

The Beautiful Synonym is Violent
Re: creating Black Identity Through a Poetics of Re-remembering

by

Isabel Cox

Submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
December 2018

© Copyright by Isabel Cox, 2018

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
LIST OF SYMBOLS USED.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2	12
CHAPTER 3	23
CHAPTER 4	30
CHAPTER 5	42
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION	50
WORKS CITED	52

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: WALKER, KARA. WALKER STANDING BEFORE SUGAR BABY.	55
FIGURE 2: UNKNOWN ARTISTS, FLORA, 1796.....	55
FIGURE 3: WALKER, KARA. DETAIL OF KATASTWÓF KARAVAN.	55
FIGURE 4: WALKER, KARA. DETAIL OF KATASTWÓF KARAVAN.	55
FIGURE 5: LUBRIN, VODOO HYPOTHESIS PART 1.....	56

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the recent works of American artist Kara Walker in conversation with two Canadian poetry collections: Dionne Brand's *Inventory* (2006) and Canisia Lubrin's *Voodoo Hypothesis* (2017). This thesis considers how we might understand the contemporary experience of Blackness in North America through a poetics of extraction, refinement, and remembrance. By turning to theories of the Black diaspora and the idea of the split-mind and/or split-experience of the diaspora created by the triangulated transatlantic slave trade and the succeeding generations, this thesis uses terms of a poetics of extraction, refinement, and remembrance. These terms are developed in the introductory section and are employed to discuss the continuing affects and effects of intergenerational trauma. This thesis seeks to address and consider, how it may be possible to preserve and understand the violence of our intersecting histories without perpetuating them?

LIST OF SYMBOLS USED

∇ Nabla

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Erin Wunker, who introduced me to the lively and courageous world of contemporary Canadian poetry. Your passion for your work and dedication to the Can Lit community is a source of inspiration. I cannot thank you enough for offering to share your immense knowledge and for ending each meeting with a humorous anecdote to send me back to work with a smile. Thank you for your genuine interest in my thoughts and ideas and for encouraging me to have confidence in them.

Thank you to my second reader, Dr. Alice Brittan, for her incredible knowledge of critical material and provocative questions. Thank you to my third reader, Dr. Kathleen Cawsey, for her unparalleled attention to detail.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to Dr. Leonard Diepeveen, Dr. Jason Haslam, and Dr. Marjorie Stone of the 2018 graduate committee for not only approving this project, but whose comments and advice helped narrow its scope. Thank you to Pamela Decker and Mary Beth MacIssac for their help navigating the administrative elements of this process.

To my dad, your courage and perseverance are both a lesson and an inspiration. To my mum, thank you for being my eternal cheerleader. Thank you to my brother for the not-so-friendly competition and lively debates, and to Andreas for keeping his sense of humor when I lost mine.

Finally, thank you to my family, friends, and peers who have accompanied me throughout this journey and to Seven Bays for keeping me adequately caffeinated.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

How is it possible to preserve and understand the violence of our intersecting histories without perpetuating them? In their works, artist Kara Walker and poets Dionne Brand and Canisia Lubrin navigate the persisting intergenerational effects of the muted and undocumented violence of the histories surrounding the Black diaspora. This thesis contends that Walker, Brand, and Lubrin do this navigational work particularly in the context of the transatlantic slave trade, and the ongoing violence, marginalization, erasure, and trauma of the Black diaspora. Walker, Brand, and Lubrin each address, redress, and rememorate the violence of our histories and expose racialized violence as the veiled cornerstone upon which contemporary systems of cultural memory are built.

This thesis will explore terms of extraction, refinement, and rememoration¹ by considering the effects and poetics of Walker's *Katastwóf Karavan* and its temporary home on the bank of the Mississippi River and its greater setting of New Orleans, Louisiana. Building on my reading of Walker's affective work, I will turn to themes, metaphors, and motifs of extraction, refinement, and rememoration as they appear in two Canadian collections of poetry: Brand's *Inventory* (2006) and Lubrin's *Voodoo Hypothesis* (2017). These themes and motifs that proliferate throughout both collections and gain currency through repetition and repetition with difference are of particular interest in considering how we might understand the contemporary experience of Blackness in North America through a poetics of extraction, refinement, and rememoration.

¹ The three central terms of this thesis, extraction, refinement, and rememoration, will be defined in the paragraphs that immediately follow this introduction.

To begin, this thesis will define its terms of refinement, extraction, and remembrance by making a short detour. This detour starts with a discussion of Walker's first site-specific sculpture, *A Subtlety*, and makes its final turn to the introductory section of Brand's *Inventory*. Along with this detour, this thesis is divided into five chapters by the nabla symbol, which resembles an inverted triangle. In vector calculus, a division of mathematics, the nabla or del is a vector differential operator and may represent a gradient, divergence, or curl ("Nabla," n.). Of particular interest here is the nabla's position in vector calculus as a symbol with multiple referents that change according to the context of the function in which it is used. Vector calculus is concerned with movement and the mapping of such movements on/in space, which speaks to the triangulated trading system of the transatlantic slave trade. The triangular symbol illustrates the movements over water and the routes that created the diaspora and laid the roots for the split-mind and split-experience upon which this thesis is focused. By opening with a detour and employing the nabla symbol, this thesis engages on a structural level with theories of the Black diaspora that have shaped this project.

Walker first tackled the element of site-specificity in her oeuvre in 2014 with *A Subtlety* or the *Marvelous Sugar Baby* at the Domino Sugar factory in Brooklyn, New York. *Sugar Baby*, the central piece of *A Subtlety*, was a site-specific sculpture of a female nude in a subordinate, yet simultaneously monumental and triumphant pose reminiscent of the sphinx (fig. 1). With the "kerchiefed head of a mammy figure," Walker's *Sugar Baby* initiates a conversation with the imperial and colonial histories of the United States, particularly the transatlantic slave trade (St. Felix). The sticky remainders of the refining process decorate the refinery's walls. *A Subtlety* invokes Walker's characteristic line of artistic inquiry within the new medium of sugar: brown in

its raw form, white when refined and “bleached –and thus made more ‘beautiful’” (Als).

The process of refining through extraction, as in the process of refining sugar, creates a product that aesthetically appears to exist nearly independent from its original form.

Extraction refers to the act of removing, “pulling or taking out” a fraction or element from an original source (“Extraction, n.”). Extraction is an agent of refinement. Processes of refinement, particularly when they are aesthetically driven, are acts of erasure under the guise of progress, which leads to violent repetitions. This violent repetition is where the title of this thesis—the beautiful synonym is violent—comes. I want to suggest that repeated substitution amplifies the affects of displacement and moves further away from potential remembrance. By looking at Walker, Lubrin, and Brand allows us to think through issues of violence, refinement, and remembrance in provocative and generative ways.

Remembrance, in this thesis, aligns with certain aspects of Toni Morrison’s “rememory” in the context of her award-winning novel *Beloved*, particularly in rememory’s active resilience and a memory’s ability to exist apart from an individual and to occupy both the past and the present moment (Morrison 43). Importantly, remembrance is not, nor can it be, restricted to histories of violence particularly since that violence evolves. Like Morrison, Christina Sharpe asks, “[h]ow do we memorialize an event that is still ongoing?” (Sharpe 20). Remembrance is expressed by the ways Walker, Brand, and Lubrin employ language to address, redress, and remember histories of violence. These writers and artist emphasize and represent the affect and effect of the violence of our histories as that which is not “of pastness and reconciliation,” but that which endures along with violence, erasure, and marginalization (62).

In the introductory section of *Inventory*, Brand reveals the potential forms that violence in terms of extraction and refinement may take, even that to which subjects of art can be subject to:

all
the broken fingers, pricked and bruised,
misformed ribs and the famished babies
for the world's most famous photos (Brand 6.10-13)

In this example the singularity of the word “for” instills a sense of guilt within the privileged and all too comfortable reader. The preposition “for” reduces the subjects of the “famous photos” to just that, subjects. They become subjects in the terms of subjection and subjugation. Subjects devoid of context are denied agency and invite the deconstruction of the boundaries between subject and object. In this sense, these subjects occupy the status of both subject and object. The selective, sculpted, and refined element that accompanies Brand’s “world’s most famous photos” (6.13), “black-and-white american movies” (3.2), and “evacuated lyrics” (8.12) produces a sense of ethical uncertainty, which Saidiya V. Hartman illuminates in a 2003 interview with Frank B. Wilderson:

once you realize [the given language of freedom's] limits and begin to see its inexorable investment in certain notions of the subject and subjection, then that language of freedom no longer becomes that which rescues the slave from his or her former condition, but the site of the re-elaboration of that condition, rather than its transformation (Hartman & Wilderson 185)

In striving for freedom and inclusion, a language of erasure is involved. The language employed to minimize the divisions among persons and communities generated by socio-cultural differences, actually highlights these differences and thereby encourages the suppression of them. The “given language of freedom” is a language that erases difference (185). This act of erasure under the guise of progress, parallels the refinement that the hegemonic narratives of cultural and colonial histories of North America have undergone. These aestheticized cultural memories preserve and reinforce erasure and negate the violence that is characteristic of these histories.

In a similar mode of expression to Hartman’s “given language of freedom,” processes of aesthetic refinement embody a complicated dualism. Aesthetic refinement is paired with a simultaneous projection of an objective lens under the guise of art. Accompanying this refined and sculpted element is an intention for these images, their subjects, and the products which they create to be circulated and consumed (as suggested by “famous”). These products and images become equally about aestheticization and objectification as they are about the subjects they depict. However, this aesthetic refinement is not absent from Brand’s collection itself. Processes of poetic refinement construct an aesthetic distance between the work, its subjects, and its reader or consumer and prompt questions concerning the relationship between aesthetics and ethics, whilst raising the notion of a poetics of extraction.

In the context of this thesis a poetics of extraction thus refers to a process of subtraction, forced removal, or severing of roots, whether these roots are known or remain unknown. This extraction or displacement results in a fracturing and leads to a re-creating, a re-construction, a re-writing, which I refer to as a refinement of this severed sense of cultural as well as individual identity. This process of extraction, symptomatic

fractioning, and refinement resonates with the idea of the subjection of a work's *Subject*: the deconstruction of the identity of a sort of capital "S," "Subject," or "subject of" that is then reduced to a "subject to" and object of the work to which it is confined². The drive to re-create, re-write, and refine what is lost as well as the desire to replant fissured roots, is grounded in histories of violence, erasure, and extraction. The histories of the Black diaspora are anchored in violence, which persist in the contemporary moment, whilst both the intergenerationally affected cultures and communities and the violence to which they are subject remain marginalized by and from the cultural hegemony. How is it possible to preserve and understand the violence of our histories without perpetuating them?

The violence of imperial and colonial history continues to refine and erase diasporic cultural histories and identities to preserve and craft a more palatable narrative of national history and culture. Refinement is symptomatic of extraction and vice-versa. Refinement may perhaps be understood as a form of preservation; however, through this desire and drive to preserve, it simultaneously erases the very thing it seeks to preserve.

The concepts of extraction and refinement are inherently interdependent and unite in theories of institutional memory and the state archive. Derrida describes the state archive as an institution as much restricted by memory as it is in "the anticipation of the future" (Derrida 51). The notion of restrictions imposed on the institution of the archive invites the idea of refinement, refinement as a re-selection, re-writing through a process of extraction. Derrida seems to understand this set of restrictions as a mode of refinement that propels the archive into a repetitious "violence of forgetting, *superrepression*, (suppression and repression)" (51). The archive is both the preserver of histories and the

² See Lacan's extensive consideration of the s/S subject.

perpetuator of violence. The archive makes violence available to posterity. Not only is the archive violent by way of intentional forgetting, particularly the erasure of marginalized cultural narratives and histories, but it is an institution that preserves violence. Thus, the limited records that document the violence of our histories that are housed in the archive, are subject to further violence, even more than what they preserve.

The limitations of dominant modes of cultural memory, demonstrate the necessity of laying roots for potential remembrance. Remembrance is premised on an understanding of a poetics of extraction and refinement and the question of how we can toe the line between preserving and understanding violent histories in the present without perpetuating them. Although remembrance is premised on the desire to understand and preserve histories of violence, it wrestles with the dichotomous nature of the archive and the “stress” or pressure not only symptomatic of, but intrinsic to intergenerational trauma: the pressure to not only remember the histories of socio-political and cultural injustices, to which diasporic cultures and communities are subject, but to remember them correctly (Gilroy 3; Van der Marel 18). This pressure to address, redress, and remember violence is intrinsic to the works of Walker, Lubrin, and Brand.

These notions of remembrance, extraction and symptomatic refinement are very much concerned with cultural identity and are grounded in theories of the Black diaspora and what Rinaldo Walcott calls the “in-between” (Walcott 31). Walcott understands the in-between as a space and place “vacillating between national borders and diasporic desires, ambitions and disappointments” (26). He notes that “[Black writings] suggest the possibilities of the new, but in many cases cannot leave various kinds of old behind” (26). He then expands upon this idea of teetering on the threshold of a liminal space by explaining, “writing blackness [...] is a scary scenario: we are an absent presence always

under erasure” (27). Thus, the place of the in-between is not limited to physical or geographic spaces and places, but rather exists within the constructs of language and memory.

Like Walcott’s “in-between” and Sharpe’s “wake,” Black scholars develop terms with complex and nuanced definitions that continue to make room for the memory work they are trying to define. These terms are often recognizable, if not concrete, and made abstract in order to make room for the displaced and/or erased elements characteristic of the dominant historical and ethical narratives that make memory work, like remembrance, necessary. Remembrance is very much rooted in an understanding of Sharpe’s theory of the wake and what she refers to as the accompanying “wake work,” which negotiates between addressing, redressing, and remembering histories of violence. Sharpe’s wake and wake work is

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 as well as in Black modes of resistance [...] Living in/the wake of slavery is living ‘the afterlife of property’ and living [...] the disastrous time and effects of continued marked migrations (Sharpe 14-15)

In developing her theory of the “wake” and “wake work,” Sharpe embraces the word’s multiple connotations including “the track left on the water’s surface by a ship [...] a region of disturbed flow,” “in the line of recoil of (a gun), and “a watch or vigil held beside the body of someone who has died” (3, 8, 10.). The ship is fundamental to the rerouting of unrecorded and muted histories of the violence characteristic of the transatlantic slave trade. As a way of thinking through the connections and differences

among Black diasporic cultures, Walcott in turn nods to Paul Gilroy's metaphor of the ship, but rather adapts the notion of the "detour" as "the (un)acknowledged routes and roots of black expressive cultures and gesture directly to their rhizomatic nature" (Walcott 31). Walcott, Gilroy, and Sharpe emphasize the role of movement and the idea of occupying and experiencing space in shaping theories of the Black diaspora.

Sharpe adopts and transforms Saidiya Hartman's notion of Blackness as "an asterisk in the grand narrative of history" and proposes a "Trans* [asterisk] Atlantic," which she suggests is a "[space and place], condition, or process that appears alongside and in relation to the Black Atlantic but also in excess of its currents [...] The asterisk after the prefix 'trans' holds the place open for thinking (from and into [the] position [of Hartman's 'unthought'])" (Hartman 2; Sharpe 30). Sharpe's "Trans* [asterisk] Atlantic" opens the discussion to histories of violence, particularly that of the transatlantic slave trade, as histories of "translation, transatlantic, transgression, transgender, transformation, transmogrification, transcontinental, transfixed, trans-Mediterranean, transubstantiation, [...] transmigration, and more" (30). Sharpe's asterisk makes space for the unknown and undocumented. Walker, like Sharpe, creates space for the unknown through the silhouette caricatures of plantation life and its violence as well as the ephemeral experience both in terms of the *Katastwóf Karavan*'s weekend-long exhibit and the fleetingness of its steam-generated melodies. Walker and Sharpe highlight what is lost and extracted by offering space for it; however, the question as to what is to occupy this space remains unknown.

Walker's *Katastwóf Karavan* gets its name from the Haitian-Creole word for "catastrophe," thereby engaging with the histories of violence at Algiers Point where human beings were extracted and refined into a violent system (Ross). *Katastwóf Karavan* was displayed at Algiers Point and hails the greater setting of New Orleans,

whose violent history pervades the contemporary moment, and was brought to global attention in 2005 with the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. In the introduction to their edited collection, Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods note that the “reconstruction of specific areas in New Orleans was stalled primarily because of the attempt on the part of the city’s white economic elite to deny the rights of black residents to return” (2). They break down the disaster into human numbers: “some of the 50,000 people who remained [in New Orleans] did so voluntarily –but in effect most of those left behind were abandoned and left to fend for themselves. In the end some 1,400 to 2,000 residents of Southeastern Louisiana died” (1). McKittrick and Woods highlight the construction of and narrowing lens encouraged by the branding of Katrina as “natural” and this language’s ability to dismiss human culpability: “the language that propped up this supposed naturalness only served to naturalize poor and black agony, distress and death” (2). The victims of said “natural disaster,” were the “victims of federal abandonment and centuries of racial segregation” (2). When I talk about a poetics of extraction, refinement, and remembrance, what I mean is this: Walker, Lubrin, and Brand engage with histories of extraction and fractured cultural identities, which continue to pervade the present, as McKittrick and Woods demonstrate in their investigation into the aftermath and branding of Hurricane Katrina.

When tracing histories of violence in diasporic communities it is both difficult and necessary to address specific locations as well as attempt to acknowledge the constancy of displacement and movement. Walker’s *Katastwóf Karavan* offers a compelling and situated lens through which to engage with both Lubrin and Brand’s navigational collections. Walker, Brand, and Lubrin each occupy a place of the in-between. Brand is Canadian by way of Trinidad. Lubrin is Canadian by way of St. Lucia. This thesis

explores the ways in which diasporic cultural identities are generationally affected by the nature of diaspora, the notion of a “double consciousness,” and the struggle to reconcile the space of the “in-between.” Ultimately, this thesis proposes that the beautiful re-creation of cultural identity is and, as these writers and artist demonstrate, in certain ways must involve a violent act of erasure.

▽

CHAPTER 2

Walker's *Katastwóf Karavan* addresses and seeks to redress the violence of colonial history and poses questions concerning the nature of the relationship between aesthetics and ethics and the challenges an artist faces, no matter the medium: how is it possible to preserve and understand the violence of our histories without perpetuating them? Walker toes this fine line in an extremely interesting way. Although American-born, Walker occupies a strange place of the in-between. Walker was born in 1969, California, but at the age of thirteen, she moved to Stone Mountain, Georgia –the inaugural site of “the modern Ku Klux Klan” (Shaw 12). In Georgia, her California accent made her “too white,” but she was “too black” to be accepted by White Americans in the deep south (12). Walker initially gained notice for her interactive installations of black-and-white paper cut-out silhouettes narrating histories of race relations, addressing themes of racial and ethnic identity, and offering a way of thinking through and developing a discourse for what Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw calls the “unspeakable” (7). Shaw understands the “unspeakable” as a “traumatic site [...] ‘unclaimed experience’ and the temporal nature of the slave narrative and its painful history [of physical, mental, and sexual abuse, which] must be ‘rememoried’” (7). Walker places her audience in the “unspeakable” by giving it a space within her installations. With the help of its ephemeral steam, Walker's *Katastwóf Karavan* envelopes its silhouettes and audience in the amorphous but undeniably present “unspeakable.”

The form of the silhouette itself is an interesting choice. The silhouette is rooted in the violent histories of the transatlantic slave trade and is an evocative example of the themes of extraction, refinement, and remembrance that this thesis examines (18). First, as a cut-out, the silhouette is quite literally extracted from source material. Johann Casper

Lavater employed the silhouette or as he called them, “shade[s],” as a tool in developing the pseudoscience of physiognomy, “the theory that facial features reveal a person’s natural and ‘national’ character” (20). Lavater’s shades “were a space whose margins contained all pertinent information and whose centers were spaces of blank, yet readable, negative interiority” (21). The medium of the silhouette appoints the figure with a presence in their very absence. A silhouette of “cut paper and brown ink” entitled *Flora* (fig. 2), “dates to 1796 and is held by the Stratford Historical Society in Connecticut [and] is accompanied by a bill of sales” (22). This bill of sales reads: “Margaret Dwight of Milford in the county of New Haven and State of Connecticut sold Flora, a nineteen-year-old slave, to Asa Benjamin of Stratford in Fairfield County, Connecticut, for the sum of twenty-five pounds Sterling” (qt. in Shaw 22). Flora’s silhouette, and the “dozen or so [...] that survive from the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries,” becomes a kind of symbol of proof of ownership (Shaw 22). Flora is denied individual traits and her person is a product to be bought and sold. Flora’s position as object-commodity is central to this thesis.

The weekend of February 23-25, 2018 marked the final days of *Prospect.4: The Lotus in Spite of the Swamp*, a contemporary art exhibition displayed throughout the city of New Orleans—a celebration of the city’s cultural and historic diversity (Contemporary Arts Center New Orleans). For the closing weekend, Walker, along with Jazz pianist Jason Moran, installed the *Katastwóf Karavan* at Algiers Point, on bank of the Mississippi. Walker’s *Karavan* is inspired by American calliope steam wagons, otherwise known as steam organs, which were the highlight of circus parades, in part because of their demonstration of technological progress. However, they also demonstrate an interesting sense of autonomy: control over volume and tune is not possible. One of the

Karavan's side panels depicts a scene in which two silhouette caricatures share the burden of carrying a corpse: one at the head and one at the feet, whilst a crouching figure in the vines of the trees above plucks out the corpse's heart (fig. 3). The opposite side panel presents three figures organized in descending order (by height), one of whom is carrying a child on their back. The three figures are connected by a rope tied around their necks and are led by a taller, untethered fourth figure in procession before three smaller figures that are stacked one atop of another, each seated on the shoulders of the figure below (fig. 4). The topmost figure holds a whip draped behind him as though he is about to strike the figures before him. Walker seems to employ the hieratic scale (a system that delineates the power dynamics of a scene by depicting the figure with the greatest power as the largest), whilst critiquing reigning systems of power by creating the largest figure by stacking the three smallest atop of one another, creating an imposing, yet comical form. The center field of both side panels is extracted, giving shape to the silhouettes, whilst exposing the calliope whistles through which the steam escapes to create the powerful melodies accented by the caricature violence of the scenes throughout which the steam eerily dances. Unlike the void center field of the narrative scenes, the silhouette characters seem to offer the inverse by occupying the two-dimensional field; however, the interiority of the figures is absent despite their unmistakable presence. The figures are two-dimensional; their perverse two-dimensionality is simultaneously unsettling and incredibly engaging. Walker's works embrace, record, and inspire a sense of tension and unease that makes them unbearable to look at, but impossible to turn away from.

Walker's evocative and "enigmatic" silhouettes adhere to a similar sculpted and refined quality evoked in Brand's "black-and-white movies" and "world's most famous photos" that open this thesis (Shaw 19; Brand 3.2; 6.13). The "deceptive simplicity" of

Walker's silhouettes is created through her pieces' explicit narrative element and the caricature character of her figures (Shaw 19). Walker's silhouettes engage and employ "symbols, themes, and tropes that have served to reinforce racist, sexist, and class-based American hegemony over the past three centuries" (19). The silhouetted figures are reduced to caricatures. The caricature element of Walker's silhouettes exposes their sculpted and refined quality to the point of obscurity. Walker's silhouettes are extracted from source material, both physically (sheets of steel) and figuratively (historical records). They become caricatures of the violence they depict, whilst alluding to the process of refinement through the extraction of the violence not wholly preserved by cultural memory upon which they are based. Walker's silhouettes manage to create an inversion of the deliberate erasure that accompanies the process of aesthetic refinement through her figures' perverse and carnivalesque features.

I use the term "caricature" in conversation with Walker's silhouettes in part because of their "grotesques" element. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines caricature as: "a portrait or other artistic representation, in which the characteristic features of the original are exaggerated with ludicrous effect" ("caricature," n.). "Exaggerat[ion]" is a form of refinement through addition. The caricature element of Walker's silhouettes is not limited to the line that creates her figures, but it is embodied in their energetic and decisive movements and the precision through which these actions are executed, which simultaneously emphasizes the theatrical quality. Shaw draws on the works of the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, whose exploration of the carnivalesque notes its ties to marginalized cultural groups outside of the cultural hegemony (14). Bakhtin suggests that the carnivalesque is "that peculiar folk humour that has always existed and has never merged with the official culture of the ruling classes" (qtd. in Shaw 14). The

caricature quality or “carnavalesque attitude that we see in Walker’s work [...] may be viewed as just that: an idea, a way of looking at the world that subverts the dominant oppressive vision into one that can be laughed at and ridiculed. These silhouette caricatures insert laughter where it is most forbidden, and therefore most meaningful” (Shaw 14). This perverse laughter that Walker’s silhouettes inspire parallels the perverse relationship between aesthetics and ethics and the unsettling negotiation between beauty and violence.

In “Laugh of the Medusa,” Hélène Cixous explores the roots of suppression and the potential of laughter to unhinge the systems that perpetuate it. While Cixous’s consideration is specifically the suppression of women, her work on laughter is relevant for the points I am trying to make with regard to Walker’s works. Cixous names “the repressed of culture” as “woman,” who she notes is “no general woman, no one typical woman” (876), but those who “struggle against conventional man” (875). I understand “conventional man” as the hegemonic systems, predominantly male and unmistakably white, which create space for the perpetuation of systemic violence and erasure characteristic of Walker’s silhouettes. Cixous seems to identify writing and laughing as two agents that hold the potential to uproot the basis and perpetuation of suppression (880, 885). Walker’s silhouettes are her “writings,” which Cixous notes is “an act that will also be marked by woman's seizing the occasion to speak, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based on her suppression” (880). Medusa is perceived as threatening, as dangerous, but also as a figure to which “woman,” “the repressed” is bound. However, she is “not deadly[; s]he’s beautiful and she’s laughing” (885). Cixous configures Medusa’s laughter with agency that holds the potential “for history to change its meaning” (885). The perverse laughter that Walker writes into her

silhouettes is the very thing that has the potential to unhinge the structures that perpetuate the violence of our histories.

The power of laughter to destabilize suppression, which Cixous outlines, is made audible in the curated playlist of Walker's *Karavan*, whose songs are rooted in histories of "black protest and celebration" including "We Shall Overcome" and Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On?" –both of whose lyrics are also interpolated into Brand's *Inventory* (Loos). The ephemeral aesthetic quality of the steam that produces the *Karavan*'s music also creates a dynamic visual play between the "water-cut steel" silhouettes, which depict "violent scenes between masters and slaves in the Old South" and "[are] intended to provide a counterpoint to that on the Steamboat Natchez a short distance upriver" (D'Addario). Walker's Instagram features a clip of the *Karavan* competing with the sound of the Steamboat Natchez, whose history is rooted in the interstate slave trade. According to Paul Finkelman "flatboats or steamboats" were key players in the interstate slave trade and "the two largest slave marts of the Deep South" were based in Natchez and New Orleans, Louisiana (Finkelman).

Let's pause to consider the literal and figurative connotations of steam. Steam exemplifies the concept of refinement through extraction. Steam is symptomatic of evaporation: a natural cycle that dissipates and disappears water, but also holds the potential to obstruct sight. Steam, not only fuels the Steamboat Natchez, but is a by-product of erasure under the guise of progress. McKittrick suggests that "while the tenets and the lingering histories of slavery and colonialism produced modernity as and with and through blackness, this sense of time-space is interrupted by a more weighty, and seemingly truthful [...], underside –where black is naturally malignant and therefore worthy of violation" (17). We are certainly dealing with a kind of "unspeakable," but

perhaps more notably “unwritten and unutterable, the unseeable and the invisible,” but only so far that we are dealing with the “uncountable and unindexed, outside the scourge, that which cannot be seen or heard or read but is always there” (22). Although it is “unsee[n],” steam cannot exist without water. In a similar mode to the “unspeakable” and “unseeable” of Walker’s unmistakably visible *Karavan*, the witness of part III of Brand’s *Inventory*, and the collection as a whole, seeks to create an inventory of the victims of far-off atrocities and to preserve the stories of their deaths, whilst mourning that which cannot be: their individuality. They are the “uncountable and unindexed” (22).

In referring to the victims as “they,” I am subscribing to the “we/they” dichotomy that Brand establishes in her introductory section and continues throughout the collection. The “we/they” dichotomy appoints the reader with the responsibility of accepting the role of passive, yet increasingly uncomfortable witness. The “we/they” dichotomy is established in Brand’s opening lines and lays the groundwork for further oppositions to persist, oppositions that reinforce a division between the oppressive and the oppressed, as with the examples that opened this thesis: the “they” who “evacuated [...] all our good lyrics,” the “black-and-white american movies,” and the “love stories [that] never contained us” (Brand 8.12; 3.2; 5.1). The adjective “american” adheres to this “we/they” dichotomy, but its lowercase “a,” denounces the authority and imposing national identity evoked by the adjective. The lowercase “a” “american,” becomes an addition to rather than the whole that the nationalist capital “A,” American, projects. This “we/they” dichotomy that is fundamental to Brand’s *Inventory* proliferates in Lubrin’s *Voodoo Hypothesis*.

The opening section of Lubrin’s debut collection is prefaced with a quotation from Derek Walcott’s *What the Twilight Says*: “*The children of slaves must sear their memory*

with a torch” (qtd. in Lubrin i). The epigraph primes the reader for what is to come by engaging with questions concerning the history of slavery, the necessity of remembrance, whilst alluding to the inevitable violence in the act of remembering as described by the “sear[ing of] their memory with a torch” (i). The potential violence of remembering and preserving memory intergenerationally sets the tone for Lubrin’s collection.

Voodoo Hypothesis is divided into five untitled sections. Each section is introduced by a greyscale reproduction of the concentric lines of the collection’s colourful cover; a bold-faced epigraph is superimposed, thereby augmenting these lines. The dividing pages that demarcate the division between sections seem to occupy a residual space—one that neither wholly marks the end of one section nor the beginning of a new. The pages that demarcate the division between Lubrin’s five sections suggest both a division and a subsequent doubling (fig 5). This multiplication through division is a central theme of the collection and embodies the idea of the in-between. In developing her notion of “the hold,” Sharpe notes the duality of the ship that contains the hold, which she notes is highlighted by Manthia Diawara: “[a] boat is a departure and an arrival” (qtd. in Sharpe 69). Lubrin’s dividing pages are just that: “a departure and an arrival.” They embody the tension of the interesting and the stress of facing two directions at once. The entirety of the structure of Lubrin’s collection echoes this dualism and is underscored by the persistent “we/they” dichotomy.

The opening lines of Lubrin’s collection establishes a competing “we/they” dichotomy in her opening and titular poem: “Voodoo Hypothesis.” Lubrin’s “we/they” dichotomy is buttressed by a similar “me/you” division. The pronoun “they” exposes the exclusivity of “we” and the clear division between these two groups:

Before sight, we imagine

that while they go out in search
of God
we stay in and become god,
become: Curiosity (Lubrin 1.1-5)

This “we/they” dichotomy is reinforced by a further division one in which the subjects represented by the pronoun “we” occupy an interior space, whilst those represented by the pronoun “they” “go out” (1.2-3). This division is further buttressed by the dual representation of “God,” initially capitalized, lowercase in the line below, but is superseded by “Curiosity,” which is capitalized, thereby engaging, both on a visual and narrative level, with the capital “G” “God” of two lines previous. Unlike the clear differentiation between the pronouns “we” and “they,” the simultaneous complimenting and competing “me/you” duality seems more malleable. This sense of slippage or malleability between the competing pronouns (the inherent either-or that accompanies them) appears in the unclear shifting of the subjects of “you”. For example, the second stanza introduces the pronoun “you” with no basis for deducing its referent: “Did you not land with your rocket behind / you” (1.12-13). This lack of stability, consistency, or rooting in identifying the subject of “you” engages with the notion of the unknown and the “displaced of diaspora” (Sharpe 19). The referent of “you” is a mysterious unknown figure, but one that is also imposed upon the reader. This explicit appeal to the reader, through the use of the pronoun “you,” appoints the reader with a responsibility to be both witness to and agent of what transpires in the opening poem and throughout the rest of the collection. The pronoun “you” seems to occupy a transient identity: one that is tied to the reader and one that stands apart from or exists in tension with the reader. The pronoun’s doubling echoes the tension or pressure to address, redress, and rememorate histories of

violence and to do so accurately. McKittrick notes, “access to new world blackness dwells on the archival display of violated body, the corpse, the death sentences, the economic inventories of cargo, the whip as the tool that writes blackness into existence” (22). But, how can we rememorate histories of violence in the present when we’ve created and preserved a space, place, and system for this violence to persist?

The referent of “you” becomes an interesting and malleable object of curiosity – shifting between the unknown and the known, a speculative uncertainty that inspires a sense of curiosity, which in conversation with the “we” group, to whom the speaker presumably belongs, is understood as “god.” Although the subject of the pronoun “you” is identifiable, the uncertainty that initially characterizes its use in the poem persists. This uncertainty remains and unsettles the present certainty. Perhaps this sense of malleability or slippage between the subjects of the pronoun “you” lies in the pronoun’s own sense of duality. The pronoun establishes a dichotomy; however, the foundation of this duality is then fractured. The absence of definite transitions between different uses of the singular pronoun, leaves the reader with an uncertainty perhaps evocative of the split-experience of the in-between.

It is not merely the pronouns’ referents in Lubrin’s opening poem that creates this sense of uncertainty that inspires curiosity. The poem is so saturated with different themes, motifs, and detail that the warning against the future repetition of a colonial expedition on Mars is buried beneath the myriad of detail. The warning against this future violent repetition is muted as much as the violence of the histories themselves. The crowding details makes the pronoun referents indiscernible. The pronoun “you” suggests another dimension to the “we/they” dichotomy. The “you” seems to be independent from the subjects of “we,” but also removed from those characterized by the pronoun “they.”

The pronoun “you” not only appoints the reader with the responsibility that accompanies the role of both witness and passive agent, but its ability to exist both in connection to and in tension with the reader enables the subject of the “you” to teeter the threshold between being and non-being. This simultaneous being and non-being engages with Sharpe’s theory of “living in/the wake of slavery is living ‘the afterlife of property’ and living the afterlife of *partus sequitur ventrem* (that which is brought forth follows the womb), in which the Black child inherits the non/status, the non/being of the mother” (Sharpe 15). In short, trauma is an inheritance. Sharpe employs the forward slash as a means of illustrating the idea of an either-and, confirming both, whilst acknowledging that neither is wholly accurate. The forward slash becomes a physical barrier that separates the two opposing experiences whilst uniting them in their very division. Sharpe’s forward slashes encompass this dualism that we have come to recognize as crucial to an understanding of the extraction and refinement of diasporic identities and puts down the roots for potential remembrance.

∇

CHAPTER 3

Walker's first site specific commission, *A Subtlety*, engages with the processes of refinement and the violent histories of plantations and their exploitative practice of enslavement-as-labour-force. The process of refinement, as with the process of refining sugar, creates a product whose aesthetic properties differ so drastically from its original form as to appear nearly independent from it. Not only is the appearance of sugar modified to such a degree through the process of refinement, but the product of it, the refined sugar, bears a striking resemblance to one of its opposing flavours: salt. Refined sugar and salt presents a dynamic dualism. Like sugar, salt is a product of extraction, a by-product of desalination. It is what remains from the evaporation of seawater, a process that calls back to the steam of Walker's *Karavan* discussed in the first section of this thesis. Perhaps, salt, in the context of this thesis, may be considered the remainder of the ephemeral steam of Walker's *Katastwóf Karavan*. There are two degrees of extraction in the harvesting of salt: sea water is extracted from its original source to undergo the process of desalination or refinement. Salt too can be mined; however, in the context of the Black diaspora of the transatlantic slave trade, the connection between salt and the ocean is undeniable. The routes through which this uprooting was made are mapped over the Atlantic Ocean, which plays an integral role in shaping theories of the diaspora as with Walcott's notion of the "detour," Sharpe's theory of the wake, and Gilroy's metaphor of the ship. Lubrin engages with the multivalent properties of salt in interesting ways that will be explored in the paragraphs that follow. I would like to read the salt found in Lubrin and Brand's collections as a salt harvested from seawater –the mass of water that was traversed to create the Black diaspora and a splintering of cultural identities. Salt is a product that is bought, harvested, and consumed for utilitarian

purposes. The slave too is product: bought, harvested (extracted, denied humanity), and arguably consumed. Salt is, however, also a mode of preservation.

In Lubrin's collection, salt is embraced for its multivalency. Lubrin embraces salt's potential to preserve, whilst not forgetting the connection to its original source. In "Through the Flaying of Backs," Lubrin unites salt's contrasting properties: "I am ageless and soft, fury reckoning / Western salt in Eastern wound" (28.7-8). The speaker adheres to the "me/you" dichotomy established at the beginning of the collection, which is reinforced by contrasting adjectives such as "soft" and "fury reckoning" as well as the opposition of "Western" and "Eastern." Salt, within the parameters I have laid out, is the product of refinement through extraction. The source of salt, in this context, is linked to histories of forced migration and the bodies that made the triangular transatlantic slave-trading system possible. Sugar, salt's visual double yet flavoured opposite, is also a by-product of refinement and is intertwined with the violent history of plantations and enslavement. Despite sugar's complicated history of violence, here, Lubrin employs salt as an agent of pain. The deliberate infliction of pain, "salt in [...] wound" implies a potential violent feature to an otherwise natural mineral, particularly when it adheres to human-imposed barriers: "western" and "Eastern," whose borders are shaped by socio-political, economic, and cultural factors. Human intervention seems to be the common denominator in creating both pain and violence. But what of salt's potential to preserve? Is salt then an agent that preserves violence and violent histories?

The preservative properties of salt are explored elsewhere in the collection, thus acknowledging and potentially remembering this pain and violence. Lubrin focuses attention on repetition: "Our holy ones these salts have kept alive, / whose tales of keeping to water, maps of speechless centuries // names her boundaries, as she clasps

shore after shore” (37.23-25). The continual repetition suggested by “shore after shore” engages with the desire to document the routes (and their passengers), tracing histories of forced migration and the trade of bodies: “Something offered as a fissure in my throat – I batter from plantation to plantation, again, these tracks / of tears again, that middle passage swings” (28.24-26). A repetitious violence is explicitly evoked by the word “batter” and reinforced with the repetition of “plantation,” a loaded word given its historical connotations as a place of violence and inhumanity. This simultaneously ambiguous, yet repetitious violence is punctuated by the isolation of the first “again” positioned between explanatory commas. The “tracks / of tears” map the progression of this violence, which creates an interesting contrast between the European science of cartography and the desire to map and record a history of forced migration, a drive to recover and to recognize the roots that have been severed (extracted). This reconstruction of an undocumented history from the present gains traction through the tracing of its violence, and perhaps the salty “tears” that replenish the “middle passage.” The saltwater, river-like streaks that temporarily mark their paths on skin perhaps echo the routes or wakes of ships, not merely vessels of transport, but agents of the transatlantic slave trade. The potential duality that accompanies this spelling, “tears,” welcomes another level of fractioning, ripping, dividing.

The multiple resonances of and uses for salt, coupled with the potential duality of “tears” is amplified in part three of *Voodoo Hypothesis* with two poems printed side-by-side that share the same name: “Final Prayer in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception I” and “Final Prayer in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception II” (62-63). The first poem establishes the foundation for repetition, but it does not wholly come to a conclusion. A clear rounded conclusion would be out of context in a collection that is

premised on fragmentation –fragmentation of cultural and individual identities, of language, and of memory. The first poem is complete in its very incompleteness. This incompleteness accomplishes two things. In connection to the rest of the collection, this incompleteness resonates with the idea of the in-between and the double-consciousness, which Walcott and Gilroy contend are intrinsic to diasporic identities. The two poems do not offer rewritings of the other, but rather offer glances into the ways in which cultural identities of diasporic communities have been rewritten –perhaps re-written in parts that drastically accumulate to rewrite and reinvent the fractioned whole. By leaving the first poem of its name unfinished, Lubrin also allows the potential for a sequel. However, the second is not a sequel per se, but a variation of the first. The title of the two poems hints to colonial missionary efforts and perhaps it is the repetition of the violence of colonial enterprises that is at play and ironized in its promise of “The Final Prayer” at the beginning of two poems.

The second poem opens with a two-line stanza that highlights this notion of refinement: “In the end / we’d settle on paraphrase” (Lubrin 63.1-2). “Paraphrase” evokes this sense of re-writing, but it is a re-writing that is rooted in the process of refinement through extraction. A paraphrase is inherently incomplete; it is a refined extraction of its original. Visually, the second poem appears to be just that, the bare bones of the poem that came before. It appears more fragmented with its extensive use of enjambment. Although the first poem contains enjambment, many of the lines end with full stops, natural pauses, or their grammatical equivalent. Perhaps the central role of enjambment in the second poem, the physical break of the lines, is to echo the fissures of cultural and religious identities that the poem illuminates. This sense of incompleteness is highlighted by the use of the word “settle,” which not only connotes a sense of acceptance, but also

an element of reluctance, a sense of acceptance that should not be necessary. However, “settle,” and its aforementioned connotations, also resonates with the act and histories of settler colonialism and its accompanying violence. The violence characteristic of settler colonialism engages on a rhetorical level with the “we/they” dichotomy that has occupied the first half of this project.

This “we/they” and “me/you” dichotomy continues to gain momentum in this pair of poems and amplifies other competing oppositions by offering another, quite persistent dichotomy. In the first poem of the pair, this dichotomy is centered around opposing understandings of the concept of god, particularly a capital “G,” “God,” as enforced by reigning religious institutions: “Tell me and I may sign myself with your cross” (62.13). This dichotomy is accompanied by a sense of possession: my God, your religion. This idea of possession, particularly persons as possessions, and competing forces within an oppressive system is reiterated: “could all look loved in the right light, the painted light / mything your glass windows” (62.8). The idea of a “painted light” and “glass windows” evokes the idea of stained glass, an art that is predominantly reserved for religious buildings, particularly those of institutions that prescribe to a language of iconography (which has its own complicated and violent history). It is “mything” that attracts attention. “[M]ything” may be read as a verb, “to myth,” which engages with the contestation surrounding the concept of a capital “g” “God” and the suspected suppression of the poem’s “I” figure and their beliefs. Perhaps “mything” may also be considered in conversation with the “me/you” dichotomy that “your glass windows” engages with. The removal (extraction) of the space between “my” and “thing” demonstrates the concept of refinement through extraction. The space between two independent words is removed, not only deviating from convention, but also creating a

new singular word: “mything.” By erasing the conventional space that separates words and delineates their independence, which makes them recognizable and understood, uniting the words “my” and “thing” highlights the possessive element; the natural possessor, “my,” and “thing” are united, perhaps even equated, thereby enhancing the notion of persons as possessions.

In a critical investigation of the imperial lens through which our geographic systems are shaped, McKittrick and Woods assert that “identifying the ‘where’ of blackness in positivist terms can reduce black lives to essential measurable ‘facts’ rather than presenting communities that have struggled, resisted, and significantly contributed to the production of space” (6). This notion of reducing lives to “measurable facts” engages with the potential violence of erasure that accompanies this reduction. “Measurable” evokes the notion of mathematics and numeric representation, whilst “reduc[tion]” calls back to our central themes of extractions and refinement, through subtraction and division. Mathematics might itself be neutral, but it is utilized in violent taxonomies regularly, which McKittrick highlights in her essay “Mathematics of Black Life”: “[p]unishment during slavery, [...] was intimately linked to counting: lashings are the soundtrack to slavery, four, ten, fifty, one hundred, two hundred” (22). Lubrin’s collection explicitly addresses the narrowness of European “science, inexact” (Lubrin 4.12). “Nowhere the Pythagoras” engages with McKittrick’s essay by emphasizing this connection between lashings and numbers: “lash me as I think today / to press down harder into some / sacrifice of numbers” (25.). McKittrick draws a distinct connection between the discourse of economics and the violence of plantation life; she notes that “the slave is possession, proved to be property” (17). Like Lubrin, Walker comments on the connection between commerce and economic prosperity as it relates to technological

progress, which she demonstrates with the steam that fuels her *Karavan*. Walker also explores the relationship between different forms of commodity as in persons and sugar, which is explored in conversation with Walker's engagement with the historical connotations of the silhouette. Walker exposes and caricaturizes the violence of plantation life by creating a perversely palatable visual and aural experience.

▽

CHAPTER 4

In this section, I would like to consider the ways in which an aesthetics of violence shapes intergenerational trauma and how the aestheticization of violence is formed through or closely allied with themes of commodification, economic discourse, and the language of mathematics. Brand and Lubrin turn to mathematics as a way of negotiating between the violence of intentional forgetting and the continued repetition of cultural erasure, particularly in the context of the diaspora created by the transatlantic slave trade.

Mathematics establishes a clear mode of assessing the effects or aftermath, if you will, of extraction and refinement; however, mathematics' inability to represent or its lack of malleability in documenting individual identities, which amalgamate to create the mass, prevents the potential for remembrance. The contradictions of both language and math as systems of recording will be explored through a consideration of themes and metaphors of extraction, refinement, and remembrance in both Lubrin's *Voodoo Hypothesis* and Brand's *Inventory*.

The role of mathematics in Brand's *Inventory* is inherent in its title. An inventory is a list which records, documents, tracks, preserves, and represents contents or one's belongings. The implied sense of ownership that accompanies the idea of an inventory illustrates, quite nicely, the understanding of the slave as object-commodity. An inventory's purpose to preserve, document, and record is crucial; however, Brand's *Inventory* demonstrates that numbers are what remain and preserve the memory of the nameless, unknown individual victims of atrocities. When language seems to fall short, Brand employs the language of mathematics in its simplest form, counting, yet the supposed precision of mathematics denies individual representation. In her inherently

incomplete inventory of violence, the lost victims are reduced to, yet together combine to create, a number, which continues to fractionally represent their memory. In part III of *Inventory*, the speaker bears witness to a figure referred to as “she” who records a “bristling list” that records the victims of far-off atrocities (Brand 2.1; 100.16). The numbers continue to increase as she records the fatalities of unknown, nameless victims relayed to her through the “oceanic blue screen” of her television (39.14). In this part of *Inventory*, or this part of the inventory, the witness by proxy preserves the list “she,” an unknown and unnamed figure herself, compiles. The numbers “she” records, which are transmitted to her, denies the victims their individual identity and their names, which the speaker also denies the central witness “she.”

Brenda Carr Vellino suggests that Brand rejects the potential for “individualistic self-identification” (245). Vellino turns to part III in which the speaker denounces the unity implied by the pronoun “we,” “there is no ‘we’” (Brand 42.13; Vellino 244-45). Vellino goes on to explain that, “the speaker’s ‘I’ can only be understood in historical and planetary context as part of a story that is plural rather than singular” (Vellino 245). If we extend this idea of Brand’s rejection of the individualized self to that of the victims that these numbers represent, I disagree. Brand does not deny victims “individualistic self-identification” (245). Brand presents each number in its written form as opposed to numerically, which provides the faceless victims with a kind of name. Brand’s readers are forced to work through and enunciate each syllable as one does with proper names. Numeric representation would enable readers to glance over the numbers, a subconscious and/or unintentional perpetuation of the systemic erasure “she” seeks to deconstruct. In using the alphabet as opposed to numerics, Brand demonstrates what Sharpe admires about her work:

[Brand] does not seek to explain or resolve the question of this exclusion in terms of assimilation, inclusion, or civil or human rights, but rather depict[s] aesthetically the impossibility of such resolutions by representing the paradoxes of blackness within and after the legacies of slavery's denial of Black humanity. (Sharpe 14)

The numbers take on the properties of a proper name; however, they simultaneously engage with their position within the inventory. Although alphabetic representation seems to deconstruct the forgetting and rejection of individual identification, the words still represent numbers, and thereby remain inseparable from the very system they seek to deconstruct. By spelling out the number, Brand gives space to the victims that they are otherwise denied. In Brand's attempt to counteract systems that depersonify humans, she demonstrates the "impossibility" of inclusive resolutions (as well as reparations) and engages with other modes of systemic erasure as in the use of inmate numbers: "the prison couture of orange-clad criminals / we became" (Sharpe 14; Brand 7.8). The orange printing of "Inventory" on the front cover appears weathered, which resonates with Sharpe's notion of the "wake" and the ways in which the past does not remain in the past, but shapes and affects the present (9). Perhaps the choice of orange is a deliberate engagement with the fact that 60% of people incarcerated are Black (15). The printed title also bears a resemblance to the imprint of a stamp, an instrument that enables near identical replications of an image or phrase with little effort.

Brand is among a group of Canadian women poets who employ the form of the list, its accumulative numbers, and its space for addendums to highlight the repetitions of racialized violence. In *Neighbour Procedure* (2010), Rachel Zolf's collection centred around the circumstances and victims of the continuing Israel-Palestine conflict, Zolf

compiles and unites multiple lists, each one lending more details to the ones before. In “Grievable,” Zolf lists the names of innocent victims whose activities, moments before their deaths, are compiled in the collection’s second poem, “Did not participate in hospitalities,” and whose ages are recorded in “Nominal” (Zolf 81). In *Zong!* (2008), M. NourbeSe Philip seeks to tell the story of the slave ship *Zong*, from which her collection gets its name, because “this story must be told” but it must be told without “telling” (Philip 190). Philip employs the form of the list and explores different modes of its accumulative and transformative potential. For example, in “Zong! #24,” Philip presents a list in which the definition of the word that opens each stanza is expanded upon: “evidence / is / sustenance / is / support / is / [...]” (41.1-6). The isolation of “is” builds momentum that accumulates along with the extensive definitions. “Zong! #24” engages with previous poems like “Zong! #18,” in terms of form (the list), shared subjects (ie. what constitutes “evidence?”), and their shared attempt at reaching a comprehensive definition and understanding of its proposed terms: “means evidence / means / mortality / means policy” (31.15-18 spaces in original). The list is not itself depersonifying, but, like the archive, it faces two directions at once: it holds the potential to preserve the victims of violence; however, its inherent incompleteness perpetuates the violence it records. This group of Black women poets in Canada seem to highlight the limitations of the list as a way of deconstructing the systems that hold space for and perpetuate racialized violence.

A list is accumulative; one thing is added to another. Considering the accumulative element in conjunction with the growing number of faceless victims of the disasters collected and recorded by the witness(es) and speaker of *Inventory*, Brand turns

to mathematics. In part III, the speaker begins to list the newest additions from the “latest watchful hour” (Brand 23.3). She notes:

eight killed by suicide bomb at
bus station, at least eleven killed in Shula at
restaurants, at least fifteen by car bomb, Irbil (Brand 25.15-17)

The alliterative “s” contained within the word “suicide” continues at the start of each of the lines that follow. The three syllables of “bus station” and “restaurants” pursue this internal alliterative “s” and establish a mode of consistent repetition. This formulaic repetition is punctuated by the re-stating of “at least” that follows each of the line’s initial three syllables, whilst rounding off the internal alliteration. The repetition of “at least” suggests an under-approximation within the equation, whilst creating a visual consistency that places “eleven” directly above “fifteen” in the page’s final line (25.16-17). By aligning the two double digit numbers, Brand alludes to the learning practice of addition: double digit numbers are positioned over one another, a visual reminder to add the last digits together, followed by the first. Brand lays out the equation before us: eleven and fifteen – “things add up” (52.17). Brand not only alludes to the practice of simple math, but perhaps even trivializes the apparent simplicity of taking an inventory, whilst foreshadowing the end of part III and the moment the speaker’s inventory seems to come together, if only momentarily: “eight hundred every month for a year [...] things add up” (52.14-17). The syllabic balance at the start of each of the page’s final two lines, the continuation of the internal alliteration, the repetition of the approximating “at least,” and the alignment of the two written numbers encourages readers to unite them. Repetition places emphasis through the accumulative use of similar, if not identical features. Perhaps we may reimagine repetition as a form of poetic addition or multiplication.

In a similar manner to Brand's alignment of "eleven" and "fifteen," Lubrin's repetitive use of sentence fragments not only emphasizes the fragmentation that is central to her collection, but creates a poetic equation. For example, "*And you never should have said / goodbye*" (Lubrin 3.94-95); "And see the black-toothed *Homo habilis* you'd expect" (62.20-21); "And mothers – already overburdened by the fallout taxes of / some distant relative's original sin, in which free will was enacted and land was spared" (64.39-41). The form and function of a sentence fragment hinges on the content and context of the sentence(s) that precede(s) it. Lubrin's sentence fragments prefaced with capital "a," "And," suggests an accumulative element, adding to and modifying the content and context of the sentence(s) before. The accumulative element of the "And" adopts similar properties to the sign for addition. "And" is the written equivalent to the mathematical symbol for addition. I would like to consider repetition as not only a mode of poetic emphasis, but one that achieves this emphasis through accumulation, building momentum through addition. Although I would like to consider the capital "a," "And," as a linguistic marker for addition, it also enters into conversation with the form of the list or inventory and its space of addendums.

A list, or inventory, is accumulative; however, in its drive to document and record this accumulation, it remains incomplete. In her essay "Venus in Two Acts," Hartman seeks to "tell a story about *two girls*, [Phibba and Dido ...], retrieving what remains dormant –the purchase or claim of their lives on the present –without committing further violence in [her] act of narration" (2). Hartman treads water between honoring the individuals robbed of their individuality in life and in death, whilst acknowledging their realities as truths and histories that remain undocumented. In conversation with Hartman's essay, McKittrick equates "the archive of black diaspora" with "a death

sentence, a tomb, a display of a violated body, an inventory of property, a medical treatise ... an asterisk in the grand narrative of history” (Hartman qtd. in McKittrick 16). The archive is both a container and act of refinement under a guise of remembrance. It simultaneously preserves and erases black death. McKittrick explores the archive of Black diaspora as an “origin story”: the holder and preserver of Black diasporic histories of migration and colonial violence (McKittrick 17). She notes that “the slave’s status as object-commodity, or purely economic cargo, reveals that a Black archival presence not only enumerates the dead and dying, but also acts as an origin story. [...] this is where historic blackness comes from: the list, the breathless numbers, the absolutely economic, the mathematics of the unliving” (17). Similarly, in Lubrin and Brand’s collections, both poets employ mathematics, a discipline that seems to be premised on the foundation of exactitude and measurement, as an aesthetic mode and tool to think through the limitations imposed upon diasporic identities by intergenerational trauma. Mathematics appears to be a universal language, one that is non-prejudicial. McKittrick notes that

the tolls of death and violence, housed in the archive, affirm black death. [...] The death toll becomes the source. The tolls inevitably uncover, too, analyses of histories and narratives and stories and data that honor and repeat and cherish anti-black violence and black death. If the source of blackness is death and violence, the citation of blackness –the scholarly stories we tell –calls for the repetition of death and violence (McKittrick 17-18)

Mathematics, however, does not have room to document and preserve idiosyncratic and/or contradictory details. Mathematics as a mode of preservation, much like the archive, is incomplete in its drive for accuracy. The contradictions of both

language and math as systems of recording are explored through a consideration of themes and metaphors of extraction, refinement, and remembrance in both Brand's *Inventory* and Lubrin's *Voodoo Hypothesis*.

Turning to Lubrin's collection, "The Mongrel" is a six-part poem divided among six pages; each part is prefaced with a mathematical symbol and concludes with an em dash (reminiscent of the "faithless hyphens" in Brand's *Inventory*). In a poem, let alone a collection, that is premised on notions of fragmentation and incompleteness, the decision to incorporate symbols of a discipline that seems to rest on the foundation of exactitude and measurement, is extremely interesting. Lubrin's prefatory mathematical symbols embody this idea of fragmentation or incompleteness. For example, she uses the symbols for root ($\sqrt{\quad}$), approximately (\cong), unequal (\neq), greater than or equal to (\geq), lesser than or equal to (\leq), and infinity (∞) (5-9). The root symbol is perhaps not the most explicit in terms of incompleteness, but the connotation of the word that is supplemented by its symbol recalls this fragmentation, the shortcomings of language, false promises, extraction, and refinement. Roots have been severed and remain unplanted. This uncertainty not only in terms of genealogy, but of cultural history, seems to engage with the poem's title, "The Mongrel," and the proposition of solving for an unknown, displaced, diasporic root (4). The *OED* defines "mongrel" as "the offspring or result of cross-breeding, miscegenation, mixed marriage, etc." ("mongrel, n. and adj."). The title's prefatory "The" suggests a singularity within a plurality. The "Mongrel" is defined by the splicing and union of two different elements that are united in fractions to create a different and independent entity that is simultaneously a unification and a division.

“Mongrel” embraces a plurality, whilst “the” suggests its singularity, presenting an interesting duality within the title.

The em dash that punctuates each of the poem’s six sections suggests an incomplete, unfinished conclusion to each of its parts and propels the poem forward, helping to ease the frustration inspired by the persistent fragmentation. Each part is understood as a part of the whole; however, as the poem tapers to an inconclusive end, the fragments do not culminate in the expected whole, the contract between author and reader is broken. The fragmented or unfinished quality is further highlighted in “The Mongrel’s” concluding line: “our knowledge of the Mongrel is only fragmentary –” highlighting the essence of incompleteness that not only pervades the six-part poem, but the whole collection (Lubrin 9.74). The em dash not only highlights the incompleteness, but it implies the potential for continuing, the promise of a future conclusion.

Although “The Mongrel” makes use most explicitly of the language of mathematics and its symbols, the role of mathematics in relation to inexactitude is not limited to the collection’s second poem, but it sets a precedent for the theme to persist and taper into the margins, much like the people, bodies, and memories it is used to preserve. The second part of the collection opens with a poem entitled “Nowhere the Pythagoras,” which continues the explicit appeal to the organized discipline, if not institution, of mathematics. The title addresses Pythagoras, the Greek philosopher and founder of the Pythagorean theorem, an equation used to solve for the unknown length of the hypotenuse line that closes off a right triangle. The role of mathematics, geometry more specifically, is suggested in the poem’s title. “Nowhere the Pythagoras” engages with the idea of solving for an unknown on a similar level to “The Mongrel.” However, considering that both the Black diaspora and the triangular transatlantic slave-trading system that created it

are central to Lubrin's collection, the triangle alluded to both by the poem's title and within the poem itself, "Nowhere the Pythagoras" enters into conversation with themes of displacement, solving for the unknown, and the drive to retrace connections, to replant the severed roots.

The triangular form is intimated through the form of the poem itself. It is organized and divided among three parts on the page. The triangular form is suggested through the deep indentation (approx. 4cm) of the fifteen center lines. The indentation of lines twenty-five through twenty-eight are slightly more left than the twelve lines above, which creates a right angle and whose points are left open, unconnected, and blank: a right triangle is suggested, but the hypotenuse is erased and unknown. This right angle is created immediately after a line break that divides "right / angles" between two lines, after which the indentation is lessened, thereby creating the right angle, whilst alluding to it (25.24-25). Both Lubrin and Brand's collections are inventories in the way that each are constructed of different things that are stitched together to make one seemingly fragmented, yet balanced whole.

In this thesis, I have referred to both Brand's *Inventory* and Lubrin's *Voodoo Hypothesis* as collections. Both are divided into fragmented sections. The seven seemingly independent parts of Brand's *Inventory* are united by the repetition of motifs. These motifs re-appear for a final time in the collection's concluding section, implying a sense of unity. Brand's speaker appears to answer "of course" to the question: "is there not happiness then[?]" (89.3 & 2). Brand's positivist response is short-lived as she demonstrates the inseparability of violence from these motifs that presumably embody or combine to project an illusion of happiness, the supposed subject of Brand's concluding section. Through the inability to separate a motif's initial position in violent episodes

from the projection of comfort and happiness in the final section, Brand demonstrates that violence is the common denominator; violence and the subsequent trauma are transferable. Brand configures violence and trauma as inheritance.

The successful tainting of the images and motifs in part VII of *Inventory* hinges on their initial framing and their reoccurrence, as with the re-surfacing of bicycles. In part VII, the speaker notes the utilitarian advantage of bicycles: “bicycles, great inventions even if you never / learned to ride” (92.8-9). The “bicycles” that open this stanza call back to its previous appearance in part III in which the bicycle is closely tied to a child victim and an act of violence:

child on bicycle by bomb

in Baquba

why does that alliterate on its own, why

does she observe the budding of that consonant (Brand 38.6-9)

This call back to the “bicycle” as it appears in previous sections is suggested in the emphasis that is placed on its initial appearance, which is punctuated by the alliterative “b” that is explicitly called into question by the speaker.

Bicycles and their potential for movement seem to play a significant role in discussions of violence and violent histories. The bicycle is brought into conversation with the list a few pages before it is noted for its role in an act of violence and the ultimate “unspeakable” –inflicting harm on a child: “the bicycles to be repaired, / the daily lists to be made of mundane / matters, like the cost of sugar” (30.9-11). The bicycle is in need of repair only for it to be decimated a few pages later. Here, the bicycle is added to an accumulating list of tasks, which is then imagined into a list that records and potentially predicts cost trajectories, as in the case of sugar, whose connection to violence

and violent histories is explored in previous sections. Once again, sugar, as an economic player, is brought to the foreground.

▽

CHAPTER 5

Like Brand, Lubrin stitches seemingly independent pieces together that are united by reoccurring themes, motifs, syntactic patterns, and/or voice. Lubrin's collection is divided into five untitled and seemingly unfinished sections. Through repetition, each section highlights and amplifies the sensations, experiences, and agents of the five bodily senses. Each section appears to amplify the sensations of an additional sense, whilst those that surface in preceding sections, continue to pervade in those that follow. This section is focused on the fragmentation of the physical body, the emphasis on the physical, scientific, if not medical approach to the body, and the rejection of the possibility for sentimentality.

The division between Lubrin's five sections are physically demarcated by the black-and-white reproductions of the collection's cover as discussed above. The very division of Lubrin's collection itself emphasizes division and a façade of wholeness, whilst disguising its incompleteness. The second section opens with a strange juxtaposition created by the presence of "blackening / flames that chaperone each dawn" in "Nowhere the Pythagoras" (25.4-5). The "blackening / flames" not only evoke the idea of burning, but the idea that the flames "chaperone each dawn" seems to suggest that the two accompany each other, whilst implying a cyclicity; however, whether or not this continual alliance is consensual remains unclear. The poem's concluding line presents a disturbing inversion of the expectations of possession: "this trouble I plot against you where small fires tongue-lash / my dark, dark pulse, is still original, still not for me" (25.34-35). The source of the "dark pulse" is clarified with a possessive "my dark," which not only emphasizes the adjective "dark," but the source of the pulse is identified as belonging to the first-person speaker. However, the line concludes by insinuating that the

“dark pulse” does not belong to its source: “still not for me” (25.35). The inconsistency between source and ownership of a bodily feature suggests a non-consensual dependence. This non-consensual dependence illustrates Hartman’s point that the slave exists outside the hegemony and is therefore denied the right to both give and deny consent in one’s position as “thing.” It is particularly interesting that it is the bodily pulse that is chosen and not the metaphoric heart. This deliberate and emphatic presence of the physical body throughout Lubrin’s collection, as well as Brand’s, will be explored further in the following and concluding section. In both Lubrin and Brand’s collections, the body is examined in individual parts, coldly scientific and medical –an examination reminiscent of a post-mortem.

Hartman highlights the connection between violence and identity, especially when one’s identity exists outside of the cultural hegemony, as in the case of Harriet Jacobs and her narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (1861). Jacobs was born into slavery in North Carolina (“Jacobs, Harriet: Introduction” 221). Before escaping “north in 1842” and writing *Incidents* “under the pseudonym Linda Brent,” Jacobs bore two children by her master, Dr. James Norcum, after whom Dr. Flint is based (222-21). *Incidents* differs from “the male-dominated slave narrative in its [...] focus on the sexual exploitation of the female slave” (221). Shortly after its publication, *Incidents* was criticized for being a fictional tale and was perceived to be the work of its “white abolitionist editor, Lydia Maria Child” (221). The narrative’s presumed inauthenticity marginalized it until the discovery of letters between Child and Jacobs, which validated the narrative (221). Jacobs’ narrative, her story and experiences, were rejected, neglected, and perceived as invalid in a manner that reflects the subjugation she was born into. Jacobs existed outside the white hegemony of nineteenth-century United States that

Walker critiques. Gramsci dissects the concept of “hegemony” into three key factors: “influence, leadership, and consent” (Hartman & Wilderson 186). Because Jacobs exists outside of this cultural hegemony, she is denied these factors. In Hartman’s interview she turns to Jacobs’ account of sexual violence and notes that “[Jacobs] has to deny the very violence, which elsewhere she said defines her position as a slave: her status as a thing and the negation of her will” (187). The violence against her must be muted, thereby erased (refined through a process of extraction) in order to mold her life experiences into a narrative that is palatable and acceptable for nineteenth-century white female readers’ sensibilities. Jacob’s story undergoes a process of refinement through the extraction of the unspeakable violence that otherwise characterizes the circumstances of her life. The subjection of her narrative to processes of refinement and extraction reinforces her subject-position as “thing.” Through the subjection of her personal experiences recorded and muted in her narrative, Jacobs is subject to continued violence despite her “freedom.” Jacobs’ further subjection enhances this notion of the slave as “thing,” as object-commodity, and the discourse of economics that accompanies this subject-position. The history of blackness is rooted in a language of economics, both “an economy of race and [of] violence” (McKittrick 17). Both Lubrin and Brand employ mathematical principles when language seems to fall short, yet the precision of mathematics also fails them. Brand notes: “enough numbers still to come so twenty / outside bank in Kirkuk, the numbers so random, / so shapeless, apart from their shape” (26). The numbers that represent these statistics that Brand’s witness records, are “shapeless,” but the form that inspires them and the drive to record them are the unforgettable forms of the underestimated victims’ bodies.

In Lubrin's *Voodoo Hypothesis*, the affects and effects of intergenerational trauma manifest on the physical body through the isolation of appendages, organs, and elements of the body's structure (ie. skin, bone, and veins). In "Give Us Fire of the Black Prometheus," the focus is placed on the structure as in a body's skin as well as the connectedness of "bloodlines" and "veins": "homo sap rusted through epidermis / after epidermis after frosty epidermis –" (Lubrin 27). The repetition of "epidermis" emphasizes skin, whilst the "frosty epidermis" perhaps evokes the cold touch of a corpse, a body through which the blood or "sap" has stopped coursing. The choice to use "epidermis" is coldly scientific. However, as opposed to the monosyllabic "skin," Lubrin makes space for the polysyllabic anatomical term. Lubrin repeatedly isolates parts of the anatomical body and highlights the loss of its function as it relates to its source.

The repeated isolation of parts of the physical body, presents a kind of division that is physical as well as visual, but may also be considered a violent depiction of erasure and processes of extraction as an agent of refinement. The body is imagined in terms of fractions of a whole in a way that reflects the subjugation to which diasporic cultures and identities are subject and the systems in place that perpetuate violence. Lubrin and Brand's dissection, if you will, is often paired with the anatomical or medical term, which offers a rather cold lens through which the reader approaches this division, denying sentimentality or the potential for metaphoric, often positive, connotations. Like Brand's numbers, Lubrin's isolated anatomical features are too "shapeless."

Lubrin's "The Frankenstein Universe" engages with "Give Us Fire or the Black Prometheus." Both poems engage unmistakably with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*. Both Lubrin and Shelley address, in some way, a division prompted by difference, particularly differences that are or have been made visible on the body.

“The Frankenstein Universe” is saturated with different forms of division –division as a mode of extraction and its symptomatic refinement. The poem opens with a division suggested in the repetition of “before”: “before cave, before light // and speed broke new wounds” (18.2-3). The “cave,” “light,” and “speed” seem to frame a division in time, whilst “light // and speed,” two of the three elements that demarcate this division, are themselves divided among two stanzas. Further division is implied in the “br[eaking of] new wounds,” which suggests a fissure, potentially one on the surface of the skin, which is then underscored by the persistent division of the physical body and the isolation of its parts:

the heart

that won’t tick, the toe that has forgotten

how to balance the body that has had its organs

auctioned at the price of an ashen brown leaf (Lubrin 18.4-8)

The “heart” is noted for its anatomic properties, void of any potential metaphoric resonance. The “toe” is handled in a similar manner. The toe’s anatomical significance and function is foregrounded; however, its function is stalled. As suggested by “forgotten,” the proper function of the toe is brought into conversation with memory. Memory is configured as fundamental to the proper workings of the body, possibly to one’s vitality: “forg[etting]” produces an imbalance.

Once again, the theme of division is visually apparent. The poem’s fifty lines are organized into twenty-five stanzas of two lines each. In the tenth stanza, Lubrin presents one of her accumulative sentence fragments that begins with the capital “a,” “And”: “And like one Columbus / pupil ’membering an early death quickened like a lie” (18.20). The

prefix of “membering” is removed (extracted) and replaced by an apostrophe (refinement). The removal of the prefix aligns with the notion of extraction, whilst its substitute (the apostrophe) creates a new undefined word, evocative of the concept of refinement. However, the product of this refinement is unfamiliar. The reader is prompted to consider the what the missing prefix is, subjecting “membering” to further forms of refinement. Considering that Lubrin’s collection is focused on different modes and forms of individual and cultural memory and the question of its preservation, which is alluded to in the poem’s first few lines, my initial response, as a reader, is to interpret the missing prefix as “re-”: “remembering.” However, with the continued space and attention given to parts of the physical body, I began to consider the possibility of “dis-” as the missing or extracted prefix. The possibility of “dis-” as the implied and erased prefix is buttressed by the poem’s concluding line and word, which is just that: “who else remember how they force our dismember?” (19.50). The “we/they” dichotomy persists and is cast as an extremely evocative and violent division. Unlike a dissection, which is a gruesome division, but one that is presumably driven by a search for understanding, a “dismember[ment]” is prompted to divide or reduce the size of a whole. Bodies are divisible. They are commodities, “things” that are subject to subjugation if they are not disposable or dispensable.

Lubrin continues to make space for individual body parts and the structure or components of these parts, as with the eye and its “iris” and “pupil” (18.19 & 20). The isolation of the “iris” and the “pupil” is demonstrated in their naming as well as between lines and sentences. The eye is an interesting choice to divide further, particularly in terms of the “double-visioned self” and the “double consciousness,” which not only evoke sight, but also embody the concept of division on all fronts – a division that is

simultaneously physical and non-physical, potentially metaphoric, and undoubtedly generationally affected.

These dissections appear to be fixated on the question of monetary worth and are explored in terms of economics: “the body that has had its organs / auctioned at the price of an ashen brown leaf” (18.7-8). This kind of a dissection is alluded to by the “auction[ing]” of “organs” and the continued fragmentation of the body, which is intimated by “carving” a few lines below (18.8, 7 & 11). The language of economics and commerce is brought directly into conversation with the function and fundamental properties of life. The unimaginable dismembering, the physical division of the anatomical body is achievable; however, Lubrin seems to demonstrate the implausibility of deconstructing the connection between the physical body and commerce. The matter of having “auctioned” organs engages with the practice of slave marts. Not only is the body discussed in terms of commodity, but the idea of the body as property, a property to be cultivated and harvested, suggests a form of cannibalism that is reasoned away by difference, culturally and commercially, other than the hegemony.

Understanding the body as an entity to be cultivated engages with the violence of colonialism and the power held over bodies. Unlike Walker’s silhouettes that explicitly address the sexual violence of plantation life, Lubrin addresses sexual violence in a slightly subtler way, yet equally unsettling. “Tonight, the Mayfly” is a poem that is constructed of competing and contrasting elements, particularly Caribbean specific figures and objects with their “western” counterparts. The poem embodies the notion of the “double consciousness,” a notion that has been accepted as fundamental to theories of the diaspora. Lubrin offers a glimpse into a muted act of sexual violence, whilst illustrating the stress symptomatic of being pulled in two different directions

simultaneously: “In vas(in)deference, give me / any stake in a calling / higher than my double-visioned self” (Lubrin 58.24-26). The notion of the double consciousness is explicitly evoked by the speaker’s “double-visioned self” (58.26). The union of “vas(in)deference” alludes to sexual reproduction, whilst not rejecting an undertone of potential violence. The vas deference is the part of the penis that carries sperm and thus makes fertilization and pregnancy possible. The potential for violence implied in the framing of “vas(in)deference” is shaped by the knowledge and context of the violent histories surrounding the Black diaspora and the poem’s explicit engagement with these histories of forced migration. “In deference” refers to a submissive “honouring,” which is ironized by this idea of sexual violence and the execution of power (“deference, n.” *OED*). The parenthetical “in” followed by “deference” may also encourage a misreading of “indifference,” which also implies an imbalance in the division of power. Lubrin pairs forced migration with forced penetration. The shape of the open and closed round brackets parallels that of the vulva. The note of secondary significance imbued in the conventional practice of parentheses along with the negation of space not only between “vas” and “deference,” but between the parentheses, suggests that the female form is secondary, is “thing.” The muting of a potential act of sexual violence engages with the subjection of Jacob’s *Incidents*, a narrative in which accounts of sexual violence were forced to denounce their violence (refinement through extraction). Noting the muted violence in Lubrin’s text, inspires a sense of uncertainty and hesitation in recognizing and assessing acts of erasure, which seem to be implied on the level of the visual in Lubrin’s poem. My uncertainty becomes my certainty.

▽

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The repeated division of the body speaks to the separation and isolation of the split-mind and split-experience of diaspora created by the transatlantic slave trade and the generations that inherit trauma and subjugation to systemic marginalization, neglect, and violence to which they are subject. Brand alludes to this inheritance of trauma and split-experience by way of her “faithless hyphens,” hopelessly uniting “Jane-Finch” and “Aulnay-sous-Bois” (Brand 47.10). Jane-Finch is a poor and often violent neighbourhood on the outskirts of Toronto. Aulnay-sous-Bois is a strikingly similar neighbourhood in the Arrondissement of Le Raincy in the suburbs of Paris. The residents of both Jane-Finch and Aulnay-sous-Bois are mainly immigrants of colour. Although these hyphens presumably unite words, they occupy the spaces between them. The hyphens’ intent and result are inconsistent. The hyphens refine names by occupying the conventional spaces between each word to create a guise of unity in regions that are segregated from the metropolitan cities that they border: “the outskirts are inevitable” (47.9). These hyphens set up an illusion of unity in neighbourhoods that are everything but.

Perhaps the continued isolation of the physical body, its appendages, and vital organs is a physical manifestation of the division of a body politic, a division that is physically, arguably violently, and mechanically the perpetuation of systemic neglect, erasure, and violence to which diasporic cultures and communities are subject. The division of the body politic manifests itself in the anatomical body. Rendering the divisions of the body politic as physical dissections or dismemberments engages with the notion of extraction –appendages and vital organs are physically extracted from a whole. Lubrin’s dissections are the physical manifestations of the undocumented violence of our histories and the continued violence of their erasure.

Rememoration is premised on an understanding that memory is not restricted to the past, but pervades the present moment. Perhaps we may consider the pressure to rememorate, the violence of our histories as a driving force in conversation with the steam of Walker's *Karavan* and the process of refinement. It is a build up of pressure that creates steam and disappears water. Extraction through processes of refinement is a violent act of erasure. It removes a part from its original source, thus leaving the source material in a fractioned state and prompting the desire to reconstruct and persist in modified state. In the context of a diaspora and the desire and drive to rewrite and reconstruct cultural and individual identities as well as personal and cultural histories, perhaps we may consider the product of this refinement through extraction as not merely a product or symbol of loss, but an act of ephemeral preservation. In considering the products of refinement as products of resilient preservation, we must not forget the violence that makes preservation necessary. Steam, sugar, and salt are by-products of extraction created by the process of refinement; however, each resiliently persists in modified states. The dismembering, dissection, division of the physical and political body is perhaps a mode of rememoration. From the erasure and marginalization of diasporic communities, cultures, and identities we are left with fragments. A post-mortem is required upon a deliberately displaced inventory of cultural memory.

WORKS CITED

- Als, Hilton. "The Sugar Sphinx." *The New Yorker*, 8 May 2014, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-sugar-sphinx>. Accessed 18 Feb. 2018.
- Brand, Dionne. *Inventory*. McClelland & Stewart, 2006.
- Camille van der Marel, L. "Amortizing Memory: Debt as Mnemonic Device in Caribbean Canadian Literature," *Small Axe*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2017.
- "Caricature, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/27973. Accessed 14 May 2018.
- Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *The University of Chicago Press Journals*, Translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, vol. 1, no. 4, 1976, pp. 875-893.
- Contemporary Arts Center New Orleans. *Prospect.4: The Lotus in Spite of the Swamp*. <http://cacno.org/exhibitions/prospect4-lotus-spite-swamp>.
- D'Addario, John. "Art & History: Kara Walker's 'The Katastwóf Karavan' spotlights New Orleans' slave legacy." *The Advocate*, 20 Feb. 2018, https://www.theadvocate.com/new_orleans/entertainment_life/arts/article_47c7c422-1290-11e8-83af-438743cac644.html. Accessed 15 June 2018.
- "Deference, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/48816. Accessed 16 June 2018.
- Derrida, Jacques. Eric Prenowitz. "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression". *Diacritic*, vol. 25, no. 2 (1995): 9-63.
- "Extraction, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/67087. Accessed 23 August 2018.
- Finkelman, Paul. "Black Migration." *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1619-1895: From the Colonial Period to the Age of Frederick Douglass*, Oxford University of Press, 2009.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Hartman, Saidiya V. "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2008, pp. 1-14.
- Hartman, Saidiya V., and Frank B. Wilderson and III. "The Position of the Unthought." *Qui Parle*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2003, pp. 183-201.

“Jacobs, Harriet: Introduction.” *Feminism in Literature: A Gale Critical Companion*, edited by Jessica Bomarito and Jeffrey W. Hunter, vol 3:19th Century, Authors (C-z), Gale 2005, pp. 221-222. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=T003&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CCX3441600210&docType=Topic+overview&sort=RELEVANCE&contentSegment=&prodId=GVRL&contentSet=GALE%7CCX3441600210&searchId=R1&userGroupName=udalhouseie&inPS=true#. Accessed 31 July 2018.

Lubrin, Canisia. *Voodoo Hypothesis*. Buckridger Books, 2017.

Loos, Ted. “After a Blowup, Kara Walker Lets off Steam in New Orleans.” *The New York Times*, 21 Feb. 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/21/arts/design/kara-walker-prospect-new-orleans-calliope-trevor-schoonmaker.html>. Accessed 3 April 2018.

McKittrick, Katherine, and Clyde Adrian Woods, editors. *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*. South End Press, 2007.

McKittrick, Katherine. “Mathematics Black Life,” *The Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies and Research*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2014, pp.16-28.

“Mongrel, n. and adj.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2018. Web. 25 June 2018.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Vintage International, 1987.

“Nabla, n.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/124759. Accessed 29 August 2018.

Philip, M. NourbeSe. *Zong!*. The Mercury Press, 2008.

“Refinement, n.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/160889. Accessed 14 August 2018.

Ross, Lauren. “Cries of Distress, Horror, and Resistance: At Prospect.4 in New Orleans, Kara Walker’s Pitch-Perfect Calliope Finally Sounds.” *ArtNews*, 26 Feb. 2018. <http://www.artnews.com/2018/02/26/cries-distress-horror-fear-prospect-4-new-orleans-kara-walkers-pitch-perfect-calliope-finally-sounds>. Accessed 26 July 2018.

Shaw, Gwendolyn Dubois. *Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker*. Duke University Press, 2004.

Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Duke University Press, 2016.

St. Félix, Doreen. "Kara Walker's Next Act." *Vulture*, 16 Apr. 2017, <http://www.vulture.com/2017/04/kara-walker-after-a-subtelty.html>. Accessed 19 Feb. 2018.

Vellino, Brenda Carr. "'History's Pulse Measured with Another Hand:' Precarity Archives and Translocal Citizen Witness in Dionne Brand's Inventory." *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 82, no. 2, 2003, pp. 242-260.

Walcott, Rinaldo. *Black Like Who? Writing Black Canada*. 2nd ed., Insomniac Press, 2003.

Zolf, Rachel. *Neighbour Procedure*. Coach House Books, 2010.



Figure 1: Walker, Kara. Walker standing before *Sugar Baby*.
(Photo: J. Grassi, *Patrick McMullan Company*, 6 May. 2014.)



Figure 2: Unknown artists, *Flora*, 1796.
(Source: Shaw, Gwendolyn Dubois. *Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker*.
Duke University Press, 2004.)



Figure 3: Walker, Kara. *Detail of Katastwóf Karavan*.
(Photo: William Widmer, *The New York Times*, 21 Feb. 2018.)



Figure 4: Walker, Kara. *Detail of Katastwóf Karavan*.
(Photo: Andrew Russeth, *ArtNews*, 26 Feb. 2018.)

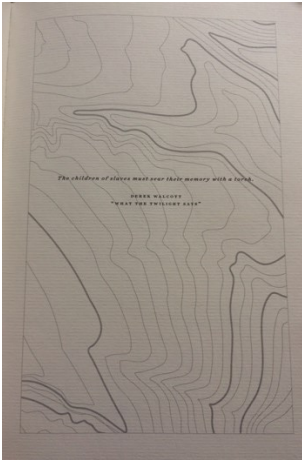


Figure 5: Lubrin, *Voodoo Hypothesis* Part 1 (Lubrin, *Voodoo Hypothesis*, 2017.)