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Black W/Holes: A History of Brief Time

Author(s): M. NourbeSe Philip

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Black W/Holes

a history of brief time

M. NourbeSe Philip

event: A point in space-time, specified by its time and place.

Immersed in a recently bought newspaper, I exit a variety store and almost collide with a man walking west along St. Clair Avenue West. I am immediately apologetic. His response is swift. And contemptuous. "You fucking people are all over the place!"

I suggest he do something to himself which is anatomically impossible. I am angry—very angry. I am also afraid. He is white. He is male. In a big city, interactions like these can easily become fatal. I quickly duck into another store. Some minutes later I emerge and am relieved to see his figure a block or so ahead of me.

quark: A (charged) elementary particle that feels the strong force.

"You fucking people are all over the place!" The white man's words remain with me for a long time. They reverberate within—"all over the place....," "all over the place...." If nothing else, it was clear that he felt I ought not to be on St. Clair Avenue West. The further implication of his statement was that my being on that street in Toronto was evidence that we—African people, I suppose—were "all over the place." The corollary being that we ought not to be. I could easily dismiss that man's statement, were it not for the fact that the notion of illegitimacy contained in his words is carefully nourished, cultivated, and brought to splendid fruition in the white-supremacist immigration practices of all the western, so-called democracies. The main job of these countries—formerly the Group of Seven, now the Club of Eight—appears to be figuring out how best to club the rest of the world into submission, while keeping darker-skinned peoples physically corralled. Meantime capital, which is in fact our capital, wielded by multinationals, runs rampant and rough-shod all over the world. Indeed, all over the place!

big bang: The singularity at the beginning of the universe.

for five hundred years the essence of being black is that you can be transported. anywhere. anytime. anyhow. for five hundred years a black skin is a passport. to a lifetime of slavery. a guarantee that the european can carry out terrorist acts against the african with impunity. for five hundred years the european moves the african “all over the place.” at his behest and whim. and then one bright summer’s morning, he looks me in the eye and tells me: “you fucking people are all over the place.”

ever since the holds of the slave ship, the european attempts to curtail the every moving of the african:

the moving in time

the moving in space

the moving into their own spirituality

the european forbids the african language; forbids her her spirituality; forbids her her gods; forbids her her singing and drumming; forbids her the natural impulse to cling to mother, father, child, sister, and brother—forbids her family. leaves her no space. but that of the body. and the mind. which in

any event they deny. cut off from their own histories and History, the african moves into a history that both deracinates and imprisons her. in the primitive. in the ever-living present absent a past or a future.

For five hundred years the european moves the african “all over the place.” at his behest and whim. and then one bright summer’s morning, he looks me in the eye and tells me: “you fucking people are all over the place.”

uncertainty principle: One can never be exactly sure of both the position and the velocity of a particle; the more accurately one knows the one, the less accurately one can know the other.

I live in a starter home. On a starter street. For two decades I have lived in a starter home. The street remains a starter street for many who buy their first home there—a starter home—then move on. There are a few like me and my family, however, who defy the very meaning of start which intends always to lead to somewhere else. We remain. Stay put. In a starter home. Away from home. Defying the wanderer, the lost, the unbelonging in Black. The spore at the root of Africa.

today—the black skin is not so much a passport as an active signifier to those manning borders of the brave new world order of everything that must not be allowed in. crime, drugs, AIDS, sex, ebola. into these self same western democracies whose spawn—the metastasizing multinational—is all over the place.

Robina, Winona, Alberta. Three women's names. And the names of three streets in the neighbourhood in which I live. The same one with the starter home. The story is that at one time—in the past—is there such a thing?—a Black man owned the land on which these streets are now located. That man had three daughters whose names were Robina, Winona, and Alberta. I have never verified this story, maybe fearing its inaccuracy. Somehow I feel more connected to this area, knowing? believing? that a long time ago Robina (I had an aunt called Rubina), Winona, and Alberta, three Black women, grew up here. In this neighbourhood. And that their father once owned this land.

We remain. Stay put. In a starter home. Away from home. Defying the wanderer, the lost, the unbelonging in Black.

Which in turn begs the question. How did he own it? How do you, as a black man—an African man, or woman—'own' land in a space e/raced of its native peoples, bounded "from sea to shining sea" by the ligaments of white supremacy? A space. Our home and native land—our stolen, native land. A space. Still being warred over by the descendants of two European powers. How do you own land, a house, even a starter home in a space and place where a minor encounter with an/other gives rise to the challenge of your legitimacy in this space. A space of massive interruptions. And disruptions. Mostly fatal for the First Nations people. That is the new world. That is the space we call Canada.

magnetic field: The field responsible for magnetic forces, now incorporated, along with the electric field, into the electromagnetic field.

Goethe was of the view that the negative space around which leaves develop influenced the shape of a plant as much as their genes. Something in the surrounding emptiness, he believed, gave shape to the leaf.

What is the space—the negative space—that is Canada, around which I grow? Around which African people—Black people—grow? How does that negative space shape us? And do we, in turn, shape that space—moulding it to fit our specificities?

in this space we call Canada, blackness serves as a cypher. a tool. the means by which the larger, white space shapes and ritually purifies itself. blackness becomes the most effective way in which the essence of Canadianness—is there such a thing?—is articulated and the purity of Canadian space is ensured. so that the refrain—"you fucking people are all over the place" is modified—parsed into "you people will **not** be allowed to be all over this place called Canada. except and in so far as we allow you to be."



Wayne Solomon, Sailor, Main Parade/Lake Shore Boulevard, 2001. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the artist.

spin: An internal property of elementary particles, related to, but not identical to, the everyday concept of spin.

Time and again in the media, the involvement of African men and women in crime becomes the excuse to question the effectiveness of the Immigration Act. As if white men and women do not commit crimes. As if the very space that is Canada is not founded on profound and unforgivable crimes against First Nations people. Against humanity.

“Why are we letting these kinds of people into **our** country?” the editorials question. Deportation becomes the most favoured tool to deal with that speciality, “black crime.” Despite the fact that many, if not most, of these people convicted of crimes may have spent their most formative years here. in this space called Canada.

At least once a year white Canadians ritually define and purify themselves and their space by going through this public process—ably assisted by their media handmaidens—of ensuring that indeed “you fucking people” are **not** all over the place.

**Wayne
Solomon,
Dancer
Waving a
White Rag,
Main Parade/
Lake Short
Boulevard,
2004.** Gelatin
silver print.
Courtesy of the
artist.



Every two or three years these rituals culminate in the high mass of a commission of inquiry into the state of immigration. The recommendations of these commissions invariably narrow the manoeuvrable space allowed Africans and other peoples of colour. Head taxes, extended waiting periods for refugees, genetic testing of family members—the list of punishments for those who have sinned by desiring to enter the space called Canada is long and exquisitely tortuous.

1973 was just such a year: Canadians would examine how immigration practices were affecting the country. In a country built primarily on white immigration, it is significant that in the 1974 Green Paper on Immigration, all the worst case scenarios used examples of African peoples: for instance, how would parents feel about the “fate of their offspring if their children were to marry a black person.” All material showing the potential effect of demographic changes resulting from **immigration** used examples of **domestic** migrations of Black Americans **within** the United States—a country convulsing in response to challenges to its governing ideology of white supremacy. The black body becomes **the** measurement—the point at which absolute difference is established.

acceleration: The rate at which the speed of an object is changing.

an emptiness—an absence
shapes me shaping it
as the space around
the leaf serrates
the oak
fringes the willow
needles the larch

you may be born here—your mother’s mother and father’s father—
you will still get asked where you’re from. if your skin is black. you
answer here. which is where? but if the minister of immigration gets
her way—even being born here, in the space called canada, will be no
guarantee that you can claim Canadian citizenship.
the white that is snow
shapes itself around the silence
of cree and ojibwa—a hardness
in the face of something new
strange

primordial black hole: A black hole created in the very early universe.

“all over the place!” is there anywhere in this world—this brave and newly ordered world—to which a white skin does not become an automatic passport? all over the place, indeed! from the fifteenth century on, columbus, pizarro, hawkins, drake, and others of that ilk—robber barons all supported by their robber-baron monarchs—run around the world terrorising africans and other peoples of colour. this is how they repay the hospitality of their hosts wherever they land. their most effective weapon is the company. there is a plethora of companies: the dutch east india company, the company of royal adventurers, the french east india company, the royal african company and on and on. and they deal in bodies. black bodies. what they call pieces of black ivory. today the ceo sons of these same robber barons and buccaneers sit atop multinational corporations whose work has not changed in five hundred years. they still deal in bodies. yours and mine. “you fucking people are all over the place!” talk about role reversal and projection.

is there anywhere in this world—this brave and newly ordered world—to which a white skin does not become an automatic passport?

Wayne Solomon, A Mother and her Daughter Dancing in the Rain, Kids' Carnival/ Eglinton Avenue West, 2000. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the artist.



Take the Ossington bus north—say at Dundas. Ride north on it to Eglinton. **Observe how the bus goes through a chromatic shift from light to dark as you enter the space of Blackness.** That ‘exotic’ space of Blackness as rendered by Atom Egoyan. Up on Eglinton. Heartland of exotica. Exotic from whose perspective? (No review or critique of Egoyan’s film [*Exotica* (1994)] challenges the use of Blackness as nothing more than a signifier. For the exotic.) Then take a walk down Bay. Not so much heartland as engine of the capitalist machine. Observe how monochromatic that space is. Its beat that of a metronome.

rhythm is simply space divided by time. “up on eglinton” at oakwood is rhythmmed in the same time as port of spain, trinidad; as accra, ghana; as scarborough, tobago; as kingston, jamaica; as harlem, new york.

event horizon: The boundary of a black hole.

Canada is the clichéd land of wilderness. Like all clichés it is also founded on truth—the space that is canada contains twenty percent of the world’s wilderness. And yet in such vastness Africans and other peoples of colour

are to be found by and large only in urban areas. Forty minutes outside of Toronto African peoples are invisible. Not present. Despite some four hundred years on this continent—in this land called Canada. Cottage country remains a white enterprise in every sense of that word. Complete with power boats, jet skis, and luxury cottages. It is, indeed, a strange way to be “all over the place” when African and other children of colour are noticeably absent from “wilderness” camps outside of the urban areas.

What is it about this experience of “wilderness”—this very Canadian experience—which Africans and other peoples of colour who have come here as immigrants do not participate in? Do our African brothers and sisters who have been here far longer than we fresh water Canadians engage in a different relationship with this twenty percent wilderness?

There appears to be some sort of psychic border which prohibits or limits our entry, as “Others,” into this particularly Canadian aspect of life. Considering that most immigrants are at most one generation away from the land, their lack of engagement with it in Canada is significant. For many peoples from Africa and Asia, the land remains integrally linked to their life: not only is it the source of food, but also of healing and spirituality. With European settlement in Canada, however, the “wilderness” has developed a language that we cannot penetrate, unless we enter the world of whiteness—possess a cottage and boat. With the erasing of the First Nations presence and their removal to reservations, their wisdoms, their languages, their manner of relating to the land have all been unavailable to us. The “wilderness” has indeed been racialized.

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Safety lies in numbers. This is why we African peoples coalesce in cities. We know we will find others like ourselves there, we will find foods we’re used to. We can hear our languages spoken. There is an immediate sense of connectedness, which cannot be underestimated. It recreates the illusion of home and belonging.

imaginary time: Time measure using imaginary numbers.

I am a child, sitting in a darkened movie theatre. This is our regular Saturday treat. A matinee. The cowboys and white settlers are on the lookout for Indians. The beautiful scenic river becomes ominous: Indian savages may be hiding in the bushes just waiting to scalp white men, women, and children. Several years later I paddle a canoe along a quiet lake in north Ontario, round a bend and for a split second am afraid, expecting a canoe of tomahawk-brandishing Indians. Maybe Tarzan will come and rescue me.

Long before I am aware of it, the “wilderness” is racialized. In movies and books—fiction, non-fiction, and comic books. I am not from the American South, but as an African person the American South is in my psyche. Somewhere.

Walking up a back road in Southwestern Ontario the sound of an engine behind me tenses my body; my thoughts—and fears—turn to rape, lynching, and racist rednecks. Nor can I forget, while vacationing in Minden, Ontario, deep in the Haliburton Highlands, that white supremacists held a rally in that very town not that long before.

When you put an African person in the woods, in the “wilderness,” one of the first images that comes to mind is that of being hunted. By dogs. By white men with shotguns.

The immediate and individual power of the redneck cannot be underestimated—one only has to think of the recent lynching in Texas of an African American by three white men who tied his body to a truck and dragged him to his death. As the most powerful purveyor of popular culture, however, the movies have played a significant role in representing the “wilderness” and rural areas as the heartland of the redneck. They also let the urban redneck off the hook. One of the strongest screen images of the urban redneck is that of poor, white trash riding shotgun in an old beat-up pickup truck. Seldom do we ever see those three-pieced, pinstriped businessmen and women (members of the Club of Eight) riding shotgun, hunting Black people. But they are, indeed, the ones with the resources and commitment to the policies and practices that have carefully nurtured and sustained the belief system of white supremacy.

Meantime Africans are literally scared off the land, which the European purchases and enjoys relatively free of any contact with African people.

It is winter. I am standing on a frozen lake some two hours north of Toronto. There is a still whiteness all around me. In this moment I recognize something about the way in which First Nations people relate to the land: As a living, breathing force which one needs to interact with. Not to conquer, but to be in relationship with. Several hours later I hear the First Nations scholar Georges Sioui speaking eloquently about the need for the newcomer—the european—to learn the concept of Americity. Americity, he argues, encapsulates an approach to the land that all the first peoples of the Americas share.

white dwarf: A stable cold star, supported by the exclusion principle repulsion between electrons.

in the brave and oh so new world where africans have no agency—can be bought or sold at will—they turn their eyes to that large undifferentiated space lacking any particularity for them. the singularity to the north called canada, at the end of the north star. where harriet tubman



Wayne Solomon, *Untitled, King and Queen Competition/Lampport Stadium, 2005.* Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the artist.

took her people and “never lost a single passenger.” they was going to do some walking, these africans, out of slavery. into freedom. or so they thought. into the space called canada.

this space called canada is not a white, virgin space. it never was. it is a space that was initially inhabited by brown peoples. and continues to be. the black presence—the african presence—has been here for a very long time—indeed ever since the black man, mathieu da costa, arrived with Samuel de Champlain in 1605. the space that is canada is linked to the black world, the african world as a space of refuge, hope, and new beginnings, all too often unrealized. during the american revolution the crown promises freedom and land in canada to africans who would flee their owners and fight on the side of the loyalists. they receive their freedom and land; often it is the most barren land and their presence in this space is neither valued or wanted. in 1796

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the colonial government of jamaica grows tired of trying to keep control of the maroons and ships them to nova scotia. once again freedom proves to be a mirage for africans—eventually the maroons emigrate to sierra leone. it is a space—this space called canada—enlarged by appetite—salted, east coast cod is sent to the caribbean to feed the bodies of enslaved africans; in return hogsheads of rum are shipped back to the east coast. for free europeans. the appetite for cheap labour: african caribbean men join their nova scotian brothers in the mines of sydney. in ontario african caribbean women enter the space we call canada as cheap domestic labour. doing work white women will not do.

mass: The quantity of matter in a body; its inertia, or resistance to acceleration.

Canada remains the place to which people flee. Good guys fleeing bad guys; bad guys fleeing good guys; white draft dodgers fleeing their abbreviated futures in the jungles of Viet Nam; some Black draft dodgers; wealthy businessmen and women who can buy Canadian passports. You name it, there's always a good reason to head for Canada. These people never go to Vancouver, or Toronto, or Sudbury. At least as represented in the movies. Sometimes—very sometimes—they go to Montreal which is French and, therefore, not really Canada after all. It is that undifferentiated mass—the same mass that Africans set out for a long long time ago—that is the space of Canada they head for. It is a space of becoming. All things to all people. Canadians on the other hand almost always never head for the United States, preferring instead LA or San Francisco, or New York or Chicago. Unless you're Black of course, and you're going Stateside. Which is a very different country.

weight: The force exerted on a body by a gravitational field. It is proportional to, but not the same as, its mass.

I am at a resort in the Hockley Valley—the land around it has been reshaped with the golfer in mind. There is an abundance of open space carefully mowed and shaped into an eighteen-hole golf course. Here white men get to drive around in little, white buggies (often followed by their women, also in little white buggies); they jump out, hit little, white balls around the green expanse, then jump back into their little, white buggies and drive off. The sense of expansive entitlement is palpable.

It is a very white space. Tiger Woods notwithstanding.

The buffet style meals continue this theme of largesse and plenitude bringing out the gluttonous, all-you-can-eat side in me.

It is the same approach of that quintessential marauder, the European, to the world. Eat all you can. It is the same approach the

multinationals, supported by the “clubbers-of-eight” to the world today. The world and its resources have become a smorgasbord, a buffet, at which they are each expected to consume all that they can, go back for seconds, thirds, and fourths, and hang the consequences.

The flash-point of the 1992 Oka crisis lay in an attempt by white Canadians to expand a golf course. Into an area that had spiritual significance for the First Nations people in Québec. So that white men with their golf clubs could run around in little, white carts, hitting little, white balls. Frances Cress Welsing, the African American psychologist, has argued that there is symbolic social and racial significance in the kinds of balls used in sports. It is no coincidence, she suggests, that golf—a game involving little, white balls played over a vast expanse of land, is traditionally the elite sport favoured by rich, white men, and from which Black men have also traditionally been excluded.

So powerful is the sense of white space, I hesitate to walk on the green, walk instead on the paved roads linking these eighteen holes. My black and female body vibrates with the question: am I allowed? Not so my companion who is white and male. He too, although not a golfer, shares in this aura of entitlement. The space is his to occupy. Which is a microcosm of how our peoples inhabit this space that is Canada. One with a sense of entitlement—even greater than that of the First Nations people; the other with a sense of being allowed in on sufferance.

strong force: The strongest of the four fundamental forces, with the shortest range of all. It holds the quarks together within protons and neutrons, and holds the protons and neutrons together to form atoms.

sing to me of africville where african nova scotians build a community. In the implacable face of white supremacy. then sing me the africville blues that tell of city fathers attempting to e/race the african presence. in this white space called Canada. so that they can build a park! not a golf course. but a park with a water fountain. what is the negative space called Canada around which those early african Canadians shaped themselves? into africville. into resistance. and into memory.

Listen to the sound of the river. I did. The Credit River. I sit, close my eyes, and listen to the sound of the water flowing by. And within the sound of water

Canadians on the other hand almost always never head for the United States, preferring instead LA or San Francisco, or New York or Chicago. Unless you're Black of course, and you're going Stateside. Which is a very different country.

I hear the sounds of the languages of the First Peoples. The liquid, mellifluous sounds of their languages. I listen and hear how the very sound of the space around us shapes us fundamentally—from the ground up so to speak—so that even the tongue must remain faithful to the language of the land.

space-time: The four-dimensional space whose points are events.

You cannot talk about space as it relates to Black people—to African people—without talking about movement or moving through space. And once you talk about moving through space as it relates to Africans, then you must confront the forces that prohibit or restrict that moving.

What happens when “you fucking people are all over the place!”? As in Caribana. Where hundreds of thousands of black bodies take over the streets of Toronto. This collectivity of black bodies, that is truly all over a specially-allocated place, is always seen as a potential source of trouble. A threat. To the city fathers, and were it not for the 200+ million dollars Caribana brings into the city, it would have been stopped a long time ago.

Just as immigration has become the ritual purification ceremony for white Canada, so the yearly abasement of Caribana organizers before the city fathers, begging for money and permission to move, has become an important provincial aspect of that ritual. The white fathers control the space through which these black bodies will move and will to move: virtually every year the police flex their collective muscle and threaten to withhold permits and licences. The white fathers reaffirm their supremacy by portraying the African organizers as being unable to manage money. Proof being the debt the organizers have incurred. No mention is ever made of the monies the province annually pours into European-based arts such as the opera, the ballet, the symphony, the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the Royal Ontario Museum. None of which generates the financial returns which Caribana does. No mention is ever made of the many financial fiascos of governments, both provincial and federal, such as the SkyDome and Pearson International Airport, for which taxpayers have had to pay. No mention is made of the \$200+ million that Caribana brings into the province’s coffers. But within this space allowed to African people, to black bodies, there must be the ritual scourging of those who will not be allowed to be all over the place. And ritual obeisance to those who are, indeed, all over the place.

photon: A quantum of light.

the moving of african peoples within a white supremacist society is from a space of longing. a longing to be free in that most basic of senses—freedom of movement. which is exactly what africans do not and have not had ever since the european moved their bodies from africa to the new world. and then told them that they could not move. or run. they could only die and even that was forcibly prevented at times. today, despite michael jordan flying through the air to do his slam dunk, or oprah travelling in the stratosphere of the wealthy, or cosby, or michael jackson. the black body moving through space—the physical space—is still a threat. to be controlled. by those whose job it is to control the space. chief among whom are the police who harass african people, particularly african men, to a degree that the very concept of freedom of movement as it applies to black people is ludicrous.

wherever it takes place—notting hill, new york, montreal, miami—the route of this festival is, indeed, a route of memory, moving through the lower case historical space that is the african canadian community here in canada, as well as the upper case Historical space that is the trajectory from slavery to freedom. it is a route of memory that traverses and confronts the space that is canada which is essentially founded on white supremacist principles. the dynamics of this space function so as to e/race the black presence—the african presence in this country—while enriching itself at the expense of those very black bodies. how else to explain the refusal of hotels in the city of toronto, some of the largest financial beneficiaries of the presence of thousands of black bodies in this space, to make any financial contribution to the staging of this festival in the form of sponsorships? the prototype for this present e/racing of the african presence is the earlier e/racing of the first nations presence. the white space we call canada is, indeed, a palimpsest scored by multiple e/racings.

how, in the space we call canada, do we explain that at the last junos awards ceremonies, black musicians were given their awards at an earlier, non-televised ceremony? how, in the space we call canada, do we explain that the canadian broadcasting corporation (cbc), the supposed voice of the nation, does not have a single black television show? are we to conclude that in this so-called vast country of ours, there are no black screen writers, with stories to tell? or black actors needing work?

the black body moving through space—the physical space—is still a threat. to be controlled. by those whose job it is to control the space.

nucleus: The central part of an atom, consisting only of protons and neutrons, held together by the strong force.

The engine driving the popular music industry in the world today is African music. Given that it has the largest number of African peoples in Canada today, Toronto naturally becomes a happening city for black music. This was the argument Milestones Communications used to base its application to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) for a licence for a Black music radio station. For the second time the CRTC refused to award a licence for a Black-owned radio station. The last remaining FM spot went to the CBC. The previous one to a country and western station—CISS FM.

The issue was never truly about black music. Had that been the case, Milestones Communications would have got its licence. To licence a Black-owned radio station, which opens up the possibility for the coverage of issues of importance to the African Canadian community and to the world Afrosporic community, is to hand the African Canadian communities a resource with enormous and unpredictable potential. To withhold the license is to ensure that African Canadian people will not have the cultural space necessary for them to flourish as a people. In this space we call Canada.

black hole: A region of space-time from which nothing, not even light, can escape, because gravity is so strong.

White society perceives the black body as dangerously transgressive. The black body is not only cypher, but metonym for danger, crime, and subversion. To have thousands of these black bodies in the heartland of white Toronto is not exotica. For many, and particularly the police, it is nothing but a riot waiting to happen.

To have thousands of these black bodies in the heartland of white Toronto is not exotica. For many, and particularly the police, it is nothing but a riot waiting to happen.

Community meetings held to discuss the issue degenerated into



Wayne Solomon, Woman in Feathered Headdress, Main Parade/Lake Shore Boulevard, 2010. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the artist.

shouting matches, and the newspapers quoted Italians as telling African organizers to hold their parade elsewhere. Where else, if not Oakwood and Eglinton?

neutron star: A cold star supported by the exclusion principle repulsion between neutrons.

I attend a funeral of an elder of the African Canadian community in Toronto. There isn't enough space for us in the funeral home. People spill out onto the sidewalk and again there is a sense of there never being enough room for us—not enough space. After such a long presence in this city, in this country, there are no Black-owned funeral homes, so that even in mourning our passing there remains the sense of being cramped and stifled.

Meantime the media allow us all the space we want, provided we show ourselves to be criminals and murderers, always looking for hand-outs, starving in africa, dying in africa, killing in africa. There is very little space for any other representation.

exclusion principle: Two identical spin-1/2 particles cannot have (within the limits set by the uncertainty principle) both the same position and the same velocity.

Where else should Africans and Black people free up? If not at Oakwood and Eglinton. Where else if not in the heart—centre is perhaps more apt—of the city? After twenty years of moving and dancing down (and sometimes up) University Avenue past the symbols and statues of a now defunct empire, past the U.S. embassy—symbol of a very present empire—past the law courts that play a disproportionately large role in African life, past the hospitals where many Africans work, often in the lowest jobs, Caribana has grown too large for the city. Or so they tell us. In 1994. Its organizers move it to the Lakeshore. Africans will have more space to free up, is the argument. Sitting on the grassy areas along the Lakeshore, watching the lake shimmer in the summer sunlight, it is easy to imagine that one is indeed in the Caribbean. The resemblance to the islands is uncanny—a sort of simulated re-representation of the Caribbean with its coastal communities and villages. The water, albeit fresh water, reminds you of the salt waters those first Africans crossed. Both separating and connecting us to Africa.

There is a shadow side: participants and spectators alike have literally become littoral if not litter/al-marginal.

naked singularity: A space-time singularity not surrounded by a black hole.

Within the confines of the city Caribana cannot/could not be ignored. The wide open spaces of the Lakeshore work to dilute and dissipate the energy generated by the gathering of so many black bodies. This dilution and diffusion is one of the unique effects of Canadian spaciality. It might be one of the ways the negative space that is Canada helps to shape its inhabitants. The beauty of the scenic surroundings works to undercut the tension generated by black bodies. The parade nature of the festival increases along with greater police control. Complete with signs commanding the music to “stop here.” A sort of

The beauty of the scenic surroundings works to undercut the tension generated by black bodies.

public *coitus interruptus*. Barricades restrain people. It is more of a challenge to participate, to move from spectator to performer, as happened on University Avenue—an important aspect of carnival. Helicopters patrol the event in a way they were unable to on University: at the end of the day the Lakeshore has a feel of

South Central, LA, with circling helicopters and spotlights. Not to mention the garbage cleaners after the last band literally and ritually cleansing the white space of the stain of blackness. And heaven forbid there should be a disturbance of any sort, then people—African people—are boxed in between the expressway and the lake.

electric charge: A property of a particle by which it may repel (or attract) other particles that have a charge of similar (or opposite) sign.

the space that is canada—a space of refuge over which hangs the north star—to which those early africans are fleeing. from the united states. leaving the past. moving into the imperfect present. believing it a racism-free space. the space we call canada: a respite—a hiatus—a pause—a caesura between the space of violence of the pilgrim fathers. and mothers all. and the space as yet unformed. the african—fleeing a space where black was not cypher or postmodern hieroglyph. but a thing. fleeing a space where even the so-called savage native could own an african slave. provided they—the native that is—were civilised enough. as in the five civilized tribes. this space that is. canada. a negative space. around which we? i? the african. the black. shapes herself—ourselves. a space of unrelenting, unforgiving whiteness. a tabula rasa which was never blank.

this space that is. canada. a negative space. around which we? i? the african. the black. shapes herself—ourselves. a space of unrelenting, unforgiving whiteness. a tabula rasa which was never blank.

nuclear fusion: The process in which two nuclei collide and coalesce to form a single, heavier nucleus.



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Sandra Brewster, *From Life 5 (detail)*, 2015. Mixed media on wood. Courtesy of the artist.