive house and a flashy car challenges and violates that implicit precept (72). Understanding the “piece o' [colonial] histries” that informs their contemporary lives does not measurably help them alter the internalized colonial behaviours or logics they continue to apply to the many problems they encounter in their city lives. That history does, however, help to explain why their odd

and self-defeating characteristics persist post-immigration and why their expression in the Canadian city leads to such disastrous results.

Since, as Fanon emphasizes, colonized subjects take on the colonizer's value system when their own is erased, the skewed ideas of the oppressor are brought to bear in the post-immigration city lives of black people (*Black Skin, White Masks* 18). The resulting "self-division"—a trait that distinguishes the characters in Clarke's stories—is, Fanon argues, "a direct result of colonialist subjugation" (17). In his discussion of the relationship between race and modernity in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy uses a similar term to articulate the particular dimensions of plantation life which is, he argues, "live[d] non-synchronously" (57) by its inhabitants; in other words, the inequalities between master and slave, owner and labourer preclude any kind of "reciproc[ity]" or simultaneity even though their lives are intimately bound up one with one another (57). The characters in Clarke's short stories experience an internal asynchronicity or, as Fanon calls it, a "two dimension[ness]" (17). Because they have unconsciously incorporated the cultural values, mores and principles of the plantation, they reproduce and live by that system's dictates and logic despite having "pull[ed] up stakes and run abroad" in an effort to escape the Caribbean plantation society ("Bells" 18). Thus, the Toronto they inhabit becomes "a[nother] site of racism, suffering, and black subordination" (Clement Ball 9). To use Achille Mbembe's terms, "the very structure of the plantation system and its aftermath has "acquire[d] a permanent spatial arrangement" in the literally and psychically marginalized lives of Clarke's characters in the city (21).

The totalizing effects of the colonial plantation project that Mbembe gestures to have been recognized by a series of scholars. In his essay, "Social Stratification, Cultural Pluralism

and Integration in West Indian Societies," R. T. Smith calls the plantation society of the Caribbean a "total institution" (230). Echoing Smith's term in his work on the American plantation in "Plantation America: A Cultural Sphere," Charles Wagley refers to the plantation as a "fundamental institution" that is, in all aspects of the lives of the black workers performing the labour, "the united social unit *above* the family" (8, italics added). And in "The Social Demography of Plantation Slavery," Ollie Gary Christian calls the plantation a "town" with all the social, economic, political, legal and infrastructural institutions and systems necessary to regulate the lives of its inhabitants (152). Using similar language to Christian, Beckford also refers to the plantation as "a distinct community which derives its full flavor from the system itself" and which has "an inherently rigid system of social stratification ... [and] virtually no mobility in either direction" (53-54). To be sure, Beckford's use of the term "community" here does not carry the usual associations of congeniality, conviviality and equality. As Mbembe points out in "Necropolitics," "as a political-juridical structure, the plantation is a space where the slave belongs to the master" and thus, "[i]t is not a community [in the usual sense of the word] if only because by definition, a community implies the exercise of the power of speech and thought" by all of its members (21). Given the extent of the plantation system's control over and influence on most aspects of the lives of black people, it makes sense that its structurally perverse social, racial and economic world view gradually became the accustomed way of life for black Caribbeans socialized over multiple generations into its idiosyncratic world view. In fact, the plantation ideology became so ingrained, Beckford argues, that the plantation's "basic structure" (65)—including "geographical isolation," "authoritarian" control, divisions based on race and class, "unskilled" workers, and family and community dissolution, to name only some of its characteristics (53)—"remains

much the same" today as it was during and immediately after slavery (65). Thus, those whose lives were structured by the plantation over centuries might also continue to exhibit its socio-political and economic values, attitudes and outlook even though they no longer live in or labour under the plantation society of the Caribbean as it exists in its present iteration and even though those behaviours are antithetical to self-preservation, the preservation of family and community cohesion.

The theoretical unanimity I outline above concerning the plantation system's firm grip on every aspect of the lives of black people who experienced it *in situ*, both during and after slavery, helps account for the extent to which the plantation culture endures *ex situ* in the lives of Clarke's colonized characters post-immigration. For Clarke's characters, the unconsciously internalized plantation is the medium through which they view themselves and the world; thus, their prismatic view of the world distorts their perception and limits their ability to genuinely inhabit or root themselves in the city. Even though they do not—and cannot—change their self-defeating behaviour, with few exceptions they still expect Toronto to be different than the Caribbean despite the fact that they continue to live, think and behave like they still live on a plantation. For instance, when Estelle criticizes a white woman in "Bells," Sagaboy tells her to "'[s]hut up your mouth tight tight, cause you not born here. Don't criticize the same people that going put bread in your mouth. Keep your tail betwixt thy legs'" (26). The negative self-perception that stems from their status in colonial Caribbean society is what causes their Fanonian "neurosis" and inhibits them from "secure[ing] self-knowledge" or participating differently in the life of the city so that they can achieve different, and better, results (Agloo-Baksh 8). In other words, the burden of the plantation past makes it difficult and, in some instances, impossible for Clarke's black

characters who have internalized its ideas and systems to produce a contemporary city space, ideology, community, sense of home or notion of the self that is not paradigmatic of the plantation and its attendant exigencies. As Clement Ball argues, "[f]or most of Clarke's immigrant characters, Toronto represents a chance for greater material success and independence than island life can offer, although that ideal is often shattered" by the social and economic realities—racism, violence, segregation, joblessness, poverty—they confront in the city (11). In Singh Johal's terms, because Clarke's characters inhabit periphractic spaces in Toronto, they have "limit[ed] … access" to the city's "services and corridors of power" (180). They do not actually live in nor are they of the newly multicultural Toronto of the collection's temporal and physical setting; rather, they exist in a contemporary "landscape of fear"—to borrow a scientific term (Laundré *et al* 1).

In an illuminating article, "The Landscape of Fear: Ecological Implications of Being Afraid," John W. Laundré *et al* coined the term "landscape of fear" to explain their theory "that the spatial and temporal use of the landscape is fear driven" (1). In the field of animal ecology, the "landscape of fear" model is used "to explain in large part how animals move and interact within their landscape" in relation to those around them, the particular spatial characteristics of their environment and the weather, generally ("Evaluating the Landscape of Fear" Hammerschlag *et al* 2117). For instance, in an aquatic landscape, predators and prey modify their behaviour and their use of space in relation to the presence and movements of their cohabiters to either avoid predation or to capture prey. I use the concept here to help capture the idea that, despite moving out of the colonial plantation society and into the Canadian metropolis, Clarke's characters replicate and remain trapped in a human "landscape of fear"; unable to modify their

behaviours to adapt to the Canadian urban landscape, they continue to function according to the antagonistic internalized dynamics of the space of originary trauma with disastrous, and sometimes fatal, results. The last few lines of "Bells," for instance, offer a glimpse of the antagonisms that arise within the urban "landscapes of fear" Clarke's characters inhabit in Toronto. Ironhorse Henry, who has spent the day on campus making surreptitious and unwanted sexual advances toward his ostensible best friend's girlfriend, Estelle, continues to secretly hope Sagaboy, his putative competitor, will "die from the tuberculosis that rackled in his chest" (18).

His attitude toward Estelle can be read as sexually predacious and his death wish towards Sagaboy speaks both to Henry's dominance—suggested by his first name, Ironhorse—and to his status within his small circle or terrestrial "landscape" as the survivor, the predator. The bells that were a source of delight, energy and hope at the beginning of the story now "give ... [Henry] a headache" (29). As the disillusioned Estelle who is afraid of deportation, the ailing Sagaboy who is afraid of death and the duplicitous Henry who imaginatively plots his friend's death "wal[k] on in the darkness of the bells," the campus and its buildings turn a dull "grey." Two of the three characters, the story suggests, will disappear from the story's temporal landscape. Thus the "landscape of fear" is a useful spatial model through which to understand "the ... implications of being afraid" for Clarke's black Caribbean immigrant characters and the urban spaces that result from their own apprehension and the suspicion directed at them from others outside their circle and from each other (Laundré *et al* 1). As McKittrick explains, "[g]eography is not ... secure and unwavering; [rather], we produce space, we produce its meanings, and we work very hard to

make geography what it is," even when the meaning of the space that we create works at counter purposes to the space we might actually desired (*Demonic Grounds* xi).[5]

Although, like Clarke himself, his characters "'had come ... [to Toronto] seeking everything,'" they are stubbornly individualist and recalcitrant to the point of thwarting their own intentions and undermining and denigrating the dreams of their compatriots (Algoo-Baksh 33). Their solitariness and quiet rebellion and their obstinacy toward authority and self-discipline are, I argue, vestiges of a plantation system that systematically severed labourers' family and community ties, discouraged independence of body and thought and encouraged conformity and obedience in the service of generating profits for the plantation and not an innate genealogical quality or characteristic. Though they come to Toronto in search of a vaguely-articulated Canadian version of the American dream, Clarke's characters cannot succeed in the city because their personal concept of success is jejune and negatively influenced by the incongruous and individualist values of the capitalistic "metropolitan corporations" that run the plantations and continue to influence their Toronto lives (Beckford xxi). The labour systems they have inherited as part of the plantation economy—slavery, indentured servitude and, more recently, wage labour—have rendered Clarke's characters spectators rather than participants in the metropolitan market economy they encounter in Toronto. As Boysie, the protagonist in the first installment of Clarke's Toronto Trilogy, warns his friend's newly-arrived sister after picking her up at the Toronto airport, "[w]e in captivity here" (*The Meeting Point* 83). Sagaboy, like Boysie, also evokes the plantation and slavery in Toronto by positioning himself and his fellow immigrants as "captives"

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[5] Here I rely on Maurice Halbwachs' interpretation of the workings of the collective memory where certain memories can be prolonged over extended periods of time when they are continually reproduced in representational forms through various media. See *La mémoire collective* (1950; rpt., Paris: *Les Presses universitaires de France*, 1967).

or slaves in the city. As such, they cannot engage in the global capitalist project whether they are physically located on the plantation or in the metropolis because a similar antiblack hierarchy obtains in both spaces. In this marginalized homogeneous urban enclave, "periphractic space" or "landscape of fear," black Caribbean immigrants exist in almost complete social and economic isolation from not only the surrounding white community but from other non-Caribbean black diasporas as well as other racial and cultural minorities. In fact, the idea of community seems foreign to Clarke's characters who are disdainful of other minorities, to whom they refer, disparagingly, as the "Eyetalians" ("Bells" 25), the "Nafrican[s]" and the "fucking Afro-Canadian[s]" ("What Happened?" 117). Of course, they compare themselves favourably to these equally maligned racial-ethnic minorities, as well as to members of their own socio-racialcultural group towards whom they are often contemptuous or envious and whose behaviour they frequently police in the manner of the white overseer. In these stories, the lives of black Caribbeans are socially and spatially circumscribed to the point of (self) erasure from the very geography they recreate but cannot easily inhabit because they see the city through the desire of black people who never got off the plantation.

Because the plantation is not only "a total economic institution" but also "a total *social* institution" (Beckford 55, italics added), it is important to consider "the social, cultural, political, institutional and environmental elements" that constitute a plantation economy's "material *and* nonmaterial (quality of life and thought) dimensions" in order to get a full picture of the plantation system's multi-pronged impact on the lives of black people (Thomas xiii, italics added). As Beckford points out, the plantation "derives its full flavor from the system itself" (53), thus the "[s]ocial relations within the plantation community are determined by the economic organization

that governs production" (55). In the Caribbean context where "individual or family [owned and operated] plantations" were and continue to be scarce, large multinational metropolitan business corporations own and operate most sugarcane and other crop plantations. Their corporate headquarters and subsidiaries are located in cities like Toronto— where the "Canadian & Dominion Sugar Company Limited" refines sugar and processes beets for the corporate plantation owner Tate & Lyle, for instance—that influence and, in many cases, control both the economic *and* the social structures into which black people are socialized and within which they learn to function (105).[6] Furthermore, because "[t]he social structure of the slave plantation took [its] shape from the social organization necessary for production," plantations typically consist of groups of labourers that are isolated along lines of race and task with white overseers and administrators at the top of the hierarchy and black slaves and indentured workers at the bottom (62). "The society as a whole was," Beckford notes, "rigidly stratified by race and color directly correlated with occupational status on the plantation and without any kind of social mobility whatever" (62). As Beckford stresses, "[t]he peoples of ... Third World countries have inherited the plantation system and all the legacies which come with it," including its racism, shadism, paternalism and classism (xxvii). Thus, along with the economic legacy of the plantation, the particular social heritage of the plantation system also migrates to the city.

In the light of these factors, it is important to read Clarke's collection as more than a series of colourful, creolized, slice-of-life anecdotes about the experiences of black Caribbean immigrants in the city of Toronto; rather, the collection is an uncompromising and compelling censure of the ongoing relationship between the plantation economic system and the capitalist met-

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[6] See *Persistent Poverty*, Table 5.2 on pages 134-137 for details on Tate & Lyle's plantation-related activities.

ropolitan economic system that continues to profit from “the income generated from plantation production” (44) but rejects the “plantation workers [who] g[o] to the metropolis” in search of better opportunities (87). The plantation was both a site of production and a “type of settlement institution” that set out and enforced a strict set of living arrangements that “pattern[ed] the relationship of people to the land and largely determined how people … live[d] on the land and with one another” (Beckford 8). One's relationship to oneself, to others and to geography was, therefore, tightly circumscribed by the “'bureaucratically organized system'” (9) that exercised “control over all aspects of the lives of people within its territory,” including matters of (relative) social status or class and race or ethnicity. As both a social and an economic system, then, the plantation takes on the contours of a “'small state'” whose citizens, over time, “'acquire particular beliefs and ways of participating [within and outside of that system] which become part of the very fibre of their lives'” (11); in other words, members of the system adopt “a general plantation psychology ... [that] reflects the over-all plantation characteristics” just as a member or citizen of any other state or system would take on, reflect and reproduce its particular ideological values (Beckford 14).[7] In plantation economies, the effect of the plantation “can be traced to virtually all aspects of human life because plantations are fully integrated in the economic and social order” (Beckford 15). Put differently, because “the plantation colony”— composed of and fuelled by disenfranchised black slave labourers—“was simply an overseas extension of the metropolis” (44)—a capitalist creation of colonial expansion aimed at “promot[ing] industrialization and development in the metropolis”—black people who migrated/immigrated to the city would be viewed as displaced commodities/labour of a mercantile system and not as par-

[7] Page 10 of *Persistent Poverty* provides a detailed summary of the twofold nature of the plantation system.

ticipants in the capital marketplace (45). Thus, their “dispossession” in the New World is a derivative of their dispossession in the plantation economy where their sole purpose was “to carry out the task of production” in a system within which they were simultaneously indispensable and dispensable (56).

As one might imagine, the plantation's “wholesale transplantation of forced labor under a system of slavery served to create entirely new societies” (37). These “plural societ[ies] ... consist[ed] of different racial and cultural groups which ... [were] brought together only in the realm of economic activity” which was the “single common bond provid[ing] the integrative element” on the plantation (79). The heterogeneous mixture of ethnically, culturally and linguistically distinct black slaves who replaced “indigenous population[s]” that were “rapid[ly] and complete[ly] decimat[ed] at the hands of the invading Europeans,” meant that the “original culture [of each group] was eroded in the process of assimilation on the plantation” (38), a measure which, in turn, facilitated the increasing Europeanization of the black Caribbean and other slave populations. As Fanon posits, the consequence of colonization is a black people with “no culture, no civilization [and] no 'long historical past'” (*Black Skin, White Masks* 34). This Europeanization of Caribbean blacks continued unabated post-abolition and post-emancipation; indeed, “the [new] education system was itself a metropolitan creation,” which meant that “the black people who passed through it further assimilated the metropolitan culture [of the colonizer] and became essentially black Europeans” (Beckford 39). Fanon describes this phenomenon of acculturation in starker, more scornful terms. The entire passage bears reproducing here: Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the

civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle. (*Black Skin, White Masks* 18). Thus, despite the best efforts of the growing post-World War II group of "European educated [Caribbean] black men" (Beckford 41) to change for the better their own lives and those of their fellow countrymen and woman, their inability to do so in substantive and sustainable ways can be traced to "the psychological legacy of the plantation on the minds of the colonized people" (41). Complicating matters was the fact that these "deculturated blacks ha[d] as much contempt for the 'unrefined' masses of black people as the dominant group" so did not always advocate to the latter's benefit (78). This hybrid, "creole society[,] ... rooted in the political and economic dominance of the metropolitan power" is the social, political, cultural and economic context into which Clarke himself was born, raised and educated and which he probes repeatedly in his fiction.

Although Clarke emigrated to Canada forty-four years after then Prime Minister Sir Wilfred Laurier formally "'prohibited ... any immigrants belonging to the Negro race, which race,'" he stated, "'is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada'" (qtd. in Yarhi), entry into the nation, the liberal humanist environment that had greeted "'selfemancipat[ed]'" former slaves Thornton and Lucie Blackburn in 1833, had turned into one characterized by ugly racial stereotypes, pseudo-scientific racist eugenics theories and widespread, if unofficial, segregation (Smartz Frost xxiv). Canadian census data show that there were almost 3,500 fewer blacks in Toronto when Clarke arrived in the city than there were seventy years earlier when Lucie Blackburn died (37). Clarke arrived in Toronto a full two decades before Caribbean immigration to Canada reached its peak, in the mid-1970s, as a result of loosening race-based restrictions on

immigration and an eventual overhaul of immigration laws. In 1971, the same year the *Free and Young* collection was published, the Pierre Elliot Trudeau government declared that Canada would adopt a multicultural policy, though official multiculturalism, which made all citizens equal under the law, was not enacted until 1988. Smartz Frost writes of the mid-twentieth-century period in Toronto that "exclusionary policies based on custom, if never on law, meant that blacks were refused service in restaurants and hotels, excluded from membership in trade unions, turned down for housing and employment, harassed at the polls, and ill treated in public" (341). The change in tenor around issues of race is reflected in these stories. Clarke's characters, made economically redundant by the legacy of the plantation economy in the Caribbean are, in turn, equally superfluous in the racist-capitalist metropolitan economy of Toronto. As Clarke himself said of his own migratory journey: "'I had come ... from nothing ... as an immigrant seeking everything'" only to be "[f]orced to contend with the notion" that he and his countrymen and women were considered by Canadians to be "'alien'" and "'inferior'" (Algoo-Baksh 33).

Enid Scantlebury, the single, penniless, abject and soon-to-be-evicted protagonist in "Waiting for the Postman to Knock," represents the Bajan "decent middle class" yet the relative social status she enjoyed in the Caribbean does not translate to her life in Toronto where she, too, is one of the many alien[ated] members of the black diaspora (32). In her letters to her landlord, whom she begs for leniency on her late rent payment, Enid misguidedly believes that telling him that "back home I never lifted a straw in the way of work, for my parents were rich people. We had servants ... [a]nd if I wanted a glass of water, our maid brought it to me" will help her case (32). It is "only in Canada," she continues, that she became "a labourer, or a working woman" which, in her mind, sets her apart from being "any DP-person" (displaced person) (32). Her con-

descending attitude underscores Smith's argument about the creole elite's perceived qualitative superiority and gestures to the thematic concerns in Clarke's early Barbados-set long fiction which I mention above. The so-called "other" Caribbeans in Smith's scenario were the growing subsistence-farming "peasantry" and their descendants that often continued to perform day labour on the massive, government-subsidized mono-culture (sugar) plantations in postEmancipation West Indies to supplement their income (39). These "poor and black" peasants were part of the group involved in what Beckford calls the "large-scale out-migration" (87) or "reverse flow of [Caribbean] plantation workers going to the metropolis" in search of a better life (86). For the most part, with exceptions like the character Enid, Clarke's immigrant characters represent this socio-economic group. Like most black Caribbean women of her age, Enid works as a domestic servant in the affluent Forest Hill neighbourhood for a wealthy Jewish family (a domestic situation that mirrors the hierarchical, paternalistic structure of the plantation) but does not make enough money to pay the rent on her room in a rooming house. Compounding her predicament is the isolation that many of Clarke's characters contend with. As Enid laments, there is "[n]ot a blind soul to make a cup o' tea or coffee, for she; nobody to run to the corner store to buy a bottle of ginger ale, [or] a pack o' chewing gum ... Is so Enid lonely in this big country" (30). Although she "cussing sheself that she ever was foolish enough to say she emigrading to this terrible place call Canada," the text reminds us of the double (economic and emotional) bind Clarke's characters find themselves in. Enid's boyfriend Lonnie, who has remained in Barbados performing wage work on a plantation, is in an equally financially untenable position (30). As Lonnie explains in his letter to his "Darling Sweetheart Enid," "[t]he sugar cane crop season was a real bastard, and the [plantation] estates been laying off men left and right like

flies" (34). Lonnie represents the many Caribbean men in Clarke's fiction who have been left behind by girlfriends and wives, often to tend to children and ageing parents, and become dependent on remittances—money sent home to help family members make ends meet because wage work is scarce, undesirable or unavailable. Beckford argues that "'people have nothing better to do' than to be unemployed *not* because they just like having nothing better to do but because they have no access to land and other resources with which to apply their labor services" (179, italics added). It stands to reason, then, that black people living in plantation societies "place such a low premium on plantation work and are willing to pay the price of unemployment and underemployment in order to be as independent of plantations as possible" (179). In his discussion of the plantation economy's long term impact on the welfare of the people who work in it, Beckford points to a pernicious cycle that creates transgenerational poverty, dispossession and apathy towards work. "[L]ow productivity among peasants within plantation economy is," Beckford posits, "a consequence of the fact that peasants are denied an opportunity to exercise their obvious managerial and entrepreneurial abilities because the plantation system creates a situation which gives them limited access to the necessary co-operant resources of land and capital" (180). Within this system, "[l]abor ... [is] bottled up within the peasant sector while land and capital are monopolized by the plantation sector" (180). In other words, the system "soak[s] the poor to help the rich within plantation society" (182). Similarly, for Clarke's struggling characters in Toronto, "[w]ork was scarce: [and] had almost died," plunging them into poverty and isolation ("Give Us This Day" 66). Further, they are ill suited and unqualified for the managerial positions they desire and that offer better economic possibilities and resentful of the domestic positions of servitude they must accept in order to survive. These systemic practices have created an entire multi-

generational group of people who have no access to or ability to engage with the capitalist economic system in either geographic location. For Clarke's characters, this problem is further exacerbated because, in Toronto, they witness firsthand the riches that their labour on the plantation has generated for the metropolis but are, on the whole, unable to access those possessions or understand how to "work" or function within the economic systems that generate individual financial wealth. For instance, Enid, in "Postman," whose unspecified ailment renders her temporarily housebound in the days leading up to Christmas, is unable to pay her rent or her bills and receives a series of letters under her door from the eponymous postman demanding immediate payment and threatening eviction for non-compliance. Rather than negotiate in good faith with the Landlord, she insults him by writing that he is "dealing with a West Indian, a Barbadian" and not "one of the stupid Canadians walking about this place" (43). Further, although she recognizes "that it isn't no honeymoon [for black people] living in this place" (31-32), Enid surreptitiously "ask[s] Mrs Rubenstein," her friend and fellow domestic worker Dots' employer, "to lend ... [her] money" on the basis that she and Dots "are friends" (45). Enid's ill-advised strategy backfires. The rental collection company advises her that its "representative and a bailiff will visit the apartment and remove from the premises ... [Enid's] possessions in lieu of settlement of ... [her] outstanding rent" (46). Making matters worse, Dots writes to tell her that she is "a disgrace to black women who come up here to better themselfs" (45-46). Though the story suggests the two women have been in Toronto for the same length of time, Enid has not learned the valuable lesson Dots seems to have acquired:

"Business," she tells Enid, "does not get conducted like that" in Canada (45).

The characters that do manage to acquire some of the trappings of success through their business dealings pay a high price for their achievements. As the narrator in the story "Four Stations in His Circle" declares, over time, being shut out of the Canadian economy "transform[s]" Clarke's characters into "deceitful, selfish and very ambitious" men, like Jefferson whose "friends hated him" because his single-minded determination to "own a piece o' Canada!" has made him "ascetic," litigious and uncharitable (51). The connection between the two geographies resonates with Clarke's characters at a theoretical and emotional level—Henry points this out in "Bells"—however, they seem uniformly unaware of the extent to which they embody a plantation ideology and are thus unable to change the destructive patterns created by centuries of colonial domination. If the plantation is "a total social institution" (Beckford 55) or "a community" (Beckford 53), it is characterized by material and spiritual poverty, race and class antagonisms, unequal access to material comforts like adequate food, housing and smallholding arable land and a perverse combination of "benevolence and paternalism" (Beckford 54).[8] According to psychologist Seymour B. Sarason, the foregoing scenario represents a "sense of community" or "psychological sense of community" which Clarke's characters have internalized in the Caribbean and then reproduced in Toronto (157). Importantly, as Sarason asserts in *The Psychological Sense of Community: Prospects for a Community Psychology*, this "psychological sense of community" or accumulation of experiences of community "is one of the major bases for *self*-definition" (157, italics added). Sarason's argument that the sense of community develops in tandem with the sense of self resonates with Fanon's argument that, "[i]n the white world [or community] the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema" or, put

[8] See Beckford, chapter 3, for a lengthier discussion of the "social and political dimensions of plantation society."

differently, the non-conscious positioning of the self in space (110). Thus, for Fanon, the "atmosphere of certain uncertainty" produced by the white world or community engenders for the black man a "[c]onsciousness of the body [which] is solely a negating activity"; in other words, because he perceives of himself in negative and negating ways, the black man erases himself from the landscape (110). Sarason's and Fanon's theories are echoed in Beckford's analysis of the socio-political reach and influence of plantation societies that wield a "[r]igid control of the labour supply ... [which] ... involved control over the movement of slaves *in space*" (64, italics added). These two linked aspects—the geography/community and the self—converge in the *Free and Young* stories where Clarke's immigrant characters unconsciously erase themselves in disturbing and perplexing but altogether historically predictable ways, from the very social and material geography-community they have reproduced in Toronto (*Black Skin* 110).

My argument that there is no Toronto in Clarke's Toronto stories and no black immigrants in his city—they are erased by the city and the text—is strengthened by the author's own claim that "'coming from one colony to another is an easy step'" (qtd in Ball 12). On one level, the claim is disingenuous. Indeed, soon after arriving in Toronto, Clarke developed an overwhelming sense that "'white people do not believe anything about black people, except that which is bad, that which is based on their perceptions of inferiority'" following an incident when "whites [refused] to sit beside him on a crowded bus in Toronto" (qtd in Algoo-Baksh 35). On another level, while there was manifestly nothing "easy" about coming from Barbados to Toronto, for Clarke, as for the Caribbean immigrant characters in his stories, the familiarity of the colonialplantation system may have "eas[ed]" what immigration narratives suggest is a very difficult transition given Canada's own colonial history ("Plantation Futures" 5). After all, "all Third World countries

are, in one way or another, colonies of the North Atlantic" (Beckford xxiv). Clearly, however, Clarke's characters make the assumption that Toronto will be like Barbados because of the commonwealth countries' shared experience as colonized spaces. This is why the characters in the *Free and Young* stories act the same way in Toronto as they did in Barbados but expect different results. What they fail to understand is that their status and value in the plantation system they were raised in did not change or increase when they emigrated to Canada's commercial capital. In his book, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of Global Capitalism*, historian Edward E. Baptist argues that slavery was a key element in the violent development of global capitalism (89). Similarly, in *Historical Capitalism*, Immanuel Wallerstein posits that systemic, institutional racism "is one of the most significant pillars" of the capitalist system and serves as "the ideological justification for the hierarchization of the work-force and its highly unequal distribution of rewards" (78). Given the complicit relationship between the plantation and the city, the status of Clarke's immigrant characters in the plantation economy as chattel, a status they have internalized through the processes I describe above, is the same status they hold in the Canadian city. Capitalism cannot work for people who perceive themselves and are perceived by others—especially those whose wealth fuels the capitalist economy—as occupying the bottom rung of the racial, social and economic hierarchy. Two stories in particular in *Free and Young*—"Four Stations in His Circle" and "The Motor Car"—put this linked relationship under scrutiny.

"Four Stations" and "Motor Car" suggest that Clarke's characters' attempts to access the metropolitan economy and ascend its hierarchical scale cause their alienation from the wider Caribbean-Torontonian immigrant community and, importantly, bring about their increasing self-

alienation and eventual self-erasure. It is useful here to think of Clarke's characters as being *sous rature* or under erasure in the Heideggerian-Derridian sense of the term given that their extravagantly visible acts of consumption lead directly to their equally excessive and simultaneous acts of self-negation and self-erasure. Jefferson's single-minded determination to possess "a house and a piece of land round the house" ("Four Stations" 51) in the exclusive Toronto enclave of Rosedale, for instance, makes him simultaneously "invisible and hypervisible," to use Rinaldo Walcott's terminology in *Black Like Who?* (45). Given that, as I have mentioned above, arable land and adequate housing were largely unavailable to black people in the (global) plantation economy where land and infrastructure were monopolized by corporate owners and subsidized by local and international governments, Jefferson's all-consuming drive to possess both as a way to prove his humanity, control his own destiny and access genuine citizenship has a significance that is historically resonant. "This" historical dispossession," Fanon argues, "may be the reason for the strivings of contemporary Negroes: to prove the existence of a black civilization to the white world at all costs" (34). Despite the historical genesis of his justifiable "strivings," however, Jefferson's drive to acquire the material trappings he believes will legitimize him in the eyes of his friends, his family back home and the white community whose acceptance he craves has the opposite effect. Although he eventually purchases the coveted Rosedale house, he is never at home in it just as, or perhaps because, he is never at home in his own black body, the city or the nation. The house's unhomeliness is directly related to Jefferson's self-perception and the "surprise" (McKittrick *Demonic Grounds* 91) his white neighbours experience when they see him "walking around th[e] respectable district" in the evening ("Four Stations" 54). McKittrick ar-

gues that “[w]hite accountability for black discrimination ... often mutates if and when it is addressed in the dominant Canadian discourse”

(*Demonic Grounds* 101). That metamorphosis, McKittrick further suggests, takes the shape of “an intelligible discursive conceptualization of” urban blackness as “criminal and problematically black” (101). Jefferson's encounter with the police in Rosedale who “pounce upon him and drag him along his lawn, with hands on his mouth and some in his guts,” (53) underscores the workings of the “spatialization of the underclass, [the] stereotyping [of] blackness, [the] overpolicing [of] black [people] ..., racial profiling, [and the] criminalizing [of] black [people]” (*Demonic Grounds* 101). The police assume that a black man walking in

Rosedale in the evening must be a “'burglourer'” and treat Jefferson accordingly (“Four Stations” 54). Despite eventually concluding he was not a thief, the arresting officer gave Jefferson “one final kick of warning” not to be “of no fixed address, unknown, [and a] labourer unskilled” in the white space of Rosedale; in other words, the police warn Jefferson not to be black and poor in wealthy white Toronto, a feat that is beyond Jefferson's—or any black character’s—realm of possibility. Despite having lived in his house for several months, one neighbour enquires whether Jefferson has “heard when *they're* coming back” (59, italics in original)—referring to the presumed white owners of the house—while another complements him for being “'a darn fine gardinner. Best these [supposed white home-owning] people ever had” (59). Similarly, Calvin —Kingston, the obstreperous protagonist in “The Motor Car,” defies the expectations of his compatriots to amass enough money to buy a flashy new car to fulfil the second part of his dual purpose in emigrating to Toronto: “one, living, and number two, motto car” (97). However, like Jefferson's house, Calvin's “custom-built *Galaxie*” car is an incongruous component in the spatial ge-

ography of the urban landscape he (re)produces in Toronto (91). Neither Jefferson nor Calvin fully understand the meaning of their purchase in the context of the spatial geography of Toronto; further, their respective purchases take them outside of the plantation system they reproduce in the city and thus, they cease to be spatial in that geography. While it may be tempting to read both purchases as acts or "strategies of resistance" against the economic and social systems that keep black people in poverty, a theory I mention above and which McKittrick advances in much of her writing on black geographies, Jefferson's and Calvin's forays into the capitalist economy of the metropolis do not end in personal triumph or access to middle-class status but rather, in personal ruin (37). Like Jefferson's house, Calvin's car literally and figuratively alienates him from himself and the larger Caribbean-Torontonian community and renders him simultaneously invisible and hyper-visible. Although he expects his inaugural drive in the car to function as a highly visible sign of his success to his black compatriots, "not one blasted West Indian or black person [was] in sight to look at Calvin new car and make a thing with his head, or laugh, or wave" when he took his victory lap "along Danforth as far as Bloor, ... [and] pon Yonge ... as far as Harbord ... and right pon College at the corner o' Spadina" (105). Similarly, when he makes a production of parking the car in front of his rooming house, again, "[n]ot one blasted person on the whole street look out at Calvin new motto-car" (106-107). Like Jefferson, who is invisible as a homeowner but highly visible as a potential threat to the white residents of an affluent neighbourhood, Calvin is invisible to the black community he wishes to impress but is hypervisible to the white figures of authority that make and enforce the rules that govern the world he inhabits. For instance, Calvin's white landlady demands that he tell "the [presumed black] owner of this car ... to move it ... [because it is] blocking ... [her] driveway" (107). Also, when he slams on the

brakes causing what the text suggests are fatal injuries to his white female companion, whom he pejoratively and misogynistically calls “the Canadian thing” (103) or “the Canadian gash” (105), Calvin attracts the attention of the police to whom he lies regarding the true nature of the events that led to his companion's fatal injuries. Importantly, the event that causes Calvin to brake so precipitously occurs when he has ventured far from the familiar geography of the urban centre and onto “the Don Valley Parkway,” whose unfamiliarity causes “the Canadian thing” to ask: “"You not nervous?"” (108). I read Calvin's nervousness here in several different but linked ways. First, his companion's question falls on the heels of an earlier narrow escape from a potentially fatal collision with a pedestrian in which the narrator suggests Calvin could have been “looking the wrong way” at an intersection because he is accustomed to the British custom of driving on the left side of the street (105). But Calvin is also, I suggest, agitated and anxious because of the unfamiliarity of the economic and spatial situation he finds himself in. The vehicle, a symbol of Calvin’s desire to project a heightened masculinity, but which becomes a self-contained instrument of destruction and death, is unwieldy in Calvin's hands because the luxury commodity is antithetical to his position in the hierarchy of the plantation system into which he has been assimilated as well as the economic system of Toronto. Calvin's ostensibly carefree Saturday afternoon drive along the DVP takes him into unfamiliar social and geographical territory, outside of the only spatial structure he knows and underscores his incongruousness within the capital economy and geography. Although part of Calvin's route takes him along the same streets Thornton Blackburn first charted in his hansom cab in the early nineteenth century, their spatial experiments have very different motivations and results. The latter definitively situates Thornton, and thus blackness, at the centre of the metropolitan geography and economy and solidifies his legacy into

the future while the former erases black bodies from the city. As there are no black people in the city to see and congratulate or admire him, Calvin is, therefore, not there/in Toronto—he is un-geographic, unspatial and, to use

Wartley's term again, "out-of-place" in the white landscape of the contemporary Canadian city.

Demonstratively, the house and car function as symbols of Jefferson's and Calvin's hy-pervisibility in Toronto; conversely and ironically, they also represent their increasing invisibility in the city. I want to suggest that, as Beckford argues, because "the basic structure of plantation society in the New World today remains much the same as that of the slave era" (65) and because that structure "involved control over the movement of slaves in space," their activities, both on and off the plantation, were circumscribed by their social, racial and geographical conditions (64). Similarly, when Clarke's characters move outside of the physical or theoretical realm of plantation Toronto, the geography they unconsciously reproduce in the city, the consequences that ensue—alienation from family and community, sickness, madness and murder/death—are tragic. In her biography of the Blackburns, Smartz Frost describes the intrepid couple as being "agents of their own destinies" who, like thousands of other enslaved blacks in the American plantation system, committed "'self-emancipation'" or "'self-theft'" in a bid to free themselves from the tyranny of plantation owners and overseers and reach freedom in Canada (Smartz Frost xxiv). Because, as the stories suggest, the nature of Clarke's characters' bondage is economic, psychological and sociological and their desire for freedom measured by their ability to attain the trappings of material success rather than genuine bodily or psychic freedom, their schemes are individualist, spontaneous and puerile. Their actions reveal the extent to which they are unaware that they have internalized the plantation and its ideological frames. Their attempts to escape the

spatial boundaries of plantation Toronto do not, therefore, result in geographical, financial or psychological freedom; rather, they lead inexorably to self-erasure and, consequently, Clarke suggests, to the erasure of blackness from the urban landscape.

Clarke's comment that "[c]oming from one colony to another is an easy step" (Fagan 60) situates the roots of the destructive impulse that plagues his characters at the centre of the knotted politics of colonization. Demonstratively, for both Clarke and his characters, the stark realities of Canadian racism, isolation and poverty in no way make their transition from the Caribbean "easy." At an unconscious level, his characters recognize that one space is paradigmatic of the other. Examined from this vantage point, their seeming involuntary inclination towards self-destructive and self-erasing behaviour assumes broad political and historical, rather than only narrow personal, dimensions. Clement Ball suggests that "a typical ["Toronto-based"] Clarke protagonist ... embraces white values and attitudes that erase his black distinctiveness for a wannabe whiteness" and that "the consequences of inauthenticity are usually devastating" (13). While characters like Jefferson and Calvin appear to fully and even blindly "embrac[e]" the principles held up by the Euro-Anglo society of the collection's mid- to late-twentieth-century Toronto, the stories also suggest that those values were largely imposed by and absorbed through the process of colonization and socialization well before they immigrate to Toronto. Further, Clement Ball's argument that the "inauthenticity" Clarke's characters display by abandoning their "black distinctiveness" can also be read as an *authentic* reorientation to the continental polity of the plantation; in other words, they are making the adjustments necessary to survive in what continues to be a hostile, white environment. This latter interpretation shifts some of the responsibility for their behaviour from the individual for ostensibly "wan[ting] whiteness" to the insti-

tutional, from the colonial subject to the colonizer, for inculcating a white supremacist ideal. As Fanon avers, “the effective disalienation of the black man entails an immediate recognition of social and economic realities” that confront him at institutional, and not only individual, levels (11). I would also argue that the “wannabee whiteness” of Clarke's striving characters is actually an inherent recognition on their part that, to reiterate a Fanonian theory, “[f]or the black man there is only one destiny. And that is white” (10). In fact, Jefferson's and Calvin's failure to sustain their relative status as home and car owner, respectively, speaks to the power of the internalization of that Fanonian hypothesis. That is not to say that Clarke's characters necessarily *want* to be white; rather, they want access to the mechanisms that will allow them the same freedoms and opportunities they see white people around them enjoying. Because their encounters with metropolitan institutions, systems and values are so fraught and coloured by anti-black sentiment, Clarke's characters are “in a constant effort to run away from ... [their] own individuality, [and] to annihilate ... [their] own presence” despite themselves
(60).

The few moments of solidarity between Clarke's black characters serve as a fleeting reminder of what McKittrick calls “a spatial politics of living just enough for the city” (“Plantation Futures” 15). In “Bells,” for instance, Sagaboy, Estelle and Ironhorse Henry exit the verdant lawns of the University of Toronto campus with their arms linked together in companionable silence, drawing from each other the strength and moral courage they need to confront the “rat-trap” boarding house homes they live in and the general precariousness of their lives in the city (28). Taken in isolation, the scene can be read as a powerful instance of the endurance of black community and the promise of “an alternative future” for Toronto's black diaspora. However,

these cursory glimpses of "just enough" life and "just enough" joy are, the text suggests, hardly enough to sustain Clarke's protagonists, most of whom end up sick, alone, mad or dead. In fact, in this concluding scene, Estelle links arms with Sagaboy and Henry *because* Sagaboy is so sick with protracted and untreated tuberculosis he cannot stand unassisted. Further, even though Estelle initially exclaims that "this Canada is a damn great country, in truth!" (16) her enthusiasm is overshadowed by the reality that "[t]he immigration department had given her one week to leave the country" because of her illegal status (16-17). The threat of her deportation, their collective poverty, Sagaboy's incurable illness, Henry's mendaciousness and the incessant anti-black racism they face in the city are translated into the final ominous scene on the campus lawn. Clarke writes that "*[s]hadows* were running slow races across the front lawns, and across the large circle of green grass in front of a large *grey* building. The bells kept ringing for a while, and then they *stopped*" and together, the three "walked on in the *darkness* of the bells" (29, italics added). The moody, foreboding and suggestive language and imagery of their exit suggests that Sagaboy's bodily decline into infirmity and Estelle's permanent departure from Toronto are imminent and definitive exits from the urban geography, leaving only Henry, whose nickname—Ironhorse—gestures to his steely character, to "exist in a worser life" in Toronto, alone. If we can consider that there are some elements of Ironhorse Henry in the character of the same name that Clarke recycles in the story "Give Us This Day," then the prediction that life in Toronto will be "worser" than it was in the Caribbean bears itself out.

As part of an enduring literary strategy of reincarnating his characters, Clarke brings Henry back in three stories in the collection, including "A Wedding in Toronto," "Give Us This Day" and "What Happened?" The latter, like "They Heard a Ringing of Bells," provides a glim-

mer of hope that certain strategies of resistance—here a macho male camaraderie—will foster "collective futures" that hold enough promise to enable black people to conceptualize black urban life that plays out at a different register (PF 4). Indeed, the cozy domestic scene at the end of "What Happened?" sees Henry and Boysie playfully quarreling about the poetry of John Keats and John Milton following their joint exegesis on the white intellectualism and anthropological racism of Henry's "fucking over-educated" white wife, Agatha (119). The text suggests that their racially mixed marriage, which is intellectually, economically and socially unequal, echoes and reproduces the skewed hierarchy of the plantation economy itself. Henry, who is emasculated by Agatha's real and perceived superiority in all areas, has no economic power, few social contacts or networks and no marketable skills or education. Indeed, Henry himself concedes that "[t]here was a greater power which Agatha had over him, a power greater than he had within himself" (120). Along with freedom and self-possession, part of the power that she has over him is the potency of intellectualism which, in Henry's mind, gives Agatha ascendancy over him. The tools of advancement—literary books and magazines—are numerous in his apartment but are, he complains, "written in a [intellectual] language that ... [he] can't understand or talk in" and are the sole domain of Agatha who both reads and understands them.

This fact, Henry laments, makes her "a human being ... in this fucking twentieth-century world" (113) and, conversely, because he can neither think nor speak like an intellectual, renders him neither human nor present in or of the modern world of the metropolitan economy. As a living vestige of the colonial plantation economy, Henry's life unravels within the geographical confines of the four walls of the basement "one-room-apartment-room" he occupies, artifactlike—but does not and cannot fully or equally share—with Agatha (114). There, Henry is hidden from

the wider circle of his black compatriots and the expansive white world Agatha seamlessly negotiates, his only company the fetishized portraits of "black people's faces" his wife has ripped from magazines and hung about the apartment (118). In *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha suggests that the "split representations [of the colonial relation] stage the division of the body and soul that enacts the artifice of identity, a division," Bhabha argues, "that cuts across the fragile skin—black and white—of individual and social authority" (63). Despite—or perhaps because of—all the "PhD's and MA's and BA's behind her fucking name," Agatha represents a liberal-capitalist metropolitan standard against which Henry measures himself and necessarily falls short, at least in his own eyes and, as "Give Us This Day"—where the married couple reappears at a later stage in their doomed relationship—makes clear, in Agatha's eyes as well. To restate Bhabha's words, then, Clarke's story "stage[s]," in excruciating detail through the character Henry, a body-soul "division" that occurs as a result of "the colonial relation."

Significantly, Henry speaks of this rupture of the self in Fanonian terms when he confides to Boysie that Agatha "is trying to give me an *inferiority* complex" (119, italics in original), a state which is "created," Fanon argues, "by the death and burial of" black people's "cultural originality" (18). Here that schism is intensified by the paradoxical situation Henry faces at home. The self-loathing or inferiority engendered by the colonial process and the quotidian antiblack sentiment he encounters in Toronto make it impossible for Henry to see beauty in the pictures of black people that Agatha hangs on the walls because they are reflections of himself in which he sees only his racial, economic and social inadequacies—his "epidermalized" inferiority—and not the kind of, albeit fetishized, "cultural originality" they have in Agatha's eyes. For Henry, understandably, there is "not ... one fucking beautiful thing in being poor, or in being black or in being

hungry" because he was "born this way, black, poor and hungry"; a state that, despite moving to the New World, persists into his present situation (119). His identity is, then, a kind of cosmic trick: his wife sees beauty in and derives pleasure from the essentialized artistic representations of the black poverty and abjection that are Henry's ugly and bitter quotidian reality. Thus, Agatha's actions and the marriage as an institution enact a dialectic between the plantation and the city that, given the plantation context that defines the city Clarke's characters occupy, concludes in a tragic but altogether predictably way.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon argues that the black man "having been made inferior, proceeds from humiliating insecurity through strongly voiced self-accusation to despair" (60). The "constellation of delirium" that defines the black man's attitude under colonization, Fanon goes on to suggest, "border[s] on the region of the pathological" (60). The symptoms Fanon identifies mirror those exhibited by Henry in "Give Us This Day." Estranged from his wife, Agatha, overdue on his rent, badgered by his landlady and, on the eponymous day, kept waiting by Boysie, Henry descends irretrievably into despair or "delirium" and literally "annihilate[s]" himself through the act of suicide. Although the text indicates that he had a last-minute change of heart, "when he moved to get down, the chair [he was standing on] trembled, and fell, and he fell" to his death (78). The fact that Henry changed his mind in the seconds before his suicide, compounds the pathos of his death and underscores the unforgiving and unseeing nature of the city. While, in this story, Henry's self-erasure is definitive, most of Clarke's other characters also follow this Fanonian trajectory to its stated end point: "despair." In each case, the various ailments, maladies, crises and tragedies they endure have the same result as Henry's death: the black protagonists are rendered figuratively and, in many cases, literally invisible and thus the

space they endeavour to occupy or create in the city—a city they can only see through the desire of the colonized black person who never left the plantation—also disappears with them. In the end, then, there are few black people in Clarke's city and Toronto and Canada are, to use McKittrick's terms from *Demonic Grounds*, "seen—as white, not blackless, not black, not nonwhite, not native Canadian, but white" (97).

Referencing Beckford's extensive investigations into the economic links between the plantation and the metropolis, McKittrick notes in "Plantation Futures" that "plantations are linked to a broader global economy that thrives on the 'persistent underdevelopment' and 'persistent poverty' of black life" in both geographic locations (3). While the socio-economic politics of the plantation system "exacerbated dispossession among the unfree and indentured," McKittrick goes on to argue, "it also instituted an incongruous racialized economy that lingered long after emancipation and independence movements in the Americas" (3). Several stories in the *Free and Young* collection demonstrate the complexity of the "linked" plantation-city, pastpresent relationship in the lives of black Caribbean immigrants living in the contemporary Toronto diaspora. One of the most compelling "real life" examples of the way that past-present bond plays out in the quotidian lives of the colonized in *both* geographic spaces is Clarke's use of the epistolary literary device; it underscores the spatial-temporal connection between the plantation past and the city present and conveys a sense of the immediacy of plantation's impact on black people. "Waiting for the Postman to Knock" and, to a lesser extent, "Four Stations in His Circle," use the epistolary form to convey the points of view of family members left behind in the Caribbean. The letters underscore the broken family relations, mutual grinding poverty and guilt and/or resentment that both senders and recipients of the letters harbour toward each other. The letter Jef-

ferson, the protagonist in “Four Stations,” receives from his ailing mother in Barbados contextualizes and magnifies the many other broken or troubled relationships in his life. Not only does Jefferson deny “the Old Queen['s]” (58) request for money to pay for an operation, but he spends the money he could have sent to his mother on the purchase of a second house in Rosedale and a “long, sleek and black ... 1965 Jaguar” (59). The “tension” that the letter's arrival causes and Jefferson's refusal over many months to open it not only highlights the tenuousness of the relationship but also suggests that the seeds of that ruptured bond were planted in the colonial space out of which she writes (57). By making the epistolary relationship monologic—Jefferson never writes back to his mother—Clarke highlights the relationship's futility and provides a sustained look into the mother’s desultory life in the Caribbean. “‘*I* ... [am] *laid up with a great sickness*,’” she writes, and “‘*I need an operation. I feel bad to ask you* ... [for money] *though. But, I am, Your Mother*’” (58, italics in original). Jefferson’s refusal to either reply to the letters (there are more than one) or send money is not only a sign of his diminishing mental state but also of the burden placed on the individual immigrant to buffer the financial solvency of Caribbean relatives back home who have been systematically disenfranchised—economically but also socially and politically—by successive colonial administrations that decimated black lives and families.

“Waiting for the Postman to Knock” is almost entirely epistolary. In this case, however, the story is a polylogic epistolary. Enid, the protagonist, is the primary letter-writer but the state—in the guise of “THE CROWN TRUST CO, INC.” (Enid’s landlord) (33)—Lonnie, Enid’s “loving man” in Barbados (35); Enid’s mother and young son Freddie; the “First Division Court of the County of York” (39); “THE CANADIAN TUBERCULOUSIS SOCIETY” (46); and Enid’s friend, Dots, also write letters and, thus, lend the story its dimension and help create its impres-

sion of veracity and multi-vocality. In his letter to Enid, for instance, Lonnie laments that "[t]he sugar cane crop season was a real bastard, and the estates been laying off men left and right like flies" (34). His missive provides readers with an insight into the precarious life plantation wage workers. "Labor and the problem of land have been inherently connected to the whole history of plantations," Beckford explains, and goes on to argue that this land monopoly has produced both a "concentration of capital in the form of land" and "high unemployment" among indigenous West Indians who simply cannot find work or are either loathe to labour for plantation owners on principal or refuse to work for sub-subsistence wages (86). The other consequence of the colonial labour-land pattern is the "high rates of emigration from plantation areas within a particular country and from the plantation economies to metropolitan countries," like Canada, where Clarke's characters settle (Beckford, 86). As the letters to Enid from various municipal agencies attest, however, the nature of employment in the metropolis often mirrors the kind of labour available to black people in the Caribbean: precarious, menial and poorly remunerated. A short absence from her domestic job due to illness is all it takes for Enid to be fired and, as a result, unable to pay her rent, groceries or utility bills. Her written request to her landlord for an extension on payment is met with their promise to send "'*a bailiff ... and remove from the premises your possessions in lieu of settlement of your outstanding rent*'" (46, italics in original) and a threatening and officious reminder that she is dealing with "'THE CROWN TRUST CO, INC.'" and not a simple "'*landlord*'" (33, italics in original). The letter from her only friend and fellow domestic, Dots, who writes to Enid to chastise her for requesting money from the wealthy couple Dots works for in order to cover her expenses, confirms their mutual precarious existence in Canada: "'*Canada is already rough enough*'" (45, italics in original) for black people, Dots

writes, without Enid making the situation worse and interfering in Dots' ability to "'*earn a few dollars*'" (45, italics in original). In their totality, then, the letters confirm Clarke's central argument throughout the collection: practically speaking, colonized black people in the diaspora and in the homeland are, still, suffering the consequences of the "persistent underdevelopment" and "persistent poverty" that the plantation system generates and maintains across time and space. The letters sent from the Caribbean to Toronto underscore the continuity between those two geographic and temporal spaces. The intimate and often wrenching domestic and social revelations the letters disclose—illness, loss of employment, family disintegration, weakened social and economic infrastructure, and so forth—confirm the sometimes unreliable protagonists' viewpoint about the extent to which they and all black people have been scarred by "'the kiss-me-arse canefield, and … slavery'" and generate a more sympathetic reaction from readers to characters that are not always appealing or sympathetic ("Bells" 18)

McKittrick suggests, hopefully, that the injustices of the plantation do not necessarily have to "negatively anticipate how we conceptualize our collective futures" in New World cities and that, rightly, black people's "spatialize[d] acts of survival" can and do produce "new forms of human life" (PF 4; 2). Her writing here and elsewhere endeavours "to contextualize the plantation as a location that might also open up a discussion of black *life* within the context of contemporary global cities and futures" ("Plantation Futures" 5, italics in original). While I concur with McKittrick's assessment (I argue in Chapter 3 that Dionne Brand's perambulatory aesthetics in *thirsty* articulate new spaces and possibilities for black diasporic peoples), I nevertheless contend that there is little textual evidence in Clarke's short stories to suggest that his characters are able to overcome "the persistence of ... the plantation influence" in order to envision a future (or even

a present) that is substantively different than their past individual and collective experience of the plantation (Beckford xxii).

Chapter Three: "The *Desire* to Remember" Hogan's Alley: Archiving the "Imaginative Configurations" of Black Urban Space in Wayde Compton's *Performance Bond*

"The fact that history does not record a fact doesn't mean the fact did not exist."
—José Saramago, *The Stone Raft*, 26.

In July 2007, several members of a group called the "Vancouver Flower Brigade" spent a Sunday morning planting hundreds of flowers on an empty stretch of green space south of the Georgia Viaduct, a 6-lane, twinned commuter freeway connecting downtown Vancouver in the west to the east end of the city. Under the direction of local artist and "interventionist" Lauren Marsden—whose highly politicized interventions involve the "[un]authorized … subverting of public spaces with art" (Zandberg)—the group planted red impatiens in the flowerbeds Marsden had dug into the earth to form the words "Hogan's Alley Welcomes You" (Compton, *After Canaan* 118). The large floral greeting on the plot of city-owned land could be seen from the freeway and adjacent buildings from where it was photographed and subsequently reproduced in books and on various social media sites. The venture was part of the Hogan's Alley Memorial Project (HAMP), an initiative "founded in 2002 with the goal of preserving the public memory of Vancouver's original black neighbourhood" located in the Strathcona district of the city's East End (Compton). Home to a racially, ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous group of people, including Chinese, Japanese and Italian residents, Hogan's Alley was also home to "a substantial concentration of black" people, businesses, restaurants and a church. Established in the early part of the twentieth century in "an alley that ran through the southwestern corner of Strathcona" called Park Lane, Hogan's Alley attracted a diverse group of black people from the US, the Car-

ibbean and across Canada and was part of the city's bustling urban landscape until the late 1960s. By the early 1970s, the community had been destroyed and its residents dispersed to make room for an ambitious but ultimately abortive urban renewal project that included the construction of an extensive freeway system linking communities in the east with downtown Vancouver in the west. When social advocates and members of affected communities, like Hogan's Alley, which the city council had neglected to consult, learned of the project's scope, they fought against its implementation but the predominantly black community of Hogan's Alley was bulldozed before the project was halted. A portion of the larger freeway project—including the Georgia Viaduct—eventually proceeded and opened in 1972. As the HAMP website indicates, "[t]oday, the block or so that is left of the alley itself bears no mark that there was ever a black presence there, having become part of greater Chinatown." Thus, the unofficial floral memorial is a complex visual record of contested black urban space and history whose "goal [is] ... to publicly memorialize the black community that once constellated around this neighbourhood" (Compton).

I begin with the Flower Brigade's subversive landscaping project because it weaves together some of the strands of Vancouver-born black Canadian writer and HAMP founding member, Wayde Compton's, multipronged interest in and approach to representing black space in the contemporary Canadian city. Known primarily as a poet, Compton draws on his interest in black history, performance and hip hop to articulate a decidedly urban vision of the city of Vancouver, making clear the interconnections between historical and contemporary erasures of black spaces, places and peoples. Compton's poetry, fiction and non-fiction—as well as his social advocacy—seek to establish a trajectory of black presence in the province from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. The Flower Brigade's disruptive act "performs" that trajectory in a highly visual

and material manner and underscores the ways in which power and anti-black racism are embedded in urban spaces whose seeming neutrality conceals violent colonial histories that help maintain the fiction that "Vancouver was untouched by the evils of twentieth century planning regimes" (Compton *After Canaan* 83) and that the city was not only not racist toward black people but that, to use theorist Katherine McKittrick's term, Vancouver was "blackless" (*Demonic Grounds* 96). The seemingly benign floral overture invites a critical examination of the idea that space could be innocent and reveals the tension between the story hidden beneath the smoothed-over surface and the narrative encoded in the floral invitation to enter Hogan's Alley and discover the history neatly concealed beneath the earth. "'[S]ituated exactly where the alley used to be,'" the floral memorial is an elaborate gesture that, according to Marsden, both "'serves to beautify the neighbourhood'" and "'commemorat[e] the former site of Hogan's Alley ... the first and last neighbourhood [in Vancouver] with a substantial concentrated black population'" (qtd. in *After Canaan* 118). The flower plot is, simultaneously, a remembrance of the erased community buried beneath it and a celebration of the possibilities for renewal and rebirth implicit in the biological, living, growing flowers. Thus, the sign resonates beyond its obvious temporal and aesthetic dimensions and its politics closely align with and elucidate those at play in the Hogan's Alley Memorial Project's larger mandate and beyond.

The Vancouver Flower Brigade's floral graffiti installation responds to the violence of forced removal, urbicide and race-based tensions over urban space with the unexpectedly hopeful expression of flowering plants as a way of encouraging readers-viewers to (re)turn to an invisible past in order to see and understand its relationship to the present. The visual nature of the sign and its evocative placement are a refusal of what Nicholas Mirzoeff, in his essay, "The

Right to Look," calls "the axiomatic phrase, 'move on, there's nothing to see here'" (495); indeed, the sign beckons viewers-readers to stop, look and, to use a term McKittrick employs in her writing on black Canada, "wonder" about what is concealed beneath the seemingly benign plot of state-owned land (*Demonic Grounds* 91). Thus the sign "construct[s] a countervisuality" to the authoritative gaze behind the government policies that saw the black space as unfit to support black life and therefore fit for destruction (Mirzoeff 495). The forgotten history that the floral sign literally writes on points toward and extends far beyond the first half of the twentieth century when Hogan's Alley was a thriving, functioning community. Although the grassy embankment is not a literal burial site for the bodies of the community's former black inhabitants, the plot of land functions symbolically and performatively as the spatial locus of the racialized targeting and thwarted trajectories of the black men, women and children who inhabited the space and created a home there before it was razed in the name of urban renewal and social progress or, as Mirzoeff names it, the "moralizing rhetoric of nation building" (489). The unmarked space to which black people "from the US and the Caribbean and from other parts of Canada" migrated and settled holds in it the history of black migrations, settlements and unsettlements that connects it to other urban diasporic sites in North America where black bodies, communities and spaces are contested, have gone missing, and been marginalized or ghettoized under various government systems and regimes (Compton, *After Canaan* 87). Further, the Flower Brigade's palimpsestic gesture superimposes an other(ed) vision of black space that undermines, challenges and literally points toward the emptied, deracinated space created by the city and preserved through the official and anecdotal retelling of a homoginizing, benevolent Vancouver history. For instance, one such recently published non-fiction, which I discuss later in this chapter insists, unselfconsciously, that

Vancouver escaped the kind of assault on the city characteristic of the wave of mid-twentieth-century city planning and construction schemes that American-born activist and author Jane Jacobs, in her seminal book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, calls "the sacking of cities" (4). Thus, the Brigade's timely and highly visual act (re)connects the present plot to the bulldozed, "sacked," and forgotten city history beneath it in ways that both contest and reclaim the space while challenging the easy assertions of municipal, provincial and state urban planning virtuousness. As McKittrick argues, "[u]nseen black communities and spaces ... privilege a transparent Canada/nation by rendering the landscape a 'truthful' *visual* purveyor of past and present social patterns. Consequently, 'truthful' visual knowledge regulates and normalizes how Canada is seen—as white, not blackless, not black, not nonwhite, not native Canadian, but white" (*Demonic Grounds* 96-97, italics in original). The Hogan's Alley example evinces the ways in which "'[o]ther' geographic evidence is buried, ploughed over, forgotten, renamed, and relocated; ... [and] how practices of race and racism coalesce with racial and racist geographic demands" in urban contexts (97). As Cheryl

Teelucksingh argues in her Introduction to the collection *Claiming Space: Racialization in Canadian Cities*, "Canadian cities are important spatial contexts in which to analyze how racialized power is produced, represented, and challenged" because they are, like Vancouver, densely populated and increasingly multicultural locations that test our magnanimity (3).

The "floral graffiti" sign points to two important ideas about urban space that pertain to my discussion of Compton's poetry (Compton, *After Canaan* 118). First, working with the concept of "'unmapping'" that Sherene Razack articulates in her writing on the relationship between aboriginal women's bodies and space, Glenn Deer argues in "The New Yellow Peril: The Rhetor-

ical Construction of Asian Canadian Identity and Cultural Anxiety in Richmond," that "[u]nmapping the problem of histories of space and the media construction of social relations ... entails restoring the racial link to identity and space, not eliding or naturalizing the occupation of a space by a particular group" (25). The floral sign in the city's urban core pays attention to space and asks readers-viewers to notice urban geographies and the stories they might tell. Thus, the sign first "unmaps" the historical-cartographic history of Hogan's Alley, and Vancouver and British Columbia more generally, in order to then remap—or re-plot—the community, city and province using a different cartographic logic and narrative. Second, given "Vancouver's beginnings as a colonial civic project" (Compton, *After Canaan* 84)—the city (and several other sites in the province) takes its name from the British explorer Captain George Vancouver who first sailed into the port city in 1792 with the imperial goals of "seizing, delimiting, and asserting social and spatial control over a physical geographical area"—it is impossible to overlook the ways in which those same colonial practices continued to assert themselves in the reshaping of space in the destruction of Hogan's Alley in the late 1960s-early 1970s (Mbembe 25). Thus, to use McKittrick's words, the "spatial continuity between ... the past and the present … the plantation [and] … the city" ("Plantation Futures" 2) is expressed in the "uneven racial geographies" in contemporary cities like Vancouver and the spatial expressions of anti-black violence and racism like those that characterize the destruction of Hogan's Alley (3). Importantly, as Achille Mbembe argues in his essay "Necropolis," the tyranny of the colonial system involves "*writing on the ground* a new set of social and spatial relations" that establish new hierarchical alliances and enact various legalistic mechanisms through which imperial systems are produced and enforced (25, italics added). As I argue in the first chapter of this study, the sod and soil that underpin

colonial power are key factors in implementing and maintaining ideological imperialism's racialized hierarchy. The Vancouver Flower Brigade's act of "writing" a floral message on and in the ground at the site of the "'visibly absent'" black community *literally* rewrites and thus rescripts the story of that unequal historical relation (Nieves, "Memories of Africville" 94).

Since I reference Compton's fiction and non-fiction as foundational materials in my discussion of his poetry collection, *Performance Bond*—the primary focus of this study—they merit brief mention here. Compton's anthology, *Bluesprint: Black British Columbian Literature and Orature* (2001), showcases a wide spectrum of black British Columbian writing representing the "144-year history of [black] presence in the province" (27). The anthology's inventory of black British Columbian writing has an analogue in East Coast-born writer George Elliot Clarke's catalogue of black Nova Scotian literature published in the two-volume anthology *Fire on the Water* (1991; 1992). Both Compton's and Clarke's anthologies make an appeal for the acceptance of what Clarke calls an "aboriginal [Canadian] *blackness* ("Embarkation" 13, italics in original) and what cultural critic Rinaldo Walcott terms "'an indigenous black Canadian space'" (*Black Like Who?: Writing Black Canada* 46). As Clarke emphatically argues in his Introduction to an earlier collection of essays and reviews, *Odysseys Home: Mapping African Canadian Literature*, his work, and that of other black Canadian scholars like Compton and the other authors in this project who are engaged in writing black lives, spaces and places back into the history of the nation, helps to "contest the erasure and silencing of black culture and history in Canada" (6). Importantly, *Bluesprint* also goes some distance in addressing writer Peter Hudson's concern that "the absence of black literary production in the writing of Canadian cultural histories has created a critical wasteland for African Canadian literature" ("Editor's" 5).

In line with his project to draw attention to the hidden history of black British Columbia, Compton's first book of poems, *49th Parallel Psalm* (1999), undertakes "a poetic, historical revision of the [little-known] migration of blacks to Canada … [from] San Francisco in 1858," some of whom eventually settled in Vancouver's East End and helped to create Hogan's Alley (back jacket). Using the trope of the 49th parallel line of latitude north—the Canadian border with the United States—as both a geographical and theoretical site through which to chart the migrations of black San Franciscans into (and subsequently out of) British Columbia, Compton investigates the porousness of national, geographic and racial borders and boundaries. The collection is, as such, a poetic groundwork for the fuller prose history of that exodus and resettlement of black people contained in the Introduction to *Bluesprint*. Together, *49th Parallel Psalm* and *Bluesprint* help form the missing black "cultural histor[y]" of British Columbia that Hudson mentions and which is the basis for Compton's more recent writing.

In his first collection of prose essays, *After Canaan: Essays on Race, Writing, and Region* (2010), Compton "repositions the North American discussion of race in the wake of the tumultuous twentieth century" in seven pensive, wide-ranging essays (back jacket). Some of the essays in the collection bring to light British Columbia's extensive black history and the varied contributions of a diverse collection of key historical and contemporary literary, political and artistic figures including Isaac Dickson, Fred Booker and Mifflin Gibbs, among others, whose works and cultural contributions Compton "'repossesse[s]'" and reconsiders in the anthology (152). Others, like the first, second-last and final essays, for instance, depart from an interrogation of the specificity of the province's black history to explore an array of broader, more philosophical, sociological and political issues tied, still, to the complex question of race. These latter include

the growing obsolescence of racial categorization in increasingly multicultural and global contexts where misapprehending race is commonplace; the politics and poetics of hip-hop turntablism; and the so-called "post-race" discourse that arose out of Barack Obama's 2008 election and two-term tenure as president of the United States. Together, then, these thematically interlocking essays situate an intellectually rigorous and encompassing debate around the politics of race and space in the global twenty-first-century and query the implications of debates about culture and cultural expression on the ways in which race is understood and perceived in the present and into the future.

The collection's longest essay by far, "Seven Routes to Hogan's Alley and Vancouver's Black Community," confines itself to an intellectually rooted and often intensely personal investigation of one of those "tumultuous" mid-twentieth-century moments and its far-reaching consequences: the racialized and racist urban renewal debacle that resulted in the demolition of Vancouver's only black community, Hogan's Alley. As its title suggests, "Seven Routes" consists of seven discrete sections, each of which considers a different path Compton travels (and readers may also take) to arrive at a deeper understanding of Hogan's Alley, its place in the history of black Vancouver and its meaning in and for the larger history of British Columbia and Canada. In the context of the present study, then, the *After Canaan* essays, especially "Seven Routes," function as an indispensable theoretical prose companion piece to the poems in Compton's second collection of extravagantly heterogeneous and experimental poetry, *Performance Bond*, which is also chiefly concerned with imaginatively reinterpreting Hogan's Alley and examining the link between the colonial plantation past and the post-colonial urban present. Compton's most recent books include a collection of interconnected short stories called *The Outer Harbour: Stories* and

an anthology of hybrid poetry by West Coast poets, entitled *The Revolving City: 51 Poems and the Stories Behind Them*, that Compton co-edited with Renée Sarojini. Before turning fully to *Performance Bond*, however, it is important to acknowledge that Compton's literary explorations of black diasporic spaces and histories in British Columbia, which I have outlined briefly in the foregoing paragraphs, have developed in tandem with and are mutually supportive of his social and community activism with and through the Hogan's Alley Memorial Project.

In keeping with its mandate, HAMP has painstakingly amassed various archival and privately-held materials including rare photographs, (transcribed) oral histories, newspaper articles, programmes from a range of religious and cultural events and other assorted items that, together, "represen[t] 'a unique record of black … life'" in Hogan's Alley (Flinn and Stevens 14). This physical archive of the black community has been publicly exhibited at various community fora in and around Vancouver. A good deal of the collected material is accessible in virtual form on HAMP's website which has a growing series of links to and blogs on a variety of HAMP and other related activities and events dating back to the website's creation in 2006 and earlier. The website has generated an invaluable set of connections to forgotten or previously inaccessible information about Hogan's Alley circa the first half of the twentieth century, some of which I mention in this study. Much of the information on the website has found its way into the *After Canaan* essays and the *Performance Bond* poems, in various permutations, which underscores Compton's intellectual and aesthetic interest in the concept of bonds and connections. For instance, the two-page epigraph to *Performance Bond* reproduces part of the "Detention" section of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act Operational Manual, *Enforcement* (ENF 20 – Detention).

"Detention" includes instructions for Immigration officials on how and when to use "the Performance Bond form" to secure the release of a foreign or indigenous detainee from government detention (12). As the literary eponym of the Immigration department's legal performance bond form, *Performance Bond* is necessarily bound up with the meaning of the form and the various images, feelings and responses it evokes; however, the poetry collection challenges, undermines, mimics and mocks the form's intended meaning and purpose.

Performance Bond re-interprets the narrow legalistic definition of the "performance bond" to demonstrate how words, concepts, people, places and spaces can be made to *perform* in compelling and unexpected ways and how the notion of a bond—between different and competing histories, spaces and places, and people—can have multiple meanings. Compton's reinterpretations of the term undermine its restrictive official-legal definition and intent, thereby asking readers to be attentive to the complexity of language in his sly poetry collection. Along with the poetry, fiction and essays, then, the website is another expression of Compton's larger project on the city and the hidden history of black urban space in Vancouver. The HAMP website and the *After Canaan* essays are key intersecting elements in Compton's project and are, therefore, indispensable components of the present study inasmuch as they provide invaluable insights into Compton's interpretation and use of history, archiving and performing and how and where these components intersect, diverge and converge around the spatial and racial politics of Hogan's Alley.

Performance Bond is a wide-ranging, experimental and exuberant consideration of the contemporary black North American diaspora. Divided into four sections, *Performance Bond* includes lyric and prose poems, concrete poetry, visual poems and aural poetry (an audio version

of section three of the collection, evocatively titled “The Reinventing Wheel,” is appended to the inside back cover of the book in compact disc form). The gritty settings, graffiti tag poems and visual poems that capture city infrastructure in stark black-and-white photos convey the deeply urban sensibility of the poetry. Both front and back cover photos—the former captures a grainy downtown streetscape “through red vinyl” (front cover); the latter depicts the author positioned against a wall of colourful graffiti—help create the collection's urban tenor and aesthetic. While its scope is broad—the poems are concerned with the Middle Passage and the legacy of the plantation and slave trade, the origins of black musics from jazz to hip-hop, the image of black people in the media and film, and the multiple migrations of black and other non-European immigrants to British Columbia, for example—*Performance Bond* maintains a steady focus on the troubling and enduring relationship between colonialism-plantationism and black urban space in contemporary Vancouver.

The poems in the first and third sections of the collection, entitled “Stations (1996-2003)” and “The Reinventing Wheel,” respectively, perform the work of identifying and then dismantling colonialism. Here, the contemporary consequences for black people of the apparatus of the imperial project—colonization, racialization, slavery, plantations, poverty, violence—are evoked in ways that make clear the persisting relationship between historical colonial geographies and spaces and contemporary urban geographies and spaces. Invoking Frantz Fanon's anti-colonial writing on the long-term psychological neuroses that historical slavery produces in black people that thwart their natural potential and prospects, the speaker in the collection's first poem, “Declaration of the Halfrican Nation,” ominously declares: “history got me / by the throat”—suggesting both the asphyxiating death grip of shackles, nooses or collars used to control slaves and a

silencing of the black voice (16). The speaker's response to the historical bind he finds himself in is to implore "all / ... [his] fellow mixed sisters and brothers ... [to] ... mount / an offensive" in support of black people *and* against the neocolonial spatial control of black people in Vancouver. The poems in "Stations" and "Wheel" which follow the speaker's "Declaration" / declaration describe the effects of that strangulating-silencing colonial history as they go about dismantling it. The poetry in the final section of the collection, "RUNE," represents the speaker's (and potentially the readers') "offensive" against colonialism. "RUNE" reimagines how black people *could* have occupied space and how that black space *may* have been perceived by remapping and recreating a different "plot" or narrative of black life and space in which the individual poems serve as archival evidence that, despite the nation's successful efforts to cast black spaces as somehow inherently dangerous, un-Canadian, absent or different than other spaces in the nation, Hogan's Alley was "just like everywhere else" ("Whither Hogan's Alley" 115).

The "Acknowledgments" section of *Performance Bond* contains a brief caveat about what Compton calls the "factitious elements" in the collection's final section, "RUNE," which focuses on the former black inner-city community of Hogan's Alley (10). A casual reader might overlook the warning but it is key to understanding Compton's aesthetic project to create an imaginative, poetic archive of that space. As Mirzoeff reminds us, seeing, looking at or "visualiz[ing] ... history ... [is a] practice [that] must be imaginary, rather than perceptual, because what is being visualized"—here, the entire history of black presence in Vancouver—"is too substantial for any one person to see and is created from information, images, and ideas" (474). As Compton himself clarifies in *After Canaan*, his aesthetic strategy in "RUNE" involved "remembering Hogan's Alley ... through ... *elliptical* means" rather than "through realistic repre-

sentation" (112, italics added). The dozen poems that comprise "RUNE" are overwhelmingly abstruse, oblique and visual; some conform to a traditional definition of concrete poetry in that "their effect is conveyed partly or wholly by visual means, using patterns of words or letters and other topographical devices" to create meaning while others rely less on text and more on other kinds of visual imagery, sometimes in combination with text, to create meaning ("Concrete Poetry"). Even the textual poems contain visual elements created by changes in font type and size, spacing, repetition, formatting, and so on. Compton asks readers to be attentive to the interplay between text and image, the multiple ways in which words and spaces can *perform* in visual ways, and the way history informs the present. For instance, the visual poem "Forme and Chase" is a mirror reflection of the infrastructure of the Georgia Viaduct, itself captured in the visual poem "Vivaduct" on the facing page, which depicts a black and white photograph of the Georgia Viaduct. In addition, the poem's title—"Forme and Chase"—draws attention to the historical process of arranging type or "forme" into a "chase" or frame in preparation for printing—a process that transformed print into a type of visual art. Although the poem's speaker suggests he only "mimic[s] [his literary forbearers] with lead
ABCs," his "hands of breath / lift, transpose / [and] lode letters" into the poems in *Performance Bond* in such a way that they, too, become art(ifacts) in the author's imaginative archive of Hogan's Alley (144).

Always attentive to language and history, Compton's "Forme and Chase" is replete with references to important historical and contemporary moments. As case in point, the poem's first line—"'A spectre is haunting this font'" (144)—borrows from the famous first line of the Prologue of Karl Marx's *The Communist Manifesto* which reads: "A spectre is haunting Europe –

the spectre of Communism." As this and the other poems in the collection suggest, black people in British Columbia, Vancouver, and Hogan's Alley in particular, are also in peril—from the "spectre" of colonialism. Compton means for his words to haunt the forlorn, emptied spaces of Hogan's Alley and those responsible for its destruction; however, his poetry also haunts readers as they come to terms with the weight of their own and the nation's loss. The author uses the poems in the collection to first dismantle or, to use Razack's term, "unmap" colonialism by "tracing the history of ... [black erasures like Hogan's Alley] all the way to their roots" in the colonial period and the plantation and then reconstruct or remap the parameters of an imaginary black urban space that holds in it the potential for a post-colonial future for black people in contemporary metropolitan Vancouver (Compton, *After Canaan* 84). To use McKittrick's expression, Compton's poems "bring forth a poetics that envisions a decolonial future" for black people living in the contemporary metropolis ("Plantation Futures" 5). The visual poems in "RUNE" that endeavour to represent that imaginary black space are, as the author avows, "articles of ... [his] own creation" that either purposely "mimic" extant texts about Hogan's Alley or are outright "fabricat[ions]" of "fictitious" spaces and places the author imagined *might have* been part of the black community (113). Thus, the long poem becomes the missing archive of black urban Vancouver and part of "a [new or counter] plot" or story about black space in the city (118). Like the "Hogan's Alley Welcomes You" floral sign, the *Performance Bond* poems first dismantle the colonial narrative that maintains the fiction of British Columbian blacklessness and then invite readers-viewers to collaborate with the author in producing a new narrative of black history, space and presence in the city of Vancouver. Thus, *Performance Bond* is engaged in questioning the destruction of the black community—an integral step towards inserting

black spaces back into the contemporary urban landscape and the collective imagination. After all, as Nieves argues, in order to "protect[t] and preserve[e] a black past," it is important to first ask "what happens to sites with 'little pure architectural integrity' or with no physical remains whatsoever?" (86).The approach Compton takes in his work also aligns with McKittrick's argument that "by seriously addressing space and place in the everyday, through the site of memory and in theory and text, … [black subjects] …confront sociospatial objectification by offering *a different sense* of how geography is and might be lived" (92, italics added).

As the collection's title suggests, the poetry in *Performance Bond* is interested in a range of different bonds: shackles, alliances, contracts, friendships and so forth. One of those is the bond that connects the vacant plot of land alongside the Georgia Viaduct with the black community that used to exist in that urban space. "[C]oncerned with the legacy of the slave trade" and colonial rule in the Americas, the poems explore the various manifestations and consequences of racism, discrimination, segregation and other forms of Eurocentrism on the social, cultural, economic, political and geographic lives of the black diaspora in the early- to mid-twentieth-century city of Vancouver (*Performance Bond*, back jacket). McKittrick's recent writing, which is central to my overall project, is similarly interested in the "spatial-temporal continuity" between the colonial system of plantation slavery and the contemporary city as a way of understanding and contextualizing the ongoing disappearance of black urban space in the nation and the continuing anti-black violence that deprives and marginalizes black people and communities in ways that resemble strategies employed during plantation slavery ("Plantation Futures" 2). In "Plantation Futures," McKittrick argues that "the legacy of slavery ... both shape[s] and ... [is] part of the environment we presently inhabit"; in other words, even in postcolonial contexts like contemporary

Vancouver, colonial systems and "colonial logic"—a fully internalized and often unconsciously deployed way of thinking and reasoning—still determine how black people are "placed" in space, how black people and spaces are undervalued vis-à-vis non-black people and spaces and how the spaces black people inhabit are perceived as naturally producing violence, danger and disease (3). "[I]t is impossible," McKittrick further claims, "to delink the built environment, the urban, and blackness" from the colonial project and thus, by extension, from the contemporary city where colonized black people reside in the diaspora (2). Although the speaker in the first poem of Compton's collection, "Declaration of the Halfrican Nation," asks rhetorically "what is britannia / to me?" since it is "three continents removed" from North America, he concedes that "the wages / of empire"—the capture, enslavement, degradation and death of black people and spaces—are still visible in the Canadian nation's "race management" strategies that seek to re-cruit "more brown whites; entre- / preneurs only, [and] no more ... / tempered niggers" to Canada (16). Thus, the poem answers its own rhetorical question in order to make the point that the British Empire's imperial project and colonial legacy of "racism" still control actions and behav-iours at institutional and systemic levels in contemporary urban contexts (16). In fact, in the poem "Illegalese: Floodgate Dub," Compton writes that "Canada is" part of "the globalization / loop" (31) that connects the colonized—whether they are "Chinese migrants" or British subjects of India attempting to immigrate to Canada on the "Komagatamaru" steamship that was turned away at the Vancouver docks in 1914 or "runaway slaves ... [who] seep into Canada," as Thorn-ton and Lucie Blackburn did, from plantations in the southern United States—to the colonial sys-tems "back home" that are still "wielding remote control" over and influencing the lives of the racially marginalized in the city of Vancouver (30). Indeed, George L. Beckford reminds us in

the Introduction to *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World*, that even in the present day, the lives "of North Atlantic peoples are [still] closely related to the ... [lives] of Third World peoples, in many fundamental ways," not the least of which is via the spatialized, geographic racism of ideological imperialism (xxi). In "Plantation Futures," McKittrick argues that although the colonial "plantation [system], at least in part, ushered in how and where we live now, and thus contributes to the racial contours of uneven geographies" in the city, imaginative works, like Compton's poetry, "might ... [be able to] give it a different future" (4). In other words, McKittrick posits, reading ideological imperialism and its formal mechanisms of control— colonialism, racism and plantationism—through imaginative texts like *Performance Bond* (and theoretical texts like *After Canaan* and the HAMP website) "might also open up a discussion of black *life* within the context of contemporary global cities and futures" (5, italics in original). Thus I use McKittrick's writing on plantation theory and her plantation futures conceptual framework as well as Beckford's foundational historical-economic analysis of the plantation system to suggest a reading of Compton's poems that opens up a more hopeful and human(e) way of thinking about black urban space in Vancouver even though there is no contemporary equivalent to Hogan's Alley in the province. The speaker's declaration at the end of "Illegalese" that "people are not a flood, borders are not God given, / lives are not dollars, and Canada is not the sum of its exclusions," gestures to a different way of being that might lead to geographic arrangements that do not end in the dehumanization of black people or the destruction and erasure of black spaces and places from the Canadian landscape (32). Before turning his poetic gaze toward dismantling colonialism in BC, however, Compton further articulates the consequences for black and other visible minorities of the "spatial[-temporal] continuity be-

tween" the colonial past and the colonial present in Vancouver (McKittrick, "Performance Bond" 2).

In "Inlet Holler," Compton points to a theoretical and material plantation-to-city pipeline—an example of the "globalization / loop" I cite above from the poem "Illegalize"— wherein mostly colonized and racialized people are funneled out of situations of poverty and racism in their own countries and into analogous circumstances in British Columbia where, Compton writes, "the great ships ... runneth over" with "koreans, filipinos, chinese, greeks, arabs, russians / coming" to Canada to seek a better life that often does not materialize (20). The fact that the speaker, who describes himself in "Declaration" as "mixed-race" or "*touched*"—a term that also gestures to the idea that multiracial and visibly black people are both afflicted and an affliction—includes himself in this inventory of the oppressed, both reminds readers of the specificity of the plight of indigenous black people in the western city and enlarges the frame of reference of the collection's interest in the impact of the legacy of colonialism on all colonized peoples (16, italics in original). The speaker's syntactical transition in "Inlet Holler" from the first person plural to the first person singular: "*we* are workers / of the world / *we* never / speak" (20, italics added) to "*I* am a settler / *I* am uneasy" (21, italics added), underscores the Freudian "unhomeliness" of the city in which he was born—Vancouver—where his race makes him as much of an outsider in the nation as the immigrants who have recently "com[e] to sup at the same trough as" the speaker (20). In his article, "The New Yellow Peril," Glen Deer argues that Sherene Razack's work on the connection between space and aboriginal bodies "uncovers the hierarchies of power and violence that are embedded in white representations of territory" (25) to explain the mounting "[r]acialized tensions over space in Vancouver and Richmond" (21).

Compton's poetry is similarly concerned with the connections between race, space and power. When the speaker in “Inlet Holler” surmises that “this inlet seems no more mine than yours / or the indians who sell us salmon in the strip bars” (21), he gestures to the racial-spatial hierarchy that is still at work in contemporary Vancouver and argues that, as Deer puts it, “spatial competition is [not] separable from race” (25). Here, the speaker deplores the idea that “there is nowhere to go” in terms of changing this dynamic; the “RUNE” poems, however, do gesture to a potential path forward by dismantling the historical domination of space based on racial identity and perceived racial inferiority (21).

Achille Mbembe's writing on biopolitics and biopower, in his essay “Necropolis,” also connects historical colonial tyranny with contemporary manifestations of anti-black metropolitan violence and oppression. His examination of “late-modern colonial” expressions of domination is particularly relevant for the present study (27). The 1960s-1970s state-led destruction of Hogan's Alley exhibits some of the characteristics Mbembe identifies in other, more recent and categorical examples of necropolitical interference in the lives and spaces of racial and ethnic minority peoples. In “Necropolis,” Mbembe argues that “[a]ny historical account of the rise of modern terror needs to address [plantation] slavery, which could be considered one of the first instances of biopolitical experimentation” or, in other terms, the political-authoritarian control of and over human life and death (21). The poems in the “RUNE” section of Compton’s collection respond to the mid-century-modern violence of forced removal vis-à-vis the urbicidal destruction of black Hogan's Alley. As Fanon argues in *The Wretched of the Earth*, colonial occupation is always represented in terms of the “compartmentalization” of space through the enforcing of boundaries and barriers and the subsequent policing of the people living within certain racially delimited

spaces (39). Although Mbembe's interrogations focus mainly on instances of urbicide in Gaza, Kosovo and Africa, his theorizing on the political strategies of terror—othering, racializing, fetishizing, castigating, demonizing, infantilizing and so forth—used to destroy those communities and disperse so-called undesirable populations obtains in a discussion of the destruction of black urban spaces in Canada, like Hogan's Alley. These strategies amount to what Mbembe calls "[a]n orchestrated and systematic sabotage of the enemy's societal and urban infrastructure" or, more succinctly, "infrastructural warfare" that involves "critical ... techniques of disabling the enemy ... [like] bulldozing: demolishing houses and cities" (29). While the scale of destruction of infrastructure, cultural heritage, places of worship, homes and land—not to mention the murder of inhabitants—in places like Kosovo and Darfur, for example, exceeds the architectural and social demolition of Hogan's Alley, the state rationale for completely erasing black spaces from the urban landscape and the enduring psychological and totalizing effects on black peoples are analogous.

I gesture to Mbembe's writing on necropolitics as a way to underscore how what he calls "the repressed topographies of cruelty (the plantation and the colony in particular)" can still be detected in the ways in which black people are situated in Vancouver (40). As McKittrick points out, these "late-modern necropolitics of the present," like the destroyed urban spaces of Hogan's Alley in British Columbia and Africville in Nova Scotia during the same period, are "tied to the plantation and empire and violence" and can lead directly to what she calls "future-misery" ("Plantation Futures 5). I make the argument in the first chapter of this study that, for Austin Clarke's Caribbean-born characters, immigration to Toronto leads to what McKittrick calls a "freedom that is lifeless" because they are trapped in the theoretical and then cartographic neo-

plantation they unconsciously reproduce in the contemporary city (“Plantation Futures” 5). Thus, their “future-misery” *is* plantation Toronto in the literary present. But “a decolonial poetics” like Compton's, McKittrick’s work argues, “reads black dispossession as a 'question mark'” that generates “a critique of the very historical process that brought the Manichean working of the plantation to 'such heights of fulfillment'” (5). Confronted with the emptied and unmarked former black space of Hogan's Alley and the desire to “illustrate how black experience in BC can feel absurd” because it is both seen (as undesirable) and unseen (because erased), Compton's poetry is an aesthetic-creative response to an *actual* question posed by a friend (*After Canaan* 114). After the author revealed his despondency at “walk[ing] through what had once been Hogan’s Alley and find[ing] absolutely nothing that indicated that a black community had ever lived there,” his friend asked: “'What do you wish you'd found there'” in the empty space at the intersection of Main and Union streets? The ensuing poems interrupt or “punctuat[e] [the] postslavery violences” (5 “Plantation Futures”) of contemporary urbicide by offering a “retrospeculative” (*After Canaan* 116) imaginary version of Hogan's Alley that provides what McKittrick refers to as “a new discursive space” in and through which to articulate an alternative result to the “plantation-urbicide” equation Mbembe puts forth in “Necropolitics” (“Plantation Futures” 5). The space Compton's poetry produces “surprises” because, as McKittrick argues in *Demonic Grounds*, “black in/and Canada ... are ... [still] unexpected and concealed” (92). By revealing the narrative behind and beneath the hidden black space in contemporary Vancouver, Compton first challenges the nation's reputation for welcoming difference by shedding light on the failings of official Canadian multiculturalism and then resituates blackness within the city from the outside.

In the Introduction to *Blackening Canada: Diaspora, Race, Multiculturalism*, Paul Barrett suggests that writers like Dionne Brand, Austin Clarke and Tessa McWatt are engaged in a literary project of "blackening" Canada by "producing nation from the shifting grounds of the diaspora" (13). Soldering Rinaldo Walcott's notion of "blackening" to Lily Cho's concept of "becoming diasporic," Barrett argues that the work these and other black writers do "queries, rewrites, and intervenes in the nation" by calling into question our vaunted multicultural tolerance and "blackening" the nation from the position of the diaspora, a paradoxically inside-outside perspective (24). In my analysis, I argue that Compton's blackening of Vancouver can be interpreted in two ways. First, the poetry recreates Hogan's Alley by "faking" archival documents that attest to its presence and place black people back in the city, thereby blackening an ostensibly white Vancouver: its history, its archives, its geography. Second, by revealing "'the racist laws, policies, practices, and ideologies that have shaped Canadian social, cultural and economic institutions for three hundred years,'" the poetry "blackens" the province's and the nation's (false) reputation as an unproblematically multicultural, convivial, equitable and welcoming space for black and other racially, ethnically and socially marginalized peoples (qtd. in Deer 25). I use Barrett's work on blackening Canada from within the diaspora to help understand what Compton's poetry achieves in rewriting Hogan's Alley and re-blackening the
city of Vancouver.

Moving from the global to the local, the poetry in *Performance Bond* dismantles / "unmaps" the colonial project in order to represent the multicultural reality of British Columbia and reconstruct an imaginative version of black urban Vancouver in Hogan's Alley, a space the author calls "a foundational narrative of presence" (*After Canaan* 109). The challenge Compton under-

takes in the “RUNE” section is how to represent erased black urban space that is presently uninhabited, indistinguishable from other empty plots of land in the city and about which there is little extant archival information or first-hand accounts from former Alley residents or their descendants. Elaborating on his poetic strategy in the “Seven Routes” essay, Compton avers that he “was less interested ... in what it was actually like then, than in the *desire* to remember” (112, italics in original). Recognizing the inherent contradictions in “romanticiz[ing]” the place that many former inhabitants have said they “remember as a place they escaped from—a slum or, more gently, the humble origin out of which they happily ascended,” Compton is less interested in what Hogan's Alley was than in what it *meant* and, if left to flourish, what it may have *become* (109). While the poetic space he creates is, in part, the product of his own artistic and intellectual desire, the poems also engage readers in a collaborative reimagining and renarrativizing of the community; thus, Compton's poetic reconstruction of black space is a joint endeavour since readers participate in its reconstruction through various textual-reading strategies. The highly visual poetic archive of Hogan's Alley responds to the problem several scholars have raised of lost, missing and poorly-maintained official archives of black people and space in Canada and an ignorance or, worse, an indifference on the part of archivists about black histories. Peter Hudson writes in his essay “Natural Histories of Southwestern British Columbia” that “[e]ven the scant archives the city has on people of African descent in Vancouver seem forged” because they are so haphazardly preserved (20). For her part, while researching Canadian slavery several years ago, McKittrick was told by a Toronto archivist that “slavery did not occur in ... [Toronto] and that blacks did not reside in the city of York (now Toronto) until the 1950s” (*Demonic Grounds*

93). In their paper, "'It is noh mistri, wi mekin histrie': Telling Our Own Story: Independent and Community Archives in the UK," Andrew Flinn and Mary Stevens argue that "the endeavour by individuals and social groups to document their history, particularly if that history has been generally subordinated or marginalized, is political and subversive" (3). The visual-concrete "RUNE" poems meet this definition; so does the physical/virtual HAMP archive, simply by virtue of "extending" what Jeannette A. Bastian and Ben Alexander call "traditional boundaries of recordness" or, in other words, by broadening—and in some cases shattering—the standard framework of orthodox archival narratives and the ways in which they are collected, documented and housed ("Communities and Archives" xxiii). The floral graffiti welcome sign is an especially provocative "political and subversive" gesture given the inherently seditious nature of the guerilla art form which is, as one critic puts it, "a[n] [artistic] response to the perceived takeover of public [urban] space by commercial interests" ("Fine Art") and thus carries with it "a healthy dose of anti-establishment sentiment" (Zandberg). The decision to plant the sign on an "unofficial space … not named by the city, but named" (HAMP website) by the former inhabitants of Hogan's Alley resembles the modus operandi behind some of the "RUNE" poems that were created in equally subversive and transgressive ways—which I discuss further on in this chapter—and make similarly overt political statements about the destruction and takeover of black urban space by hostile, racist and profit-driven government interests and institutions. The "RUNE" poems serve as proof of black presence and compose part of a new archive of black urban space. They are "innovative black diaspora practices that ... spatialize acts of survival" (McKittrick "Plantation Futures" 2) and reimagine the city of Vancouver on different terms— terms that acknowledge the presence of black people and refuse "the patriarchal slave-owning genealogy of

authority" in its post-colonial form which continues to wield power over the spatial politics of contemporary urban Vancouver (Mirzoeff 479).

In *Performance Bond's* eponymous poem, the speaker reminds readers that even though "[i]t's sun / down in the Empire, and time has done / gone by" it is important to remember the history of British imperialism "because those who don't remember / repeat" it ("Performance Bond" 42). The speaker's invoking of this particular past and the ensuing mini history lesson on British Columbia's colonial history echo the urgent lecture Sagaboy delivers in Austin Clarke's short story "They Heard a Ringing of Bells" on the colonial history of the Caribbean plantation and the need to "comprehend the piece o' histries" that led to the emergence of the West Indian plantation system and created the predicament in which the immigrant characters in that story find themselves in the contemporary city of Toronto (18). Both texts begin by looking back at the colonial past as a way to understand and explain why black people (and other colonized groups) occupy such a precarious position in the metropolitan present.

In the first stanza of the third section of "Performance Bond," Compton's speaker observes that, despite the fact that the presence of indigenous peoples in the province predates the arrival of white explorers-settlers from the European continent, "[t]he history of BC is the history of whiteness / performing as the watcher / unaffected by the colour it watches, ignores, / and watches" (43). The speaker's remark introduces several key ideas in Compton's writing— such as history, race, space, the complexity of seeing and so on—that can be better understood in the context of two theoretical strands of thought. In "Plantation Futures," McKittrick argues that the constructing of the geographies of continental Africa and America as "uninhabitable" and "inferior" is the colonial process through which "the geographic (non)location ... [of] the plantation

emerged" (6). People who were indigenous to those ostensibly unliveable and uninhabited/able geographies were assumed to be ignorant and savage and therefore unable and unfit to manage their own lives or the lands on which they had always lived. The colonial response to this puzzle was to enslave the inhabitants and "transfor[m] [the territory] into profitable colonial outposts and settlements" (6). Importantly, McKittrick goes on to argue that

"[t]he geographic process *after* the rush to colonize the lands of no one unraveled into New World cultural exchanges that settled into a rigorous nonhomogeneous human model: geographies for white men, white women, indigenous men, indigenous women, black men, and black women" (6, italics added). Fanon first made this point in *The Wretched of the Earth*, where he writes of "the system of compartments" that characterizes the colonial world (37). "The colonial world is a world divided into compartments," he argues, "of native quarters and European quarters, of schools for natives and schools for Europeans" and so forth (37). British Columbia's demographic and cartographic arrangements were and continue to be, Compton's speaker suggests, conceived according to the compartmentalizing schemas Fanon and McKittrick propose. In "Performance Bond," for instance, "whiteness" is theoretically, literally and textually elevated (the word is placed above and set off from the word "colour" in the same stanza which is positioned in the centre of a line) above blackness as it alternately surveys and "ignores" people of colour who are geographically confined-compartmentalized and kept under control by "the watcher" (43). The white "watcher['s]" impassive, authoritative and "common sense" stance as it surveils "the watched" underscores the idea that "black geographies ... were designated as incongruous with humanness" and thus in need of constant surveillance, supervision and management ("Plantation Futures" 6). Further, the speaker's contention that the white gaze also "ignores" the

presence of black bodies in the province reinforces Compton's argument in *After Canaan* that several recently published histories of Vancouver completely overlook "Vancouver's black community" effectively re-erasing it from the province's history altogether (83). Although the second stanza in this section of the poem suggests a shift in the "human model" McKittrick describes, which I discuss in some detail below, the "history of whiteness" in the first stanza establishes a critical baseline against which Compton compares the progress or lack of progress the province has made toward changing that colonial schema. Further, the suggestion that a pervasive historical whiteness "performs as the watcher" and "watches" people of "colour" exerts what Mirzoeff calls "the authority of visuality" over those upon whom it gazes (474); this approach, he suggests, has its origins in the same historical moment "through which the plantation emerged" ("Plantation Futures" 6).

In "The Right to Look," Mirzeoff draws a distinction between what he calls "looking"—an intimate, benign, friendly or even amorous action—and "visualizing"—a strategic and political act of scopic authority over those being surveilled. Whereas looking validates the subjectivity, agency and discreteness of the other, visualizing reduces the subject to the status of object and, as a strategic practice, has its roots in what Mirzeoff calls "an old project[:] ... the visualization of history" (474). Further, Mirzeoff posits, as praxis, visualization is necessarily "imaginary, rather than perceptual, because what is being visualized"—an entire group, a people, a community, and so forth—"is too substantial for any one person to see and is [thus] created from information, images, and ideas." It makes sense then, as Mirzeoff goes on to argue, that "[v]isuality's first domains were the slave plantations, monitored by the surveillance of the overseer" (475). In *Persistent Poverty*, Beckford reminds us that "the plantation system was an integral part of the

political colonization of tropical America and tropical Asia" (4). The fact that plantations and their segregated slave populations were "set up for the benefit of the metropolitan colonizers" (4) who often did not set food on the plantation suggests that, like a general in charge of a battle-field, planters would have categorized spaces and people based "on information supplied by sub-alterns ... and ... [their] own ideas and images" of the tropical spaces and people rather than on having actually looked at those spaces and people (Mirzeoff 475). Unlike the act of "looking," which "begins at a personal level with the look into someone else's eyes to express friendship, solidarity, or love," visuality dominates, racializes and categorizes the objects of its perception (473). Thus, "the autonomy claimed by the right to look is ... opposed by the authority of visuality" (474) which has become, Mirzoeff suggests, "a discursive practice for rendering and regulating the real that has material effects" on the individuals and groups it "classifi[es]," "separat[es]" and "aestheticiz[es]" (476).

In *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Species*, Michel Foucault characterizes visuality as the bridging of the gap between, on the one hand, "language" and the "observing gaze" and, on the other hand, "the things observed" and "words" for the purpose of classifying those things; a process he refers to as "the nomination of the visible" (132). Similarly, Mirzeoff argues that "[t]his nomination was founded in plantation practice from the mapping of plantation space to the identification of cash-crop cultivation techniques and the precise division of labor required to sustain them" (476). For instance, although it conceived of its mission in the colonies as righteous and benevolent, "British imperial visuality" (475) or, in Foucaultian terms, British "nominati[ng] of the visible" in the colonies during the period of European expansion is the source of what McKittrick refers to as "a '*new* symbolic construct of race'" that "organized

much of the world according to a racial logic" wherein "the lands of no one were carved up to distinguish between and regulate the relations of indigenous, nonindigenous, African, and colonial communities" ("Plantation Futures" 6, italics in original). McKittrick's "racial logic" or "plantation logic" (3) is, then, analogous to Mirzoeff's "complex of visuality" and Foucault's "nomination of the visible": all three systems are based on the "classifying, separating, and aestheticizing" of colonized bodies and spaces along racial lines (476). Compton's poem argues that "visualizing," "nominating" or "racial logic" is at play in the compartmentalizing of space and segregating of inhabitants in British Columbia along a Du Boisian colour line wherein, the speaker notes, "[i]t's a crime / to ... colour / outside / the lines, to ... confound / the order ... [and] the border" (43) established by the Mirzoeffian "complex of visuality." To the watcher, the "unrestrained, / [and] uncontained" bodies of colour exceed the borders of nation and whiteness and humanness and are thus "crim[inal]" bodies and a threat to the boundaries that maintain whiteness and/in nation (43). Although the speaker goes on to suggest that "the history of colour / ... changes BC" and "changes the [white] watchers in the shadows" because it "*assimilates* / ... / ... whiteness" thereby gradually changing the colour of British Columbia (43, italics added), Compton's entire collection is a reflection on and reaction to the fact that, as McKittrick puts it, "the uninhabitable still holds currency in the present and continues to organize contemporary geographic arrangements" like those in Vancouver, despite the ongoing process of cultural assimilation ("Plantation Futures" 6). That model's ability to withstand change in the contemporary setting of the Canadian city is due, in part, to the extent to which its ideological tenets have become normalized geographic and/or spatial patterns.

In a discussion of the three components—"classifying, separating, and aestheticizing"—that characterize the systemic mode of visuality employed to map the spatial boundaries of the colonial plantation and surveil the enslaved black bodies that performed its labour, Mirzeoff argues that the widespread, routinized and normalized implementation of the first two components—classifying and separating—created a sense of their aesthetic fitness and legitimacy (476). Classifying and separating spaces, tasks, people and techniques along racial lines became an integral part of the normal procedures of the plantation system. The visibly segregated spaces, places and people exerted its own logic, making "this separated classification seem right and hence aesthetic" (476). Pointing to Fanon's theorizing in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Mirzeoff suggests that "such repeated experience generates an 'aesthetic of respect for the status quo'" and thus there is little significant resistance to the established pattern, however illogical or doctrinaire it may be (476). "Aesthetic expressions of respect for the established order," Fanon posits, "serve to create around the exploited person an atmosphere of submission and of inhibition which lightens the task of policing considerably" (38).

In "Performance Bond," Compton draws attention to (and eventually challenges) the ways in which the "status quo" or "established order" or, as he names it in the poem, "whiteness," is still adhered to and normalized in the present: "it is universal because it is without perimeter," the speaker notes (45). This boundless, boundary-less, generalized and normalized whiteness has, the speaker argues, "accumulated an epidermis" to protect itself against the black "perimeter" it watches. The effortlessness of the authority whiteness exercises in its surveillance of people of colour is captured in the speaker's enumeration of its qualities:

The definition of whiteness is invisibility;

it is because it is not;
it is universal because it is without perimeter;
its perimeters are that which is not (non-);
whiteness is the camera;
whiteness is the eye that creates the panorama;
whiteness encompasses;
whiteness, if seen, implodes. (45)

Further, the repetition of the word "whiteness" five times, the use of the pronoun "it" / "its" that takes the place of the noun "whiteness" three times in an eight-line stanza, as well as the speaker's insistence that the geographical and human patterns of segregation in British Columbia are "histor[ical]" and thus customary, underscore the power and tenaciousness of the status quo (43). Contravening "the [naturalized and hierarchical] order" or "cross[ing] ... / ... the border[s]" established and policed by the historical authority of whiteness, the speaker in "Performance Bond" insists, has the same consequences for black people now as it did "half a century" ago—a gesture to the McKittrickian spatial-temporal continuity between the colonial past and the present: the past is / in the present (45). For instance, in the first two stanzas of the poem "The New Station," the speaker recounts the repercussions for two black men who, in the eyes of the white watcher, committed the offense of crossing the racial border and thereby disregarding the status quo or established racial order in Vancouver. Both "Clarence Clemons, a black longshoreman" and "Kary Taylor, a black dentist" were "beaten" by police officers for the "crime" of being with a non-black woman (150). Clemons, the speaker recounts, was "beaten to death … / … in [an] alley" in the early 1950s because "the / [white] officers objected to his common law marriage to a white woman" and, more than four decades later, Taylor was badly beaten when the police "saw

a black man in a nice / car with an Oriental female" and assumed "it was / possibly a prostitute-pimp situation." "The New Station" underscores the tyranny of the status quo that persists across time and space; however, it also raises several other salient issues. First, as the third stanza suggests, the status quo in Vancouver is slowly changing: four of the speaker's "high school buddies ... / ... all of them Asian" eventually "became Lower Mainland police officers" (150)—a turn of events that could not have been tolerated by the whiteness that policed the "perimeters" of the spatial-racial borders of the British Columbia portrayed in the first stanza of the third section of "Performance Bond" (45). Next, as the speaker in the eponymous poem suggests, "[t]he multicultural thin[g]" happening in Vancouver "changes the watchers in the shadows, / the whiteness" so that, over time, "[t]he history / of whiteness *is* the history of colour / as it changes BC" (43, italics added). The speaker in "The New Station" calls this change "alchemical work" that not only "lightens the task of policing," but, to repeat Fanon's words, it shifts the balance of the Fanonian "established order" and offers a way forward out of the social and political miasma of the racialized status quo and the tyranny of the authority of white visuality (150). The speaker's subtle gesture to the medieval-magical process of transformation functions as an irreverent subverting of the quasi-scientific eugenics theory of improving the human race though racial purity. Finally, the last line of the poem offers a succinct elegy "[t]o the mixed / children they [Clemons and his partner Dolores Dingman] never got to beget" (151). The lament underscores one of the strategies Compton employs in the collection to decolonize Vancouver: the crossing of geographical, racial, spatial, literary-generic and other borders and boundaries to create other(ed) bonds. The "mixed children," like the "Asian" officers, "transform, / ... [and] translate" the city into something new (150). The comma at the end of the poem's last line—"children they never got to

beget,"—asks readers to consider what might have been had Clemons lived and he and Dingman produced racially mixed offspring and how they, too, may have helped to "transform" and "chang[e] BC" (151). The comma is, in other words, a refusal of the authority of visuality and a rejection of the "aesthetic of respect for the status quo" because it insists that the story is not static, is not over, that something follows the comma, that there is more to come. One of the possible scenarios Compton's comma points to is a (slightly less idealistic) version of Nicholas Hune-Brown's "utopian post-racial future" for the Canadian city which I mention in the Introduction to this study. Many of the poems in the remainder of the collection, especially those in the "RUNE" section, undertake a working out of

a range of possible versions of Hogan's Alley's history and black people's response to it, which I discuss at length further on in this chapter.

If, as Mirzeoff argues, "the right in the right to look acknowledges the patriarchal slave-owning genealogy of authority—and refuses it," we can understand Compton's poetic project in *Performance Bond* as one that acknowledges the colonial origins and legacy of "the history of whiteness" in British Columbia, and performs an aesthetic of *refusal* of the established order as it manifests itself in the contemporary city (479). Just as the floral graffiti rooted in the soil on the former site of Hogan's Alley functions as a defiant and democratic gesture against the "authority of visuality" by looking and enticing-encouraging readers-viewers to *look*—at the sign, the "un-inhabitable" space it points to, the erased history it represents, and so forth—the poems in the collection, especially those that are highly visual, are also, collectively, a poetic expression of "[t]he right to look [that] claims autonomy from this authority, refuses to be segregated, and spontaneously invents *new forms*" (476, italics added). The "new forms" of looking at black

space, black people and black history in “Performance Bond” constitute a “countervisuality” to the old project of colonial visuality that categorizes black spaces and people as “nothing to see here,” dangerous, non-human, chattel, slaves, invisible, and so on, and work to restore and reconcile blackness to British Columbia (495). “It is the performative claim of a right to look where none technically exists,” Mirzeoff argues, “that puts a countervisuality into play” (478). “[A]s time goes by,” insists the speaker in “Performance Bond,” the *perimeter* acquires eyes” and claims the right to look from “[t]he [imperial] eye in the sky” (45, italics added).

In “Nothing's Shocking: Black Canada,” the important fourth chapter in *Demonic Grounds*, McKittrick contends that “[w]ithin the context of Canadian historical geographies” there is “a dominant narrative ... which preserves a false legacy of whiteness by renouncing 'race' and racial concerns” (91). That legacy persists because it is aided by both official and informal government policies and institutions, historians, archivists, various media and other bodies that continue to adhere to the status quo because that established political, social and economic order perpetuates an ideological position that helps maintain the universal whiteness—and the power it allows—Compton names in “Performance Bond.” Deer probes the power of media and other popular interpretations of social relations in racially mixed communities to foment unrealistic public fears, collective paranoia and intolerance in his writing on Richmond, BC, adding that these kinds of racialized “'discourses work to repress, marginalize, and invalidate others'” as they naturalize “Anglo-European Canadian entitlement to space” (25). In the case of Vancouver, the nationalistic and jingoistic tone the media employed in its representations of Hogan's Alley (along with other published and anecdotal histories of Vancouver) resulted in not only the “eliding” of the presence of black people and black spaces in Vancouver but the altering of the carto-

graphic and demographic history of space in the province (Deer 25). The first poem in the *"*RUNE*"* section is a highly visual poetic response to the official discursive reaction to struggles over space and race in Hogan's Alley and underscores how the "history of whiteness" or authority of visuality constructs black people and spaces according to a colonial logic despite the mid-twentieth-century context of the conflict.

Aptly titled "BLIGHT," the first poem in "RUNE" operates at several different levels. First and most obviously, the use of all uppercase letters in the title suggests emphasis and, at the limit, given the social media age in which the poem was written, can be read as code for anger or disgust. As I discuss in greater detail below, this idea is borne out in a Canadian documentary on Hogan's Alley. Regarding the body of the poem, what is immediately evident visually are the sixteen blank spaces, indicated by the underscore sign, interspersed throughout the seven-stanza prose poem. For example, the first line reads: "When _____ take _____ pictures of _____, there are no people there" (113). The sixteen underscore signs visually prompt readers to fill in the blank spaces with their own words as they read in order to make up / make sense of the poem; in so doing, they become unwitting collaborators in the writing of the poem and thus in Compton's new history of Hogan's Alley. Interestingly, the author writes in the prose essay "Seven Routes" that:

> In a city like Vancouver, where there is an absence of a *place* that black people can regularly find each other, Black History Month has become instead a *time* to do so—at various sites, with varying focuses, and open to everyone. … these events are multicultural. And they are temporary zones in which the community can see itself, can conceive of

> itself as a 'community', can chart its political progress, and can consider the issues specific to it. (106, italics in original)

The underscore signs in "BLIGHT" provide readers with a similar opportunity as Black History Month does to its participants; that is to say, they invite readers to explore the "absence of … [black] *place*" within the organizing structure or "zon[e]" of the literary and to fill in those spaces in order to create a sense of black "community" that may have existed in the area. Aside from this literal-literary function, the sixteen underscore signs also serve the theoretical purpose of emphasizing or underscoring the empty white spaces between black words just as the floral welcome sign discussed in the opening of this chapter draws attention to the empty / emptied (black) space between the Georgia Street Viaduct and Union Street where Hogan's Alley was situated and which is currently considered unproblematically and naturally white space. In Compton's poetic vernacular, these blank spaces represent the holes and gaps in the incomplete official historical archive of Hogan's Alley that continue to resonate in non-fiction histories of Vancouver that re-erase Hogan's Alley from the urban landscape, written history and public memory. However, they also represent an opportunity, for Compton and readers alike, to fill in those spaces with their own version of black urban Vancouver history. In this sense, the spaces are not just indications of black absence but function, also, as opportunities to playfully make(up) the black archive, to create black presence or, alternately, to create what McKittrick calls "new forms of human life" ("Plantation Futures" 2).

In her paper, "The Site of Memory," American writer and scholar Toni Morrison describes the imaginative process of "fill[ing] in the blanks that the slave narratives left" in order to arrive at a fictional account or facsimile of the forgotten and erased lives of African-American

slaves and the spaces of American slavery (113). Naming her methodology "literary archeology," Morrison explains that, "on the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey [imaginatively] to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply" and which have been "deliberate[ly] excis[ed] … from the records" (Morrison 112; 111). As I recount in the Prologue to this study, Karolyn Smartz Frost employed *literal* archaeological methods along with extrapolation to piece together the forgotten history of African American former slaves and Toronto city-dwellers, Thornton and Lucie Blackburn. Likewise, as I discuss in my Introduction, McKittrick describes a similar archaeological process in "Plantation Futures" where anthropologists and scholars re-assembled the material remains of thousands of former black slaves buried in an un-marked mass grave in New York City in order to glean a sense of their lives and deaths under / in slavery. Reading (and co-writing) "BLIGHT" entails a similar kind of literary archeological-anthropological process in order to reconstruct what Compton calls the "imagined elements of the history that never" was (*After Canaan* 112; 113). The collaborative fill-in-the-blanks exercise forces participants to occupy several positions simultaneously, including reader, writer, archeologist and historian, to name a few; in other words, they help to build the new archive of Hogan's Alley and thus have a shared stake in its history and the reshaping of the collective history of the nation. The fact that the poem is literally unfinished or incomplete and relies on the reader's collaboration for its completion challenges the ideological hegemony of so-called authoritative constructs of history and locates Compton's work (and the reader's collaboration) outside of those troubling paradigmatic methods of history-making.

At yet another level, the title "BLIGHT" recalls the term "urban blight" which has become an integral part of the ubiquitous polarizing vernacular of contemporary urban renewal and redevelopment debates in North America and beyond. In her study of the mid-1990s redevelopment of Toronto's Yonge-Dundas Square in *The Moral Economy of Cities: Shaping Good Citizens* (2006), urban planner-turned-sociologist, Evelyn S. Ruppert, argues that the anxiety over "socially and economically … 'blighted'" areas has led to entire "discourses of fear and urban decline" that construct economic, gender and racial "[d]ifference … as overwhelming and dangerous, as something to be excluded or segregated where possible – indeed, as something to be feared" (39; 42). As case in point, in one local BC newspaper article of the day on Hogan's Alley, the reporter refers to the community no fewer than three times as "a breeding place for crime" (Stepler 21 April 1938). As Ruppert further argues, "[t]hrough discourses of fear, agents seek to create physical or symbolic boundaries, walls, and fences to ensure security"; to be sure, Ruppert is referring to the security of the white people within the sealed off structure from ostensible threats posed by the black people kept at bay beyond the constructed architectural and theoretical borderlines (42). In the case of Hogan's Alley, the ideologically charged urban blight discourse was used frequently and disparagingly by various media outlets and city officials to describe the physical state of the site and the supposedly loose moral condition of its inhabitants, thereby generating fear in the larger community and justifying the Alley's eventual destruction. As I mentioned briefly above, the poem "BLIGHT" can be understood as a direct response to a 1964 National Film Board of Canada (NFB) documentary, entitled *To Build a Better City*, about what it terms "the problem of blighted areas" in Hogan's Alley (*Build*). A link on the HAMP website that takes users to a site where they can view the documentary in its entirety underscores

the convergences between the varied generic expressions of Compton's overall project—civic engagement, social justice, literary expression, electronic archive, urban-guerrilla art, and so forth—and makes clear the fact that the poem speaks back directly to the film, and thus the state; in other words, the two are in conversation with each other.

Co-presented by the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation,[9] a federal agency with a long history of funding urban renewal projects in Canadian cities—including Toronto's ill-conceived Regent Park—and the City of Vancouver, the film immediately, unselfconsciously and authoritatively establishes the colonial imaginary and visuality that has produced a homogeneous urban landscape. The film accomplishes this sense of imperial sovereignty with a close-up shot of a statue of "Captain George Vancouver, commander of His Britannic Majesty's ships *Discovery* and *Chatham*, [who] sailed through the entrance to Vancouver's harbour on the thirteenth day of June 1792 (*Build*)."[10] The cinematic techniques that the director employs, such as specific camera angles, the size and duration of the shots, lighting and sound, fast versus slow movements, and so forth, have a significant influence on the many levels of meaning the documentary produces. For instance, against an upbeat soundtrack the narrator, former veteran CBC journalist George McLean, extols the contributions of industry and "the ingenuity of man" in the constructing of the city as the camera pans across a glistening skyscape of apartment buildings, office high-rises, industry towers and multi-lane overpasses (*Build*). "Vancouver's ever-changing skyline [is]," McLean affirms in a light, optimistic and confident voice, "a symbol of its civic progress" (*Build*). With this last declaration, the music stops abruptly and the camera angle de-

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[9] The Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation was renamed the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation in 1979.

[10] George Vancouver used both Royal Navy survey brigs, the HMS Discovery and the HMS Chatham, on his 1791-1795 exploration of the North American west coast. They served as both warships and merchant vessels.

scends precipitously as though in free-fall from the top of a cluster of soaring, sun-dappled, white high rise buildings to linger, in brooding silence, on a grouping of low-slung, modest, wood-sided, brown-toned, single-family homes in Hogan's Alley that sit directly in the shadow of the Le Courbusian "Radiant City" and squarely in the path of the city of Vancouver's ostensible "civic progress." Out of this dramatic silence, McLean's now dire voice intones:

> *BLIGHT!* … is death to a city. And these dwellings, built with such hope and care at the turn of the [twentieth] century [by white inhabitants], are dying board by board and the property they occupy dies with them. *Most* of Vancouver is kept strong and healthy through the *normal* process of land and building renewal. But in areas such as this, nothing happens except dilapidation, and decay gets worse each year. Property values fall and *BLIGHT* is the result. (*Build*, emphasis inferred)

As the camera lens idles on the modest dwellings in the Alley, the narrator poses several rhetorical questions: "What does it cost," he asks, "to police this area? To provide social assistance, fire protection and water? Are sufficient taxes collected from this area to pay for these services?" (*Build*) The racist and presumptuous narrative strategy is made clear when the putative answers to the questions align with the documentary's conclusion: the cost of maintaining Hogan's Alley far outweighs the benefit of destroying it.

McLean's narration sets up an overtly racist dialectic between the so-called "strong … healthy … normal," "civic" and "progress[ive]" white part of the city and the "blighted," "dying," "dea[d]," "dilapidate[ed], and decay[ing]" black space of Hogan's Alley. The moralizing, racializing, medicalizing and fetishizing undertones of the narrator's language (not to mention the camera angles, music and other cinematic devices) clearly situate black people and the

spaces they inhabit as diseased, contagious, malignant and menacing threats to the security and civic-mindedness of the so-called "normal" or white city of Vancouver. Further, the alliterative structure in the passage I cite above which employs the harsh-sounding "d" consonant, emphasizes the documentary's unspoken cruel, racist message and helps maintain the tense mood it strives to create in relation to black city-dwellers. In "Memories of Africville," Nieves argues that one of the most contentious elements in the ongoing debate about reparations and restorative social justice for marginalized communities and groups is "the 'standard and narrow definition of what is "significant"'" in terms of the architectural landscape of black communities—the "homes, places of worship, and schools"—that gets demolished and plowed under in "acts of racial hatred and violence" that characterize state-led attacks on black space (82). *To Build a Better City* systematically undermines the value of black spaces and places in Vancouver by applying a hierarchy of value to the urban architecture which accords some places and spaces (vertical, shiny, metallic, newly constructed, dense, individualist) a high standard of significance while others (horizontal, dark, organic, heritage, family-oriented / collective) are deemed primitive, natural, insignificant and, therefore, expendable. In his article, "The Architect as Totalitarian: Le Corbusier's Baleful Influence," Theodore Dalrymple argues that urban architect Le Corbusier's Purism-modernist vision of the city involved "'cleaning and purging'" it in order to build "'a calm and powerful architecture'" whose centrepiece was a series of self-contained concrete, steel and plate glass monoliths (qtd. in Dalrymple, para. 5). That is the vision that architects and city planners implemented in mid-twentieth-century Vancouver. Interestingly, Dalrymple points out that the city of Stockholm first rejected Le Corbusier's designs but later architects implemented his plans and fairly "destroyed" the city by doing so (para. 5). The NFB

documentary would suggest that, in the same trend, Hogan's Alley was also "destroyed" when the city of Vancouver implementing a Le Corbusian vision of urban architecture and city life—a vision which, at its core, expresses a utopian or Edenic aesthetic within which blackness and other kinds of otherness are antithetical. As Nieves cautions, "as long as we continue to privilege structures built by and for European[-descended]" people, "black … communities and historic places … will remain marginalized" (83).

The language of disease that McLean uses in the documentary to describe black spaces and bodies recalls Morrison's argument in "City Limits, Village Values: Concepts of the Neighborhood in Black Fiction," that "[b]lack people are generally viewed [by white people] as patients, victims, wards, and pathologies in urban settings, not as participants" (37). This language of disease, coupled with the deathly silence of the NFB soundtrack as the camera angle expands from a close up view of one "dying" black home to a wide angle shot of the entire "decaying" black neighbourhood, exposes the documentary's—and thus the nation's—deliberate strategy to undermine, malign and marginalize the black community by suggesting to viewers that, if left to fester, one "dying" black home and its inhabitants will spread like a contagion and infect or contaminate the entire (healthy and white) city of Vancouver. By contrasting what Ruppert calls "images of decline and decay, of the bad city, [against] images of progress and reform, of the good city," the documentary makes the city's urbicidal action appear almost benevolent—like amputating a festering limb to save the otherwise healthy body (4). Walcott makes a similar point about racializing or fetishizing language in his article, "Repeating

Histories, Black Bodies and Forensic Forms," on Kenyan-born American collage artist Wangechi Mutu's series of distorted African/black female figures in her *Forensic Forms* collage series.

Arguing that "[t]he science used to mark the African/black body as non-Human is a science of spectacle," Walcott suggests that what he calls the language of "'scientizing' was and continues to be used to mark African/black bodies and their environments as never sufficient or as always in excess" (30-40). The language of disease used in the NFB documentary is contiguous to the language of science that Morrison, Walcott and others identify inasmuch as the documentary also positions the black bodies and spaces of Hogan's Alley as being both too much (too black, foreign, different, dangerous) and too little (insufficiently human, not "*normal*") for Vancouver. *To Build a Better City* clearly suggests that Vancouver's black population and "the blighted area" it occupied stood in the way of the city's unrelenting march toward supposed "civic progress." In the "Seven Routes" essay, Compton reveals that the city's infrastructural freeway plan for Hogan's Alley only "collapse[d] … after its scope, formulated in secret by the city council, was revealed and subsequently fought against by local residents" (84). "BLIGHT" challenges the NFB documentary's "authoritarian planning ideology" and its sanitized version of history; its revised and collaborative version of the destruction of Hogan's Alley functions as a counterpoint to the official government version in the NFB documentary (84). Much of the poem's textual impact (as opposed to the effect it has when "read" alongside the NFB documentary) is conveyed by its striking visual elements, as I argue above. Like "BLIGHT," many of the other visual poems in the "RUNE" section—"Lost Found Landmarks of Black Vancouver," "Whither Hogan's Alley?" "From Portals: East Vancouver Oral Histories," "Forme and Chase," which I discussed briefly above, "Vividuct" and "Getto Fabulous Ozymandias," in particular—also rely heavily on both form and content, word and image, to query the uneven ways in which the black urban history of Vancouver has been written and un-written. These "RUNE" poems

distinguish themselves from those in Compton's preceding poetry collection by their reliance on the interplay of textual and visual elements to generate a heightened meaning that is greater than the sum of either part.

Theorist Willard Bohn considers the "symbiotic relationship between word and image" to be the centerpiece of visual poetry which he defines as "poetry that is meant to be seen" because it "possesses a pictorial as well as a verbal aspect" (14; 13). The multidimensionality Bohn refers to is also an integral aspect of the provocative Vancouver Flower Brigade project whose heightened meaning is produced by the symbiosis between its terrestrial, visual, artistic and linguistic aspects. As Richard Kostelantez argues, visual poetry is at the leading edge of the avant-garde movement in literature because it "transcends current conventions [such as rhythm, rhyme, simile, metaphor, and so on] in critical respects" (3). In addition, according to Bohn's paraphrasing of Jean-Pierre Goldenstein in *Reading Visual Poetry*, visual poetry "represents the most successful attempt to free poetic discourse from its linear constraints" (13). Compton's visual poems argue against the ostensibly straightforward, uninterrupted and conflict-free trajectory of the emergence of the city promote. As well as challenging the notion of linearity at the level of the line, another important way that Compton deemphasizes the linear-temporal sequence in "RUNE" is through pagination. This particular poetic choice mimics the lived experience of black people and the trajectory of black spaces and places in Canada which, as the destruction of Hogan's Alley and Africville—and the many smaller desecrations of black spaces and bodies in the nation attest—rarely follow a straight path because they are interrupted and undermined by various state interventions.

The entire collection including most of the "RUNE" section is traditionally paginated in consecutive ascending order beginning with the "Acknowledgements" on page 9 and finishing with the last page of written text on page 156. However, the two most strikingly visual poems in the collection," "Landmarks" and "Whither Hogan's Alley?"—which I discuss in more detail later in this chapter—are unnumbered. The lack of pagination separates "Landmarks" and "Whither" sequentially / linearly, spatially and aesthetically from the poems on the numbered pages. Because they are not paginated like the other pages in the collection, the visual poems on the unnumbered pages also convey the sense that they are photocopies of extant works from an outside archival source that have been inserted into "RUNE" rather than written by Compton himself. This strategy serves two related purposes: it suggests the ease with which history can be invented and manipulated (a pristine and innocent white Vancouver history and a diseased and criminal black Vancouver history, for instance) and it gives the poems, and thus the rest of the section, the impression of historical / archival veracity and authority. That the visual poems appear to be reproduced photographs of "real" homes or businesses in Hogan's Alley and a "real" newspaper article, respectively, challenges the "truth" of the originals and encourages readers to question whether the copy or the original is a truer artifact. The ten unnumbered pages (nine in "Landmarks" and one in "Whither") suggest that the space and diaspora represented in the two visual poems do not fit seamlessly into a linear narrative about the knowability or transparency of black Canadian urban spaces, peoples and their complex histories. Breaking with other traditional poetic conventions in the visual "RUNE" poems emphasizes image over word and allows Compton to create greater impact and immediacy. By deemphasizing the conventional linear sequence of the pages in "RUNE," Compton frees the poetry to focus on spatial concerns and chal-

lenges the Western assumption that history necessarily follows a straightforward, direct and uncontested progression. Given Compton's interest in the politics of space and his literary aim of producing black space in Vancouver retro-speculatively, these formal choices, which stress the visual dimensions of Hogan's Alley and the disrupted, interrupted lives of black people and space, help lend the section its archival sensibility and verisimilitude. Representing Hogan's Alley through a series of visual poems is, then, especially significant given the project's archival thrust.

The visual poetry registers on another level that is directly connected to Compton's central thesis. "Landmarks," "Whither?" and several other visual poems in the "RUNE" section "creat[e] images that appear as photographs" of actual places, items and artifacts; as such, their verisimilitude allows readers to literally see and not just read about Compton's imaginary history of black Hogan's Alley (*After Canaan* 116). With respect to "Landmarks," given that the physical-material place that preceded Compton's poetic representation of the space is literally no longer there, the visual poem's poetic-photographic-archival map of black urban space in Vancouver becomes more real for viewers / readers than the actual space that came before it which, one may safely assume, most readers of Compton's work have never seen and will never see. In *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981; trans. 1994), his ground-breaking treatise on the relationship between symbols and reality, French theorist Jean Baudrillard uses an anecdote about map-making from a story written by Argentinean writer Jorge Borges to frame his theory of the simulacrum, a term first used by the Greek philosopher Plato to describe a false copy of an original. In Borges' short fable, "On Exactitude in Science," which is written in the style of a literary forgery, imperial cartography has become so exact that the map precisely replicates the size and

scale of the original territory which, over time, it eventually replaces. The map is so convincing in its details that it becomes a simulacrum of reality. Simply put, then, the simulacrum is a copy that has no original; or, in other words, it is a realistic (re)presentation of something that no longer exists. Baudrillard suggests that there are three "orders of representation" and each is associated with a particular time period. In the third order, which is associated with the postmodern age, the thing being represented actually comes before and, importantly, even *determines* the actual or original thing. These exact copies or "simulacra" of places, spaces and objects become so "hyperreal," Baudrillard suggests, that they eventually *become* the real in the minds of those seeing and interacting with them (3).

Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum converges nicely with Compton's efforts to retrospeculatively produce the urban space he imagines as Hogan's Alley but which he recognizes as his own "fake" image of the place and not the actual place itself although, for readers/viewers, it *is* the real place—a simulacrum of Hogan's Alley (*After Canaan* 117). According to Baudrillard, "'postmodern societies are organized around *simulation* and the play of images and signs'"; thus, he further argues, "'in the society of simulation, identities [of people and places] are constructed by the appropriation of images, and codes and models determine how individuals perceive themselves and relate to other people'" (qtd. in Kellner 90). "Fak[ing]"—to use Compton's term for his process—or simulating black spaces in "RUNE" that no longer exist is a poetic device that produces "an alternative image of a surviving Afro-Vancouver," as Compton has pointed out, but it is also a subversive political strategy that replaces the dominant version of history tainted by racist, anti-black sentiment and a desire for genealogical homogeneity with a more measured, complicated and heterogeneous one. In *After Canaan*, Compton explains the political purpose of

his poetic simulacrum of Hogan's Alley in the poem "Lost-Found Landmarks of Black Vancouver":

> One of my hopes is that readers will experience the sensation of acquiring the knowledge of a particular history and then will subsequently feel that history disappear from them with the realization that it is a fiction—a process of reading that *imitates* the conditions of the history itself, the sense of incredulity that our city seems to associate with its improbable black populace. (117, italics added)

In this scenario, then, even though the "particular history" readers believe they have discovered in their reading/viewing of the poems is revealed to be a fiction, a fake, given the misrepresentations of that history in mainstream media, the version of the black city Compton offers his readers (and the version readers help to create) is at least as real as, if not more real than, the distorted, exaggerated, racist and often jingoistic versions that still prevail in many historical accounts of the making of the city of Vancouver.

Compton's poetic prestidigitation is akin to the strategy celebrated Canadian artist and photographer, Arnaud Maggs, employs in the stark black-and-white portraits that compose much of his early body of work. Given the highly visual nature of many of the "RUNE" poems in *Performance Bond*, it is useful to compare the impetus and effects that Compton's visual poetry has on readers with those on viewers of Maggs' photographs. In "Designs on Life: An Interview with Arnaud Maggs," art critic and cultural journalist Robert Enright points out that, "[w]hile the work carries the designation of portraiture, it has the look of something else. Maggs wanted it read analytically," Enright argues, "which is why he chose the grid as an organizing structure" (41). Strictly speaking, the portraits are, individually and collectively, works of visual

art; however, when the individual prints are framed side-by-side in long rows within a grid, the viewer is encouraged to "read" the portraits in a linear fashion from left to right as one would read prose text written in Standard English. The viewers' expectations of what constitutes visual art are challenged by the artist's aesthetic choice. Of his most famous early work—*64 Portrait Studies*—Maggs has said, "'It's as if a machine could have done it … as if there's no photographer involved'" in the making of the art (qtd. in Enright, 43). Thus, Enright insists, "[s]eeing in the photographic world constructed by Arnaud Maggs, is not believing" because "[y]ou don't get what you see" (41). In this same sense, readers-viewers of the photographs in Compton's visual poem "Landmarks" do not get what they see either; instead, what they do get, Compton clarifies, are "'fake images'" (117) of "imagined" places (116) that were meticulously "designed" by a "visual artist" and then "staged" and "sh[o]t" by a professional photographer under Compton's direction (116). As Compton recounts in "Seven Routes," he and his collaborator and fellow trespasser, the artist/photographer Robert Sherrin, had to do "some tricky fence-climbing" and "explain[ing]" in order to access unauthorized spaces in and around the former site of Hogan's Alley to photograph the four private properties that appear in the eightpage "Landmarks" poem (116). A second collaborator, the writer and visual artist Mykol Knighton, "designed and made four hand-painted wooden signs" that announce each building's ostensible vocation: "*Strathcona Coloured People's Benevolent Society of Vancouver*: *227 Union Street;*" "*False Creek Moslem Temple*: *315 Prior Street;*" "THE FAR CRY WEEKLY: VOICE OF THE NEGRO NORTHWEST (*SINCE 1957*): *618 Main Street;*" and "*Pacific Negro Working Men's Association*: *221 East Georgia Street*" (*Performance Bond*). The four buildings were chosen, Compton clarifies, because they "*suggested* … these imaginary sites in and near Hogan's

Alley" (*After Canaan* 116, italics added). Interestingly, only the first site in the series was actually located in Hogan's Alley and was inhabited for almost a decade in the second quarter of the twentieth century by "Kansas-born African-American laborer Elijah 'Lige' Holman" (HAMP). Compton then affixed the signs on, beside or above each building's doorway with "industrial-strength double-sided tape" to stage the buildings before photographing them for the collection (116). Compton refers to the staged photographic sequence in "Landmarks" as "a poetic device" designed to produce "an alternative image of a surviving Afro-Vancouver" diaspora. That "alternative image" is, I argue, a simulacrum of Hogan's Alley. Like the floral graffiti sign welcoming visitors into a community that no longer exists physically or cartographically, then, the doorways of the "four imagined institutions" in "Landmarks" symbolically open into an imagined black space that "allegorize[s]" the actual place but ultimately remains a formal "experiment … with cultural memorialization as a representative act" (116; 117). Of added interest here is Compton's use of doorways in a way that is analogous to the doorways in Dionne Brand's general aesthetic vision of black life and space; a trope, in her poetics, that gestures to the unfinished history of blackness and to the invitation (to readers) to enter into a conversation about black life. Thus, both the HAMP welcome sign and the

"Landmarks" poem are subversive artistic expressions that challenge the conventions of standard discourse in their respective generic categories. Both are also examples of the complex and inventive way Compton makes space and place *perform* or "act" in order to elicit a particular response from readers / viewers; a response which, importantly, creates a bond—intellectual, artistic, social, political and emotional—between writer and reader. The poem is, then, a visual "'device'" that "allegorize[s]" a history and "experiment[s]" with notions of "representatio[n]" (116).

Enright's assertion that "looking [at Maggs's analytical portraits] is a continuous process of inventing abstraction" (41) is a useful way to think about looking at "Landmarks" as well as the other visual poems in the section. That which is abstracted—stark black-and-white portraits in Maggs's work of art and barren black-and-white buildings in Compton's poem—only becomes familiar when the creator of the image and its recipient find some common ground on which "we [might] understand the modes of representation with which … [the] photographs seem to be engaged" (Enright 41). In the context of a poem titled "Lost-Found Landmarks of Black Vancouver" which consists of four black-and-white photographs of built landmarks in black Vancouver, then, readers might rightly assume that the structures in the photos represent homes and other buildings that were an integral part of the physical, social and cultural architecture of black Hogan's Alley. In other words, "we assume we are in familiar territory" when we look at the images (Enright 41). But as Enright argues of Maggs's photographs, "Maggs wants us to partake of that familiarity and then he does everything he can to negate it." What Enright calls the "negat[ing]" of the familiar in Maggs's work is analogous to what Compton himself refers to—in the long passage I quote above—as the "disappear[ing]" of the knowledge of a particular history that we *think* we are seeing on the pages of the collection and are generally familiar with. As the contemporary Vancouver-based photographer Jeff Wall recently noted of his own postmodern, urban tableaux, "The Crooked Path," in a CBC Radio One podcast, the viewer is invited to "reinvent the subject" in the viewing of the art ("Crooked"). Compton invites readers to do the same—to "reinvent the subject" of his poem, Hogan's Alley—"in the viewing of the" visual poems they encounter in "Rune."

Referring to the author as "my forger-friend" in an essay that augured the work Compton would do more than a decade later in "RUNE," Peter Hudson confides that the two "joked of writing … [their] own histories of black Vancouver: forging documents, [and] parodying the discourse of poorly written syndicated columns and low-budget pamphlets" ("Natural Histories" 20). The poem "Whither Hogan's Alley?" which I discussed briefly earlier in this chapter, is an example of Compton's literary forgery and parody of a real newspaper column. The poem, which re-imagines an actual newspaper article titled "Hogan's Alley Fate at Stake" written by Jack Stepler and published in *The Vancouver Daily Province* newspaper in April 1939, looks like a photocopy of an actual newspaper article (*Performance Bond* 10). "Whither Hogan's Alley?" which Compton calls "a newspaper article of my own creation that appears … as if it were photocopied rather than fabricated," is one in a series of visual poems in "RUNE" that uses (art)ifice to re-imagine black urban spaces in different terms while drawing attention to the (equally) deceptive strategies journalists and city government officials employed to misrepresent the black community and justify Hogan's Alley's destruction. The *Province*, which "ran four articles about Hogan's Alley" in the space of one month in 1939, "had," along with other newspapers, "begun to represent the neighbourhood as a problem spot" (*After Canaan*, 91). In many of its articles on the black community, it used "a poor-bashing phraseology, showing a biased disdain for Hogan's Alley, and focusing on its abject status" (91). "Whither Hogan's Alley?"—Compton's "factitious" facsimile of Stepler's article—interrogates the subjectivity involved in the writing of so-called historical fact. According to Flinn and Stevens, "[t]hese 'recast' histories and their making challenge and seek to undermine both the distortions and omissions of orthodox historical narratives, as well as the archive and heritage collections that sustain them" (3).

Closely resembling the layout of a standard newspaper article complete with multiple columns of text, reliable sources and so forth, "Whither?" mimics the style, structure and cadence of the Stepler article in the tradition of a parody. Both articles have similarly attention-grabbing, sensationalized headlines (Stepler's reads: "Civic Body Inspects Scene of Long Criminal History" and Compton's reads: "Community or Hotbed of Criminality?"); both situate the neighbourhood cartographically "between Union and Prior streets;" both quote local residents and figures of authority; and both refer frequently to the "rundown tenements" (Compton) and "tumble-down shacks" (Stepler) of the Alley. There are, however, some key differences between the original article and Compton's re-imagining of the piece that are worth noting here. One of the most striking distinctions centres on the issue of voice. At the core of

Morrison's theory in "City Limits" where she discusses the limitations imposed on black citydwellers is her argument that, due to their racial status, "the city [does not] belong to [them]" and that they are "not … participants" in discussions about the fate of their own lives and communities (37). "Whither?" gives a voice to the black community of Hogan's Alley by quoting an ostensible black resident at length. The Stepler article, on the other hand, only briefly mentions a Hogan's Alley resident. Instead, in Stepler's piece, Carl Marchi, a well-known bootlegger and the so-called "mayor" of Hogan's Alley, is depicted in one of the three photographs that accompany the original article that are laid out above the headline. A middleaged, well-dressed and neatly-shorn Caucasian male, Marchi's visual presence in the *Province* article is as prominent as his voice. In the article, Marchi's full figure has been cut out of a photograph and superimposed over two wide-angle shots of the mostly-deserted streets of Hogan's Alley. His body is entirely surrounded by a gleaming white frame that creates a halo effect, making him appear to hover

benevolently and angelically above the "crime-breeding area" of which, the article tells us, he is the unelected but de-facto boss. His strategic placement in Stepler's collage creates a visual effect that enlarges and foregrounds Marchi while reducing the Alley (visually and in importance) depicted in the two larger background photos. The photographic landscape reinforces the idea conveyed in the article that blacks are excluded from the very decision-making processes that involve the future of their homes, livelihoods and community and need an overseer, like Marchi, to keep them in line. Although Marchi is characterized in the Stepler article as a stalwart advocate of Hogan's Alley who believed the community's bad reputation was mostly unwarranted, the fact that he held no legitimate office but is nevertheless given a space and voice of prominence, respect and authority by Stepler—and thus, presumably, by Stepler's and the paper's readership—further silences and infantilizes the adult black Alley residents.

In contrast, Compton's "factitious" article repeatedly cites "[l]ong-time resident Hadrian McCabe, a Negro and retired foundry worker" (115) as its major source of inside information about Hogan's Alley. Though the re-imagined article does not include photographs of the Alley or of individual black or other Alley inhabitants, its impact and verisimilitude are created through McCabe's confident, reasoned and often jocular voice. A full one quarter of Compton's article, penned by the humorously-named journalist Dickenson Foyle, is given over to the black elder whose measured, resolute, pragmatic, and at times philosophical, pronouncements on Hogan's Alley underscore a profound sense of kinship, community and tolerance. "'This place has its church people and its good-time people,'" reasons McCabe, "'just like everywhere else. Some of these buildings are raggedy, but most of them are clean and doing just fine'" (115). McCabe's voice of reason functions as a counterbalance to the voice of what Stepler calls "officialdom" but

which is more akin to fear- and hate-mongering, represented by the "city's departments of building and sanitation." Compton's re-imagined piece dismantles the us-versus-them binary that Stepler begins to set up in the first line of his article when he refers to Hogan's Alley as "a street of mystery to Vancouver's *gentle bred*" and that, "for the *average* citizen, Hogan's Alley stands for … squalor, immorality and crime" (italics added). While the Stepler article proceeds to "describe some of the neighbourhood's most sensational and gory murders," Compton's reimagining of Stepler's piece uses the character McCabe to shed light on the many "honest labourers, small business owners, families, and … church community … [that were] swept aside in … [Stepler's] crime-obsessed journalism" (*After Canaan* 92). By making the point that Hogan's Alley is "just like everywhere else," Compton, through the character McCabe, refuses the orthodoxies and fundamentalisms inherent in the position the Stepler article takes which pits the black inner city against the rest of (white, "gentle," "average") urban Vancouver. Further, by locating the problems that are said to be specific to Hogan's Alley—dilapidated buildings, unsavory characters, violence, and so on—in "the entire metropole," Compton expands the socio-economic problems of mid-twentieth-century Hogan's Alley to include the entire city, thereby diluting, normalizing and routinizing them (115). It becomes impossible, Compton insists in *After Canaan*, to isolate Hogan's Alley without also ghettoizing the entire city of
Vancouver. Race, then, the text argues, is at the heart of the black community's dissolution.

Compton does not re-imagine Hogan's Alley in the article as an urban utopia because the historical record, including the materials that have been amassed in the last two decades by members of HAMP, does not support such an interpretation. Rather his project, here and elsewhere in the collection, involves imagining what it would have taken to change the trajectory of

Hogan's Alley and therefore the fate of its black community. This idea resonates in the character Dickinson Foyle's final journalistic observation: "[T]he civic committee[']s] … probe will undoubtedly prove influential in future strategies for concretizing the neighbourhood's salvation" (115). Whereas Stepler's article concludes with what sounds like a *fait accompli* for Hogan's Alley and the surrounding areas—"demolition of … [Hogan's Alley's] slums will be of little value unless action is applied to the entire district" (*After Canaan* 92)—Compton's article hints at an alternative future for the city. What Compton does here resembles his real-life artistic intervention on the grassy incline of the George Street Viaduct as well as his history-defying, sly, playful and performative interventions in other poems in the "RUNE" section of the collection, especially "Lost-Found Landmarks of Black Vancouver," "Whither Hogan's Alley?" and "Veve." In playing with the historical record as he so often does in the poems, Compton is rearranging history by inserting black people and their voices back into it; in effect, creating a new and often playful history and archive for black Vancouver that both looks back and, simultaneously, looks forward. As Hudson points out, his and Compton's collegial jesting grew out of a genuine shared concern over the seeming ease with which black space was erased from the urban landscape of Vancouver and from the collective memory. "Even the scant archives the city has on people of African descent in Vancouver," Hudson laments, "seem forged … [because they are] [o]ften indexed without dates or the names of the journals in which they originally appeared" (20). The "failure of mainstream heritage organizations to collect, preserve and make accessible collections and histories that properly reflect and accurately represent the stories of all [members] of society" is, Flinn and Stevens assert, at the core of such individual and community efforts to create

and invent their own genealogies, stories and archives to commemorate those that have been lost, forgotten and buried (4).

Rinaldo Walcott characterizes this movement "backwards … [to] work out a history" ("Repeating Histories" 40) of black space in *Black Like Who?: Writing Black Canada* (2003), as a deliberate and imperative "mapping [of] a black Canadian poetics of space" (46). Such cartographically-driven literary endeavours are, Walcott insists, crucial since "historians and sociologists have not been able to furnish black Canada with a discourse that recognizes an almost five-hundred year past …" [.] Therefore "it is," Walcott goes on to argue, "up to those of us [like Compton, who are] engaged in other aspects of cultural work to articulate what that means" (46). While literary histories and other scholarly enterprises have their place, Walcott argues that "*imaginative works* often render much more complex and interesting constructions of our multiple historical experiences than other cultural forms" (46, italics added). As Angel David Nieves argues in his paper, "Memories of Africville: Urban Renewal, Reparations, and the Africadian Diaspora," "new strategies are needed … if we are to break free from the 'standard and narrow definition of what is "significant"'" (83). So while Compton's prose essays and the HAMP website reflect actual history, the "RUNE" poems—like the floral graffiti sign—often memorialize Hogan's Alley in transverse and oblique ways rather than "through realistic repre-sentation" (*After Canaan* 112). Compton's "RUNE" poems embody Walcott's theory regarding the value of "imaginative works" and get to the core of the question: "in what ways can and should a person … recall such a place" as Hogan's Alley when the place itself no longer exists? (112). The "RUNE" poems, like the seemingly innocuous floral graffiti sign, are important visual markers and signifiers of black space in a city, and country, that appears eager to forget its own

extensive black history, its complicity in the destruction of black spaces, places and histories and its continued efforts to conceal them.

The deliberate overlooking of British Columbia's black history in the examples discussed above has a contemporary literary corollary in West Coast-born writer Douglas Copeland's non-fiction book *City of Glass: Douglas Copeland's Vancouver* (2000). In his "Seven Routes" essay, Compton argues that Copeland "suggests Vancouver was untouched by the evils of twentieth century planning regimes" (83) when he writes that "[m]any of the factors that stripped the innocence away from other cities never occurred here [in Vancouver]: freeways were never built and a soul-free edge city never arose" (34). The book's subtitle perhaps speaks to a purely individual naïveté or socio-cultural myopia given the ready accessibility of facts proving that Hogan's Alley "*was* destroyed by the construction of the Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts, the completed first steps of a larger freeway plan that was ultimately stopped" and that the "viaducts *were* part of an urban revision that had evolved out of earlier 'slum clearance' endeavours" in the East End of Vancouver and the Downtown Eastside (*After Canaan* 84, italics added).[11] Quashing Coupland's assertion of Canadian exceptionalism, Compton compares Vancouver's "urban renewal" plan to the American strategy that celebrated writer and social activist James Baldwin famously referred to "Negro removal"—a play on the term "urban renewal" (After Canaan 104). Despite these realities and the fact that concrete remnants of the halted freeway project sit, still, like hulking reminders of the city's ill-conceived and secretly-negotiated urban renewal plan, Compton argues, "Vancouver's planning successes in the 1970s and into the present are usually related as though no community paid a price for them to happen" (84). Nieves makes a similar

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[11] See *After Canaan* for details on the geographical limits of Hogan's Alley, Vancouver, BC.

point when he argues that, "as long as we continue to privilege structures built by and for" white, European-descended Canadians, black and other racial minority citizens "will remain marginalized" (83). While Copeland's easy assurances are disconcerting, given what we know about the very visible failed freeway project that helped render Hogan's Alley a so-called "soulfree edge city," the book's more damaging effect is the lasting impression it creates of a city that was mysteriously unaffected by the vicissitudes of racist mid-twentieth-century urban planning schemes, not to mention other long term, broadly-based and, in some cases, ongoing campaigns of racial and cultural devastation aimed at Chinese-, Japanese- and Native-Canadian populations in Vancouver's East End and Downtown Eastside that endeavour to "whitewash" the city.[12] With regards to black Vancouver specifically, as McKittrick argues in *Demonic Grounds*, [u]nseen black communities and spaces … privilege a transparent Canada/nation by rendering the landscape a 'truthful' *visual* purveyor of past and present social patterns. Consequently, 'truthful' visual knowledge regulates and normalizes how Canada is seen—as white, not blackless, not black, not nonwhite, not native Canadian, but white. The HAMP sign interrupts the deceptively innocent urban landscape by visually documenting the location of the "ploughed over" black space of Hogan's Alley. Moreover, it draws the reader's gaze to the "evidence" of an erased black urban history in Vancouver and thus to both the complexity of space and the ease with which emptied urban spaces are made to seem naturally and fundamentally racially homogeneous and, as Copeland insists, politically "innocent[t]." The visual "RUNE" poems make this same point by reinserting a see-able black presence and voice back into national dialogues about urban space

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[12] Known colloquially as "Canada's poorest postal code," this area—described in a recent *Globe and Mail* article as a "Dante-like … world of misery crammed into 10 blocks"—would certainly qualify as a "soul-free edge city" that has arisen out of a stunning mixture of official government incompetence and neglect as well as social, economic and racial discrimination (*Globe and Mail*, Aug. 15, 2008).

and challenging and undermining the spatial "innocence" to which Copeland and other contemporary chroniclers of Vancouver's urban history so urgently cling, even in the face of evidence that contradicts their easy and nostalgic claims.[13]

Both McKittrick and Nieves insist that the official archival and anecdotal carelessness about black history, people and space in Canada to which Hudson and Compton gesture form a pattern of eradication that is both widespread and ominous. Understanding the extent of the practice helps to contextualize Compton's project. As McKittrick argues, "the demolition of Africville in Nova Scotia and Hogan's Alley in Vancouver" are part of a broader official strategy for denying black presences in Canada wherein "[c]oncealment is accomplished at least in part by carefully landscaping blackness out of the nation" (96). Along these same lines, Nieves charges that the destruction of black communities like Africville and Hogan's Alley are "acts of racial hatred and state terrorism" that often remain concealed because disclosing these actions would expose government policies and practices, not to mention individuals complicit in these acts, to unwanted scrutiny (83-84). As Quebec historian Marcel Trudel reveals in his important and recently translated book, *Canada's Forgotten Slaves: Two Hundred Years of Bondage* (2013), the details of black slavery and slave ownership in New France (Montreal) and Lower Canada (Quebec, Newfoundland, Labrador) were purposely and assiduously misrepresented by Canadian historians, archivists, politicians, military leaders, clergy and ecclesiastics with the express goal of erasing the two-centuries-long presence of black slaves in the nation and constructing heroic legacies for French and English settlers and the new colony's important institutions.

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[13] See *After Canaan* for a more fulsome discussion of *The Vancouver Achievement: Urban Planning and Design* (2003) by John Putner and *City Making in Paradise: Nine Decisions That Saved Vancouver* (2007) by Mike Harcourt and Ken Cameron.

Slave holders like James McGill, the British-born founder of McGill University, and Saint Marguerite D'Youville, the founder of the Roman Catholic Grey Nuns of Montreal religious order who was canonized by Pope John-Paul II in 1990, were prescient enough to protect their legacies into the future. For these and other participants, erasing their complicity in the institution of slavery was an act of historical self-preservation, especially since slavery in Canada was, as Trudel points out, "a form of public extravagance which conferred prestige" rather than a necessary evil on which the survival of the colony hinged (163). The dearth of uncensored, firsthand archival materials about Canadian slavery attests to the enduring success of the measures that notable and less notable citizens alike took to bury or falsify their participation in maintaining a two-hundred-year-long (1628-1833) and firmly established

Canadian tradition. Afua Cooper makes a similar point in her book, *The Hanging of Angelique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Old Montreal*. Here, Cooper recounts the difficulty she experienced in locating and then accessing archival material on black Canadian slave, Marie-Joseph Angelique, whose owners attempted to obscure the facts about her life in enslavement and brutal torture and death by hanging.

In the light of these arguments and given that nothing remains of Hogan's Alley save a stretch of empty space abutting the Georgia Street Viaduct, the "semi-hoaxes" and "'fake' images of … community" in "Landmarks" and the other "factitious" "RUNE" poems speak to an inspired and subversive literary strategy on Compton's part for making (up) his own (archival) history of black Hogan's Alley as a way to commemorate that space (*After Canaan* 113; 117). As Flinn and Stevens argue, "*creating* archives and '*making* histories' can have [a considerable impact] on the development of subversive and counter-hegemonic social or public memories" that

contradict dominant or traditional historical narratives of blackless Canadian space and insist on "equality and cultural recognition and … [an end to] racism and discrimination" (4, italics added). Compton's poetic-archival simulacrum of Hogan's Alley functions as a visual tool for creating "new" memories of the original place. "Landmarks" gives readers in general and the black British Columbian community in particular an alternative point of reference with which to find their way (back)—if not literally then at least figuratively—to Hogan's Alley.

Recovering and documenting a detailed black history of Hogan's Alley is a problematic endeavour for several reasons (some of which I detail above) and Compton self-consciously interrogates his own desire to materialize the past in "Seven Routes." In fact, long before writing either *Performance Bond* or *After Canaan*, and despite finally concluding that in many intimate ways he is "*in* this project of drawing a line from what was then to what is now" ("Seven Routes" 112, italics added), Compton, along with Hudson, grappled with the "efficacy of the[ir] earnest attempts to forge a tenuous link to the past" ("Natural Histories" 22). As Compton rhetorically and self-referentially queries, "'Who really cares if we know that there was a black poet writing in late-nineteenth-century Vancouver?'" That question, articulated more broadly, is, of course, also at the core of this and other scholarly interrogations about black space and place in Canada. Compton's unease is well founded. First, as he outlines in "Seven Routes," the danger of allowing what he calls his "own latent romantic pseudo-black-nationalist desires" to colour his poetic reconstructions of Hogan's Alley threatens to undermine and distort the very real memories of the few remaining elders who lived there and who remember the black enclave as "a place they escaped from—a slum or, more gently, the humble origin out of which they happily ascended" (115; 109). Nevertheless, Compton's interest in "this old alley …, this place that

seems to have been the least of … [its inhabitants'] achievements" is "worth valorizing" because "their childhood is now our history" (109). As the oft-quoted Spanish philosopher George Santayana writes in *Reason in Common Sense* (1905), "[t]hose who cannot remember history are condemned to repeat it" (284). Remembering, rewriting and re-contextualizing black Vancouver history is a step towards safeguarding and preventing the ongoing systemic demolition and forgetting of black spaces and places in urban Canada. Furthermore, as Nicholas Dames notes, nostalgia is a type of "retrospect that remembers only what is pleasant and only what the self can employ in the present" (4). Along these same lines, Linda Hutcheon points out that nostalgia is "the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire" (20). Keeping in mind the foregoing cautions, the Hogan's Alley that residents were either thrown out of or eager to escape from is now, in Compton's words, "a foundational narrative of presence" that unequivocally connects blackness and black space to Canada (109). For these reasons, Compton produces a decidedly unsentimental and measured imaginative account of Hogan's Alley in which its former black residents are ordinary people and not heroes. In fact, I argue that *Performance Bond* functions to counterbalance the overly romanticized recollections of the building of Vancouver in books like Copeland's *City of Glass*, mentioned above, and others like *City Making in Paradise: Nine Decisions That Saved Vancouver* (2007), co-authored by ex-Vancouver Mayor and Premier, Mike Harcourt, and former regional planner, Ken Cameron. The title's allusion to Danté's epic poem, *The Divine Comedy*, and its nine circles of suffering alleviated, finally, by the poet's ascent into Paradise, presages its ideological premise.

Not only does Harcourt and Cameron's book "portray Vancouver as a model of global urban development," its title produces Vancouver as a "*Paradise*," a strategic move that entirely

forecloses any consideration of the racializing of the black community that occurred during the city's urban renewal campaigns of the 1960s and 70s, not to speak of more recent and ongoing necropolitical acts and strategies targeting First Nations individuals and communities (*After Canaan* 83). After all, the title suggests, how can racism exist in *Paradise*? The title's Edenic trope signals the authors' desire to retrospectively construct Vancouver as conflict free and therefore necessarily "unblack," to re-employ McKittrick's term. As Compton argues, "despite Harcourt's assertion that the city was 'saved,'" as the book's subtitle asserts, "from the perspective of the black community, this part of the city was shamelessly sacrificed … [and made] … a scapegoat of the union between an authoritarian planning ideology and a developerled civic government" (*After Canaan* 84). The ongoing refusal to recognize the city's troubling history continues a pattern that continually (re)produces Vancouver, and the rest of Canada, as recently multicultural but fundamentally racially homogeneous, or, to use McKittrick's term again, "Euro-white." The Edenic trope situates black people as antagonists or interlopers in a white "paradise" and constructs black spaces, like Hogan's Alley, as conversely geographically "hellish" or fundamentally at odds with innocent white space. The "nine decisions"—one of which was to destroy the black community—are, Harcourt and Cameron suggest, responsible for releasing Vancouver from the Dantésque nine circles of suffering brought on by the presence and potential threatening and unchecked growth of black Hogan's Alley. These contemporary examples of how the myth of the "unblack Pacific Northwest" is maintained help set up the context in which Compton situates his own intervention into those mythologizing and historicizing practices. Inventing an imaginary past instead of sentimentalizing the actual past through a nostalgic lens,

allows Compton a way out of the trap of romanticizing "a place that seems to have been the least of … [the black community's] achievements" (*After Canaan* 109).

The other potential difficulty Compton's work raises (and then quashes) is the perception that it produces yet another ostensibly authoritative or hegemonic version of black urban history by someone with only an admittedly tangential relationship to the place under study (neither Compton nor his parents lived in Hogan's Alley). As Compton himself avers, "I sometimes find my own circumstances strange; that I, a person who has more white than black biological ancestry, have devoted so much of my time to the project of recovering blackness in this place" (108). One way Compton undermines the notion of archival or historical authority is by compelling readers to actively participate in his "recovering of blackness [and black urban history] in" Hogan's Alley, as I argued in my analysis of the poem "BLIGHT." That way, the project becomes a joint endeavour between writer and reader. The reader's participation in creating a black history for Hogan's Alley also draws our attention to the precariousness and instability of the idea of a single authoritative history. Compton's work is invested in challenging how black people and spaces are made to disappear, how they are seen and not seen and how and by whom history is made and, often, made up.

Fittingly, since improvisation and performance are such central concepts in Compton's poetry, the poem "Vévé" is written as a three-person mini-play whose characters—Analogue, Digital and The City—perform a re-enactment of the forced removal of black people from Hogan's Alley. In the poem, Caribbean-American poet and theorist Kamau Brathwaite's philosophy about language comprises the framework for the character's articulation of a trajectory of European repression of black peoples. In "Trials of Authenticity in Kamau Brathwaite," Silvio

Torres-Saillant argues that "Brathwaite's tireless pursuit of cultural authenticity has cohered around the effort to bring a genuinely Caribbean language into visibility. Brathwaite has," Torres-Saillant continues, "dwelled systematically on the need to render language indigenous by discovering the elements that could serve to emancipate it … from its European origins" (697). In the poem-play, set in an area of downtown Vancouver that resembles the Alley, Analogue enacts the Haitian Voodoo ceremony of invoking the loa or spirit when he draws the elaborate vévé —a symbol of Papa Legba, the god of the crossroads—on the sidewalk using "trail mix" (118). Analogue uses the pictorial demonstration to explain to Digital a Brathwaithian theory of black language that "pos[es] an alternative existential model to the Western Tradition" (Tores-Saillant 697). "I think what Brathwaite means is," Analogue says to Digital, "that it's ["it's" meaning the intricate "trail mix" symbol that represents the vévé] the *beginning* of writing, or the urge to make a new kind of language, one unique to the New World" (119, italics in original). In their discussion about the origins of language, however, Analogue and Digital conclude that the tyranny they call "Inking" (121) or, in other words, the use of standard European language and the permanence and seeming finality of the written word in ink—as opposed to using "different granulated things" (117) to draw the vévé—has created or articulated blackness as inferior: "You're nothing new," Analogue informs Digital, "They had a theory for you almost from the start. They just needed the tools to make you real" (121). The exchange between the two characters suggests that "They" (white people) have the power, through the authority of Standard English, to both affirm and deny the existence of black language and thus black people and black history. The play bears out this idea at the end when the patronizing, authoritative character, The City (a synecdoche for the government, the colonial master, and so

forth), arrives on the scene, chastises the two men for drinking brown-bag wine and tells them: "Now move along, both of you," effectively kicking them out of Hogan's Alley (122). The final stage directions, which state that "Analogue and Digital exit north," confirm this argument (122). Because north of Main and Union streets is, as the opening stage directions tell us, the corner at which the two men sit for the duration of the play, it means that Analogue and Digital have physically left the city. Within the political context of *Performance Bond*, however, Analogue and Digital's departure from Hogan's Alley has more sinister undertones that suggest that Brathwaite's struggle to "forg[e] an authentic voice" (Torres-Saillant 699)—the voice and language Analogue describes—with which to resist the authority of dominant forces like the character The City and all he represents, fails, in this instance, to salvage the integrity of black life in inner city Hogan's Alley. Tellingly, The City, a character that represents the powerful civic systems and agents whose secret plotting and unilateral decisions resulted in the obliteration of Hogan's Alley and the dispersal of the black Vancouver disapora, "slowly exits south" and re-enters the city, "his baton aloft and resting on his shoulder" (122). His demeanor and the weapon he wields recall the authority of the colonizing, brutalizing figure that envisioned and then violently created "'the geographic (non)location through which the plantation emerged" (McKittrick "Plantation Futures" 6). The double entendre in the last line of the stage directions, which states that The City "exits south walking backwards" (122), conveys two meanings that inhere in this situation. First, the figure of authority walks backwards as he exits *into* Hogan's

Alley in order to keep his eyes on Analogue and Digital whom he has just forced out of the city. His confident movement into and occupation of Hogan's Alley and his steady gaze recall the ways in which "the history of whiteness / perform[s] as the watcher" in the poem "Performance

Bond" (43). The occupying colonial force that "watche[s] in the shadows" (43) calls to mind the "visualizing" scopic strategies that Mirzeoff argues are used to subjugate the black bodies being watched by "whiteness." Thus, The City gazes at Analogue and Digital with the "authority of visuality." Second, the playwright-persona suggests that The City lacks foresight, is unsophisticated or, in colloquial terms, that he is "backwards." The poem-play connects the surreptitious, state-authorized and urbicidal mid-twentieth-century destruction of black spaces and lives in Vancouver to the colonial appropriation of "'the lands of no one'" in the Caribbean and the Americas and their transformation into plantations serving the economic needs of European imperial expansionism (McKittrick "Plantation Futures" 6).

Compton returns to the linked issues of language and education in the poem, "To The Egress." As its title suggests, "To The Egress" is dedicated to "a family man's" young black ("mulatto") daughter. But the use of the word "Egress" in the title functions on two levels, both of which are directly related to the meaning the poem generates. First, the word "Negress" is, of course, a pejorative and now defunct term for a black female. The word has been, for the most part, stricken from common use. Black people in Hogan's Alley have, too, been erased from the cityscape. The fact that Compton leaves off the letter "N" to make "Egress" is an indication of the many slippages, disappearances, erasures, and exits that he draws the reader's attention to in the poem. Second, in the realm of property law, the terms "ingress" and "egress" are used to indicate a property owner's "right to enter or leave property" ("Ingress," "Egress"). These two meanings enmesh in the fourth stanza where Compton writes: "Desks are undoing us, he thought. / Or, more rightly, deskism. / They are writing us out of this part of the City; / they are reporting us away; they are bylawing us blank" (148). Here the word "Desks" (as well as the noun

"deskism") functions as a synecdoche for education. The kind of education the poem accuses of "undoing," invalidating and erasing black presences and histories in the city is one conceived by colonial, imperialist and racist agendas and which Braithwaite argues keeps black people oppressed. "The point," of such a system is, the narrator insists, "to undo" black progress. While "Marie-Joseph Angélique, Nat Turner, [and] Archy Lee [have been] unchained. / [And] [t]he Adam Clayton Powells, the NAACP, [and] Billie Holiday [have been] unlooped" through their own accomplishments and the efforts of scholars, freedom fighters, judges and various other supporters, the poem argues that "The Negro Citizens League, [and] the B.C.AACP [have been] undermined" by Euro-centric education systems and curricula. The narrator's contradictory but telling statement that "[h]e unknew where this [undoing and undermining of black British Columbia diasporas and organizations] was going" suggests both a knowledge of the (bleak) future of black places and people in the province and an incredulity at the lengths to which the forces controlling city government and education agendas would go in order to "byla[w] [black people] blank." The narrator's charge at the end of the fourth stanza of "To The Egress"—that "[they] are writing us out of this part of the City; / [and] they are reporting us away"—is an oblique allusion to the subtle but systematic undermining of the black voice that occurs in the 1938 Jack Stepler article published in the *Vancouver Province* newspaper. Compton's reimagining of that article in "Whither Hogan's Alley?" which precedes "To the Egress" in the RUNE section, foregrounds the voice of the "Negro" character Hadrian McCabe as a way of

"undoing … / [the] deskism" implicit in the unselfconsciously authoritative and knowing Euro-

Anglo-Caucasian voices in the Stepler piece (as well as the supercilious narrative voice in the NFB documentary, *To Build a Better City*). "RUNE" continues to create space and challenge the status quo through black voices in the two long prose poems "From *Portals: East Vancouver Oral Histories* (1972) Madoo Abdul Wahid" and "From *Portals: East Vancouver Oral Histories* (1972) Geraldine Diamond."

The poems "Madoo Abdul Wahid" and "Geraldine Diamond" are, like "Whither?" and "Landmarks," "factitious." Taking the form of transcribed oral histories, both poems are based in fact but have been fictionalized by Compton for literary and aesthetic impact. The immediate effect of both poems is to underscore the fact that the personal experiences that the characters Madoo Abdul Wahid and Geraldine Diamond—first cousins by marriage—recount fill the gap created by official histories of Vancouver that have failed and continue to fail to recognize or commemorate black inner city diasporic voices. Ostensibly recorded in 1972, both oral histories chart a black genealogical trajectory from Minnesota and Iowa in the American Midwest, through to Winnipeg and finally on to Vancouver where both characters settled into the small but tightly-knit and growing black diaspora in the early-to-mid 1930s. While both oral histories reference hard times in the States as the impetus for migrating to Canada, both also acknowledge the presence of racism in Vancouver which was, as "Geraldine Diamond" suggests, as bad as that in America. "[E]ven though … [Hogan's Alley] wasn't to-the-letter segregated" like American Jim Crow laws, Diamond claims, "it was still hard to find a job. In some ways, it was actually harder. 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" (139). In his oral history, Wahid's cousin Eamon (Geraldine's husband) refers to the owner of a Vancouver bookstore he frequents regular-

ly as "a prejudiced fool" (134). Both transcriptions undermine the sentiment in both the real and "factitious" newspaper articles about Hogan's Alley and in the official historical context Compton writes against, that the black Vancouver diaspora was primarily a dangerous collection of ne'er-do-wells, criminals and itinerants. In "Madoo Abdul Wahid," Wahid cites both his brother-in-law's and his friend's presences in Vancouver as his reason for migrating to B.C. and in "Geraldine Diamond," Diamond also cites family as the cause of her move to Vancouver: "Eamon [her husband] wanted to settle up in Canada because he said he couldn't stand the thought of raising children in the USA" (139). Both re-imagined oral histories, then, work to underscore the existence of the deep family, community and professional ties and commitments blacks from disparate locations in North America and beyond had to each other and to the space they called Hogan's Alley. "Madoo Abdul Wahid" and "Geraldine Diamond" also reference the "Landmarks" poem. In the former, Wahid, a convert to Islam, opens a temple in his False Creek home, adjacent to Hogan's Alley. In the second poem-photograph in "Landmarks," the manufactured sign above the door of the dwelling at 315 Prior Street reads "False Creek Moslem Temple," a gesture to the non-European religious history of Vancouver that the character Wahid's personal story represents. In the latter of the two oral history poems, Diamond recounts how she and her husband put a donated printing press to use to serve the wider community:

> [W]e were sort of ideologically adrift, you know, after the dissolution of the UNIA. But we were paying attention to what was happening in Africa, the decolonization process: Kwame Nkrumah, the Mau Mau, the ANC. We wanted to find a way of tying in what was happening here, in our own environment, this part of the Commonwealth, with what was

> happening in other parts of the world. That was how the idea for *The Far Cry Weekly* came about. (141)

The third poem-photograph in "Landmarks," which shows the front door of a building at 618 Main Street, displays a plaque bearing the name "The Far Cry Weekly: Voice of the Negro Northwest (Since 1957)." That organization's prefix is the same as the name of the black weekly which Eamon and Geraldine Diamond produce in "Geraldine Diamond." Diamond's personal recollections of early life in Hogan's Alley produce a history of black life which, as the long passage above suggests, attempts to align itself with the democratizing, de- and anti-colonizing and anti-apartheid strategies of the Pan-Africanists, the Mau Mau uprisers and the African National Congress reformers. This move universalizes the struggles of the black inhabitants of Hogan's Alley against European imperial agendas and resituates Canada and Vancouver, specifically, alongside other nations that segregate, exploit and eliminate black people and historically black spaces and communities. Both transcribed oral history poems, then, reinforce the imagistic poems in "Landmarks" by adding depth, texture and historical background to the spare black and white photos and the imagined community they conjure up. Together the two oral histories and the four visual poems compose the architectural and human landscape of Compton's imagined black urban diaspora in Hogan's Alley. Elsewhere in "RUNE" Compton continues to inscribe Hogan's Alley into a shared global history of oppression and segregation.

The collection's final poem, "GHETTO FABULOUS OZYMANDIAS," relies on the camera to capture and relay the lost history of black space, people and community in ways that are similar to those Compton brings to bear in the poem "Landmarks." Of course, part of the poem's impact is also produced by its relationship to the English Romantic poet Percy Shelley's

1817 poem “Ozymandias,” about the Egyptian pharaoh Ramesses II, who was referred to by the name Ozymandias in Greek writings. A massive and highly anticipated fragment of a statue of the great Egyptian King was transported from Egypt to London before Shelley's death in 1822, generating his and others' interest in memorializing the pharaoh in letters, art and song. Compton's poem suggests links between the posthumous deracination of the pharaoh's head and torso by an Italian adventurer who transported them to the British Museum in London where they remain on display and the uprooting of the black inhabitants of Hogan's Alley and their subsequent dispersal and relocation into substandard slum housing elsewhere in the city. An entire page of the four-page “ OZYMANDIAS” poem consists of a sprawling black graffiti tag (usually a single-shade, spray-painted signature or other name/representation for the tagger) of “‘Rev. Oz’”’ the “homeless / … churchless” urban prophet-protagonist of the poem who tells his interlocutor-“narrator” who is photographing the site about the history of the place “between Union and Prior” streets that “Rev. Oz” haunts: “‘this place – the community that was here – they were driven / out. Their neighbourhood was flattened by the City. There’s nothing / left here because of an injustice” (154; 155; 153; 156). The “'Rev. Oz'” tag—the graffiti author’s name written, in this case, with interlocking letters in what is known as the “wildstyle” form—is a revolutionary graphic statement that marks black territory and denotes Oz’s own defiant agency in the face of destruction and his lingering presence in an urban space where he is not / not supposed to be: “‘I can only see you through this camera. When I lower it, / you go’” the narrator explains. “‘So don’t lower it’” “Rev. Oz” advises (153-155). As their dialogue suggests, it is crucial that we bear witness to and look headlong at / into urban spaces like Hogan's Alley when they become the target of the racist and punitive policies of governments and their agents. Fur-

ther, the link Compton makes here between graffiti and photography is one that American music journalist and critic Bill Adler makes in "Who Shot Ya: A History of Hip-Hop Photography." In his article, Adler suggests that photography "was … critical in legitimating graffiti as an art" (103) and points to Marty Cooper and Henry Chalfant's book *Subway Art* (1984), a documentary-style printed record of New York graffiti, as the standard bearing text. The act of recording and publishing the stylized words and images in book form transforms a disparate and extensive collection of surreptitious markings on urban architecture into art that communicates a powerful socio-political and cultural message. The photo of Compton on the back cover of *Performance Bond*, which captures the author standing in front of a wall covered in colourful graffiti and various tags, is itself an example of documentary graffiti photography since the photograph is reprinted in / on Compton's published book. The "floral graffiti" welcome sign published first on the HAMP website and then reproduced again in *After Canaan* is also an instance of documentary graffiti photography and political art. The "Rev. Oz" graffiti tag, like the back cover photograph and the photographs in "Landmarks" that record signage written on four buildings, document and thus work outside of traditional ways of recuperating and reclaiming black urban space. Like the examples cited above, the graffiti tag-poem serves as a visual marker or manifestation of the narrator's desire to uncover and see blackness in the erased space of Hogan's Alley. The graphic style of the tag—written with broad, sweeping, black strokes; underscored by a bold line that ends in an arrow pointing toward the adjacent page of text; and centred on a blank white page—draws the reader's attention to the contrast between the white and seemingly empty background and the black letters that appear to be framed by it and thus to the notion of space—black space, white space and the intersection of the two. Although

the white frame literally centres the black tag, it also surrounds it and, because of the disparity in the percentage of the page occupied by whiteness, also suggests that whiteness (the mundane whiteness of the page and the more menacing whiteness of the political community that surrounded and then dismantled black Hogan's Alley) threatens to subsume the blackness on the page. Given the political nature of graffiting and tagging in the urban context, Compton's use of the tag reminds us of how thoroughly and expediently undesirable elements—graffiti, tags, black spaces and black people—can be erased from the city landscape. Of course, in this context, the tagging also underscores the way black people and history haunt the Canadian space; the multiple ways in which black voices are writing over, into and back at white spaces; and, of course, the excessively urban nature of Compton's work.

American cultural critic Murray Forman argues in "Ain't No Love in the Heart of the City: Hip-Hop, Space, and Place," that "[s]pace and place are important factors that influence identity formation as they relate to localized practices of the self" (155). "Rev. Oz's" black tag on the white page, the floral welcome sign and the signage on the four buildings in "Landmarks" all mark and reclaim erased black space. Although the space has been emptied and the people who once lived there can no longer be seen in it, except through the lens of a camera as the "narrator" in "Ozymandias" sees "Rev. Oz," the graffiti tag remains as an important cultural artifact of black urban presence, available for and visible to those desirous and able to see it. As Compton writes in "Ozymandias," when "[t]he narrator lowered the camera … Rev. Oz was gone. / [But when] [h]e squinted at the tag: it was still there, the script / ducking and interlacing, weaving into itself, looping. / He lifted the camera to his eye again. There was Rev. Oz" (156). Just as the "narrator" sees "Rev. Oz" and / in Hogan's Alley through his camera lens, Compton's archival

act allows the reader to "see" Hogan's Alley—what the city may have been and what it might still be had it not been destroyed—through the literary device of visual poetry.

Chapter Four: Dionne Brand's *thirsty*: Charting the Cartographies of Possibility in Toronto's "Urban Barracoon"

> "There must be eyes upon the street, eyes belonging to those we might call the natural proprietors of the street."
>
> —Jane Jacobs. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 35.

In her 2005 novel, *What We All Long For*, Dionne Brand refers to the story's second generation protagonists, Bihn and Tuyen Vu, as "interpreters … annotators and paraphrasts" of the city (67). Throughout the narrative, Canadian-born Bihn and Tuyen endeavor to "translat[e] the city's culture" (120) and "transmi[t] the essence of life in Toronto" to their bewildered Chinese-Vietnamese immigrant parents who, in fleeing Southern Vietnam after the Vietnam War, lose their son, Quy, in the confusion of a treacherous nighttime escape by boat across the South China Sea. Subsequently, the narrator reveals, in "the confusion of their new life" (67) in Toronto, they also "lose other parts of themselves" to both the formal and informal but equally incomprehensible social, cultural and bureaucratic rules that govern their adopted city (66). Unable to shed the psychic wounds inflicted by almost seven decades of French colonial rule, civil and proxy wars, military coups and other human-manufactured disasters in their land of birth, these first-generation elders rely on their "denizen-citize[n]" (Sanders viii) children to help them "disentangle [the] puzzlement" of life in an unfamiliar, socio-culturally diverse and politically foreign twenty-first-century metropolis (Brand 67).

Initial critical response to the novel focused on what many characterized as Brand's new or changed relationship to the city and argued that the depiction of Toronto in the novel signaled a sharp departure from some of Brand's earlier representations of Toronto—in the collection

Winter Epigrams and Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal in Defense of Claudia, for example—as "a city of whites" (Hutcheon and Richardson 272). While the novel does convey a change in the tenor or attitude of Brand's narrative treatment of the city, it is part, rather than the beginning, of a shift that actually has its theoretical and methodological genesis in the long poem *thirsty*. Published three years before the novel and also set primarily in downtown Toronto, *thirsty* is where Brand first begins to shape several key ideas and images that she later takes up again, revises, refines, and expands in the novel. The central concepts that first appear in *thirsty* and are subsequently amplified in *What We All Long For* include Brand's razor-sharp focus on Toronto as subject and object of enquiry, affection, and promise; colonial history's material and theoretical scar on the city's black inhabitants and the landscapes they inhabit; the articulation of a shared and humane urban praxis; and, finally, the role of the urban interpreter in seeing, articulating and making sense of the city.

thirsty translates the experience of contemporary Canadian city life in a focused and sustained manner through a more worldly-wise speaker that, like the novel's Vu siblings, also functions as an urban "interprete[r], … annotato[r] and paraphrase[t]" of the city. As in the novel, the urban-interpreter-as-poetic-vehicle for translating the enigmatic nature of contemporary Canadian urban life is a central structural element and image in *thirsty*. What becomes clear is that the long poem is where Brand first explores the promise of a city in the throes of shedding its colonial past and becoming the more diverse and regenerative Toronto that eventually emerges and is captured through the gaze of the sanguine second generation characters in *What*

We All Long For.[14] Several critics have noted the significance of Brand's poetics of accretion and how the accumulation of key ideas and images across her corpus produces and underscores her complex, layered and humane vision of contemporary city life.

Much of Christian Olbey's 2002 discussion with Brand, for instance—following the publication of her first novel, *In Another Place, Not Here*—centres on the implications of what he characterizes as her move from poetry to prose and the extent to which the novel is, despite the form's inherent expansiveness and relative languorousness, freighted with the syntactical, social, and political burdens that attend poetic language and form. Regardless of form, Brand tells Olbey, "'I think of myself as still and always producing poetry'" (qtd. in Olbey 89). Whether writing prose fiction or poetry, she argues, her task is the same: to "'break open creative places over and over again'" (qtd. in Olbey 89). It is Brand's focus on language—over plot or characterization, for instance—and her stated aim of *repeatedly* forging new spaces in which different ways of existing in the city can be imagined, that helps create the impression of a gradual accretion of concepts, ideas, and images across her corpus. What *In Another Place, Not Here* allowed critics and readers to see clearly, is the author's preoccupation with and continual revising of certain key ideas in and across both the poetry and the prose. As Olbey notes, Brand "sometimes *cover[s] similar material or ground* in both [her] poetry and prose" (89, italics added). Gesturing to Brand's tendency to review and revise key concepts and images in her writing, Winfried Siemerling, in his article, "Writing the Black Canadian City at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century," argues that we might think of *thirsty* as "a poetic preface and companion piece to … *What*

[14] With the exception of Alan and Julia's unnamed daughter, the other characters in *thirsty* are mainly first generation immigrants to Toronto. The main characters in *What We All Long For* are second generation young people. They fully embody the spirit of the newly becoming Toronto that the unnamed daughter in *thirsty* only provides a glimpse into and which Julia and Chloe find baffling.

We All Long For" (112). Similarly, in her analysis of Brand's language in "The Uses of Literature: The Poetry of Dionne Brand," Pamela Mordecai observes that "[m]any critics use the word *litany* to characterize the gathering of images in Brand's [writing], along with terms such as *tumult*, *association*, *amassing*, and *accretion*" (145, italics in original). This "collecting of extended images" in Brand's poetry and prose, Mordecai argues, "forces the reader … to close in on each aspect of an accumulation of images" thereby according them a special degree of critical meaning within the wider context of the individual text(s) and of Brand's overall literary vision of a more humane and just world for black and other marginalized peoples (197). Thus, *thirsty* and *What We All Long For* are mutually referencing intimate textual partners in the relationship that Olbey, Mordecai and Siemerling describe in their respective analyses of Brand's writing. The effect, and indeed the intent, of the replication or collecting of words and images in the novel is to compel readers to *go back* to their source in the long poem in order to give substance to and provide context for the ideas circulating in the novel and to read the prose with a poetic attentiveness to language and imagery. Since the novel plainly gestures back to *thirsty* and reveals the genesis and process of accretion of key images and ideas that have become increasingly central in Brand's more recent writing, it makes sense to reconsider their source in the long poem, to explore their liberatory possibilities, and to scrutinize their significance for Brand's wider literary, aesthetic, and socio-political project. The following analysis of *thirsty* "close[s] in on" the central role of the urban interpreter as a poetic vehicle for illuminating the city of Toronto, for translating the ways in which Canada's colonial beginnings still disfigure the city's geography and inform its institutions, and for articulating a mode of coexistence that re-

jects the hierarchies upon which the nation's systems, policies, and laws were conceived and still function.

Set primarily in the downtown west end of the city of Toronto at the close of the twentieth century, *thirsty* is a slim, 63-page paean to the city whose thirty-three prose poems alternate between two distinct but intertwined urban experiences. In the first strand, the speaker provides an intimate and candid first-person account of her own decades-long experience of and in the city as she traverses its streets, highways, neighbourhoods, and markets eavesdropping on conversations and witnessing—sometimes retrospectively and even imaginatively—the complex range of interactions between its diverse residents. As she moves through the city, the speaker alternately translates the significance of certain events and locations, illustrates its many contradictions, rephrases key historical moments, and explains how to survive in a city whose institutions, systems, and spatial practices are weighted against black and other marginalized city dwellers. "[D]on't dwell too long" on the historical injustices and anti-black expressions of violence and hatred, she cautions fellow city-dwellers and readers alike (22). The second strand is a third-person, retro-speculative, fictionalized account of the 1979 shooting death by the Metropolitan Toronto police of black Jamaican immigrant, Albert Johnson, during a domestic disturbance call at his home on Hallum Street in the city's west end. In this narrative strand of the long poem, the speaker describes the fictional characters Alan, his wife Julia, their unnamed daughter and Alan's mother, Chloe, in a series of recollections and suppositions that focus on and analyze their troubled lives before, during and after the fatal shooting as well as the event's impact "eightee[n] Sunday[s]" later on the surviving family members, the wider black community, and the speaker herself (4). The two strands intersect and advance each other throughout the long poem as the

speaker moves across the city streets, observing "the three" (3) women undertake their annual peregrination to a local church to commemorate Alan's death since, she tells us, "he's dead when this [story] begins" (13). Having begun Alan's story *in medias res*, the speaker provides an historical framework to explain Alan's state of mind leading up to his death. As she continues to traverse the city, bearing witness to "the wraith and rate of absence pierc[ing]" the three women, the speaker shifts to a more ambitious, reflective, tender, and hopeful analysis of the prospects for Alan's remaining family members, the wider black diaspora and the city of Toronto itself (3).

The fact that Brand uses the long poem form in *thirsty*—a genre that has become her signature mode of poetic expression—to translate the city is especially apt. As Sharon Thesen points out in the Introduction to *The New Long Poem Anthology* (1991), "the [long poem] form offers … an opportunity to … push into *new territories* or to draw them out seductively, slowly, patiently" (28, italics added). Thesen's observation regarding the intrinsic possibilities the long poem form creates which allow the poet to discover and extend new or different theoretical ground in novel ways, recalls Olbey's argument that Brand often "*covers similar ... ground*" in her endeavour to articulate an ethical human politics of space and place in the city. One of the "new territories" that Brand "push[es] into" in *thirsty* involves the methodology for investigating the contemporary city of Toronto. The mode she employs historicizes the speaker's descriptions and translations of ongoing spatial practices and events that both continue to marginalize contemporary black city-dwellers but that also open up new possibilities for existing in the city. The methodology Brand employs has its genesis in French poet Charles Baudelaire's nineteenth century figure of the *flâneur* or city stroller who, in traversing the spaces of the rapidly-changing city of Paris, observed, reported on and translated the nature of metropolitan life for his like-

minded city-dwelling peers. As American theorist Dana Brand points out in his book, *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, the activity of *flânerie* was not only "the privilege of a bourgeois, educated, white, and affluent middle-class but also, above all ... a luxury of male society" (173). Indeed, in her study, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*, Deborah L. Parsons argues that Baudelaire "denies … [women] the power of observation," "entirely objectif[ies]" them, and paints women as impassive objects and consumers by denying them the "act of sight" (25). In questioning the assumption that the modern city—and thus the very definition of modernity—was the exclusive domain of the unrestrained male (*flâneur*) and his unfettered gaze, Parsons argues for a "female city consciousness" (37) that is able to "[c]ross different temporal, canonical, racial, national, class, and generic boundaries" (37). In *thirsty*, Brand interrogates the traditional figure's orthodox pedigree, appropriates the trope, and then repurposes it by creating a radically-reinterpreted figure that is black, female, ideologically proletarian, and marginalized by dominant white society—as are most of the city-dwellers she looks at and follows on her perambulations—but whose essential function and approach are analogous to the *flâneur's*. The nature and intent of her gaze, however, shifts the terms of the relationship between the viewer and those being viewed.

In the sense that Nicholas Mirzoeff defines it in his article, "The Right to Look," Brand's neo-*flâneuse* "claim[s] the right to look," which is to say she "claim[s] … a right to the *real*" (473, italics added). In Mirzoeff's ocular model, "[t]he right to look is not about merely seeing" that which is before the observer; rather, it is a look that produces a reciprocity of expression that includes or produces emotions and bonds such as "friendship, solidarity, or love" and, importantly, "claims autonomy, not individualism or voyeurism" (473). Surveillance or, as

Mirzoeff names it, "visuality" (474), is "[t]he opposite of the right to look" because it is "author-it[arian]"—meaning that it categorizes, hierarchizes and marginalizes the objects of its gaze by race, ethnicity, gender and so forth (474). Because "[v]isuality was held to be masculine," it functions "in tension with the right to look which has been variously depicted as feminine" (474). Other scholars of metropolitan theory have made similar arguments about the nature of the figure of the *flâneur* and the consequences of his gaze for black and other marginalized city-dwellers. In "Walking in the City," the central essay in Michel de Certeau's important collection, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, for instance, the author argues that the traditional or Baudelairean *flâneur*'s theoretical and often literal "elevation transfigures him into a *voyeur* … [and] … puts him at a distance" (92, italics added) from what de Certeau calls "the ordinary practitioners of the city" (93). The common or average city-dwellers constitute the group that urbanist Jane Jacobs argues is best situated to look at and interpret the politics of public city spaces. In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs argues that "[s]treets and their sidewalks, the main public spaces of a city, are its most vital organs" (29) and if they are to be truly understood, "there must be eyes upon the street, eyes belonging to those we might call the natural proprietors of the street" (35). And the "natural proprietors" of the arteries, highways, alleys, and pathways of the city should be, Jacobs goes on to suggest, "both its users and pure watchers" of "the activity generated by people on [various] errands" across the city (37). Just as the *flâneur's* characteristics have changed over the years so too, scholars argue, has our understanding of the figure's purpose and place.

Keith Tester argues in his Introduction to the collection, *The Flâneur*, that even though "originally the figure of the *flâneur* was tied to a specific time and place" (1)—nineteenth centu-

ry Paris—the "*flâneur* is [now] used [in a number of contemporary contexts] as a figure to illuminate issues of city life irrespective of time and place" (16). In fact, Tester asserts, "the *flâneur* has been allowed, or made, to take a number of walks away from the streets and arcades of 19th century Paris … and into the pages of" postmodernity (1). Indeed, Aruna D'Souza and Tom McDonough, the editors of a collection of interdisciplinary essays called, *The Invisible Flâneuse?: Gender, Public Space, and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (2006), propose that the present interest in "nineteenth-century Paris as a crucible for modernity" (1) is tied to efforts by contemporary cultural and social historians to understand the consequences on the city of the more recent "shift … *from modernity to post-modernity*" (1, italics added). Making sense of "the advent of modernity and its characteristic cultural modalities" may, D'Souza and McDonough argue, facilitate a better understanding of the impact *recent* transformations in spatial relations, such as migration, immigration, globalization, densification, gentrification and the like, are having on the contemporary city and its inhabitants (1). D'Souza and McDonough's position echoes Tester's view that the *flâneur* "and the activity [of *flânerie*] appear regularly in the attempts of social and cultural commentators to get some grip on the nature and implications of the conditions of … post-modernity" (1). Despite having been so intimately tied to the suffocating patriarchy of nineteenth-century Paris, then, the figure is currently experiencing a literary renaissance outside of that specific time-place framework. *Flânerie* is increasingly being employed by writers and theorists as a useful aesthetic posture and investigative tool for interpreting and translating changes in contemporary urban contexts. Given the figure's inclination toward temporal and spatial meanderings, then, it makes sense that the *flâneur* might walk into the streets and markets of twenty-first century Toronto via the pages of *thirsty* in order to shed light on the mounting

problem of anti-black racism and violence and an increasingly divisive debate around the value of black life and black space in urban centres. What is especially notable in Brand's urban vision, is that the figure appears in the long poem to elucidate both the risks *and* the possibilities of black life in the twenty-first century city of Toronto. The speaker's intimacy with "the main public spaces of … [the] city"; her physical location or posture vis-à-vis the spaces, places, and people she encounters in the city; and, finally, her insights into and interest in the colonial history behind the racialized division and use of geography make her a particularly well-suited figure to translate the contemporary city. Drawing on the historically and poetically resonant trope of Baudelairean *flânerie*, Brand creates a repurposed poetic voice or speaker/neo-*flâneuse* that constructs a city where "history and modernity kis[s]" (48). Within the context of Euro-North American colonial history, the intimacy of that contact produces not only a lingering legacy of racial inequality—a kiss of death or what Katherine McKittrick, in "Plantation Futures," calls "black dispossession" (5)—but also the visceral elements for a consideration of a more productive relationship—a kiss of life or "black *life*" (5, italics in original).

Brand draws attention to the "spatial continuity between the … past and [the] present" (2) or what the speaker/neo-*flâneuse* calls "history and modernity" by interpreting or translating two cities in *thirsty*. The first is the city that has already "happened" (11). This Toronto is the place whose spatial, social, political, and economic logic was violently mapped onto the territory by explorers, settlers and the colonial governments they established in the sixteen hundreds and onward under British imperial expansionism. The second city Brand's speaker translates is "the city / that's never happened before" (11). This Toronto is being formed in the literary present by the tectonic forces of globalization by and for the myriad immigrants, migrants, refugees, and so-

journers who have converged in Toronto from every corner of the globe "thirsty for … / … peace, for life, for just halting" (22). Brand holds these two disparate yet mutually constitutive urban spatial constructs in tension throughout the long poem. Their uneasy coexistence—the one a stagnant space informed by and still subject to the ideological impulses of imperialism, colonialism, and plantationism; the other an expansive and continually evolving space whose character reflects the multidimensionality of its forward-moving and forward-looking inhabitants—reinforces the temporal and spatial connection the text exposes between the ever-present reality of historical colonial domination and the possibility of "envision[ing] a decolonial future" for black people living in the city of Toronto ("Plantation Futures" 5). The internal and external conflicts and discrepancies that arise from the competition between these two ideological positions are at the core of and help create a schema for Brand's articulation of the city's restless, "murmurous genealogy" (63). Dana Brand addresses the contradiction of contemporary urban life in *The Spectator*. Here, the author convincingly argues that the city is a container for the history that shapes it and that our perspective of the city is, in turn, shaped by those who interpret and translate it for us:

> There ... seems to be ... no good reason why there can't be a perspective on modern urban life that understands the terrible things that can be seen or experienced in a city in the context of society as a whole, and not as a sign of the inevitable depravity of cities or the inevitable squalor of modern life. It is not so much that the modern world is incoherent, impersonal, and immoral compared with earlier periods as that *we have failed to develop effective and accurate ways of perceiving, imagining, and representing it*. (197, italics added)

The poems in *thirsty* argue that, while a "colonial logic" (McKittrick "Plantation Futures" 3) or what George L. Beckford calls "the plantation influence" (xxii) is still visible in the cartographic arrangements and designations in the city of Toronto, "[a] new road is [being] cut" (*thirsty* 37) by the "transient selves" (40) whose collective presence in the city is creating a more humane, democratic and compassionate way of co-existing. Fittingly, then, the city Brand represents in *thirsty* is a complex bipolar space equally informed by the lingering history of colonialism, plantationism, slavery, and oppression and by the "loud, wide, promising … / [and] … hyphenating" (40) presence of people from around the globe who are "[re]writing the biographies / of streets" in Toronto (40).

Streets are an important cartographic, conceptual, and structural principle in the literature of *flânerie* and they are, fittingly, a central image and vehicle in *thirsty*. As German writer, translator and self-styled *flâneur*, Franz Hessell, explains in *Spazieren in Berlin*, his memoir-guidebook on strolling through the streets of Weimar-era Berlin, "Flânerie is a kind of reading of the street, in which [people's] faces, shop fronts, shop windows, café terraces, street cars, automobiles and trees become a wealth of equally valid letters of the alphabet that together result in words, sentences and pages of an ever-new book" (136). de Certeau makes a similar connection between walking, reading and writing when he theorizes that the movements of ordinary city denizens along city streets constitutes a "rhetoric of walking" (99) or an active perambulatory language that "describes the ways in which walking in practice manipulates the formal codes of city space, both using them and transgressing them" (25). Inextricably tied to the modern city, his natural habitat, the traditional *flaneur's raison d'être* was to wander the streets in an aimless or purposeless way, observing modern life and "absorb[ing] the activities of the collective" (Jenks

146). By his presence, he assured his fellow aristocratic city-dwellers "that urban crowds were not as illegible as they appeared to be ... that the masses [of commoners, immigrants, migrants, drifters, idlers and women] were not as politically threatening as they appeared to be ... that the urban crowd existed for their delectation ... and that one's fellow city-dwellers were all 'harmless and of perfect bonhomie'" (Dana Brand 6). But just as *flânerie* is not confined to one city or time, its purpose also changed as the figure "walk[ed] away from the streets and arcades of nineteenth-century Paris" and into other temporal and spatial contexts
(Tester 1). For instance, Dana Brand argues in a chapter called "From the Flaneur to the Detective: Interpreting the City of Poe," that in his short story, *The Man of the Crowd*, American writer, "[Edgar Allen] Poe offers a *critique* of the flaneur's methods of representing modern cities" (22, italics added) along with "*new models* for reading and consuming the modern city" (23, italics added). In response to the particular time and place Poe wrote about, his detective-*flâneur* appeared on the streets of mid-1800s London with the express goal of exposing misdeeds, revealing guilty parties and solving crimes; an enterprise most scholars associate with the Industrial Revolution and the turn from rural to city life and the resultant focus on the individual rather than the collective. Although the traditional *flâneur's* aimlessness is replaced in Poe's work by the methodical work of detecting crime, both figures' activity results in providing city-dwellers with an assurance that the city they inhabit is safe or, at the very least, comprehensible. As Dana Brand puts it, "[a]lthough the detective observes a city that is more threatening and mysterious than that of the flaneur, and although his process of reading is fundamentally different, he is … *like* a flaneur, a reassuring figure" (103, italics added). Dana Brand goes on to reason that:

> The detective suggests that what appears to be an increasingly opaque urban world can be grasped, even if only by a panoramic observer with superhuman powers. By resolving mysteries that are emblematic of the urban anxieties of his audience, the detective, like the flaneur, suggests that social order is a possibility. In fact, he offers a stronger assurance of this possibility than the flaneur because it seems as if the detective's methods of interpretation could actually be used in a practical way to maintain that order.
> (103)

Dana Brand's theorizing on the similarities between the *flâneur* and the detective offers a model for bridging the gap between the *modus operandi* of the Baudelairean *flâneur* and Dionne Brand's perambulating figure in *thirsty*; a figure she later (re)covers in the novel *What We All Long For*. Despite their fundamental differences, both figures perform similar functions for their inner- and outer-textual audience. If, as Dana Brand argues, "[i]n spite of their differences, the detective is not a contradiction of the flaneur so much as *a dialectical adaptation* of him," then we can understand Dionne Brand's neo-*flâneuse* as an incrementally more radical dialectical transformation of the traditional aimless *flâneur*, the punitive detective and other iterations of *flânerie* like the dandy and the badaud, for instance (105, italics added). Whereas both the *flâneur* and the detective discipline the city through the authority of the male gaze and the exposing of anti-social behaviour with the aim of maintaining traditional socio-political, gender, and race hierarchies, Brand's city disciplines, but also nurtures, those within its borders without regard to gender, race or class. Given the demographically diverse urban audience Brand's speaker addresses and the purpose of her *flânerie*—to witness, translate, and render the fullness of black life in a city whose institutions and systems still refuse to recognize and value blackness—

Brand's neo-*flâneuse* is an exemplary prolocutor of twenty-first century Toronto. Rejecting the Baudelairean *flâneur's* aim of reassuring his fellow elites that the Haussmannization and gradual democratization of industrializing Paris would not destabilize their economic, political, social, and cultural grip on the city and the detective's avowed objective of exposing and solving urban crime, Brand's *flânerie* is grounded in a democratic humanism in the manner of Edward W. Said's *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. That is to say, in her urban wanderings, she "connects th[e] principles [of humanism—individual agency, refusal of orthodoxies, anti-authoritarianism, and so on] to the world in which" she and the city-dwellers she observes "live as citizens" (6). As she moves through the city, Brand's neo-*flâneuse* is "moved by ideas of justice and equality …and the … notion[s] … of liberty and learning" (10). While Baudelaire's *flâneur* and Poe's detective would construe the black city-dwellers in *thirsty* as "threatening and mysterious," Brand's neo-*flâneuse* exposes the genealogy of hatred by tracing it continuously from the menace of colonial oppression and black subjugation to iterations of the same in the present. Throughout the long poem, Brand often positions the speaker at the same physical level—on the streets—as the black urban crowds she observes and with whom she shares a struggle to create a harmonious and productive model of ethical coexistence. Significantly, then, when the speaker/neo-*flâneuse* enters the city at the beginning of the first stanza of Poem I, she appears "in the streets" (1) and immediately aligns herself with the other marginalized "practitioners of the city" by using the first person plural pronoun to include herself in what she describes as the "gnawed life *we* live" (1, italics added).

Beginning the long poem by gesturing to the speaker's physical and political position accomplishes two related goals that help fill out the repertoire of extended images Brand collects

across her corpus. As Jacobs insists, "[s]treets in cities serve many purposes besides carrying vehicles, and city sidewalks … serve many purposes besides carrying pedestrians" (29). By repeatedly situating the speaker/neo-*flâneuse* on "street corners" (5), "at … crossroads" (40), and on sidewalks in the city, Brand maps out a complex arterial urban landscape that challenges the elevated, voyeuristic and punitive posture of the traditional *flâneur* and the detective whose authority was mostly contingent on their relative economic, social and moral superiority over those they observed, judged and punished. Thus, *thirsty* enacts the spatial relation between the observed and the observer on more principled terms. The fact that the speaker's gaze here and throughout the long poem sees and is often situated at the same level as "the *strip mall* of ambitious immigrants / *under* carcasses of cars" (11, italics added), Alan's body which is "already *descending*" (21, italics added) as a bullet strikes him, and "the bright veiled Somali women *hyphenating* Scarlett Road" (40, italics added) reinforces the anti-hierarchizing scopic principle that underscores Brand's literary reconstruction of the city. As D.M.R. Bentley suggests in his survey of Brand's writing, "Brand's perspective on Toronto is often that of … a figure in motion *at street level* and among Toronto's 'yet-to-become people'" (12, italics added). The (mostly) absent architectural hierarchies in the city suggested by the focus on streets and their inherent horizontality—"College and Bathurst, Queen and Yonge, St. Clair and Duffern, Eglinton to the highway"—reinforces the text's aim of articulating a similarly non-hierarchical or horizontal social network capable of withstanding the onslaught of systemic injustices and even envisioning and realizing a future that is not predicated on black death (40). Bentley's observation that Brand's speaker appears to be "among" the other city-dwellers who are helping to define "the city / that's never happened before," helps clarify the significance of the poetic persona's use of the first person

plural pronoun "we" in reference to the beleaguered life black city-dwellers endure in contemporary Toronto.

Whereas the traditional *flâneur* is always alone *in* the crowd but is never *of* the crowd, Brand's speaker/neo-*flâneuse* clearly considers herself to be a member of the black diaspora among which she easily circulates and for whom she translates the "inconclusive" city (1). In *thirsty*, the speaker alludes to a shared colonial history in two ways. First, despite Alan's obvious failings, the speaker/neo-*flâneuse* uses a compassionate and measured tone to describe Alan, the victim of state violence, whose erratic behaviour and "mad sermons / cursed bewildered subway riders" at the "Christie / Pits" subway station (4). Without excusing his behaviour toward his wife, Julia—he "spilled … / suspicions on her belly" (7) and "threat[en] her" in their home—the speaker/neo-*flâneuse* argues that "[i]t would matter to know him as a child" (13), inferring that his history growing up in the shadow of colonial plantation slavery in Jamaica might help explain his psychological state. In fact, the man the speaker describes "frothing a biblical lexis" (4) at the subway station, calls to mind the "obsessive neurotic ... black man" that Frantz Fanon describes in *Black Skin, White Masks*, in whom, Fanon argues, colonization produces "a constellation of delirium, frequently bordering on the region of the pathological" (60). Using similar terms, McKittrick argues in "Plantation Futures" that "the protracted colonial logic of the plantation … define[s] many aspects of postslave life" in the new world (3). This "plantation logic" helps account for the ongoing anti-black attitudes and practices of state agents and Alan's internalization—and subsequent externalization—of that racist pathology which expresses itself in violent, erratic and self-defeating behaviour toward his wife and himself. It is, after all, Alan's menacing treat to Julia at the door of their house—"You're not leaving here with what is

mine"—that sets in motion the events that lead to Alan's death because her fear of him prompts her to tell her daughter to "'[c]all the police! child, call the police! 911!'" (21). Second, Brand implies a differently experienced but shared history between the speaker and Alan in Poem XIII. "[O]f course / he was thirsty, as I," she explains, "though we were not the same" (22). The speaker goes on to caution and advise other city-dwellers and readers "to be on your toes or else you'll drown," like Alan did, "in the thought of your own diminishing" (22).

In addition to underscoring a shared colonial history, the speaker aligns herself with all the other refugees, "immigrant[s]" (36) and "impossible citizens" (40) from around the globe who have come to Toronto in search of "peace" (22) and "anonym[ity]" (22). By acknowledging that she is "just like the rest" (57) of the city-dwellers she observes, the speaker positions herself inside of the community she belongs to and observes. While she encourages them to work towards a better understanding of the impact of their actions on the diasporic community—"you have / to be on your toes" (22)—she underscores her own struggles as someone who is both in and of the city, to respond with kindness and live humanely: "as I said / I crave of course being human as … [Alan] must have." The work that has to be done is a collective undertaking that must, Brand insists, be shared by reader, writer, city-dweller. In her analysis of Brand's long poem *Inventory*, which she calls "a text of decolonial poetics" ("Plantation Futures" 12), McKittrick argues for a perspective on Brand's poetry—one that sees it as a call to a collective summons to ethical and political witness. Naming the interlocutor's task "reading-work," McKittrick contends that *Inventory* "asks us to … engage cooperative human efforts and turn the practice of accounting for the brutalities of our world toward the reader" (14). *Flânerie* produces "letters of

the alphabet"—to use Hessell's term again—that are based on the scopic interpretation of people, places, spaces, and objects the *flâneuse* sees as she walks the city streets. These "letters" "produce a grammar" (Brand, "*Ars Poetica*" 59) or "a living guidebook" (Parkhurst Ferguson 31) that is intended to be read and acted on. In Wolff's assessment of the figure's role as translator-writer, "a crucial aspect of urban wandering is the 'reading' of the urban environment and the production of texts" that attempt to decipher the city's inscrutable and shifting nature (24). The *flâneur's* socio-cultural and literary value is, therefore, based in "the translation of observations of city life into literary and artistic texts" that can function as guides to understanding and negotiating the transforming contemporary city (24). In *thirsty*, it is Brand's and the speaker/neo-*flâneuse's* "*own* political affiliations to space" (McKittrick "Plantation Futures" 14, italics added) in the city that convey the sense of a shared history with city-dwellers and articulate a collective task in terms of defining "an alternative future" in which black life is valued (14). The speaker's frank acknowledgement of her own struggles in Poem XIII—"thirst I know" and "I crave of course being human" (22)—are what McKittrick calls "assertions of humanness" that resist the "insider/outsider world" of institutionalized colonial scales of human value ("Plantation Futures" 14). "This positioning of the poet is important," McKittrick goes on to theorize, "because it refuses to venerate the comforts of us/them paradigms" which are, generally speaking, the patterns produced by and through the traditional *flâneur* and the detective (14). Through the politically freighted but reconceptualised figure of neo-*flânerie*, "Brand … writes cities and other spaces anew vis-à-vis her black diasporic history" (14).

The outward simplicity of the first line of Poem I—"This city is beauty"—belies the

layers of complexity conveyed by its form and content. While the demonstrative adjective "This" unmistakably announces Brand's intention to focus on the city of Toronto—the long poem's central character and subject and object of inquiry—the line does other work related to establishing the main concepts or images that begin to take shape in *thirsty*. For instance, Brand's use of the word "beauty" to describe the city speaks to Dana Brand's argument, which I quote at length above, that orthodox and essentialist perspectives of modern urban life can only be dispelled when those "perceiving, imagining, and representing it" have the qualities necessary to see the city differently. As Donald B. Gibson argues in his essay, "The Harlem Renaissance City," black writers (and by extension black people) do not see the same city white writers and people see, because their experiences are not the same" (41). Both Dionne Brand and her repurposed urban interpreter or neo-*flâneuse* are able to see, conceive of, and depict Toronto differently—as a more responsive, transitory, intricate, and hopeful space—because they experience it through black subjectivity and are, therefore, "just like the rest" of the racially, socially and genderly marginalized denizens of the city they focus on for whom diversity, in all of its forms, is "beaut[iful]" (*thirsty* 57). The diversity of Brand's Toronto suggests a more promising future for black and other city dwellers traditionally pushed to the periphery of society because of factors like anti-black and anti-immigrant sentiments, urban renewal, and political indifference. In her essay on *flânerie* in nineteenth-century Paris, "The *Flâneur* On and Off the Streets of Paris," Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson argues that "[t]he confusion wrought by relentless political and social transformation, [and] the incertitude fostered by a changed and changing population" created the conditions that "ma[de] it possible for the *flâneur* to narrate the connections among the several parts" (39). Similar kinds of changes in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Toronto—eco-

nomic, social, political, demographic, architectural and other transformations to the urban landscape—are what render Brand's speaker a relevant and necessary interpreter of the rapidly changing city. A city—like Toronto—undergoing significant change, Parkhurst Ferguson clarifies, both "*invites* as it *requires* new urban practices" (39, italics added), like Brand's neo-*flâner-ie*, which can be read as "a response to particular cultural and social conditions that allo[w] conception of the city simultaneously in terms of its parts and as a whole" (39). In *thirsty*, that simultaneity in conceiving of the city is conveyed by the speaker's representation of Toronto as a city still clinging to its colonial past while being pulled, forcefully, into the future by various forces, not the least of which is the formerly colonized who are immigrating to metropolitan centres around the world, like Toronto (11). Thus, Brand's city is both unruly and unpredictable but also celebratory and welcoming.

The fact that Brand refuses to contain the long poem's opening declaration with end or terminal punctuation—one of the grammatical requirements of declarative sentences— underscores the incongruity of the city the speaker translates. "Beauty," like other aspects of the city, has layers of possible meanings or interpretations just as Brand's city itself is a palimpsest of the desires, policies and practices of many successive settlers, mappers, politicians, corporations and the like. "Nothing in a city is discrete," she warns in Poem XX, suggesting that Alan's actions cannot be disconnected from their results nor can the colonial past—the root cause of his pathological behaviour—be disconnected from "[a]ll the dreadfulness that happened in America" and that, over time, "had come home to" Alan in the urban present (37). "[G]od would not be sufficient for me, / nor the ache and panic of a city," the speaker insists in Poem XIII, suggesting her refusal to be literally or theoretically confined by the systems and beliefs that theoretically and

psychologically enslaved Alan and helped to create the circumstances that led to his death (22). The speaker appeals to her fellow city-dwellers to "be on your toes or else you'll drown," as Alan did, "in the thought of your own diminishing" (22). The movement implicit in the line: "I skim, I desert, I break off the edges" functions to reinforce the idea of non-containment and escape or openness and freedom, which are central images and ideas in Brand's aesthetic vision of humane urban coexistence (22).

Although the speaker argues that "[h]istory doesn't enter" (7) the house on Hallam Street where Alan was shot, the colonial history that imprinted its "logic" onto Alan's psyche (and the subconscious of other colonized people) does enter the contemporary city of Toronto ("Plantation Futures" 4) via what McKittrick calls "plantation schemas" (4). Violent, segregationist, misogynist, and anti-black structures created by and through colonial plantation/slavery systems produce a rationale that, McKittrick argues, "emerges in the present and folds over to repeat itself anew throughout black lives" (4). Alan's disturbing and often violent behaviour in public and private has, at least in part, the speaker argues, a genealogy in the long and violent history of racial and spatial domination. It is worth noting that the speaker's inventory of human-inflicted atrocities in the last three stanzas of the section—"a baby found in a microwave, a baby shaken to death, / fourteen girls murdered in a college, … / Black men dragged," and so on—resembles the seemingly endless lists of violent acts that the speaker in the long poem *Inventory* makes, and is, therefore, another instance of Brand's collecting of ideas and images across her corpus. But Brand's scrutiny of the traumas produced by violent colonial history and its far-reaching legacy extends well beyond its impact on Alan. Brand also explores other expressions of historically-

informed systemic and institutional violence, cruelty, and indifference to those perceived as being located at the bottom of an assumed social, racial and spatial hierarchy.

"[H]istory and modernity [also] kis[s]," the speaker argues, in the troubling form of the "sashaying," "carefree," "gunsling[ing]" police officer whose brazen performance is "captured by several television networks" as he "light[s] a cigar in victory of being acquitted" of shooting Alan (48). By invoking the "gunslinger," a figure redolent of the history of violent, white, male outlaws of the nineteenth-century American Old West whose natural nemesis was the essentialized native American who the "gunslinger" shot with impunity, Brand gestures, again, to a long genealogy of racial hatred and terror that continues to express itself in the twentieth-century Canadian city, in the shameless figure of the white cop. Rather than being a figure of condemnation, revulsion and ridicule, though, Brand suggests, this state-sanctioned outlaw is analogous to the "high-fashion model walking a couture runway / in Paris or Milan. A showy stride / with the sexy swagger of a male model, / all muscle and grace, his virility in hand" having killed a member of the diaspora with whom the city has an antagonist relationship (48). The cop's confidence that he will not be punished for shooting a black man dead mirrors the historical "gunslinger['s]" certainty of his moral and cultural blamelessness and, indeed, heroism for dealing with the so-called Native problem. The authority figure's self-assurance is supported in the first stanza of Poem XXVI. Here, the "scales of justice" frame the cop's "head [which is] centred in the television / cameras" that capture and broadcast the acquittal celebration around the world (48). The image underscores the unjust systems—legal and other—created according to and in the service of long-established racially hierarchized colonial norms that penalize black people while they exonerate while people. The image of the white cop's face "frame[d]" or bracketed by the blind-

folded—and blind—face of the law, underscores the complicity between the nation's legal system—which is based on Canada's former status as a colony of the United Kingdom and its current status as a member of the Commonwealth of Nations—and those it empowers to enforce its laws in the continued expression of violence against black citizens. In *thirsty*, Brand proposes, the individual is not alone in being subjected to the logic of the plantation; rather, colonial history also expresses itself in and through geography and geographic-cartographic-architectural arrangements in twenty-first century Toronto.

In "Plantation Futures," McKittrick argues that "the plantation, at least in part, ushered in how and where we live now, and thus contributes to the *racial contours of uneven geographies*" in cities around the globe today (4, italics added). Chery Teelucksing also explores Canada's historically racialized cartography and the layers of political meaning that produce and maintain it in "Toward Claiming Space: Theorizing Racialized Spaces in Canadian Cities," were she argues for "the need to explore how spatial conditions in Canadian cities are simultaneously part of and influenced by racial domination and racial resistance" (2). Brand draws attention to the notion that "racialized spaces are tied to systems of power" (Teelucksing 9) in *thirsty* by linking the physical geography of the downtown core, where Alan was shot, to the specific historical systems and "structural, political, and economic processes" that have produced and continue to maintain "space [in Toronto] as a form of oppression" (Teelucksing 10). After all, as Beckford notes, geographic "territory" is brought "under new and more stringent forms of control" within the colonial project and those spatial structures are maintained across time and space (30). As she moves across the city, Brand's speaker/neo-*flâneuse* reveals "the ways in which race [and racialized space] is systematically hidden within the working of Canadian cities" (Teelucksing 11).

Brand's appropriated and repurposed *flâneur* not only sees and understands geography differently because of her black gaze, she is also able to accurately see and name spaces in the city that have been racialized through historical colonial forces for what they are. For instance, in Poem VIII, the speaker/neo-*flâneuse* describes the characteristic features of neglect that have become synonymous with the racialized geographies of urban space in Toronto in her description of "the garbage / of pizza boxes, dead couches, … / … / … carcasses of cars, … / … [and] hulks of rusted trucks" that crouch on the landscape where "the strip mall of ambitious immigrants" labour to make ends meet (11). Making reference to the state's uneven and race-based divisions of urban space, the speaker argues that "they've laid a quick over green sod down / back of this urban barracoon, hoping / to affect beauty" (11). The use of the term "barracoon" is significant here because it is an historical term for "an enclosure in which black slaves were confined for a limited period" before being transported to the slave auction or plantation ("Barracoon"). African American novelist and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston's posthumously published biography of the last survivor of the harrowing Middle Passage slave crossing, *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo,"* begins with the story of former slave Cujo Lewis's confinement in a barracoon in West Africa before he was transported via the Atlantic slave trade to the American South and into a life of plantation slavery ("Last Slave"). Speaking of the segregated barracks where he and other young men from different tribes on the continent were held after capture and before being forced onto the slave ship, Lewis tells Hurston that he observed that "'each nation in a barracoon by itself'" ("Last Slave"). Brand's use of the historically burdened term to describe the segregated division and use of land in twentieth-century Toronto reveals the state's political position and motivation with regards to the ongoing containment and separation or segregation of blackness

in the contemporary city. As McKittrick argues, “the geographic process after the rush to colonize the lands of no one,” in the West Indies, “unraveled into New World cultural exchanges that settled into a rigorous nonhomogeneous human model” (“Plantation Futures” 6). That model, McKittrick goes on to assert, produced “geographies for white men, white women, indigenous men, indigenous women, black men, and black women”
(6). In his article, “Social Stratification, Cultural Pluralism and Integration in West Indian Societies,” R. T. Smith refers to this kind of social-spatial arrangement as “a segmentary society … rigidly stratified by race” in which “color directly correlated with occupational status” (229). The barracoon in *thirsty* is similarly segregated, along geographic, economic, racial, and social lines. It is, in McKittrick’s terms, one of the “spatially evident … sites of toxicity, environmental decay … and pollution … that are inhabited by impoverished communities” (7). Here, and elsewhere in the long poem, it is possible to “trace the past to the present and the present to the past through geography” (7). The connection is heightened, amplified, and provocative because of the speaker’s subject position and personal stake in “envision[ing] an alternative future” for herself and the other city-denizens she encounters as she traverses the city (“Plantation Futures” 14). Brand's bipolar urban space where, the speaker insists, “the angular distance of death ... [*and*] the elliptic of living” (62) exist side-by-side, can be understood as what McKittrick terms “a location of black death that holds in it a narrative soundscape that [*also*] promises an honest struggle for life” (2). The speaker’s complex relationship with the city acknowledges the ways in which it marginalizes, exploits, oppresses and confines black people. As Janet Wolff reminds us, “the dominant discourses of the city render invisible” certain people and places “which a different discourse would entirely re-write” (129). Brand’s “different discourse” and her speaker’s manner

of moving through and seeing the city also illuminates a path toward what McKittrick calls a "context through which black futures are imaginable" ("Plantation Futures" 12).

Dana Brand argues in the "Conclusion" to *The Spectator* that "There … seems to…be no good reason why we can't enjoy the spectatorial pleasures of the flâneur, while expanding the scope of those pleasures to include pleasure in various forms of dissonance and discontinuity that were excluded when the flâneur crowded out his more subversive … rivals" (1991, 197). Dionne Brand's black neo-*flâneuse* is an inherently "subversive" figure that, like the author herself, is interested in the lives and stories that are produced in and through the "dissonan[t] and discontinue[ous]" spaces of history and geography. Although *thirsty* does celebrate the city, it also criticizes the city's systemic and institutional anti-black racism and violence as well as those who have been marginalized by the state and its agents but who have, nonetheless, blindly followed its dictates, like Alan. The speaker/neo-*flâneuse* reserves some of her harshest criticism for Alan regarding his inability (or refusal) to cast off his colonial yoke, especially concerning his blind faith in the religion of the colonizer—"god would not be sufficient for me," she insists, "I believe nothing" (22). Ultimately, the speaker asks readers to make up their own minds about the city. To use Brand's own terms, as a poetic document *thirsty* "interrogates the reader" about his or her own relationship to the city (qtd. in Olbey 89) and, as with most of her other writing, *thirsty* is concerned with the "possibilities for ethical citizenship in an era of globalization" (Maria Caridad Casas 5) and thus "demands ethical engagement" from readers ("Plantation Futures" 14).

In "On and Off the Streets," Parkhurst Ferguson points out that, historically, the figure of the *flâneur* (and the activity of *flânerie*) is inextricably bound up in the attempts of writers (and critics) to understand the social, cultural and political upheavals taking place in and changing the

cities they inhabit and about which they write (31, 30). Understandably then, the *flâneur* commonly makes an appearance in the city and in city literature at moments of monumental and potentially dislocating or disorienting social and cultural change.[15] While the narrative in *thirsty* looks back at and centres on a specific violent event that occurred in Toronto in the late 1970s, the text is primarily concerned with exploring "the [present] city [as it] emerges … into a new century," to use the words Parkhurst Ferguson employs to describe the Parisian *flâneur's* interest in that city as it too moved toward a new millennium (22). *thirsty* draws on this connection—between *flânerie* and the city—inserting the long poem into a rich literary tradition of urban writing but extends and complicates the relationship in several important ways.

Fittingly, given Brand's political and aesthetic project of translating the old city into the new, *thirsty* both begins and ends in the spring, the undisputed and universally-recognized literary metaphor for rebirth, hope and renewal. Because the season evokes the notion of change and growth—as opposed to stasis and decay—the parenthetical structure as well as the content it brackets escapes rather than reinforces the inherent boundedness of its form. The intrinsic possibility associated with new beginnings is further emphasized by the beginning of the long poem where the speaker appears "in the streets" (1) in the "early morning" on "a Sunday" just "before [the] city wakes" (3). Taken together, all of these "firsts"—the first moments of a new day, the first day of a new week, the first hint of illumination in the "unarranged light / that hovers on a street" (3)—produce the effect of promise and regeneration that characterize Brand's overall vision of the new Toronto as a space that is just emerging from the politically, socially and culturally stagnant past. The first verse of Poem I emphatically underscores these key structural and

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[15] See, for example, Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson's article "The *Flâneur* on and off the Streets of Paris," in *The Flâneur*, ed. Keith Tester, pp. 22-42.

thematic ideas, suggesting the central role they will play in Brand's ongoing revisioning and re-writing of the city of Toronto: This city is beauty

> unbreakable and amorous as eyelids in the
> streets, pressed with fierce departures, sub-
> merged landings, I am innocent as thresh-
> olds and smashed night birds, lovesick,
> as empty elevators (1)

Here, the reference to "streets," "departures," "landings," "thresholds" and "elevators"— imbricated concepts that are thematically and structurally linked to the idea of movement, transition, passage and beginnings (as well as endings)—distinguish Brand's new Toronto from the social, political and cultural fixedness and orthodoxy of its Euro-Anglo past. Notwithstanding *Inventory*, which primarily explores the sweeping geo-political ramifications of global and local acts of man-made violence and terrorism, *thirsty* marks a dramatic turning point in Brand's literary position on "here." Thus the Toronto Brand evokes in *thirsty* has little to do with the absence evoked by those old portraits of Toronto. The first line of the first verse announces this change and points to the complexity and maturity of both the city and the poet's new vision of it which captures and even celebrates the city's inherit contradictoriness. Like a lover longing for the object of her desire, the speaker is seduced—made "lovesick"—by this new city's incongruousness and resilience which Brand goes on to illustrate in more detail in Poem II.

Movement, both backwards and forwards, theoretical and imaginary, literal and figurative, is a central concept that resonates throughout Brand's entire *oeuvre*. Though it may appear that *thirsty's* "halting" in the city marks a definitive break from what Marlene Goldman refers to

as Brand's use of movement as a "legitimate resistant practice" (13) in the diaspora against state-initiated and other forms of oppression, the long poem actually practices an equally political kind of movement within the geographical limits of the city of Toronto. Discussing "the politics and aesthetics of drifting" (22) in her study of Brand's memoir, *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, and the novel, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Goldman argues convincingly that Brand employs the trope of "drifting" as a palliative to the stasis and tyranny implicit in conventional structures of member- and citizenship in the nation. As Goldman puts it:

> In Brand's writing, the notion of drifting offers an alternative to the boundedness of home and the nation-state. Indeed, by emphasizing drifting she underscores the inadequacies of the nation-state, particularly in its response to demands for social justice in a global era and in its long-standing practices of exclusion. Although claims to nationhood can be seen as contributing to projects of decolonization, Brand nevertheless promotes drifting as an equally legitimate resistant practice. (13)

thirsty's focus on Toronto does not negate Brand's ongoing project of vigilance over the nation's or state's continued resistance to progress on the issue of equality for all of its citizens. Rather, by "halting" here, Brand challenges the notion of a singularity or fixity of origin, home and place in *thirsty* by re-theorizing the city as a site of radical multiplicity, transition, crossing, and possibility. Although it is the omniscient narrator of *What We All Long For* that suggests that "Lives in the city are doubled, tripled, conjugated" (5), the figure or trope of an expanding and multiply varied diasporic demographic applies nicely to the city dwellers in the long poem as well, particularly given the texts' intimate theoretical and thematic connection. The streets in *thirsty* gesture to the idea of constant movement through which renewal is achieved. The speaker-*flâneuse*

watches Alan and Julia's young unnamed daughter as she "vanishes on her bicycle of light" (30) along a "street [that] begins / to move" (32) in an attempt to negotiate her escape from the suffocating hopes and desires of her widowed mother and still-grieving grandmother. As a representative of the second generation of immigrants in Toronto the daughter, whose namelessness universalizes her desire for a new way of existing in the city and marks her as a new kind of urban citizen-denizen, represents transition and the movement away from the older generation's more rigid and historically bounded understandings of city dwellers and city life. Adding to the idea of the city as a site of passage and therefore newness are the many architectural references to open spaces and structures that also symbolize constant flux. For instance, the frequent mention of "landings," "thresholds" and "doorways," all sites of transition, transformation, passage and beginnings and endings, insist on the city's ability—and imperative—to constantly change (1). The speaker's claim that "Nothing unfortunately is ever one way" in the city is a central recurring theme that underscores the idea of Toronto as a palimpsestic and open space (55). The speaker's description of the house "on Hallam Street" where Alan was shot further emphasizes this point (38): A house in this city is a witness box of every kind of human foolishness and then it all passes, new people inhabit old occurrences are forgotten and repeated to be forgotten again. (54)

The house's porousness is, ironically, the very trait that renders it continually habitable and relevant, despite the acts of "foolishness" committed by the succession of people who occupy it. "The girl who died here was born / in Regio Calabria" (54), the speaker explains, and she "died hard, like Chloe's son [Alan]," who has come to Toronto from Jamaica (54). Thus in Brand's own vernacular, these two figures have "cross[ed] cultural spaces here" and their presences, however troubled and fleeting, are inextricably bound up in each other and forge changes

to Toronto's cityscape. The speaker does concede, though, that "perhaps … [Alan's death] was harder"; however, the use of the adverb "perhaps" in this line makes the speaker's remark seem arguably less definite and helps to undermine or challenge the idea that any one death (or life) in the city is more or less worthy of consideration than another (54). This equal attention to the lives of everyone in the city is, in part, what distinguishes Brand's neo-*flânerie* from its more traditional cousin. In fact, Poem XXIX implies that the prematurely shortened lives of both the "thirteen year old [girl] … [who] liked jigsaw puzzles" (54) and "Chloe's boy [Alan] / who was afraid of his own shadow" leave equally indelible marks on the city (54). "In sickness," the speaker insists, the girl's "beauty was so convincing / they could not open her casket for fear / she would come alive again through beauty" (54). When Alan falls to the floor bleeding, "A deliberate red, like Ethiopian henna, / seeped into the floor grooves" (55). These evocative—and, indeed, "beaut[iful]" images—argue that even death by disease and murder ultimately signals a kind of excruciatingly exquisite possibility because the beautiful girl from Southern Italy and Alan, the shy boy from the Caribbean, are absorbed, and therefore transformed, into or metamorphized through the texture of the new city which retains in its very architecture the pulse of their desires and the intention of their stories:

> The walls of a house can *sense* like skin,
> that is why sometimes you can tell
> what happened in this apartment,
> the doorway *shivers* a deep blue, the ceilings *rain*,
> the staircase *declares* a radiant girl
> and someone *saying*, "thirsty …" (55, italics added)

The moments of verisimilitude and anthropomorphism in this passage suggest that there is something tangible—some essential human quality—of the girl and Alan that lingers in and animates the architecture of the house long after their death which transforms it into a living, breathing simulacrum of the deceased former inhabitants. Also, the ellipsis at the end of this excerpt, used frequently in the long poem to convey the impression of openness, movement and possibility, and the concomitant refusal of closure, underscores the idea of continuity—that the city (its people and its buildings) remember the girl's and Alan's life and passage. There is beauty to be found, the speaker insists, in that act of community which is here both a contemporaneous and a posthumous possibility. As the speaker contends:

> Nothing in a city is discrete.
>
> A city is all interpolation. The Filipina nurse bathes a body, the Vincentian courier delivers a message, the Sikh cab driver navigates a corner. What happens? A new road is cut… (37)

The lives and deaths of both inhabitants of the house on Hallam Street create new ways of thinking about the city, a space "where nothing is simple" but where, also, the city's demographic complexity renders it new and therefore beautiful (5).

In one of the introductory sections of *Tenacious Light / Luce ostinata*, an Italian-English collection of Brand's selected poetry, cultural theorist Rinaldo Walcott argues persuasively that "Brand's writing … commands us to think differently of how we might live together. Brand writes us maps," Walcott elaborates, "for new forms of social life to come into existence" (22). Through the figure of the black female *flâneur*, Brand "brings into view experiences and connections generally obscured by the dominant tropes and theories" used to explain the city (Wolff

24).[16] The Toronto Brand constructs in *thirsty* charts the urban spaces and places where a more humane existence is possible. Her "writing," Ball posits, "provides models for … mapping out a more promising cultural and psychological space … [in] … Toronto" (18). *thirsty* not only "writes us the maps" needed to understand and negotiate the new city, as Walcott suggests, but the long poem also maps difference—racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and so on—onto the city of Toronto. Deborah Parsons puts it this way:

> The urban writer is not only a figure within a city; he/she is also the *producer* of a city, one that is related to but distinct from the city of asphalt, brick, and stone, one that results from the interconnection of body, mind, and space, one that reveals the interplay of self/city identity. The writer adds *other maps* to the city atlas; those of social interaction but also of myth, memory, fantasy, and desire. (1, italics added)

The streets being "cut" and added to *thirsty's* new map of the city in the passage above, then, demarcate the unexpected culturally and socially significant spaces in this new Toronto without looking away from the material and theoretical spaces—like the "barracoon," the court of law, and psychosis-inducing racial (self)hatred—that were imagined, and then designed, by an imperial ideology.

Though there are, arguably, two cities in thirsty, it is the first city, the one Brand describes as "transient" (40), "brief as history" (28), and "vagrant, fugitive" (36) that is captured and presented back to the reader. The focus on this "becoming" city or, in Walcott's terms, the city that is "coming into existence," is what connects the text to a larger conversation about the role of the *flâneur* as a translator of urban life. On one level, Brand's speaker acts as an interpreter of the

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[16] See, for example, Justin D. Edwards and Douglas Ivison's "Introduction" to *Downtown Canada: Writing Canadian Cities*, pp. 3-13.

human and spatial contours of the urban landscape. She refuses to diminish the complexity of urban life to a series of clichés or to offer definitive opinions about life, particularly the lives of black people, in the city. “Look it’s like this,” she insists, “I’m just like the rest, / limping across the city, flying when I can” (57). In this light, Alan’s murder by a white police officer who is subsequently acquitted and the rupture his death (and life) causes in the intergenerational relationships between his mother, wife and daughter, do not illicit any reductive or binary explanations. “[I]n the city,” the speaker warns, “there is no simple love / or simple fidelity” (5). After all, the speaker reminds us, although Alan is a victim of a racist legacy situated both in “history and modernity” (48) where it coalesces in the “sashaying … carefree … swagger[ing]” (48) figure of the modern day cop figured as neo-Western “gunslinger” (48), Alan is also the man who would awaken his wife “rage red as the tip” (7) of a cigarette and “spil[l] … / suspicions on her body” (7). The scene of his shooting is, after all, also the scene of Julia's suffering at Alan's hands. In several lengthy sections of the long poem, the speaker follows Julia’s restless movements through the city, piecing together her story of domestic abuse and the self-recriminations that still haunt her almost two decades after Alan’s death. This kind of dissonance, complexity and paradox are ubiquitous in *thirsty*—and in the rest of Brand’s corpus—and help create the richness and contradictoriness of Brand’s vision of Toronto. As Janet Wolff has observed, speaking of the historical erasure of female figures from the public space and the refusal of patriarchal renderings of modernity to even consider a *flâneuse*, it is high time theorists “adopt the rather different aim of exploring women’s (and men’s) *actual* lives in the modern city,” rather than simply lamenting their unequal treatment in the literary history of modernity (24-25, italics added). Brand’s resolute approach to investigating and representing the “actual” lives of the vari-

ously marginalized figures in this new post-metropolitan Toronto through the more sympathetic gaze of a similarly marginalized figure—the black *flâneuse*—reveals the contradictoriness of their behaviour and the complexity of their negotiations of everyday life. "These [deeply paradoxical] figures," to borrow again from Wolff, "offer a striking contrast to their more familiar prototypes" which, in the Canadian context, are writ large in mainstream representations of urban bodies in the city of Toronto (25). In addition, these paradoxical "figures" become central to Brand's representation of city life, rather than being cast as lurking figures on the social and cultural periphery of the city. Thus, although at one moment the speaker describes Toronto as a place where "[a]ll the hope [has] gone hard" (24), at another moment she can state in all seriousness that "[d]ays are perfect" here (57).

Reading *thirsty* through the lens of *flânerie* produces the kind of nuanced representation of contemporary or postmodern city life that Dana Brand refers to in *The Spectator and the City*. Although Dionne Brand's poem about the city begins with a declaration of its beauty, the speaker's gaze also falls on the detritus and human suffering so ubiquitous in metropolises as big and complex as Toronto. Importantly, though, when the speaker turns toward the grittier aspects of the city, her gaze is generous and accepting of even these difficult features because they, along with all the "untranslatable" moments of urban beauty, are what create the city's diversity and what make it, ultimately, a livable place (2). In fact, the city's incongruousness is, in Brand's vision, infinitely more desirable than Toronto's growing "suburbs [that are] undifferentiated, prefabricated from no great / narrative" and whose "unflagging dreariness dries the landscape" (36). These desiccated geographies are invariably associated with the spiritual and intellectual death of the unthinking, "the oversleeping, [and] the insomniac" (36) who flee to them for

"succour" (36). The contradictoriness of the city Brand produces in *thirsty* is also its strength. Recalling the opening verse of the poem, Poem III reinforces the thematic ideas that open the long poem:

> That north burnt country ran me down to
> the city, mordant as it is, the whole terror of
> nights with yourself and what will happen,
> animus, loose like that, sweeps you to em-
> brace its urban meter, the caustic piss of
> streets,
> you surrender your heart to the numb symmetry (5)

While the regions north of the urban core might offer temporary relief from the city, they are not without their own particular "terror[s]" and although the city can also be corrosive, it is knowable and, in a paradoxical way offers a kind of solace that the "North burnt country" cannot. The model of neo-*flânerie* in these poems "does justice to the complexity and density of … life as it … [is] lived by all kinds of people" (Dana Brand 189). Notwithstanding the scourge of racism and violence that haunt the book and the city, Brand remains committed to celebrating and, at the very least, recognizing the possibility inherent in the dissonant elements that define city people and city life. It is at these crossroads that the long poem situates that possibility but it also suggests that each individual is responsible for making a choice about how to live in the city: Sometimes the city's stink is fragrant offal, sometimes it is putrid. All depends on what wakes you up, the angular distance of death or the elliptic of living. (62) *thirsty* insists that there is something celebratory in "the sweet ugliness" of a city (24). This seeming discrepancy is reinforced struc-

turally in the way the long poem foregrounds hope, beauty, and possibility despite its consideration of the violence, death, and sorrow that mark the lives of some city dwellers. The idea of possibility, hope, and renewal is foregrounded in small moments and details that the speaker-neo-*flâneuse* notices and translates as she looks around the city. The "clothy blooms of magnolia" (3) on the perennial tree that typically blooms in early spring and the "young man / [who] passes wreathed in cologne" (62), the olfactory expression of desire, anticipation, and possibility are expressions of life and hope.

Coming to Toronto from "Calcutta, Colombo, / Jakarta, Mogila and Senhor do Bonfim, Riberia Grande / and Hong Kong, Mogadishu and the alias St. Petersburg" (20), the movements of the "becoming" city's "yet-to-become people" through the city forge significant changes to the social and cultural texture of the contemporary urban landscape. *thirsty* explores these "spatial practices" at one of the most ideologically and historically significant locations of community in the text, the marketplace. Importantly, in the literature of *flânerie*, the marketplace is a hotly contested site of nineteenth-century sociological investigation which supposedly proved the *a priori* absence of women and other marginalized bodies in the public realm. The "Market" in Poem XXII, is where cultures, ethnicities, races, genders, languages, and social classes collide and intermingle and, importantly, is also the site of transformation and "translation" (40). If the city has its own language, it is created, spoken, and "learned" in the "obscure[e] and raptur[ous]" spaces of cultural and linguistic exchange that transpires in the multi-ethnic, inter-racial, multilingual site of the urban marketplace where commerce is a "danc[e]" between equal partners who, together, reinvent themselves and each other (40). Their "presences" here, in Toronto, "writ[e] the [new] biographies" of the city (40). As Walcott convincingly argues: [Brand's] … restlessness,

the poetics [sic] restlessness, the ethical demand to account for the world we inhabit and the desire to produce a different kind of world … signals … a writing of the space and place of Toronto as a node in a network of international distress and the need to account for and redress such distress. It produces a global feeling from a familiar local. The global circulation of bodies and capital collide and produce the impetus for what should be a world slanted on the side of those pushed furthest from the category of the human. Brand's writing then commands us to think differently of how we might live together. (*Luce ostinata / Tenacious Light* 22).

Toward the end of *thirsty*, in Poem XXX, the speaker declares: "I'm just like the rest, / limping across the city, flying when I can" (57). The line recalls French novelist and playwright Alain-René Lesage's limping devil, Asmodeus, from the novel *The Devil Upon Two Sticks*, who, in an attempt to escape the commotion and dangers of eighteenth-century Madrid, flies above the Spanish city with a companion in tow. From their elevated height, Asmodeus describes all that he sees and translates the conditions and events that unfold beneath them for his friend Cleophas. Often used as a framing text for writing on the *flâneur* and the activity of *flânerie*, Lesage's novel offers a perspective on Brand's methodology for representing the city in *thirsty*. Like the limping devil Asmodeus, neither the city nor its inhabitants need be completely incapacitated by the challenges and vagaries of postmodern life. As the last stanza in Poem XXXII argues, "Sometimes the city's stink is fragrant offal," and "sometimes it is putrid" but in terms of how one lives in and responds to the city, Brand writes, "All depends on" one's perspective (62).

Conclusion:
Ellipsis, Colon, Spring:
The Unfinished Story of the Contemporary Black Canadian City

In his article titled "In Praise of Novels Without Neat Conclusions," critic Lee Rourke argues that, in literature, "tidy narrative ... [c]losure belittles the complexities of meaning" that a text endeavors to create and that, further, "loose ends and ambiguity offer a truer sense of real life" (Rourke). Although the three primary texts in this study are works of literary fiction and poetry, they all draw on historical and current facts to create a sense of verisimilitude and, by extension, urgency. The final story in the Toronto section of Clarke's collection and the last poem in both Compton's and Brand's books of poetry end in untidy, ambiguous, and, perhaps for some readers, unsatisfactory or frustrating ways that mirror the complexity of the emotionally charged and politically trenchant issues they examine. Although, as I have argued in the foregoing chapters, Clarke's, Compton's and Brand's aesthetic and political projects are often excessively disparate, all three writers employ two literary techniques simultaneously in the final poem or story that underscore the common arguments they make about the persistence, ubiquity and efficacy of colonial logic in maintaining the monopoly capitalism and unequal relationships, opportunities and geographies of the colonial era in the contemporary Canadian city. In the first instance, each text is characterized by an unfinished or unresolved narrative thread that acts as a conclusion at the textual level. In the second instance, the narrative non-closure is reinforced by the choice or absence of end punctuation in the final story or poem in each text.

The narrative refusal of closure (the written accounts and the images those accounts evoke) and the choice of closing punctuation (both the presence and absence of typographical marks) are deliberate strategies that have a dual purpose. First, the approach represents with fi-

delity the complexity of black lives and the ongoing struggle black people undertake over space in the city of Toronto. Second, the strategy encourages readers to pick up where the text left off and continue the task of reflecting on and working toward literally changing the current racial, socio-political and economic conditions that Clarke, Compton and Brand take up literarily. In other words, the "loose ends" that Rourke speaks of extend outward into the theoretical spaces beyond the literal confines of the physical text and demand some form of principled intellectual and emotional engagement, commitment, and action from the reader. The continuity that each text forges between the literary and the literal mimics the continuity between the past and the present that is the foundation of McKittrick's "plantation theory" which forms the framework of the present study. In this conclusion, I explore the use and purpose of non-closure in these texts and offer some possible theoretical directions, discourses and spaces the texts point to and open up individually and collectively.

In "What Happened?", the final Toronto story in Clarke's *Free and Young* collection, friends Boysie and Henry quibble about the latter's love poetry which attempts, unsuccessfully, to reproduce the heightened emotion, elevated tone, and vivid imagery of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English poets—like John Milton and John Keats—whose work the two companions were forced to read and memorize as grade-school students in the pre-independence British colonial education system of the Caribbean. Of Henry's love poem to his wife Agatha, Boysie derisively declares: "'I see this as just something write-down on a piece o' paper you took outta your hip pocket, talking a lotta shite about roses…'" (129). Unable to resolve their squabble about the symbolic connotations of the rose in verse or the larger aesthetic meaning of poetry, their comical, profanity-laden and malapropism-peppered disquisition trails off into supposition.

The typographical representation of the characters' inability to resolve the argument—which is a micro-version of the collection's larger preoccupation with the persistent and negative influence of the colonial system on black people living in the Toronto diaspora—is, appropriately, an ellipsis. The use of the ellipsis here suggests the characters' inability to resolve their disagreement about the nature of "real" poetry which must be, Boysie insists, "*printed* in a book … in an English book" like "*all them poems*" the two friends "ha[d] to learn by heart … in school" (129, italics in original). Recalling Beckford's caution that "educational opportunities" for black people in the post-colonial era "served further to acculturate black people to the culture of the dominant white class" which resulted in "black people … regard[ing] the white European culture as superior and, in a dynamic sense, [one] they all [should] aspire to," we might also read the ellipsis in the final line as an indication of the author's inability to complete the difficult conversation around racism, anti-black violence, cultural genocide and black death in the city that unfolds in the individual short stories (64-65). The ellipsis at the end of Boysie's unfinished utterance is especially effective because it connotes an *intentional* omission of information—an unfinished conversation, in this case—and leaves readers with a literal and a theoretical lacuna which the text encourages them to fill in or, at the very least, ponder. Thus, the typography and the discursive caesura are mutually producing and mutually inclusive which creates a more emphatic final narrative gesture; it underscores the sense Clarke endeavors to generate throughout the collection that the situation for black people in the city of Toronto is dire and needs to be addressed directly to prevent the continuing abjection, isolation and death of black people living in the diaspora. Compton uses a similar dual technique in his poetry collection.

At the end of "GHETTO FABULOUS OZYMANDIAS," the final poem in *Performance Bond*, the character called the narrator poses an ostensibly simple question of his interlocutor, Rev. Oz, whose response is a puzzle for which there is seemingly no logical or definitive solution. "'How does it make sense,'" the narrator asks, "'to call the targets'" of urbicide in Hogan's Alley "'arrogant'" (156)? Rev. Oz's response—"'It is arrogant to disappear'"—is a riddle whose answer the narrator finally "'realized'" but, because he does not divulge the solution to the riddle before the end of the dialogue, the reader is left on his or her own to attempt to solve the enigma (156). The narrator and Rev. Oz's conversation is mediated through the "viewfinder" of the narrator's camera which allows him to see his bedraggled black interlocutor—whose home is "a pile of sleeping bags wedged beneath the concrete confluence" of the twinned Georgia Viaduct—when he puts the camera to his eye (153). When the narrator lowers the camera, Rev. Oz disappears. The encounter gestures to a number of issues Compton raises throughout the collection, including the disappearance of black people and space in Hogan's Alley through the urbicidal strategies of the local government as well as the notion that it is only possible, now, to "see" the remnants of that destroyed community through archival photographs. The literal camera lens through which the narrator is able to see Rev. Oz, the black former-present, invisible-visible resident of the Alley, also functions as a trope here. Readers are asked to consider looking at blackness through a different lens—one that does not result in the violent eradication of black life and space; in other words, the intimacy of the camera lens suggests the Merzoeffian "right to the real"—to "friendship, solidarity, … [and] love"—implicit in "the right to look" into "someone else's eyes" in order to produce a sense of "collectivity" (473). Compton underscores this appeal to the reader by employing a colon at the end of the final line of the poem. The colon disam-

biguates the readers' role vis-à-vis the issues the collection raises and encourages readers to elaborate on or complete the intellectual work undertaken within the framework of the discussion between the narrator and Rev. Oz and, indeed, in the other poems. In order to illustrate or expand on what the narrator has said, the reader must make the next move or, in other words, he or she must take up Compton's project by coming up with a solution to fill the space beyond the colon. The reader has to decipher the meaning of Rev. Oz's riddle and from there, look at black life and black space through a lens that sees blackness and black space in more positive ways. Brand uses a similar literary strategy to end her long poem in a way that also does not produce a tidy conclusion, but the absence of punctuation at the end of the final line in the last poem magnifies the impact and significance of her aesthetic choices.

In the last stanza of Poem XXXIII, the final poem in *thirsty*, the speaker/neo-*flâneuse*, a seasoned and resilient but sometimes beleaguered denizen of the city of Toronto, explains that the piercing lament of a siren at night always awakens her and leaves her "breathless as a coming hour" (63). For her, the expectant wail of the siren and the myriad other small nocturnal noises that keep her suspended between sleep and wakefulness create a sense that the city is as "open as doorways," an analogy that figuratively holds both the speaker and the end of the poem in suspension or abeyance (63). The open door is, in Brand's poetic vernacular, an invitation or a possibility or a pathway to create something new out of the legacy of anti-black violence bequeathed by the colonial system. Indeed, the many references in *thirsty* and throughout Brand's entire corpus to open doors, highways, bicycles, subways and other passageways and methods of locomotion argue against neat resolutions or intellectual or physical stasis. In a gesture that reinforces the unclosed and unbounded narrative ending in Poem XXXIII, the last word in the final line is

"undone," which further underscores the incomplete or unfinished nature of the speaker's disquisition on the possibility of creating a decolonial and humane future for black people living in Toronto. In addition and as I argue in the Brand chapter, the fact that *thirsty* both begins and ends in spring—the universal literary symbol of new beginnings, renewal, rebirth and opportunity—lends support to the theory that the poem is only the beginning or part of the hopeful work Brand envisions. The absence of punctuation at the end of the final line of the poem suggests that there are no barriers between the speaker's strategy for creating a more liveable urban existence and the possible actions an engaged reader might take to help mitigate black misery. Brand's ending insists on—rather than suggests with leading punctuation—action because there is no pause at or beyond the end of the final line. Thus, the enjambment is more than an invitation; rather, the open or blank space that exists alongside the speaker's words requires a response from the reader. In and of themselves, then, the unsettled and unsettling narrative endings in Clarke's, Compton's and Brand's writing, convey the impression that the authors' efforts to reproduce and represent a more equitable vision of black city life are only partially realized. The punctuation or absence of punctuation in the final lines of poetry and prose underscores the narrative non-closure that I site above. The typographical choices both anticipate and reflect the ongoing tumultuousness of black city lives and the continuing precariousness of black urban places and spaces that each work takes up.

Each of the primary texts in this project is grounded in and shaped by longstanding histories of imperialism, colonialism, anti-black racism, white supremacy, social segregation and economic exclusion. The plausibility of the descriptions of black spaces and lives is supported by the number of "real life" issues that mirror those depicted in the literature and that have contem-

porary analogues in twenty-first-century Canadian cities. Because racism, exclusion, urbicide and black death persist in various forms and degrees of intensity in the present, these texts argue, so too must the struggle to articulate a path forward towards the creation of a future in which black people and spaces are not subjected to colonial tactics of oppression, violence and erasure. Some of the works in this study undertake that task through the characters' actions or the speakers' account of the poet's message to the reader and thereby inveigle readers to take on the challenge the text lays out. As the texts suggest by their respective endings, it is the responsibility of readers to continue the conversation begun between their covers. To be sure, these three works of literature require an attentive, curious and receptive reader open to and prepared for the kind of principled outer-textual commitment to creating the changes they suggest are necessary in order to produce more liveable urban spaces for black and other marginalized people today and into the future. In other words, although the reader may simply derive pleasure from reading them for their own sake, as literary texts, the deeper, more politically relevant meaning of the poetry and prose can only be fully embraced through the active witnessing and imagining—if not implementing—of change.

In "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place," McKittrick argues that readers and scholars of literary works like Clarke's, Compton's and Brand's must endeavor to "imagine how we are intimately tied to broader conceptions of human and planetary life" and "re-imagine geographies of dispossession and racial violence … as sites through which 'co-operative human efforts' can take place and have a place" (960). In other words, the attentive reader is or becomes a partner in the vision the writer articulates or infers in texts like Clarke's, Compton's and Brand's which "deman[d] ethical engagement" (McKittrick "Plantation Futures" 14). Attending

to the implicit invitation the texts' respective endings extend to readers magnifies their literary value, expands the political work they perform and projects the urgency of their arguments into the realm of "real life." Taken together, then, the effect that the endings of these three texts produce is similar, engages the reader in an intellectual exercise, and argues that the examination of black urban space and life that they begin is not only not done but it is necessarily one that depends on the reader's willing collaboration for fulfillment.

Examining these three particular texts together and within the broad historical-theoretical framework of plantation theory, illuminates the multiple pressures black spaces and people have been under historically and continue to function under in the contemporary Canadian city as they struggle to survive in an inhospitable climate of systemic racism and socio-political and economic hardship. Although their aesthetic styles and their literary, political, and social focus are different, Clarke, Compton, and Brand each draw on the history of the colonial plantation and slavery to demonstrate the colonial-imperial underpinnings of the various systems and institutions in post-colonial contexts that continue to oppress black people and mark black spaces as unlivable, dangerous, and expendable. Despite some commonalities, their literary statements are, as I have argued above, different. Clarke's short fiction suggests that his characters are doomed to repeat the colonial behaviour they have unconsciously internalized. Each of the stories suggests that Clarke's characters are unable to recognize or access their own potential for change thus, despite living in the city of Toronto, they continue to function according to the plantation logic into which they were socialized; they then reproduce and live within a system that, theoretically and psychically, resembles the plantation. While there is merit to Barrett's argument that Clarke's stories and fictional characters "blacken" Toronto with their presence in

the nation—they literally add blackness to the city's existing demographic mix—the persistent racism, violence, economic hardship, and social exclusion they suffer exposes the nation's systems and institutions for the racist colonial relics they are and thus tarnishes or "blackens" Canada's reputation. More precisely, Clarke's stories make a mockery of the putative hospitality, congeniality, and equality enshrined in the nation's multiculturalism act and its policies. This aspect in Clarke's writing—the way it holds up a mirror to the racist elements in Canadian society—has earned him a number of detractors who argue that his harsh critique is not merited and his ingratitude for the country that received him dilutes the power of his fiction and alienates his potential reading audience. Be that as it may, Clarke has steadfastly confronted the ongoing impact of the colonial legacy on the individual and collective lives of black Caribbean-Canadians in Toronto and although neither Clarke nor his characters were able to fully envision a postcolonial future for black people living in Toronto in which they benefitted from the same opportunities as other members of society, his stories force readers to confront a history which is not always (accurately or fully) represented in official histories of the nation. His fiction necessarily and, I argue, purposely, leaves readers wrestling with an unsavory depiction of Canada and Toronto and, it is hoped, a desire to prove the writer and his characters wrong by endeavoring to change the problems Clarke's Toronto stories so vividly depict. Unlike Clarke's stories, Compton's poems depict a "fake" black community in the space were the real Hogan's Alley once thrived. Compton's sustained literary focus on the Alley as well as his decades-long socio-political advocacy on behalf of the black Vancouver diaspora via HAMP seem to have a direct, linear connection to the City of Vancouver's recent decision to revitalize Hogan's Alley— a decision that speaks to the outer-textual life of the message *Performance Bond* conveys.

In mid-2017, the City of Vancouver announced that it was embarking on a project aimed at revitalizing Hogan's Alley. Working in conjunction with African American architect, Zena Howard, who is known for undertaking "culturally-significant projects including the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC" (Howard), and a "city-supported working group" with multi sectoral membership, the provincial government is removing the hulking Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts so that it can "resurrect Hogan's Alley as a cultural hub" (Dimcoff). The working group involved in the revitalization, the Hogan's Alley Society, is an offshoot of two other local black advocacy groups: the Hogan's Alley Land Trust and, importantly, the Hogan's Alley Memorial Project or HAMP which Wayde Compton co-founded almost two decades ago as a way to "kee[p] the black history of Vancouver alive and part of the present" (HAMP). Before the end of the present decade, "a Cultural Centre to support community building through food, gathering and celebration, education and empowerment, art, music and dance, and research and knowledge of Black Canadian history" will be erected in the space where the floral "Welcome to Hogan's Alley" sign Compton and his colleagues planted eleven years ago first took root (HAMP). Compton's decades long literary interest in Hogan's Alley as well as his years of social advocacy on behalf of the black Vancouver diaspora, suggest a direct correlation between the literary invocation to action in *Performance Bond* and the literal Hogan's Alley revitalization project initiated by the City of Vancouver—the same body that was responsible for its demolition in the middle of the last century. This turn, at the institutional level in particular, towards an embracing and celebrating of the legacy of Hogan's Alley and the contribution its black citizens have made to the city of Vancouver speaks to the power of the literary, the poetic and the performative to challenge

mis-history and effect change in the present and the real. I suggest that we might think of the Hogan's Alley revitalization project as a long overdue response to the question Compton's colleague, the writer Joy Russell, posed of him some two decades ago during a conversation about their joint work on HAMP; her question, Compton writes in *After Canaan*, acted as "[t]he spark of inspiration for th[e] retro-speculative project" (113) that is *Performance Bond*: "What do you wish you'd found there?" Russell asked (114). Compton's poetic response to Russell's question is one of several elements that acted as the "spark of inspiration" for the physical revitalization of Hogan's Alley and thus speaks to the power of Compton's poetry.

In "An *Ars Poetica* from the Blue Clerk," Dionne Brand argues that "poetry's power" is located in its ability to "interrogat[e] the reader" (50). Unlike narrative, which, Brand argues, "is … almost always implicated in the colonial/imperial/racist project" because it contains and articulates "the persistence of the dominant narratives of coloniality, racism and imperialism" (60), "Poetr[y]" has the "capacity[y] for overwriting … the narratives of non/being in the diaspora" (59). The poems in *thirsty* demonstrate the power of poetry and poetic language by creating a "becoming" city in which the lives of its black residents are not contingent on the approval or permission or even the presence of its white residents. For instance, despite his death at the hands of a white cop, Alan is still *in* and inextricable from the city of Toronto—its history, its architecture and its soil. Like the recovered remains of black slaves in Lower Manhattan and the bodies of Lucie and Thornton Blackburn in Toronto, Alan's life and death also serve as what McKittrick calls a "corporeal connection[n]" to the history of the plantation and the colonial project ("Plantation Futures" 1). The "deliberate red" of Alan's blood which "seeped into the floor grooves when … [he] fell" (*thirsty* 55) after being shot in Toronto, Canada, is a reminder

that he is "*still* there" ("Plantation Futures" 2, italics in original) and that his presence "brings into the production of space and the cityscape, into the soil, the physical, chemical, and biological remains of blackness" (2). In *thirsty*, Brand's poetry "produce[s] a grammar in which Black existence might be the thought and not the unthought; might be" (59). Recognizing that "[w]e are a people without a translator" (*Ars Poetica* 60) who understands and speaks the language of black, Brand, through her neo-*flâneuse*, creates a poetic language—a "grammar"— that "cut[s] out a space toward a description of being in the diaspora" (59) and fully "living" (60) in that geography. The neo-*flâneuse's* "refusal of a particular interrogative gaze" (59) or, in Mirzoeff's terms, her refusal of "the authority of visuality" (474) is what gives her, and her fellow black "denizen-citizens" the "autonomy" (Mirzoeff 473) Mirzoeff associates with the act of "looking" (473).

Despite their often divergent and sometimes incompatible visions and interpretations of black urban life and space, studying Clarke's, Compton's, and Brand's writing together underscores the contradictoriness and complexity of the black urban life that they depict. In addition, discussing such different texts together also conveys a reality about blackness that is frequently overlooked which is that black people in the diaspora do not think or function as an undifferentiated or amorphous mass. The perspectives and frames of reference of the authors and their characters/speakers are influenced by such diverse factors as gender, age, temporal and spatial proximity to plantation life, aesthetic vision, desire, and geography, amongst others. Naturally, then, their visions of black life in the Canadian urban alternately diverge, merge, overlap, and, in some cases, bear little resemblance at all even when the subject of their writing is the same city, as in the case of Clarke and Brand. The endings of these three texts signal the writers' inability to re-

solve the many troubling issues they raise. This is not to say that they are unable to do so literarily; rather, the literary non-closure highlights and mimics the "real life" non-resolution around issues like anti-black violence, ongoing racism and systemic abuse and thus underscores the urgent need to continue discussing the issues the texts raise with a view to finding ways to create a present and future that does not subject black spaces and people to colonial ways of valuing their presence in the contemporary Canadian city. The texts' open-ended endings serve to awaken readers to the unfinished work of ensuring that black bodies— those already buried and those still alive—are granted the same respect which is due all people regardless of race, gender, social status, or country of origin. Thus, by refusing "tidy narrative closure," each of the primary texts in this study also, through their typographical gestures, "refuses a commitment to our present order of things" ("Plantation Futures" 14).

This group of texts leads us towards an understanding of black life as emerging into a new kind of wakefulness that both recognizes its origins "in and of the wake" of the slave ship as it crossed the Atlantic, the Middle Passage, but also as fully awakened to the possibilities intrinsic to that theoretical and spatial location (Sharpe 8). Christina Sharpe links black people everywhere to the watery space of the wake caused by the forward movement of the vessels that transported black people from Africa into slavery in the Caribbean and the Americas during the Middle Passage; importantly, however, Sharpe's analogy also suggests that, despite and because of that history, black people are also moving steadily forward, toward a collective awareness of and desire to mitigate the historical factors that continue to preserve the status quo. In the wake of Austin Clarke's death in 2016; in the wake of the imminent revitalization of Hogan's Alley; and in the wake of the awarding of the Order of Canada—whose Latin motto, *Desiderantes Melio-*

rum Patriam, translates to “they desire a better Canada”—to Dionne Brand, these writers and the texts I have explored here “bring th[e] Black body into focus *in itself* and *for itself* in a language for recording the space/time of that body” (“*Ars Poetica*” 69).

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