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Evoking a site of memory: An Afrofuturist Sonic Walk that Maps Historic
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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the work of historians, geographers, writers and other Black Canadian Studies scholars I argue that Blackness has been systematically 'disappeared' from the Canadian nation. I explore various mechanisms through which this disappearance has been achieved, ranging from historical omissions to social exclusion as well as literally burying evidence of Canada's Black past. Numerous theorists agree that the absence of Blackness defines the Canadian landscape and although their ideas about how to redress this absence vary, their work demonstrates that this absence is highly generative for Black artists and scholars. I apply this insight to my work as a digital artist creating HUSH HARBOUR, a sonic walk that utilizes digital media and performance to reimagine the past from the perspective of the present and future and to remap Blackness onto the Canadian landscape in embodied and sonic ways. Embracing elements of African Diasporic sonic, fantastic and spiritual traditions, I evoke a site of memory and desire within which participants recreate, reveal and transform the space that currently hides the Black presence.

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FOREWORD | Mapping motivation

My work as a digital media and performance artist explores the notion of home and belonging. My interest stems from personal experience. When I was 9 years old I left Jamaica where I was born to live in Canada. When I arrived in Canada I felt like a foreigner. When I returned "home" to visit Jamaica, I realized I had become foreign there too. This 'geographic rupture' fuels my search to locate myself in relation to the Canadian nation and the African diaspora.

I will begin with the exploration that led to this project. Shortly after I moved into the Grange, an old area of downtown Toronto, I tried to find evidence of the Black community that my friend Tim speaks of so fondly when he recalls his childhood growing up there in the 40's and 50's. I searched the streets only to realize, to my astonishment, that it had seemingly vanished. There was little or no acknowledgement of the history of enslaved and fugitive Africans and servants who helped build the town, nor was there mention of the Blacks from the Caribbean and Southern States recruited by the railways as cheap labour.

Continuing to search the Grange neighbourhood, I eventually found two important traces of the area's Black past. The first was a plaque in front of a house on Cecil Street near Beverley commemorating Donald Willard Moore, a tailor who came to Canada from Barbados in 1913. Moore, who was an activist and leader in the Black community, led a delegation to Ottawa on April 27,

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1954 to challenge the nation's discriminatory immigration policies. This lobby contributed to the recognition of Toronto's multi-cultural identity. (McTair, 2000) The plaque's tiny surface is densely packed with information, as if to make up for the absence of other acknowledgement of an entire community.

At Huron and D'Arcy streets I came across First Baptist Church—a living legacy. This church is credited as being both the first Baptist Church in the city and the city's oldest Black institution. (Hill, 1992 p.139) Its history began with fugitive slaves who arrived in Canada in 1826 from the Southern States seeking freedom. On the church's website their historian, Rochelle Williams, chronicles their story.

“When they first arrived, the group was not numerous or prosperous enough to support their own church, so they tried to attend existing white churches.

They soon found that they were required to meet two conditions for membership; they needed to produce letters of dismissal from their old churches and repay their former masters the loss of money sustained because of the escape from slavery.

Shocked by the response of the white churches to their request, the group realized that they would not be joining those congregations and under the leadership of Elder Washington Christian—himself a former slave and native of Virginia who had a call to serve among the refugee former slaves—organized the group into a Baptist congregation in 1826.”

(Williams)

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The congregation, which has since moved out of the area, still worships there—coming from North Toronto, East York, Scarborough, Mississauga and places even further afield. Unnoticed by most of its neighbours, the church's visibility on Sunday mornings as a vital site of Black geography belies its invisibility within the mainstream histories of the city. The absence of these stories in accounts of Toronto's official history is emblematic of the exclusions of Canada's Black past across the nation. Framing Black bodies as foreign and new reinforces White bodies as the normative bodies that belong in these spaces. This creates a spatial narrative that edits Black Canadians out of the story.

Encountering these few 'hidden' sites of historic significance awakened my determination to uncover more of the Black histories buried in Toronto. I consulted Afua Cooper for help on the project. She pointed me to stories that date back to the beginning of the town of York in 1793.

Blacks first arrived in York as servants and slaves of the loyalists. Black labour helped clear the land and build the town. Daniel Hill confirms that in 1790 a law to abolish slavery was overthrown in Upper Canada's legislature. *"It was loudly opposed by some of the slave-owning legislators and by many wealthy land-owners who insisted that slave labour was necessary in an agricultural economy"* (Hill, 1992 p.17)

Thus began my quest to piece together the earliest Black past of Toronto. This endeavour yielded many suppressed and buried stories, ironic in

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a city considered one of the most multicultural on the planet. Rinaldo Walcott states

“the struggle of diasporic blacks for space in Canada has a long geneology, and a trajectory that will continue to cause reverberations across all aspects of the national body. I invoke the body, or rather, bodies, here because what is ultimately at stake is the space and place that bodies, both actual and symbolic, occupy in the nation’s imagination.” (Walcott, 1997 p.54)

I too had a desire to evoke Black bodies. I wanted to intervene in space to breathe life into Black historic figures and present them as physical beings that once occupied the city. I wanted people to walk in their footsteps and imagine their lives. I brought together several stories of historic Black communities of the Grange to create a narrative entitled *Miss Canadiana’s Heritage and Culture Walking Tour*. Miss Canadiana, a beauty queen persona I created and have performed since 2002, guided the tour and told the stories. My image as a Black woman representing Canadian culture and identity disrupts what I experience as the unspoken binary of *Real Canadian and Diverse Other* that seems to be taken for granted in Canada. *“By embodying the contradictions of the Canadian nation, she (Miss Canadiana) at once centralizes Blackness, and points to its absence within constructions of Canadian national identity.”* (Turner, 2012 p.56) Miss Canadiana probes beneath the familiar city to reveal stories below the surface. As an engaging

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personality, her body is an interface to the Grange's Black past, enabling the public to access stories that are conspicuously missing from the city's official narratives.

These stories, told through Miss Canadiana, succeeded in attracting public and media attention and response but this format had its limitations. Miss Canadiana was welcoming and engaging but some of these stories were painful and peopled by folks who had lived in such contradictory times that the nuances of their lives could not be captured within this format.

I searched for a form that would enable me to express a fuller range of Black subjectivities and explore the complexities of the Black experience through time and space. I sought to understand the mechanisms through which space is created and Blackness is disappeared so I could find ways to interrupt and intervene. The next chapter lays the ground from which HUSH HARBOUR—my sonic walk project—emerges.

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Chapter 1 | The Where of Blackness

Numerous scholars give evidence that Black history is not only missing but purposely erased from Canada's official historic records (McKittrick, 2006) (Holness & Sutherland, 2000) (Vernon, 2008; Walcott, 1997). Afua Cooper states "*Canadian history, insofar as its Black history is concerned, is a drama punctuated with disappearing acts.*" (Cooper, 2006 p.7) Key to reinstating Black history in Canada is trying to understand how the disappearance came about. I ask: What mechanisms hold in place this history of denial and disappearance that forms the Canadian landscape? By what means is four hundred years of Black presence erased from the land? How can I, as a Black Canadian simultaneously exist in a space and yet be rendered either hypervisible or invisible? One way to begin to explain this is to draw on ideas about the nature of space.

The Social Production of Space

Space is central to human life. It shapes, reflects and influences every aspect of life, but as several scholars assert space does not naturally occur. It is shaped as a result of the exercise of power. Lefebvre (1991) reminds us that space is produced through a series of deliberate acts by different and competing social groups. These acts start with the reasons for wanting to make space. Dominant groups shape space in their own interests. A brief example

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from the built environment in Toronto illustrates Lefebvre's idea. If you walk up the imposing University Avenue in Toronto from Front Street, you encounter Osgoode Hall, the building which is the home of the legal institutions of the state such as the court of appeal. You encounter buildings which house large commercial and financial corporations as well as medical and administrative institutions. Your walk culminates at Queens Park where the provincial legislature and seat of governance for the province is sited. En route you walk along a wide boulevard with a series of statues on the meridian that divides the road. Many of these statues commemorate wars of the British Empire such as the South African War in which the British fought the Dutch colonists on African soil for control of the colony. Another statue commemorates those who died in World War 1 in which Europeans fought each other for control of the world. The provincial legislature itself is an imitation of a large Scottish stone edifice.

I read this space as a performance of how elites reproduce their dominance through space. That is, the space enacts the power relations which rule our lives. Since space is created within a system where dominant groups seek to maintain their power, space necessarily reflects the dominant order. At the same time space is also recreated actively through our use of it. As we use the space on University Avenue we continually encounter the colonial history of Canada and are reminded that the country was built by British settlers. As we walk we experience the grandeur of the wide streets which propose to us that we are part of a powerful nation brought into being through

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the military and intellectual activities of white men. We are invited to internalize the pedagogy of the avenue as we are continually reminded of the sacrifices that men of grit and strength have made in order for us to be able to enjoy this urban landscape.

The space becomes both an end product and a part of the process of production itself since everything that comes into being on University Avenue uses space. Values and power relationships are encoded into space and then are reproduced in and shape the lived experience of those who inhabit space. As Lefebvre reminds us "*The space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power.*" (Lefebvre, Henri, 1991 p. 26) Space then is both a tool of control and power and a part of the process through which power works.

These ideas of space are also echoed by Katherine McKittrick who argues that "*space and place give black lives meaning.*" (McKittrick, 2006 p.xiii) She observes that space, although actively and humanly created, appears to just naturally occur without human interaction. This perception of naturalness enables uneven power relationships, such as racism and sexism to be replicated undetected in the process of space production and mapped on the land, resulting in uneven geographies. (McKittrick, 2006 p.xv) This explains how race becomes spatialized and as McKittrick would argue, despatialized.

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Following McKittrick and extending my reading of the built environment on University Avenue, I want to propose that this environment actively renders black subjects invisible since it in no way references their presence in the nation other than as the objects of empire. There is, for example no memorial to Thornton Blackburn, an escaped slave who worked at Osgoode Hall in the 19th Century and who some years later started the first taxi company in Toronto. The proper place of Black folks in this constellation of spatial power is as invisible objects of stable and powerful colonizing subjects who come into being and visibility through the act of advancing empire. In the words of McKittrick *"The 'where' of black geographies and black subjectivities then, is often aligned with spatial processes that apparently fall back on seemingly predetermined stabilities..."* (McKittrick, 2006, p.xi)

Given the centrality of space in human endeavours, the way it reflects society's uneven power and its neutral appearance, let us now return to an examination of how space becomes racialized in the context of the Canadian nation.

Space/Race and the Making of the Canadian Nation

If spaces are organized to sustain unequal social relations how is it that these relations become racialized? How do spatialized social relations become spatialized racial relations? One way that this happens is through national narratives. Nations, as Benedict Anderson famously observed, are *"imagined*

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communities." (Anderson, 1983, p. 7) That is, nations are constructed through narratives which are told and retold to enable people who have never met each other to imagine that they are part of the same community.

The concept of nation as a space for being and becoming draws on mythologies and foundational narratives to define which bodies belong and which bodies are foreign, which bodies are dominant and which subordinate. Canada, Sherene Razack notes, follows the trajectory of a typical White settler state. In Canadian narratives indigenous bodies—those of the first peoples—are seen as belonging to an ancient time before the nation was formed. History begins, in this model when White settlers arrive. Their imposition of a legal principle called *terra nullius*—declaring the land to be empty—enabled them to 'legitimately' lay claim to the land. Aboriginal people, erased through 'legal' means were forced to prove their existence in White courts. Whites became the indigenized owners of the land and the creator of the narratives that tell stories of their struggle to build and civilize a wild country. People of colour are seen in this model as "newcomers" who, upon their arrival, reap the benefits White Canadians have benevolently provided. Histories that contradict this narrative are simply excluded. (Razack, 2002 p.3)

Razack's ideas help explain how White Canadians have racialized Canadian space as White space by privileging the narratives of the colonizer/settler. Dominant White settlers have held the power to define the landscape and its histories while the nation simultaneously constructs itself as

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a modern, multicultural, multi-ethnic state. Razack helps us to understand how narratives of space produce and reproduce stories of racial dominance and subordination. She also helps us to understand how colonial relations underlie this. I propose however that she does not discuss how these spatial narratives produce Black Canadian subjects nor does she account for the specifics of anti-Black racism. Racism, enacted through exclusion, differentiation and subordination was experienced historically in particularly violent, embodied ways by Africans in the Americas where Black lives were reduced to property from which profit was produced during the long period of slavery.

To understand how anti-Black racism operates in the context of the making of Canadian national space, we will look at the process by which Black migrants were excluded through the regulations around migration.

Ideas of the Canadian nation were encoded in specific exclusionary imagery in the 19th century. The Department of the Interior iconized images of the Canadian landscape, constructing pastoral scenes of White farmers harvesting golden wheat. These images were launched as part of an elaborate publicity campaign. James Oliver Curwood, a writer, was paid to concoct romantic adventure stories of the emerging nation, then legion of officers were hired to distribute this information internationally. Thousands of White Europeans and Americans were attracted to Canada's frontiers, lured by offers of loans for the purchase of farms. (Francis, 2011 p.25) When the publicity campaign to settle Canada reached Oklahoma, it excited many Blacks who

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yearned to leave behind them the Jim Crow laws, racism and growing segregation in that state. The Canadian prairie seemed an attractive alternative and in the early 1900's over 1,000 Black settlers arrived in Saskatchewan and Alberta, only to find as Shepard notes, that American style racism was alive and well in Canada—fanned into frenzy by the media. (Shepard, 1996 p.85)

Immigration officials tried to discourage Black settlement on the Canadian prairie through strict medical tests and taxes, but the Black migrants easily met all the requirements (Shepard, 1996 p.88). Their presence caused alarm that rippled across the nation. 'Coincidentally' a media story of a young white girl who claimed to have been attacked and robbed by a Black man evoked the fearful mythology of Black men as sexualized savages and aroused hatred. Although the child later confessed that she had made up the elaborate story, the stage was set for the racist response it provoked. Led by the *Edmonton Board of Trade*, and supported by groups like *The Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire*, 3,400 Whites signed a petition demanding that the federal government slam the door shut to Blacks. An order-in-council was issued to bar Blacks from entering Canada; it was approved by the federal government on August 12, 1911 and repealed a few months later in favour of more covert ways of controlling Black immigration such as sending agents to the source to dissuade Blacks from coming. As Shepard points out, "*the fact*

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that it (the Order in Council) was approved at all indicates how serious Canada was about keeping the northern plains white.” (Shepard, 1996 p.100)

Canadian space became racialized through an historical process of exclusion under the colonial regime. This allowed for the privileging of the stories and images of white settlers who produced and controlled the space in their own interests and who excluded bodies of colour through the policing of Black immigration.

Burying the Evidence of Black Canada

The production of Canada as a white space was, in part, enabled through the active destruction of the evidence of Black settlement. *Speakers for the Dead*, a film by David Sutherland and Jennifer Holness chronicles events as they unfolded in Grey County where whispered secrets shrouded the disappearance of the Black settlement that pre-dated the current White community. One town resident who wanted to break silence led a group of citizens determined to dig up a White farmer's field and find the Black cemetery that had been ploughed over to make room for a potato patch. Alarmed, the town tried to stop them, preferring that the Black history of the area remain quietly buried underground. The group's leader, who appeared visibly shaken, noted that this scenario, repeated in sites all over the country, brought the veracity of the nation's histories into question. (Holness & Sutherland, 2000)

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The disappearance of Blackness from Grey County was achieved through a number of factors. Space appears to be natural, neutral and normal, which enables the dominant social order to be replicated undetected. As McKittrick reminds us, space isn't something that "*just is*". Space is socially produced and actively created. (McKittrick, 2006 p.xi) Through burying the Black past, Whites established the town as a natural space of Whiteness. The townsfolk's fearful response to the threat of physically unearthing Blackness reveals their stake in maintaining what appeared to be the 'natural order'.

The Space of History

In Grey county and across the nation, there were other incidents that contributed to erasing the Black past from the space of the nation. Since history is the source from which national narratives are created and, as discussed, these stories play a role in shaping space, it is important to look at what shapes history.

The following example helps explain the way archival knowledge shapes these space of Blackness in Canada.

While researching and compiling a Black prairie literature archive, Karina Vernon reported that she was constantly confronted with well-meaning people offering their knowledge about John Ware, a famous Black prairie cowboy. She wondered why Ware was so visible yet nobody seemed to know

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anything about Canada's Black prairie communities. She realized through her research that Ware was memorialized in a way that removed him from the context of the Black prairie. This process culminated in his house being moved to Dinosaur National Park years after he died.

“As a way of remembering John Ware, though, this memorial only forgets. Dinosaur Provincial Park’s interpretative material does not contextualize Ware’s presence in southern Alberta within the wider black history of the prairies. Nor does it mention the black fur traders, interpreters, cowboys, ranchers, and labourers who were on the prairies during the nineteenth century, both before and during the same time as Ware, nor the black farmers, homesteaders, business-owners and what I call ‘points-system settlers,’ who came after him, in the twentieth century.”

(Vernon, 2008, p. 3)

Revealing Space and Race

We can see from the previous examples that through the production of space, White Canada actively maintains an imbalance of power that replicates the dominant order. The results are uneven geographies that conceal, overwrite and disappear Blackness. Let us now look at how Canada's White space can be interrupted and the Black presence can be restored and revealed.

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Katherine McKittrick's work specifically focuses on Blackness and space in Canada. She uses geography, which she defines as the social production of the meanings of space as an interpretive lens to locate Black bodies in relation to social history. (McKittrick, 2006 p.xi) She views geography as a system that both conceals and reveals, which sheds light on how Blackness can be both hypervisible and invisible, a phenomenon often referred to as the absent presence. (McKittrick, 2006 p.99) For instance, stories of fugitive American slaves escaping via the Underground Railroad occupy a place of pride in Canadian history yet the story of Canadian slavery, Black feminism and Black resistance are surprises, "*unexpected and concealed*" within Canada. (McKittrick, 2006, p. 92) Space is constructed to exclude Blackness and Black people in Canada. McKittrick argues, they are not perceived as belonging to Canada because Canada is "*a landscape of systemic blacklessness*" (McKittrick, 2006 p.93) where "*landscaping blackness out of the nation coincides with intentions to put blackness out of sight.*" (McKittrick, 2006 p.96)

Systemic erasure of Blackness can be interrupted, insists McKittrick. Seemingly "*Blackless*" spaces can be transformed into Black geographies, sites of memory where currently concealed narratives of Canada's Black past are revealed and enable new possibilities beyond that which is currently visible to be imagined. Black geographies "*insist that the Canadian nation-space is simultaneously occupied by and implicated in different forms of blackness*". (McKittrick, 2006) In order to explain her ideas, she gives the example of a

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transatlantic slave ship, a space where multiple geographies oppose each other. She points to two different geographic windows through which this moment in history can be understood. (McKittrick, 2006 p.xii) Through one window, we see technological progress and slavery as an economic engine that exponentially expands the European empire and feeds its wealth. Using Sylvia Wynter's theory, (McKittrick, 2006 p.129) McKittrick explains that the enterprise of global expansionism was the product of socio-spatial rupture. When Europeans encountered worlds previously considered non-existent and people that they couldn't imagine, they called into being a biocentric code that centralized Europeans as "Man" and classified the rest of humanity into sub categories of "human others". This shift justified spatial and economic dominance and created "*Man's geography*", which became the 'normative and natural' measure of the world Europeans dominated. (McKittrick, 2006 p.128) Black lives were regarded as units of profit so are concealed within this geographic space. (McKittrick, 2006 p.xi)

Drawing our attention now to look through a Black geographic window, McKittrick points to Olaudah Equiano, centralizing the experience of Blackness in his narrative of the middle passage and ascribing meaning to the ship from his subject position. When Black subjecthood is revealed the ship is articulated as a space of pain, and violence, throwing into question the seemingly stable cartographic rules that have produced unequal geographies. (McKittrick, 2006 p.xii)

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Demonstrating that these spaces are unstable and can be ruptured to reveal Black subjectivities, McKittrick offers a key idea that enables a reimagination of Blackness and space in Canada. As sites of memory, these spaces are powerful; they have the potential to provide an opening for artists to generate new meanings through artistic interpretations and responses. McKittrick acknowledges the pain and potency of this creative work when she says,

“The site of memory is also the sight of memory—imagination requires a return to and engagement with painful places, worlds where black people were and are denied humanity, belonging, and formal citizenship; this means a writing of where and how black people occupy space through different forms of violence and disavowal.” (McKittrick, 2006 p.33)

This sentiment was echoed by Saidya Hartman,

“This writing is personal because this history has engendered me, because “the knowledge of the other marks me, because of the pain experienced in my encounter with the scraps of the archive...”

(Hartman, 2008, p. 5)

It is this site of memory that offers me a place of belonging from which to speak. Here, is where I begin to (re)imagine the Black past of Toronto and to articulate Black subjectivities.

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Mapping Black Canada

One of the key debates in representing the space of Blackness in Canada is the question of the relevance of the concept of the Canadian nation in relation to Blackness. Karina Vernon represents these polarizing arguments through an examination of the work of George Elliott Clarke and Rinaldo Walcott. (Vernon, 2008 p.26) Clarke, whom she identifies as a cultural nationalist, offers an exhaustive historical archive of Black cultural production that ruptures hegemonic assumptions that Blackness is recent and urban. His position is to construct Blackness as Canadian whereas Walcott conceptualizes Blackness as part of a diaspora that rejects the construct of the nation state to imagine a post-national connection of various global diasporic sites. Vernon notes that while the deterritorializing post-nation debates leave out the particularities of place, the Canada-centric theories affirm rather than disrupt the contested terrain of nation. (Vernon, 2009 p.40) Both sides of the debate, she argues, are needed in order to theorize the vast complexity of Black Canada. (Vernon, 2009 p.42)

Dionne Brand is on the extreme side of the post-nation debate. I found myself arguing more yet also agreeing more with her than any of the others who accompany me on this journey. This is possibly because Brand and I investigate the same terrain and have come to the same conclusions yet we have chosen different responses. She describes a scene in St. Vincent where

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she meets children who ask her where she was from. (Brand, 2001, p. 181) Her feeling of being from nowhere in sharp contrast to their rootedness is heartbreaking and all too familiar. My art practice is fuelled by this experience of alienation. It arises from living in a land that professes to be welcoming but in which I am reminded daily that I am an alien, or as Brand states, a fiction. I use my image as Miss Canadiana to point to the contradiction of the Canadian mythology. My body, as a representative of Canadian heritage, is surprising only because Blackness is perceived as foreign in Canada.

Through her poetry, Brand offers a cartography of Blackness that defies borders and collapses space. (Brand, *Land to Light on*, 1997 p.58) Like Brand, I am haunted by the idea that she refers to as a "*rupture in geography*", a realization that "*we were not from the place where we lived and we could not remember where we were from or who we were*". (Brand, 2001 p.5)

I find Brand's embracing of the idea of displacement discomfoting, because I too feel this displacement and experience it as a painful condition. Brand articulates displacement as her identity and as I have previously stated, "*my experience of diaspora is a sense of restless landlessness, offering no possibility of return. Without place as an anchor point the idea of belonging becomes a poetic metaphor*". (Turner, 2012 p.53) Her provocative statement "*to live in the Black Diaspora is I think to live as a fiction*" (Brand, 2001 p.18) brings me face to face with my own longing for home.

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Like Brand, I resist the idea of an uncomplicated belonging to the Canadian nation but my work, in many ways, is a (re)negotiation of the terms of belonging. I argue that the Canadian nation, like any nation, is a socially constructed entity that holds the power to create space. This space, in turn, defines the lived experiences of people within it. It is necessary then to unearth and restore Canada's Black past not only as Black history but as Canadian history; this confronts and transforms the structures of power that currently relegate Blackness in Canada to the margins. Despite the persistence of the 'Blackless' Canadian landscape and the mechanisms that keep it intact, I see my task as intervening in the mechanisms of spatial domination to create new narratives that engage with histories uncovered by scholars like Afua Cooper and Karina Vernon. I seek to create a site of memory that enables voices that have long been silenced to speak.

Breathing life into fragmented, buried Black histories requires an intervention into history. Toni Morrison uses the term, *Site of Memory* to describe how memory and imagination can intervene in history. She states that her work involves completing slave narratives so their hidden truths can be revealed. (Morrison, 1992 p.299) She explains that slave narratives were veiled because the writers' goal was not to reveal the truth of their inner lives but to persuade Whites that Blacks were human so they would stop the heinous institution of slavery. She observes, "*in shaping the experience to make it palatable to those who were in a position to alleviate it, they were silent*

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about many things, and they 'forgot' many other things." (Morrison, 1992 p.191) Morrison takes up the personal invitation to "*complete*" their work. She intervenes in history where power very rarely rendered Black subjects its authors. "*Facts can exist without human intelligence, but truth cannot.*" (Morrison, 1992 p.193)

As if in answer, Brand irreverently critiques what she considers Toni Morrison's attempt to interrupt the overwhelming power of dominant mythologies. She points to what she sees as Morrison's inability to create a counter mythological space for Blackness in America. "*The dominant myth overwhelms Morrison's mythmaking, leaving her characters stranded in a kind of inevitable failure.*" (Brand, 2001, p. 129) Brand's observations are bitingly honest and her poetry casts a spell over me. She dares to name what I feel and I do agree that Morrison's work is dwarfed by the American myth but as a counter-hegemonic read on dominant mythologies, Morrison's work is potent and even though she firmly locates her stories within the American nation, they speak across borders to inform and inspire artists like myself.

In order to find ways to intervene in the erasure of Blackness from Canadian space I sought to identify and understand the workings of spatial dominance. Through this exploration I've shown how space is actively created within a system of power that reflects the interests of the dominant group. Uneven power relationships are replicated in and through space but since space appears to be solid and natural, these geographies that reflect dominance

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appear to be normal. Blackness is displaced from the Canadian landscape which is constructed as a space of Whiteness. This is achieved through several mechanisms: First, narratives of the Canadian nation have historically constructed Canadian landscapes as places of belonging for white settlers, displacing aboriginal people both forcibly and through the law and making all settlers of colour into newcomers who are also foreign bodies. Stories of Black presence are not circulated widely through the prevailing pedagogies of the nation. Second, immigration procedures also accomplish exclusion by preventing the mobility of Black bodies. Third, the literal destruction of black presences and black history—such as tearing down cemeteries and other settlements—makes Black communities invisible. This is accompanied by the hypervisibility of Black individuals who are presented as isolated exceptions.

As a Black Canadian I experience this despatialization of Blackness as a geographic rupture. Since space is a construction, the cartographic rules are not fixed and stable. They can be reconfigured and new meanings can be constructed. While there is controversy among Black scholars about how these new spaces should be imagined, the project is highly generative. The HUSH HARBOUR sonic walk is an intervention in space that emerges from these explorations. I draw from different sides of the debate about African diasporic presence and the Canadian nation. Participants of HUSH HARBOUR through their active participation bring history from the past into the present and connect the space to other spaces within the Black diaspora to enable Black

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subjectivities to be revealed and expressed.

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Chapter 2 | Digitizing HUSH HARBOUR

“We are vessels of speech, we are the repositories which harbour secrets many centuries old.” (Kouyaté, 1995)

This section is a reflection on the process and principles I used to create HUSH HARBOUR, *a site of memory* that breathes life into overwritten and suppressed Black histories concealed in the Canadian landscape. I present the methodological concerns I encountered in recovering lives that have been systematically erased and embodied forms of knowledge production that draw from both the archive and repertoire as sources from which to recuperate not just objective facts but to capture the emotional geography of the lived, embodied experience. Using sound, digital media and interactivity, I bring the past and future into the present moment. I work with Black bodies as vessels of cultural memory and sculpt a world rooted in the rich sonic cultures of the African diaspora. Using walking as a way to explore space, I peel back the familiar city to reveal hidden layers that hide in plain view.

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Memory and History

Much of the Black past, as we have seen, has been systematically erased and overwritten. Paul Thompson argues that history is not a neutral retelling of facts. It is created within a system of power and has a frame around it whether overtly stated or not. (Thompson, 1978 p.5) He also notes that the source of most mainstream history is the archive, recognized as the authoritative centre of knowledge. Through its practices of collecting documents that evidence the past, the archive has the power to determine whose histories are told and how knowledge is framed.

Just as geographies that reflect uneven power relationships have been created through the production of space, histories are created to reinforce dominant Whiteness. This has resulted in a lack of archival evidence to substantiate the Black past. Reflecting on the loss of histories Marlene Kadar comments that it isn't just the stories of the individuals or groups that is lost; society as a whole suffers the loss. (Kadar, 2005 p.224)

This work of recovering the Black past involves piecing together the absences and silences to breathe life into fragments. Saidiya Hartman expresses the challenge she faced when she searched the archive for evidence that would help her tell the story of Venus, an enslaved girl who died in the hold of a slave ship.

"We stumble upon her in exorbitant circumstances that yield no picture of the everyday life, no pathway to her thoughts, no glimpse of the vulnerability of

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her face or of what looking at such a face might demand. We only know what can be extrapolated from an analysis of the ledger or borrowed from the world of her captors and masters and applied to her.” (Hartman, 2008, p. 3)

Since there was little material evidence to work with in the archive, the work of recovering the Black past had to be done using alternative methods. Toni Morrison differentiates between finding truth and finding facts, explaining that *“facts can exist without human intelligence, but truth cannot.”* (Morrison, 1992 p.303) The work of finding the truth involves looking in places beyond hegemonic sources such as the archive.

I turned to performance and the work of Diana Taylor, who advocates the use of embodied forms of knowledge production in order to capture that which cannot be stored in the archive. She acknowledges the role that colonization has played in centralizing writing as the authorized form of knowledge and history. She observes, *“Part of the colonizing project throughout the Americas consisted in discrediting autochthonous ways of preserving and communicating historical understandings. As a result, the very existence/presence of these populations has come under question.”*(Taylor, 2003 p.34)

Taylor's work broadens academic research to include embodied methodologies which she argues can be used in partnership with archival sources to produce knowledge. (Taylor, 2003 p.16). Performance studies provide access to richer, multi-layered stories and hidden histories since vital

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information, in some cases, can only be transferred through performative acts such as food preparation, songs, religious pilgrimages, political performances, protests and mourning. (Taylor, 2003 p.2)

I have observed that the memories of diasporic Africans who survived the middle passage, despite the violence of colonization, have been passed down mainly from body to body through sound, orality and performance. It is for this reason, I argue that embodied forms of cultural production can best capture, (re)present and re-embody Black cultural memories.

An example of African memories that have survived through performance can be seen in African religions that were outlawed in the Americas. Through an elaborate process of syncretization, African deities were disguised as European saints. St Barbara, for instance, was understood to be the Shango, a Yoruba god, so practitioners would worship Shango in the guise of St Barbara. (Gonzalez-Wippler, 2003 p.77)

Performance enabled me to step into the lives of the people I was researching. I learned about them through tracing their footsteps. For example, Peggy Pompadour, an enslaved woman who lived in the old town of York didn't leave any writings behind. Her life was evidenced through the writings of others. A few letters in the archives along with a couple of newspaper ads by her owner who tried to sell her are the only material traces of Pompadour's life. I used Kadar's ideas from her work on Romany survivors from the Holocaust to find ways to connect the dots of Peggy's life.

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Romany experiences are largely missing from mainstream accounts of the holocaust. Kadar notes, "autobiographical texts" are considered the authorized version of the life histories of individuals or groups. (Kadar, 2005 p.223) In her work to uncover the lives of victims of trauma from a population that left few written texts, she has expanded the genre of autobiography to include fragments and traces. (Kadar, 2005 p.225) Autobiography, notes Kadar, is about feeling, not fact. It slips between history and memory. (Kadar, 2005 p.224)

Roma culture is passed on mainly through "*shared autobiographies*" such as songs and stories, she explains. The autobiographical, therefore, must be expanded to include these and other traces. Kadar further pushed the boundaries of autobiography to include objects that evidenced the social context in which Romany people experienced the holocaust. These included testimonies of those outside the group, lists by the Nazis that recorded the deportation of Romany people to concentration camps and the presence or absence of tattoos. She states:

"in its crudest form, then, I imagine autobiographical traces being able to do the following work; the interpretation of a deportation list as if it were a biographical account, a stand-in for more legitimate biography. In other words objects such as deportation lists and memories passed down through songs can stand as witnesses from which autobiographies can be extracted."

(Kadar, 2005 p.229)

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In the case of Peggy, there were no material objects to draw from but I knew she had been thrown in jail. Building on Kadar's work, I used the space of the jail as an autobiographical trace. The information that Peggy was incarcerated for leaving the house without her owner's permission was entered into the public record through Russell's mention of it in a letter he wrote to fellow slave owner Mathew Elliott to, whom he was trying to sell her. He used one sentence to summarize what might have been some of the most pivotal moments in Peggy's life. There was nothing written about what happened to her in the jail and nothing in the public record was written from her point of view. This left me wondering what her experience was like. I wanted to hear her story from her perspective.

I found sketches and descriptions of the building through books from stories about two famous inmates—Samuel Lount and Peter Mathews. I learned that the building was a rough, rudely built log structure with no beds, blankets nor heat and just straw on the floor. I knew it was infested with vermin because of a journal entry of Russell's sister describing Peggy's son Jupiter and his infestation after he did time in jail. Drawing from this evidence, the social history, events of the day, my own imagination and my experience of living in a Black female body, I wrote a scene of Peggy in jail imagining how she felt and acted in in such an inhuman environment. This scene did not become a part of the HUSH HARBOUR but it informed the script in key ways, enabling me to connect the dots and flesh out Peggy's character, motivations and actions.

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Slavery was central to the world I created for HUSH HARBOUR. I read several narratives of fugitives escaping to Canada in order to understand the conditions that Samuel, the central character in HUSH HARBOUR, might have endured. Samuel was a fictitious character but his experiences were drawn from real accounts of slaves surviving conditions that taxed them beyond what I could imagine. Toni Morrison's description of her work of unveiling slave narratives gave me insights into using imagination to flesh out what is read between the lines of texts. (Morrison, 1992 p.299) Morrison notes that the writers of slave narratives wrote their texts with the desire to prove that Blackness was human in order to appeal to their readers to stop slavery. *"In shaping the experience to make it palatable to those who were in a position to alleviate it, they were silent about many things, and they 'forgot' many other things."* (Morrison, 1992 p.301) Morrison regards her work as unveiling and giving voice to what could not be said within the context in which it was written. She draws from her experience of living in a Black female body and her imagination to explore her subjects' inner lives. She fills in the gaps and completes the incomplete texts to centralize the lives of those deemed marginal.

Her method of exploring the inner lives of her subjects starts with the creation of an image through feeling and memory then letting words emerge. Her process involves trusting the knowledge stored in her memory and drawing on the memories of others. Similar to Kadar, she makes a distinction between

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truth and fact, noting that imagination was the way to truth. (Morrison, 1992 p.302) The Mississippi river, explains Morrison, was rerouted and straightened to make room for houses and development. The river, however, always remembers what it was before it was altered and never stops trying to become its original self. So it is with humans. She calls this "*emotional memory*". It is the source she draws for her work. (Morrison, 1992 p.305)

Naomi Norquay's work provides an example of the use of Kadar's autobiographical trace in the context of Black Canadian history research. Her quest is to recover the life story of Ned Paterson, a Black settler who once owned the land where her family cottage in Grey County is now located.

Upon finding contradictory documentary evidence of Paterson's life in the archive, she stated, "*my journey now attempts to come to know Ned Patterson outside the contexts of the written and oral record.*" (Norquay, 2011 p.5) When Norquay found a picture of Paterson, she noted that the image anchored her imagination. It became a trace that prompted self-reflection and yielded information beyond the facts. (Norquay, 2011 p.2) Norquay decided to use as traces several artifacts left behind by Paterson on the land they shared. These included the foundation of his home, the apple trees he planted and remnants of what was once a kitchen garbage heap. Rooted in the physicality of her own body, Norquay walked on the land imagining Paterson there. This intimate self-inquiry prompted reflection. The autobiographical traces helped

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augment fragments of stories that challenge the dominant views of the history of Grey County.

I found Norquay's methodology useful for my work. I too used the land as a trace, in a similar way, walking through the space with the characters in my imagination. Located in an old military burial ground, HUSH HARBOUR was evoked to become a container for Black memory.

Anna Deveare Smith's documentary play *Fires in the Mirror* serves as an example of how performance can be used as a means of reflecting on traumatic histories through the lives of individuals. The play traces the Crown Heights Riot of 1991. A Brooklyn community exploded in violence when a Jewish man accidentally killed a Black child. A Jewish youth lost his life in the riot that followed. Smith recorded testimonies of a variety of people from the community representing varying points of view. Using their actual words, she wove a carefully constructed narrative and performed each character. Their stories were often contradictory and together provided critical distance and reflection to the community so it could see itself. At her performances, Alison Forsyth reports, people across the spectrum of difference came together to see themselves reflected and make sense of the trauma. (Forsyth, 2009 p.145) I was drawn to Deveare Smith's work because the range of stories she tells about the same incident from different points of view gave the viewer an understanding that truth is a collective project. In the end, what she presents is the human story. I grappled for some time with whether to tell a general

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story that reached out across cultures or to tell a story that was rooted in the Black experience. I worried whether such a story would shut everyone else out. In the end, I realized that it was necessary to tell the story of slavery in the town of York from a Black subject position, paying close attention to the particular details in order to enable participants to find their own point of entry.

Afua Cooper's work in uncovering history enabled and inspired me to create this project. Her insights into Canadian slavery were instrumental as a place to start exploring the workings of enslavement and how it shaped the lives of both enslaved and free Blacks in the town of York. Cooper used a combination of methods to recover the story of Marie Joseph Angelique, an enslaved woman who allegedly burnt down Montreal in 1734. Angelique, through her actions, wrote herself into history, insists Cooper. The events that unfolded as the result of the fire created a path that Cooper followed to find and reclaim Angelique's life story. She used archival documents such as trial transcripts, demographic data and letters. Cooper used walking as a tool in order to connect the dots. By walking the city of Montreal, retracing Marie Angelique's footsteps, she knit together the story of the life of the enslaved woman. She describes how she imagined the people and places that shaped Angelique's life and communed with her spirit. *"As I walk along rue Saint-Paul, I see Angelique, a scarf on her head, her bleached-out cotton shift trailing in the dust, a basket in one hand, going to the market."* (Cooper, 2007 p.5)

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Walking was a main activity from which my work emerged. Michel De Certeau asserts that it is the people who walk through a city that write its story. (De Certeau, 1984 p.99) I walked the space of the HUSH HARBOUR numerous times. My walking took me beyond the space, through and around it, spending time in it and observing it at different times of the day. There were many details that made their way into the work such as objects, the name on the plaque, the water fountain, the playground. The cornerstone of an old church became the stepping stone that was the entrance (Soundwalk) to HUSH HARBOUR. The most fantastical object, however, is the Black Ordinance, which emerged from observing a bronze arrow embedded on the sidewalk to the southeast of the park. Its initials were BO for board ordinance so it inspired me to create the Black Ordinance, a key concept in the work. It refers to the ancient knowledge possessed by the Afronauts that enabled them to transcend time and space. I used the ever-present view of the CN tower as the location from which the broadcast originates and orient the participants via directions that rarely made mention of names but were descriptions of spaces within the park. This helped anchor the work in the now while the participant travelled into the past.

I want now to turn to the central concept of the work, the Hush Harbour I invoke as a container for the memories of people of African descent. The term Hush Harbour refers to gatherings held deep in the woods where slaves carved out spaces of safety, freedom and healing. Here, they would sing, dance, let

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down their guard and claim their right to be free. This temporal event was never held in the same place twice. It was a world that only existed when people created it together and it was spoken about in coded language to keep it secret. It is a space of Blackness that allowed people to dream, to plan, to imagine new possibilities, to comfort each other and to help each other through what they were living now.

I kept a journal that chronicled the creation of the project. The explorations that lead to the work took place over several weeks. During one week I set up a sonic residency with Kurt, an artist whose collaboration was an essential part of the creation process. Here is an excerpt from my journal.

Day 3 | May 23, 2012

Walking has become the foundational ground of our explorations. During this morning's walk we came to the decision to use the concept of Hush Harbour as the central location of this project. I asked Kurt what site he felt evoked the feeling of Hush Harbour. His response was Victoria Memorial Square, a military burial ground. It was a circular park surrounded by buildings and dotted by mature trees. We walked to the park to imagine how it might be transformed into HUSH HARBOUR. Since Hush Harbours were generally located near rivers and streams the idea instinctively evoked water. HUSH HARBOUR is a place of safety, a cocoon/a circular shape. It is protected and quiet. We noted its similarity to a tropical lagoon in moist rainforests where water springs eternally

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from underground grottos replenished by tropical rains. This is a Black lagoon. The sounds are rich, ripe, velvety. Hush is lush. As opposed to slave harbouring cells that evoke coldness and lifelessness, HUSH HARBOUR nurtures life. It is a safe harbour so people can stay there for long periods of time. Quilts hung on trees and water in large bowls on the ground muffled the sound.

Victoria Square is already a site of memory, rituals and the unseen—a perfect place for time travel. A memorial stands at the centre of the park, beneath it, a time capsule buried in 1902. A statue of an unnamed, unknown soldier, created in 1906 by Walter Seymour Allward sits atop the memorial with empty sleeve and hat in hand.

Wreathes have been laid at the foot of the monument to memorialize the hundreds of bodies of soldiers and their families that lay buried underfoot. Perhaps they are silently watching or maybe they're oblivious to the rituals constantly enacted in this space. A steady stream of dogs paired with owners strolls through the park observing the modern-day tradition of pooping and stooping.

After we decided to use Hush Harbour as an anchor, the ideas came quickly. While in the park I wrote a series of words that came to mind when we imagined HUSH HARBOUR. They were: above, below, return, ritual, home,

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enter/exit, beyond and water. We decided to add Jane Jacobs to the list as we discovered a pair of stone chairs dedicated to the author and advocate of “walkable” cities. Jacobs described the park as “an urban jewel, rescued from a wasteland of neglect and forgetfulness. It beautifully ties the city’s earliest roots into a living, caring, revitalized community.”

Kurt and I constructed an exercise for ourselves that used these words to help us to tap into our bodies to draw out some ideas about HUSH HARBOUR. We wrote each word on an index card and placed them in a circle about 6 feet in diameter that represented HUSH HARBOUR. Standing back to back with arms interlocked, we took turns saying the words and generating responses.

The energy flowed freely, rising and falling as we riffed on the words, their rhythms, sounds, meanings and the images they evoked. When we turned our attention to Jane Jacobs, the word we had been avoiding, the exercise ended in peals of laughter. Although Jacobs is an important influence in urban theory, she had little to do with what we had just created.

We realized that we had finally understood what we had been searching for. We succeeded in creating what Katherine McKittrick refers to as a Black geography—a space from which Black thought, Black memory and expressions of Blackness can be articulated. She states, “*The site of memory is a powerful*

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black geography because employing it assumes that the story of blackness in the diaspora is actual and possible, and that the discursive erasure of black peoples does not eliminate how they have been implicated in the production of space” (McKittrick, 2006 p.34)

This space of Blackness, as many theorists note, has been denied, overwritten, buried, erased and silenced. We found a way to insert ourselves into the Blackless space of Canada, not as a marginal absent presence, but as whole beings stepping fully into space and claiming it as our own. Establishing a Black geography is an important step to enable the characters to emerge and speak from their experience.

To create HUSH HARBOUR I drew memories from my own body, from other Black bodies, and from fragments in the archives where Black lives are mentioned. I combined elements of history, science fiction and fantasy to reimagine and reframe the future and past. The story is experienced as a sonic journey in which beings from the future open a portal into the past that is experienced in the present. The city becomes the stage for an immersive, embodied theatrical experience that invites participation from the audience. Through walking in the footsteps of the characters, participants write Black narratives of the city onto the landscape. Centralized within the narrative, the participant assumes the role of the character, which enables them to confront

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their own thoughts, feelings and responses to the situations presented in the story. (Turner, 2012)

Sonic Culture and Memory

I first envisioned HUSH HARBOUR as an app that would use video to present a narrative. While there is a predominance of research in visual media there is evidence to show that sound is actually central to reality. As I continued my research into sound, my imagination was ignited and I became intrigued with the idea of creating a sonic world. Sound, I realized, was a more immersive modality than sight. Unlike sight, sound has to enter the body in order to be perceived.

Peter Salvatore Petralia writes about the immersive quality of sound through headphones. He recalls his experience of Janet Cardiff's locative audio-visual piece, *The Telephone Call*, and how he was haunted by its seamless interweaving of recorded and real sounds. Through headphones, sound can be used to manipulate time-space and enable alternate worlds to be created and shared. The participant experiences these shifts within their heads so he named the phenomenon "*headspace*". (Petralia, 2010 p.97) A group called *Soundwalk*, known for walks they have created all over the world alerts their users to "*become one with the narrator... inviting him or her inside your head.*" (Soundwalk) An actor who performed in one of their walks describes it this way "*You gradually enter into the Soundwalk exactly as you would a film.*

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It's a very peculiar feeling. Sliding into the skin of a character and following every one of his steps, sharing every one of his actions" (Garcia, 2008)

Julian Henriques' in depth analysis of Jamaican dancehall, which he identifies as part of the sonic culture of the Caribbean, offers insights into the embodied act of experiencing sound and the idea of "*thinking through sound*" that informed my work. He conceptualizes sound as a system of knowledge capable of expressing that which is beyond language. (Julian F, 2001) He allies himself with feminist thinkers to whom he attributes taking the lead in shifting the focus from discursiveness in favour of embodied ways of knowing.

Henriques describes the properties of sound as: time-based, ephemeral and leaving no physical marks. Sound is propagated through waves that are perceived throughout the body. It crosses modalities to evoke images from the imagination. His emphasis on the body and the idea of thinking through the body is beautifully encapsulated, as he points out, in Richard Rorty's statement, "*If the body had been easier to understand, nobody would have thought we had a mind.*" (Rorty, 1979 p.239)

In the Caribbean, Henriques posits, movement and rhythm predate speech as a means of communication. The drum, he points out, is a mechanical translation of the body and is understood to be the first form of language. (Henriques, 2001, p. 11) He links this to conditions during the trans-Atlantic slave trade when people from various origins and speaking different languages had a strong need to communicate. Henriques gives examples of the resulting

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richness and diversity of Afrocentric auditory practices such as: the voicing of dancehall MC's, Anansi stories, revivalist and other similar spiritual practices, labrish (gossip), tracing (the ritual of telling people off), sound poetry, street vendors and glossolalia (speaking in tongues). These practices bring to mind the tradition of the Griot, oral historians of West Africa who embody and share the collective memory of a people.

My sonic walk draws from and adds to these practices. HUSH HARBOUR incorporates a number of examples of sonic culture; for example, a preacher's call and response interactive sermon, pouring libations, Peggy and Samuel's sassy courtship ritual and a laying of hands healing ceremony for Deborah. The Negro spiritual, *Wade in the Water* was included because of its importance as a coded song that was used to warn people that slave-catchers and bloodhounds were near and they should wade in the water to avoid being caught. Another song was sung to evoke *Oshun*, the Yoruba goddess of rivers, lakes and healing.

Walking and Sound

HUSH HARBOUR takes the format of a sonic walk. Using this form enabled me to combine the immersive properties of sound with the participatory, embodied activity of walking through space, which according to Tompkins can render "*critical thinking into physicality through both time and space.*" (Tompkins, 2011 p.226)

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There are a number of artists working in this hybrid art form, amongst them, the Canadian team of Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller. Their project, *Missing Voice*, is a pioneering one in the field. The duo were amongst the first artists to set their narratives within immersive three-dimensional sound environments within the context of an audio tour. *Missing Voice*, which reflects the city of London over time, is described as “*Part urban guide, part detective fiction, part film noir*”, (Artangel)

Joanne Tompkins's work helped me gain a better understanding of the form. She analyzes what she calls audio walks and I refer to here as sonic walks. She describes the form as *site-specific theatre* in which the participant becomes the performer. (Tompkins, 2011 p.234) Utilizing the framework of psychogeography pioneered by Guy Debord and the French Situationists in the 1950's as an analytic tool, she theorized how sonic walks map and explore space and reinterpret cities in provocative, personal ways. Extending the useful framework of psychogeography, she included mapping history, social dynamics and the underlying structures of power in the city.

Like Petralia, Tompkins also describes sound through headphones as particularly eerie as it creates the effect of voices inside the participant's head and inhabiting the body. (Tompkins, 2011 p.234) Also of note is her assessment that although the work is created sonically, the user experiences the environment as the visuals for the audio walk.

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I use sound to transcend the present moment—to open a space of reflection and to set the stage for the narrative in which the past and future meet and actions unfold. As the user enters the character's world, through walking in their footsteps and engaging their imagination they evoke hidden spatial dimensions and trigger rich visuals.

Afrofuturism and Performance

My sonic walk project physically maps a narrative that centralizes Blackness in and on the land to disrupt the dominant way the city is read. I combine technology, ancient African mythologies, stories of York's Black past, histories from other African and diasporic sites within a futuristic narrative. Afrofuturism is one of the sub-genres of speculative fiction, a broad field that includes a variety of genres from horror to futurism. (Jackson, 2011 p.2) This is where I locate my work. It draws from non-Western cosmologies, mythology, fantasy, science, technology and history to posit new possible futures.

Charles Saunders praises speculative fiction for its myth-making power and the way it enables writers to ask the "*what if*" questions that can generate new possibilities for the future. This is a quality, he argues, that differentiates it from other genres. He draws similarities between the role of speculative fiction in our society and the function of traditional bards and griots—storytellers who perform vital memory work to chart the past and future of a

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people. (Saunders, 2000, p. 404) David Wyatt similarly sings the virtues of the genre.

“Speculative fiction is a term which includes all literature that takes place in a universe slightly different from our own. In all its forms it gives authors the ability to ask relevant questions about one’s own society in a way that would prove provocative in more mainstream forms...In all its forms, it is a literature of freedom, freedom for the author to lose the chains of conventional thought, and freedom for the reader to lose themselves in discovery.”

(Wyatt in Jackson and Moody-Freeman 2009, 128)

Although questioning hegemonic assumptions and concern for social issues is part of the inherent nature of the genre, the worlds created by the White males who have dominated the field have not generally dealt with issues of race or gender. Madhu Dubey draws attention to W.E.B. DuBois’ sardonic comment that race was such a contentious issue that it was eradicated altogether. *(Dubey, 2011 .16)* There are Black speculative fiction works that date back as early as Charles W. Chestnutt’s 1887 *The Coopered Grapevine* and W.E.B. Du Bois’ 1920 *The Comet*, yet until very recently, relatively few Black authors have ventured into the realm of the speculative. Mark Dery, who coined the term Afrofuturism in 1994 in his pivotal article *Black to the Future*, expressed surprise that there weren’t more Black science fiction writers. Dery asked,

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“Why do so few African-Americans write science fiction, a genre whose close encounters with the Other—the stranger in a strange land—would seem uniquely suited to the concerns of African-American novelists?”
(Dery, 1994)

One possible explanation for the scarceness of Black writers in science fiction is the preoccupation of Black writers with what Sandra Jackson and Julie Moody-Freeman term *“the harsh realities of the here and now, shaped by colonialism, slavery, servitude, underdevelopment, Jim Crow terror, segregation, violence and repression and a host of inequalities as a consequence of structural inequalities and their legacies of difference, notions of interiority and Otherness”*. (Jackson S. &.F., 2011 p.1)

I argue, however, that these concerns have always been addressed through various expressive cultural practices, not just through social sciences so this doesn't explain why Blacks have come so lately to the genre. Ideas of Alondra Nelson, moderator of the now historic *Afrofuturist Listserv* is a more plausible reason. She recalls that the 1990's literary creation of a 'raceless future' combined with a growing awareness of a 'digital divide' where Blacks and other people of colour are left out of the 'space of cyberculture', effectively erased Blacks and Blackness from the future. Madhu Dubey explains that *“Afrofuturism emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century in reaction*

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against precisely this sort of conception of blackness as the residual remnant of the past.” (Dubey, 2011, p. 17)

My engagement with the future in the context of the past enables me to weave a tale that crosses temporalities to facilitate a reflection on the past from the perspective of the present.

Conclusion

By unearthing the past I reveal how Blackness is hidden within the constructed space of the Canadian nation. I created HUSH HARBOUR, a speculative fiction narrative, presented as a sonic walk to disrupt the seamless cohesiveness of uncontested White space and to present a world through which Black memory can surface and Canada can be read through the Black experience. This site is connected to other sites in the diaspora through time and space, enabling a broader concept of a global sense of place to emerge from the specific location of the historic town of York. This research shows that memories are not gone, they've been preserved, hidden in plain view—protected in vessels of flesh. Black bodies carry these memories from the past and into the future. I envision the HUSH HARBOUR project as a beginning of a series of sonic walks that will link Black geographies across the country.

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