A Black Diasporic Conversation on the Caribbean Woman

"...diaspora is continually built and re-built through an ongoing set of conversations...formed through actors...not through a spurious blood lineage; it is...continually evoked...through...writing [and] art..." (7).

- Editor and writer, Peter James Hudson, in his article, Anti-Localism, from the collection, Reading the Image: Poetics of the Black Diaspora

Two actors deeply involved in the constant construction of a Black diasporic conversation on the Caribbean woman are poet/writer Olive Senior and artist Maud Sulter. Both Senior and Sulter are representing and paying homage to influential Caribbean women of the past who have suffered an erasure in history. Jamaican native, though writing from Toronto, Canada, Olive Senior writes her poem Meditation On Red, in her book Gardening in the Tropics (1994), as a eulogy to Caribbean novelist Jean Rhys (Ella Williams, 1890-1979). Rhys, a Creole woman of Dominican, Welsh, and Scottish descent, was born in Dominica, of the West Indies, but lived and wrote in England. She is famous for her novel Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), which can be considered the prequel to Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre (1847). Rhys tells the story of Antoinette (renamed Bertha), Mr. Rochester's first wife, who he keeps as the mad woman locked in the attic. Rhys's protagonist, Antoinette, is also a Creole woman, though from Jamaica; presumably a
representation of Rhys herself. Maud Sulter (1960-2008), an artist who lived and worked in Glasgow, U.K., and is of Ghanaian and Scottish descent, created the collection of self-portraits titled *Les Bijoux* (2002, translated to English as *The Jewels*). These nine self-portraits represent Jeanne Duval (1820-1862), the Haitian female lover of French poet Charles Baudelaire. Sulter is heavily influenced, in her *positioning and gaze*, by the photograph of Duval, titled *Jeune modèle*, taken by French photographer Felix Nadar; (Nadar is said to have introduced Duval to Baudelaire). The title of Sulter's piece, *Les Bijoux*, is also the title of the first poem in the "Black Venus" section of Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* (1857), a book of poems that *exoticize* Black women, of which Duval is the muse. Sulter's piece is included in the exhibition, and accompanying literature, *Reading the Image: Poetics of the Black Diaspora*. Guest curator, Andrea Fatona, writes "This exhibition...serves as a...crossroads through which...black diasporic subjects intersect" (5). The aforementioned literature, written by Peter James Hudson, Rinaldo Walcott, and Fatona, aids in the conversation between Senior and Sulter's work. Senior's *Meditation On Red* and Sulter's *Les Bijoux* intersect through the idea of diasporic distance (both geographical and ideological), a sense of dissatisfaction, and within "...the erasure of Black women from European art history..." (Hudson, 8).

Senior (or Rhys in the same vein) and Sulter's work is important because they are foregrounding issues that may have continued to be underrepresented, unstated, or hidden. These issues being the stereotypes of the exotic, fetishized, hyper-sexual, objectified, therefore in a sense erased Black / Caribbean / Creole woman. They are filling in a narrative, giving voice to those that were given none, or differently humanizing people that have already been humanized in an exploitative way. They are good examples of how artists of the Black diaspora are reconstructing
Black femininity specifically against the racial gender construction in European literary discourse, the white artist's gaze on the Black subject that only focuses on the visual aspect, not what she is doing. Her subjectivity is constructed purely as a circuit for the white male to understand his own subjectivity, the usual formula of whiteness, he can only construct through this imperial gaze, using the "other". This is essentially an artistic metaphor for how imperialism works economically with Europeans exploiting the labor of Black bodies. Diasporic subjects then are written out of the canon in specific ways; the Black female suffers both a total erasure and an erasure even in being made visible. Sexual symbols, like the jewels, and other racial or gendered stereotypes that aid in the absence of voice or the ability to act are what cause the erasure. These Black diasporic female artists are revealing this contradiction of erasure. For example, Sulter is not actually recreating Duval, as in giving her her own story or background, she is taking advantage of the image that Baudelaire and Nadar have already created and tweaking it slightly to rid Duval of her erasure and giving her the agency to act. Erasure and construction through the gaze are central factors here. Exoticization goes hand in hand with erotisization where the white male sees pure radical otherness as hyper-sexual and objectifies Black bodies as material wealth. As respondents to white literature and art, Senior and Sulter are revealing the racist ideology for what it is and what it does to the Black/Caribbean/Creole woman.

A third actor in the construction of this Black diasporic conversation is Guyanese critic, writer, novelist, and academic, David Dabydeen. Even though he is from the Caribbean, his focus is not specifically the Caribbean woman, but he does help a great deal to further explicate and prove these claims of Black female erasure, dissatisfaction, and exoticism, and give a sense of how and where they all began, in his book *Hogarth's Blacks Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century*
*English Art* (1987). Hogarth (1697-1764) is important because, as Dabydeen writes, "Of eighteenth century English artists, William Hogarth was the most prolific painter and engraver of blacks." Yet, no one has examined the Black presence in Hogarth’s work, it is as if they are invisible. This may be because Hogarth was presenting the Black figure as satire or irony to an audience that would never understand. His goal was to unmask the evils of the white well-to-do by utilizing the stereotypes they had placed onto Black bodies, but as Dabydeen writes, "To use the myth at all...was to give it validity." The images Hogarth presented were actually "in accordance with the worst conventions of English racist thought" (131). Although Black subjects have always populated European art, at the time Dabydeen publishes his book, only four others had been published on the subject of Black presence (9). That extremely small number just further proves the erasure of the Black figure, male or female. He mentions that most of the Black subjects within European art were male and asks the question "...was the white male artist nervous or guilty about depicting black women?...what psychological and sexual politics and neuroses were at play...?" (39). In an attempt to answer those questions, Dabydeen not only looks at Hogarth's work, but also that of Joseph Wright and James Gillray, both from England as well, Pierre Mignard, from France, and Isaac Cruikshank, from Scotland. Their paintings and engravings span the years of 1682-1795 and, to some degree, do include Black women.

Dabydeen is foregrounding the Black presence in Hogarth's work, how it becomes a false satire revealing how white artists have failed to counter or critique white literature and white depictions of Blackness. He comments on how reproducing these images of Blackness is not enough to cancel them, so where Hogarth failed these other artists succeed in critiquing the white gaze.
We will first deal with geographical/physical and ideological distances, then turn to a
diasporic sensibility of dissatisfaction, and finally the erasure of the Black/Caribbean/Creole
female in order to evaluate these different artist's projects and successes or failures. In working
through these concepts we can determine their place within or what they do to or for diasporic art,
how they are making it exist at all.

black European art the physical distance is important because these artists are creating in white
spaces with it as a backdrop they aren't ignoring that explicitly a question of difference in distance
diasporic distance becomes posited as opportunity in perspective what has changed in the
movement what is happening in the white gaze related to black people the conditions for that
representation being diaspora the distinction between two spaces that are explicitly racialized as
black and white spaces her presence in the company of whites reflecting on the white peoples
themselves still playing into the white subject being sexually obscene unpack these truths and what
they're creating a space to play with these relationships what truths are they uncovering the old
paintings how these figures entered European art what is that sexuality doing the women
constructed as fetish it's still for white people using black bodies there is something subversive
that can be uncovered thru art criticism white people are constructing their own sexuality thru
proximity to degrading or degenerate black sexuality that has been constructed but what are senior
and Sulter doing in this space representing the failure of the truth distance brought together in the
paintings certain relationship of inside outside or obscene to normalized whites Dabydeen the
obscenity is actually just a reflection of the white racism is just a projection of whiteness like white
supremacy doesn't even want to acknowledge whiteness as a construct whiteness is not natural it
is actually constructed thru these moves of setting up the obscene expressing a tension between what's overtly happening in these paintings and what's repressed in them which is that white people are representing themselves or using black people so here is the black subject coming forth revelation Sulter is changing the representation creating a counter image riffing off the original what is that change doing what is the distance or difference between the two

The distances from Jamaica to Toronto, from Dominica, in the West Indies, and also Guyana, to England, from Haiti to France, and from Ghana to Glasgow are what make up the geographical diasporic distance here. At the end of her poem, Senior writes, "Look, / Miss Rhys: / No rain!" (55), as an example that the distance has now visibly become a clear sky, as in a blank slate, as in opportunity. Geographical/physical distance/migration is effective, in any case, for one to see things from an outside perspective, to compare experiences from one place to another. She also writes, "...dark voyagers / like me / can feel free / to sail" (54). Geographical distance can be seen as a separate act of courage as well, the power to tell these truths from any given location, no matter the circumstance. For example, Rhys's lived circumstance was extremely destitute, yet she persevered as a writer. Whatever size of a feat, her writings may have been her only sense of upward mobility, apart from her light skin. Although Sulter embodies the distance from Ghana (not the Caribbean) to Glasgow, she is able to explore Duval's Caribbean thread. And Dabydeen plays within this space because he is Guyanese, though living in Britian, and examining Black subjects in European art. Physical distance does stake its claim here, but the ideological might be of more importance, though they do connect at the idea of perspective: outside vs. inside, center vs. periphery. Diaspora implies that there is an original place then a scattering, so instead of a nationalism based on a single place, there is a dispersed sense of identity.
Ideologically, a space is created more through the historically biased exotic representation of the Black/Caribbean woman; she is perceived as a hyper-sexual being. When examining engravings of Black female subjects from the eighteenth century, Dabydeen writes, "...these prints tend to caricature...emphasizing sexuality..." (39). Probably the best example Dabydeen finds in Hogarth's work is that of the Black woman in *A Rake's Progress*, Plate 3 (fig. 62, p. 92). In the print, she is among the 'Drury Lane whores',

Her presence in fact heightens the mood of obscenity...[there are] dark animal sensations symbolized by the black woman...she is an obscene 'hottentot' herself, her presence in the company of whites revealing their sexual degeneration, the extent to which they have sunk to the level of the 'hottentot'...her laughter evokes the term 'black joke' which was slang for the female sexual organs. (Dabydeen, 97)

As demeaning as it is, the space created here, between the hyper-sexual/fetishized/exotic stereotype and reality, paves the way for present and future Black/Caribbean female artists and writers to create, to uncover truths, and to credit those that came before them. For Rhys and Duval, the content of their stories, both written and lived, makes it possible to influence future Caribbean female artists and writers.

Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* exposes the fetishization of the exotic Caribbean female and how this perceived exoticism ultimately led to the deterioration of the Creole woman in a historically white space (England). The exposure, or her representation of the truth, has led to a stronger sense of courage to create as a marginalized being, to continue to reveal wrongdoings.
Sulter, on the other hand, makes an attempt to rid the art of the stereotype. Baudelaire's poem, *The Jewels*, not only tries to exoticize Duval by equating her to a tiger (line 14), but is sexually charged by the fact that Duval is wearing nothing but her jewelry, "My well-beloved was stripped. Knowing my whim, / She wore her tinkling gems, but naught besides:" (lines 1-2). Sulter's version of Duval is shown ripping the jewels, which "...signify material wealth and sexual desire, and represent black women as both", from her neck. She also removes the aspect of the "...so-called 'good hair,' one of the primary objects of Baudelaire's mulatta fetish..." by presenting her hair cut very short (Hudson, 8).

"At least one crucial aspect of a diasporic sensibility is dissatisfaction...desires for a satisfactory liberation and freedom...desire for reform...about an original and violent dispersal from a once actual or imagined homeland" (12).

- Writer and cultural critic, Rinaldo Walcott, in his article, *Salted Cod...Black Canada and Diasporic Sensibilities*, from the collection, *Reading the Image: Poetics of the Black Diaspora*

the idea of origin, this seems to be important with the idea of homeland or dissatisfaction when comparing the shitty portrayal of England's weather with the warm fire trees building the concept of dissatisfaction what is it and how is it linked to origin the only reason one place can be preferred is because the other exists nostalgia or sense of loss is this dissatisfaction the original and violent dispersal equals the Atlantic slave trade so the origin is stemming from Africa but the origin is also the Caribbean homeland of these artists
In Sulter's self-portraits, she mimics Duval's "...expression [of]...smug self-possession and faint distress...or a defiant and proprietary rejection of the lens" to convey that dissatisfaction, that desire for reform. This gaze, or pose, transforms how Black women are represented in photography and other forms of visual art. A more typical representation might be reminiscent of the portraiture by Pierre Mignard or Joseph Wright. Both Mignard's Duchess of Portsmouth (fig. 11, p. 25) and Wright's Two Girls and a Negro Servant (fig. 19, p. 33) show a young Black female "gazing respectfully at [her] owner" (Dabydeen, 23). However, in Sulter's piece there is no longer just the voyeur, the subject is aware and is looking back. Sulter is reminding us to give credit where it is due, introducing us to an otherwise erased pioneer of the past, i.e. Duval.

what is the lens white gaze rejection of the white male gaze reversing the voyeurism the idea of looking and the gaze when talking about representation the looking back represents the dissatisfaction because it is confronting your enemies so the dissatisfaction comes first and now the looking comes second Duval is already dissatisfied and so Sulter reverses the gaze she is looking back a big question in art what do you do if you are dissatisfied with your position you can look back it is a challenge

Senior shows Jean Rhys's dissatisfaction in Cheriton Fitzpaine, England, through images of gloomy weather, "'It is very cold,' you write / 'It gets dark early. / One meets dark figures... / frost and ice are everywhere'" (48), and a nostalgia for her Caribbean homeland, "knowing / you would prefer / a blanket / of red / -flame of the forest" (52-53). The origin of this sense of dissatisfaction, perhaps stemming from a displacement, is better drawn out by Dabydeen, in reference to Hogarth's engraving of an incarcerated pregnant Black woman, in Plate 4 of A Harlot's Progress (fig. 78, p.
107), where he states that "The black woman's dislodgment from her native soil and the concomitant slide into degradation" can be seen as "a measure of, and a reflection upon, the sordid commercial culture of the white man" (113). Think of an endless circle of exploitation, a never-ending realm, there is no light at the end of the tunnel. Her pregnancy further symbolizes that circle, both in shape and idea; her child will be born into slavery. So there is indeed a desire for satisfactory liberation and freedom.

so commerce plays a big role satisfactory liberation ie liberation that combats dissatisfaction breaking the cycle similar to today with people claiming that racism does not exist or that we are post identity so there is already a sense of false liberation but the satisfactory liberation would be actual freedom and equality instead of this privileged white idea that it already exists

The idea of an actual or imagined homeland, or Rhys's nostalgia for her Caribbean homeland, appears in Wide Sargasso Sea as a thirst for the Caribbean (the picturesque, the tropical), one that Antoinette gives to Mr. Rochester. He comes to despise the scenery in England, just as Antionette does, which can be interpreted as an accidental, or otherwise, act of reform. Perhaps Rochester is now a bit keener to the "sordid commercial culture of the white man", whether or not he understands it as such. Yet, he reacts out of cowardice by locking Antionette in the attic, attempting to erase her, essentially.

the picturesque why people vacation in the Caribbean Krista Thompson searching after this perfection but it is totally constructed how is it working in these arts it is the picturesque but in a very different way? it is still the same landscape that has been constructed by European colonists
the white tourist imaginary is Rochester thirsting after the Caribbean in the same homeland way or a more colonial way difference between two different kinds of picturesque

The erasure of the Black female in European art history can take many forms. Some examples being: simply the placement of the figure, the context in which they are included, and if they are included at all. What also matters is whether or not they are remembered, or even analyzed within the piece. Dabydeen looks at the importance of placement of a Black female figure in works like Wright's *Two Girls and a Nermo Servant*, where the young Black female servant is kneeling down to the two white females. She is even erased from the title, there are three girls in the painting, yet she is only included as Negro Servant. Erased as girl but posited as servant. Placement is where a "relationship of dominance and inferiority" can be seen, just like the kneeling of the servant (32). This relationship can also be seen in the constant background placement of the Black female, like in Gillray's *Election Troops* (fig. 24, p. 38) or in Hogarth's 3rd Plate of *A Rake's Progress*, where the Black female figure is almost hidden behind, or within a crowd of, white figures. And where the Black female is shown at the forefront, it is only in obedience, looking up to the white figures, or in the corners, facing away from the viewer; "The black then is a...peripheral figure" (130). Hogarth's *Strolling Actresses Dressing in a Barn* (fig. 88, p. 130) includes a Black female in the bottom right corner, but one just misses her, since she is turned away and hunched over, fixing a stocking. Even the previously mentioned, incarcerated pregnant Black woman from *A Harlot's Progress*, though packed with meaning, "has attracted very little critical attention...brief comments...amount to about all that has been written", writes Dabydeen (106). The idea of context, in which the Black female is included, brings us back to the historically biased, stereotypical representations, such as being used to always represent the sexual. But is this the sexual here?
In a couple of ways, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is ultimately about the deterioration/erasure of the Creole female. Senior references the novel in *Meditation on Red* to draw a parallel between the erasure of Rhys and of her protagonist Antoinette. In one way, the erasure of Antionette is concrete and abrupt, in the sense that she finds herself locked in Rochester's attic, to be shut out and ignored by the world. In another way, her erasure is endless, caused by the fetishization of the exotic, making it so that the Creole female is never seen as a fellow human, but rather an object for pleasure. Rhys's erasure spans almost an entire lifetime of poverty and depression, in England, but becomes more apparent, in the sense of the European artwork mentioned above, when Senior is at her gravestone and suggests that a photograph be taken of she and Rhys (54-55). Although the poem is a tribute to Rhys, Senior is successful in making the point that she still remains very much invisible. How, why?

this erasure paradoxically also makes one seen but only as a sexual object so strangely erasure of ones humanity leads to or equals sexualization only seen as a sexual object by erasing the humanity then they can be sexualized if Antoinette is his wife ie sexual partner who is simultaneously erased physically that's the same move it is like she wasn't married to be displayed but she was at first and the locking in the attic came out of shame white guilt that tension or paradox of erasure happening where at first she was erased as a subject and was merely a sexual object trophy wife arm candy and then became the other type of erasure totally hidden Rochester hiding his sexual shame the tension of imperialist/male sexuality that it's both a shame to be hidden and something to flaunt for power both erasing and displaying etc not just erased and then gone but constantly in this state of being erased identity based around being erased in the present tense
Sulter's representation of Duval's erasure is more of an idea, based on Duval's history with Baudelaire. She was literally erased from Gustave Courbet's painting, *The Painter's Studio* (1855), but her shadow can still be seen behind Baudelaire's image (bottom right corner). Even if she were still present in the painting, she would be another hidden Black figure, placed behind/inferior to a white male figure. She was also disrespected by being left unnamed as the subject of Baudelaire's own sketch, *La femme sans nom* (Hudson, 8). Also, as the muse for *Fleurs du Mal*, though not intended by Baudelaire, she is erased yet again by the exclusion of six poems, due to censorship, until the 1940s. By making her inspirations obvious, Sulter is allowing her audience to see pretty clearly Duval's erasure, but Sulter's representation of Duval acts to completely recreate how she is represented, repositioning her, giving her the agency to act: to have cut off her hair and ripped off the jewels.

In a sense, Senior and Sulter are utilizing the geographical and ideological distances to make visible the dissatisfaction and erasure of the Black/Caribbean female by creating their art in historically white spaces, i.e. Canada and the U.K.. They are creating a rise of questions to be asked about already existing works of art that, otherwise, very well may continue to go unnoticed. This is exactly what Dabydeen is accomplishing, as well. They are each unmasking truths where they have already detected falsehoods.

what truths thru what mechanisms in the diasporic condition or the representation of diaspora or of femininity etc the already detected falsehoods being what the erasure this specific kind of sexualization the falsehoods are more similar to the pieces about Hogarth's work he thought he
was doing a good thing but he was actually failing to represent these Black characters correctly
self-deception false consciousness
Works Cited


Works Consulted


I wanted to use *Blacks and Blackness in European Art of the Long 19th Century,* but it is lost in the library somewhere. The Carnegie Library in Pittsburgh also did not have it.

I use page numbers, instead of line numbers, for *Meditation on Red,* because there are 285 little "lines".
Savonna Johnson
Jaswinder Bolina
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Trap Music and American Avant-Garde Poetry

Institutionally recognized American avant-garde poetry, as an Academy of formal experimentation, has clearly left out poets of color, stemming from the belief (Perloff) that they are not formally innovative enough and too identity political. It interests me as to why one would think identity politics could not fit into avant-garde. Since the term itself is to defend the people, to be accessible to the masses.

[Experimentalism as insular or accessible, thinking about audience or thinking about development of craft/ Elitism.]

The term Trap originates in the southern United States, in places like Atlanta, Georgia and Port Arthur, Texas, where rappers such as Outkast's Big Boi and Andre 3000 and UGK's Pimp C and Bun B were some of the first to use the term and introduce Trap life into their music.

Have you ever thought of the meaning of the word trapped? Baboon on your back, but what's sad is that crack was introduced to hispanic communities and blacks, but then it spread to white and got everyone's undivided attention...[and] they scared to talk about it. (Y'all Scared, Aquemini, 1998)

The Trap genre of rap music focuses its lyrical content on the taboo lifestyle of selling drugs and the struggle for success, financially or otherwise. A Trap is a place where drugs and drug deals are made, usually (at least in terms of this music) in the housing projects of low income
areas. When you are part of the permanent lower class, making and selling drugs can be very profitable in a society where it is extremely difficult to obtain a living wage, especially as a person of color.

"The United Parcel Service and the people at the Post Office didn't call you back because you had cloudy piss. So, now you back in the trap, just that, trapped. Go on and marinate on that for a minute" (SpottieOttieDopalicious, Aquemini, 1998).

Many southern rappers then began to focus primarily on the lyrical topic of the Trap lifestyle. However, Trap was not yet a genre until the early to mid 2000s when more southern rappers, like T.I., Jeezy, and Gucci Mane played up their drug dealer personas for their music. Most of these artists were actually coming from the Trap lifestyle. Atlanta was the area for Trap music's breakthrough, as a genre, in the early 2000s and is still the central hub. Atlanta rapper T.I. claims to have created the genre with his 2003 album Trap Muzik; he says that he opened the public to the Trap life in an attempt to make it more acceptable to the masses.

We got lives, we wanna live nice too. We got moms, dads, wives, kids, just like you, but our options are few. It's hell in high school when you're helping with the rent, lights, and the gas bill too. So, before you go judging us, loving us won't hurt. (Doin' My Job, Trap Muzik, 2003)

By 2012, the EDM (electronic dance music) scene began to grab inspiration from the drum sounds in Trap music and, in a sense, attempted to recreate the genre by using the name Trap. Although sometimes paired with vocals fromTrap rappers, this electronic music is just that, no lyrics, meaning it is without the lyrical content of the Trap lifestyle, meaning it has no spoken political or humanitarian agenda, which is what original Trap music is primarily focused on. There
could be something said about how the actual sounds communicate Trap, though, like the scary sense or danger of the environment / hard attitude.

Today, in 2016, popular Trap artists from the booming Atlanta scene are people like Future, 2Chainz, and Young Thug. Andre 3000 is also still around, featured in many Trap songs lately. An example of more recent lyrical content might sound like this: "I sold drugs to my loved ones and it's hard for me to admit it. The first time I seen a crack pipe was in my parents' kitchen" (2Chainz, FREEBASE). Where it was close to home before, it is now going inside. We see a slightly more confessional aspect here.

The term avant-garde is from the French advanced-guard, vanguard, or literally fore-guard, the defensive line in front of the troops. It is used to define experimental or innovative art, culture, and politics that push the boundaries of what is the norm and also promotes radical social reforms. This meaning is partly taken from Saint Simonian Olinde Rodrigues's essay, *L'artiste, le savant et l'industriel* (1825), in which he says that "the artist serves as the people's avant-garde and that the power of the arts is the most immediate and fastest way to social and economic reform." In its most basic purpose, the avant-garde should defend the people. To be avant-garde is to be accessible to the masses, like Malevich's *Black Square* that 'your five-year-old could paint'. Yet, American avant-garde poetry seems to have never received that memo. Instead, they have created a country club of white academia.

German literary critic Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974) claims that "art as an institution neutralizes the political content of the individual work." His negative viewpoint on avant-garde seems to stem from what white supremacy has done to the concept that originally was
opposed to mainstream cultural values and often had an intense social or political edge. Bürger says that the avant-garde should "reject the institution of art and challenge social and artistic values, and so necessarily will involve social, political, and cultural factors." But, as Haryette Mullen said in 1996, "the assumption remains...that avant-garde poetry is not Black and that Black poetry...is not formally innovative. I hope that my work continues to challenge the deadly distinction between Blackness and humanity or universality that is still imposed on Black human beings." Here, I think of Zizek, and how the universal subject is precisely the excluded subject, the one excluded from imperial projects of power.

Almost twenty years later and nothing has changed. Stefania Heim of The Boston Review writes, "there are many reasons why poets deploy broken forms, leaps, disjunctions, irregular syntax, obfuscated meaning, improvisation, metonymy, polymorphic subjectivity, but...an innovative surface does not make something politically, ethically, or even artistically radical." A.k.a. American avant-garde poetry, an expressed style without any underlying substance. Is it entirely ironic that appropriation is conceptual poetry's, the vanguard's second coming, main idea and tool? Yep. A perfect example being Kenneth Goldsmith's appropriation of Michael Brown's body through reading and editing his autopsy report. Conceptual poetry goes from dising identity politics to literally appropriating someone's identity for the sake of 'formal innovation'. From this, The Mongrel Coalition has been questioning the "colonial aesthetics" of conceptual art, and in response to the Goldsmith incident wrote this passage on their website:

In what was clearly an attempt to salvage the corpse of "conceptualism" – Goldsmith made explicit a slippage that we (and others) have been bemoaning for years: The Murdered Body of Mike Brown's Medical Report is not our poetry, it's the building blocks of white
supremacy, a miscreant DNA infecting everyone in the world. We refuse to let it be made “literary”. Goldsmith cannot differentiate between white supremacy and poetry. In fact, for so many the two are one and the same.

(2015)

I am brought to Trap music when thinking of the avant-garde and its original purpose or the African-American literary traditions that inspired American avant-garde poetry’s radical languages and forms, but have not been credited as such, like Cathy Park Hong references, probably due to a fear of being associated with "identity politics". I am then brought to think of the EDM version of Trap music as analogous to the institutionally recognized American avant-garde poetry, because it uses parts of Trap music (namely drum sounds) and adopts the Trap name, in an attempt to make a profit. However, the EDM version is not racially or economically exclusive in production, but its audience is that of rave culture and the middle class youth's music festival scene. Electronic dance music, though sometimes paired with lyrics, is not focused on a lyrical content. It could be said that it is "against expression" or "post-identity" like the white dream of American avant-garde poetry.

The beef that American avant-garde poetry has with poets of color or the blanket term, identity politics, is leading to its demise. Trap music's main tool essentially is identity politics and they are successful in it, completely destroying American avant-garde poetry's argument that identity politics are unhip, politically light, out of date, etc. (Hong). However, Trap music has a ton of listeners in every age group and every race, there are Trap songs on most radio stations, most young people know at least a couple Trap songs, so it is getting out there, obviously better
than poetry is, and the artists are extremely wealthy, so they must be communicating effectively. It just does not make sense to say that what are considered identity politics are not cool or are boring; they are the most relatable aspects of art, the familiar, the personal. Hong says, poets of color do not want to be exiled to *that* ghetto. Trap music is proudly *that* ghetto. As far as politics, Trap music is able to reach parts of society that need help, speaking to the disenfranchised or encouraging the disenfranchised to find and use their own voice. Its main function is to tell the stories of living in poverty and racism, lives that are otherwise ignored or looked down on in society when, in all actuality, American society has forced them into these positions.
Those Sunday Mornings
— after Robert Hayden

Lil' Kim poses bare breasted under red fishnet, framed in white matboard, overseer of the tiny elephant knick-knack shelf. Across the room, oodles of noodles almost frying on a dirty single burner hot plate. My mother's PTSD makes for strange cleaning habits, or she just can't afford a vacuum cleaner. She lint rolls the floor. Her purse was stolen or lost, so she reaches into the cupboard, under the sink, for a plastic grocery bag to hold her tithes envelope, soft hairbrush, Doublemint, and cocoa butter stick. She pulls out some beige string bag that looks like it was knit too loose. "Cute," she says and stuffs a plastic one inside so nothing falls out. Great, all I need is for the neighbors to know we're even more ghetto. "Mom, I think that's one of them bags white folks use for fruits and vegetables." She responds, "Well, let's find us an apple tree then. Come on girl, hush. We bout to be late." I turn off the hot plate.
those hours must be about more than this surfeit of pain as history

he was tall with a toolbox
drove a Beemer stick heated seats
don't let it fool you
pizza dates
the man smelled of
sheet metal sweat
blue cotton must
opened me with blackened nail beds
sometimes gripping his brother's Army knife
pressed deep in my thigh
but I deserved it
my hair full of dread
locked in a wet palm
like wake me the fuck up

I've been blind
a silkworm
a port wine
a piece of lavender soap
A Triple-Consciousness

My white father, stand still stranger,
precious milk skin, but I never knew that man.

Black by nurture, not by drop. The daddy I know is brown.
Is this what you want to know?

How momma snuck him through her windows—
How I came to be a nuisance

by the curve of my white ass
or the way my white mouth speaks.

I can go to market, greet
my lover and my father.

Confuse their blue eyes with a powder
I want to wash off,

a blood bond so distant,
I ain't even mixed.
J,

Frick Park was not even a block away from your damp basement apartment
the door and window frames painted orange by your smelly upstairs neighbor
an empty soccer field where we both cried behind sunglasses
a wooden bench at the front and back
we would walk out there some nights to see the stars
you used to say you'd go naked alone but I still don't think I believe you
on the short walk there two or three houses from your 1980
but you said 1979 red but you said orange Toyota pickup
parked on the steep uphill driveway
an old man keeps his front lawn the smell of your absent addict father
we pass the bush or grass or flower that makes you say
the scent always reminds you of your dad
sometimes I would pass by sniffing
with an attempt to know the crack dealer who
beat the shit out of your mother and stole your Toy Story movie one Christmas
lluvia con sol / not worth a frijol

You taught me it's okay to have rain with sun, or maybe that's just another one of my misinterpretations. In fact, you taught me that it ain't even worth livin. Was that it? No blasé, no briefly. Introduced me to your tongue, it was conch fritters, key lime. Even the sky knew the day we parted and mocked my Spanish lesson, like the mango tree tempts, with fruit hanging by a string, and I guess you thought I was ripe because of my bruise.
"Self-eval"

Process Note:

As you can see, I love to find different ways to disrupt white space(s).

Fiction pieces – *Those Sunday Mornings, From: The Rust Belt Stories, even the sun...*

Here, I’m trying to tell versions of my family's story, so that there can be more narratives in the world speaking to people like us. I'm from a small fishing/shipbuilding/steel town in the Rust Belt, northern Appalachia. It is post-industrial failure, severe poverty, limited and poor education, extreme gun violence, opioid and crack infested. This is where my stories come from. These are the people that need to be heard, preferably before they all drop like flies. I struggled with ‘amount’ of dialogue and character desire ‘worth’, which I believe came from the same space of oppression that my stories take place in/deal with. It’s difficult not to get stuck in the idea that these characters don't know what they want; how could they? These characters don’t have a voice; how could they? Although, within this world, I found that character desire is driven by addiction, hunger, shame, and escape. An important lesson I’ve learned is that short fiction is not necessarily plot based. Other elements can drive the story while plot is sub-text. My stories seem to be driven by character and world-building rather than plot or desire. The ideas come to me almost in photographs, i.e. vignettes.

Poetry

My poetry process is mostly therapeutic in working through my trauma and identity, but can also be playful and image based. I don’t usually come to the page and start from scratch. A rhythm or a string of words will circle in my head and most often I can already see its shape and placement on a page. These visualizations, I'm sure, go hand in hand with my post-trauma flashbacks and my brain's compartmentalizing functions. I'm very particular about sound and syllable (though I don’t count them out), which probably stems from my life-long love and obsession with Hip-Hop music. Haiku also plays a large role in my writing. I’ve been practicing how to say a lot with a little or say only exactly enough for almost ten years now. The format order of poems in this thesis begins by
introducing the speaker and moving through her ‘lyric I’. Eventually, the poems become more focused specifically into a small group about race and family, which leads into the Rust Belt story. After, there are more poems within these same veins, but they are now addressing someone, the ‘you’. The last grouping is also an address to another, but this ‘you’ makes for a bit more peaceful, almost surreal, ending.
Annotated Bibliography

Flick, Sherrie. *I Call This Flirting*. Flume Press, 2004.
Flash fiction inspiration. I try to use objects in association with character and emotional temperature.

Experimentation in poetry and thematic inspiration (how to write sexual abuse).

I definitely got stuck with the color blue and even ‘b’ sounds after reading this. I love how the abusive romantic relationship is explored through this obsession of a color.

Poetic structure, sounds, language, and even short story influence (hybrid). Her love poems are top notch and I strive to accomplish the same. Cultural similarity.

Musicality inspiration, sound, formal experimentation. Cultural similarity as well.


Exploration of race as a light skinned Black woman and paternal conflict.