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DRAMATURGY OF A DIASPORIC BODY: BLACKNESS AS A PRAXIS OF
PERFORMANCE

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PERFORMANCE

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DÉDICACE/DEDICATION

Dedicated to my parents, who I hope would have
been proud of me.

Dedicated to Kari, a present for your 100th
birthday.

Dedicated to my children, may you always believe
in your possibilities.

Dedicated to Winnie, who would have been a
drummer.

Evoking the spirits of the ancestors, Nunu claims in one of her stories
that “we could fly anywhere and this flesh is only what
is stopping us.”

Olufemi Vaughan quoting Haile Gerima
(Vété-Congolo, 2016)

“In order to find your way, you must lose it. Generously.”

Bayo Akomolafe
(2022)

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ABSTRACT

Taking the field of dramaturgy in contemporary dance as its point of departure, this research-creation explores my experience of performance and dramaturgy from the point of view of my Blackness. Using a decolonial lens to interrogate dramaturgical praxis with regard to the performer, the project's conceptual moorings move through the iterative acts of performance as both the tool for, and the outcome of my questioning, ultimately coming to anchor in the field of Black performance studies. The need to experience my Blackness through my artistic practice in order to articulate its manifestation and influence on my work, is the buttress for the dance creation that is central to this project. Grounded in the collaborative practices through which the performer generates the material for performance, the creation of the full-evening solo work, *Confession Publique*, choreographed by Mélanie Demers, took place over three months and premiered in November 2021. Based entirely on material drawn from personal anecdotes, the piece becomes a dramaturgical praxis of Blackness that is activated in and through performance.

The wholistic epistemology of Womanism, proposed by Black feminist writer Alice Walker, centres Black women's intellectual, spiritual, and self-reflective experiences as embodied academic knowledge and feminist resistance. Accordingly, it frames the Black methodologies that are used in this study. Countering the exclusionary logics of the historical plantation system and its social order, these methodologies prioritize working, reading, thinking, and creating across different sites, knowledges, and histories (McKittrick, 2021). Performance, as a form of storytelling, is the principal research method and my experiences during the iterative performances are the primary sources of reflection and analysis. Documentation and intuitive analyses, beginning during the creative process and continuing beyond, have been in the form of journal and voice notes; since the premiere, analysis through prose, poetry and oral discourse has also been used.

Tracing the varied expressions of my diasporic Blackness as they manifested through the performances of *Confession Publique*, I am aware of the predominant lack of recognition of a performer's specificities that is characteristic of dramaturgy in dance. Acknowledging the disruptive and political potential of dramaturgical practices, this dissertation proposes that the dramaturgy of the performer be seen as a way of reconsidering (recentring) the historical situatedness of the performer and thereby resist the invisibilization I seek to counter.

Keywords: dramaturgy, dramaturgy of the performer, contemporary dance, blackness, black methodologies, womanism, black performance studies, black diasporic studies

RÉSUMÉ

Prenant comme point de départ le domaine de la dramaturgie en danse contemporaine, cette recherche-cr ation explore mon exp rience de la performance et de la dramaturgie   partir du point de vue de ma n gritude. En utilisant une lentille d coloniale pour interroger la praxis dramaturgique de l'interpr te, les ancrages conceptuels du projet se d placent   travers les actes it ratifs de la performance en tant qu'outil et r sultat de mon questionnement, pour finalement se tisser au domaine des  tudes sur la performance noire. Le besoin d'exp rimer ma n gritude   travers ma pratique artistique afin d'articuler sa manifestation et son influence sur mon travail, est le point d'appui de la cr ation qui est au centre de ce projet. Enracin e dans les pratiques collaboratives par lesquelles l'interpr te g n re le mat riel pour la performance, la cr ation du solo *Confession Publique*, chor graphi e par M lanie Demers, s'est d roul e sur trois mois et a  t  cr e e en novembre 2021. Bas e principalement sur du mat riel tir  d'anecdotes personnelles, la pi ce devient une praxis dramaturgique de la n gritude qui est activ e pour et par la performance.

L' pist mologie holistique du Womanisme, propos e par l' crivaine f ministe noire Alice Walker, met l'accent sur les exp riences intellectuelles, spirituelles et autor flexives des femmes noires en tant que savoir acad mique et r sistance f ministe. En cons quence, elle encadre les m thodologies noires utilis es dans cette  tude. Contre les logiques d'exclusion du syst me historique de plantation et de son ordre social, ces m thodologies donnent la priorit  au travail,   la lecture,   la r flexion et   la cr ation de la femme noire   travers diff rents sites, diff rents savoirs et diff rentes histoires (McKittrick, 2021). La performance, en tant que forme de narration, est la principale m thode de recherche et mes exp riences au cours des performances sont les principales sources de r flexion et d'analyse. La documentation et les analyses intuitives qui ont  t  initi es pendant le processus de cr ation se sont poursuivies au-del  et ont pris la forme d'un journal et de notes vocales. Depuis la premi re repr sentation de l' uvre, l'analyse par la prose, la po sie et le discours oral a  galement  t  utilis e.

En retra ant les diverses expressions de ma n gritude diasporique telles qu'elles se sont manifest es   travers les performances de *Confession Publique*, j'ai constat  le manque de reconnaissance des sp cificit s de l'interpr te qui caract rise la dramaturgie en danse contemporaine. Reconnaissant le potentiel perturbateur et politique des pratiques dramaturgiques, cette th se propose que la dramaturgie de l'interpr te soit employ e comme un moyen de reconsid rer (recentrer) la situation historique de l'interpr te et de r sister ainsi   l'invisibilisation que je cherche   contrer.

Mots cl s : dramaturgie, dramaturgie de l'interpr te, danse contemporaine, n gritude, m thodologies noires, f minisme,  tudes sur la performance noire,  tudes sur la diaspora noire

INTRODUCTION / CHAPTER 1

“To be an artist and a black woman, even today, lowers our status in many respects, rather than raises it and yet, artists we will be.”

Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. (1983, p. 405)

Preamble...

I have come into my Blackness¹ over the course of the past three years. I already had clear curiosities about what my body carried socially and artistically but I would not necessarily have defined myself as a Black woman before the death of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer in May 2020. I knew that I was seen as one. Through the global manifestations of support for the Black Lives Matter movement, I began to more consciously situate my place in a global history, understanding that the very system in which we all live was constructed on the imposed objecthood of black lives as they were shipped across the Middle Passage,² and that systems – perhaps even an ethics – of exclusion forcibly persist in the values and aesthetics that define Western society and, consequently, my art form of contemporary dance.

As a recently tenured faculty member in a university dance program at the time of Mr. Floyd's murder, I had already been contemplating the significance for me of a permanent academic position. What did it mean for me, as someone who had always worked as a freelance artist, to have a permanent, well-paying job in an institution of a certain prestige? What did it mean to truly

¹ I will use the terms Black and Blackness throughout this thesis. Inspired by Michelle M. Wright in her 2015 article for *Artforum*, “The Physics of Black Art”, I have chosen to “... always capitalize *Blackness* to distinguish it from a pejorative connotation born of its etymological relationship to the color black: that peoples of African descent are immoral (blackhearted) and unenlightened because they are dark. *Whiteness* I keep in lowercase because its capitalization always strikes me as uncomfortably close to its own stereotype of superiority.” Where other cited writers have used lowercase *black* or *blackness*, I have respected that redactive choice accordingly. Chapter 3 of this thesis, entitled *My Blacknesses*, is dedicated to explaining my understandings of these terms and the perspectives from which I use them.

² The Middle Passage is the name given to the forced voyage of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the New World. It was the “middle” leg of the triangular trade that took goods (guns, ammunition, tools, cotton cloth, brass dishes) from Europe to Africa, Africans to work as slaves in the Americas and West Indies, and produce from the plantations (sugar, rice, tobacco, indigo, rum, cotton) back to Europe. From about 1518 to the mid-19th century, millions of African men, women, and children made the 21-to-90-day voyage aboard grossly overcrowded sailing ships manned by crews mostly from Great Britain, the Netherlands, Portugal, and France.

distance myself from the precarity of my art form and, at the same time, gain a platform to stand up for what felt important to me in the specific context? What did it mean to be responsible for someone else's child's education; was I up for the task? Interestingly enough, in my first week on the job six years earlier, the photographer responsible for taking portraits of new faculty remarked to me: "You need to know that it's a big deal that they've given this position to a Black woman." I politely acknowledged the comment but could not fully understand its significance until much later. George Floyd's untimely death and the consequences it generated across the world, for my own Black children and within my tenure-granting institution, became the impetus for me to commit the following three years to leading the university's efforts to address anti-Black racism.³ A permanent academic position meant taking on activism as a moral responsibility. There is little doubt that this engagement has had a profound and lasting impact on my perception of myself as a Black woman and artist, as well as on the roles and responsibilities I am ready to assume both in my pedagogy and in my research-creation practice. *Confession Publique*, the contemporary dance solo that is the central pillar of this doctoral project, would have been entirely different had I not been immersed in the activism of countering historical structural exclusions based on race.

Also worth mentioning at the outset – because it has strongly influenced my experience of the work and its relationship to my Blackness – is the fact that *Confession Publique*, has enjoyed a very particular success. Since its premier in November 2021 in Montreal, the piece has played to sold-out houses, enjoyed unanimous critical acclaim, and prompted awards in November 2022 from the prestigious Prix de la danse de Montréal for best choreographic work for Mélanie Demers and best performer for myself.⁴ I mention these accolades because they have contributed to my musings about what I represent – what stories a body like mine tells – on a stage, in this moment, and how that affects my own sense of agency as a Black performing artist.

This research-creation project sits along an axis of interdisciplinarity. Taking the field of contemporary dance as its point of departure, the project explores my experience of the

³ I was chair of a 50-person university-wide task force on anti-black racism for two years, culminating in 88 recommendations published in a final report and accepted by the university administration. At the time of this writing, I have assumed the role of special advisor for a five-year mandate to supervise the implementation of these recommendations.

⁴ The review that appeared following the last performance before this submission is included in Appendix E.

performance and dramaturgy from the point of view of my Blackness. Using a decolonial⁵ lens to interrogate dramaturgical praxis with regard to the performer, the project's conceptual moorings move through the iterative acts of performance as both the tool for, and the outcome of my questioning, ultimately coming to anchor in the field of Black performance studies – or studies of historical and artistic manifestations of Blackness. With regard to this burgeoning discipline, E. Patrick Johnson writes,

The interanimation of blackness and performance necessitates the codification of this relationship through intellectual inquiry – thus “black performance studies.” While black performance has been a sustaining and galvanizing force of black culture and a contributor to world culture at large, it has not always been recognized as a site of theorization in the academy. Similarly marginalized as the black bodies with which it is associated, black performance, while always embedded within institutionally sanctioned and privileged forms of performance, has often been neglected as an intellectual site of inquiry. (2005, p. 447, emphasis in original)

The need to *experience* my Blackness through my artistic practice so as to articulate its manifestation and influence on my work, is the buttress for the dance creation that is central to this project. As I navigate through choreography, performance, dance and performance studies, philosophy, and Black studies, I attempt to give form and voice to the hybridity of my being and of my thinking.

My particular interest in the legacies of coloniality stems primarily from the fact that I am a woman of colour, originally from the island of Jamaica – a former British colony – and that I have lived most of my life in contexts in which I have been a minority, and where there is still much evidence of significant colonial pasts. My curiosity about my own inheritances and how those are born in, and by my body has led me to look at their impact, both through and on, my artistic expression. My conceptual thinking has navigated towards Blackness in response to my own experiences living as a minority as well as my growing awareness (I would say embodied rather than intellectual) that

⁵ A term coined by sociologist Anibal Quijano, decoloniality “undoes, disobeys, and delinks from this matrix [of modernity/coloniality]; constructing paths and praxis toward an otherwise of thinking, sensing, believing, doing, and living.” Decoloniality is understood as a process of undoing. It is concerned with “the habits that modernity/coloniality implanted in all of us; with how modernity/coloniality has worked and continues to work to negate, disavow, distort and deny knowledges, subjectivities, world senses, and life visions” (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018, p. 4).

Western society has its foundations in the aftermath of the Atlantic slave trade. My intergenerational inheritances include slaves and slave masters; my Caribbean origins place me at the cultural crossroads of that historical movement of peoples; I am seen as Black in the contexts in which I have lived outside of Jamaica. So, what does that Black mean for me? As an individual, as a woman, as a mother of Black children, as an artist? My questions about my specificity as both performer and dramaturg cannot be separated from this broader context. It is on this basis that I enter into this journey of discovery of the ways in which my Blackness, and my experience of it, underlie and move through my art.

I began this research-creation project with a desire to better understand what I had experienced in the creative processes in which I have worked over the past forty years of my professional practice as a dance artist.⁶ What constitutes this body of mine – in its physicality, in its relationality – when I step into a creation and must resonate with the ideas and propositions of a choreographer? There were several initial questions to this inquiry, only some of which ultimately materialized in this text. As I have attempted to work my way through my interrogations over the course of my research-creation, the world has shifted, and my sensibilities along with it. The summer of 2020, characterized by the Covid-19 pandemic and global expressions of Black Lives Matter following Mr. Floyd’s murder, provoked new lines of thought for me that now firmly situate my questions in the conditions of my Blackness and its dialogue with my artistic practice as performer and dramaturg. I recognize that it has been a sort of blind spot throughout my career that I now seek to acknowledge and perhaps articulate through this research-creation. The ultimate quest, therefore, is to attempt to address thinking/moving/experiencing a creative process⁷ but, moreso, its performance outcome through the lens of my Blackness.

In order to clearly contextualize the artistic framework that situates my practice, I identify my point of departure as one of a reflexive performer and dramaturg of contemporary choreographic creation, i.e., I adhere to the artistic (to not say cultural) lineage of contemporary dance (Western concert dance), and its aesthetic. I do not claim to, nor intend to make or perform what might be

⁶ A brief biography of my artistic and academic path appears in Appendix A.

⁷ My initial intentions had included an interrogation of my Blackness in relation to the actual creative process that produced *Confession Publique*. However, what emerged through the performances of the work has proved much more substantial and revealing with regard to my experiences of Blackness.

considered Black dance;⁸ neither is this research-creation *about* Black dance. My objective is to explore how my contemporary dance body holds Blackness. By choreographic creation, I refer to a context in which the body of the performer⁹ and their movement, however minimal, are the main protagonists; the *modus operandi* is one of collaboration between the choreographer and the performer – i.e., the latter generates the material for creation through their improvisations and explorations in response to various prompts from the choreographer. My study is devoted primarily to investigating the (less evident) dramaturgies that accompany the individual performer rather than to the creation as a whole and, as explained above, it has evolved to become an investigation of my own dramaturgical content provoked through the act of performance.

Keeping the broader context of contemporary creation in mind, three key considerations that have gradually become part of the *collective conscious* of dance, emerge as having direct bearing on this study: 1) the recognition of dramaturgy as a key contributor to thinking with, about, and through, choreographic creation, 2) the contribution of the performer to choreographic content and the recognition of their role as co-creator, and 3) the still troubled notion of decolonization in dance which I will not develop here, but which informs my decolonial interrogations of the Eurocentrism of contemporary dance and its corresponding idea of a universal (or non-political) body. I expand this to include an attention to Blackness.

In the case of dramaturgy, there have been numerous gatherings and collections dedicated to this practice since the 1990s in Europe.¹⁰ In Canada, the collection edited by Hansen and Callison, *Dance Dramaturgy: Modes of Agency, Awareness and Engagement* (2015), the special issue of the *Canadian Theatre Review* “Dance and Movement Dramaturgy” (Hansen et al, 2013), and the

⁸ In the introduction to his edited volume *Dancing Many Drums*, dance studies scholar Thomas DeFrantz (2002) offers a chronological “b(l)ackground” of the emergence of the term “black dance” and its various derivatives in the United States, from the Black Arts movement of the 1960s through “African American dance” to contemporary usages of Black and Blackness. The term “Black” comes predominantly from an American context; however, in my experience, I am perceived as “Black” in both North American and European societies. I use the term here to encompass Afro-descendant experience more broadly.

⁹ I borrow this term from the Flemish dramaturg Marianne Van Kerkhoven (1994a). It proposes a positioning beyond a specificity of artistic disciplines which, in my experience, corresponds better to the reality of current choreographic creation than the term ‘dancer’.

101993: Symposium 'Context 01: Active Pooling, the New Theatre's Word Perfect', Amsterdam

1999: 'Conversations on Choreography', Amsterdam and Barcelona

2003: Danseværket in Aarhus, Aarhus, Denmark

2008: 'The Witness as Dramaturg', Hancock & Kelly Live and Dance4, Great Britain

2008: 'International Research Workshop – Dramaturgy as Applied Knowledge,' Tel Aviv University

encounters proposed by the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity (Banff Centre, 2019), the Regroupement québécois de la danse, and annually by the Festival TransAmériques, testify to this marked and ever growing interest.¹¹

In my understanding and experience of dramaturgy, the term usually refers to the overall coherence of a performance: “the entire context of the performance event, the structuring of the artwork in all its elements” (Turner & Behrndt, 2008, p. 5). “New dramaturgy,” a term coined by Flemish dramaturg Marianne Van Kerkhoven, places dramaturgy in a broad creative context, shifting the focus from a single interpretation to process-oriented creative methods, and generating multiple perspectives for the audience (Van Kerkhoven, 1994a). I adhere to Van Kerkhoven's suggestion that dramaturgy is not a truth that is imposed on a creation, but rather a constantly evolving thought process that is specific to each context. She described her practice as follows:

The kind of dramaturgy that I am familiar with has nothing to do with the “concept dramaturgy” that has been in vogue in German theater since Brecht. ... The kind of dramaturgy that I feel connected with, and that I have tried to apply in both theater and dance, has a “process” character: one chooses to work with materials of various origins (texts, movements, film images, objects, ideas, etc.); the “human material” (the actors/dancers) is decidedly the most important; the personality of the performers is considered as the foundation of the creation rather than their technical abilities. The director or choreographer sets to work with these materials; during the rehearsal process he/she observes how these materials behave and develop; only at the end of this process does a concept, a structure, a more or less defined form slowly emerge; this final structure is not known from the beginning. (Cools, 2005, p. 90)

In the sense that it is the objective of this research-creation performance to the exclusion of all other motivations or inputs, this project takes full advantage of Van Kerkhoven’s proposition of “human material” and the personality of the performer being the foundation for the choreographic process and its outcome. She no doubt imagines it as an element in a broader context of creation, as one of several original materials. In this project, I propose that the performer (myself) essentially become that broader context. This is not to say that other considerations do not enter into the crafting of a final outcome; however, the primary focus here is to centre my Black body and the

¹¹Banff Centre: The Creative Gesture – Dramaturgy for Dance 2019; Regroupement québécois de la danse: <https://www.quebecdanse.org/2019/05/23/la-methode-a-modeler-de-la-dramaturge/>; Festival TransAmériques: Les Cliniques dramaturgiques https://fta.ca/cliniques-dramaturgiques-2/cliniques-dramaturgiques-fta_formulaire/

forces of my stories and experiences and to “observe how these [dramaturgical] materials behave and develop” through performance.

Dramaturgy, as I have known it, is a practice of listening, observation, improvisation, and sometimes provocation. Its form is fluid, by nature constantly adapting to its context, and it includes all facets of the creation. The emergent character of dramaturgy is rooted in the fact that its process, its reflection, its articulation, are intimately linked to live artistic exploration. According to Turner and Behrndt (2008), dramaturgy is, therefore, always in-progress, open to the disruptions caused by both rehearsal and performance. The possibility for “disruption” consequently implies a dynamic, contextual, and political dimension to dramaturgical practice (p. 5) and, in the context of this study, then, also to dramaturgical experience. Further, I see the potentially disruptive and political nature of dramaturgy in its practice of placing things in relationship, in an ecology of sorts – not necessarily always harmonious. At the micro level, that ecology is constituted of the confrontation of ideas; of the performers in relation to their subjective experience, to each other and to the propositions of the choreographer; and of the modalities and hierarchies of the creative process. At the macro level, the emerging creation with its wider artistic, sociopolitical, and cultural contexts, as well as where the work sits on the choreographer’s trajectory, all contribute to the tensegral ecology of elements at play.

If my corporeality is the moving, adaptive dramaturgical *ecology* in question, then what is centred is precisely how my body, my stories and my experiences place themselves in relationship – to each other as well as to the audience, to the constraints or framework proposed by the choreographer, to the broader readings of my body in society, and to my own past and current histories. Of particular import is how this dramaturgical ecology is activated by and through performance, that moment of meaning-making that crystallizes experience, temporality, and the imaginary. In the case of this research-creation project, therefore, even as I come to it from the perspective of my practice as a dramaturg, my particular interest is less in the overall context of the creative process and the dramaturgy that emerges from that dynamic. Rather, my interest is in the performer’s – in this case, my – *experience* of the dramaturgies that are borne in/by my corporeality, how they are triggered, how they manifest and, ultimately, how they in turn inform the creation. The ecology of the creative process itself is pertinent only insofar as it allows/generates a context that makes the exploration of my dramaturgy possible. Ultimately, I am

interested in the *extramuros* (i.e., external to the ecology of the creative process itself) dramaturgies that are provoked in/through the body of the performer in/through performance.

The contribution of the performer to choreographic collaboration is well-documented in recent scholarship. Turner (2020), Bienaise (2015), Gouju and Pichaud (2014), Gravel (2012), Roche (2009), Levac (2006), among many others address issues ranging from the specific physicality of the individual performer and its ‘becoming’ through the collaborative process; the creative ecologies that generate the performer’s contribution; and the subjective experience of the performer as creative material. Other literature on dance dramaturgy also recognizes performer contributions: André Lepecki refers to the contribution of the dancers’ personal histories in Pina Bausch's work (2004, p. 173); Bettina Milz, speaking of the work of William Forsythe, La Ribot, and Xavier Le Roy, posits the body as “research territory” (2008, p. 2); Hildegard de Vuyst, long-time dramaturg and collaborator of Alain Platel, asserts that in his creations, “the performers are the dramaturgy of the production” (Behrndt, 2010, p. 189); Vida Midgelow recognizes “the body – its corporeality, its knowings, and implicit memories” as “dramaturgical content” (2015, p. 109). Similarly, scholars of dance and somatic practices – and, more recently, of embodied social justice work – acknowledge the physical and cultural *content* of the individual body as it is informed by contexts and experiences, from pre-birth (i.e., intergenerational and foetal) through to adulthood and, consequently, its significance in the creative sphere and in the broader context of social and cultural interaction (Godard 1990a, 1994a, 1995; Bainbridge Cohen, 2018; Menakem, 2017; Johnson, 2017; Albright, 2015, among others).

The assertions that are encompassed in this literature give the individual performer and their subjective experience a critical place in the creative process. Seen for its dramaturgical potential, what I call the relational body of the performer becomes a place of meaning-making. Further, these works imply that the body in its fullest sense can never be considered neutral. By neutral, I refer to the metaphor of a neutral or blank canvas on which a choreographer might imprint their vision. Once the traditional mode of Western concert-dancemaking, the neutral canvas metaphor has largely been replaced by acknowledgement of the individual subjectivity of the performer as primary creative material, nourished by the value given by contemporary choreography to the *soma*, i.e., to the whole being.

What the myriad of practices of the *soma* (somatics) have contributed to dance training, making and aesthetics since their emergence in the dance field in the 1960s is nothing short of revolutionary, but as Doran George (2020) argues, their focus on the “natural body” is also ridden with the fundamental values and politics of very specific, essentially white, sociocultural contexts. “Theorizing movement as a cultural site of meaning making,” (p. 5) George recounts that the notion of the “natural body” and its desirability emerged out of a white post-Second World War America filled with liberal ideologies and the rejection of authoritarianism. In the context of dance, this manifested in a shift away from the seemingly prescriptive regimes of classical ballet and the modern techniques (Graham, Limon, Cunningham, Horton...) in favour of the perceived freedom and authenticity of “natural,” seemingly aesthetic-free movement, epitomized by the famous Judson Dance Theatre of the early 1960s.

Without wishing to generalize Black experience to the American context,¹² it is worthwhile thinking about what was happening for/to/with Black bodies in New York during the 1960s, precisely *when and where* the Judson dance revolution was taking place. As mentioned in an earlier footnote, “black dance” was emerging during this period, as part of the broader Black Arts movement (DeFrantz, 2002, p. 5) initiated by poet Amiri Baraka’s (formerly known as LeRoi Jones) establishment of the Black Arts Repertory Theater in Harlem, New York in 1965. The movement’s spiritual roots were grounded in the civil rights movement, the Black Power Movement, and the teachings of Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam. Artists associated with the movement (including Baraka himself, James Baldwin, Maya Angelou, Audre Lorde, among others), sought to create politically engaged work that reflected African American historical and cultural experience and that spoke to the community’s desire for self-determination and nationhood (Neal, 1968). Even without digging very deeply into African American history, the assassinations of Malcolm X in 1965 and Martin Luther King in 1968, as well as the renowned anti-white supremacy work of the writers mentioned, are clear indications of the fact that Black bodies at the time could not have enjoyed the ‘perceived freedom and authenticity of “natural,” seemingly aesthetic-free movement that characterized the Judson Dance Theater. Already revolutionary in the context of the African American reality was the creation of the Alvin Ailey American Dance

¹² With regard to generalizations of Black experience to the *American* Black experience, it is notable that dance among Canadian Black communities at that time was also relegated to *other* i.e., non-mainstream spaces, with consequently little recognition of its significance for the agency and heterogeneity of those bodies (Boye, 2017).

Theater in 1958 and the Dance Theater of Harlem in 1969 by Arthur Mitchell, both companies focusing at the outset on providing opportunities for Black dancers and on telling the stories of African American people. In postwar America, characterized by liberal ideologies and anti-authoritarianism, the Black woman Rosa Parks was nevertheless arrested in 1955 for refusing to sit at the back of a Montgomery, Alabama bus.

In the sociopolitical context enjoyed by white American bodies, then, out of which postmodern dance emerged, what George describes as “the new universal contemporary body” naturalized white pedestrian vocabulary, ease, and modesty (2020, p. 37). It is in this light that I propose that although the neutral canvas body seems to have virtually disappeared from dancemaking, the notion of the natural body – still largely the focus of dance training practices – may still be one that does not fully consider the *embodied political* of individual performer bodies, in particular those of Black and racialized performers. My own embodied political hinges on the fact that I am perceived by others – and, consequently, have had to learn to position myself accordingly – as a Black woman. My relational body cannot be divorced from my experience of my Blackness and, as a result, neither can my contributions to the choreographic processes in which I have participated during my career. My dramaturgical potential is deeply intertwined with that experience, whether or not it was a deliberate focus of attention for myself or for the choreographers with whom I collaborated. Harking back to George’s observations with regard to the natural body:

... social arrangements are embedded in and extend from the dancing body. Not only do the dancers produce, sustain, and transfer their values in and through the sensuous and physical dimensions of kinetic experiences, but also the patterns of social organization extend from and support the meaning constructed in the dancing. (2020, p. 7)

I have experienced very little directly racist behaviour in my lifetime, and even less as an artist. Yet, I am deeply aware of the social arrangements referred to by George that are “embedded in and extend from my (dancing) body.” I have certainly witnessed racist behaviour on multiple occasions and in a variety of contexts. I can only attribute my own seeming good fortune to a certain invisibility in society that I suspect is related to effective assimilation (my light skin, my education, my gender, etc.). That same invisibility also exists in dance, where I have rarely felt seen as a Black woman dancing. Without meaning to diminish the value of my hard work and some talent, I admit

to a certain ambivalence about wanting to just be a dancer and, at the same time, wanting some acknowledgement from my peers that my experience of the world is historically conditioned by Blackness. All bodies do not live equally (i.e., with the same “natural”) in the world; as a consequence, dramaturgical praxis must also find its anchor in that reality. Recognizing the richness for the creative process of the performer’s soma unfortunately often excludes the potentially fundamental differences in the ways certain bodies are called to engage with the world. The specificity of individual subjective experience must not only enjoy its phenomenological and ultimately co-authorial place in the creative process; it must also be considered in terms of its embodied political. My reflections on decoloniality and Blackness in dance are in part embedded in this notion of the embodied political. In his contribution to the 2008 edition of the *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*, theatre director and performance studies scholar Ronald J. Pelias writes on the embodied political of the performer:

[I]n any act of embodiment there is always a political body. All performance is ideologically laden. Performers’ bodies are not neutral. They carry, among other markers, their gender, sexuality, ableness, class, race, and ethnicity with them. They signal cultural biases—beauty and blond hair, handsome and tan, jolly and round, and so on. Such claims imply that the performer’s body is always a contested site. Efforts at color-blind casting, for example, only demonstrate that directors can attempt to erase issues of race but cannot eliminate how audiences might interpret what they see. The identities that are put on stage come with and without cultural endorsement. Performers who are interested in interventionist work find their political bodies a rich methodological source for exploration and advocacy. (p. 5)

Pelias’ notion of the “political body” has been a long-time source of inspiration for my thinking. When I consider the decolonization of dance (or its decolonial rethinking), the *sine qua non* for me is the acknowledgement of the fact that “performers’ bodies are not neutral,” i.e., all bodies do not tell all stories. They are always read and understood according to diverse and ever-changing criteria, most of which the dancers themselves do not control. How we are perceived therefore is a critical, *if not selectable*, component of our dramaturgical input into a creation. Pelias proposes the political body as an invaluable methodological tool for advocacy. I would argue that my political body is also a source of artistic empowerment and agency that situates myself, my artistry and, consequently, my dramaturgical potential in the broader sociopolitical and historical contexts that I navigate (see biography in Appendices). In the particular context of this study, my political body

cannot be separated from “how audiences might interpret what they see” – a Black woman. Although I focus primarily on the relationship between race and my artistic self, I am also aware that my Blackness cannot be separated from the other intersectional considerations that refute any imagined neutrality of my performer body. Being a Western-educated, middle-class, 60-year-old female immigrant not only defines my relationships to my Blackness; it also dictates the ways in which my Blackness might be perceived.

Over the course of my career, there have certainly been moments of *playing with* my political body and consequent audience perceptions, albeit sometimes unwittingly on my part. I say unwittingly because in the context of all creative processes (as I have known them), many ideas appear and disappear, some develop further, some stay, and those always depend on what ultimately emerges as interesting for the choreographer. With specific reference to the political body as source material, one of the most notable performances of my time in Europe was Belgian creator Alain Platel's *La Tristeza Complice* (see figure 1.1). Neither during the creation nor in performance had I considered the potential impact of my duet with fellow dancer Koen Augustijnen, in which I sang *If Love's a Sweet Passion* from Henry Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* while he used his teeth to undress me. I discovered only many years later that a photograph of that scene graced the front cover of American dance studies scholar Ann Cooper Albright's 1997 book, *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance*. In it she writes:

In one section, for instance, a drag queen (played by Koen Augustijnen) repeatedly grabs a woman's body (Angélique Willkie). Pulling and picking at her skin, her hair and her clothes, he seems at once abusive and yet also desirous of becoming her. Watching a white man touch a black woman in such an abusive manner emphasized her passivity and at first I felt very uncomfortable with the sexual and racial politics of this scene. Nonetheless, these politics were complicated by the fact that this man was wearing a bra and lipstick, as well as the fact that he had earlier been the object of sexual harassment. In addition, the woman endured the whole event while doggedly singing a slow ballad. While I found the work to be disturbingly ambiguous at times like this, I also found it powerful and compelling ...” (pp. xx-xxi)

Figure 1.1 *La Tristeza Complice*



Photo by Chris Van Der Burght, 1995.

Koen and I did not intentionally explore the dynamics of race or gender or passivity. But what our respective political bodies represented in that moment together transcended any initial objective on our parts. Other performances also took advantage of other aspects of my person:

Figure 1.2 *Circuit*



Photo by Helena Waldmann, 1995.

In *Circuit* by German theatre director Helena Waldmann, inspired by the crucifixion of Christian martyr Saint Sebastian, Waldmann played with the fact that I was bald with a slim build, exploring the gender ambiguity my appearance evoked.

Figure 1.3 *Rien de Rien*



Photo by Chris Van Der Burght 2000.¹³

In *Rien de Rien* by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, I wore a Tina Turner wig, a skimpy dress and high heels, transforming my brown body into the pop star as I spoke a flawless Slovenian text to a Serbian audience who assumed I was an African American living in Ljubljana. The common element in all of these examples is the affect generated for the audience which, though critical to Pelias' notion of the political body (2008), only tells half the story. I recognize that what is not explored by myself nor by the creators of the abovementioned works is what exists beyond what Tina Camppt calls the "visuality" of difference (2021, p. 7). That is the Blackness that is of interest to me here – the Blackness that I experience and hope to articulate.

¹³ Also in the photograph appear dancers Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and Jurij Konjar.

In her 2021 publication, *A Black Gaze: Artists Changing How We See*, Tina Campt discusses how contemporary Black artists are pushing the boundaries of the simple representation of Black presence in favour of Black “livingness” (McKittrick, 2021) in art:

Here the radical question they are posing is: rather than looking *at* Black people, rather than simply multiplying the representation of Black folks, what would it mean to *see oneself through* the complex positionality that is blackness – and work through its implications on and for oneself? (p. 7, emphasis in original)

Exploring the fullness of my Black positionality and how that feeds my person and my dance artistry is precisely the focus of my research-creation. Campt describes this as a profoundly transformational shift for Black artists away from the habitual frameworks through which blackness is seen, and towards one that challenges the “dominant viewing practice: the fact that blackness is the elsewhere (or nowhere) of whiteness” (p. 7). She continues:

Neither a depiction of Black folks or Black culture, [the Black gaze] forces viewers to engage blackness from a different and discomfiting vantage point. ... It is a Black gaze that shifts the optics of “looking at” to a politics of *looking with, through, and alongside another.*” (p. 8, emphasis in original)

If there is a dramaturgy of my Blackness to be uncovered through this research-creation, this is its essence – what is it to “look with, through and alongside” my experiences of my Blackness? Turner and Behrndt refer to the dynamic, contextual and political dimension to dramaturgical practice (2008, p. 5); I further argue that a visceral *experience* of dramaturgy has an equally disruptive potential that provokes things to be placed in relationship in profoundly political and transformational ways. Dramaturgy is both a practice and a relationship to experience – processual and emergent in nature. This research-creation project is an invitation to myself and others to see the parameters (and perhaps ethics) of dramaturgy differently – not only as a meaning-maker for performance in its overall sense, but also as a tool for facilitating the uncovering of meaning borne in the body of the performer. Through alternative understandings of dramaturgy, I see the potential to resist the “worlding” that has been part of my contemporary dance experience.

I come from a context of colonization. As a daughter of a former British colony, my British-based education in Jamaica made sure that I not only internalized the language, value systems and hierarchies of the former colonial power, but also that I came to see my own culture, heritage, and land through the lens of that, and subsequently other, Western cultural hegemonies. I realize to what extent I saw (and perhaps still see!) the folk dances of my childhood, the flat feet and kinky hair of those dancers, as inferior to the arched feet and slick buns of white dancers in magazines or on TV. Even beyond the official chronology of my home country's colonial experience – Jamaica was granted self-government in 1944 and independence from Britain in 1962 – I had inherited a world that had been “worlded,” according to feminist postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak (1985). The term worlding has its origins with the philosopher Heidegger¹⁴ but the signification that is of interest to me here is of Spivak's coinage. Crudely explained, the concept of “worlding” describes any gesture or measure that encourages the colonial subject to see their own world from the viewpoint of the dominant colonial master. When the colonial power “worlds” the world of its subjects, the subject is less likely to resist or to challenge the status quo because of their intimate identification with that status quo. What the master sees as truth accordingly becomes the subject's truth. In this context, there is no recognition of an embodied political; rather, there is only the assimilation mentioned earlier.

I still have semi-vivid (what is real and what is fiction?) memories of standing on my tippy toes at about six years old to peep through a back window of my 'prep school' gym where Miss McGowan was teaching ballet classes to a small group of girls. They all had brown skin, most darker than mine, and all were wearing pink leotards and pink ballet shoes. The ones who were lucky also had a little pink skirt attached to the leotard and pink tights. I adored Miss McGowan – she was a small dark-brown woman who was always smiling. She kept her hot-comb straightened¹⁵ hair very flat on her head in the front and pulled back in a large, teased bun as was the style of the 1960s. It didn't occur to me at the time that pink wasn't the colour of the girls' skin.

¹⁴ See Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time*. Blackwell Publishing

¹⁵ At that time, the metal comb would be heated on the open flame of the gas stove and used to “straighten” the kinks out of Black hair, making it easier to comb into styles popular for Caucasian, or naturally straight hair.

Or that Miss McGowan's hair wasn't naturally straight. They would dance to piano music playing from the cassette tape. (A memory from my childhood.)

This is the first of many stories I will tell throughout this thesis, and my first recollection of seeing dance. And yet, I know I would have seen Jamaican folk dances before that moment but, somehow, they did not hold the same fascination for me. The colour pink, the piano cassette tapes, accepting that the natural curve in my spine and my flattish feet would be considered aesthetically (not necessarily functionally!) less pleasing – my dance was “worlded.” In the late 1980s, some twenty years later, I travelled to Havana, Cuba where I attended a performance of *Swan Lake* by the Ballet Nacional de Cuba. Technically exquisite, the Black dancers' faces, arms and legs were all covered in white pancake makeup – their dance was “worlded”; perhaps more importantly, their bodies were “worlded.” The message was clear: they needed to (at least try to) be white-skinned in order to respect the aesthetics (and values therefore) of a classical *Swan Lake*.

This last anecdote took place admittedly some thirty years ago, but its traces in my visceral memory as well as its social and cultural implications have continued to hover. I would have liked to believe that we no longer live in that kind of world. But the events of the summer of 2020 are a clear reminder that history hovers. As I recall the beginning of my European adventure in early 1990s Brussels, there were three “Black” dancers among the freelance and company dance community – myself, a woman of Trinidadian-Indian origin who had one white parent, and a woman of Malian and French parentage. Without discounting our respective talents, I dare to suggest that we were working because we *fit in*, in spite of our difference. By fitting in, I mean that our body types were close to European dance norms and that our visual appearances did not evoke any radical departure from the customary cultural mores.¹⁶ It would be another several years before dancers from the Congo, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, and other Black African countries appeared on Belgian and European stages in the performances of Alain Platel and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui among others, and even longer before those dancers would be funded to create their own work, i.e., tell their own stories. There is definitely an unworlding evident in the choreographic propositions of these and

¹⁶ See Boulila's (2019) *Race in Post-racial Europe: An Intersectional Analysis* for a fascinating study on being from “elsewhere” in the European context, and the apparent disappearance of race as a social consideration in postwar Europe's perception of itself.

other Black African dancemakers,¹⁷ their work informed by dramaturgies inspired by their cultural traditions and the contemporary concerns of their communities and performed by dancers largely steeped in those contexts. I cannot deny that the contemporary dance stage has changed substantially and continues to do so. I am interested in furthering the possibility “to *see oneself through* the complex positionality that is blackness” according to Camp (2021, emphasis in original).

Speaking to issues of race in contemporary dance as recently as in 2018, Colombian-American dance artist Miguel Gutierrez writes:

How did I come to be colonized? And how did I find out that I had been colonized? Have I found out? How did whiteness become, I shudder even to write this, safety – a lack of feeling, a lack of allegiances. It made space, or at least I thought it did, for me. For a me that had no history ... Who has the right not to explain themselves? The people who don't have to. The ones whose subjectivities have been naturalized. (para. 18)

Using Gutierrez' comment and my own experience as the point of reference, in Spivak's terms, contemporary dance has been “worlded” for non-white performers. I acknowledge my own sense of shock and dismay when I realized that I too had felt “safe” i.e., without allegiance, without history – invisible, in fact. I had worked hard to “bolster the universality of my capacities” in the words of Doran George (2020, p. 6). And, at the same time, I cannot deny that extraordinary art has emerged from that place of seeming invisibility and lack of cultural specificity or conspicuousness. My reframing of the contexts in which that art was made does not question its validity for me; it is my own awareness that has shifted. As realities and our understandings of them are multiple, fluid, and emergent, a judgement in hindsight would not seem useful. However, as our/my sensibilities evolve, I cannot *not* interrogate the culture of naturalization of subjectivities, as Gutierrez describes it, that continues to be part of contemporary dance. It is essential that I attend to my Blackness – how it has been obscured in so-called universality, how it is lived, how it is perceived, how it manifests in, expresses and affects my art. Coming to terms with my allegiances, my history, my (in)visibility, i.e., unworlding my dance practice, is an activist attempt to embrace

¹⁷ I am thinking here of the work of dancer-choreographers Faustin Linyekula, Serge-Aimé Coulibaly, Qudus Onikeku, Nadia Beugré, among others.

the fullness of my personal and artistic being. Engaging with the nebulousness and multiplicity of my Blackness is not only part of my embodied political; it is my dramaturgical potential. Dramaturgy, both as concept (the processual logic that emerges in the creative process) and as practice (meaning-making), has the potential to unworld. The multiplicity of possible dramaturgies and dramaturgical configurations has the capacity to challenge and/or augment our perceptions of reality. Exploring a dramaturgy of and through my Blackness potentially unworlds the dance that whiteness has given me and, in so doing, becomes a means of both reflecting, and reflecting upon, that Blackness. However long it may have taken me to get here, I can no longer consider my now almost 40-year dance career and practice outside of the framework of how I have lived as a Black-bodied woman. Sitting with myself – which is the journey of this doctoral project – is, quite simply, about me *dancing while Black*. It is about me wondering what dramaturgies emerge from my body in performance in relation to my Blackness. It is about me wondering in what ways my act of performing *Confession Publique* engages a dramaturgical praxis of Blackness. Finally, it is also me wondering about the ways in which an understanding of the historicity and, yet, porosity of Blackness can inform dramaturgical thinking.

In the upcoming chapters, I will unfold many stories and reflections. Some have risen up from the inside of my dancingness; others have informed my growing understandings of my Blackness and what that means for me, not just intellectually but somatically, i.e., from an embodied perspective. There is no attempt to provide answers to a specific research question as such; the musings above are just that and the idea of a hypothesis of any kind seems counter to the very essence of the adventure upon which I have embarked. The road has been a visceral one; its objective has been to engage with whatever relationships might manifest between my performing body, the dramaturgy it holds and/or provokes and the fact of being a Black woman. It cannot answer questions. The knowledge produced is shareable only to a limited extent because it is contained in my body and in what transpires during the performances of *Confession Publique*. My ambition is to share the musings that have erupted from those performances, a discovery of the dramaturgy that is my Blackness. My own prose, poetry, and reflective text interweaves throughout this thesis.

Rather than begin by presenting a conceptual framework that holds my thinking about Blackness, I have chosen to first orient the reader by offering insights into the epistemological *how* of the project. This responds to the realization that my methodological approaches to this research-

creation are intimately intertwined with the ways in which I consider Blackness. Consequently, how I get to the storytelling is the necessary preface to the stories themselves. **Chapter two, (My) Black Methodologies**, introduces the Womanist thinking of Black feminist writer Alice Walker (1983), which focuses on a holistic view of Black womanhood. Methodologically, Womanism centres Black women's intellectual, spiritual, and self-reflective experiences as (and as deserving of) academic research methods and knowledge, and as feminist resistance. The notion of opacity (Glissant, 1997) provides the conceptual justification for irreducibility, for inexplicability, for the right to non-transparent difference. *Black Methodologies* (McKittrick, 2021) advocate for Black storytelling in all its multiplicity, and introduces the idea of "black livingness," (p. 3) the container for that multiplicity. Storytelling as a form of scholarship is proposed in *Endarkened Storywork* (Toliver, 2022). Taking inspiration from *Endarkened feminist epistemology* (Dillard, 2000), *Indigenous storywork* (Archibald, 2008), and *Afrofuturism* (Womack, 2013), the approach is grounded in the "freedom technologies" (Lavender, 2019) that are Black diasporic folktales. Finally, performance itself is fundamental to the research-creation, not only as an outcome but as the primary methodological tool. The potential for transformation and metamorphosis inherent in performance is in dialogue with the mythical trickster figure of the Anansi spider stories of my youth, whose primary tactic is always mutation. The reasons for the choice of Mélanie Demers as choreographer, as well as the ways in which I captured my thoughts and sensations during the research-creation close the chapter.

Chapter three, My Blacknesses, situates the different facets of my Blackness as I understand them, including resisting any specific definition attributed to the term. Exploring the origins of Blackness, I look at my Jamaican slave ancestry in the context of Sylvia Wynter's conceptual proposition of the optimal Man (2003), and notions of Other in various sociocultural contexts (Wright, 2004). If Blackness is not attributed to bodies, then its performance and, in fact, production become key to my experience and to the contexts that spawn it (Johnson, 2003; Wright, 2004). This non-fixity of Blackness is explored through the idea of fugitivity, an essential theorization of Black diasporic life (Tina Campt, 2014; Fred Moten, 2008); while the proposition of a phenomenological spacetime of Blackness (Wright, 2015b) encounters Stuart Hall's (1990) interaction of history, culture and power as specific moments in time that generate a collective identity – an idea that is particularly pertinent for what I consider the cultural Blackness of the

Caribbean where I grew up. This geographic situatedness is addressed in the notions of “Caribbeanness” and the “poetics of landscape” (Glissant, 1989), as well as in the human and material geographies of the Black diaspora (McKittrick, 2006), and in the proposition of the Black Atlantic as a producer of Blackness (Gilroy, 1995). Finally, the relationship between the colonial plantation system and the slave plot (Wynter, 1971) serves as the background for an exploration of the resilience emerging from provision grounds (DeLoughery, 2011) and Maroon communities (Casimir, 2020). These set the stage for the journey of the performance itself.¹⁸

Diving into the abyss of the performance of *Confession Publique* with its fluid non-fixity is the task of **Chapter four, The Unknown...waters**. Water appears as a metaphorical medium that allows me to conflate both historical and contemporary temporalities. Black and Caribbean people’s relationship to water, including my own, underlies the discussion in this chapter, especially with respect to the Atlantic Ocean as the birthplace of Blackness and its diaspora (Walcott, 2021). The intergenerational passing on of the visceral experiences of racism and slavery (Menakem, 2017) allows me to contemplate what of my own history of Caribbean waters is potentially held in my body. My engagement with the movement of water and the similar fluidity of various sequences in the performance also speak to the metaphorical story of Black survival as dependent on the capacity for movement, for adaptation – another reference to fugitivity (Akomolafe, 2020).

Through my own experience of nudity in *Confession Publique*, **Chapter five, MILK or I the nude black female** looks at the history of naked Black female bodies on display. Moving from the metaphorical birth of the Caribbean (Benitez-Rojo, 1996) and the auction block, to the fragmented reproductive value of Black women’s bodies (Brown, 2015), I contemplate the imposed objecthood of the racialized-gendered body (Spillers, 1987), and the theatricalization of Black skin (Cheng, 2013). The story of Saartje Bartman, the writing of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (2004) and Gayl Jones’ *Song for Anninho* (1981), the poetry of Grace Nichols’ *The Fat Black Woman’s Poems* (1983) and, finally, the work of Josephine Baker, all contribute to my reflections on the reclaiming of my Black female body.

¹⁸ The link to a performance video of *Confession Publique* as well as a breakdown of the timing of the video appears in the Appendix C.

Chapter six, Hauntings, captures the historical, personal, and diasporic ghosts that rise to the surface through my performances of *Confession Publique*. The social and political haunting of bodies by supposedly past abusive systems (Gordon, 1997) provides me a lens through which to understand my personal diasporic history and the potential dramaturgies that it holds. The shapeshifting and adaptation that is inherent in diasporic movement is expressed through the metaphor of the mythical figure of the Anansi spider (George-Graves, 2014), and the outward movement that characterizes Caribbean “creolization” (Glissant, 2008, as cited in Verstraet, 2017), always present in the body. Rememory (Morrison, 2020) and critical fabulation (Hartman, 2008) help me fill in the gaps and address the lostness of memory that is such a deep component of Black diasporic living.

In the guise of a conclusion, **Chapter 7, My Unworlding**, gathers together the unansweredness of this journey. Finding myself tracing the histories of Caribbean enslavement through my body in the performances of *Confession Publique* continues to be unexpected. In this final chapter, I look at the possibility of lostness as resistance (Akomolafe, 2021), as a component of Blackness. I also consider the potentialities of a dramaturgy that defies historical unsituatedness, a strategy that I hope is both activist and liberatory.

In the pages that follow, I have chosen not to facilitate the reading by dividing my reflections into neat sections identified by subheadings. Anchored in the fundamental premise that Black living is, in and of itself, embodied Black knowledge, I want the reader to be immersed in the flow of ideas, sensations, thoughts; the fluidity (and perhaps fugitivity) of movement. That movement is sometimes suggested by words emboldened on the page,

or by moments of suspension
in time,
in explanation,
in transparency.

I hope for this written contribution to reflect a creative thinking process, not a linear one, not separate from the poetic thinking that *is* the actual performance. I seek for the writing to reflect the

gaps in what I know, in what I understand, as well as the sudden or steady realizations that bubble up from inside the process.

I also need to acknowledge the profound impact that music has had on my work. In order to keep it short, the music that helped with this writing, *BLACK ACID SOUL* by Lady Blackbird (2021), might also help with the reading.

Figure 1.4 *Les ondulations (Undulations)*



Photo by Cloé Pluquet, 2021.

CHAPTER 2 (MY) BLACK METHODOLOGIES

The crisis of legitimacy in qualitative educational research is between foundationalism, positivism and postpositivism, postfoundationalism, critical theory, postmodernism, and poststructuralism. Black feminist truth claims are deemed to be credible within our communities, and our “truths” must be validated from within, with less concern for how outsiders legitimate (or receive and perceive) our assertions. Black women’s lived experiences, and reflections of these socially constructed experiences, are legitimate subjects of research and analysis (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 23).

Evans-Winters almost seems to ridicule the conceptual paradigms that often guide our positionality in qualitative research. This is not necessarily my intention; however, I am aware that I sit on various fences that make navigating the parameters of “legitimate” research a complicated dance. I am an artist who works in academia and I vehemently adhere to the conviction that the knowledge and methods in my body are research-worthy, however unarticulated. I am also a Black woman and a product of a colonial history that has thrived on the premise of divide and rule – whether that division is of territory, peoples, knowledge, bodies. In light of both these considerations, my intuition is to *make whole* my thinking and to anchor it in lived, rather than abstracted experience. This is the perspective from which I situate the methodologies embedded in this research-creation.

In the very first pages of her 1983 collection of essays, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*, writer and feminist Alice Walker, offers us her definition of a “womanist”:

Womanist 1. From womanish. (Opp. of “girlish,” i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, “you acting womanish,” i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered “good” for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: “You trying to be grown.” Responsible. In charge. Serious.

2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally a universalist, as in: “Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige and black?” Ans. “Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower

garden, with every color flower represented.” Traditionally capable, as in: “Mama, I’m walking to Canada and I’m taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me.” Reply: “It wouldn’t be the first time.”

3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless.

4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender. (pp. xi-xii)

The definition is a complex one and, perhaps to some extent, even unclear. “Womanism” has been the source of numerous and varied analyses and interpretations¹⁹ and, since the collection’s publication, the concept has taken on its own momentum. It is neither my intention, nor within the scope of this thesis, to recount and/or participate in the possible significations of Walker’s thinking. Instead, what is of greatest interest to me here is precisely the complexity, the intensity, and the very Blackness of her proposition.

Womanism is a form of feminism that focuses on the experiences, conditions, and concerns of women of color in general, but of Black women in particular. Recognizing that the priorities of white women’s feminism often do not recognize the specific situation of Black women (and women of colour) in society, it anchors anti-racism as a core tenet. Perhaps most importantly, it proposes that Black women’s sense of self depends on this multi-faceted, holistic, seemingly contradictory relationship to our femininity and our culture. Addressing much more than equality of genders, womanism speaks to family, to mothers, to daring and courage, to our sexuality, to our strength and spirituality, to the need for solidarity with (Black) men, for joy, for self-love. It is in this context of an interwoven, opaque quilt²⁰ that is the situation of the Black woman in the world, that I frame the methodology for this research-creation. As a Black woman artist-scholar, I enter into this work

¹⁹ See Hudson-Weems (2020), Phillips (2006), and Maparyan (2012).

²⁰ The metaphor of the quilt is significant in the history of the African American slave woman. In an essay on Black women’s historical expressions of creativity and artistry from her collection *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, Alice Walker recounts the following: “[I]n the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., there hangs a quilt unlike any other in the world. In fanciful, inspired, and yet simple and identifiable figures, it portrays the story of the Crucifixion. It is considered rare, beyond price. Though it follows no known pattern of quilting, and though it is made of bits and pieces of worthless rags, it is obviously the work of a person of powerful imagination and deep spiritual feeling. Below this quilt I saw a note that says it was made by “an anonymous Black woman in Alabama, a hundred years ago.” If we could locate this “anonymous” black woman from Alabama, she would turn out to be one of our grandmothers – an artist who left her mark in the only materials she could afford, and in the only medium her position in society allowed her to use” (1972/1994, p. 407).

holistically, with a desire to consider all of my intersectional complexity in my definition of academic research. Drawing on what I read, what I write, what I know through my body, what has been forgotten, what I dream, what I imagine, who is with me, and who is not, my hope is that, at least in some way, I contribute to the “outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior” of “womanism.”

Examining issues of (post)identity politics through the lens of womanist and mestiza writings, scholar Laura Gillman (2010) asserts that, “*Womanist* [emphasis added] scholars enact individual and collective processes of resistance against various forms of oppression...” (p. 54). She continues:

Such a project requires a centering of Black women’s experiences, and includes more generally a social analysis of the conditions in which the Black community operates, an interrogation of the formation of African American spiritual life as a source of empowerment, and a deconstruction of all of the oppressions that limit self- and collective determination. Since asking questions about the ways in which the lives of Black women are limited by hegemonic practices has immediate personal implications for the womanist scholar who forms part of the community she is researching, the self-reflection of the scholar becomes an integral part of the methodological process. As such, the autobiographical data or subjective perspectives supplied by the womanist scholar, is ... as important for testing out methodological assertions as are the social texts and contexts that are the objects of their critical analyses. (p. 54)

I am careful not to conflate my experiences and interrogations regarding being Black in the Western contemporary dance community with those of Black women who face racist oppression and lack of empowerment where they live. My situation is one that I recognize, in relative terms, as being privileged in the extreme – I have had a successful international performing career that continues; I am a full-time professor in a reputable academic institution; I am well-respected in my professional communities; and I know – carnally – that I am not Black enough to be problematic in most contexts. Nevertheless, as I have come into various realizations in recent years, I am aware that much of my cultural and spiritual background has had to lay fallow as I have (successfully) met the expectations of Western contemporary dance hegemonies. Wondering about how my Blackness manifests in my dance is, perhaps, me wondering about my wholeness and the extent to which I can call on it, cultivate it, in whatever I do. Whether as artist or academic researcher, my

desire is to centre my experiences and sensibilities in subjective, but nevertheless critical, methodologies.

Considering its origins, the development of womanism as a theoretical framework has logically taken place predominantly in the African American context. Nevertheless, I consider this perspective equally applicable to women of the broader African diaspora – our origin stories with regard to the Middle Passage are the same;²¹ so then are at least some of our inheritances. Consequently, even if I am not pursuing a research project that engages a broader Black community, my interrogations of the structures that I have navigated over the course of my dance career challenge “hegemonic practices” as named by Gillman (2010, p. 54). My quest to better understand and articulate the dramaturgical praxis that is my Blackness automatically means calling on all aspects of my person – intellectual, spiritual, self-reflective – as methodology.

From that perspective, and with the complex multi-facetedness of Alice Walker’s definition of womanism as a point of departure, I am called also to think of Martinican poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant’s notion of “opacity” as a way of reflecting on the clarity that might (or might not) be the objective of this study.

In *Poetics of Relation*, in which Glissant (1997) turns the historical particularities of the Caribbean into the embodiment of a transformational relationality that is both aesthetic and political, he speaks to the notion of difference and the consequences of its measurement, i.e., what its categorization does. He writes:

²¹ It is nevertheless important to acknowledge that the evolution of Black women in society in the African American context versus that of the Caribbean is not identical. The Caribbean’s history as island-colonies has meant the need to look outwards for economic survival since the granting of independence from colonial powers over the period between the 1940s and 1960s. Significantly, this has been accompanied by the virtual disappearance of the former slaveowners from the island populations, leaving slave descendants as the majority of those populations. I grew up in a Jamaica that is predominantly Black, even if the relationship between shade of skin and social class remains critical in that society. After the abolition of slavery in the United States, their descendants were numerous enough in a single territory to have developed the cultural groundings that have become the principal reference for virtually all Black diasporic living. (This cannot be separated from the global hegemony of the United States.) However, for African Americans, their post-slavery existence continues alongside their former slaveowners, creating a much different contemporary reality. Race relations between Black and white populations remain at the heart of the African American reality, while Jamaican and Caribbean living is oriented primarily towards the economic struggles of third world reality.

If we examine the process of “understanding” people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought, we discover that its basis is this requirement for transparency. In order to understand and thus accept you, I have to measure your solidity with the ideal scale providing me with grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgments. I have to reduce. (p. 189)

He further explains transparency as the need to reduce according to a scale of one’s own reference: “I relate it to my norm. I admit you to existence, within my system. I create you afresh. But perhaps we need to bring an end to the very notion of a scale. Displace all reduction” (p. 190). If we remove the scale and the reduction it inflicts, opacity becomes what he considers a rightful escape from an imposed legitimacy and, by extension, from the criteria that define that legitimacy:

Agree not merely to the right to difference but, carrying this further, agree also to the right to opacity that is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity. Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components. (Glissant, 1997, p. 190)

It is precisely this notion of non-reducible, opaque complexity that sustains my person and my artistry, and that closely aligns with Alice Walker’s multi-faceted “womanist.” Focusing on the “texture of the weave” as Glissant calls it, rather than on “its components”, allows us to see the whole quilt, in all of its intricacies (including its holes!), and to recognize that they only exist in the irreducibility of that singularity. From this perspective, I call on *all* of my person as I explore my Black dancingness, i.e., both as researcher and researched. From the most analytical to the most subjective, the methods used for this study emerge from the wholeness of my person and, of particular importance, from the forgotten practices of my childhood and of Black diasporic peoples in general – so painfully absent from my successful dance career, and most certainly from academia, and that must inform *my* knowledge production if *I* am to consider it legitimate.

Opacity would perhaps not normally be considered a methodology, but it is an invitation to a way of living that, in my opinion, must also be a way of making art and a way of doing research. The proposition of an irreducible quilt (the “texture of the weave”) suggests that *everything* contributes to its singularity and beauty. Thinking through Glissant, I see irreducibility as not necessarily any less critical or efficacious than the more traditional, “transparent” approaches typical of academia.

In fact, it more closely resembles the complexities of human being and thinking, moving away from the divide and rule strategies that have characterized the colonial project – whether applied to peoples or to people. In the context of this study, the lens offered by irreducibility and opacity is a preferable way to engage in the processes of understanding myself and/in society. By refusing the idea that I am admitted into existence, created afresh, according to an imposed system of values, opacity allows me a decidedly decolonial positioning. It not only invites me to consider all that has informed/informs my person; it is also a call to embrace all articulations of understanding that emerge as I move through the voyage that is this research-creation.

Anchored in Black feminism and Black anticolonial thought, geographer Katherine McKittrick asserts that Black Methodologies are tasked to “work, read, think, create across different sites and knowledges and histories, in order to undo plantocratic and colonial logics that thrive on owning, possessing, having, excluding, extracting” (Prescod-Weinstein, 2021, para. 19). Her approach, articulated in her publication *Dear Science and Other Stories*, uses what she calls “radical interdisciplinarity” (McKittrick, 2021), e.g., associating particle physics to Black liberation, as a way to “upend typical knowledge systems which seek to discipline, through enacting disciplinarity, the unruly cross-disciplinary activities of Black and anticolonial scholars” (Prescod-Weinstein, 2021, para. 47). In her words, “part of the work of Black and anticolonial studies is bound up in the labor of sharing how we live in this world” (para. 49). Consequently, her methodological perspective accounts for the necessary work of teaching, mentorship, friendship, and collaboration:

When we talk about, and experience, creation and improvisation and curiosity, it is important to signal how these acts are laden with learning and studying and watching and listening and hearing and imagining... we can create, and we have created, alternative conditions through which to relate to each other, in spaces that assume we should be disaggregated according to race and disciplinary expertise. (para. 53)

In so doing, she positions Black storytelling – in its multiple forms – as narratives that, through their imprecision and their fundamental relationality, interrupt knowledge systems that would seek to render Blackness transparent – in the words of Glissant – or, to discipline it. Her approach gives credence to the (womanist) interdisciplinarity that is an integral part of this research-creation and to the varying modes of documentation and analysis that have arisen throughout. In addition, the allusion to community that is suggested by her references to teaching, mentorship, friendship, and

collaboration intimately reflect the actual relational contexts that have constituted the creative process of *Confession Publique*. Even if this thesis does not have as its principal focus the actual process that generated the performance – concentrating instead on my experiences in/of/through that performance – it is clear that without the sharing of experiences and stories with the creative team that informed our time together, the reflections that now result would have been impossible. The relationality that is embedded in community speaks to the importance of those exchanges in the achievement of understanding.

McKittrick’s (2021) work focuses on the invaluable notion of “black livingness” and Black ways of knowing, defying the knowledge systems that have emerged from “colonial and plantocratic logics” and offering a rebellious methodology intended to invent ways of living outside of prevalent systems of knowledge. Explaining further, her proposition “takes into account how black intellectual life is tied to corporeal and affective labor (flesh and brains and blood and bones, hearts, souls) by noticing the physiological work of black liberation” (p. 3). Like Glissant and, indirectly, also Walker, McKittrick affirms that these labours are “impossible to track and capture with precision” and asks for “a mode of recognition that does not itemize-commodify black liberation and black embodied knowledge” (p. 3). Being unable (and refusing) to quantify the “affective-physiological-corporeal-intellectual labor” of Black livingness has been critical to the way I have approached the methodological anchoring of this research-creation. Allowing the project to define its own forms and porosities has meant “reinventing the terms of black life outside normatively negative conceptions of blackness, [which] is onerous, joyful, and difficult, yet unmeasured and unmeasurable. Mnemonic black livingness” (p. 3). This approach has encouraged me to trust that my intuitions and catapults into memory – both as tools and as outcomes – get me closer to my Blackness.

The use of stories that emerge from and represent Black livingness is also expressed in S.R. Toliver’s notion of Endarkened storywork (2022). An approach specifically oriented towards qualitative research, the offering hinges on Black diasporic storytelling traditions as alternative modes of scholarship. The rich and innovative methodological proposition – which I will necessarily take the time to break down further – brings together the Endarkened feminist epistemology of Cynthia Dillard (2000), Indigenous storywork of Jo-ann Archibald (2008), and Afrofuturism as articulated by Ytasha Womack (2013). Grounded in stories like the Anansi

folktales of my Jamaican youth (to which I will return in Chapter 6) – traditionally told by women – the approach honours the ways of the griots who were the poets, musicians, scholars, advisors, and diplomats of Western Africa. Passing them down from generation to generation, enslaved Africans adapted the traditional stories to their new realities, using them “to teach, to heal, to bring life” (Toliver, 2022, p. xv). Storytelling, therefore, is not a mere pastime for Black diasporic populations; rather, it has been vital to Black survival, both physical and cultural, before and after the horrors of the Middle Passage. Importantly, as Toliver points out, in academia, researchers are, more often than not, restricted to gathering stories as opposed to using them as a tool for knowledge production and analysis. However, in Black communities, alternative sites such as literature (see the work of, e.g., Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, June Jordan, Audre Lorde, James Baldwin, among others) and music (listen to, e.g., Nina Simone, Jimi Hendrix, Sun Ra, Fela Kuti, Marvin Gaye, Billie Holiday, among others) have historically produced both knowledge and brutally lucid cultural critique. The “storied traditions” of Black people, which reflect their lived experience and cultural anchors, are also a tool for the Black academic researcher and a necessary form of research engagement. In the Preface to *Recovering Black Storytelling in Qualitative Research: Endarkened Storywork*, Toliver (2022) makes an enheartened statement with which I resonate:

Endarkened storywork precedes enslavement and predates the existence of a “structured” academic space. So, in this book and in this moment, I reclaim my history, excavating the storied ways of my ancestors to recover and remember what I have been taught to forget. Through this work, I make myself whole, stitching together parts of me that have been ruptured by the consistent need to place standard research documents above my desire to witness, to exhort, to sing praises, to tell stories. (p. xvi)

The context challenging her whole-making is the academic one; my queries begin first with the world of contemporary dance and, subsequently, expand to encompass academia. In both cases, the “stitching together parts of me” is a conscious and vital methodological, cultural, and political strategy.

The first of the three threads that enweave Endarkened storywork comes from Cynthia Dillard (2000) who, deliberately distancing herself from the principles of Enlightenment that, she argues, dominate social science research and move away from Black cultural ways of being and knowing, instead employs the term, *Endarkened* [emphasis in original] feminist epistemology to articulate

how reality is known when based in the historical roots of Black feminist thought, embodying a distinguishable difference in cultural standpoint, located in the intersection/overlap of the culturally constructed socializations of race, gender, and other identities and the historical and contemporary contexts of oppressions and resistance for African-American [read African diasporic] women (p. 662).

That difference in cultural standpoint refers to the activities, communal experiences and spiritual traditions that Black women have been made to “forget” as part of the historical cultural erasure endemic to the Middle Passage and its wake, and as part of the culture of assimilation necessary to even begin living successfully in a post-slavery Western world. Like many Black women thinkers (e.g., Walker, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, Saidiya Hartman, and others), Toliver directly associates the epistemologies rooted in Black feminist thought with the idea of “remembering.” She writes:

In remembering, we center our full selves, heal and uplift our communities, and create new worlds in which we might live life more fully. In remembering, we rupture traditional ideologies and standard paradigms to grasp at the roots of who we are and how we’ve come to know ourselves, others, and the world. (2022, p. xvi)

The profound importance given to memory and to the act of remembering that it engenders speaks to Black diasporic history in its broadest sense; but, more particularly, it speaks to the historical realities of the women of the Black diaspora – the “mules of the world”²² according to Zora Neale Hurston (1937), who have been instrumental in the birth of the New World, as well as for the cultural and spiritual survival of Black people in it. The subjectivity of memory and of the act of remembering that has often been eschewed by “enlightened” research is a fundamental part of what it means to *know* for Black people. By contrast, therefore, in an endarkened feminist epistemology, remembering – in all its forms – is an act of empowerment and resistance that becomes both an objective and a tool for knowledge production. Acknowledging multiple ways of knowing as its ethical pillar, endarkened feminist epistemology “centers a paradigm of spirituality, one in which

²² “De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see” (Patton, n.d.). Speaking through Janie Crawford, the heroine of her 1937 novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston was praising the Black woman’s strength.

the researcher's scholarship serves humanity and the self, seeks creativity and healing, and centers peace and justice" (Dillard, 2000, p. xvii).

The second thread comes from Coast Salish educator, Jo-Ann Archibald's Indigenous storywork, which is anchored in the traditional use of Indigenous stories to guide the development of the heart, mind, body, and spirit. It is a theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical framework that centres not only the making and telling of stories but, significantly, also focuses on the cultural and spiritual understandings necessary to be able to make meaning from stories. In her chapter "An Indigenous Storywork Methodology" in the 2008 edition of the *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues*, Archibald guides us through an explanation of Indigenous storywork that, though lengthy, I believe is worth sharing:

During a Sto:lo cultural gathering, one of the organizing speakers tells the guests, "My dear ones, it is time to start the work." When these words are spoken, it is time to give serious attention to what is said and done; this is the "cultural work." The words story and work together signal the importance and seriousness of undertaking the educational and research work of making meaning through stories, whether they are traditional or lived experience stories. Seven principles comprise storywork: respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, wholism, interrelatedness, and synergy.

The four Rs of respect, responsibility, reverence, and reciprocity are traditional values and teachings demonstrated toward the story, toward and by the storyteller and the listener, and practiced in the storywork context. The other three principles of wholism, interrelatedness, and synergy shape the quality of the learning process. Indigenous wholism comprises the spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual domains of human development. Wholism also addresses the relationships among the self, family, community, wider world, and the environment. Effective storywork grows out of the actions of interrelatedness and synergy formed by the storyteller, the story, the listener, and the context in which the story is used. (2008, p. 373)

The deep values of interconnection that are reflected in the "work" of the storyteller and the story-listener are critical to the knowledge (both academic and cultural) produced in and disseminated through Indigenous storywork. Of particular import for me is the fact that as we are invited to think about the story being shared, and the subjective methods of its storyteller, we must pay equal attention to the work of the story-listener. Toliver (2022) references the work of Anishinaabe writer, Gerald Vizenor (Bruchac, 1987), who affirms that the story cannot work without a

participant to *actively* listen. “Thus,” she writes, “all involved in the storying process are responsible for contributing to the futurity of a people, for creating reciprocal relationships that will ensure stories will live through them” (Toliver, 2022, p. xix). In the context of this research-creation, this applies directly to the readers of this thesis and to the audience viewers of *Confession Publique* except that, in this case, I do not bear the responsibility for their listening. However, being the researcher and dramaturg from the inside of my own investigations, I wonder about my own story-listening – from the inside. How have I “listened” to my own stories? What are the methodological perspectives that guide this work?

In *Recovering Black Storytelling in Qualitative Research: Endarkened Storywork*, Toliver (2022) shares her methodology through the telling of her own stories and those of six Black girls who were participants in an Afrofuturism writing workshop she gave. She speaks of her own learning:

To become a story listener, I had to recenter Black quilting. It wasn't enough to group ideas into themes and display them as regimented findings. It wasn't enough to identify when their stories occurred, where their stories took place, and who was involved in their stories. Instead, I had to follow the research threads connecting the girls' experiences to the larger quilt that is Black life.... Relying on Black quilting as method made space for me to engage in the Black networked consciousness. (p. xxix)

The image of the quilt appears and reappears in Black history and in the Black imaginary. It is as if the quilt has had the gift of life – it has existed, it has traversed Black time and space, it speaks directly to literal (and non-linear) interconnections between Black bodies and geographies, to Black women's work, to the beauty made from utility, to the gaps in the weave that are filled with lived – often forgotten – experiences. The crisscrossing of lives, of learning, of understanding, requires a “networked consciousness”, like Anansi's spiderweb. My own voyage through *Confession Publique*, both onstage and in the reflections that have been provoked by my experiences during the performances, is reminiscent of the interweaving that is quilting – sometimes the result of clear forethought, at others, revealing the surprises of association or even inattention.

Accidental threads that connect.

The final of the three threads is Afrofuturism, which honours the historical legacy that Black imaginations have had and will have on activism and social change. Toliver describes Afrofuturism as a cultural aesthetic based on speculative creation that seeks to reclaim the past, counter negativity in the present and propose other futures. Taking her lead from the particular perspective of Ytasha Womack (2013), who sees Afrofuturism as not only technologically and scientifically speculative, but also valuing “nature, healing, creativity and mysticism” (p. xxi), Toliver approaches Afrofuturism as an aesthetic mode of communication rather than a literary genre. Positing it as a way of addressing Black realities across time and space, thereby “giving us a way to better understand Black freedom dreams” (p. xxii), she builds on Isiah Lavender’s (2019) proposition of “freedom technologies,” which she sees as critical to her reconceptualization of Afrofuturistic thought. Lavender offers the following definition of freedom technologies:

any kind of practical knowledge that helps Black people solve problems with their environment and in their society, abetting their escape from physical and psychological bondage and thereby allowing them control of their own actions, qualifies as a freedom technology. (p. 26)

Toliver furthers this reflection in the context of Afrofuturism: “In this way, literacy, spirituality, language, trickery, coding, communal connection, intergenerational links, dance, hope, imagination and joy can all be classified as technologies of freedom, as Afrofuturistic practices” (2022, p. xxii).

The notion of “freedom technologies” again encourages a holistic vision of the Black individual, seeing all facets of their activity as potentially speculative practices and contributions to the collective liberatory imaginary. It gathers together the various expressions of Black livingness that have been essential for Black survival and honours the multiple forms of Black narrative and storytelling practices that speak to Black pasts, presents, and futures. Toliver (2022) situates the Anansi storytelling tradition that survived the Middle Passage at the centre of her own Afrofuturist work. Considered a “trickster technology” (p. xxii), the spider-man stories bore messages of rebellion, hope and liberation during slavery and continue to live through the networked consciousness of African slave descendants throughout the Black Atlantic. Anansi’s infinite capacity for metamorphosis constantly blurs what can be considered true or real, focusing instead

on ideals of “creative chaos and freedom from oppression” (Marshall, 2007). Anansi scholar Emily Zobel Marshall further describes the trickster:

they continually change to suit the needs of the people who keep them alive. Embodiments of resistance and opposition, universal archetypes, testers and extenders of boundaries, personifications of liminality and crossroads, they exist in a perpetual stream of transformation... These tricksters of West African origin are symbols of freedom and revolt who will continually be adapted to new circumstances as they can never be fixed, captured, or contained. (2010, p. 190)

Having grown up with Anansi stories as a child, I am particularly drawn to the idea that this mythical folk character, moving freely between the spiritual-unreal and the earthly-real (Toliver, 2022, p. xxiii), be considered an Afrofuturistic freedom technology. Methodologically speaking, the movement between realms, occupying the spaces in-between, the porosity and malleability of boundaries all contribute to the ways in which I consider the performance that has resulted from this research-creation, as well as what it holds/reveals of my Blackness. Toliver’s multilayered proposition of Endarkened storywork emboldens my conception of the storytelling that is at the heart of this research-creation – what are the stories my body carries, holds, bares; how do I understand (i.e., experience, process and analyze) their import; how are they a source of empowerment for me as a Black woman dance artist? My storytelling happens through my body. Though the creative process of *Confession Publique* no doubt has its own stories to tell, it is in the performance of the work – the bringing forth and dissemination of my embodied knowledge that I have been able to become aware of the submerged knowledges that inform this research-creation. Performance is among my “freedom technologies.” As a form of storytelling and site of embodied knowledge production and analysis with respect to my Blackness (and, consequently, my dramaturgy), it is not only the outcome of this research-creation; it is in fact its principal method.

In the introduction to the edited volume, *Black Performance Theory*, Anita Gonzalez and Thomas DeFrantz (2014) make the following statement:

...black sensibilities emerge whether there are black bodies present or not; and [...] while black performance may certainly become manifest without black people, we might best recognize it as a circumstance enabled by black sensibilities, black expressive practices, and black people. (p. 1)

My quest to trace *my* “black sensibilities” and their manifestations in my art can only be “enabled” by my doing, i.e., by the exploration/performance of my “black expressive practices.” These sensibilities, in part a consequence of the historical charge embedded in my made-to-be-Black body, can be likened to what D. Soyini Madison identifies as “subjugated knowledge”²³ (1998, as cited in Johnson, 2005, p. 449); they rise to the surface through the movements, navigations, negotiations and resonances that emerge for me, yes, to some extent during the creation but, predominantly, through the performance of the work. My understandings, intuited but not necessarily known until my iterative encounters with audiences, are necessarily fleshy both in their reflection and their articulation. Notions of Blackness only become *my* blackness through my performed explorations of them. The story-listener – essential for the meaning-making – manifests in the audience as witness.

In her Introduction to the *African American Review*’s special issue On Black Performance, guest editor Soyica Colbert (2012) writes:

Historically aligned with hypervisibility, blackness places the individual on display. Cultural workers have used the transformative power of performance—repeated actions presented before an audience that carry with them the history of their recurrence—to shape viewers’ and listeners’ perceptions of blackness. Working against the notion that categories of identity, including racial ones, are fixed, performance strategically uses improvisation to instate and destabilize subjectivity. (p. 275)

The possibility (or even necessity) for metamorphosis that is endemic to performance reminds me that the reality of Blackness that I explore is, in fact, a process, rather than a condition – I constantly redefine, reshape, and re-signify that Blackness through its very exploration in performance, exploiting the (Anansi-like) fluidity of identity categories that liberates my subjectivity.

Examining the realities of Black Brazil, Renata de Lima Silva (Kabilaewatala) and Jordana Dolores Peixoto (2022) see Black performance as an aesthetic and kinesthetic expression of experience, defining it as “organized events or behaviors that are manifested by creating, in those who perform

²³ In the sense of Foucault, i.e., knowledges that have been explicitly disqualified as inadequate or insufficiently elaborated. Imagining these as not satisfying the required level of scientificity, his examples include the knowledges of the psychiatric patient, the ill person, or the delinquent (1980, p. 82).

or in those who witness, an immediate connection with the idea of blackness, which here should be understood as synonymous with black identity” (Santos, 2019, as cited in Peixoto & Silva, p. 6). Creating a connection with my idea/s of Blackness becomes an active practice rather than simply a conceptual positioning – a practice that Silva and Peixoto consider a “countercolonial methodology” (p. 9).

The past, present, and future of Black performance is intimately related to the constitution of Black identities, to the aesthetic forms that are their expression, and to successive freedom movements. As described by Soyica Colbert, Black performers “attenuated the hold on blackness on display atop the auction block” (p. 275). They took advantage of the ambiguity of racial science in antebellum performance to produce alternative theories of Blackness, “unhinging blackness from the ‘truth’ of the body, and thereby uncoupling race from an impoverished concept of the biological body” (p. 276). Exploiting their ability to shape the body through the manipulation of appearances, Black performers have historically engaged in the recuperation of Blackness and of the Black body *through movement*.

In “Black Performance II: Knowing and Being” in *The Black Scholar*, Stephanie Leigh Batiste (2019b) speaks of the capacity of performance to illuminate Black systems of knowing and ways of being. Offering a live trajectory of social experience and imagination that is both improvisational and planned, Black performance creates the possibility for transformations of knowledge, and experience of race, self, and community (p. 1). She further asserts:

Performance provokes much in the space of the unspoken and unspeakable. It offers an affective play with and playing upon. It relies on kinetic and symbolic shifts in the mind and muscle, bone and skin, breath and sound. It plays in a layered relationship with the capacity of Blackness to be about itself and about things beyond itself. Blackness too provokes beyond its intentionality—it performs. Black performance carries histories of race onto the stage and performs with, in lieu of, and regardless of its fact. (p. 1)

Relating the viscosity of performance to the viscosity of Blackness is critical to the methodology of this research-creation – it speaks to my experience of/within *Confession Publique* as well as to the embodied engagement that has contributed to my reflections. The historically unspoken informs, plays with, and plays upon my corporeal experiences of my Blackness, manifesting in my

“mind and muscle, bone and skin, breath and sound,” while, simultaneously, that very Blackness seeks to define and redefine itself, transform and mutate, perform.

Black cultural production is intimately associated with historical and contemporary performances of alterity, whether they manifest in the in/visibilizing “avatars” of fugitive slave Ellen Craft or conceptual artist Adrian Piper (McMillan, 2015), in the “strategic ambiguity” that allows Oprah Winfrey or Michelle Obama to “stay at the postracial table” (Joseph, 2018), or in the taking on of hypersexualized alter-egos by rapper Nicki Minaj (Hobson, 2018) and Jamaican dancehall queens (Niaah, 2010). Whether Black women perform hypervisibility or invisibility, the (re)presentation of our Black bodies remains a necessary marker for understanding the (fluid) identities of Blackness in Western society. By extension, such exploration is also pertinent in my art form of contemporary dance, with respect to the ways in which my body has been/is perceived, but also to my own perceptions of my Black performing body.

Figure 2.1 Empty stage, *Confession Publique*



Photo by Cloé Pluquet, 2021.

Black studies and anticolonial thought offer methodological practices wherein we read, live, hear, groove, create, and write across a range of temporalities, places, texts, and ideas that build on existing liberatory practices and pursue ways of living the world that are uncomfortably generous and provisional and practical and, as well, imprecise and unrealized (McKittrick, 2021, p.5).

Moving across, through and with reading, writing, listening to music, talking aloud, talking to others, performing, going for walks, revisiting thoughts, sensations, significations, it is my desire that the epistemological underpinnings that inform the *doing* of this research-creation *not* be seen as in any way separate from the methods used for that *doing*. Storytelling is a cultural and ancestral inheritance. As much an epistemological positioning as a methodological strategy, it manifests in the stories told by my body during the performances of *Confession Publique*; in the prose and poetic texts that appear throughout this thesis; it informs the choice for narrativity, for vernacular language, and even for the structure of this academic submission; it accounts for the untold, the

unsaid, the unexplained, the gaps. I have created and felt stories across times and forms in order to tell the one that unfolds here.

My artistic practice is the fundamental anchor of this research-creation project. It is as much the subject being explored as the tool for its exploration as the manifestation of the knowledge produced. The embodiment that is essential to all of the above means that “the act itself supersedes its discussion” (DeFrantz, 2002, p. x). The knowledge I have gleaned about my experience of my Blackness and the power of its dramaturgy has only been possible thanks to the movements, navigations, negotiations, and resonances that emerged for me beginning with the in-studio creation, and then magnified during the subsequent performances of *Confession Publique*. My fleshy understandings have manifested in different modes of writing, situating the interrogations and analysis in terms of my own experience, i.e., “Blackness” becoming *my* Blackness, informed by *my* sensations and sense-making, and generating dramaturgical meaning within and from my physical and somatic self.

Before diving into the logistical details of the doing, some contextualization of how *Confession Publique* came about seems appropriate. The following is from the website of MAYDAY, the dance company of Montreal choreographer, Mélanie Demers:

MAYDAY: distress call dispatched mainly by boats and aeroplanes. In use since the early 20th century, probably derived from the French expression “Venez m’aider!” (Come help me!).

For the choreographer and artistic director of MAYDAY, Mélanie Demers, the stage is a platform for performers to reflect as a group, a space for calling into question the role of the artist and the genre of theatre, and where our collective and individual fates are pondered. She does not subject audiences to accusatory harangues, nor does she wallow in a mood of sterile resignation: she simply draws our attention to the dark side of the human condition. Her works are at once a cry for help and a call for change. Hence the name MAYDAY: in the eyes of Mélanie Demers this word is imbued with equal parts hope and despair. (MAYDAY Danse, 2022)

The choice to work with Mélanie Demers was an obvious one for me. We met through a mutual friend and developed a friendship previous to starting our professional collaboration some eight years ago, when I stepped in as dramaturg for the creations of her company, MAYDAY. I have

worked closely with her on all of her last six productions: *Animal Triste*, *Danse Mutante*, *Post Coïtum*, *La Goddam Voie Lactée*, *Cabaret Noir*, and *Déclarations* and have consequently become familiar with her way of working and with the sociopolitical considerations that are part of her artistic signature and human interest. Most importantly, we have developed a relationship of deep trust and mutual respect. We share similar curiosities regarding our field of dance and the profound interdisciplinarity that shapes the way we both practice it, and we also share concerns about the role of art in society and who we are as Black women and mothers of Black children. Mélanie's choreographic aesthetic, desire and method all centre the performer, regardless of the subject or thematic focus of the work. It is this fundamental positioning, and the confidence that I had knowing that I could entrust myself to her creative hands that led me to ask her to choreograph a solo on me, using only my individual dramaturgy as the starting point. Importantly, although it was by no means a primary focus nor at the centre of our considerations during the creation of *Confession Publique*, I was also aware of, and curious about the encounter of our respective Blacknesses. I am a Black woman of Jamaican descent who has enjoyed a successful career in white-dominated Western concert dance. Mélanie is of mixed Haitian and white Québécois heritage – seen as a Black woman – who, likewise, has enjoyed professional success in white-dominated Western concert dance. Even though we had already met in the studio on several occasions in our usual relationship of choreographer and dramaturg, it was clear that the shift in roles and responsibilities related to me becoming the performer in her work might well ask different questions of that particular commonality.

At the outset, my invitation to her was to participate in a choreographic and dramaturgical research-creation experiment, focused on defining my corporeal dramaturgy and exploring its impact on the dynamics of the creative process. However, very early on in our conversations, Mélanie expressed the desire that the creative process resemble, as closely as possible, a full-fledged creation as it would happen with her company MAYDAY, rather than an academic 'experiment'. Consequently, funding was obtained from provincial and federal arts councils and she was able to surround herself with her usual team of collaborators and administrative and production support (pertinent biographies appear in Appendix B). This fact had a resounding impact on the production, not the least of which was the ultimate integration of the rehearsal director, Anne-Marie Jourdenais, into the performance as witness, helper... (more on that later). This also meant that *Confession Publique*

was presented on the usual circuit for contemporary dance programming in Montreal. Initially, this seemed like nothing more than an unexpected opportunity to discover the impact of the work on its audiences; but, subsequently, the performances revealed themselves to be my primary means of exploring and experiencing my *dramaturgical Blackness* and its implications for me as performer and dramaturg.

Demers' aesthetic sensibilities and choreographic methods rely heavily on the layering of tasks for the performer, provoking my labour to the surface so to speak, and making it a critical component of the work's dramaturgy and of the performance interpretation. In this approach, traditional rehearsals quickly lose their pertinence. During the course of the creative process, various parameters emerge that provide the framework for the actual labour of the performance. However, the improvisatory foundation of the choreographic content, the lack of counts or specific musical cues, and the reality of being able to achieve the physical and emotional states that determine those elements *only* after living each preceding moment, all contribute to the difficulty of rehearsals in the traditional sense. The living of each moment is only made real by/in the presence of an audience. Referring to Alain Platel's 1995 production mentioned earlier, Ann Cooper Albright (1997) writes: "[...] dances like *La Tristeza Complice* ask the audience to be willing to stay with the performance, even when the situation becomes disturbing or uncomfortable. For me, this is when the act of watching transforms into the act of witnessing" (p. xxii). Similarly to *La Tristeza*, the nature of *Confession Publique* also requires "witnessing" rather than simple "watching" in order for me to engage in the depth of emotional and physical transformation the performance requires – not unlike the work required of the storylistener in Archibald's (2008) Indigenous storywork mentioned in the Introduction. Consequently, it was not the process of creation that necessarily revealed the fullness of my dramaturgical Blackness; rather, it was through the fact of being "witnessed" that I began the journey of discovery that informs this writing.

Officially, the creative process was organized in three, three-week rehearsal periods, for a total of 75 hours, spread over the three months preceding the premiere in November 2021. Rehearsals took place mostly in the studios of Circuit-Est centre chorégraphique where Mélanie Demers is a resident member and choreographer, with two technical residencies – one very early in the process in September 2021 with the participation of all four artistic collaborators (music, lights, scenography, costumes), and a second in the week preceding the premiere. I mention these

residencies in particular because they were the beginning of my realization that being “witnessed” generated an entirely different somatic experience of the performance for me. I of course knew what it meant to perform in front of an audience; but somehow, this process left me more *navigable space* than I was used to as a performer. Critical to this *impression of space* was the fact that the essence of the work was not to practice and make perfect one sequence or another; rather, it was to do the practicing – the labour of the practicing – live, witnessed. This is something I will return to later on. Since the choreographer and I already shared both a professional collaboration and a friendship, many conversations that directly influenced the creative process – intimate, philosophical, political, choreographic – took place over several months. These escaped all documentation but their contribution to my thinking and to the final outcome attests to the importance of sharing, community and orality in the creation of the piece. The culminating full-evening work was presented as a public performance at *La Chapelle scènes contemporaines* in Montreal as part of their regular programming for the 2021-2022 season. Because of the importance of the act of performance in the understandings that have emerged in this research-creation, I believe it important to indicate the number of performances that have taken place between the premiere and this submission, as well as when they took place.

November 2021 (Montreal)	Open general + 6 shows	La Chapelle scènes contemporaines
March 2022	Open general + 1 show	Espace Le Vrai Monde? (Ahuntsic)
June 2022	Open general + 3 shows	Festival TransAmériques (Montreal)
March 2023	Open general + 3 shows	La Nouvelle Scène (Ottawa)
June 2023	1 show	Monodrama Festival (Luxemburg)
July 2023	Open general + 2 shows	ImPulsTanz Festival (Vienna)
December 2023	Open general + 4 shows	Usine C (Montreal)

There has been something inexplicably valuable for the deepening of my reflections about performing *Confession Publique* some 25 times (including the general rehearsals) over the past two years, to full houses, and at three-to-six-month intervals. With the intensity of regular rehearsals now past, there has been time to re-encounter the work (and myself!) with every iteration. And somehow, where I need to go inside of myself to perform the work – which is not a place of

rehearsal – has become increasingly accessible, not to mention significantly helped by this writing! It is revealing that in spite of there being eight months between, for example, the performances in June 2022 at the Festival TransAmériques in Montreal and those of La Nouvelle Scène in March 2023 in Ottawa, the show was deemed *ready* after only two afternoons of rediscovery in the studio – *ready* meant: I needed to be *witnessed*.

Over the course of the creative process, I began with earnest intentions of recording multiple conversations during each rehearsal day as well as regularly filming key explorations. It became quickly evident that in order to accomplish that, I had to be stepping in and out of my performer role with a frequency that proved counterproductive for everyone concerned. In addition, if I was to honour the choice made with Mélanie Demers to keep the process as true to real as possible (precisely in order to note *what emerged* of my Blackness, *not what we imposed* of it), then I needed to trust that the dramaturg-researcher inside of the process would work her latent magic. I leaned on my journal as a trusty repository for things to think about, feedback, reflections, unfinished thoughts, conceptual musings, evocations. Having these all in the same place, sometimes on the same page or even in the same sentence, ultimately kept me in the viscerality and intuition of the experience instead of in the more rigid *modus operandi* that stepping out to film would have required. I considered a daily rereading and/or rewriting of the journal entries in the form of prose or poetic text but, instead, I made a conscious choice to trust the intuitive impulses that manifested. What did emerge was a series of personal audio recordings (voice notes) in lieu of daily journal entries or syntheses that proved extremely valuable, as it also permitted me to discover the importance of orality both as method and conceptual anchor for my methodology. It is significant to note that it was precisely my decision to ‘suspend’ traditional documentation that allowed me to realize that what was of primary interest to me was not in fact the creative process in its strict sense, but, rather, the creation (the dramaturgy) that emerged in/through/on me whenever I engaged in the tasked labour proposed by the choreographer and was witnessed by an audience.

The first section of this chapter is dedicated to epistemological positionings that anchor my methodologies and storytelling looms large as both tool and outcome. Orality is perhaps implied in the idea of storytelling but in the context of this study, it has assumed importance as a way of recording impressions, thoughts, sensations, as well as of analyzing and synthesizing those impressions, thoughts, sensations. In short, I spent a lot of time talking to myself even *before* any

significant writing occurred! Because of its inextricability with *doing*, this small return to epistemology seems appropriate here. In the preface to her edited volume *The Caribbean Oral Tradition: Literature, Performance, and Practice*, Martinican poet and scholar Hanétha Vété-Congolo describes the concept of interorality:

A deficit of orality is a “lack of experience” made up [...] by the overflow of writings. As a compass, orality finds its expression through speech. Among the components of orality, speech provides direction, but is not the direction, for the real concern of orality is to answer to the question of how we live experience. [...] The interorality that emerges from Caribbean societies was constituted by multiple separations: separation of people from Africa, separation of the subjects from their own selves, separation of families within the plantation system, separation of the subjects from their primordial languages, and finally, separation between writing and orality. (2016, p. x)

Unconsciously honouring the oral storytelling traditions that are part of my cultural ancestry, I talked my way through several moments and performances of *Confession Publique*, either according to particular thematic preoccupations or just as ways of mapping my thinking. The voice in which I spoke was liberating and embodied and, admittedly, I initially felt ‘not academic enough.’ However, the kind of thinking that emerged from my speech musings was markedly different from writing directly onto the page. I discovered more *space* inside the thoughts; they were seemingly less rigid and left more interstice for me to fill with images, intellectual reflection, or poetic inquiry. The fact of being able to record these voice notes spontaneously using my cell phone meant that they could discretely appear at random moments – just before or after an improvisation, before or after a performance, walking home, on the metro, sitting in the bar after a show... Sometimes I transcribed them fully; at others, I simply relistened and used a single word or phrase as flight. Effectively telling myself stories, I discovered my vernacular voice as method, meaning, and analysis. Vété-Congolo closes her preface with the following: “Speech ties and unties, takes into account what comes before and what comes after, blesses and curses, gives and holds back. Speech is memory (it looks back to the past) and promise (it anticipates the future)” (p. xiv). I was able to find the words to hold the images and sensations that gushed to the surface across temporalities during the performances thanks to trusting the thoughts of the voice. Many of the personal prose and poetry texts in this thesis have their origins in these oral spewings. This kind of writing has become my spoken voice on the page – greatly inspired by the texts that have been part

of this journey with me (Toni Morrison, Grace Nichols, Saidiya Hartman, Bayo Akomolafe, Édouard Glissant, and so many others).

As much as voice notes permitted a certain spontaneity, after experiencing one “explicitation interview” facilitated by an experienced practitioner²⁴ – during which the significance of my maternal grandmother in this process became manifest – I realized the need for me to be able to access thoughts, feelings, and sensations that navigate beneath the surface, somehow more connected to a kind of subconscious and visceral thinking than to fully articulated reflections. Inspired by psychologist Pierre Vermersch’s “explicitation interviews” (1997, 2007, 2009) (a guided approach that highlights the merits of introspection as a research method and brings the subjective experience of a particular moment back to a place of conscious articulation) and stream of consciousness writing techniques familiar in my pedagogical, creative, and somatic work, I indulge in what I call somatic writing. Sometimes in response to the visualization of a (moment in a) scene, other times prompted by a particular word in my journal or even a body part, these non-linear texts allowed me to revisit my experiences and thoughts, taking some of those into improvisational imaginaries. They are fed with free associations, repetitions, recollections, sensory observations, imagery. What emerged – including their seeming disjointedness – informed much of the prose and poetic writing that appears in this thesis. Importantly, however, the approach not only facilitates poetic associations, it also encourages shifts beyond the obvious focal points and towards apparently less significant elements, opening up further possibilities for revealing dramaturgical content and/or for intuitive analysis. A concrete example of this (which ultimately did not make it fully into the body of this thesis) might be the riffing that took me from writing about the gold chainmail-style dress I wear at the beginning of *Confession Publique* to the ostentatious bling of hip-hop to not being a hip-hopper myself to whatever else I am not to Jamaican dancehall to skimpy clothes to nipples. Nipples (not breasts) brought me to the poem *Pedestal*, which appears at the end of chapter 5: MILK or I, the nude black female.

²⁴ As part of a research study on research-creation methodologies by the Groupe de recherche interdisciplinaire en Arts Vivants (GRIAV) at UQAM, I was invited to be one of three artist-researchers interviewed in June 2022 by Prof. Caroline Raymond, using the *explicitation interview* techniques developed by French psychologist Pierre Vermersch. Transcript in Appendices.

As mentioned previously, continuing to perform *Confession Publique* since the premiere has proved invaluable for my research-creation interrogations and accounts for much of the reflection in this thesis. Documentation of my experiences has shifted to periodic scribbled thoughts in a journal and precious voice notes, predominantly on the days immediately surrounding the performance dates – during the technical rehearsals, warming up on my own before a show, back in the hotel room after a chat with an audience member. Importantly, the time between the moments of these reflections and my revisiting them for my writing has been a productive liminal space, not unlike the embodied time between the performance occasions themselves. It has allowed a submerged process of reflection that is anchored in what I can only describe as an *unconscious non-thinking of knowing*. Accessing this knowing would have been unlikely had I committed to a less intuitive process which might not have allowed my Black livingness to infiltrate my conscious thinking in the way that it has.

Figure 2.2 *Je suis ca (I am that)*



Photo by Cloé Pluquet, 2021.

CHAPTER 3 MY BLACKNESSES

How soft is the blackness as it falls. It falls in silence and yet it is deafening, for no other sound except the blackness falling can be heard. The blackness falls like soot from a lamp with an untrimmed wick. The blackness is visible and yet it is invisible, for I see that I cannot see it. The blackness fills up a small room, a large field, an island, my own being. The blackness cannot bring me joy but often I am made glad in it. The blackness cannot be separated from me but often I can stand outside it. The blackness is not the air, though I breathe it. The blackness is not the earth, though I walk on it. The blackness is not water or food, though I drink and eat it. The blackness is not my blood, though it flows through my veins. The blackness enters my many-tiered spaces and soon the significant word and event recede and eventually vanish: in this way I am annihilated and my form becomes formless and I am absorbed into a vastness of free-flowing matter. In the blackness, then, I have been erased. I can no longer say my own name. I can no longer point to myself and say "I." In the blackness my voice is silent. First, then, I have been my individual self, carefully banishing randomness from my existence, then I am swallowed up in the blackness so that I am one with it.... (Jamaica Kincaid, 1983, p. 46)

This description of Blackness by Caribbean-born American poet and writer Jamaica Kincaid reflects all the contradictions and ambiguities I feel with regard to my own Black identity. I have lived with, alongside, next to, in spite of, away from, beyond Black-ness all my life; and yet, the impalpability of this invented and yet undefinable feature of my person remains its most challenging characteristic. I am particularly intrigued by how much *being Black* can account for the way I am seen, the communities I participate in or am seen to be part of, the cultural references and collective memory that somehow seem to hang off my skin. I resist the reductivity of the label it imposes even as I treasure the sense of belonging it can sometimes offer. Blackness, for me, is contextual and in a state of constant morph; it is about the in-betweens of my bastard origins, colonially depicted as Black.

I am a light brown-skinned woman from Jamaica, with kinky dark brown hair and green eyes. My father was a dark brown-skinned man and my cousins from his side of the family range from very dark-skinned with straight black or very kinky hair to light-coloured skin, hair and eyes. My mother was a very light-skinned woman with brown curly hair; her father was apparently part German (she never knew him) and my grandmother passed as white in colonial Jamaica. Her mother was Scottish; her brother's skin resembled 98% dark chocolate. Growing up in Jamaica, where more

than 90% of the population identifies as Black, my light skin betrayed a privileged social class and influenced what belonging meant. Moving to Canada as a teenager, I discovered Black, even as I felt brown. Dance subsequently drew me to Europe where I lived longer than I have lived anywhere else in my life; being Black there was not the Black I knew – the Black I had been became exotic – not too Black, and nevertheless privileged. After all, I was Jamaican – Bob Marley, Usain Bolt... everybody's darlings.

Since my formative years in Jamaica, I have lived in contexts characterized by very different colonial histories – mostly in Belgium, which was a more recent colonial power with dominion over today's republics of the Congo and Rwanda in central Africa; and Canada, which had Black and Indigenous slavery on its territory (albeit less widespread than for its neighbour to the south) but exercised no colonial power beyond its own borders. Each of these situations generated its own particular Blackness for me, each distinct from the other, all real and felt and visceral. I am interested then in perspectives on Blackness that solicit and evoke my histories – beginning with the birth of the Caribbean as the foundational crossroads of racial capitalism – but that also consider the multiplicity of Blacknesses that I have experienced. The (essentially Black) nationhood of Caribbean populations is characterized by significant ethnic diversity and, consequently, the region boasts what could be described as a heterogeneous *cultural Blackness*. This did not prepare me for the Otherness that Blackness meant in North America or Europe. The legacy of enslaved Black bodies on American soil and the presence of formerly colonial Black bodies in European metropolises provoked very different relationships for me to being Black, to being seen as Black, and to living Blackness.

Throughout my career, my dancing body has navigated these nuances mostly unconsciously I realize (the blind spot mentioned in the introduction). It seems strange to say at sixty years old, but I have never really noticed what it *feels* like to be Black on stage until *Confession Publique*. I have experienced excitement, political conviction, sisterhood, trepidation, alienation, pride, anger, fear – all in relation to being Black in various contexts. *But actually taking the time to experience what Black feels like to me in performance is an entirely new exercise*. Most particular is the fact that it is not a one-time realization or understanding, and that *I somehow need an-other to be Black with or in relation to*. The gaze of another person on my person during the performances of *Confession*

Publique is what has awoken the torrent of images, impressions, projections, sensations that have invaded my consciousness over the course of this research-creation.

Any experience of Blackness, by definition, requires engaging with the historical and contemporary status of Other which, in turn, cannot be separated from the notion of the human or, in Sylvia Wynter's (2003) complex and rich analysis, from the Western bourgeois conception of the *optimal human*, "Man" (p. 260). The Enlightened, rational Man appears as the ontological signification of whiteness, biologically selected, according to the tenets of the scientific racism that upheld colonialism. The (contemporary) ideal of middle and upper class, scientifically educated, white, male, heterosexual humanity was/is the cornerstone of a Western history that was/is fundamentally racist, violent, and constitutive of global exploitation and erasure. It is this conception of Man, and its ongoing "over-representation as if it were the human itself" (p. 260) that weaves an unbreakable thread between the "old and new hierarchies of humanness" (Wright, 2006, p. xvii) that continue to haunt our present landscape. The ongoing quest to "secure the well-being" of Man – that narrowed version of the human – necessarily requires the ongoing exclusion of all Others. From Wynter's perspective, the invention of race serves precisely to distinguish Man from his human others, specifically Black, indigenous, and female, projecting only a very limited model of worthy human life and, consequently, justifying the objectification, commodification, domination, and effective erasure of those populations. In contemporary terms, assimilation (also to be read as invisibilization), may offer a certain survival for some, but only insofar as there is acceptance of the universality of the values (and therefore of the superiority) of Man. Wynter (1994) argues that "humanness and North Americanness are always already defined, not only in optimally White terms, but also in optimally middle-class (i.e., both Simi Valley,²⁵ and secondarily Cosby-Huxtable TV family²⁶), variants of these terms" (p. 44). The pervasive nature of that "North Americanness" (which I equate with Western Europeanness) contributes to the ambivalences that I feel towards a predominantly white contemporary dance as a Black woman from a former slave colony. Ultimately, I realize that these ambivalences are intimately intertwined with my experience of

²⁵ Simi Valley is a suburban city in the southeast region of California and is part of the Greater Los Angeles Area.

²⁶ The 1980s American sitcom hit *The Cosby Show* features an upper-middle class African American family.

being Black; they are part of my subjective engagement with the contexts in which I find myself – whether on or off stage – traversing my body, repeatedly and viscerally.

In her monograph *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora*, Michelle Wright introduces the idea of “Others from within” and “Others from without”:

Even peoples defined by the same racial category can be rendered Other in different ways. In looking at Black populations in the West, the first difference we encounter is between those blacks brought into the “home space” of the colonizer – African Americans [Others from within] – and those who were brought to a “third space” – the Caribbean – in which neither blacks nor whites originally understood that space as their “home.” (2004, p. 7, emphasis in original)

Without comparing the realities of Jamaican Blackness with those of African American Blackness, in predominantly Black Jamaica, where class bias rather than national identity or patriotism was the major concern, I experienced being an Other from within – I was often called a *red nigga* as a child because of my light skin. That sometimes implied that I was not Black enough; more often than not, however, the legacy of slavery and colonialism meant my skin colour was to be envied. As a teenager, I was referred to as a *browning* – Jamaican slang for a light-skinned Black woman – implying in historical terms that my ancestry included relationships between Black slave descendants and white slaveowners or colonial rulers. Light brown skin was, and still is, read as a marker of privilege and access in Jamaican society.²⁷ However, arriving in Canada at the age of fifteen, I learned that even my light brown skin was considered Black, with myriad implications for how I was perceived by the society as well as how I was to situate myself within it. I became an Other from without. Minority Blackness meant that I acknowledged every Black person I passed on the street; I sought solidarity, comfort, community. And I found it among brown, Black, *and white* Caribbean people. Somehow, this was the cultural Blackness of home. Ironically, subsequently living in Belgium, where the Black population is predominantly of Congolese and Rwandan origin, my Blackness found kinship in the more familiar African American references – the music, the literature, the language – things I could belong to from afar. Up close, familiar food and camaraderie came from the Blackness of Belgium’s racially mixed *métisse* community (one

²⁷ The still rampant use of skin bleaching creams, particularly in the slums of Jamaica, is a testament to this ongoing belief. See Alaine Robinson, 2012; Charles, 2009; 2003.

Black African parent, one white parent) – I had greater cultural affinities with this culturally and ethnically hybrid group than to their purely African counterpart. Since leaving Jamaica, the relational quilt woven by my Blacknesses has been a constant dance between belonging, alienation, privilege, and, more recently, activism; it has determined how Black I am in one situation versus another, how that Blackness manifests, and in relationship to whom. As different as each is to the other, they are all real, felt, visceral and, often, concurrent.

As Wright (2004) observes, “for peoples of African descent living in majority-white nations in the West, *the harmful and the healing* [emphasis added] potential of Black self-consciousness, or subjectivity, are both quite clear and quite real” (p. 2). My Black history has ultimately been shaped by Western racism. The history of my island home has been shaped by the racial capitalism that defined the colonial project. Is my Blackness also shaped by that racism? Or is it of my choosing? How does my Blackness relate to my Black history? Is Blackness something attributed to me or is it something I feel? Does it sit on my skin or is it something I experience? The invitation to sit with these questions in my body through performance is not something Mélanie ever proposed directly. Interestingly enough, it has emerged through a focus during the creative process on my individual experiences, stories, predilections, making the actual performance a kind of subconscious *bodying* of their traces. My impression from the inside of the creation and of my own performing body is that it is precisely because I was not following any specific indication regarding my Black experience that it has been able to bubble up to the surface between the cracks of confusion that my Black living is made of.

light skin light eyes
not black enough
uptown house uptown clothes
not black enough
uptown slang uptown car
not black enough
red nigga no nigga
not black enough
uptown maid uptown gardener
not black enough

sudden lull...

light skin light eyes

too black

three knives three forks

too black

private school private thoughts

too black

still your hands when you talk

too black

sudden lull...

think, think more

black enough

get up, stand up

black enough

sudden lull...

young and exotic

brown

step them up social

brown

wanna be blacker

brown

losing the slang

brown

sudden lull...

making art
not as black
another continent
not as black
maybe anonymous
not as black
visible invisible
not as black
black on black
not black enough

sudden lull...

remember
black enough
reposition
black enough

what is black

sudden lull...

(Written during this chapter on Blackness, April 2023)

During the course of the hour and fifteen minutes that I am on stage, perhaps because the indications are relatively few – if not simple!! – I conjure and reconjure moments of too black, not black enough, brown, blacker... And each makes me move differently.

It is important to reiterate that my intention for this thesis is not to engage in any exhaustive study of the concept of Blackness. Considering my own experiences, it would be difficult for me to engage in the formulation of any single definition or even to imagine that one might exist. Michelle Wright (2015b) affirms that "...locating Blackness as a determinable 'thing,' as a 'what' or a 'who,' gives us a conceptualization that exhibits the unnerving qualities of a mirage: from a distance, it appears clearly cogent, but up close, Blackness evanesces ..." (p. 2). As much as Blackness is influenced (to not say defined) by the social and political histories that link Black peoples to their African origins, it is safe to say that it cannot be attributed simply to the Black body. Not all Black bodies consider themselves Black; not all people who see themselves as Black share the common physical trait of Black skin (whatever *Black* might mean in this context). The epidermis therefore cannot be the signifier. Blackness may be in the eye of the beholder (emphasis on the visuality); but it is most definitely not skin deep for those who feel themselves to be embodying Blackness. *There is an experience of Blackness. There are experiences of Blacknesses.* Performance studies theorist E. Patrick Johnson (2003) describes Blackness as the "inexpressible yet undeniable racial experience of black people – the ways in which the 'living of blackness' becomes a material way of knowing." He continues, "blackness resides in the liminal space of the psyche where its manifestation is neither solely volitional nor without agency" (p. 8). The critical factor then is *my experience as the agent of my Blackness* – the bringing into materiality of my physical, emotional, sociohistorical self.

The in-between – that "liminal space of the psyche" – is the space of Black lived experience, the space of awareness of my direct engagement with feeling, with sensation, with being in material embodiment. Wright (2015b) further situates this idea, anchoring it in time and space and, therefore, to specific moments or contexts of "performance":

Pursuing this question requires focusing on the phenomenology of Blackness – that is, *when* and *where* it is being imagined, defined, and performed and in what locations, both figurative and literal. Blackness cannot be located on the body because of the diversity of bodies that claim Blackness as an identity. Blackness, then, is largely a matter of perception or...made up of moments of performance in which performers understand their bodies as Black. Furthermore, it is not necessary for the audience to understand such performances as Black...this further suggests that Blackness is in the mind of the performers. (p. 3, emphasis in original)

It is the Blacknesses that manifest in/through my dancing body in *Confession Publique*, the ways in which they express themselves, and what histories inform them that piques my curiosity and that I hope to articulate. *My Blackness is my performance of it*. Wright suggests that an audience's understanding of that performance as Black is not essential to my embodiment of it. I share her view; nevertheless, I am deeply aware that it has been the specific context of theatrical performance, in that moment of being "witnessed" (in the sense evoked by Cooper Albright [1997, p. xxii] in my Introduction) by the predominantly white audiences, that my various Blacknesses – historical and contemporary – seem to have risen to the surface of my skin and my psyche. For Johnson (2003), those performances are "productions of blackness" (p. 2). What is the particular Blackness produced in/by *Confession Publique*? This is the principal question addressed by this research-creation thesis and the remaining chapters will each capture some part of the puzzle of *whens* and *wheres*. In the interim, it is useful to consider what Johnson sees as characterizing that "production of blackness," i.e., the "mutual constructing/deconstructing, avowing/disavowing, and expanding/delimiting" that are part of Black *being* in a white world and, therefore, perhaps also constitutive of Black culture (p. 2). There is little doubt that the ambivalences he describes are present for me throughout my time of being "witnessed" by the audience – a constantly re-routing flow of questioning of history, of memory, of certainty, of doubt, of belonging, of defying, of hiding, of exposing, of accepting, of refusing, of hoping, of dreaming. The greatest challenge that is *Confession Publique* is simply being, that state that does not require that I navigate my degrees of Blackness, that does not require the extra layer of skin. Moving beyond the epidermis as signifier, the being (or ontology) of (my) Blackness is its constant adaptation and (re)definition, the movement that is imposed by diasporic unfixedness, both historical and personal.

One of the conceptual emergences spawned by this reality is the notion of fugitivity as a "rhetoric of resistance," to borrow the words of Nick J. Sciullo (2019), a tenet that is central to current (predominantly African American) thinking on the nature of Blackness – what it is, as well as how it manifests. In his article "Another Life is Possible: Black Fugitivity and Enclosed Places," Damien M. Sojoyner (2017) situates fugitive being and doing:

Proceeding from an understanding of the intimate connection between Black fugitivity and the social and political governance of plantation-based economies, my argument is

for the repositioning of Black fugitivity from a static historical act to one of the core theoretical devices informing Black radical planning and action. (para. 6)

Sojoyner positions fugitivity as a *device* for engagement, for movement; not an abstract paradigm. The strategy emerges from an historical and political reality “in which the fugitive is the simultaneous embodiment of life, culture, and pathways to freedom” (p. 526), and survival of that embodiment requires anything but “a static act.” Also positioned in political terms, Tina Campt (2014) argues that “the concept of fugitivity highlights the tension between the acts or flights of escape and creative practices of refusal, nimble and strategic practices that undermine the category of the dominant.” Fred Moten (2008), perhaps one of the most prominent proponents of fugitive thinking suggests:

Perhaps the thing, the black, is tantamount to another, fugitive, sublimity altogether. Some/thing escapes in or through the object’s vestibule; the object vibrates against its frame like a resonator, and troubled air gets out. The air of the thing that escapes enframing is what I’m interested in—an often unattended movement that accompanies largely unthought positions and appositions. (p. 182)

No less political, Moten speaks to the very immateriality of fugitive Blackness. That for me is the ephemerality of movement, my movement in *Confession Publique*. There is something impalpable about what I actually do in the performance, and yet, its impact is a visceral and transformational one, both for myself and the audience. As if he were referring to the difference between the facts of what I do versus their lived experience, Moten speaks of the slippage “between the fact of blackness and the lived experience of the black” (p. 179). His proposition is reminiscent of Johnson’s “liminal space of the psyche” (2003, p. 8). For all of these thinkers, there is a space in-between that is critical to Blackness – that perhaps, following Moten, *is* Blackness. That fugitive space is the space of refusal is the space that allows the movement from enslaved object to uncontained subject; it is the space of unstillness, of constant adaptation and shapeshifting. It is performance.

*blackness produces fugitivity produces performance produces performance produces
blackness produces fugitivity produces performance produces blackness produces
performance produces performance produces fugitivity produces blackness produces*

*performance produces performance produces fugitivity produces blackness produces
fugitivity produces performance produces blackness produces performance*

*the shapeshifting to produce blackness
is the shapeshifting of performance
is the whens and wheres of blackness
is the times and spaces of blackness
is the fugitivity of the blackness
of a performance of refusal.*

(Written during this chapter, April 2023)

In my lived experience, my performed Blacknesses have been marked, above all, by the times and spaces of Otherness – mostly as an Other from without (Wright, 2004, p. 7) – when figurative survival (or success) has meant having or, at least, trying to maintain a seat at the white table. That has, to a very large extent, been my quiet experience of the world of contemporary dance – admittedly, with all the ambiguity I feel as I write this, having enjoyed a successful career while, at the same time, experiencing pangs of guilt at having left my roots behind so to speak. Citing Patricia Williams (1997), Johnson (2008) writes: “indeed, one may experience what Williams calls ‘a sense of split identity’” (p. 8). He continues:

The black who has been accepted into the elite circle of whiteness is expected to bracket the blackness that proffered his or her (temporary) invitation to the welcome table of whiteness and in the face of the dissonance he or she feels in relation to the black hands extending the hors d’oeuvre tray. In these instances, Williams suggests, “You need two chairs at the table, one for you one for your blackness.” (p. 8)

Figure 3.1 *Je suis ca (I am that)*



Photo by Cloé Pluquet, 2021.

a space and a time
the smile of
anonymity
boundary-less
I disappear
into
the comfort of invisibility
another spacetime
and
anonymity
is the abyss of non-existence
I belong
to lostness
to a black hole
I am seen
an alien of extraordinary abilities
the exception
or crushed

(Written after reading Wright's (2015b) "spacetime," November 2022)

The world of contemporary dance lacks a diversity of representation of non-white bodies, sensibilities, worldviews. Defining what is meant by *contemporary* already provokes a certain polemic. This is not necessarily a debate to be developed here; suffice to say that in spite of my success as a contemporary dancer, pedagogue and dramaturg, my professional milieu has often felt like an "elite circle of whiteness." I was aware for much of the time I lived in Belgium, for example, that other darker Black African bodies (and their dances) were less likely to be on stage than my own. I no doubt earned my place at that elite table, but my mastery of the craft of chameleon-like adaptation was certainly helped by the fact that my particular Blackness was not threatening; it did

not come from Belgium's colonial past. I "performed" an inoffensive and unthreatening Blackness, an exotic Blackness. I was already domesticated, diluted, not Black enough to bother. Being Black (and successful) in contemporary dance has often meant fitting in, distancing myself from my Jamaican folk-dance origins, from afros and flat feet, from reggae music and dancehall as art. It has meant becoming historyless (Gutierrez, 2018); it has meant being "worlded" (Spivak, 1985). Being Black (and successful) in the context of contemporary dance has meant reaching for the homes of high art, stretching the arches of my feet, preferring the abstract. Like a child at school, all I wanted was to be just like everybody else – and to a certain extent, I have been.

*what is it
that makes me
disappear
into the sameness
a body
my body
black or blank
seen or same
which brings me
closer
to history*

(Written during this chapter, April 2023)

As individual as my relationships to my Blacknesses may be, they are framed within broader frameworks of cultural and/or collective identities. Stuart Hall (1990), a Jamaican-born migrant to Britain and the founder of the field of cultural studies, offers a way of framing identity that considers precisely the movements held in cultural/collective identities – they transcend imposed historical categories, including race, and encompass the multiplicities that have been my own experience. In his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Hall writes:

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being externally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture, and power. Far from being grounded in the mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past. (p. 225)

I am aware as I perform *Confession Publique* that I am myself engaged in a particular “‘play’ of history, culture, and power” in those specific moments, and that it is happening through the storytelling of my body. How my performance contributes (or not) to a broader collective identity is not something I can effectively address here; however, I realize that I move through identities during the piece precisely because I reckon with “narratives of the past” in real time. Hall proposes an experience of history that is not fixed, a history that is ever shifting, *rewritten every time that it is told*. An ever-shifting history means an ever-shifting signification to the notion of *being Black*; a history rewritten with every telling is profoundly dramaturgical and particularly pertinent with respect to the Blacknesses that ebb and flow through me during the performance. Asked to comment in 2009 on the election of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States, Hall replied: “He’s a black politician because of what he symbolizes, not because of the color of his skin or the history” (Yardley, 2014). His reflection suggests that my Blackness also manifests based on what I “symbolize” in a specific context rather than on any objective reality. The moments that manifest a particular “play” of history, culture and power are “constructed” and “phenomenological” spaces and times; Michelle Wright (2015b) refers to these as “spacetimes” of collective Blackness:

Our *constructs* of Blackness are largely historical and more specifically based on a notion of spacetime that is commonly filled in a linear progress narrative, while our *phenomenological* manifestations of Blackness happen in what I term *Epiphenomenal* time, or the “now,” through which the past, present, and future are always interpreted. (p. 4, emphasis in original)

Like Hall, Wright adheres to the idea of a continuous play of history and of changing present moments that continually resituate the temporalities that influence our experiences of Blackness. My Epiphenomenal time, or “now,” is in perpetual flux; it is culturally hybrid, constantly challenged by, and challenging, its (re)definition. In life as in performance, that essence of flux

sustains me beyond the historical constructs of Blackness and, at the same time, allows me to both engage with those constructs and reimagine their futures. I become at once a multitude of Blacknesses – past, present, and future – and, as Jamaica Kincaid suggested in her prose poem at the beginning of this chapter, no Blackness at all.

this is a 60-year old woman
this is a 60-year old black woman
this is my grandmother's granddaughter
this is a Jamaican woman
this is a Belgian woman
this is my children's mother
this is a woman who has never given birth
this is a lover
this is my mother's daughter
this is my father's child
this is my brother's sister
this is a Canadian woman
this is a Quebec resident
this is the body of a brown settler
this is a hybrid, a bastard, a zinneke²⁸
a strategically ambiguous success story
this is the past
this is now
this is a goddess
this is a survivor
this is no-one in particular
this is belonging
this is not belonging
this is being seen

²⁸ A 16th century Brussels word for a small bastard dog, a cross between two breeds. It ended up becoming the nickname of all Brussels people, at the crossroads of many cultures, breeds, and histories (Brussels by Foot, 2020).

this is invisibility
this is an island girl
this is my Scottish great grandmother's great granddaughter
this is a big city girl
this is blackness
this is also blackness
so is this blackness
this is my blond cousin's cousin
this is a hybrid, a bastard, a zinneke
forever ambiguous, caramel-coloured
exotic if needed
a warrior
this is fear
this is triumph
this is hope
this is despair
this is sadness
resignation
this is knowing
and accepting
this is laughter
and camaraderie
these
are blacknesses
mine
and none

(Started as post-performance journal notes in June 2021; completed during this writing)

Even though the spacetimes I have lived (and lived in) have been white-majority contexts for most of my life, where I have learned Blackness and moved slowly closer to my own articulations of it, I am aware that my Blackness is anchored in “Caribbeanness,” in the words of Édouard Glissant – more specifically, in Jamaicanness. Glissant speaks of the importance of our situatedness, of our relationship to the lands that situate our bodies in space and time. Discussing the writing style of Caribbean versus European writers in his collection of selected essays, *Caribbean Discourse*, he speaks of the “language of landscape” (1989, p. 146), and the extent to which our thinking and our expression of it emerge from our relationship to place, to the ground on which we stand. That he speaks from the reality of a Caribbean island himself is significant for me.

I know in my blood and bones that I am (of) Caribbean Blackness.

Geographer Katherine McKittrick (2006) expands on Glissant’s arguments (among others) in *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographic Struggle*, looking at the human and material geographies of Black women across the diaspora. She begins her introduction with a line from *Land to Light On* by award-winning Trinidadian-born Canadian poet and essayist, Dionne Brand:

I don’t want no fucking country, here
or there and all the way back, I don’t like it, none of it,
easy as that. (p. ix)

The phrase immediately conjures the realities of the diaspora – the pain and loss of leaving, the anger and sadness of coming but not being accepted, and the materialities of both. Relative to so many displaced people in the world, my own story of contemporary diasporic imposition seems much less extreme. Nevertheless, I remember vividly the urgency to escape our island home because of personal threats, followed by the nomadic adaptations my family needed to make once in Canada in order to survive. The Blackness that is that kind of uncertainty, confusion, conformity, is still present in my body, and baring my skin has meant baring those very struggles. Uncertainty, confusion, and conformity feel like a tug of war that is constantly being negotiated from the inside out during the performance. I do not try to show it; I simply allow myself to live it and be witnessed.

In her comment, McKittrick mentions that Brand's text reminds her that "geography is always human, and that humanness is always geographic – blood, bones, hands, lips, wrists, this is your land, your planet, your road, your sea" (p. ix). That visceral connection to space and place is one that is conspicuously pertinent for Black diasporic peoples – perhaps even via its lack. Aligned with the "spacetime" of collective Blackness that Wright proposes and Glissant's "language [or poetics] of landscape," which also implies place and its historical time, McKittrick affirms the relationship between Black populations and geography: "Black matters are spatial matters . . . Space and place give black lives meaning" (pp. xii-xiii). By its very definition, the Black diaspora implies the ongoing (re)definition of Black peoples' spatialization and the consequent (re)writing of histories and subjectivities that follows suit. McKittrick describes transatlantic slavery as a "geography of domination" that establishes the Atlantic Ocean and the slave ships of the Middle Passage as *makers* of the Black diaspora and its ultimate experiences of Blackness. The production of diasporic space, then, manifests in the geography of the Black Atlantic Ocean, which she describes as "space, place, and location, in their physical materiality and imaginative configurations" (p. x).

My own navigation of the diasporic space that is the Black Atlantic is profoundly constitutive of the multiplicity of Blacknesses that I navigate. My body knows intimately the spacetimes of the Caribbean, North America and Europe. The "physical materiality and imaginative configurations" of my Epiphenomenal "now" are embedded in the crisscrossing of the Atlantic Ocean that has been my way and the way – imposed and (semi)voluntary – of my family members for generations. They are also intimately intertwined with my dancing life. Typical of diasporic living, these Blacknesses that I produce are not exclusive of an engagement with white culture – on the contrary, according to British theorist Paul Gilroy (1995), this is the fundamental nature of the Black Atlantic. In his still essential book, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, he advocates for the mongrelized nature of cultures that slavery and colonialism both produced and displaced, proposing the idea of a Black Atlantic culture rather than a specifically African, American, Caribbean, or British one. In that encounter, (he looks especially at manifestations among artists and intellectuals), there is an embracing of white culture even as messages against racist power

structures might also be present. As I stand on stage as a contemporary dancer with all the aesthetic sensibilities and life choices embedded in that positioning, I can only attest to my own contemporary Black culture and sense of Blackness being heavily influenced in this regard (even if that does not preclude the importance of my origins). I admit to that being a significant part of the ambivalence with respect to my artform that feeds this inquiry.

Thinking along with Wright’s spacetimes, McKittrick’s geographies, Gilroy’s Black Atlantic, and Glissant’s “poetics of landscape,” I produce and am produced by a diasporic landscape that resonates in my body. It is “performed” in the ways that I, as a historically racialized-gendered person from the Caribbean, walk, talk, stand, think, feel a sense of place, engage with others.

Figure 3.2 On my way to *La danse des seins ou l’offrande* (*The breast dance or the offering*)



Photo by Cloé Pluquet, 2021.

Living in Canada has exposed me to territorial acknowledgements that honour the stolen lands of Indigenous peoples who must still struggle to overcome the annihilating consequences of colonialism on their ancestral homelands. Stolen lands prompt me to think of the stolen and displaced bodies of my Black ancestors and the freedom (or place) they came to fight for (as home). By the time the slave trade was abolished in 1807, almost two million slaves had been traded to Jamaica from West Africa, with hundreds of thousands more dying on slave ships during the Middle Passage crossing of the Atlantic (Embassy of Jamaica, 2007). Upon the collapse of the plantation system after slavery's abolition in 1834, the Black population in Jamaica greatly exceeded the number of white slaveowners – the former slaves were no longer legislated Others²⁹ (Statista Research Department, 1978).

Albeit with mixed ethnic ancestry, my cultural DNA is embedded in the earth of an island that was once the largest slave colony of the British Empire. The diasporic landscape that I embody is one that is rooted in the legacy of the plantation, a system characterized by the colonial clearing of nature's complexities and the subsequent universalizing monocultures that held Black and Indigenous bodies as erasable/erased objects for centuries, particularly racialized-gendered ones (McKittrick, 2006). In her brilliant essay, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, geologist Kathryn Yusoff (2018) writes: "Coloniality cuts across both flesh and earth in the economies of valuation it established" (p. 33). She goes on to argue that those economies of valuation created by the "cutting of flesh and earth" imposed the exclusion of Black and Indigenous bodies from the spaces of subjectivity. Excluded from subjectivity, they were blank slates. Yusoff cites Richard Eden, the author of a popular 1555 publication entitled, *Decades of the New World*, who compares the people of the so-called New World to blank pieces of paper, ready to be written upon, to be filled in with European civilization:

these simple gentiles lyvinge only after the lawe of nature, may well bee likened to a smoothe and bare table unpainted, or a white paper unwritten upon, upon the which yow may at the first paynte and wryte what youw lyste. (p. 33)

²⁹ By contrast, in the United States, the minority numbers of former slaves and their descendants relative to their former colonizers meant that they have remained Others from within, to borrow Wright's term, a fact that has generated a markedly different political, social, and cultural reality.

The tabula rasa that was imposed on nature was also imposed on the not-seen-as-human Indigenous populations and, subsequently, on the Black bodies of colonization's economies of valuation. The razing of lands by colonial Man (the "optimal human" as described by Wynter, [1994]) heralds the "geographies of erasure" (Yusoff, 2018, p. 35) – both physical and human – that epitomize the plantation system. Man's quest to universalize their particular "humanness" Wynter (1994, p. 44), denying the subjective complexities of all human Others, is itself a kind of monoculture, not unlike the very plantation system that sustains it, erasing all diversity and dismissing any value to uncultivated nature. The universal monocultural Man was sustained by the monocultural slave plantation.

Colonial clearing

Erasure

Blank slate

Monoculture

Colonial clearing

Erasure

Blank slate

Monoculture

As I consider the evolution of Western concert dance, I cannot help but wonder about the values historically embedded in the dance studio – this cleared, supposedly neutral (and therefore universal) space that emerged from a very specific (white) sociocultural context and that has excluded certain bodies (and their dances) and conditioned others into a kind of monoculture. Here, I am admittedly thinking especially – if not exclusively – of classical ballet traditions. (A reminder of my experience mentioned earlier watching Black ballet dancers in Cuba covered in white makeup.) Even as I recognize that the field of Western concert dance as a whole has changed (and continues to do so), thinking historically forces me to consider the value systems that have generated the aesthetics of the dance studio and what is taught and created there. I also cannot help but think of the creative and body dramaturgies that have been generated by the monocultural leveling of history and that continue to resonate in my own body today, in spite of the creations I have participated in that have actually sought out diversity (Platel, Cherkaoui, Demers are obvious

examples). The key, in this moment, is the evolution in my own sensorial awareness of my Blackness as it manifests in the performances of *Confession Publique*.

Contemplating Black complexities in historically monocultural spaces famous for erasure, I am drawn to the stories of those who resisted the monoculture of the plantation and of colonial Man – the fugitive Black slave as a creator of the diasporic landscape of the Caribbean. The Maroons were instrumental to the history of sustained resistance to plantation slavery in the region. Radically resisting the social relations defined by the plantation system, they lived as “vagabonds” on squatted rural lands (mostly in the hilly interiors of the islands) and are considered the principal transmitters of African traditions (Casimir, 2020, p. 143). Referring to the Maroon culture of rural Haiti, scholar Jean Casimir considers Maroon societies “counter-plantation systems”:

The Haitian peasantry—and those of the entire Caribbean—constituted themselves in opposition to the processes of integration and assimilation to the commodity-producing plantation. Their culture was and remains a response to slavery, a form of self-defense responding to the abuses inflicted by modern, colonial society. From the moment the captives took control of their gardens and provision grounds and demanded more free days [...], the counter-plantation system and the institutions through which it was articulated were put into place. (p. 351)

Maroon resistance in Jamaica was no less significant in the island’s history. In her monograph entitled *The Mother of Us All: A History of Queen Nanny, Leader of the Windward Jamaican Maroons*, which recounts the life of Maroon guerilla warrior and famed Obeah³⁰ woman, Nanny, Jamaica’s only female national hero, writer Karla Gottlieb (2000) offers insights into the impact of the Maroons in Jamaican, Caribbean and broader Black history: “The very act of being a Maroon was an act of ideological defiance that questioned the validity and survivability of the colonial slave system” (pp. 1-2). She further asserts that the study of marronage is an important aspect of Black history because of the opportunity it afforded for Africans and their descendants to create

³⁰ The practice of harnessing supernatural forces and spirits for one’s own personal use, known in some parts of Africa as ‘Obeye’ (an entity that lives within witches), has taken on many names in the Caribbean islands, such as Shango (Trinidad), Santeria (Cuba), Vodun or Voodoo (Haiti), Ju-Ju (Bahamas), Obeah (Jamaica). Although African slaves usually practiced Obeah for “evil” or rather self-interested, instrumental purposes, this faith also aided them as a source of strength and clandestine resistance. The practice of Obeah is the belief that one can use certain spirits or supernatural agents to work harm to the living, or to call them off from such mischief. Generally, the British used the term Obeah to describe all slave acts and practices that were considered supernatural or evil in nature, such as rituals and fetishes (Giraldo, n.d., para. 1).

their own societies, beyond the control of the plantation system, thereby adding an important dimension to the traditional, plantation-bound vision of Black history and culture (Kopytoff, 1978, as cited in Gottlieb, 2000, p. 288).

For me, growing up in a spacetime that acknowledges African warriors as national heroes and where practitioners of Obeah still abound has had a profound impact on the situatedness of my Blackness. The porosity between the trickster world and the real world is a given; temporalities collide shamelessly; duppies (evil spirits or ghosts) have a seat at every table. In spite of extreme classism and colorism, my first and foundational experiences of Blackness were grounded in Jamaican earth where, essentially, it surrounded, swallowed, and sustained me. This “humanness” is certainly far removed from the model of humanity proposed by the principles of Enlightenment characteristic of the colonial period and that continues to haunt us today. The tensions between the dramaturgies of the monoculture and the complexities of lived experience manifest in creative strategies and in the bodies that generate and perform them. Admittedly, at times, *Confession Publique* has felt like a battle ground of sorts.

In her article, “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation”, Sylvia Wynter (1971) writes: “The Caribbean area is the classic plantation area since many of its units were ‘planted’ with people, not in order to form societies, but to carry on plantations whose aim was to produce single crops for the market.” (p. 95). The slaves themselves, however – these “planted” people – were sustained by their provision grounds – small, less fertile plots, often on mountainsides in the context of the Caribbean since those were not suitable for sugar cane cultivation, that were allotted to them by the slaveowners. The provision grounds, a concentration of diversity of Indigenous and African subsistence crops, “reflect the historical plot of cultural sustainability amid the terrors of plantation capitalism” (DeLoughery, 2011, p. 59), becoming the focus of resistance to the market system and market values imposed by, and in the image of Man – Wynter (1971) writes:

For African peasants transplanted to the plot all the structure of values that had been created by traditional societies of Africa, the land remained the Earth – and the Earth was a goddess; man used the land to feed himself; and to offer first fruits to the Earth; his funeral was the mystical reunion with the earth. (p. 99)

The primary crop to be cultivated on the plots was the yam – a fellow survivor of the Middle Passage and rhizomic plant – which Wynter calls “the roots of culture” (p. 99) and which is known in Jamaica simply as “food”, testifying to its importance as a staple. As far removed as the yam may seem from a discussion of Blackness, and perhaps even further from contemporary dance, I am interested in its historical function for my ancestors and the metaphor that it now allows for my contemporary self. Elizabeth DeLoughery’s (2011) article “Yam, Roots, and Rot: Allegories of the Provision Grounds” is a rich exploration of the metaphoric import of this crop. She affirms that:

The yam’s location in the provision grounds outside of the plantation complex (often out of view), as well as its subsistence underground (where it collects nutrients for the community), underlines its significance as an invisible resource, one that must be physically and imaginatively sought, cultivated, and excavated in terms of both time and space. (p. 61)

*The hidden, invisible rootedness of the yam,
at the centre of the provision ground that,
in its complexity of cultivation
sustained Black people,
their language, their culture,
and some degree of agency,
on the margins of the plantation system
they even grew flowers.*

The spacetimes of the yam and the plot are metaphorical producers of my Blackness. While they ground me in my ancestral past – the horrors of transatlantic slavery as well as its survival – they provide me with an allegorical lens through which to imagine my own resistance to contemporary monoculture, to the “predefinition of humanness and North Americanness”, in Wynter’s words. The hidden complexity of the plot, the rootedness of the yam ground, are reminders of my own. In attempting to identify (as opposed to define) the various influences that inform my Black living, my desire is not to extract myself from the context in which I live as an act of resistance; rather, the act of resistance is to better situate myself in that broader context. Blackness was created by the *optimal huMan*, whose “full humanity [is] only gleaned in relation to the lack of humanity in

blackness” (Weheliye, 2002, p. 27). My resistance then is to live the full and complex humanity of my Blackness. In “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation”, Wynter (1971) asserts:

For if the history of Caribbean society is that of a dual relation between plantation and plot, the two poles which originate in a single historical process, the ambivalence between the two has been and is the distinguishing characteristic of the Caribbean response. This ambivalence is at once the root cause of our alienation; and the possibility of our salvation. (p. 99)

yams sailed
pulled up by their roots
they are roots
spreading like rhizomes
they wear their roots on their skins
transplanted
planted
spreading
cut, they are whole
fragmented, they are whole
defiant
“the root (of Africa) in a creolized, rhizomatic Caribbean”³¹

(Written during the writing of this thesis, April 2023)

³¹ This last line is from DeLoughery (2011), “Yam, Roots, and Rot: Allegories of the Provision Grounds” p. 62

Figure 3.3 Sprouting yam



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CHAPTER 4

The Unknown...waters.

I am sitting on a small table, in fact, it's three small tables... Behind a wall of drums, which I don't play, at least, that I don't know how to play. And I'm waiting, watching people enter the theatre. I know I'm at the edge of a kind of abyss. A precipice. For an hour and fifteen minutes, I'm going to dive into myself on a kind of rock and roll ride. I'm trying to keep breathing calmly... I have a couple of moments I can hold on to in the piece but... mostly, it's about what I am able to dig into, unearth, awaken, explore, feel. And share. Well, maybe not share; it's more what (I let) the spectators see, what they will witness. I realize that they have no idea what to expect. And in a way, neither do I! Sometimes I think: How the fuck am I going to find whatever it is that it takes to do this? To dive in that deep? To be so viscerally naked?

I don't have an answer... all I can do is wait...

I'm waiting for everyone to sit. I look around. Sometimes people wave at me and say "Hi Angélique!" I think how odd it is that people feel the need to make it known that they have a connection with the person on stage... I can't afford to acknowledge them, so I don't. I need to stay in my bubble – in pre-dive mode...

Indigenous choreographer Michelle Olson (2016) accompanies me on this first thought journey:

This essay is about these brief moments. When the theatre goes black and the stage lights reveal the performer to audience, audience to performer. Whole histories inform this moment, the memories in our blood and bones sit with the audience and stand with the performer. The possibilities to be transformed are within reach for both the performer and the audience. (emphasis added; p. 272)

Before reading this paragraph, I had not yet been able to define what it was I felt in that “brief moment” of pre-dive, before the performance of *Confession Publique* officially begins. I say officially because even if there are audience members slowly assembling and they are witnessing me witnessing them, I know there will be a moment – a charge-filled interstice – that signals that

the ride has begun, for all of us, that particular encounter with my whole histories, the memories in my blood and bones has begun...

As I think about how to talk about *Confession Publique* – where to begin, what thread to pull from the seemingly insurmountable task of unraveling my sensorial experience, my articulation of it and the theorization that emerges from, through, alongside the lens of my Blackness – I am drawn to the wisdom of the body, to its sensations and its knowings. I am, after all, a dance artist; the body is how I understand and engage in the world. So that is perhaps where I shall begin, in the sensations of the body and in the intuitions that emerge from its living.

(Parenthesis)

I realize that I write predominantly in the present tense and I respect that intuition and take it as a road sign, an indication of the thinking and the understanding and the processing that is happening in the *now* moment – as the performance does; as survival of any sort generally requires – no projection or extensive reflection, simply the immediacy of the gesture. It is also the *now* of the storytelling that has become critical to the form, the content and the analysis of *Confession Publique*, and that aligns me with so many of the traditions that are part of my Blackness.

I am back to sitting behind the drumkit; Anne-Marie has opened the door, I can hear her footsteps approaching and the audience hushes. I hold my breath.

There is first another story to be told – one of intensity, uncertainty and trusting my body to know.

I've spent the entire day roaming around this small island off the coast of Formentera. I'm on holiday on my own. It's the end of the day and I need to get back. I walked across the gentle, watery space that had opened up in the Mediterranean between the two islands earlier in the day – the tide was low, the water never more than hip height... Some five or six hours later, I am on the small pier looking towards Formentera and the landscape is totally different. And I feel it in my gut, in my blood, in my bones. There is no more watery space opened up; there is only ocean, deep

blue and choppy – the wind is up. It's getting cold and there's no shelter on the small island so the only option is to get to the other side. There's no-one else around. They've either walked back much earlier or left in boats. I'm not a great swimmer – I can keep myself above water and I can keep myself moving underwater. I step into the sea, knowing that there's no option but to survive the crossing. I start swimming on the surface but the wind is too strong and I'm quickly off-course and have a hard time keeping water out of my breath! I look to where I need to end up, quickly (and intuitively) estimate what seems to be a corrected course in case the wind and water currents take me off the needed path, I take a deep breath and I dive deeper, hoping I'm below the wind and currents. I can't think, I can only hold my breath and keep swimming. Once or twice, I claw to the surface to breathe and hoping I'm not too far off-course. The water and the wind throw me around and I look around to make sure there are no fishing boats nearby – either to help me or that I need to avoid! I know they won't necessarily hear or see me in time... Back under. There's no other thought but to keep going. I feel that I'm brushing up against something that I realize is seaweed. I hate swimming through it but I know it means I'm almost safe – the shoreline must not be far away. I eventually stand up and walk out of the water with my tiny backpack still on my back. I exhale. I'm fine. The relief is visceral. I'm alone and I start the long walk back to the guest house.

This suspension in time is my experience of *Confession Publique*, told through an encounter with myself during a somatic writing session. These sessions allow me to access sensations, moments, and memories of intuitive significance. In this particular session, I zeroed in on the moment of *pre-dive*, just as the performance really begins, and the feeling I have of being at the edge of an undefinable precipice every time I am about to perform it. What rose to the surface was this visceral memory of holding my breath in order to survive, the suspension of all but the most essential thinking in order to dive in – hold your breath, keep moving, trust the water, trust yourself – and the absolute relief of the exhale once I realized I had made it to the other side. In that lived parenthesis, my “whole histories,” the “memories in my blood and bones” were profoundly present, charged and ready, just beneath the surface. In that moment on Formentera, there was a curious sensation of being totally empty and totally filled at the same time, as if in order to be fully available

to focus on the task and the depth of the journey it required, I needed to strip away all that seemed sure and trust that my body would know the unknown. *Confession Publique* is by no means a life and death ultimatum; nevertheless, I find it curious that the lived experience that rose to the surface in response to the feeling of suspended time and place I often feel before the performance is one that is anchored (all puns intended) in water and survival. Notably, what also emerged was the realization that I often use metaphors involving water – pre-dive, what rose to the surface, anchored, navigate.

Sprawling across the bluish green waters of the Caribbean Sea, is an archipelago that curves out towards the Atlantic in a C-shape from North to South America. The geopolitical region of the Caribbean is home to 13 sovereign states (including Jamaica) and 17 dependent territories; the predominant languages are English, Spanish, French, Dutch and Antillean creole – a chaos of European inheritances and slave survival. Christopher Columbus “discovered”³² the area in 1492, landing on the shores of today’s Bahamas and claiming it for Spain. The first Spanish settlements were created on the island of St. Domingue (actual Haiti and Dominican Republic) and by the 1600s, the British, the Dutch, the French, the Danes, and a good dose of pirates were crisscrossing the Caribbean Sea, seizing and exchanging the islands as war trophies and bounty – Indigenous populations essentially decimated, the lands and peoples – first Indigenous and then African enslaved bodies – for profit. It is beyond the scope of this writing to go any more deeply into the history of the region, but it is difficult to overstate the ongoing impact of slavery and colonial “worlding” in Spivak’s (1985) terms, on the economies, the political and social structures, the ways we live, the ways we die, the dreams, the accomplishments of the Caribbean self. Over centuries, we were flung around between competing colonial powers like ragdolls. Our bodies were only worth what they could earn. For women, in emasculated societies, we found kinship to survive and protect our children, but with the constant threat of domestic violence.³³ Many histories are virtually untraceable; being Black was something to overcome. Nevertheless, the mixing and matching that characterized the region historically has become a defining feature of our cultures

³² I call attention to the idea of *discovery* simply because it encapsulates the Othering inherent in colonization. The term suggests that something had been lost or was waiting to be uncovered – previously unseen or unknown. This is in fact the inherent problematic.

³³ In 2022, Jamaica had the second highest femicide rate in the world (UNFPA, 2022).

<https://caribbean.unfpa.org/en/news/unfpa-jamaica-collaborates-government-and-csos-address-gbv-and-family-violence-scale-hfle-0>

and the hybridity of our peoples. And being in relation with the rest of the world – particularly, Western metropolises – has dictated our survival. Growing up on the island of Jamaica has shaped me like none other. The original inhabitants of Jamaica before the arrival of Columbus in 1494 were the Arawak-speaking Tainos peoples; they named the land “Xaymaca”, meaning “land of wood and water”. I grew up around water, on it, in it. My relationship to the world beyond Jamaica meant crossing it. As I stand on my island pedestal in *Confession Publique*, I imagine the water that surrounds me – it isolates, yes, but it is also the medium through which my relationality is expressed.

Figure 4.1 *Le baptême (Baptism)*



Photo by Cloé Pluquet, 2021.

Figure 4.2 *Le baptême (Baptism)*



Photo by Cloé Pluquet, 2021.

My relationship to water is a complex one, a mixture of deep fascination (my first ‘when I grow up I want to be’ desire was a marine biologist) and deep apprehension – not unlike someone who is attracted to the void. There are times when I have thought that I am not afraid enough of water. Canadian writer and Black Studies scholar, Rinaldo Walcott (2021), has written about what he calls the *black aquatic* – “Black peoples’ lived relation in and to bodies of water” (p. 65) – and the ways in which that relation is constitutive of historical and contemporary Black subjectivity. The historical reality that many Black bodies were lost in the ocean crossings of the slave trade is a clear first reference. But I am particularly drawn to his offering that Blackness itself was born in that historical moment:

The black aquatic names the claim that blackness itself is birthed in salt water — the Atlantic Ocean as a first instance — and then later becomes a kind of saline embodiment of early modern and late modern new life forms or Black selves. The aquatic and the saline, then, are not just metaphors for Black people’s emergence as a category of persons in the Americas and beyond; the aquatic is a kind of foundational birth claim for blackness and thus Black diasporic people. (p. 65)

With respect to the content of the performance and the stories that I recount during it, water is not an obvious medium for *Confession Publique* to live in; and yet, I have experienced a kind of birthing over its short but iterative lifespan. Somehow, the performance has become the amniotic fluid that has nurtured my own Blackness. I have the particular privilege of continuing to perform the work as I write about it so the cyclical discoveries and articulations remain ongoing. The constant repositioning and redefinition that this implies is not only a logistical advantage and conveniently heuristic tool. This movement is constitutive of my own Blackness and of my diasporic subjectivity – like tides, repeating seas, “cadences of blackness” in the words of Bayo Akomolafe (2021). The movement of water and my movement in it is a re-membered dance of life lost, of Blackness birthed, and of diasporic survival.

I have no clear recollection of when or why Mélanie wanted to explore the specific use of water in *Confession Publique*. We had spoken at length, and at some point, it was a simple intuition to be tried. It ended up being critical in the image that was ultimately used for promotional purposes, leaving it ambiguous whether I was wet from water or from sweat. During the performance itself, water – thrown by Anne-Marie – stops me from reliving my/all histories and memories in the

movement section we call *Archives nationales (National Archives)*; she then continues to pour it all over me in a way that leaves me feeling like I am sitting in my pee, like I've been caught in the rain, like I'm being washed, like I'm being watered like a plant, like I'm being baptized, like I am made of water. I sit in it, on it, with it, as it falls off my face, my shoulders, my breasts, the table, feeling a combination of shame, dismissal, relief, acceptance, exhalation. The dripping water slows around my immobile body; it is almost the end of the piece and this is the closest I will get to leaving my island platform.

However, the metaphor of water is already very present earlier in the performance. The *Undulations* section requires me to engage in simple, slow, repetitive waves that move through my almost nude body over several minutes. The waves are a deep, oceanic ebbing and flowing of my fluid cells, fluid histories, fluid memories – cadences of blackness. As much as I am doing them, they happen to me. Going back to the black aquatic evoked by Rinaldo Walcott (2021), he sees Blackness as beginning in the liquidity of the Atlantic Ocean, marking the birth of Black possibility and potentiality (p. 66). He forcibly also recognizes that liquidity is coupled with the historical and contemporary liquidation of Black people and their potential. My ebbs and flows are a succession of births and deaths, triumphs and losses, past and present, personal and beyond. The undulations themselves feel like unending layers of women's lives – from the Greek goddess to the auctioned slave, from the woman indulging her sexuality to the grieving mother – they are draped on and through me in strangely timeless and yet visceral corporealities. I feel inside of me the historical and ongoing tensions and frictions of the liquidity-liquidation dynamic – I think of *Black Lives Matter*, I think of my Black son, of the ongoing precarity of Black life and I am aware that I am a connection of sorts between then and now – my undulations reach both back and forwards.

Bayo Akomolafe is a Nigerian author, poet and intellectual agitator based in Chennai, India, with whom I feel a certain kindred connection. He has written few books but his profound feminist thinking is seen, heard, played via talks and curated conversations available on podcasts, writing on his website and on Facebook posts, and globally coordinated courses that he runs, one of which I participated in during the fall of 2021, called: *We Will Dance With Mountains / Into The Cracks*. This is where I first heard him speak of the “cadences of blackness,” a notion I will come back to later in the thesis. In his poetic offering, *In the morning, you won't find me here, A meditation in blackness*, Akomolafe (2019) writes:

I must spill.

I am a black man.

My mother is water, and my father is movement.

The water metaphor is ever present. Walcott's black aquatic also seems to speak to the ontological connection that Akomolafe makes between being Black and being/having fluidity. The lack of defined boundaries as the Black man "spills" suggests

perpetual motion

shape-shifting

uncontainability

navigation of seas, oceans, cultures, lands

(my) undulations.

Black women thinkers have also anchored their reflections on Black realities in the context of our relationship to water. Consider the examples of Kimberly Juanita Brown (2015) who, in her introduction to *The Repeating Body: Slavery's Visual Resonance in the Contemporary* speaks of "... the circular logic surrounding slavery's 'eternal return,' [in which] oceans meet bodies in flux and alter the trajectory, the sway, and the movement ..." (p. 12); or Jessica Marie Johnson (2020), whose Introduction to *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World*, is entitled, "The Women in the Water," after a poem by Rae Paris. Johnson writes of her monograph: "Wicked Flesh positions black women as swimming at the crossroads between empires and oceans, diasporas and archipelagos." (p. 4) The resonance in Black women's bodies of having been at this crossroads is something I will explore further later, but what has become clear as I have dug deeper into the histories of Blackness and Black bodies, is that the "Black Atlantic" – a term coined by Paul Gilroy in 1995 in his groundbreaking work of the same name – is not only geographic, historical, or political; but rather also a metaphor for the profound metaphysical reordering (chaos?) that is the ongoing aftermath of the Middle Passage and the transatlantic slave trade. It is also expressed in the relationship of my Black woman body to water.

Liquidity, movement, the non-fixity of “black livingness” (McKittrick, 2021) – not as a choice but as a necessity for survival, is carried in my cells – historically, biologically, metaphorically. This is in part what I have discovered through my embodied experience of *Confession Publique*. In his 2017 bestseller *My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*, social worker and therapist Resmaa Menakem proposes that the history of racialized trauma is actually held predominantly in our bodies, not only in our cognitive selves. Using the neuroscience of behaviour and the principles of somatic exploration, he invites readers to enter into a more intimate relationship with themselves as “black-bodied,” “white-bodied” or “people of culture-bodied” individuals and identify the physical habits/traits/instincts that continue to hold and reproduce racial trauma, whether we might be victims or unconscious perpetrators. Focused particularly on the specific reality of the United States, but that we know is not exclusive to that country, he cites Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015), journalist and author of *Between the World and Me*, who reminds us that:

... racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth... You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body. (p. 5)

The need to keep moving in order to stay alive is deeply ingrained in the Black psyche – particularly so in North America. The idea of the black aquatic not only speaks to the Black *origin story* – literally; it also suggests the metaphoric story of both physical and philosophical survival (of slaves and their descendants) as dependent on the capacity for movement, for non-fixity, for adaptation.

As I think of both liquidity and fugitivity in relation to my embodiments in *Confession Publique*, (even if I begin the piece virtually locked in behind a wall of drums and then am confined to a small table for its duration), I am reminded of the indications that emerged during the creative process and that continue to frame the sequences in performance. A primary improvisational strategy for Mélanie Demers is the layering of tasks. She is interested in the ways in which the performer negotiates the often continuous onslaught of information and in the labour of this negotiation being witnessed by the audience. Whether the explorations were focused on movement or text or both, the tactic was to never allow me to arrive at any destination or to fully complete a

movement or story but, rather, to constantly use each *almost-arrival* as the catalyst to chart another yet unexplored avenue – all the while, nevertheless seeking for the traces of gestures past to be evident in my body in concrete but undefinable manifestations. Once in performance, the challenge deepened because I now needed to find the continuous onslaught of information from within, while trying to respond in the moment through text or movement. Staying in what I would describe as a state of liquidity, of constant spilling, of fugaciousness, while still allowing forms to be recognizable in my movement or in my thoughts through text is the leitmotif of *Confession Publique* and is largely responsible for the particular kind of challenge its performance presents. Although it is clear that I am (thankfully) not engaging in life and death journeys, I am struck by the ways in which the historical and metaphorical experiences that inform my Black livingness manifest and are embodied. As I confront the challenge of Mélanie's instructions and allow myself to be witnessed, I am profoundly aware of the performance becoming a portal for my own histories – the need to keep moving, the sense of not being able to escape the (white colonial) gaze, and the underground river of thoughts that is essential to survival and the task at hand.

Figure 4.3 *Archives nationales (National Archives)*



Photo by Cloé Pluquet, 2021.

In a 2020 talk addressing his concept of “ontofugitivity,” Bayo Akomolafe speaks of the need for us to embrace the “fugitive moment[s], poised at the liminal edges of things” (Science and Nonduality, 6:33). In his estimation, “modernity does not know how to meet ghosts or to deal with ancestry; it does not know how to deal with a past that still haunts and lingers” (21:28). He speaks of pausing at available crossroads to listen and to enfold the confusion, the noise, inviting “the invisible that is surging through the cracks” (53:54). As I never fully finish a gesture or a story in *Confession Publique*, I realize that it opens up spaces in my being, interstices that allow the invisible to surge through the cracks. Earlier, I had referred to the introduction of Jessica Marie Johnson’s (2020) *Wicked Flesh*, in which she also uses the metaphor of a crossroads, describing it as the historical and geographical in-between of empires, oceans, diasporas and archipelagos navigated by black women during the rise of slavery. The archipelago to which she refers is that group of Caribbean islands, including Jamaica, where I am from.

I am about 10 years old and I’m having a vivid recurring dream. I live in the sea, not in and out of it, but in it, under the surface. I don’t need to come up for air. I sometimes come up just to look around. My eyes are closed as I try to recall my 10-year-old self who was so consumed and moved by this dream. I remember the impact it had on me more than the details of the dream but there are flashes – of clear clear bluish green seawater, no seaweed, only soft white sand beneath me and I float, suspended. I can see far under the surface of the water. I can feel the sun, gentle and warm. I see its light. I realize I have a tail. And sometimes I have legs. I’m not naked, but I’m not dressed. I feel something brushing past my tail-legs like little fish. I look down and see very small people but apparently they can’t see me, or feel me. I’m invisible to them. They seem to live lower down and not be so close to the beautiful bluish green water and the warm sunlight. I think I recognize some of their faces but now the memory is too far away to be sure... I know they’re all brown and I remember I’m surprised. I take advantage of the fact that they can’t see me and get close to some of them. I touch them and watch them not understand where it comes from. I watch them for a long time. As I try to access the memories, I realize that trying hard doesn’t help. It’s only by letting go and allowing the spaces to open up, the watery spaces between the archipelago of clear images that I am able to recall

the dream... Something happens to the person leading them. I can't remember what. But his face I remember; it's the face of Billy Dee Williams, the first African American movie star I ever had a crush on! Invisibly, I pull him to the surface of the warm bluish green seawater, and he floats.

I have purposefully allowed myself to write about remembering myself trying to recall my childhood dream because the experience speaks, ultimately, of embodied interstices, of portals. The memory of this dream surfaced as I was steeped in the imagery of water, the Caribbean Sea, and Black women's bodies navigating it, albeit in a context of death, loss, abuse and survival. *Confession Publique* is a moment of storytelling. I realize increasingly that it comes from a long tradition of storytelling that I have inherited and deeply know. Dreams and intuitions – including those of me as a ten-year-old girl – are a means of re-membering my histories; they are an essential part of the abstraction that helps me make sense of them and that writes this thesis. My lived experience as a Caribbean person is one of cultural hybridity and constant, fluid shapeshifting. I have always looked beyond my Caribbeanness – in a way, that is part of it. I have crossed the bluish green seawater into distant oceans, learned other languages, navigated other waters. I am defined by ever-changing relations with a multitude of others, historical and current. Not surprisingly, seagrasses are rhizomes – as I undulate on the platform that is *Confession Publique*, I feel the cadences of my Black relations, connected in the waters alongside me.

CHAPTER 5
MILK, or I, the nude black female

to swig my breasts
in the face of history

(Excerpt from “Thoughts Drifting through the Fat Black Woman’s Head while Having a Full Bubble Bath” by Grace Nichols)

Figure 5.1 *Daguerréotype (Daguerreotype)*



Photo by Cloé Pluquet, 2021.

During a talkback with students after a performance of *Confession Publique*, I was asked about my nudity in the piece – how I felt about it, how I prepared for it, what it meant to me. Beyond the fact that I am not a particularly prudish person and that I am interested in interrogating the ways in which we view bodies and nudity in Western – particularly North American – societies, I realized that the particular choice for nudity in this piece was intimately linked, for me, to the murder of George Floyd and its aftermath for my thinking. The impunity with which Black bodies are erased

in American society in particular suggests that they hold no intrinsic value. Thinking specifically about Black women's bodies in that context, I was reminded that during slavery, their value was essentially defined by their capacity to (re)produce slaves, an assessment that was made through the scrutiny of their bodies on the auction block. What value might be attributed to my own 60-year-old Black body under the gaze of an audience in 2021? A secondary consideration for me lay in the hypersexualization of Black women's bodies in pop culture, especially hip-hop and dancehall. As I learn more, I am better able to think beyond my *worlding* (albeit still with some ambivalence) and see that (in part) as the reclaiming of their bodies by Black women – a response to the historical objectification and commodification of the racialized-gendered human. Inviting the scrutiny of the spectator to both interrogate my value and, at the same time, reclaim my Black woman body, nudity seemed the most appropriate *performance* of my Blackness.

In her 2020 monograph, *Bodies That Work: African American Women's Corporeal Activism in Progressive America*, Tami Miyatsu offers a literary example of the way value was attributed to the Black female body under slavery. She cites a passage from the novel *Clotel; Or, The President's Daughter* by formerly enslaved writer, William Wells Brown, in which a 16-year-old girl is assessed according to the value of all of her individual body parts and characteristics, for a total of \$1,500:

“Fifteen hundred dollars,” cried the auctioneer, and the maiden was struck for that sum. This was a Southern auction, at which the bones, muscles, sinews, blood, and nerves of a young lady of sixteen were sold for five hundred dollars; her moral character for two hundred; her improved intellect for one hundred; her Christianity for three hundred; and her chastity and virtue for four hundred dollars more. (Brown, 1853/2018, p. 50)

The otherwise invisible Black female body was divided up by its proprietors – slave traders, speculators and customers, who collaborated to decide the *accurate* price of her whole body (Miyatsu, 2020, p. 5).

If they survived the water, Black women began their lives in the Americas on a slave auction block, sold for their reproductive promise. And even once slavery was officially abolished in most of Europe and the United States, Black people (women especially for their buttocks and genitalia)

were displayed in exhibitions and human zoos – the last of which closed in Belgium as late as 1958 – as objects of Otherness, bestiality, and couched desire, effectively serving to confirm the superiority of whiteness. Acknowledging the fact that I now have the privilege of choosing my own situation in the context of performance and artmaking, my naked Black woman body on a platform is nevertheless reminiscent of horrific histories of objectification and profound violence – histories that I carry. My choice then to stand naked before the audience is both 1) a recognition of my place on the particular historical continuum that I embody as a Caribbean Black woman in a world built on the “corporeal imperialism,” in the words of Kimberly Juanita Brown (2015, p. 18), that defined the colonial project; and 2) a reclaiming of my *whole* self – here, now, *witnessed*, both by the audience and by Anne-Marie, who occupies the stage space with me.

The historical pulling apart of Black women’s bodies is exemplified in this particularly graphic metaphor used by Antonio Benitez-Rojo in his 1996 monograph, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*: “The Atlantic is the Atlantic because it was the painfully delivered child of the Caribbean, whose vagina was stretched between continental clamps” (p. 5). In her introduction to *The Repeating Body*, Brown (2015) discusses Benitez-Rojo’s statement and the ways in which it horribly captures the forced fragmentation of Black women’s bodies, the conquests made possible through their birthings, and the violent tug of war among continental powers that manifested in the waters and lands of the Caribbean. Brown writes of Benitez-Rojo’s assertion: “In this space of birth without female subjectivity, the gendered body is one of total and complete physical (and violent) utility” (pp. 6-7). This fundamentally existential rape marked Black women’s “flesh” – in the sense evoked by Hortense Spillers (1987) in her seminal text, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe...”, i.e., captive and lacking the benefit of a “liberated subject-position” – as central to corporeal imperialism and, ultimately, to 19th century Western economic development. Spillers writes: “If we think of the ‘flesh’ as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship's hole, fallen, or ‘escaped’ overboard” (1987, p. 67). It is this viscerally pungent sensoriality experienced by Black “flesh” that has denied the “liberated subject-position” of Black people in general and, more particularly, for Black women.

During the colonial period, enslaved women's lacerated bodies suffered centuries of gendered abuse and exploitation, from sexual harassment to forced prostitution and breeding, to rape. Slavery historian Sylviane Diouf (2015) offers a description of this reality:

Rape by sailors on the slave ships, and rape by overseers, slaveholders, and their sons in the Americas was a persistent threat to all, a horrific reality to many. Used, like it continues to be used today, as a weapon of terror, rape was meant to assert power over and demean not only the women, but also their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons, who were reminded daily that they were considered less than men since they could not protect their womenfolk. Breeding through compulsion or incentives was another appalling feature of the gender-based violence and exploitation women had to endure. Overall, the sexual abuse of women was part of the larger attempt at demoralization and submission of the entire community. (para. 12)

Hortense Spillers (1987) further suggests that the impact of "These undecipherable markings on the captive body," "a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh," actually "transfers" from one generation to another (p. 67). I referred earlier to the work of Resmaa Menakem (2017) and the proposition in his book *My Grandmother's Hands* that racist legacies continue living and are passed on through the body. In light of Diouf's and Spillers' descriptions of Black corporeal experience under slavery, it is frighteningly telling that in the Jamaica of my youth, I grew up hearing (in my lived experience, *knowing*) that the paradise island boasted the highest rape rate per capita in the Western hemisphere.³⁴ In a society founded on historical emasculation, women's flesh still suffers the brunt. These are among the histories I carry.

³⁴ Current statistics reveal that the country is ranked number two in the top five nations with the most rape cases in the world (UNODC, 2013, cited in Bourne et al., p. 590), while as recently as in 2022, Jamaica's femicide rate was the second highest in the world. UNFPA Caribbean Sub-Regional Office <https://caribbean.unfpa.org/en/news/unfpa-jamaica-collaborates-government-and-csos-address-gbv-and-family-violence-scale-hfle-0>.

Figure 5.2 *La danse des seins ou l'offrande (The breast dance or the offering)*



Photo by Cloé Pluquet, 2021.

At some point, when I finally start to slow down the drums and leave some gaps in between the groove I've managed to make, I know that it's time to peel off the layers. I think about the gaps and how they feel, how they sound... Bits of the drum kit disappear little by little with Anne-Marie's back and forths to and from my table. I'm left with the unsatisfying sound of the drum pedal hitting nothing but itself. The wall of protection has disintegrated. I take off the rings, the bracelets, the necklaces. And I stand in front of the audience. I look at them, they look at me. I'm still wearing the chainmail dresses. I haven't taken those off yet. I'm sure people think, ah fuck she's going to get naked, but they'll have to wait, not yet... First, I take the microphone that Anne-Marie brings me; it has a very long cable, no stand. I have tape around both index fingers because otherwise the cable burns me. I've already had blisters from spinning the microphone above my head for more than ten minutes... I spin the mic to start: Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Ange. The first story is the same, always, and the last story is the same, always. But in between the two, I can't do anything else but nosedive into all that I am. I need to access and offer a kind of mosaic of my life, going from death, to sex, to my kids, my work, my parents, how I feel, where I'm from, and on and on.... The stories are sometimes short, sometimes longer, disconnected one from the other – except when they're not, sometimes fast and accelerated, sometimes slower and farther apart... Most of all, I mustn't know where I'm going; I just have to dare to open my mouth and invent with whatever comes out. I have no idea when it's going well and when it's not. I have all the instructions, but I have no indications; I only have the actual physical and emotional experience of doing it. Fugitivity can only exist in the present. At the end of this part with the microphone, I peel off the three dresses. And I'm just standing there, looking at the audience. It feels weird every time I do it, getting naked in front of people; it's something... special, peculiar. I'm not a particularly prudish person so it's not that, but I know what gets projected on to this older female Black body. On top of that, I don't have the perfect little dancer's body anymore. I have to face my own resistances, barriers, biases. And the only thing is to... to let everything that goes through me... all this questioning, all these doubts, all these discomforts, to let it all be present. Not describing it, not saying what I'm doing, but letting it all be part of

what's revealed when I'm standing there naked, looking at people...looking at people looking at me.

Figure 5.3 *Le dévoilement (The unveiling)*



Photo by Cloé Pluquet, 2021.

As I exercise my agency as a Black woman in part by standing naked on a stage platform, I am called to think with two figures that have been present with me throughout this thesis project, Saartje Baartman and Josephine Baker, both of whom were respectively Black-naked on stage platforms before white audiences, albeit in very different circumstances. Fundamentally, (Black) women's bodies can be seen as a "cultural text" (Bordo, 1993, p. 288), in that they are both formed by, and an expression of, the particular complex of historical and cultural mediations to which they have been/are subject. Their bodies therefore manifest as "complex sites of ideological, ecological, and discursive power relations" (Oppermann, 2013, p. 77). Although this research-creation does not focus on ecologies in terms of environmental degradation, there is little doubt that ecologies of power, ideology and geography have dictated the destinies of generations of Black women,

enslaved or not. Borrowing from the work of ecofeminist Izabel F.O. Brandão (2018), I am interested in the “emancipatory strategies” (Murphy, 1991, as cited in Brandão, 2018, p. 189) that emerge from feminist ecocriticism, proposing antidotes for the historical oppression of (not only Black) women and nature. It is in this broader context that I consider the circumstances of the two women in question and, ultimately, perhaps my own performance as an emancipatory strategy.

Saartje (Sara) Baartman, the young South African steatopygic³⁵ woman also known as the Hottentot Venus, was brought to London from South Africa in 1810 and paraded throughout Europe because of her unusual body, according to the European standard. Locked in a cage, she was exhibited close to naked in freak shows – her body an extremely productive commodity for those who exploited her. Ultimately, she was taken to France where, upon her death in 1816 at the age of 26, her body was dissected for scientific research (including the pickling and display of her brain and genitals) and a plaster cast erected at the Musée de l’Homme in Paris. Following the African National Congress (ANC)’s victory in South African elections in 1994, President Nelson Mandela negotiated the return of her remains from France, which happened only in 2002.

My interest in Saartje Baartman revolves around the demeaning objectification of her non-Western (and therefore Othered) body – regardless of whatever agency she may or may not have been able to exercise with respect to the events of her adult life.³⁶ The utter dehumanization of Saartje as Other by those who exploited her, rendered her non-human, an object, “...an image [..that..] replace[d] the actual being. The actual being [was] then denied speech; denied self-definition, self-realization; and overarching all this, denied selfhood – which is after all the point of objectification” (Cliff, 1982, p. 34). The public displays, the images diffused, the stories written – Baartman’s horror came to represent the reality of generations of Black women. Through the lens of

³⁵ Steatopygia defined as an “as excessive fat of the buttocks, usually seen in women and sometimes called Hottentot Bustle because it was commonly seen in the Hottentot people [or Khoi-Khoi people] of southern Africa” (Ersek et al., 1994). In their 1963 article, Krut and Singer affirm that, “This condition, with its associated lordosis, may also be seen in some Upper Paleolithic paintings in European and North Africa caves and shelters”, suggesting that, in fact, Steatopygia may have been more common even in European ancestry (p. 181).

³⁶ There is some controversy about whether or not Baartman signed a contract with whoever was responsible for displaying her. However, in light of the fact that she had been enslaved in South Africa and taken to the United Kingdom, the moral and ethical validity of any such signing can be called into question (“The Saartje Baartman Story,” 2019).

ecofeminist critique, Brandão (2018) looks at the underlying ideologies that allowed the humiliating human exhibit to exist. Citing Monique LaRocque, she remarks the “‘long-standing tradition’ associated with the oppression of nature, as well as of women, and ‘characterized by a logical structure of otherness and negation, where the undesirable *other* is made inferior and is subjugated’” (p. 186, emphasis in original). Patriarchy’s suppression of any value other than an exploitative one applied equally to women and to the natural environment. Baartman’s own enslavement in South Africa by Dutch traders before being taken to Europe cannot be separated from the Dutch colonization of the African land territory and its wealth – a wealth which included its Black inhabitants. The same is present in the “birth” of the Caribbean as Benitez-Rojo (1996) described it, in which the genocide of indigenous populations and subsequent enslavement of Black people were a direct consequence of the ruthless rivalry to subjugate the geographical region’s nature for economic gain.

In her contribution to the edited volume, *Literature and Ecofeminism: Intersectional and International Voices*, Brandão examines the work of two poets, Grace Nichols and Jackie Kay, whose writings take Saartje Baartman as their thematic focus. Although both works are certainly worthy of attention, in the context of this study, I am more intrigued by Grace Nichols’ “Thoughts Drifting through the Fat Black Woman’s Head while Having a Full Bubble Bath” because the author is a Black Caribbean woman from Guyana (which is actually on the South American continent), who emigrated to Britain in 1977 – the year that my own family left Jamaica and moved to Canada.

In Nichols’ poem, Baartman is given a voice but is never actually named, suggesting “that some kind of universality can be associated with this woman”, asserts Brandão (p. 188). It is precisely this implied universality – and its varying forms of repetition – that makes the story of Saartje Baartman so significant. The poem is part of Nichols’ 1984 collection *The Fat Black Woman’s Poems*, not all of which are related to Baartman, but which explore various historical representations of the Black female body. Brandão (2018) describes the poem’s long title as reminiscent of a newspaper headline, summarizing its content and “telling (more or less) what to expect from what is to come” (p. 188). The rest of the poem is quite short with few verses and the notable repetition of the key word “steatopygous” in the two identical stanzas that start and end the poem:

Steatopygous sky
Steatopygous sea
Steatopygous waves
Steatopygous me

O how I long to place my foot
on the head of anthropology

to swig my breasts
in the face of history

to scrub my back
with the dogma of theology

to put my soap
in the slimming industry's
profitsome spoke

Steatopygous sky
Steatopygous sea
Steatopygous waves
Steatopygous me

Interestingly, the imagery of repetition is again present here, as in the titles (and content) of previous scholarly sources (*The Repeating Body*, *The Repeating Island*, among others), in the movements of the ocean's waves, and in certain movements of my stage performance. In Nichols' poem, the repeated use of the word "steatopygous" is what Brandão calls "a rehabilitating appropriation" – i.e., a reclaiming of Saartje Baartman's body as she was born, a self-affirming definition (p. 189). Sarah Lawson Welsh (2007), a scholar of Grace Nichols' writing, further comments: "although it carries the 'pain of history' it is also used as a positive term of self-identification, as the fat black woman realizes in her own body a history of representing the black female form" (p. 41). The relationship of "Steatopygous me" to the natural elements – particularly that of water through the sea and waves – is also part of the self-affirming mantra, and a further refusal of the historical subjugation of both the fat woman and the nature that spawned her. This liberatory objective is reinforced by her longing to "swig her breasts in the face of history" – a history characterized by oppressive discourse and anthropological and theological distortion (Brandão, 2018, p. 189).

My own breasts in my hands, I imagine hers ample and filled with Black female agency.

My standing naked in *Confession Publique* is a dramaturgy of the pedestal. Thinking again from the auction block to the inhuman display of Saartje Baartman and human zoos against the value attributed by the ancient Greeks and Romans to the representations of their gods and emperors and ultimately to colonial and modern-day museums and galleries, I am drawn to consider what choosing to display myself means. During the performance, I experience it emotionally as challenging, as courageous, as defiant. Physically, I cannot always see around me, I am limited in space which feels confined, and at the same time, I feel empowered on my pedestal. Importantly for me, it interrogates the relationship between the watcher and the watched – a reference to both the colonial gaze on a Black woman’s body and the fact of a contemporary performance by a Black woman in the 2023 reality. Fundamentally, from inside of myself, I feel my nudity challenging any refusal of my value.

Figure 5.4 *Les ondulations (Undulations)*

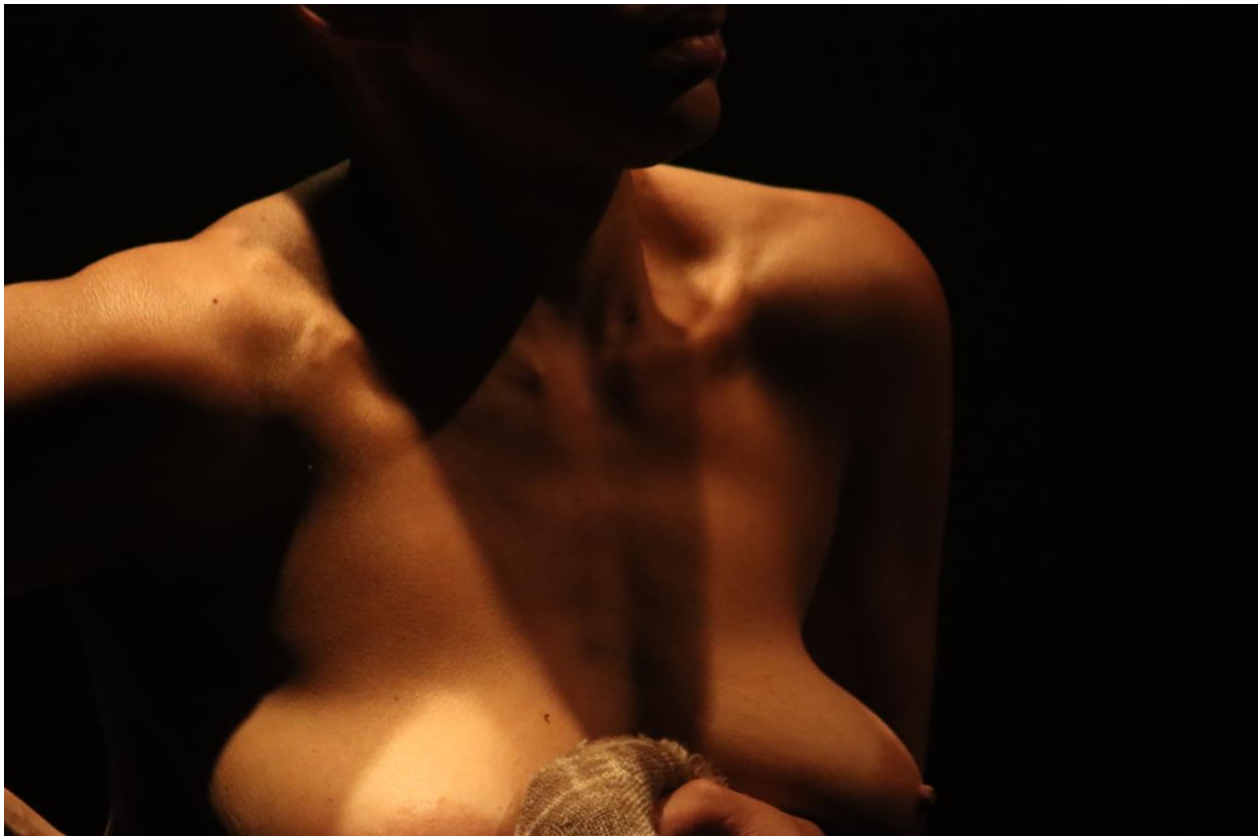


Photo by Cloé Pluquet, 2021.

*on the edge
of a precipice
down inside herself
out into the black
she knows the unknown
tells the untold
she is traversed
by layers of female story
flirt with the edges
of the space of herself
of the encounter
this a place of no comfort
to be entered willingly
stay in the middle
and crouch
spread as on a medieval rack
in sacrifice
not a lamb
a black
woman*

(Written in sections in journal notes; compiled in November 2022)

In contrast with the exploitation of “flesh” that characterized Baartman’s experiences, Josephine Baker’s nude and bare-breasted performances brought her enormous success in 1920s and ‘30s colonial France until her death in 1975, becoming a source of agency, social status and ultimate financial stability. Baker’s famous appearances at *La Revue Nègre* and subsequently at *Les Folies Bergères* in Paris featured a range of representational characters from the clownesque dancing Negress and the bare-breasted African savage clad only in a banana skirt, to the elegant male bandleader, and the enigmatic, feather and sequin-decked Black Venus. Mesmerizing audiences all over Europe, she stymied prevalent colonial attitudes and expectations and built a career characterized by shape-shifting both on and off the stage. There is a studied ambiguity about

Baker's willingness to parade on stage the trappings of colonial racist attitudes towards Black people – possibly regarded by some as a betrayal of her Blackness; certainly seen by others (myself included) as a strategy that allowed her the privilege of agency and social critique at a time when Blacks had little or no such access.

Looking at the theatricalization of Black skin at the turn of the 20th century through the lens of Modernism's aesthetic quest for the "pure surface" (p.11), Anne Anlin Cheng draws us into the convoluted interconnections between the colonial perceptions prevalent at the time (including expressions of European Primitivism), the theatrical culture of striptease which also emerges in the early 20th century, and the architectural fascination with interior and exterior coverings. She writes:

It is no coincidence that the striptease becomes a recognizable theatrical genre at the height of European Primitivism, nor is it surprising that the theatrical idiom of venues such as the Moulin Rouge and the Folies Bergères would favor what might be called the "zoological". Racialized and feminized nudity in turn serves as a primary conceit in this visual vocabulary emerging from European Primitivism. The simultaneously scientific and prurient display of such nakedness ... has been central to the imperial and colonial projects of European expansion. (p. 37)

The exploitation of Black women's flesh (both "scientific" as in the case of Saartje Baartman and "prurient" as with Benitez-Rojo's metaphor of the "gaping vagina") inherent in the project of European expansion is seemingly confused by Baker's performances of her *exotic, savage* objecthood. Her naked skin manifesting as a kind of "performance costume" according to Miyatsu (2020, p. 11), Baker actively played to colonial stereotypes, going from the idealization of primitive innocence and the apparent denigration of primitive sexuality to suggesting her victimization and, ultimately, parodying European racism and sexism (Cheng, pp. 41-42). Often clad in nothing more than feathers or bananas, the ambiguity of Baker's performances suggests that while her naked skin was being revealed for the colonial public – potentially satisfying stereotypical colonial expectations; it was, at the same time, also being partially hidden from the colonial gaze – potentially provoking colonial fascination and desire. Through her *performed nakedness*, Baker was able to successfully navigate the quagmire of being simultaneously historical object, artistic subject, beheld object and what I would describe as subject-self.

It is precisely this corporeal agency that inspires my own stage nudity. Baker's self-fetishization and self-imposed objecthood played artfully with the complexity of skin and "its inherently complicated relation to essence versus surface" (Cheng, 2013, p. 28). By its nature, skin is both a covering and a "medium of transition", "a vibrant interface between the hidden and the visually available," according to Cheng (p. 28). Baker was somehow able to take full advantage of the colonial projections that were made on what was "visually available," i.e., her epidermis, to both protect and promote what was in fact "hidden" – her interior self. I am aware in my own skin during the performance, that I sometimes experience it – my skin – as *performed*, as if wearing a costume; at others, that same skin is porous, like an open window to my absolute interior nakedness. The difference in sensation is palpable and I wonder if the audience can tell; regardless, I feel it is one of the strengths of the performance. In contrast with Josephine Baker's experience, I certainly do not in any way feel that I am manipulating extant colonial tropes; but bearing in mind the cultural histories we have all inherited, Cheng's distinctions between "essence" and "surface," "hidden" versus "visually available" remain pertinent. As a reproductive object, historical Black nudity had no right to "essence" or "hidden." *Confession Publique*, however, allows me to play with exactly what seems beneath the surface and have it invade my "visually available" "surface." For me, my nudity challenges the spectator to witness (in the sense evoked by Albright [1997]) my "essence." my subject-self.

Although he does not address nudity per se, Uri McMillan's proposition of the "embodied avatar" (2015) seems worth contemplating even in relationship to skin, to *my* skin. His study offers an alternative reading of the forms, content, and intentions of objecthood in Black feminist performance, examining both historical and contemporary Black women's use of objecthood as a means of identity-formation and resistance in a (still) racist society. His argument is anchored in the body-as-object strategies for Black women's survival and escape in 19th century slave America, as well as those of contemporary Black woman artists for whom self-imposed objecthood has been a means to agency. He uses the notion of the avatar – a spiritual incarnation and alternate self – as a framework for looking at the different forms of impersonation that have been staged by Black women, and the ways in which these particular objecthoods have actually been manifestations of embodied subjectivity. Whether it is with respect to escaping slave women Joice Heth and Ellen Craft or conceptual and performance artists Lorraine O'Grady and Adrian Piper or rapper Nicki

Minaj, the taking on of other selves – perhaps other “skins” if applied to Josephine Baker – has been a strategy of reclaiming their “flesh,” allowing them either the possibility of survival, or the possibility to comment on/within art, on/within society, on/within their place in both.

My own nudity (one of my “embodied avatars”) in *Confession Publique* is a multi-layered act of reclaiming, that moves as much through the revealing of my skin as the hiding of it, through the attraction of the audience’s gaze as the escaping of it, through the sharing of secrets as the opacity of their fictions.

am I covered?

what hides?

what is exposed?

am I more naked draped or costumed only in my skin?

is naked

an offering?

a defiance?

what distracts the eye of those who gaze?

their discomfort?

their fascination?

my voice?

do they see me?

who has the right to look? at what?

do they see beyond my brown skin that is called black?

do they see my dark chocolate-coloured cousins

do they see my blue-eyed great grandmother

do they see my black uncle

what histories does my brown skin tell?

what confessions does my naked skin truly reveal?

perhaps mostly those of the gaze

(Written in sections in journal notes; compiled in March 2023)

‘Milk’ is named in this chapter’s title. Its significance relates first and foremost to the nourishing of offspring and therefore to reproductive capacity. However, ‘milk’ also relates to breasts insofar as they gender women and speak to female sexuality and eroticism. The freedom evoked as the fat black woman swigs her breasts at history in Grace Nichols’ poem or the sexual innuendo borne by Josephine Baker’s nude torso personae bring into focus the metaphorical importance of Black women’s breasts in any reflection on our historical experience. The *Danse des seins* (breast dance) in *Confession Publique* is yet another moment of reclaiming for me – of my reproductive body, of my erotic body, of my playful body.

Figure 5.5 La danse des seins ou l’offrande (The breast dance or the offering)



Photo by Cloé Pluquet, 2021.

I would have preferred to be somewhere else. I repeat it several times, I’m naked again – Anne-Marie has torn my princess covering away. I bend towards the table and lie down, on my back. Like a sacrifice. And I think about all those women in my family, in history – Black women, Jamaican women, all women. I think about how the

woman is sacrificed, has been sacrificed. I think about how the woman's body does not belong to her. I take my breasts in my hands. And I feel this weird mix of emotions...a little bit of modesty, because, well, I am lying naked with my head hanging off the table with my breasts in my hands, in front of a lot of people who have paid to see a performance...I wonder what they're thinking... I lie there, my breasts in my hands...I also know that what's coming next is a moment that's going to last, yes, a good five or six minutes and I manipulate my breasts...it's like... This breast dance is all the breasts I have lived. From a mammogram, to having sex, and even the breasts I haven't lived – feeding my children, being raped... Using them like guns, like a video game, to make periscopes. I live this thing, this body that is so intimately familiar to me. And I reclaim it. I re-tame it, it belongs to me even more. Through this dance of breasts. Mine. The breasts are mine. And all of a sudden, I think of the people watching and I think: “Fuck you all, it doesn't matter. My tits, I do what the fuck I want with them.” I smile... Eventually, I roll over and sit at the edge of the table with my back to the audience and wait.

(Transcribed from a voice note from June 2021 in which I “talked my way through the performance.”)

The image that is featured on the cover of *The Repeating Body* is the work of Afro-Cuban artist Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons (figure 5.4). From her 2009 series *When I am Not Here/Estoy Alla*, the photographic self-portrait shows the torso of a woman (without the head visible) consumed in the blue waves of the sea, cradling a small carved wooden boat in her two hands, with two baby bottles hanging around her neck just covering her own nipples, milk dripping into the boat below. Her Black diasporic body, painted into the sea-like background, is the ocean. Her ocean-body holds the boat which carries her ancestors whose children she births and nourishes with her milk. Her “flesh” is the Middle Passage. The repeated movement of the ocean’s waves brought waves of forced human migration – Brown (2015) speaks of bodies repeating... (p. 70); and Black women’s breasts were repeatedly milked to continually replenish the stocks.

Figure 5.6 *When I am Not Here/Estoy Alla*



By Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons on the cover of *The Repeating Body* (Brown, 2015).

The metaphor of milk and breasts as a way of addressing the traumas of maternity and sexual and reproductive agency under slavery is present in the work of many Black diasporic women artists and scholars. Perhaps one of the most well-known is the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Beloved*, by acclaimed African American author, activist and essayist, the late Toni Morrison (2004). *Beloved* is inspired by the true story of fugitive slave Margaret Garner who, upon recapture, tries to kill herself and her four children to prevent their return to slavery. Only her two-year old daughter dies. Garner and her husband are tried and found guilty of attempting to escape their owners. (A trial for the murder of her daughter would have implied the status of ‘subject’ for Margaret Garner – an impossibility since she was owned, not free.) In Morrison’s novel, the main protagonist, pregnant Sethe, has her breast milk stolen from her at one point to feed other infant mouths than that of her own toddler. She, her milk and her offspring, are owned – all countable objects. As with Margaret Garner, Sethe also tries to escape with her children and, ultimately, attempts to kill them rather

than have them live as slaves. Also as with Garner, only Sethe's two-year old daughter dies – Beloved is the word inscribed on the toddler's tombstone.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to enter into any meaningful analysis of *Beloved*, because of the work's brilliant and profound complexity, and the fact that it has been studied and re-studied by many scholars far better equipped than I to understand and explain its nuances. Most important is the fact that Morrison's novel is an icon of literary work that speaks to the horrors of slave motherhood and the sexual subjugation of person as property that is embedded in that reality. Against the backdrop of infanticide as the most desperate gesture of maternal love, she digs deep into the fragmentation of the body, of memory, of the expressions of guilt, shame, loss and absence experienced by generations of Black women who were forced to birth without mothering, and to mother those they did not birth. Spillers' (1987) reference to the "seared, divided, ripped-apartness" of "flesh" is as much psychologically, spiritually and emotionally visceral as it is physically visceral. Seen in the light of Benitez-Rojo's (1996) metaphor of the Caribbean as a gaping vagina rather than any whole woman, the historical lack of corporeal agency suffered by Black women and the separatedness of self imposed by the dismembering of kinship and family ties and reproductive autonomy, have meant the need for the Black woman to literally re-member herself beyond the ripped-apartness of her flesh. What has been historically inherited from corporeal imperialism is a fraught relationship with her own body, with maternity, with her sexuality, with sensuality, eroticism, pleasure.

My sensations from inside of *Confession Publique* allow me to confront some of this fraughtness in my own regard. I am a product of my history but, of course, also of my path. Exposing my body at all is complicated in my culture of origin. Even if voluptuousness is considered an asset for a Jamaican woman in terms of her attractiveness, that ample flesh is always covered – and not only by skin. Consequently, the performance repeatedly brings me face to face with the cultural container in which Caribbean women's bodies sit. Perhaps this is also a slavery inheritance. Nevertheless, the slight emotional tremors that I feel at various points in the piece are very much related to the deep knowledge that my parents, for example, would have been horrified! But, further, the moments of feeling the draped fabric graze my skin, or during the *Danse des seins*, when I play with the quality of my touch on my skin, or feel the space between my legs (even if it is not exposed to the audience's gaze) – these moments are powerful reminders of the eroticism

that my Black women ancestors were denied and that I must be sure to reclaim – as woman and artist.

Another contemporary African American woman writer, Gayl Jones (1981), has made a significant contribution to the metaphorical imagery surrounding Black women's mammary flesh. *Song for Anninho* is a narrative poem set in the freed-slave enclaves of 17th century Brazil in which the main protagonist, Almeyda, separated from her lover Anninho in the forest, has her breasts cut off by Portuguese soldiers and thrown into a river. She is left without "the globes of her breasts" (p. 4), without the capacity to nourish offspring and thereby contribute to the continuity of her people. In Almeyda's eyes, her disfigurement by the colonial power is a denial of her corporeal agency, robbing her of her femininity and effectively de-gendering her. The wounds on her chest – in both their physical and psychological traces – are again reminiscent of the mutilation and objectification Spillers refers to when she speaks of the "seared, divided, ripped-apartness" of "flesh", and signify the loss of self that haunts Almeyda throughout the poem. As she seeks to heal, repetitive movements through time take her on a spiritual journey of memory and she manages a fragmented reconstruction of self, of her couple, and of her people. Not unlike Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, it is once again traveling through fragments of memory that becomes, in and of itself, an act of survival and wholeness. It is "rememory"³⁷ or, in the words of the woman who rescues the injured Almeyda, "the places where the visible and the invisible meet" (p. 85) that provide respite for the Black woman – the places of hauntings.

lost and found breasts
re-membered

³⁷ In her collection of essays entitled *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, Meditations*, Toni Morrison describes Rememory and her use of it in the novel *Beloved*: "For imaginative entrance into that territory I urged memory to metamorphose itself into metaphorical and imagistic associations [...] History versus memory, and memory versus memorylessness. Rememory as in recollecting and remembering as in reassembling the members of the body, the family, the population of the past" (2019, pp. 323-324). Rememory will revisit me later in the text.

Figure 5.7 *Le dévoilement (The unveiling)*



Photo by Cloé Pluquet, 2021.

she stands on a pedestal
rich brown skin woolly hair eyes black
stripped of her history
of touch of the feel of tender fingers not her own
she has forgotten the pleasures...
of her lips thick and full... hanging between her thighs
the smell of sweet... of sweat

who reminds her of her?
who knows her richness?
her eyes close

close out the other-story be in the her-story
fill in the gaps
critically fabulate
head and ass rotate to feel
to remember
to re-member our bodies back/s... arched in the sway
in the cadences of black

Saartje Baartman went home in pieces
her backside in a fucking jar
her sexuality a scene of subjection

we want our bodies back
nipples protruding like a dancehall queen
the drop beat is a beat stripped... of her story... a gap filled
with self-pleasuring gyrating erogenous-making self-
pleasuring...

the bastard cream-coloured child resists
the sway the cadences of black
she has learned to "white" her sensuality away from her spirituality
forgotten that the sacred communion is the profane sensation
of pleasure provoked by her hand or that of another

who knows her richness?
how can she? without a teacher?
stripped of her-story by a white his-tory

we want our bodies back
nipples protruding like a dancehall queen
backsides full and round and spreading...

in cosmic offering...

With inspiration from Saidiya Hartman, bell hooks, Toni Morrison, Jessica Care Moore, Grace Nichols, Nicki Minaj...

(Written in January 2023 from random journal notes.)

CHAPTER 6 HAUNTINGS³⁸

When I sit down, Anne-Marie puts the microphone in front of me. I am wet and cold; she brings me a fur stole. I'm actually thinking, all through the show, about all the skins I put on – figuratively and literally – all these layers that I take off, and put on, that I take off, and put on... and how much these things, they... Yes, they sustain me. My grandmother had a stole too. She was a seamstress... a dressmaker. She made dresses for the prostitutes and she would make holes, secret pockets in their dresses, for them to hide their money.

(Voice notes, after the “explicitation interview,” June 2021)

My almost white-passing grandmother, Winnie – single mother of five children and family legend has it, a distant cousin of Florence Nightingale, considered one of the founders of nursing – emerged unexpectedly during an explicitation interview once I had started gathering together my thoughts, intuitions, and writings about *Confession Publique*. In the specific moment that triggered my images and sensations during the interview, I have just peeled off the gold chainmail dresses and am standing naked in front of the audience on my platform. I begin to sing *If Love's a Sweet Passion* from Henry Purcell's *The Fairy Queen*; throughout the song, I slowly turn to face the four cardinal directions, exposing my naked body from all four angles (as a slave body might have been displayed). When I return to face the front, I begin a ten-minute journey of slow undulations during which my nudity is sometimes draped in fabric. The section culminates in a succession of fleeting emotions that traverse my face while my body, once again exposed, comes to stillness.

During the interview (excerpt in appendix), I was asked what I was attentive to in that moment of the performance:

I pay attention to all the stories that come up. At one point, I found myself thinking, well, not even thinking, but rather, telling myself: ‘This is a 60-year-old woman. This is my mother's daughter’. As if I can feel all the stories that make me. And I'm

³⁸ I have borrowed the term Hauntings from Avery Gordon's (1997) publication, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*.

deliberately not saying that ‘made’ me, but that ‘make’ me. Because it’s something that... it moves, it’s not constant, from one millisecond to another, the stories change, the sensations change. [...] I feel the surface, funny from the inside, like ...like I’m bathed in these stories that come to the surface, and come out...they come out of my pores... they come out. I am just bathed in them... it’s like I’m under the shower. I even prefer to think of a waterfall. Yes, there’s water, there’s water falling, but it’s not water coming from outside. It’s my own water, coming to the surface, washing me, enveloping me, draining me. (excerpt, explicitation interview, June 2021)

The questions pushed further, probing to discover what words came to mind for me in this moment:

“Strength, life, vulnerability, fear. More life, more strength.” And who was I in that moment?

I am, I am all these bodies, all these different bodies; all these, and I don’t even say different beings, all these different bodies that are manifesting, that are flowing through me. I am all of these, I am all of these. (excerpt, explicitation interview, June 2021)

When asked who I felt connected to, the answer was unequivocal: “My maternal grandmother. Winnie. And the word that comes to mind is survival.”

Who is this woman I carry?

Her face hovers, her power, her fragility

At all costs, save her children

Even if it means to sacrifice them

What are the indicators of survival?

Crisscrossing the oceans

Once white

Once black

Neither is her

All is her

nursing the richest

Sewing pockets into the dresses of whores

a defiant smile of solidarity

a friend to raise her children

scattered in love and division

her ashes drift off the coast of an earthquake

(Written after the “explicitation interview,” June 2021)

Winnie is profoundly present for me as I perform, in spite of not having been part of the creation of the piece in any way. My grandmother, who I knew of as a rebel of sorts and who, apparently, I am similar to in my adulthood, has somehow come to be, to represent, so many unknown women who have come to inhabit my performing self. *Confession Publique* is not easily rehearsed. Beyond the structure of the work, which is stable, the ways in which I navigate the movements inside and in between the sections are always to be discovered in the moment. There is little else to *do* other than give myself over to the experience itself and allow that to be witnessed. In that light, what feeds the experience in each performance takes on particular importance. One of the images – or better said, sensations – that has become an anchor for this part of the performance (particularly during the undulations) is this feeling of layers of Black women’s bodies emerging from my own – rising to the surface of me as my body undulates, as it waves, like the ocean. Winnie is there – the fact that she had a blue-eyed mother and a Black-skinned brother; that she went from sewing Black prostitutes’ dresses and light-skinned politicians’ suits in downtown Kingston (the capital of Jamaica) to nursing a Rockefeller in 1960s New York; that she raised five children (including my mother) without their fathers present by farming them out to close friends who raised them. She was stunning and almost-white in some circles; stunning and a Negro in others. Like my grandmother, the survival of countless women like her is also expressed through the realities, fears, triumphs, and lost stories that echo through my own imaginary and lived experience. These are the hauntings that manifest for me through the holes in the prostitutes’ dresses, in the gaps, in my undulations, in what is known and what is forgotten.

Sociologist Avery Gordon (1997), from whom I have borrowed the term, speaks of “haunting” as the way in which (supposedly past) abusive systems of power continue to manifest in people’s everyday lives, whether as obvious expressions or more indirectly. She writes:

Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future. These specters or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view. (1997, p. xvi)

When I perform *Confession Publique*, I have the distinct impression of being traversed by, of travelling with, such specters. I give myself over to their presence and the altered experience of time that they impose, one in which the pasts lived by Black bodies, especially women, manifest in my own present body, and with every performance, they rewrite a possible future. Some of these ethereal visitors I know, others are faces, others simply a presence. Now that I have met her in this context, Winnie is always there. The choreographic work was never intended to address the kind of social and political haunting described by Gordon; nevertheless, that is in fact what has emerged from the inside of my experience. It suggests to me the extent to which I am a product of, and subject to, that social and political haunting. Perhaps, in this context, what has been “contained or blocked from view” is precisely the significance in my present moment of the histories that I carry and the ways in which they inform and affect my person and, consequently, my artistic practice. In my case, these are not necessarily ghosts to be gotten rid of, but rather, to be welcomed and understood as part of my *submerged dramaturgy*.

That said, I acknowledge that the disregard for and violence against Black bodies in contemporary society are the kind of haunting to which Gordon refers – ghosts of the Middle Passage and its wake. Thinking with her, I am reminded that throughout my childhood in Jamaica, I witnessed extreme social inequality, unpitying prejudices as part of a wickedly rigid class structure, colorism, violence against women, homophobia... I did not yet understand these to be the specters of times past, that they actually belonged to what followed “in the wake” of the slave ship. I simply thought I was from a third world country and that’s what third world countries were like. Once I arrived in Canada as a teenager in the 1970s, some of the certainties of childhood started to unravel (not the least of which was the sudden discovery that I was *Black*). They have continued to do so, it seems, for more than 45 years. I have of course lived both triumphs and challenges, both individually and in my circles of family and friends. But again, I did not often make any clear connection to the deeply collective social histories that have been “contained or repressed,” that are borne in and through my body, and that have in a profoundly cathartic way, manifested as ghosts rising to the surface of my skin since the summer of 2020 and my subsequent deep dive into *Confession Publique*. The repetition of the performance has allowed me to encounter the specters that cohabit my spacetime. What has happened in the world since George Floyd’s murder has removed any illusion of the end of the legacy of chattel slavery, and I am called, with every performance, to

conjure up the ghosts that are part of my personal story while allowing my body, my skin, to carry, to bear the stories of those Black women who have, not so long ago, birthed the Americas into being.

Figure 6.1 *Le baptême (Baptism)*



Photo by Cloé Pluquet, 2021.

I am a diasporic wanderer, by history and by nature (increasingly, I wonder if those are even separable). I left my island home, and my rainbow-arrayed extended family, at the age of fifteen and, subsequently, have lived in eleven cities in seven countries and visited countless others; I speak four languages and am extremely aware of how differently I feel and am viewed from one place to another, in one culture versus another, through the lens of one history or another. *Confession Publique's raison d'être* springs from my curiosities about what I have been where, what I have taken with me, what has manifested, what I have left.

I am in Mali, on the African continent for the first time. We're³⁹ doing research for a new album and we're with our guide, Ali, who is taking us into different villages to listen – mostly to the children and the women because they are the ones who most often approach us – and to offer our music. In one of those villages, we meet a man who speaks some French and we manage to communicate with him more easily – at least, beyond using music as the language of encounter. We introduce ourselves and he has never met anyone from the former slave colonies of the Americas before. My companions are all able to identify their Congolese ancestry and speak of their languages and music – for me that's impossible. The man looks at me closely and says, "But you are a Fulani woman!"⁴⁰ He goes on to describe what my features tell him of my ancestry.

(An anecdote from past adventures)

The fact that I could not in any way identify my ethnic origins with any specificity was a reminder of the long legacy of extractive slavery and colonialism. However, I remain surprised by the depth of emotion I felt being *recognized*. The man in question was not himself Fulani, but I nevertheless had the feeling that I had been truly *seen* by one of my own. It was a humbling and yet glorious experience that situated me on a historical continuum, yes, but also on a *land continuum*. With my feet on that Malian ground, I had been gifted a past. With a well-ingrained sense of Jamaican

³⁹ We were a group of five women musicians from Belgium, three of Congolese-Belgian origin, one a white Belgian woman, and myself, a light-skinned Jamaican with green eyes.

⁴⁰ The Fulani people, also called Peul or Fulbe, are scattered throughout many parts of Africa, mostly in West Africa (Nigeria, Mali, Guinea, Senegal, Niger). The Fulani language, known as Fula, is classified within the Atlantic branch of the Niger-Congo language family [Britannica, 2023b]).

patriotism growing up, I never really considered the loss of cultural origin stories – which sits at the heart of the birth of the Caribbean – as a gap in my being, as something that might need to be re-membered. Neither did I understand in any truly embodied way what it meant to be of African origin. My European origins are *normality*. (I am reminded of the words of Miguel Gutierrez [2018]): “How did whiteness become, I shudder even to write this, safety—a lack of feeling, a lack of allegiances. It made space, or at least I thought it did, for me. For a me that had no history” (para. 18) Like Gutierrez, my coming into my history has been more recent and, perhaps also similarly, harder to explain and to justify because of a successful career as a contemporary dance artist. I have often felt that part of me has been *unseen* throughout my career, even by me (a reference to the blind spot I mentioned in my introduction). This research-creation project and *Confession Publique* itself are first and foremost an encounter with my unseen selves, a discovery of my ghosts and hauntings. Coming back to Canada after 25 years in Europe and having the opportunity to work closely with Indigenous artists has been a moment of profound awakening to the fact that I am part of a diaspora, in the etymological sense of the term – ancient Greek meaning “to sow over” (Britannica, 2023a) or disperse. The seeds that have made me come from dispersed lives and have been dispersed; in my lifetime, I have continued to do the same. My history is one built on ghosts. Where am I from? Everywhere and nowhere. Who is with me? They all are.

It is a curious experience to surrender to these spaces that have emerged in myself that are not in fact empty; rather, they are filled with what I do not know, but that is mine – strangely and deeply familiar. In one of the last scenes of the performance that we call *Archives nationales (National Archives)*, the indication from Mélanie is to move through the shapes, through the forms – human, animal, thing, Black, white, real, mythical – that echo the beginning of time until now. She has never said it, but I have always heard behind those words, “and situate yourself in it”. Because I am actively producing those forms (unlike the *Undulations* section mentioned earlier in which the trance-like repetition of wave movements invites ghosts to the surface of my skin), I provoke deliberate encounters with the images that come in the moment. It is not simple movement improvisation – the stories that I must evoke continuously are what give consistency, depth and lived experience to the section. I have discovered that the stories that come from time immemorial – *and not the time of history* – situate me in places I have never been but have known, with spirits I have never met but have known, in worlds of futurity that contain all of my histories, past and to

come. The fact that I am never to complete any movement and must always be on my way to the next, keeps the fleeting, furtive, fugitivity of Black being very present. The emergence of these *dramaturgies of unstillness* throughout the performance, these *agitated dramaturgies*, echo the hauntings of dispersal that characterize the Black diaspora.

This Black movement that survived the Middle Passage and that continues to inform Black lives (in West Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, the Americas) is also expressed in what dance scholar Nadine George-Graves (of Jamaican origin) calls “diasporic spidering” (2014, p. 33). Her conceptual proposition is inspired by Anansi, meaning spider in the Akan language of the Asante people of West Africa. The anti-authoritarian trickster god/man/woman/spider is at the centre of the oral storytelling traditions of western Africa, provoked into diaspora by the Atlantic slave trade. Originally from modern-day Ghana, the shapeshifting trickster survived amongst the enslaved populations and Maroon communities of plantation colonies all around the Caribbean. In Jamaica – where the largest concentration of Asante slaves landed – the stories have been passed along in living tradition by the “old Nanas, or creole nurses” (p. 394). (Considering the spontaneous appearance of my own grandmother during this process of awakening, it is curious that the Asante word Nana means Granny [p. 394]). In the folktales, full of cunning and devious trickery, Anansi moves beyond the more Eurocentric binary of good and evil, sometimes represented as the messenger, sometimes the hero, sometimes the thief. Turning the tables on oppression and authority, whether historical or contemporary, Anansi folktales recount feats of ingenuity and transformation, not always honorable, that “inspire a combination of psychological and practical methods of survival and resistance,” according to Black Atlantic and Caribbean Studies scholar Emily Zobel Marshall (2012, p. 4). In the spirit of oral traditions, the folktales entertain as much as they instruct, resisting fixed definitions and interpretation (Marshall, 2006, p. 11), and encouraging us to do the same.

I identify with the mythical Anansi figure in a deeply embodied way – the spider messenger was the storyteller of my youth. Anansi was around at home, at school, in (not many) books, in theatre, in music. My relationship to performance is very much influenced by my Anansi inheritances – orality, messages (i.e., morals of stories), and the ever-effective strategy of mutation. *Confession Publique* is a manifestation of all of these. Although my conscious objective in the work’s creation was not related to a need to *survive*, I acknowledge that *resistance* has been present for me

throughout this adventure – at first manifesting only intellectually in relation to the gnawing feeling of a certain invisibility throughout my career that I was interested in interrogating. Subsequently, each performance has become an embodied gesture of defiance, a testament to the fact that I not only can stand in spite of the *historical gaps*, but also that I can fill them – thanks to the ghosts that wash up on my shores as I undulate.

Figure 6.2 *Finale*



Photo by Cloé Pluquet, 2021.

In the Americas, where Anansi is, Black slaves have been, and their descendants have built, and continue to build on, their histories. George-Graves (2014) defines “diasporic spidering” as: “The multidirectional process by which people of African descent define their lives. The lifelong ontological gathering of information by going out into the world and coming back to the self” (p. 33). This constant (oceanic) movement outwards in order to understand and, subsequently, navigate inwards, and even to define “the self,” has been a way of life for me. Whether I look at what has been the history of migration in my family and my own journeys towards the various metropolises,

or the languages I have embraced as my individual expression, or my engagement in my artform of contemporary dance, continuous and multidirectional movement and adaptation define me. Growing up in Jamaica, I have vivid memories of travel back and forth amongst family and friends to “Kingston 21” or Miami, Florida, which was considered an additional zone to the twenty that constitute Jamaica’s capital city. Amongst Jamaicans in the 1970s and ‘80s, we spoke of the “Carry-us-beyond-our-borders” Sea, rather than the Caribbean Sea. Movement outwards represented opportunity, defined cultural influences, sometimes afforded escape and physical security; movement inwards brought the hybridization that also feeds national pride. I still feel this reality resonate in my own body. I have become who I am by leaving my island home, crossing seas and oceans, taking on other skins as a strategy for adaptation/survival, to ultimately return “home” to my Black Jamaican woman body, certainly hybridized, but more affirmedly anchored in my “self” as such. George-Graves writes: “Diasporic heritage survives despite the odds, and Anansi’s processes of journeying, gathering (wisdom and memory), gaining insight, sharing, and connecting are Diasporic Spiderings” (p. 35). There is a resonance to the movement that is essential to diasporic spidering which “haunts” my being: it is how I remember feeling as a child after a day spent in the sea – even once I was lying tired in bed, the waves kept moving inside my body as if I were theirs.

The movement essential to “diasporic spidering” as proposed by George-Graves, and which “haunts” my own being, is reminiscent of Martinican poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant’s “creolization.” Glissant dedicated much of his life’s work to the philosophical underpinnings of Caribbeanness or *Antillanité* (1981). Importantly, his thought emerges not from the North American continent but, rather, from deep inside the Caribbean, influenced by all the geographical and historical particularities that define the colonial project. His notion of Caribbeanness recognizes a diverse mixture in the cultures that compose Caribbean identity; but he further develops this in the proposition of “creolization,” which he sees as the *ever-changing* result of relations between cultures or between elements that result in *multiple identities*. “Creolization is hybridization with an added value which is unpredictability” (Verstraet, 2017). His emphasis on the processual nature of “creolization” again brings into focus the essentiality of movement – unpredictable, constant, out away from the island and back.

I *diasporically spider* and *creolize* – as I have done throughout most of my life – in every performance of *Confession Publique*. In a strange kind of way, the presence of the audience offers me the opportunity to move out into this world of my histories, gathering new information, allowing other voices to manifest, and constantly transforming and (re)defining myself through the process. The spectators bear witness to my re-membering. And revisiting the performance regularly during this writing has allowed me to realize the depth of importance this witnessing holds for me. Somehow, having the predominantly white audiences attend to my re-membering process feels like a shift in the historical power dynamic as well as an acknowledgement that we are all in this history – together. As I stand, seemingly alone, on the platform, I am deeply aware of my own generational and personal stories of diasporic wandering and all those who (have) come and go alongside me on those journeys. But, more specifically, what does *Confession Publique* afford me? Where does the performance allow me to wander? The encounter of cultures, the multiple identities I have taken on like new skins and, when needed, shed as if moulting, are part of the continual hybridization that manifests in my Black living as I process and transform and mutate – as I “spider” with Anansi as my guide. In the context of the performance, even if I never step off my platform, there is a constant (figurative) movement outwards, beyond my *island* and towards the world inhabited by the audience and beyond, before returning to myself – gap-filled, haunted, and yet, somehow more whole. Their witnessing of that is a validation of my person, of my path, of my history – not unlike the moment of defiance I mentioned earlier. In this context, creativity, improvisation, and a willingness to bare my skin are the substitutes for Anansi’s cunning and trickery; but mutation remains the outcome. Standing on that platform is like a condensed version of my current and past histories and life strategies, but not simply a retelling of those – the process fundamentally transforms me.

Just as constantly as I fill those gaps in my being, just as constantly do others come to reveal themselves at the surface of my skin. The shapeshifting that is a natural part of performance seems exacerbated for me in *Confession Publique* – not only must I shift what I know of myself, but also what I do not know, what has been lost, what is forgotten; all in the moment, like a kind of fugitive practice that compels me to define and redefine myself and the stories my body holds, at every opportunity. Through the iterative performances of *Confession Publique*, I have to come to realize the absences, the losses, the impossible to resolve stories that haunt my person – some of them I

know carnally; some of them I suspect from histories learned. As a Black Jamaican woman, a descendant of the “gaping vagina” that birthed the Caribbean, what writer and scholar Saidiya Hartman (2008) calls “the ubiquitous presence of Venus in the archive of Atlantic slavery” (p. 1) manifests also in my own corporeal archive. It cannot not be so. The Venus of the Hottentot Venus, the abused and murdered Venus girl of whom Hartman speaks in her article, “Venus in Two Acts,” these are all the unnamed women who, Hartman argues, were “transformed into commodities and corpses” (p. 2). I have the privilege of filling their voices with sensorial embodiment and questioning, of choosing to safely but defiantly expose my body so that they may take their space and place on my skin.

It is worth repeating what was mentioned in a footnote in the previous chapter: when commenting on the origins of “rememory,” Toni Morrison (2020) speaks of the need to “free [her] imagination of the impositions and limitations of race *and* explore the consequences of its centrality in the world” (p. 323, emphasis in original). Recognizing that recorded history is *full of the absence* of Black living, she is compelled to rely on memory rather than history to gain the insights into the cultural specificity that interests her. Morrison continues: “I urged memory to metamorphose itself into metaphorical and imagistic associations. [...] History versus memory, and memory versus memorylessness” (pp. 323-324). *Confession Publique* is not a historical narrative, neither is it about history. Yet, haunted by/anchored in my Blackness, the performance speaks to and through the recorded and unrecorded histories of Black life as colonialism has birthed it. The histories haunt by their absence, making the metaphors of memory the only alternative means of situating, recording, celebrating Black survival. Freed from the shackles of fact, subjective and imperfect memory becomes memorylessness – a place of infinite reinvention. My re-remembering/rememory – i.e., remembering what my body has lived and opening up submerged awarenesses of what my body carries (and therefore has known, if not physically lived) – is made possible through (the) performance, through the back-and-forth movement outward towards the audience-world and then back into my gaps, into my memorylessness and place of infinite reinvention. That movement, like the repeating tides away and towards my island, triggers my (awareness of the) hauntings; their presence invites transformation. I finish the performance a different *whole* every time – a future, rewritten.

Before I leave this chapter on ghosts, there is a final anecdote to share:

*It's the dress rehearsal for the last series of shows before submitting my thesis. It's public, so there's a small audience of some 20 students. I am standing naked singing Purcell's *If Love's a Sweet Passion* and turning to face the four cardinal directions. It's dark and I can't see much around me; most of all, I can't see the edges of the table I stand on – it's black so it disappears in the darkness. It's always a slightly uncomfortable moment, I can often feel my legs shake, my feet uncertain. Tonight I am excitedly distracted on top of it. It has suddenly occurred to me while I'm singing, that I should check and see when this piece of music was performed – perhaps there was some connection with slavery! I finish the performance, return to the hotel and look up the première date of *The Fairy Queen*. The first performance took place on May 2nd, 1692. Then I type in '1692' and 'slavery' as keywords to see what connection might exist between the two. What appears is strangely disconcerting: On June 7th, 1692, just a month later, a massive earthquake and tsunami devastated the Jamaican city of Port Royal, much of it disappearing into the sea. I sit quite still and my skin tingles. I re-read this new information a couple of times, feeling the presence of the ghosts.*

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, *If Love's a Sweet Passion* was part of a performance that was instrumental in me becoming the artist that I am. Working with Alain Platel (Les Ballets C de la B, Belgium) on *La Tristezza Complice* transformed my ideas about dance, dance-making, and social commentary on stage. The music was entirely by Henry Purcell, arranged for ten accordions and a soprano voice. *If Love's a Sweet Passion* was one of the pieces sung and at one point in the performance, I sang a much blues-ier version while my fellow performer tore my clothes and wig away with his teeth. When we were gathering material together as inspiration for *Confession Publique*, the request was made for songs as well – I proposed *If Love's a Sweet Passion* which became a musical leitmotiv in the piece. The song is itself a ghost, a trace of the start of a profound awakening that has brought me to this moment of writing, thinking, performing.

Port Royal, or rather its ruins, was a favourite outing for my family. We would spend the day going to the beach, eating at small fishing taverns and climbing on old cannons and what was left of old stone buildings and walls. A haven for pirates – the historical inspiration in fact for *the Pirates of the Caribbean* film series – and the centre of the New World's frenzied trade in slaves and sugar,

Port Royal, originally founded by the Spanish, became the largest city in the Caribbean under the English. A notoriously cutthroat settlement, characterized by wealth, prostitution and slavery, the city attracted pirates from as far as the Indian Ocean. The seat of enormous fortunes, it was considered a jewel for the growing English Empire.

There is nothing that would have suggested a connection for me between the Port Royal of my youth and my singing of Purcell's *If Love's a Sweet Passion* in *Confession Publique*. It had never occurred to me that the two histories might coincide in any way.

I must always be open to the hauntings.

My grandmother Winnie's ashes are scattered off the coast of Port Royal.

CHAPTER 7 MY UNWORLDING

Having lived the majority of my life as a minority, either in Europe or Canada, dance and Blackness are inextricably intertwined in my adult experience – I have danced while Black and been Black while dancing for the past forty years. So much so that I have not always been able to distinguish when they exist separately or not. When I embarked on this project, it was never my intention to write or even think about slavery and its particular legacies on/in my body. The research-creation that *Confession Publique* is part of was to be an experiment in dramaturgical practice; an interrogation of the (perhaps more socially inscribed) dramaturgies that I as a Black performer bring into the creative processes in which I participate, and how they might be used in creation. Thanks to the choreographic and aesthetic predilections of choreographer Mélanie Demers, I have ended up with a solo that has become a portal of sorts to my histories and their expression through/on/in my body. By not imposing any other story on what was transpiring in the studio beyond my own reality-fictions – daring to strip away impositions in order to coax out my hidden dramaturgies – Demers created a non-skinbound, temporal interstice, a “liminal space of the psyche” (Johnson, 2003, p. 8), that has invited my histories to the surface and into my lived experience. The return to the source of what Blackness is for me has brought an understanding of its complexity and of the nebulousness of any possible definition. By contrast, my experience of my Blackness has proved to be visceral, magically layered, and diasporically grounded in yam rootedness.

If there is one leitmotiv to this research-creation, it is movement. It is the essence of my experiences of my Blacknesses – from the forced ancestral crossing of the Black Atlantic Ocean to the subsequent migrations of generations of family members to Western metropolises for better lives; my own migration to Canada as a teenager, then Atlantic crisscrossings to Europe and back to Canada as an adult; the movement of my body as a dance artist in all those various sociocultural contexts; the movement through my body of the stories that have surfaced on my skin in *Confession Publique*; and, ultimately, the movement through this thesis of ideas, reflections, musings. None is linear; all are incomplete. By incomplete, I mean, unresolved. Survival of the Middle Passage and the horrors of enslavement that ensued can have no resolution. Diasporic migration has no real resolution. Dance as a way of being in the world is not a place of resolution, but rather, of constant

change, as my body has morphed through the joyous sweat of jumps and stamping feet to the discipline of Western forms to the stillness and reflection of the pedestal as I now inhabit it.

The movements of incompleteness, the gaps in my histories, are profoundly part of this thesis. I have chosen for this writing *not* to be divorced from the visceral experience that is *Confession Publique*, but instead, to be its own creation, full of intuitions, improvisations, unresolvedness. It is the ontofugitivity of Blackness in the metaphors of Nigerian postactivist philosopher Bayo Akomolafe – the fugitive who escapes the capture of both the slave ship and the plantation; the moving, productive, generative shapeshifting of the West African trickster; the “porous, olfactory, membranous, exposed, open, experimental, diffracting” way new things are born (Du Cann & Akomolafe, 2021, para. 10). Without the presumption that this thesis is a new thing born, my hope is that, at the very least, it is itself an interstice, a portal – like *Confession Publique* – for readers to move through and beyond their own more-than-human “Blacknesses”. Akomolafe’s fugitive asks, “*how do I lose my way? How do I lose this plantation? How do we get as far away as possible?*” His response is “cartographies of lostness, rehearsals in losing one’s way in order to meet the world anew” (para. 17, emphasis in original). *Confession Publique* and this writing are my “cartographies of lostness” – I am forever changed.

I performed last night. I performed tonight. Tonight was the last show before I unofficially submit this thesis. What's different for me now that I'm plunged into it? The performance is richer. I'm aware of... Every time I sing the song If Love's A Sweet Passion, I think of Port Royal and the earthquake. And the fact that a month after the premiere of The Fairy Queen, the earthquake and tsunami hit Port Royal. It's a little bit like Nero playing the fiddle while Rome was burning. I think of the British colonial empire sinking. With the slaves, the plantation owners, the pirates. When I'm lying on the table doing the “danse des seins”, I think of the fragmentation of Black women's bodies. I think of my breasts as makers of milk as things that were cut off of Black women's bodies. I think of my own sense of agency. And enormous privilege to be able to get on a stage now and own my whole self, my body, my eroticism, my activism. When I do the undulations... In that whole section I was already thinking in terms of... from a Greek goddess to a slave woman. But now, I'm in the repeating seas, in the repeating body. The constant repetition, this constant

flow of bodies arriving from Africa to people the Caribbean. And the role of women's bodies in making that productive. And in our survival. At the very beginning when I'm playing the drums I'm aware of somehow being surrounded by armour, and that I'm wearing armour, albeit a kind of hip hop, or dance hall armour, gold chainmail... as if the gold had value. But it's just a covering. Like a skin. And as I'm stripped away, or the layers are stripped away, both the clothing I'm wearing and the...the drums and ultimately the tables, I'm aware of coming down to, not just the flesh, in the sense of Spillers, but ultimately to my body as a subject. Not captive. Because in a funny kind of way, I'm captive on that table. But when... when I'm stripped I'm strongest. And then there's Anne Marie, this white woman. Serving me. Witnessing me. I am the focus in this strange transformation from flesh into body... And how important it is potentially for that shift ... that Black coming-into-my-ownness to be witnessed by white. And accepted. And even supported.

(Post-performance voice note, Ottawa, March 18, 2023).

Being witnessed has been an essential catalyst for the movement that is *Confession Publique*; as if my histories had been called up from the depths. They have come in waves, these “cadences of blacknesses,” to borrow another Akomolafe term (2021). With reasonable predictability, they have been unpredictable, imprecise, and deeply full. But this is the very space of the in-between that is the specificity of my Black livingness and the value of its contribution to creative and dramaturgical thinking. Seeing myself and the performance through the positionality of my Blackness, as suggested by Tina Campt (2021), has been about cultivating my Black gaze, one that “shifts the optics of ‘looking at’ to a politics of *looking with, through, and alongside*” (p. 8, emphasis in original). For me, in the context of my experiences in contemporary dance, this has meant situating myself in a mottled history, instead of existing strangely outside of it as Miguel Gutierrez (2018) describes in his article mentioned earlier – “for a me who had no history” (para. 18). This positionality has allowed the uncovering of hidden dramaturgies, the submerged dramaturgies of the Black diasporic body, born in the spacetime of the Atlantic Ocean, still felt, still resonating, in me, around me and through me – like after a day spent in the sea. Herein lies the potential of dramaturgical practice.

Dramaturgy's capacity to be disruptive and political is in its practice of placing things in relationship, in a certain ecology. My dramaturgical unworlding is about placing myself in an alternative relationship to history, i.e., centring my specificity rather than my un-situatedness. Here, I am considering the margins of the historical plantation system and its legacy to be an imposed un-situatedness. Resisting those margins invites me to think with Casimir's "counter-plantations" (2020, p. 351); perhaps even to imagine *counter-dramaturgies* that disrupt the impositions of history, refusing un-situatedness. Such a creative ecology is both political and transformational. As I explore both stage and performance as Black diasporic spacetime, I like to think of the resulting disruptive dramaturgies as an "emancipatory strategy" of sorts (Murphy, 1991, as cited in Brandão, 2018, p. 189), not dissimilar to The Fat Black Woman's Poems of Grace Nichols. In his essay "Unnameable Objects, Unspeakable Crimes," the inestimable James Baldwin (1996) writes: "The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it ... history is literally present in all that we do" (para. 5). My investing a dance studio and dance creation without acknowledgement of the histories I carry and that profoundly inform my artistry, keeps me colonized in dance spaces, and elsewhere. Paraphrasing Gutierrez (2018) once more, the lack of allegiances that has been my experience of (whiteness in) contemporary dance contributes to the illusion of safety that I realize, in fact, is a denial of my situated (and therefore decolonized) self.

We are all part of this historical legacy. All our stories need to be recognized and told, with the same depth, the same complexities, without "hierarchies of humanness" (Wright, 2006, p. xvii). In 2009, Nigerian feminist and novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie gave a TED talk called, *The danger of a single story*. In it she speaks of the fact that our lives and cultures are composed of many overlapping stories and that, in her case, these multiple stories have been essential to how she found her own authentic voice. Most importantly, she warns that if we hear only a single story about another person, country, *or ourselves*, we risk a critical misunderstanding. In Adichie's words: "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete.⁴¹ They make one story become the only story" (TED, 2009, 12:45). Part of the single-story problem, of course, is about who does the telling. Contemporary

⁴¹ Here, Adichie uses the term "incomplete" slightly differently than I have. Her meaning suggests: missing the element(s) needed to be complete. I have used it in the sense of something unfinished.

dance, harking back to its Judson Church origins, has always taught me to “bolster the universality of my capacities” (George 2020, p. 6). That place of universal sameness – the single story that, to a certain extent, has assured my success over the past forty years – is what this exploration of my Blackness has sought to counter. Through *Confession Publique*, I have opened the door (of no return⁴²) to how much more there is to say beyond that single story. In a way, the iterative performances of the work have allowed me to discover (or perhaps, to uncover?) my corporeality as its own diasporic space, produced precisely by that crisscrossing diasporic history and my inheritances of it. It continues to produce itself in the spacetime of each performance – a Blackness “through which the past, present, and future are always interpreted” (Wright, 2015, p. 4).

There is much of *Confession Publique* that is not addressed in this dissertation. My initial ambitions had been to move through the piece systematically, from beginning to end, offering explanations, contextual insights and, wherever possible, some sensorial input. Very quickly, however, it became clear that such an approach was not at all what I was interested in writing. It did not in any way correspond to my experience of the piece, nor of my Blackness, nor of the understandings that have emerged over the course of the research-creation. Creative exploration through the body is how I understand the world and my place in it – however Black. Consequently, I have trusted the intuitions that emerged regarding what stories to tell, what angles to explore, because they were precisely that – somatically felt intuitions. Moments when I could feel a sudden surge of excitement, slightly shortened breath, a little warmth around my ears, I sat up straighter. These were the embodied indicators that what was rising to the surface of my skin and falling onto the page was what needed to be told. In the context of dramaturgy and creation, the incompleteness (both the gaps and the unresolvedness) of Black diasporic stories needs to be seen as an interstice of possibility, cracks we can explore and fill with all the complexity of our counter-plantation provision grounds. As I use the term ‘fill,’ I shy away from any suggestion of seeking or providing answers. If anything, as in my practice of dramaturgy, it is the perpetual asking of questions that is at the heart of such ‘filling’. Dominican Republic-born, US-raised, German-resident choreographer

⁴² Borrowed from Trinidadian-Canadian poet Dionne Brand’s (2011) *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*.

Ligia Lewis gave an interview in 2016 about her acclaimed work, *Minor Matter*. Asked about the relationship to race in her choreography, she replied,

Especially when you deal with race, everyone wants you to have a stance. I think a position is important, but to have an answer? I'm like, really? I think we all need to be asking more questions. There's a lot of people that think they have answers, but I think we're in a place where all of us just need to be in the process of asking more and more questions, and inviting problems into the work. (2016, para. 25)

In my opinion, it is the “inviting more problems into the work” that best speaks
to unworlding
to counter-dramaturgies
to diasporic stories
to Endarkened logics
rather than to those
that ‘shed light’.

There is a short moment in *Confession Publique* when I need to speak in Jamaican patois, a language that I was not supposed to speak in my middle-class household. It is revealing that it has been an ongoing struggle for me. I am always concerned that the audience will not understand, that it lasts too long, that...I suddenly feel strangely naked, revealed under the predominantly white gaze. Harking back to Hanétha Vété-Congolo's concept of Caribbean interorality, she writes, “Interorality is a speech of resistance. Resistance against the imperial impositions of unquestioned epistemologies” (2016, p. xiv). Trusting the self-sustaining rootedness of the yam is crucial. There is still some unworlding to be done. The political (and dramaturgical) strategy is to seek to “make myself whole” (Toliver, 2022, p. xvi). Becoming whole is about being in my diasporic fullness, in spite of doing so in a world that historically sought to exclude me and to erase the specificity, the situatedness of my Black experience.

Blackness defies definition. As it must. The diversity of Blacknesses that constitute the Black and African diaspora is multiple; it is done an existential injustice by any attempt to reduce those Blacknesses to any one “scale” or “irreducible singularity” (Glissant, 1997, p. 190). Accordingly, the specificities of my Black diasporic voice are just that – my own. As much as my experiences

of my Blacknesses are not transferable, my desire is that they inspire others to explore their own. I have been deliberate in my attempts to preserve the Caribbeanness of my experiences in this writing. To the extent possible, I have relied on imagery and thinkers that speak to that reality. I am nevertheless indebted to the African American artist-activists, writers and scholars who have so brilliantly expressed the realities of the African American experience and who have been (and will continue to be) instrumental in my thinking about Blackness and being Black in a white world.

That said, living as an Other from within (Wright, 2004, p. 7) – as African American Black people have now done for centuries – creates very particular experiences of Blackness. As I think beyond this thesis, my curiosities turn to the ways other Black diasporic performers – often distanced from the cultural anchorings of their ancestors and constantly negotiating the muddled tensions of intergenerational belonging and assimilation – might engage in the disruptive counter-dramaturgies possible in choreographic creation and performance. What creative methods and awarenesses allow their histories not to disappear once in the dance studio?

My final thoughts speak to Blackness as an encounter...

my skin like a mirror
reflecting their projections
of knowing
the power
of the trap
of the epidermis
the place of performance in my black livingness

(Reworked from a post-performance voice note, March 2022)

Figure 7.1 *Drum session*



Photo by Cloé Pluquet, 2021.

APPENDIX A ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

A multidisciplinary artist and graduate of The School of Toronto Dance Theatre, Angélique Willkie pursued a career in Europe over 25 years, where she performed with dance companies and independent projects throughout Europe, most notably Alain Platel/Les Ballets C. de la B., Jan Lauwers/Needcompany, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Helena Waldmann and as a singer with the Belgian world-music group Zap Mama, bands Arno, dEUS, 7Dub, DAAU, Ez3kiel, and Zita Swoon Group, with jazz vocalist David Linx and contemporary composers Walter Hus, Kaat De Windt and Fabrizio Cassol.

Performer, singer, dramaturg and pedagogue, Angélique was among the more sought-after contemporary technique teachers on the European professional circuit for several years, teaching companies, schools and festivals including ImpulsTanz (Vienna), Henny Jurriens Stichting (Amsterdam), SEAD (Salzburg), Wim Vandekeybus/Ultima Vez (Brussels), Circuit-Est centre chorégraphique (Montreal), among others. She spent eight years at École Supérieure des Arts du Cirque (ESAC) in Brussels as a teacher and dramaturgical advisor to the students as well as Pedagogical Coordinator of the school. Her dramaturgical work has included projects in dance-, music- and circus-theatre, with artists as varied as Belgian theatre director/choreographer Isabella Soupart, French trapezist Mélissa Von Vépy and Dutch choreographers Arno Schuitemaker and Pia Meuthen/PanamaPictures.

Now based in Montreal and actively involved in the professional dance community as teacher, mentor, performer and dramaturg, Angélique has contributed to the work of choreographers Lara Kramer, Mélanie Demers, Frédérick Gravel, Clara Furey, Helen Simard, Daina Ashbee, Sovann Rochon-Prom Tep and Émilie Monnet, among others. She also sits on the Boards of key organizations including the Festival TransAmériques, La Chapelle scènes contemporaines and Espace Perreault transmissions chorégraphiques. She is the 2022 recipient of the prestigious Prix de la danse de Montréal – Interprétation.

Associate Professor in the Department of Contemporary Dance at Montreal's Concordia University, her current research interests are firmly anchored in interdisciplinary artistic creation

with a specific focus on decolonial and expanded dramaturgical practices and, more specifically, on the dramaturgy of the performer. She is Chair of the President's Task Force on Anti-Black Racism at Concordia and Special Advisor to the Provost on Black Integration and Knowledges and has recently been awarded a Concordia University Research Chair in Ecologies of Black Performance. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.

APPENDIX B COLLABORATORS — ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

A multidisciplinary artist, **Mélanie Demers** founded her dance company, MAYDAY, in 2007, in Montreal, exploring the powerful link between the poetical and the political. Her body of works have all been created from this perspective. With each new creation, she deepened her engagement with cross-genre works and hybrid forms. Her fascination with the interplay between word and gesture crystallized with [WOULD](#) (2015), which won the CALQ Prize for best choreography. In 2016, Mélanie Demers began a new creation cycle with [Animal Triste](#) and [Icône Pop](#); both works toured internationally. In 2017, Mélanie Demers was invited alongside Laïla Diallo to work as a guest choreographer at the Skånes Dansteater in Malmö (Sweden) for the creation of [Something About Wilderness](#).

After the ambitious and international project [Danse Mutante](#) hit the stage, *La Goddam Voie Lactée* (2021), [Confession Publique](#) (2021) and [Cabaret Noir](#) (2022) are entering the spotlight in various prestigious venues and festivals. In 2021, Mélanie Demers received the [GRAND PRIX de la danse de Montréal](#) which recognizes the unique impact she has left on her era. The following year, she was awarded the CALQ Prize for best choreography for [Confession Publique](#) and Angélique Willkie received [the best performance Prize](#) for the same work at the ceremony of [Les Prix de la danse de Montréal 2022](#).

Lastly, she turned towards theatre and directed the piece [Déclarations](#) by acclaimed author Jordan Tannahill. She teaches in the most important theatre schools in Canada and is a regular contributor on radio and television shows. To date, she has choreographed thirty works and has been presented in some forty cities across Europe, America, Africa and Asia.

Anne-Marie Jourdenais has worked in the Montreal dance scene since leaving the Ecole de danse contemporaine de Montréal in 1996. Her association with Mélanie Demers dates back over twenty years. She started out as a performer, discovering and creating with Marie-Pascale Bélanger, Julie Boisvert, Estelle Clareton, Mélanie Demers, Jacques Poulin-Denis, Harold Rhéaume, and Tassy Teekman. She then steadily developed an interest in the bigger picture and became a rehearsal director. Over the years, she has exchanged questions, recommendations, and intuitions with,

among others: Alan Lake, Mélanie Demers, Ginette Laurin, Manon Oigny, Marie-Claude Rodrigue, and Dave St-Pierre. Fascinated by everything the body can feel and express, she devotes a large portion of her time and energy to the practice and teaching of Qi Gong.

Frannie Holder is a **composer**, singer and multi-instrumentalist from Montreal. Member of the pop-hip hop band Random Recipe and the electro-folk band Dear Criminals, the versatile artist started her musical career in 2007. Focused on live performance, Random Recipe quickly played internationally (Canada, United States, France, Belgium, Italy, Iceland, Mexico, Chile, Panama, Colombia, Brazil, Australia). At the same time, her band Dear Criminals explores multidisciplinary creation processes and collaborates with theater (Les Lettres d'Amour – Quebec/Rouen), contemporary dance (TRAPPED, Things are leaving quietly in silence), opera (SeX'Y- Opéra de Paris), digital arts (STEREOSCOPIC – Quebec/Berlin) and cinema (Fatale Station, NELLY). The music composed for the feature film NELLY won the IRIS for best original music at the Gala Québec Cinéma in 2017. Independently of her musical groups, Frannie Holder provided the musical design for the play La déesse des mouches à feu by Geneviève Pettersen at the Théâtre du Quat'sous in 2018 and for the contemporary dance show La poursuite du cyclone by Kevin Jean in Paris in February 2019.

Claire Seyller is an artist whose primary medium is **light**. While completing her degree in Performing Arts – Theatre at the University of Strasbourg, Claire began her apprenticeship in light as a self-taught artist. She continued her training at the National Theatre School of Canada in the Production program. Since then, she has collaborated with artists and companies of the younger generation such as Charles-Alexis Desgagnés, Théâtre des Trompes, Satellite Théâtre, Théâtre à l'Eau Froide, Théâtre Kata, Grand Poney... Very involved and inspired by nature, Claire also assists various lighting designers on dance, theater and music shows. Reflecting on her practice, she has recently completed a Master's degree in Research-Creation at the École Supérieure de Théâtre de l'UQAM.

Elen Ewing is a graduate of the Cégep de Saint-Hyacinthe Theatre School and has a Bachelor's degree in Art History from UQAM. Over the past several years, she has carved out a prominent place for herself in the Montreal theatre community as a **set, costume and prop designer**. Among her recent creations are the designs for Les Hardings, (director, Alexia Bürger), Nos ghettos

(directors, Jean-François Nadeau and Stéfán Boucher), *L'idiot* (director, Catherine Vidal), *Les larmes amères de Petra von Kant* (director, Félix-Antoine Boutin), *Soifs matériaux* (directors, Denis Marleau and Stéphanie Jasmin) as well as *Les corps avalés* (choreographer, Virginie Brunelle).

Odile Gamache has been working on Montreal stages as a set and costume designer since 2013. Upon graduating from the National Theatre School of Canada, she joined forces with director Félix-Antoine Boutin to found the performing arts company *Création dans la Chambre*. Focusing their research on the sacred, the intimate and the political in unusual settings, this year they are completing their 8th collaboration on the production *Les larmes amères de Petra Von Kant*, recently presented at the Théâtre Prospero. In parallel to her company's activities, she has designed the sets for some forty dance and theater shows, including six under the direction of Philippe Cyr, with whom she has collaborated closely since 2016, notably on *Le Brasier* (2016-2019), *Prouesses et digestions du très redouté Pantagruel* (2018), *Ce qu'on attendé de moi* (2017-2019), not to mention Christine Beaulieu's documentary play *J'aime Hydro* (2016-2019), which has been touring throughout Quebec since its creation.

APPENDIX C
VIDEO TIME STAMPS

Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/714603663/c03101255a> (contact author for password)

0:14 to 3:30	Drum session
3:30 to 8:00	Le démantèlement (The dismantling)
8:00 to 17:49	Confessions “Once upon a time”
17:49 to 19:40	Le dévoilement (The unveiling)
19:40 to 23:00	Daguerréotype (Daguerreotype)
23:00 to 29:27	Les ondulations (Undulations)
29:27 to 35:55	Je suis ça (I am that)
35:55 to 43:00	La danse des seins ou l’offrande (The breast dance or the offering)
43:00 to 52:00	CHSLD
52:00 to 57:11	Archives nationales (National Archives)
57:11 to 1:00:50	Le baptême / (Baptism)
1:00:50 to 1:06:38	Le ventriloque (Ventriloquist)
1:06:38 to 1:08:46	Finale

APPENDIX D
LE PRESOIR — REVIEW

Review: <https://www.lepressoir.ca/la-presse/2023/3/19/confession-publique-la-nouvelle-scene-gilles-desjardins>



[L'agenda culturel La Presse](#) [À Propos](#) [Contact](#) [S'abonner](#)

Confession publique à La Nouvelle Scène Gilles Desjardins

Confession publique quand la peau cesse de taire ses idées noires et de les cacher dans le fond de ses blancs de mémoire

Publié le 19 mars 2023

Par [José Claer](#)



© Kevin Calixte

Imaginez si la Statue de la Liberté était une femme noire, et au lieu de cette torche de lumière qu'elle porte à bout de bras, il s'agissait d'une fronde composée d'un long cordon ombilical terminé en guise de roche, par un micro. Le micro de la rue. Le micro du cell qui leitmotiv le volume au max la voix de George Floyd inventant un nouveau slogan létal : « I can't breathe ».

On a toujours parlé de l'arbre généalogique de l'homme blanc duquel, on descend, et si maintenant, on parlait de l'arbre gynécologique de la femme noire qui monte, stalagmite, et figure-de-proue, et presque'il/iel et elle, sa nudité qui parle et porte tous les itinéraires strappés des corps de ses ancêtres. Psalmodiant une litanie de « Once upon a time... a little girl name Angie, » mais moi dans mon mauvais anglais, j'entends Ancien. Une fillette qui s'appellerait les Anciennes. Les antennes. De Angélique Willkie dont le spectacle coïte avec sa complice Mélanie Demers, est statuesque d'or pleinement réveillée, et nous inocule sa force à vif, la force majuscule de sa vulnérabilité de vulve nue, de seins malaxés pendant 174 coups de fouet.



© Cloé Pluquet

C'est comme cela que commence la nouvelle Genèse : Angélique drummeuse-dreameuse en rut avec les rots de la musique pendant que sa servante blanche la déleste de son set de vacarmes complexes dont elle joue ambidextre, ne laissant à la fin que les cymbales représentant ses seins et la grosse caisse matricielle. C'est le marché aux esclandres, aux escales dans une île de Gorée où on égorge même nos silences. Les 3 âges de la femme. Ce corps dénudé n'est pas dénué de toute sexualité, il est noué à une pulsation, une voix-berceuse de nanny, la poitrine asymétrique de la nourrice, combien de générations aux tétées blanches? Mais au-delà d'une question historique de la couleur des peaux qui s'opposent, la tendance de l'artiste Angélique est de revisiter son parcours créateur sur scène, sa théâtralogie à même son corps, ses vergetures, ses genoux-nœuds, ses cheveux ras, ses rides, ce corps n'est pas en déboire, il nous donne à boire, à manger, à orgasmer des overdoses de malaises, de doutes ; et c'est tellement rassurant-rassasiant, au-delà des notions de races, de rafles, de rascals ou d'effaces, quand on cesse d'être écrit à la mine dans les livres d'écoles blanchies au lieu d'être caviardées.



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Angélique Willkie ne danse pas. Elle est dense comme la danse de la derviche tourneure. Angélique Willkie ne chante pas. Elle est champ de croix blanches au milieu du stade de Sarajevo. Angélique Willkie n'est pas nue. Elle strip tease son âme à répétition et nous oblige à ne plus oublier que les afros-humains en ont aussi une. Une Histoire et un Avenir d'âme.

Ne faites pas qu'aller voir et entendre ce spectacle. Allez NAÎTRE avec l'artiste, c'est non un must, mais un much en plein sur le kisseur de l'Humanité faite femme.

APPENDIX E
THE DANCE CURRENT — REVIEW

Review:<https://thedancecurrent.com/review/confession-publique-asks-whether-we-can-choose-not-to-look/>

Confession Publique Asks Whether We Can Choose Not to Look

Angélique Willkie centres humanity in Mélanie Demers's interrogating performance

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By [Philip Szporer](#)



Willkie / Photo by Kevin Calixte

Confession Publique premiered on Nov. 29 and runs until Dec. 4 in Montreal at La Chapelle Scènes Contemporaines.

Confession Publique has the makings of a collection of essays, stacked with anecdotes, recollections and snatches of stories. In its essence, the piece interrogates this time of cultural and societal upheaval.

Angélique Willkie has been an influential member of Montreal's dance community since settling here a number of years ago. Jamaican-born but Toronto-raised, she was based in Belgium for 20 years, working with Alain Platel, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and other notables of the Flemish contemporary dance and performance scene. She returned to these shores, providing workshops and teaching to a city of hungry artists. More recently, she attained associate professorship at Concordia University, where she is my colleague. Over the years, she has founded an ongoing collaborative relationship with the celebrated Mélanie Demers, who just received the Grand Prix de la danse de Montréal. Willkie has often served as a dramaturge on many of Demers's works, including this one. But now, Willkie is also front and centre, performing solo in this new Demers creation.

The opening of *Confession Publique* has Willkie seated on a series of table risers, at a drum set, elegant in a gold-linked dress and heavy jewelry, observing the audience as they wend their way to their seats. The theatre is still in its pre-show penumbra, but our gaze is upon her. For those who have not seen her work, Demers likes to upend expectations, and in recent shows, she's had her dancers, as in her *La Goddam Voie Lactée* production, perform equally as musicians and singers. Here, as the lights go up, Willkie starts banging away at the drum kit, not so much making music but expressing both rage and release, courtesy of the machine.



Willkie / Photo by Cloé Pluquet

There's verbal detail in Willkie's text, and right from the start, there's a questioning of whose story is it, anyway, Demers's or Willkie's? Well, the tales are clearly rooted in Willkie's life experience. The refrain "Once upon a time, there was a girl named Ange" recurs. Willkie has crafted a number of distinctive versions of this well-worn storytelling device. Standing on a table, nude, she swings a microphone. The audible swoosh as the mic swirls, and the measured, almost nervous manner in which Willkie recounts a gathering of tales is engaging.

That visceral physical choice, delineating her axis, allows her to chart her territory. The weight of that swinging mic alters her breath, its gravity grounding her further and, by consequence, drawing the spectator into her presence. This one word — presence — is the basis of this performance. In part, it's the amplified nuance that Willkie brings to the occasion. Whether or not Willkie is reimagining a past truth and extracting with veracity is of little importance. The bigger denominator is the authenticity this 60-year-old artist offers audiences, allowing them to share in her remembrance, extending the boundaries of personal privacy and offering insights into identity.



Willkie / Photo by Cloé Pluquet

Willkie draws us into her private worlds of imagination, hopes, dreams and memories and makes the viewer want to enter her journey. She talks, for instance, of not speaking to her now deceased mother for 12 years, a memorable bathing suit, rolling in the freshly cut grass until she bled and other moments of her life, fuelled by disappointment, violence, lingering damage and awareness. The structure of the work threads chosen bits of stories, collaging text, image and sound. Willkie, once a featured member of the Zap Mama band, is also a skilled singer. Here she intones, acapella,

among other lyrics, “Sweet love, why does it torment?” (The music and lyrics are by Frannie Holder.)

One of the more striking elements lasts just a few minutes, midway in the show. The audience observes Willkie standing nude on the table, turning in measures to face each of the theatre’s four walls. The section recalls the display, prominent in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, of Black people from across the African continent. These “human zoos,” as they were known, placed these people on plinths, on display, for white Europeans to view with a perpetrating gaze. Willkie and Demers, both Black women, neither strangers to activism, seize the moment, bringing this historic reference into the present, centre stage. It’s a purposefully inclusive moment showing that standing there, exposed, representing herself, Willkie is visible and human. Because racism dehumanizes and treats people as objects, this scene is absolutely necessary. For some, what will be experienced emotionally is the dawning of awareness; for others, it will be the affirmation that invisibility is no longer possible. It’s hugely impactful because in this space of subtle yet direct confrontation, fuelled by the various strands of stories imparted earlier, Willkie brings the audience into her sphere, bearing witness to her questioning, grief, compassion and the fundamental exploration of injustice.



Willkie / Photo by Cloé Pluquet

I imagine what sticks is highly subjective. One scene that painfully examines the circumstances of a resident in a long-term care facility displays bitter truth, something that cannot be solved. Both in the gestures (crouching, folding inwards), reflecting resistance in this character's articulations, and the anxious verbal storytelling, presented as a crude statement of fact, Willkie wholly embodies a realistic representation of the loss of agency, avoiding the prurient, never muddling her message. This woman's deadened eyes resist an aestheticized response and push back at anything we could call pleasure. *Confession Publique* proves its muster in these moments and responds to a fundamental question that reverberates across time: can we choose to not look? And is there choice to not speak? Demers and Willkie consider radical alternatives, not redemption, addressing the eye, the intellect, the heart and the familiar.

APPENDIX F TRANSCRIPTION D'UNE TRAVERSÉE ORALE

En français aujourd'hui. Alors je vais très probablement sauter d'une langue à l'autre. D'accord. Et peut être même en pensant à la dramaturgie du corps, du performing body, pour moi, c'est important aussi de dire que ma langue maternelle compte. Je pense autrement en anglais. Je pense encore plus autrement en patois jamaïcain mais bon, si je racontais tout en patois jamaïcain personne ne comprendrait... Donc c'est pas ça le jeu.

Alors, c'est quoi qui informe la logique du spectacle, de la création? Et je me demande qu'est ce qui se passe si le sens, si cette logique, est générée surtout par mon corps. Et qu'est-ce que je vais dire par corps? Pour moi, je parle des expériences, d'une écologie. Il y a un côté morphologique, sûr, mais ce n'est pas que de la morphologie, c'est aussi des inscriptions sociales qui me sont projetées. C'est la langue que je parle, c'est également les langues que je parle pas, ou que je parle pas souvent en tout cas, ou uniquement dans certains contextes. Je suis intéressé par une dramaturgie qui est ancrée dans les expériences de mon corps, que mon corps porte. Et je ne peux pas voir ces expériences comme séparables d'où mon corps est situé, où il a évolué. Donc les rapports entre mon corps et ses différents contextes... Il y a du sens qui jaillit de ces rapports-là.

J'aime beaucoup Glissant. De plus en plus d'ailleurs. Il vient des Caraïbes comme moi. Ça m'a rendu curieuse. Et lui il parle de comment the experience of embodiment is embedded with the larger body of the earth. il parle de the language of landscape. Et pourquoi notre situation physique est une force qui forme et qui donne forme. Qu'est-ce que j'ai lu? Il dit: My landscape changes in me. It is probable that it changes with me.

Je suis assise sur une petite table. Derrière ce qui semble être un mur de batterie, que je ne joue pas, fin, que je ne sais pas jouer. Et j'attends, je regarde les gens entrer dans la salle. Je sais que je suis au bord d'un espèce de gouffre. Précipice. Pendant une heure et quart je vais plonger en moi-même d'une façon assez imprévisible. J'ai quelques balises mais... Le reste s'agit de ce que je suis capable de creuser, de réveiller, d'explorer, de sentir. Et de partager. Je vais pas utiliser le mot partager, c'est de laisser voir, de laisser recevoir par les spectateurs.

Je me rends bien compte qu'ils savent pas à quoi s'attendre. Parfois je me dis, putain, comment trouver l'énergie pour? Comment prolonger aussi loin? Comment être aussi viscéralement nue?

Je n'ai pas de réponse mais j'attends.

J'attends que tout le monde soit assis. Je regarde. Parfois il y a des gens qui me font signe; ils disent Coucou, salut Angélique! Je me dis, tiens, c'est quand-même bizarre, j'ai pas du tout envie de leur répondre donc je réponds pas.

Et à un moment donné.... je suis habillée ... Le public ne voit pas tout encore parce que je suis assise derrière ce mur de drums.

Je suis habillée avec des robes, il y a 3 robes, en.. Comme des mailles en fait. like what medieval fighters would wear...

Sauf que ce sont trois robes qui viennent de Saint-Hubert. Je vois des mailles, mais je ne sais pas s'il y a d'autres gens vont voir ça et j'ai plein de colliers, des grosses boucles d'oreilles, des bracelets, des bagues. Vraiment comme un style un peu hip hop comme ça. Et je pense déjà au fait que je ne sois pas de cette génération-là mais que les gens pourraient me regarder et voir ça. Peut-être je joue avec. Consciemment ou inconsciemment et inconsciemment.

Alors à un moment donné Anne Marie entre, et je me dis, ok, un bon Gloups et je dis, ok Angélique, éteins ta tête, vas-y, plonge. Parce que si je réfléchis, je ne peux pas le faire. Je dois juste me lancer. Je tape sur la batterie. Au plus fort que je peux et puis, la consigne est que je dois parler en même temps. Tout le long. J'ai quelques consignes, des paramètres pour la batterie, mais je ne sais pas jouer. Donc comme je ne sais pas jouer, j'essaye de trouver simplement la liberté, la joie dans le fait de taper fort et faire beaucoup de bruit et je hurle derrière cette batterie et j'ai peur de casser la voix. Mais si je réfléchis, je vais me casser la voix. Mais si je réfléchis pas je casse pas la voix. Je dois raconter des histoires tout le long, mais il n'y a rien d'écrit ; alors je dois tout inventer. Et de temps à autre, je dois lâcher la batterie pour que les gens puissent m'entendre parler. Et je ne sais pas ce que je vais dire. Et les histoires ne doivent pas se répéter et ça ne doit pas être une histoire en continu.

J'ai la tête complètement, déjà, plongée dans ce que j'ai à faire et il n'y a pas de... Il y a pas moyen de m'extraire pour réfléchir en pensant que ça va, ça va, ça va me permettre de mieux faire. Au contraire, c'est d'être terriblement dans le présent. À un moment donné, quand finalement, je commence à ralentir la batterie, je sais que on va enlever les couches. Il y a des bouts de batterie qui vont disparaître. Il y a.. Je vais enlever les bagues, les bracelets, les colliers. Et je me mets devant les gens. Je les regarde, ils me regardent. J'ai toujours les robes de mailles... Ça je ne les enlève pas encore. Je crois que les gens doivent se dire, ah putain elle va se mettre à poil, mais pas tout de suite. D'abord je prends un micro en mains, qu'Anne-Marie m'apporte, avec un filet super long. J'ai du scotch autour de mon doigt parce que sinon, ça me brûle. J'ai déjà eu des ampoules, des cloques comme ça, du fait de tourner le micro pendant plus de dix minutes... Et je tourne le micro et je raconte *Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Ange*. Et encore une fois, toutes ces histoires, *the first story is the same always, and the last story is the same, always*. Mais entre les deux, je dois, je dois plonger dans, qui je suis. Je sais pas comment le dire autrement, et proposer une espèce de mosaïque de ma vie. Je dois toucher à la mort, au sexe, mes enfants, au boulot, d'où je viens, comment je me sens...j'en ai raté c'est sûr. Je n'ai aucune idée quand ça marche bien et quand ça marche pas bien. Je n'ai aucune idée. J'ai pas de repères, j'ai juste l'expérience même de faire.

Il y a cette autre penseuse noire, afro américaine, Saidiya Hartman qui propose de la *Critical Fabulation*. C'est une façon de regarder son histoire, l'histoire, de reconnaître les trous dans l'histoire et de les remplir. À sa façon. Et j'ai l'impression tout le long, pas juste à ce moment où je suis en train de tourner le micro comme une dingue, et j'ai mal à l'épaule. Et je change de côté. Je dois tourner dans l'autre sens, mais je suis moins bonne avec le bras gauche, la main gauche... J'ai des crampes aussi dans les ... J'ai la fibromyalgie, donc à un moment donné les tendons râlent, mais je ne dois pas changer trop souvent d'une main à l'autre. Donc je dois juste, je dois me pousser au bout de mon endurance tout en racontant ces histoires, *filling the gaps*, mais sans... Encore une fois, sans répéter quoi que ce soit, toujours dans ce défi de... Je ne veux pas dire aller de l'avant, mais de n'être jamais au même endroit, être tout le temps ailleurs. Et ça aussi, c'est quelque chose de... C'est le côté recherche, recherche-crédation, mais la notion de la fugitivité. Qui fait partie du travail de plusieurs penseurs, surtout afro américains encore une fois, mais qui parle de l'expérience noire comme étant quelque chose, oui, rester au même endroit, c'était c'était mourir. C'était... il fallait

toujours être en fuite. Et cette chose, de ne jamais me répéter, d'être toujours dans la lutte, de trouver autre chose, chercher autre chose, dévoiler une autre partie de moi... Ça me fait penser à une... Ce n'est pas une fuite dans le sens... mais une fuite de survie. C'est une fuite de survie. Et quand je pense à d'où je viens, à cette terre, de laquelle j'ai jailli moi, en fait, c'est une histoire de plantation, d'esclavage. Donc je pense à ça aussi.

À la fin de cette partie avec le micro, j'enlève finalement les trois robes. Et je suis juste là, je les regarde et je... Et je crois que oui, je me dis que ça fait bizarre de toute façon, à chaque fois que je fais, se mettre à poil devant les gens, c'est quelque chose de particulier. Je ne suis pas quelqu'un de particulièrement prude donc c'est pas ça, mais je sais ce qu'on projette, sur ce corps d'une femme plus âgée, je n'ai plus le corps de la petite danseuse. Moi, je fais face moi-même à mes propres préjugés, barrières, biais... Justement parce que je n'ai plus le corps de la petite danseuse. Et l'important, c'est de.. De laisser tout ce qui me traverse... tout ce questionnement, tous ces doutes, tous ces, tous ces méconforts, de laisser tout ça paraître. Sans le décrire, sans dire que c'est ça que je fais mais de laisser tout ça faire partie de ce qui est révélé quand je suis là en train de regarder des gens, à poil. Ça me fait aussi penser à un moment donné à ce spectacle que j'ai fait avec Larbi, Rien de Rien. J'étais habillée avec une perruque, j'avais pas de cheveux, encore comme maintenant, puis j'avais une perruque, comme Tina Turner puis une petite robe mini, truc comme ça, avec des plateformes. Et les gens évidemment même sans que je dise quoi que ce soit, ils me regardent et ils voient Tina Turner, avec tout ce que ça peut vouloir dire. Mais je me rappelle un jour aussi j'ai dû remplacer quelqu'un dans le spectacle. Il était coincé aux États-Unis for 911, on était à Belgrade, et j'ai dû faire son texte et son texte était en Slovène. Que je ne parle pas. Je racontais ce texte habillée comme Tina Turner aux gens qui comprenaient le slovène. Or, moi je ne savais pas ce que je disais, c'était un peu particulier. Mais tout ça pour dire, en tout cas, les critiques le lendemain matin ont parlé de la femme Afro-Américaine de Ljubljana, la capitale de la Slovénie. Or, rien de tout ça était vrai. C'est curieux ce que les gens voient, les croyances qu'ils se donnent, et comment on peut jouer avec ça, consciemment ou inconsciemment quand on fait ce qu'on fait.

Puis à un moment donné. En étant nu, il y a une, Anne-Marie m'amène ... il y a une musique super forte qui commence, elle commence en douceur mais elle va monter. Je sais qu'elle va monter. La section dure douze minutes, un truc comme ça, donc c'est super long. et je ne fais que des ondulations. Et ça aussi c'est spécial, le fait d'onduler son corps c'est tout à fait sexuel, c'est c'est

sexuel, c'est sensuel. C'est comme si j'accouchais. C'est comme si je jouissais. C'est comme si je m'exposais. Anne-Marie vient et me met un tissu sur le corps. Et ce tissu, un espèce de grand drapé comme ça, c'est autant une déesse grecque qu'une esclave. Et je continue simplement à faire des petits gestes et onduler. Et je dois gérer le fait que les ondulations me font mal au dos, parce que j'ai des problèmes de dos, donc ça devient ce qui me traverse pendant toute la section. Comment est-ce que je ralentis cette chose pour donner toute l'ampleur nécessaire en protégeant ce dos qui fait mal. Et je pense à tout le temps que moi j'ai traversé depuis que je me suis fait mal au dos, et tout ça nourrit ces douze minutes, ce trajet, de ce corps qui, qui m'appartient, mais en même temps est autre, qui appartient aussi à ce que les spectateurs voient. Ce corps qui leur appartient peut-être. Je pense aussi à ma grand-mère parce que ça passe par, moi-même, je vis différentes époques, donc je bouge à travers du temps et je pense à ma grand-mère et les temps qu'elle a vécu. Ça aussi je lui parle. En faisant...

Puis on arrive à une autre section qui est, à un moment donné, il y a de moins en moins de mouvements dans mon corps et de plus en plus de mouvements de mon visage. Et j'effleure les pleurs, les rires, le dégoût, le rejet. Le bonheur, la joie. La tristesse, le fait d'être perdue, la confusion. Tout ça change continuellement pendant plusieurs minutes, jusqu'à ce que le sourire se fige comme si, comme un masque. Je ne sais pas où je dois aller en moi pour trouver toute cette transformation qui se fait devant les gens.

Anne-Marie m'apporte une robe, une robe de princesse que je tiens devant mon corps nu et je pense au nombre de fois que j'ai porté un masque, que j'ai laissé les gens voir ce qu'ils avaient envie de voir, que j'ai ... I glossed everything over. Puis j'ai un texte qui s'appelle Je suis ça. Puis c'est juste ça, en fait. Je dis tout ce que, tout ce que je suis. Mais c'est intéressant parce que c'est ...pour créer ce spectacle, on a tellement parlé, on a tellement parlé, et la plupart des choses que je dis sur le plateau viennent de moi, en tout cas elles surgissent de mon imaginaire et de mon expérience. Et cette petite partie ici a été écrite par Mélanie. Le reste je parle en anglais, cette partie ici en français, qui n'est pas ma langue maternelle. Donc c'est écrit par quelqu'un d'autre dans une langue qui n'est pas la mienne et je sens la distance que j'ai avec ce que je dis. Et je profite de cette distance. Je l'explore. J'essaie de la négocier. Je ne sais jamais si je suis trop proche ou trop loin. J'essaie juste d'exister dans cet espace entre. Je termine en disant que j'aurais préféré être ailleurs. Et je le répète plusieurs fois, je suis de nouveau nue. Et je me plie vers la table et je m'allonge, sur le dos. Comme

un sacrifice. Et je pense encore à toutes ces femmes dans ma famille à moi et aussi dans l'histoire, des femmes noires, des femmes jamaïcaines, toutes femmes. Je pense à comment la femme est sacrifiée, a été sacrifiée. Je pense à comment le corps de la femme ne lui appartient pas.

Je prends mes seins en main. Et je sens cette drôle de mélange d'émotions entre ... un peu de pudeur, parce que bon, toutefois je suis allongée à poil avec ma tête qui pendouille de la table avec mes seins en mains. Devant plein de gens qui ont payé...je me dis, qu'est-ce qui se passe... Je suis là, je prends les seins en mains...je sais aussi que ce qui vient, c'est un moment qui va durer, oui, je crois une bonne cinq ou six minutes et je manipule mes seins... c'est comme si... Cette danse des seins is all the breasts I have lived. Donc. D'une mammographie, à faire l'amour, et même les seins que je n'ai pas vécu – nourrir mes enfants, être violée... Les utiliser comme des pistolets, comme un jeu vidéo, de faire des périscopes. Je traverse ce truc, ce corps qui m'est tellement intimement connu.. Et je le reprends. Je le ré-apprivoise, elle m'appartient davantage. Au travers de cette danse des seins. It's mine. The breasts are mine. Et d'un coup, je je pense aux gens qui regardent et je dis, fuck you all, it doesn't matter. My tits, I do what the fuck I want with them. Ça fait un bien dingue. Et puis éventuellement, je roule sur le côté et je m'assieds au bout de la table, le dos au public et j'attends. Anne-Marie elle fait des choses, elle fait des vas et vients puis, je ne lui prête pas beaucoup d'attention.

Puis elle vient et elle m'habille. Et là, en attendant qu'elle je m'habille, je me prépare psychologiquement parce que je sais que ce qui suit, c'est... Je trouve ça super dur, super dur, donc je dois aller à l'intérieur de moi, et chercher la protection pour elle, parce que je vais lui hurler dessus des insultes, mais, atroces, et si je le fais, si je le fais en faisant semblant, ben, tout le monde va savoir que je fais semblant. Donc je dois vraiment ... I need to mean all the shit that I throw at her. Et je hurle. Et je dois aussi le faire, entre autres, en patois jamaïcain. Et ça m'est super dur. Et je me demande pourquoi parler dans cette langue qui m'a bercé toute mon enfance est tellement difficile sur ce plateau de danse contemporaine. Et je pense à l'article de Miguel Gutierrez, qui a écrit cet article en 2018 Does Abstraction Only Belong to White People in *BOMB* magazine. Et une des choses qu'il dit, je ne me rappelle plus de la citation exacte, mais quelque chose dans le genre: how did whiteness become a place of safety and comfort? a place where in fact, he had no history. Et je pense à ça et je me dis putain, mais, est-ce que c'est ça que j'ai vécu, que je vis... à chaque fois que je dois faire cette chose et de parler aux gens en patois jamaïcain, parler à Anne-

Marie... Derrière, c'est comme si.... J'ai quand même envie que les gens me comprennent donc pourquoi est-ce que je vais le dire en patois, ils ne vont pas comprendre. Et puis en même temps, si je suis vraiment honnête, je me sens nue. Quand je parle en patois jamaïcain c'est comme si on pouvait me voir réellement. Et c'est drôle que je peux me cacher derrière la nudité, mais je ne peux pas me cacher en parlant ma langue maternelle.

Et je pense aussi à Glissant et l'opacité, et le fait qu'on ait tous le droit de ne pas être transparents, en gros, de ne pas s'expliquer, de ne pas être explicable. Que notre complexité est notre richesse, et notre force. Et que peut être, c'est le temps de s'ancrer dans cette complexité, sans essayer d'expliquer à qui que ce soit.

À la fin de cette section, je.. Je suis vraiment dans un état assez lamentable, je me sens perdue. À chaque spectacle c'est... . C'est toujours un moment où je me sens perdue. Je ne sais pas ce que je fais. Je sais pas...j'ai des repères musicaux kind of, et je sais ce que je dois faire, kind of.. Je ne sais jamais si ce que je fais est bien ou pas bien, juste pas juste. Faut juste que je patauge dans cette espèce de quagmire. C'est vraiment juste... It's just a fucking mess. I don't know where.... Et la seule façon d'arriver de l'autre côté, c'est de traverser. Même si je n'ai aucune idée comment traverser, je me dis, ok Angélique, vas-y, vas-y! Continue, ok, maintenant à 4 pattes, ok on essaie à 4 pattes. Et puis, on doit bouger encore un peu, mais pas trop. N'en restait pas là, ok d'accord. Tu termines pas, mais tu es déjà ailleurs, ne bouge pas trop vite, ralentis, un peu plus rapidement, plus concret dans les images... Oh shit. Ça dure encore un bon bout de temps. Finalement, je me rends compte qu'il y a très peu de tableaux dans ce spectacle. Tout dure. Et par le fait de durer, je traverse. Et cette section s'appelle les Archives nationales. Je traverse tous les temps, je vais essayer de traverser tous les temps et.. Mais il n'y a aucune idée qui vient, il n'y a pas d'idées qui viennent... je vois les choses tous les jours, j'ai vécu plein de choses, je connais plein de gens, j'ai vu plein d'images et il n'y a rien qui vient dans ce moment-là. Et encore une fois, c'est une espèce de gouffre horrible horrible. Et en même temps, je suis consciente du fait que ça marche parce que je suis paumée. Ça marche parce que le gouffre est réel. C'est marche parce que j'ose plonger dedans et essayer de m'en sortir, pas savoir où je vais puis, tu vois.. Je sais que ça marche pour ça. Donc il faut juste le faire. Ça m'horripile.

Anne-Marie vient et elle me jette un seau d'eau dans la face. Je suis assez soulagée quand elle le fait, je l'avoue. . Mais l'eau m'est importante. L'eau lave, l'eau... autant avant le spectacle que pendant le spectacle qu'après réflexion sur le spectacle, l'eau c'est... Je vis à Montréal, j'ai traversé l'océan plusieurs fois. J'ai vécu à Bruxelles, y a le fleuve ici, le fleuve à Bruxelles, y a la Jamaïque et en plein milieu de l'eau, y a le Middle Passage where all the slaves went back and forth, il y a la diaspora, l'eau me remplit, je suis Scorpion.. Y a de l'eau. Et l'eau est aussi cette chose fugace, incontenable, qui trouve toujours son chemin. Quand je m'assieds, Anne-Marie vient puis elle met le micro devant moi. J'ai froid et elle amène une espèce de châle, un truc en fourrure - il y a un mot en français, mais je ne me rappelle pas ce que c'est... Et je pense en fait, tout le long du spectacle à toutes les peaux que je mets - dans le sens figuré et aussi dans le sens complètement littéral. Mais toutes ces couches que j'enlève, que je remets, que j'enlève, que je remets... et combien ces choses-là... Oui, me soutiennent. Ma grand-mère avait un truc comme ça aussi. Elle était couturière... seamstress, dressmaker. Et elle faisait des robes pour les prostituées et elle faisait des trous, des poches secrètes pour qu'elles puissent cacher leur argent.

Je raconte encore une fois une dernière histoire de Once Upon a Time.. de moi dans une voiture. C'est une histoire assez... En tout cas, je ne la termine pas complètement. Je laisse le public dans un état ... un peu second, j'avoue. Mais c'est intéressant parce que tout en sachant que je les laisse là, je les laisse croire le pire, je ne les aide pas, et je m'ancre dans la réalité que, ... Je ne veux pas utiliser le mot réalité, mais dans le fait que il y ait tellement de fictions dans les réalités qu'on tisse et quand on crée, c'est avec ça qu'on brode, tout le temps. Même si même si c'est pas dans ce genre de spectacle, même si c'est quelque chose que je joue pour quelqu'un d'autre, je joue avec mes fictions et mes réalités, et le dialogue constant entre ces deux choses-là. Quand je chante cette dernière chanson et puis.. je hurle, je balance les baguettes à la fin... Le soulagement est palpable. Je suis tellement vidée, contente d'arriver au bout. Je ne sais pas comment j'ai traversé, mais je sais que j'ai traversé quelque chose, j'ai vécu quelque chose et je me rends compte que le public aussi.

Je ne sais pas ce qu'ils ont vécu. Ce n'est pas que je m'en fous mais je m'en fous. L'important, c'est que moi j'ai traversé quelque chose et c'est pour ça que ça marche. En tout cas si ça marche, c'est pour ça que ça marche. Je joue sur une petite table. Et cette petite table, je suis là pendant 1h15. Elle est comme une île, on pourrait dire un îlot mais pour moi c'est une île. Quelqu'un a parlé d'un puits. Cette petite table, cette plateforme me fait penser à tout ce qu'il y a en dessous - qui est vu,

pas vu, qui est connu ou pas connu. Je pense aussi à une espèce d'iceberg où on ne voit que le sommet, et la plupart de cette chose existe en-dessous, non-visible. Je pense, en étant sur cette plateforme à l'isolement, je ne peux pas descendre; au fait d'être complètement exposée... Et une vulnérabilité et aussi... Mais aussi un pouvoir, une force qui vient du fait d'être au-dessus et de regarder le public, et d'être moi, présente en moi, face à ces gens qui regardent. Il y a le pouvoir de la parole, il y a le pouvoir de la déclaration, tout en jouant avec la vulnérabilité de la confession. La tension entre le non-dit et ce que je dis. Au fait Confession Publique n'est pas une autobiographie; elle reste une exploration dramaturgique.

APPENDIX G
TRANSCRIPTION VOICE NOTE — FEBRUARY 8, 2023

Uhm. Yeah, this is. So, here's the recording. Dramaturgical body, mhm, and that would go into the unworlded dramaturg. Dramaturgical body— we would talk about the fact that dramaturgy is emergent. And so, the dramaturgical body is also emergent. And it would consist of all the other elements, considerations, bodies that are explored. Then, looking at the, looking at the different bodies. So, we could call it the bodies of my blackness and organise structurally on that basis. We will look at where, where does the ghost fit? Where does the Anansi fit, etc... Hm. On Post-its. Spread them out. Okay.

So. Sylvia Wynter, when I talk about the island, the island, I think of Glissant, creolization, Sylvia Wynter and the DeLoughrey article. Uhm. Well. Sylvia Wynter just in- well maybe not Sylvia Wynter. Yeah. Sylvia Wynter. Little bit in terms of ground provisions versus the provision grounds. So, hm, the... I create my provision grounds through that. And the ground provisions are I guess, all of the different elements that go into it. I think of Anansi and Anansi for me is, ah, so this trickster idea, of course related to diasporic spidering. My own background works in all over the place, is also the fact of being the performer. Mhm, as Anansi. So, the perpetual transformation, I think that's part of the Anansi thing. I think potentially as well, the teaching through, well that might be a bit stretched, but.

Then there's the ageing body, of course, of the performer, so I'll read that book. Then the ghosts, I think are related to this idea of layers of woman that emerge. So that's generational. So maybe that's in part the historical body. It makes me think of my, the ghosts are my grandmother as well, and the histories she carried, also diasporic. And then I also think of course of the ageing body on stage. So, dealing with the realities of pain, hm, physical limitations. Uhm. And then... What else. Can't think of anything else just yet.

And then there is also the second skin. So really looking at the epidermis of race and I would look at, hm, that's the lynching book as well as strategic ambiguity. So, the *Postracial Resistance*, Ralina Joseph. Yeah. Okay.

Of course, Anansi is also part of the folk tales storytelling, which is part of the methodology. Orality. Again, part of the methodology. Me recording this now, part of the methodology. Intuitive analysis and storytelling as a as a form of cultural preservation. Cultural preservation and teaching and learning, of course, also. As part of the transformations, professional transformations. And we can also potentially look at Uri McMillan and the embodied avatars so that, in a way, my performance persona becomes an embodied avatar. There's also, ah, but I don't know yet.

It may be this idea of the bodies of my blackness actually come from. Maybe that's *Confession Publique*. The name of the chapter, *Confession Publique*, colon, the bodies of my blackness. And put the reasons for choosing Mélanie and the way she works, etc. Don't put it in the *Confession Publique* creation section. Put it in the methodology section where I talk about the other creations, as well. And in that hm, methodology section, perhaps, otherwise for sure in the results, like, conclusion section. I don't really know where to put that bit. Not conclusion, but what happened in the creation is to talk about the importance of storytelling. I think that's in the methodology, the importance of storytelling as a methodology, and that my body moving and my texts as part of the storytelling and it manifests in the thesis as also the prose and poetry that I've written.

APPENDIX H
TRANSCRIPTION VOICE NOTE — MARCH 2, 2023 — A

Maybe the other thing that I could realise in a way is how much— I'm standing by the river, mhm, at David and Jeff's... And thinking immediately of how many other, which other people have stood next to this river or have gone down this river. And then I think generations, centuries previous, about which bodies were here. Again, I think this idea of thinking through the body. Thinking history through the body, thinking geography through the body, thinking ecology through the body, and it's not to be only focused on humans. No, not at all. But it's my references, what we are. Yeah, what bodies have lived, where and how, and situating them in all of their various surroundings. So as soon as I start to think, I mean, I think through the body as a dancer, that's my way of entering the world. And as soon as I do that, I can't help if I think in terms of my own body, I think of how it is perceived by others and how I feel in it and how it... How it situates me. And that in and of itself is a kind of Blackness.

The fact that I have to question at all. I'll have to. The fact that I question at all is a kind of Blackness. It's a positionality. It's also a reaction to... The way, to the world, to the way it is built historically, to how it functions, contemporarily. Recognising that there are differences, recognising that we are seen differently, recognising that my children are seen differently. Recognising that my children see themselves differently from their father. Mhm. Yeah. That's a beginning or an end thing, like, introduction or conclusion material. But again, musing the stuff from no neutral canvas that I talk about with Glissant. Really this idea of situating the body first. Geography is important and the extent to which geography maybe not dictates, but certainly influences. What does geography impose on our relational being? That for me already is also a kind of Blackness. It's my experience, it's this, it's this fluidity. It's water. Goes back to Bayo's thing. I am a black man, I spill. So, we can't be contained. There's no sense of containment. Mhm.... Yeah.

(Sound of water in the background.)

APPENDIX I
TRANSCRIPTION VOICE NOTE — MARCH 2, 2023 — B

I don't know if this means that I won't be able to use it because I'll move further away from the Internet, but we'll take a chance. Already, just saying it aloud lets me realise the importance of this orality business and I think, a penny has dropped. I'm just reading the first couple of lines of that article and realising that it's not only about exactly what I have consciously done, it's about this, this discovering blackness business is also a question of understanding what is implicitly present or subconsciously present. And so this idea of explicitation as well as the the other kind of subconscious methods of research, of thinking, of recording. So, the music I'm listening to, the questions that I'm asking the the the need to say it aloud, the the need to do it through poetry, the need to, to look again at... Yeah. I mean my skin colour, how I've dealt with that, how I've lived that over the course of my journey. Canada, Europe. Canada.

Um, the the the talking through community. So the sharing. So it's not just me in my corner but very clearly creating contexts for exchange and being able to name that so, you know, the conversation series with ABCs Stéphane and 'Funmi also mentioned it. Ah, or gathering everybody around the table with Bayo. Here are knowledge making exercises and that's also happening inside of the creative process. Inside of...

So the things that I can think about. Water for sure, it's kind of risen to the top. Nudity is... Nudity is skin. It's my age. It's being exotic is being not black enough. It's hybridity. It's not not belonging to anybody else's framework by colonial histories and stuff, when I was in Europe. I didn't like being categorised when I was in the U.K., I don't like it here either. So water, nudity, water as diaspora, the the Middle Passage, my own pathways between the different places I've lived. Uh, me drowning. Well, almost drowning. And the different facets of diaspora.

It's also the fluidity of form. Of form, form, as in, for example, even disciplinary specificity. The the the shifts back and forth, kind of nomadic. Nomadic in disciplines. Nomadic in expression of their disciplines. Nomadic in my interdisciplinary body. I need to go back to that article I wrote, haul it out. What does an interdisciplinary body look like? All of that is water, that's really fluidity

for me. It's also the lack of disciplinary, well not lack, I'm going to call it lack, that traditionally the fact that we don't separate the arts. You know, in an African context.

The role of orality, which is movement. Movement of bodies, again, water, again, uh uh, fluidity. Not fixed. Not definable. Not fully reproducible. So yeah, so water, nudity, so skin. And then history. Yeah. Filling in the gaps. So my, my. Winnie. My grandmother. Which of course links up as well to matriarchy, which I haven't really talked about. Matriarchy and the Caribbean. Matriarchy and African societies. I don't really know much about that and want to investigate. But yeah, the matriarch in my family. So Winnie and yes God forbid my own mother.

And... I think also looking at. Yeah. Just again, there's diaspora. There's also hybridity as well. So, you know, I mean she passed as white, what does that mean? How does that, for me, what are the gaps in our history? What do we know about, what do we not know about, how do we fill those in? How am I filling those in all the time? What is a kind of critical fabulation that is happening for me? I have adopted two children. There's histories I don't have, either. Neither do they. How are we filling those gaps? How are we... Um, let's see.

How I mean, ultimately as a conclusion, how am I looking at blackness, looking at all of these different things as a praxis? How does it become a lens for me to think about her through the creation, dramaturgy? I think I... It conditions me as a dramaturg and as a result it then manifests in the creations. So in everything that I'm participating in, there's an element of my blackness that is part of that praxis. Praxis suggests that it becomes more conscious, so it's not just implicit any longer. Hm. That's it for now.

APPENDIX J
ENTRETIEN D'EXPLICITATION – JUNE 20, 2022

(Recherche effectuée par le GRIAV sur la question méthodologique du terrain en recherche-création en arts vivants. Entretien d'explicitation mené par Caroline Raymond. Recherche menée par Johanna Bienaise, Caroline Raymond, Marie-Christine Lesage, Isabelle Héroux et Mélissa Raymond.)

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:01:13] Donc il y a un protocole. Il y a un protocole pour la conduite de l'entretien d'explicitation. Puisqu'on est en écran et on est un face à face côte à côte. C'est très étrange, mais c'est tout à fait possible de mener un entretien d'explicitation. Si on était en présence Angélique, on serait en côte à côte en position trois quart en fait, tu ne serais pas face à moi. Donc je vais te faire une proposition, c'est à dire.. tu es assise sur une chaise ?.

Angélique [00:01:37] Oui.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:01:38] Devant ton écran? Parfait, donc tu peux te reculer un peu pour que je puisse voir. Oui, exactement, et voilà et que tu puisses décrocher le regard pour faciliter la mise en évocation et laisser revenir les moments qui sont importants pour toi, significatifs...

Angélique [00:01:53] Est ce que t'as besoin de me voir?

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:01:55] Oui, j'ai besoin de te voir. Et toi, t'as besoin de me voir. Mais moi, il faut que je me fasse disparaître et je te propose de te faire disparaître. Alors sur Zoom, dans ta vignette en fait la vignette de ta photo, il y a trois petits points. Je ne sais pas si tu le vois, alors si tu cliques sur ces trois petits points là, moi je l'ai en anglais, c'est Hide Self View. Tu sais, je pense que c'est Masquer, Masquer ton image.

Angélique [00:02:22] Voilà.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:02:23] Voilà. Alors si tu cliques

Angélique [00:02:26] je ne me vois plus.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:02:27] Exact, tu me vois juste moi. Voilà. Moi aussi ça m'arrange de plus me voir. Alors je te vois que toi.

Angélique [00:02:33] Je ne te regarde pas.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:02:35] Exact. T'as pas besoin de me regarder, en fait, c'est ça. Voilà. Puis idéalement, j'aimerais bien voir tes avant bras. Si tu es capable de même te reculer un peu ou ajuster ton écran vers le bas pour que je puisse voir toute la gestuelle qui vient avec. Ouais, ça c'est super, fantastique.

Angélique [00:02:51] Oui, ok.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:02:52] Exactement, c'est ça. Je peux même faire ... Sans souci. Tu prends ton verre d'eau, j'ai mon verre d'eau à côté. Et puis ce qu'est chouette, c'est pe peux faire un peu d'accompagnement postural avec toi. Alors s'il y a des gestes porteurs de sens, je peux te voir est t'accompagner à partir en ancrage avec ton geste. Alors écoute Angélique, prends le temps de bien t'installer confortablement, d'être bien posée.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:03:29] Alors, je te propose, si tu veux bien, Angélique. Même prendre une respiration si tu en as besoin. Voilà, tu peux garder tes yeux fermés, les ouvrir comme tu le sens, d'accord. Alors je te propose, si tu le veux bien, Angélique, de laisser revenir un moment où tu as porté ton attention, en fait un moment significatif pour toi ou tu as su mobiliser ton attention, porter ton attention dans un moment de recherche-crédation sur le terrain de ta recherche-crédation à un moment significatif. Alors prends ton temps, reste là. Ce moment où tu as su mobiliser ton attention, en particulier dans, dans un moment de recherche-Crédation. Et fais-moi signe quand tu es prête, quand tu sens ce moment revenir, quand tu entres en évocation de ce moment où tu le laisses revenir. Et peut être oui, ça se passe quand? Tu l'as trouvé ce moment?

Angélique [00:04:34] Oui oui.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:04:35] D'accord, ça se passe quand, Angélique ce moment? Quand ou à quel moment à peu près tu as vécu ce moment?

Angélique [00:04:52] C'est une grande question. Oui.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:04:55] Oui, c'était l'hiver, c'était l'été, c'était le printemps peut être?

Angélique [00:05:01] Je crois, peut être le printemps.

[00:05:06] Oui, d'accord.

[00:05:08] Fin de l'année dernière, peut-être.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:05:10] ok, de l'année dernière. D'accord, printemps l'année dernière, et tu es où?

Angélique [00:05:18] Je suis dans le studio. Studio A de Circuit-est.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:05:23] OK, Studio A Circuit-est, OK. Il fait beau, il fait sombre? Il y a de la lumière naturelle?

Angélique [00:05:32] Il y a de la lumière naturelle et on travaille en début d'après-midi.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:05:38] D'accord.

Angélique [00:05:40] Donc oui, il y a la lumière du jour, il n'y a pas de lumière artificielle.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:05:48] D'accord. Tu es là dans le studio. Tu es seule ou tu es accompagnée à ce moment là dans le studio de Circuit-est?

Angélique [00:05:55] Je travaille avec la chorégraphe Mélanie Demers ainsi que la répétitrice, la directrice de répétition Anne Marie.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:06:08] Et là où tu es en ce moment, avec, avec Mélanie, avec la répétitrice, où es-tu située dans le studio par rapport à elles?

Angélique [00:06:21] Les chaises sont Elles sont devant. Le dispositif de jeu à la limite, c'est un espace dessiné par les chaises qui sont en cercle. Donc je suis à l'intérieur du cercle.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:06:47] D'accord.

Angélique [00:06:51] Elles sont devant. Elles s'approchent de ma zone de jeu comme ça. Mais voilà,.

[00:07:01] T'es au centre.

[00:07:02] Oui, oui, oui, oui, oui Elles sont devant.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:07:05] Parfait. Angélique, à quoi es-tu attentive à ce moment là, quand tu es au centre du cercle, à l'intérieur de cette zone?

Angélique [00:07:15] On travaille sur quelque chose de bien précis qui sont les ondulations. Et je prends conscience surtout des zones de mon corps, vraiment sur ma colonne vertébrale, qui sont liées à des blessures et trucs comme ça, qui sont raides.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:07:44] D'accord,.

Angélique [00:07:46] J'ai des difficultés à onduler comme Mélanie aimerait que j'ondule. Elle me guide, mais le, je cherche à trouver ma façon. Mais je me rends compte de, Je prends véritablement conscience de la raideur de ma colonne vertébrale.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:08:14] Et à quoi tu le sais qu'il y a une raideur dans ta colonne vertébrale à ce moment là en particulier.

Angélique [00:08:21] A quoi?

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:08:21] À quoi tu le sais? Qu'il y a cette raideur dans la colonne vertébrale?

Angélique [00:08:25] Ben là où ça fait mal.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:08:27] OK, d'accord.

Angélique [00:08:28] J'ai carrément des zones de douleurs. Alors j'essaie de, j'essaie de les négocier.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:08:39] Et qu'est ce que tu fais? Qu'est ce que tu fais quand tu essaies de les négocier?

Angélique [00:08:44] Je fais plus petit.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:08:46] D'accord.

Angélique [00:08:48] Je réduit la taille du mouvement.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:08:50] D'accord.

Angélique [00:08:51] Pour essayer de m'épargner, de me protéger. Mais le mouvement se raptisse.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:09:06] D'accord. Qu'est ce qui se passe à ce moment là? Quand tu es entourée de Mélanie, la répétitrice, que tu essaies de négocier cette douleur. Qu'est ce qui se passe pour toi à ce moment là?

Angélique [00:09:22] C'est un moment de confusion. J'avais envie de vouloir chercher avec l'ampleur proposée, de confronter de manière très claire... Mon corps me dit non. Il y a un moment de, oui comme je dis, pas confrontation mais confusion, Qu'est ce que je fais? Est ce que je. Est ce que je... Qu'est ce que j'essaie de trouver pour? Pour pouvoir aller dans une ampleur quelconque. C'est quoi? C'est quoi cette ampleur? l'ampleur que je vois dans son corps, c'est quoi cette ampleur dans mon corps? Et donc je me rends compte que ce chemin là est tout sauf limpide et je suis dans un état de confusion,.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:10:31] De confusion.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:10:33] Et oui.

Angélique [00:10:34] Frustration aussi.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:10:36] OK, confusion, frustration, certaine frustration.

Angélique [00:10:43] Peut être même. Oui, il y a des élans, des souvenirs lointains qui reviennent de la petite danseuse qui se remettait toujours en question: on n'est pas assez bonne. On n'est jamais... des vieilles habitudes. Oui, qui viennent. Ah oui, rappelle toi!

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:11:15] Et quand tu es là, dans ce, ces vieilles habitudes qui remontent et qui te dit: rappelle toi, rappelle toi avec eux, Qu'est ce que tu vois chez Mélanie? Qu'est ce que tu vois chez Mélanie? Qu'est ce que tu perçois chez elle?

Angélique [00:11:34] Je perçois une certaine frustration aussi. Ne pas voir ce qu'elle imagine . Je perçois également Peut être Confusion c'est pas le bon mot et C'est le mot qui me vient, par rapport au fait de se poser la question jusqu'où elle peut me pousser... jusqu'où est ce qu'elle pousse? quand est-ce qu'elle lâche une idée? quand est-ce qu'Elle appuie davantage? je perçois aussi oui, cette zone que je vais appeler un peu grise, où elle cherche, elle cherche: c'est quoi une autre indication qu'elle peut donner qui va aider, ou c'est quoi, c'est quoi la bonne tactique? la bonne stratégie...

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:13:08] Et qu'est ce que tu fais à ce moment là? Avec cette cette recherche de tactiques que tu perçois chez Mélanie. Qu'est ce que tu fais, toi?

Angélique [00:13:20] Je me rends compte que je fais la même chose. Je cherche d'autres tactiques chez moi aussi.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:13:26] D'accord.

Angélique [00:13:30] pour essayer de, comme je le disais, trouver un accès à ma version de cette ampleur. Donc j'essaie de contrer les petites voix qui me font un tour et j'essaie de trouver, OK, mais cette ampleur se manifeste comment? Où est ce que je vais? Comment est ce que je contourne les zones de douleur? Aller chercher dans, c'est quoi la douleur? est ce que ce sont des douleurs juste de pas avoir fait ces mouvements depuis un bout de temps? Ou est ce que c'est vraiment des douleurs là si j'y vais, je vais me faire mal? De négocier ça aussi. Mais c'est dans le moment même, c'est dans le ...C'est impossible de prévoir, en tout cas de prévoir.. c'Est en faisant que la négociation se fait. C'est en fonction de ce que je ressens au moment où je fais un mouvement ou un autre.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:14:42] Et qu'est ce que tu sais faire ou qu'est ce que tu as su faire avec cette négociation? pour trouvez une façon.

Angélique [00:14:53] encore une fois de faire abstraction de mes pensées, oui, oui, et d'essayer d'être le plus à l'écoute de ce qui se passait dans mon corps. Euh, oui, être le plus à l'écoute possible, oui. Ne pas être dans le jugement de ce qu'il fait, le corps, mais de laisser le corps faire. Hmm. Et en le laissant faire, ben il propose. Il propose ses solutions, il propose.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:15:34] Et comment tu fais pour proposer ces solutions? Évidemment à Mélanie, à celles qui sont là, qui sont présentes ou non. Comment tu fais pour proposer ces solutions?

Angélique [00:15:47] Je sors du chemin. Encore une fois, je. Oui, j'essaie de sortir du chemin dans le sens de mon jugement, dans le sens de la petite voix, dans le sens même de la douleur et de faire confiance à ce corps qui connaît ses possibilités et ses limites. Alors, si, si, je le laisse faire, il fait. Et je ne sais pas forcément ce qu'il va faire. Et je ne sais pas s'il va faire ce que Mélanie voudrait ou voulait plus précisément. Mais j'essaie de m'en foutre. Et de juste être dans la sensation de la chose, être dans le ressenti. Donc je ne peux même pas dire être l'observatrice, c'est pas ça non plus. C'est pas que je, c'est pas que je m'extrait mais je, j'essaie d'être dans le ressenti.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:17:07] Reste dans ce ressenti, oui, reste dans ce ressenti, Angélique, reste là présente à ce, à ce ressenti. Et dans tout ce que t'as raconté depuis le moment où tu es là, dans le studio 303, au centre du cercle. Et le début de ce mouvement ondulatoire que Mélanie te propose, qui génère chez toi des douleurs, où tu te parles, est ce qu'il y a un moment qui se détache en particulier sur lequel tu souhaiterais revenir? En particulier approfondir ce petit moment d'attention, de mobilisation de ton attention très très fine.

Angélique [00:17:59] C'est sûr qu'il y a deux moments qui me viennent.

[00:18:03] D'accord,.

[00:18:06] Une, c'est quand on essayait ces ondulations là en me déplaçant au sol, au sol, à mi chemin entre la sol et debout ou debout, et cetera. Donc, à ce moment là, oui, une envie, envie, c'est pas le bon mot.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:18:45] Prends ton temps.

Angélique [00:18:47] Oui, patience pour me rendre compte que je voulais bien essayer les ondulations, mais je n'avais pas envie de bouger. Je n'avais pas envie d'être bafouée dans tous les sens du terme. Pas envie d'avoir mal, pas envie d'être dans le défi ou dans le défi physique.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:19:16] Qu'est ce que tu fais quand tu n'a pas envie d'être dans ce défi physique? Qu'est ce que tu fais à ce moment là?

Angélique [00:19:25] Je l'ai, je l'ai quand même essayé, parce que c'est ça qu'on m'a demandé de faire. Alors encore une fois dans le moment même - c'est difficile de ne pas projeter mes, mes, mes pensées analytiques -

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:19:51] Mais t'es toujours là, tu es toujours dans ce mouvement? ce Passage au sol où t'as pas envie d'aller là? Oui.

Angélique [00:19:57] J'ai pas envie d'aller là. Et donc c'est encore une fois comment, comment reconnaître cette résistance? ne Pas la subir.?

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:20:14] D'accord.

Angélique [00:20:17] De reconnaître qu'elle existe mais De la laisser fondre pour pouvoir chercher, me rendre compte aussi que mon manque d'envie n'était pas une décision de ne pas bouger. C'était juste un manque d'envie. Donc ça veut dire que ce manque d'envie ne m'empêchait pas de faire. Mais il m'accompagnait quelque part. Hum. Le mouvement, Les actions, le genre de truc que je cherchais. le genre de truc qui émergeaient plutôt

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:21:12] Et quand tu es là-dedans dans ce, ce manque d'envie, mais en même temps qui accompagne ton mouvement, qui est là, qui est présent, est-ce qu'il y a de la valeur pour toi là dedans?

Angélique [00:21:28] Oui.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:21:28] Qu'est ce qui a de la valeur pour toi là dedans?

Angélique [00:21:31] Je ne me. . Il y a la valeur de m'écouter.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:21:52] Quels sont les mots qui te viennent?

Angélique [00:21:56] Ne pas avoir eu l'habitude de faire ça, m'écouter. Oui, de laisser mon ressenti, mes élans avoir de l'importance dans ce que je faisais; juste être Une espèce de véhicule. Mais d'être, d'être à l'écoute de moi même au fait.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:22:33] Et qu'est ce qui se passe ?

Angélique [00:22:35] En Dehors de la douleur? Il y a quelque chose évidemment qui va toujours m'arrêter et qui sera toujours entendu par qui est là. Mais c'est autre chose. Un manque d'envie ce n'est pas la même chose, parce que en dehors de la douleur, ça parle d'autres choses, c'est autre chose et je me suis rendu compte que oui, il y avait une valeur là-dedans qui était liée au fait de m'écouter

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:23:09] T'écouter. Han Han, han Han. Et qu'est ce qui se passe ensuite quand tu es la dans Ce moment où tu t'Écoutes? il y a la douleur, t'as pas envie, mais il y a aussi cette capacité de te t'écouter qui est là, présente. Qu'est ce qui se passe ensuite pour toi? À ce moment là. Ou autre chose peut être qui se dégage?

Angélique [00:23:38] Mais il y a une conversation et c'est ce dialogue constant entre le, moi qui me parle, au niveau de mon ressenti: mes envies, mes douleurs, et cetera mais en même temps, un amour profond pour cette capacité d'être une interprète, de d'aller m'ouvrir, de trouver les espaces qui permettent autres choses d'émerger ou ou de, pas forcément de répondre à, mais de donner forme à des idées, des visions de de Mélanie. Oui. , ça reste quelque chose qui me ...C'est un amour profond.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:25:09] Hmm. Et quand tu es dans cet amour profond, cet amour de l'interprète qui est capable de trouver ces espaces, à quoi tu es reliée, Angélique, quand tu es dans cet amour profond d'interprète qui trouve ces espaces? À qui ou à quoi tu es reliée à ce moment là?

Angélique [00:25:34] à ma vulnérabilité. Et La force, la. La conviction que les forces allaient s'ouvrir, Oui, laisser, me laisser envahir par, Oui, c'est comme l'eau qui trouve toujours... Mais je dois juste me laisser pénétrée, être envahie par oui, mais par ces images qu'elle envoie, pas ses envies, mais ça, ce n'est pas mon problème. Au moment même, j'entends les envies parce que je peux les capter ...sont les images, sont les. il y a de l'information qui doit juste traverser mon corps, mon expérience, mon ressenti.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:27:12] Reste là dans cette cette information qui te pénètre, dans cet état là, d'espaces ouverts où il y a quelque chose qui circule,...Qu'est ce qui est essentiel pour toi ce moment là? Quand ça circule, il y a de l'information. Tu travailles avec cette information et tu réponds pas aux besoins de Mélanie, mais tu es la avec toi avec cette information là qui circule... Qu'est ce qui est essentiel pour toi?

Angélique [00:27:52] Je dirais l'honnêteté de la rencontre. Mais par rencontre, je parle autant de ma rencontre avec moi même, en fait, je parle surtout de ça. Parce que l'autre rencontre ne se fera pas si celle-ci ne se fait pas. Je ne parle pas de l'autre rencontre, je parle véritablement de celle avec moi même qui est changeante, fluide. Elle, elle. Elle se cherche tout le temps. Mais je suis dans le oui, oui de ces espaces d'ouverture qui permettent cette rencontre de se faire.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:28:54] Dans tout ce que tu viens de dire, Angélique, conserve ça précieusement pour toi même. C'est une très très belle... Il y a de l'appartenance, il y a de la mission là-dedans. Il y a un travail sur soi, Avec l'information qu'on perçoit chez l'autre, dans ton propre travail, en fait, d'interprète, de créateur interprète. C'est extrêmement précieux ce que tu viens d'évoquer sur ce petit moment qui s'est peut être expénu dans le temps, avec Mélanie, avec la répétitrice. Mais il y a t il peut être autre chose que je souhaiterais rajouter dans ce Très beau moment de d'explicitation et de sens que ça a pour toi dans le travail d'Attention, quand tu portes ton attention, tu mobilises ton attention dans ce travail de création..., qui porte aussi la recherche, qui te met en recherche?

Angélique [00:30:00] Mais ça, ce que tu viens me dire, juste l'idée de me mettre en recherche... Ça me parle, ça résonne. C'est comme si c'est une espèce d'ampoule qui vient s'allumer dans ma tête. Oui.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:30:26] À manière singulière? Oui.

Angélique [00:30:28] Et je crois que l'autre endroit où je suis... certainement il y a eu plusieurs moments pendant la création, oui, comme ça... Mais où l'attention est à son paroxysme, j'ai envie de dire, c'est quand je suis sur scène, quand je suis devant un public, qui pour moi fait partie de du fait de me mettre en recherche.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:31:08] Et ce moment là, tu es d'accord pour y aller? Pour décrire patiemment ce moment là? OK, c'est un moment de scène. OK. Est ce que ce moment est relié aux moments de travail que tu as fait avec d'ondulations que tu as fait avec Mélanie? Ou C'est un autre moment?

Angélique [00:31:30] Il y en a tellement...

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:31:31] Mais prends le temps, prend le temps de le laisser revenir.

Angélique [00:31:35] il faut que je choisisse. , il y a les ondulations aussi. Mais ...

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:31:45] Tu parlais où la tension est à son paroxysme, à ce moment sur scène... Qui est toujours en lien avec ta recherche-Création?

Angélique [00:31:58] c'est le spectacle que je viens de terminer avec le FTA, donc c'est très proche. Tu n'as pas vu le spectacle?

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:32:09] Non, je ne l'ai pas vu, non.

Angélique [00:32:12] Là, il y a un moment où je suis je suis nue devant le public et puis, je chante. Mais c'est la seule chose que je fais. Je ne sais pas comment dire ça en Français. Tu sais les photos qu'on faisait des gens... on pourrait imaginer ça comme les ,un prisonnier par exemple. Ils font une photo comme ça et comme ça,

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:32:52] Profil, des photos de profil.

Angélique [00:32:54] Mais c'est pas juste le fait d'être profil, c'est le fait de montrer le corps de face, de profil. Et il faisait la même chose avec des esclaves, de face, de proche, de dos, de profil, des photos qui existent. Et il y a un moment dans le spectacle où, on ne le dit pas, mais on emprunte l'idée, Pour moi, c'est un moment Très particulier parce que je ne fais rien.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:33:38] Et pendant tu fais rien? Ouais Tu es là, et pendant tu fais rien, à quoi tu es attentive à ce moment là? Pendant que tu fais rien?

Angélique [00:33:54] À tout ce qui remplit ce rien. le rien n'est pas vide du tout. À la limite, on ne peut plus chargé Que ce moment de rien. Drôlement je suis à ma plus vulnérable. Je suis juste là à poil devant tout le monde. Je ne fais rien.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:34:32] Est ce que tu perçois quelque chose ou qu'est ce que tu perçois? Oui. Pendant que tu es toute nue à poil devant tout le monde, quand tu ne fais rien. et que tu es attentive à ce rien.

Angélique [00:34:49] Je suis attentive Comme je le dis à toutes les histoires. À un moment donné, un des derniers spectacles, je me suis retrouvée en train de me dire, donc même pas de penser, mais de me dire: ça c'est une femme de 60 ans. Ça c'est la fille de ma mère. De sentir toutes les histoires qui qui qui me font. Hmmm. Et je dis exprès, je ne dis pas qui m'ont fait, mais qui me font. parce que c'est quelque chose qui... Parce que ça bouge, parce que ce n'est pas constant, parce que. D'une milliseconde à une autre Les histoires changent, les sensations changent.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:36:03] Tu es toujours là? À ce moment là, précisément sur la scène? Tu es toujours là, précisément? Ouais, Tu es là est bien là. OK.

Angélique [00:36:12] Entre guillemets, c'est un "rien" qui est tellement chargé, hein.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:36:17] Et dans toutes ces histoires qui te font, qu'est ce que tu fais à ce moment là? Qu'est ce qui se passe pour toi à ce moment là? Tu es toujours sur la scène.

Angélique [00:36:31] Je sens la surface, drôlement de l'intérieur, comme si ...je suis baignée Dans ses histoires qui remontent à la surface, et qui sortent..., ça sort des pores... ça sort.. Je suis juste baignée dans...

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:37:08] Et quand tu es baignée de toutes ces histoires qui te font, à ce moment là, faisant ce geste... Ce geste, tu peux le reprendre, ce geste? Ce geste de oui, quand tu es complètement baignée à ce moment là...

Angélique [00:37:24] Et c'est comme si j'étais sous la douche. Oui, oui. Je préfère même penser à une cascade. Oui, il y a de l'eau, qu'il y a de l'eau qui tombe. Ouais, mais c'est pas l'eau qui vient de l'extérieur. C'est mon eau à moi.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:37:42] C'est ton eau à toi.

Angélique [00:37:45] qui remonte à la surface, qui me lave, qui m'enveloppe, qui me draine,

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:37:57] Oui, tout ça. Mais qu'est ce qui est important pour toi? dans tout ça? Qu'est ce qui est important pour toi?

Angélique [00:38:06] De les sentir. de les sentir. Sans les juger. sans les évaluer. sans Préférence. Sans rien de tout ça. juste Les sentir.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:38:31] Et quand tu les sens, quels sont les mots qui te viennent? Reste là Avec ce ce sentir sentir, ces histoires qui qui te font, sans les juger...

Angélique [00:38:47] Force, Vie, Vulnérable, peur. encore vie, encore force.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:39:14] Qui es tu à ce moment là angélique? Quand tu sens la force, la vie, la vulnérabilité, la peur, qui es-tu?

Angélique [00:39:25] Je suis, je suis tous ces corps, tous ces corps différents, tous ces, et je ne dis même pas des êtres différents, tous ces corps différents qui se manifestent, qui me traversent. Un. Je suis tout ça, je suis tout ça.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:39:55] Et à qui es-tu reliée quand tu es tout ça?

Angélique [00:40:00] peut-être ma grand mère, maternelle.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:40:08] tu es toujours là? tu es toujours là avec ta grand mère?

Angélique [00:40:13] Oui.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:40:28] Qu'est ce qui est essentiel pour toi à ce moment là? Tu es avec ta grand mère. C'est ça qui te vient, cette image qui te vient

Angélique [00:40:37] En fait, le mot qui me vient, c'est la survie. Mmmm, Oui, je sais. C'est bien le mot qui me vient mais ce n'est pas la réponse que je t'aurais répondu. mais c'est le mot qui me vient. la survie, la survie.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:41:02] Garde le pour toi ce mot là, il est important, il est important et au cœur, au cœur de ce que tu fais au coeur de ce que tu vis, au cœur de ce que tu ressens, au cœur de ce que tu cherches Dans ta recherche création. En tout cas il est présent, il est là. C'est un mot important. Merci Angélique. Merci pour cette magnifique, ces deux magnifiques moments d'explicitation. Et même je suis allée avec toi en décryptage du sens. Je pouvais pas, tu y allais naturellement. Alors j'ai injecté un peu de décryptage du sens, des relances, pas juste d'explicitation de Qu'est ce que tu fais quand tu fais ce que tu fais. Mais qu'est ce qui se passe pour toi? Qu'est ce qui est important pour toi? Qu'est ce que tu te dis à ce moment là et qui es tu? C'est très identitaire aussi. Très très identitaire. Oui, oui, tout à fait. Et si tu es d'accord, Angélique garde ça pour toi là

parce que c'est quand même, c'est vivant tout ça. Si c'est prégnant, c'est vivant, c'est là, c'est pour toi, ça t'appartient, c'est des ressources pour toi, pour faire ta recherche, ta recherche-crédation. Es-tu d'accord de prendre le temps ou peut être de laisser revenir... Mais dis moi, comment tu te sens actuellement, est ce qu'il y a toujours une énergie pour continuer l'explicitation ensemble? OK, d'accord. Juste avant d'aller vers le moment de cette prise de décision méthodologique, il me manque une information dans ce très beau moment que tu as explicité de scène. Tu es là, nue, où il y a à peu près rien qui se passe, mais il y a beaucoup d'histoires, qui te font. Avec cette eau qui te coule dessus. Avec ces images qui te viennent jusqu'à la survie même, le mot survie qui est important. Et ta grand mère qui apparaît.

Angélique [00:43:13] Dans ces moments là, j'ai besoin de savoir dans la temporalité à peu près, tu as fait combien de représentations de cette pièce? Une fois?

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:43:25] Deux ou trois fois?

Angélique [00:43:32] Au FTA 4, en comptant La générale, où il y avait une cinquantaine de personnes, donc ça fait cinq. J'ai fait Ahuntsic: six et puis j'ai fait six à la chapelle, donc on est à douze.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:43:46] D'accord, le moment que tu explicitais, est ce qu'il est clair pour toi ce moment là? Est ce que c'est la première? La deuxième représentation, La troisième représentation du FTA ou la chapelle? J'ai besoin de cette information.

Angélique [00:44:02] Je dirais que le le souvenir le plus le plus aigu, vient peut-être du troisième spectacle au FTA.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:44:19] D'accord. Troisième spectacle au FTA. le moment que tu as évoqué; à peu près le troisième spectacle. OK. Très, très, très récent. Oui.

Angélique [00:44:30] C'est toujours un peu là, et c'est un moment fort à chaque fois qui me... C'est un moment très particulier dans le spectacle, pour moi.... Mais j'ai l'impression que le fait de plonger dedans, la clarté du ressenti, c'est au troisième de la série de quatre.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:45:00] Merci d'avoir pris le temps de retracer cette cette expérience là de de scène qui était prégnant pour toi, important. Tu as parlé de paroxysme, où la tension était à son paroxysme à ce moment de scène d'interprétation. Maintenant c'est , tu es Toujours d'accord? Puis tu me fais signe. Je te propose dans un dernier temps, en fait, avant de clore ce moment d'entretien, de laisser revenir un moment où tu as pris, où tu t'es retrouvée en prise de décision méthodologique, mais sur le terrain de la création, pas en dehors, pas dans un moment d'écriture de la thèse ou un moment de réflexion théorique. Mais vraiment, dans un moment de création. Une prise de décision méthodologique au sens où: ah ben là, il y a de la donnée peut être que je pourrais utiliser dans ma thèse; je suis en train de produire de la donnée ou je suis en train de développer ma façon de faire. J'étais en train de garder des traces....

Angélique [00:46:20] Moi je peux, je peux penser à quelque chose.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:46:23] Oui, il y a quelque chose qui te revient. Oui.

Angélique [00:46:26] C'est vrai.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:46:28] Je t'écoute.

Angélique [00:46:28] Alors: ne pas documenter de façon religieuse. C'est un moment très précis. Oui, il y a eu plusieurs j'ai envie de dire, mais je me souviens d'un moment très précis où je savais dans l'absolu qu'il fallait que je documente, il fallait que je mette QuickTime, que j'enregistre et à un moment donné je me dis, tu sais quoi Angélique, Fais confiance.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:47:01] dans ce moment là.

Angélique [00:47:06] À Ce moment là Précisément, J'ai pris la décision de ne plus essayer, de ne plus m'acharner à la documentation comme On l'écrit; de faire confiance à ce qui allait émerger quand je revisitais, quand je note en fin de journée ou même à la limite en fin de semaine, il y a des choses qui émergent.... peut être écrire de la poésie au lieu de ...Sois avec l'expérience de la chose et en tout cas basta avec cette obsession qu'on s'impose de tout noter.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:48:03] C'est un moment important pour toi, mais à quel, à quel moment Ça se passe à peu près?

Angélique [00:48:09] Ça se Passe... On avait déjà démarré la répétition, donc j'avais mis l'enregistreur. Dans cette conversation du début: on va travailler sur ci et ça. Et puis on avait terminé une première improvisation. Et on me donnait des retours. Je suis sur une table dans la pièce.

[00:48:43] Et c'est récent? ou ça date de quelques temps?

Angélique [00:48:47] C'est pendant la création.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:48:49] C'est pendant la création.

Angélique [00:48:51] l'automne dernier, même un peu plus tôt

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:48:58] L'été, L'été, l'automne. Fin d'été, OK, d'accord, l'année passée. 21. OK et tu es où et tu es où? Toujours à circuit-est?

Angélique [00:49:07] Je suis debout sur la table. Donc debout sur la table. Et là, on vient de... Je suis sur la table... Et on vient de me balancer de l'eau. Ça fait Partie de la pièce. Et comme toute chose, on fait une improvisation et puis on en discute, puis je les enregistre... Et là...

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:49:49] Qu'est ce que tu perçois?.

Angélique [00:49:52] un choix de ne pas, de ne pas descendre de la table et aller chercher l'ordinateur et appuyer sur PLAY.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:50:00] Hmmmm, ok, d'accord

Angélique [00:50:04] Je reste là, mais drôlement avec de l'eau qui coule sur moi, encore une fois.... C'est intéressant ça. Anne-Marie, m'a apporté une serviette et je me suis juste assise au bord de la table avec la serviette autour. Et on a causé. j'ai pas, j'ai rien noté, j'ai rien enregistré. J'ai pris la décision de juste vivre ce qu'il y avait à vivre, discuter de ce qu'il y avait à discuter.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:50:52] À quoi es-tu attentive à ce moment là? quand tu causes, tu discutes?

Angélique [00:50:58] Ce qui doit être retenu; ce qui disparaîtra, disparaîtra. Que voilà, que ça, ça suffit, en fait, C'est ça la sensation de l'intérieur - que cette trace qui restera sera suffisant.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:51:19] Et à quoi tu le sais que ce sera suffisant?

Angélique [00:51:22] je le sais. Je le sais à l'intérieur de moi.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:51:26] Reste là l'intérieur de toi. Reste là, reste là dans le je le sais à l'intérieur de moi.

Angélique [00:51:32] Je sais que c'est assez.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:51:35] Qu'est ce que tu fais quand c'est assez? Et quand tu sais que c'est assez? Qu'est ce que tu fais ensuite?

Angélique [00:51:42] Je lâche.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:51:44] Tu lâches.

Angélique [00:51:46] oui.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:51:47] Et comment tu fais pour lâcher?

Angélique [00:51:50] Je respire. je plonge Dans ce qui se fait. Donc à l'occurrence, c'est l'échange sur la scène. Et ce que je venais de faire....l'Arrivée d'eau et ce qui marche et marche pas ... Je me suis juste laissé rentrer dans cet échange avec Mélanie et Anne-Marie.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:52:27] Et qu'est ce que...

Angélique [00:52:30] avec Oui, cette confiance que oui, c'est , c'est bien, c'est ça qu'il fallait faire et puis.... ce qu'il doit se noter se notera après. Après.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:52:48] Hmm. Et dans ce plongeon là, quand tu dis je plonge, reste là. dans cet échange, qu'est ce que tu as su faire?

Angélique [00:53:08] Ça, c'est difficile, c'est difficile de ne pas projeter Avec ma tête chercheuse, de rester dans la.... Parce que j'ai l'impression....

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:53:24] dans ce moment, dans ce moment de oui, de conversation, d'échanges....Où tu fais confiance de de

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:53:43] Qu'est ce que tu sais faire dans ce moment de confiance?

Angélique [00:53:45] Recevoir.. Oui, oui, oui. Recevoir ce qu'elles avaient à partager... Et de partager mon ressenti. Mais sans rien d'autre, sans d'autre chose, sans parasite, de juste recevoir. Et quand je parle de parasite, c'est, encore une fois c'est juste d'être l'interprète. Juste recevoir. Et être dans un processus d'intégration... pour pouvoir refaire, parce que c'est à ça que ça sert ... Comment est ce que ça me nourrit? Ce que je reçois?

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:54:59] Qu'est ce qui se passe pour toi quand tu reçois? Et que tu es dans ce, dans cet état de comment ça me nourrit? Tu es attentive à ce qu'est ce qui te nourrit à ce moment? Comment tu fais pour rester là dans cette réception, cette nourriture?

Angélique [00:55:38] J'ai envie de le refaire. Ah ok, j'ai envie de refaire la scène avec ces informations là. Ça me donne envie de reessayer, en tenant compte - pas en se rappelant, mais en tenant compte, Dans le corps, c'est à l'intérieur que ça se passe - Mais ça me donne envie de le refaire, de reessayer, de toujours reessayer...

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:56:18] Et qu'est ce qui se passe ensuite? Quand tu as cette envie de réessayer?

Angélique [00:56:26] Je le dis.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:56:27] Tu le dis.

Angélique [00:56:29] je le dis.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:56:30] Tu dis comment?

Angélique [00:56:32] Bah je dis que j'ai envie de le refaire. Ou d'essayer un autre chemin ou , trouver d'autres espaces, contrer, à la limite... Mais ce n'est pas une question de contrer....J'allais dire contrer mes habitudes, mais ce n'est même pas question de ça - c'est chercher un autre chemin. C'est pas que consciemment, je dois contrer mes habitudes. Non, c'est chercher un autre chemin, c'est chercher d'autres chemins, moins familiers, moins familiers, moins prévisibles. Je ne connais... Les contours desquels je ne connais pas en fait, je ne les connais pas. Donc je ne sais même pas.... Je ne sais pas quand je vais vers un nouveau chemin, ou un chemin habituel... Je ne le sais pas, je ne le sais pas avant d'y être.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:58:01] OK, et quand tu ne le sais pas... Quand tu ne sais pas, avant d'y être, qu'est ce qui se passe pour toi? Quand tu le sais pas?

Angélique [00:58:16] Je me raconte des histoires tout le temps, non-stop, j'essaie de.... j'essaie vraiment d'aller - Ça fait partie des consignes que Mélanie propose aussi - Mais je le prends réellement! je me raconte des histoires vraiment de façon complètement schizophrène comme ça, je passe d'une chose à l'autre et j'essaie de De sentir toutes ces choses qui.... L'élasticité de mon expérience de vie. je vais là, je vais là je vais là; ça c'est loin, ça c'est proche, ça c'est... Je ne sais pas où je vais. Et je pars dans le dans le fait de ne pas savoir donc, je dois trouver des formes, donc je me raconte des histoires pour essayer de trouver des formes, et avant d'arriver au bout je change d'histoire... Je. c'est très particulier ...

Prof. Caroline Raymond [00:59:43] Et tout ça part du moment où tu as pris la décision de ne pas enregistrer ni prendre des notes Et De rester là dans la conversation, pour qu'il se passe quelque chose....

Angélique [01:00:00] je crois que ça vient de tout ça parce que c'est ça qu'on se dit. Toi et moi. Je me serais jamais dit que tout ça s'est fait à partir de cette prise de décision là. Je ne crois pas que c'est le cas, honnêtement. Je crois que le... Ce qui est important, c'est le chemin que je. J'ai fait quand J'ai reçu les retours, je n'ai pas pris de notes, et j'ai refait l'impro...c'est une partie... C'est quelque chose qui vient d'Une séquence dans le spectacle qu'On approfondissait. C'est une séquence qui existait, qui existe encore, où il y a j'ai envie de dire un contenant clair, mais le contenu est toujours... toujours à chercher... le comment de Ça est bien particulier, j'avoue. Alors le... C'est pas que tout ça s'est fait à cause du moment, à cause de cette prise de décision. Ce qui s'est fait, c'est que je n'ai pas, j'ai rien noté! C'est ça qui s'est fait! Et ça, le fait de ne pas noter mes ressentis, et puis les notes qu'on m'a donné, Et puis, quand j'ai refait l'impro, j'ai pas pris le papier, j'ai pas renoté etc.... ce qui s'est passé suite à ce moment là, à cette prise de décision là est quelque chose qui déteint sur le reste du processus. Pas juste sur ce moment là.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:02:19] Et qu'est ce que t'as fait avec ça? Avec tout ce qui se passait en toi.

Angélique [01:02:27] Au moment même?

[01:02:28] Oui. Où tu notes pas. Tu ne cherches pas à noter. Tu ne cherches pas à enregistrer quoi que ce soit, à Analyser les notes....

Angélique [01:02:46] Une une sensation de liberté risquée.

[01:02:53] OK, qu'est ce que tu te dis?

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:02:59] Liberté risqué.

Angélique [01:03:02] liberté pour l'artiste, risqué pour la chercheuse? mais je fais confiance. J'ai rien noté. Et ça, c'est quelque chose qui vit en moi encore. la confiance que le savoir et là sans Ça. De me permettre de sentir... non, je le dis autrement - de découvrir quel savoir j'ai vraiment envie d'évoquer quand je vais éventuellement écrire. Ça c'est à défendre ça. Ça me parle, mais ça reste. C'est encore là et ça résonne encore.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:04:21] Si tu me permets, Angélique, dis la dans ce savoir qui est en toi....Qui est présent en toi. Est ce que tu as fait quelque chose avec ce savoir là où il est toujours en toi? Et comment tu fais pour le nourrir ce savoir là? Qui est en toi. Pour la recherche. Pour la création et pour la recherche?

Angélique [01:04:50] Le. Le fait de jouer ça m'a énormément, énormément, énormément apporté. Énormément. Ça ...

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:05:11] A quoi tu sais que ça t'a énormément apporté? Le fait de jouer?

[01:05:17] C'est encore une fois Parce que cette attention est à son paroxysme. Il y a même tout ce que je ne sais pas que je sais, est là. Tout ce que je sais est là, tout ce que je sais, même tout ce que je ne sais pas que je sais est là. Tout, tout, tout est là. Dans cet état de performance... C'est un état de vie aiguë. Ça ça nourrit ma recherche, c'est sûr. J'écris par la suite aussi. Oui.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:06:28] D'accord.

Angélique [01:06:30] Mais j'écris pas... J'écris genre stream of consciousness. Je pose le crayon sur le papier et pendant sept minutes, je ne le bouge pas, il y a des choses qui sortent. Je fais ce genre de trucs là . Parfois, il y a trois lignes qui pourraient être un poème....

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:07:01] Et tu le fais quand Angélique?

Angélique [01:07:03] Quand ça me prend.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:07:05] Quand ça te prend?

Angélique [01:07:08] Parfois le soir même. C'était rarement le cas pendant le FTA, parce que j'allais prendre des verres, et puis après je n'étais pas en état de vouloir faire quoi que ce soit... Mais pendant la période des spectacles et depuis les spectacles, j'en ai fait aussi. Pas pas de manière..., mais c'est pas systématique, c'est c'est toujours présent. Et je me permets de noter dans n'importe..., je me suis déjà retrouvée dehors et je prends mon téléphone et J'écris trois phrases, puis je les transfère dans mon cahier après.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:07:56] d'Accord, y a t il un moment qui te revient? À un moment prégnant, qui te revient, significatif, qui te revient, d'écriture?

Angélique [01:08:07] J'ai essayé de... J'allais dire transcrire, mais c'est même pas ça... Quelque chose qui me venait - ce moment où j'étais debout, nue sur le plateau, en train de tourner.... J'ai essayé d'écrire ce poème qui m'est venu en juin. Et j'ai, je l'ai fait aussi stream of consciousness... c'est juste des phrases courtes. Donc je disais ça, c'est une femme de 60 ans, c'est une femme noire de 60 ans. Ça, c'est la petite fille de ma grand mère. Ça, c'est une Jamaïcaine, Ça, c'est une Belge, c'est un Oui donc. Je note, Je lis aussi beaucoup. Mais C'est rare, mais avant, je lisais, je notais tout ce que j'avais lu, mais je lis tellement, c'est pas possible. Donc ça j'ai dû abandonner aussi et je me laisse imprégner. Donc ce moment me revient. C'est un peu comme ça aussi, c'est ce qui remonte à la surface.... Il est remonté à la surface, c'était ces deux trois phrases qui me sont venues

pendant le spectacle. Et finalement en notant, j'ai trois pages de trucs... assez pour 7 minutes du coup, tu vois? Mais je, je sens que le Dans ces mots là, l'artiste qui a joué est présente, la chercheuse est extrêmement présente.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:10:42] Dans ces mots là, tu dis,.

Angélique [01:10:44] Oui.

[01:10:45] À la fois l'artiste, ouais, la chercheuse

Angélique [01:10:48] Là, Les deux sont là, la chercheuse... c'est comme si elle est... La chercheuse en moi a donné... S'il n'y avait pas de la recherche à faire, je n'aurais pas forcément écrit, dans ce sens là.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:11:08] Oui, oui, oui, tout à fait.

Angélique [01:11:12] J'ai juste eu ces deux phrases Et puis voilà. L'artiste est là, mais la chercheuse "holds her".

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:11:24] dans ces mots là, à quoi es-tu reliée?

Angélique [01:11:30] ma grand mère.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:11:31] À qui tu es relié - ma grand mère? Oui, c'est ma grand mère.

Angélique [01:11:36] Oui, oui, c'est drôle, j'ai jamais pensé à elle dans le contexte de cette création, avant cette conversation aujourd'hui - jamais.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:11:47] Elle n'est jamais venue à la surface.

Angélique [01:11:49] Non. Je n'ai jamais pensé à elle.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:11:56] Et pourtant, elle est présente.

Angélique [01:11:57] Ben là, punaise eh... elle est dans la pièce!

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:12:04] C'est la magie, c'est la magie de l'introspection Angélique, c'est vraiment la magie de l'introspection, accompagnée en plus. Il y a Toi qui a trouvé ta grand mère dans tout ce processus. ta grand mère et le mot survie aussi qui est un mot.... Il y a des mots, il y a des mots clés comme ça qui sont, qui ont émergé de ton explicitation, du temps que tu as pris pour décrire patiemment ces expériences là. Avant de terminer Est ce que tu as autres choses ou quelque chose à partager En mode en mode rétroaction? Angélique T'as une prédisposition naturelle à l'évocation et à l'introspection. En fait, ça va tout seul. Pour moi, c'est presque fou parce que tu génères des relances intérieures à l'auto-explicitation. Pour toi, ce serait un outil fantastique.

Angélique [01:13:38] Ben oui, comment? Comment est ce que tu as fait ça?

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:13:41] Ça s'apprend, Ça s'apprend. Avec une méthode très très techniquement, très claire, très. Mais c'est une plongée dans un monde intérieur et une où. Si c'est fou parce que on doit faire un contrat de communication avec soi même et on n'est pas très habitué à de se de se demander et de se parler à soi en disant, Angélique es-tu d'accord pour laisser revenir ce moment là? Et quand tu fais ça, c'est très très très très étrange et très atypique. Mais une fois qu'on entre dans ce travail là, je dis qu'il y a des choses magnifiques qui peuvent émerger, surtout en processus de création. Même en pédagogie, je te dirais ou en pratique professionnelle. Mais je pourrais même t'envoyer un un article sur l'auto-explicitation d'une étudiante que j'ai co-encadrée à la maîtrise en danse avec avec qui? Déjà? Avec Nicole Harbonnier sur son processus d'auto explicitation, elle aussi en enseignement. Mais elle a analysé son propre enseignement et elle avait besoin de faire une plongée intérieure incroyable pour comprendre comment elle procédait. c'est magnifique parce qu'elle a décidé méthodologiquement de passer de l'explicitation, demander à quelqu'un de lui faire un entretien d'Explicitation comme je l'ai fait avec toi, s'apercevoir chemin faisant qu'elle n'avait pas assez de données de qualité ou sensibles ou en

profondeur pour continuer sa recherche. Donc là, elle a adopté le mode auto explicitation. Mais c'est au passage comme ça je t'en glisse un mot...

Angélique [01:15:24] Et écoute, le travail que je fais. Et en plus, je suis vraiment juste à la rédaction maintenant. Oui, oui. Et ce n'est pas ce n'est pas de la phénoménologie, c'est pas ça.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:15:41] C'est pas ça.

Angélique [01:15:42] C'est pas ça. Non, ce c'est pas le fait de m'observer faire. c'est pas ça. C'est vraiment Faire Ressortir des choses latentes, en fait, que je trouve le plus Utile. et évidemment, en dialogue avec toutes les choses conceptuelles et méthodologiques qui encadrent cette chose là. Mais je me rends compte que l'une des choses que je regarde, c'est nos méthodes ou ma méthode de recherche-création. Et donc c'est autant dans la création même que dans la recherche, dans la rédaction. Comment est ce que je fais en sorte que ces deux choses là ne s'éloignent pas l'une de l'autre? Alors le pouvoir nourrir la rédaction, Toute, toute Cette réflexion entre guillemets, du ressenti et pas juste de l'exercice intellectuel.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:17:07] Absolument, absolument.

Angélique [01:17:11] Ça m'intéresse vraiment.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:17:13] Ben c'est super. Alors je ce que je fais, Ce que je vais faire c'est que je te l'enverrai cet article en tout cas, Johanna je demande son autorisation, mais je pense que Johanna va avoir l'ouverture au moins pour que tu le lises puisque tu découvres cette méthode. Et pourquoi pas? Et peut être peut être pas. T'auras ta propre méthode à toi aussi. Mais l'exercice d'écriture quand même, si c'est un long pèlerinage...

Angélique [01:17:37] Oui, tout à fait.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:17:38] Et créer les conditions pour que ça se passe aussi, cette écriture, c'est aussi ...

Angélique [01:17:43] Moi, parfois c'est la vie qui décide certaines choses. Dans un monde idéal, j'aurais déjà terminé. Mais finalement, je me suis retrouvée à Concordia à gérer un comité anti-raciste depuis deux ans, pour toute l'Université. Et donc ça m'a laissé très peu d'espace mental.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:18:08] Mais je comprends.

[01:18:09] Plonger. mais du coup Des écrits intuitifs, ces choses là, je note n'importe où, dans n'importe quel contexte, quand j'ai le temps, c'est plus de temps, quand c'est déjà, et donc c'est aussi je donnais... reconnaître la valeur de ça et de donner forme à ce genre d'émergence. On avait déjà parlé de des entretiens d'explicitation dans l'absolu et que ce serait quelque chose à chercher. Mais l'auto explicitation, j'ai un été devant moi, je serai en Europe pendant six semaines. Ça, je ferais avec grand plaisir.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:19:03] Ça prend un peu de coaching en fait, de formation technique pour éviter, entrer dans la conceptualisation de l'expérience. Le le défi, Et tu le dis très bien, et je pense que c'est même un garde fou pour toi de pas entrer dans le travail intellectuel volontaire, de vraiment laisser émerger ce qui est incorporé, engrammé. Il y a toutes sortes de façons de le dire, embodied... Mais ça passe par le mot et à un moment donné, le mot doit advenir si on veut communiquer à l'écrit. mais que ce Soit parfaitement en phase avec avec ce que tu dis. Le comme tu le vis, c'est vraiment je trouve qu'écrire une thèse-crédation, c'est vraiment ce défi. Il y a beaucoup d'ouverture, beaucoup d'originalité aussi dans la constitution de la thèse, on peut proposer des manières de la structurer cette thèse là pour qu'elle soit bien accordée, en fait, à l'expérience telle qu'elle a été vécu. Mais écoute, on aura peut être la chance d'échanger dans cette poursuite.

Angélique [01:20:05] Avec plaisir et.

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:20:06] Fantastique. Moi, j'ai vécu un très, très beau moment avec toi, Angélique.

Angélique [01:20:10] Merci Caroline

Prof. Caroline Raymond [01:20:11] La description... Tant mieux si ça t'a donné quelques ressources, quelques ancrages. Puis que la grand maman ait pris sa place, là-dedans, c'est pas rien. C'est un plan identitaire.

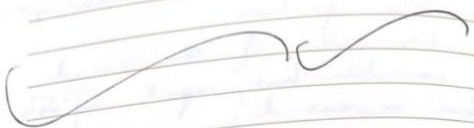
APPENDIX K
JOURNAL NOTES CONFESSION PUBLIQUE

2. Can I always see anyone
the difference between a secret
& a truth I've integrated into
a reality I (co)live with.
8. I lie to my boss! & my husband
(with my kids!)
9. I feel like an imposter in
my job very often.
10. I'm afraid to step back a
step → the idea makes me
feel lost.
- I've (allowed) myself to be
scammed to the amt. of over
3000 \$ that I've "abandoned"!
- I think I'm selfish & times
I sometimes feel like I could
t go bk to my old life & leave
resp'ies of children & a
husband, & a job.
14. I hide \$ from my husband!
15. I'm ashamed of my self-absorption.
16. I'm scared of ~~not being~~ ~~losing~~
of my kids' need.
17. I pick up cheap people who
"forget" & take them home!
18. I buy stuff online knowing
I'm going to lie about where
I got it (to my husband).
19. I used to hide in my be-
droom closet w/ the girl fr. no
door & play sex games
20. I've had 3 abortions
21. I lied about 2 of
fathers!

Date

still the "blank canvas"
 ↳ @ least the sense of the
 percep' of (they) h/o of (they)
 "should" be.

- agency!



- is dram'l process leads to
 - is way does Bs operate
 as dram'ty?
 - Moler → Blur
 → dance /inst/ dram'ty
 - keywords: dram'ly
 Bs
 ↳ idently / hist'y / phil'sophy
 festival history.
 - is dram'ty → ext'l force
 th' directs? Apemben
 - does Bs as concept perform
 o kind of dram'ty on the
 world?
 - brainstorm/writers/concepts re:
 Bs + Digy-
 - Color-blindness of Europe - Bil.
 - Hybridity of Carib - psycho-geography
 - Blk in N. America -
 - 4 dram'l bodies in 4 diff. cities
 TO - Mt. Kyr - Bil
 - each a scene fr. my memory.

Date

2. Can't always tell anymore
 the difference between a secret
 & a truth I've integrated into
 a reality I (c)live with.

8. I lie to my boss! & my husband.
 (all my children.)

7. I feel like an impostor in
 my job very often.

10. I'm afraid to step back &
 stop → the idea makes me
 feel lost.

11. I've ^{lost} allowed myself to be
 scammed to the amt. of over
 5000 \$ th' I've "abandoned".

12. I think I'm selfish s'times

13. I s'times feel like I could
 just go bk to my old life & leave
 the resp'is of children & a
 husband, & a job.

Date

14. I hide it from my husband!

15. I'm ashamed of my self-absorption

16. I'm ^{scared} scared of not being / providing
 w/ my kids need.

17. I pick up things people h'f
 "forgotten" & take them home!

18. I buy stuff s'times knowing
 I'm going to lie about where
 I got it (to my husband).

19. I used to hide in my bedroom
 closet w/ the girl fr. next
 door & play sex games.

20. I've had 3 abortions!

21. I lied about 2 of them to
 fathers!

Date

James discuss -

- is doubly another word for prod' narrative / narrative's identity
- form - familial body / domesticity
→ prod'
- TO - TDT
- Bel - interdisc'y + exp'tl
- MLE
- a dramaty of body in each str.
- The Dramaty of Blkness as they
→ evidence
- Dialogues of Blkness in MLE
→ Mel solo CP
- Poly body of expanded dialogue
- earlier chaps. based on memory in dialogue w/ various theorists

expect me of my ble

- plurality cult' + linguistic
- a quest of define myself
- choreography + corporeality
→ To Defiant
- being moving in-between
- Scene of Subject
- Hartma
- lots of dram' prod' stuff
- Stuart Hall : cult' studies
→ cult' obj's / artefacts / processes of cult' prod' = dram' Narratives of nation = prod'!
- keynote : flexible / versatile
→ post-rac' more inflammator
- porous "Blkness" "Dram' prod'!"

Date

- Samuel Oluwalade Kosoko

- Drunken + dance
- Katherine Profeta Polpheman
- build my collection of concepts for others saying about each concept.
- check Blk British perspective
- Perf'ce Studies wants to look @ dance / bodies DO
- Cult' Studies (Mixed perspective)
→ w/wise d/af look @ we need to look @ b/cas it was cult' prod'.

→ they situate dramaty diff'ly re: cult' prod' vs perf'ce prod'

(last chap w/ Mel = cont. perf'ce studies theory chap. on street dance or ordinary forms of art for my

childhood

→ dram' prod' of Blkness
→ relevance of Stuart Hall.

- Dana : - Notes trigger for queer around Blkness (Lepetit)
- Poetics / Pol'rality : Gissant
- Cultural Studies / Blackness : Stuart Hall.
- Double-consciousness : Dub
- Blkness + performativity
- Da Silva → non Afro Amerⁿ Blkness theorist - Wiyoko
- Paul Gilroy
- Ruth Wilson Gilmore
- Ch' James ?
- dynamics + fluidity + + form antithesis of static of m

Date / /

"paranatural" (Note)

Day 1!!

- film: "La nuit des rois" YouTube BS
- recording A.M.

Day 2

- iceberg
- well / puit
- mic on table.

Day 3

- prendre des moments précis par la dramaturgie
- présente susth à début puis se lâcher progressivement pour laisser place à l'interprète à la fin.
- undul's v. slow! bigfish...
- Papi - ^{laxo} ~~puet~~ - paon - somnabile - soupe - reine / reines - gear shift - stabbing - ~~case~~ - (lent) _{petit deg}

Date / /

boucles d'oreille - (siffles combiné) (+ de contour) - bagarre de chiens

- Plus de temps stat undul
- rythme:
 - accents doivent s'inscrire de 1 mot existant (pr p'voir trouver l'ém)
- vers Piedestal ?? visage!
 - Jack Nielson
 - Joachim Phoenix keep undul's!
 - ~~plutôt~~ esquissé
 - peu de bras
 - ralenti
 - visage + corps racontent tout
 - comme si
- Tunnel ?? parler non stop
 - libre assocⁿ de mots pr histoire
 - utiliser dernier mot pr m'ancrer ailleurs

June 28 PADS!

Date / /

garder undul's ^{les} → laisser partir progressivement

plonger de 12 undul's à début en moi!

- p-e vers Ventriloque ?? puis Map Monde ??

They see:

- sexuality + sensuality of a 60 y.o. woman
- slave being sold.

Map Monde: (lundi 14/2021)

1) details in deconstruction

- slower undul's
- A rhythm
- amalgams: plus fr à: combinaisons + rapide
- + surprenant pr moi / moins contrôlé

Date / /

2) Piedestal

- sens physique + grad + expressⁿ + petite
- états peuvent durer + longps + form's entret bien + lentement!
- comme une histoire
- laisser 12 états "creep in"
 - ça Δ le regard.

3) aller vers Ventriloque ^{de} Piedestal ⇒ Δ graduel du visage (but no sound)

- mfb long smile first ??

4) Map Monde:

- enlever the intro / tt commentaires
- histoires / souvenirs / préférences
- mes répulsⁿ / les points
- soit directet de l'histoire !!
- MORE SECRETS !!

Date / /

Contradict's mardi 17/02

- lenteur qui respire / qui se varie
- 2 caractéristiques: → la répétition
 - lenteur avec accents
 - avoir à cacher le visage
 - plus abruptement!!
- ↳ décision répétition profane se: se cacher. l'absurdité
- choses en parl + aléatoires!!
 - ie. rythmes mais constants
- joué + entre concert + abstrait
 - je découvre moi-même l'état d'appeler le chat
 - ↳ aboyer comme le chien
- ↳ ne perd pas la physicalité de la lenteur!
- ↳ ne perd pas les forces de la lenteur!

Date / /

prendre les impulsions ailleurs que de le centre!!

↳ périphérie!!

- chien-chat-danse latine - cover my face - lenteur des formes
- ↳ parties du visage
- "La vie est lente par un geste lent"
- ↳ donc tps des sobresants l'adieu!

Wed. Jan 16 Odite / Franck / Mish

- dramaturgy se: scène
- lasso w/ mic: A handle / big loop held w/ other hand in fct of body
- tell story Once Upon a Time + repeat it @ each stage + add data
- Compil

on a Time!!
ING TIME!!
circ.

clés

west passini

my
ill
d/

Keywords:

- ① hélicoptère (Chapellon / Grenada / Sarajevo)
- ① Adoption (car seat)
- ① Stephanie abused by Christoph?
- ① Ava - Elizabeth S - Donald
 - car accidents / letter after she died
- ① Apartments
- ① Décès de ma mère - letter left after her death
- ① décès de mon père
 - "d/come; n/ rec'y if call bk"
- fumer un crayon
- Mali
- ① mon père le juge 40' perçue
- ma mère
- ① ma première fois! Bobby Smith
- ① cockroaches M. phil Sardinha!!
- lemon nectarine pie
- ① weekend trip of NY or was for Bel
 - met him on flight
- Bel - Anno
- ① trashed apt of Gaeta Marotti
- ① spent aft. w/ train conductor
- fucking!

Date

- Ventlogue Once Upon a Time !!
 ↳ once upon a FUCKING TIME!!
 ↳ une suite du Coupil.

* email 4-5 chansons clés
 ↳ Redempt' Soap
 ↳ Flat Paup
 ↳ Purcell If love's a sweet passion
 ↳ Nature Boy
 ↳ STOP

June 21 (123)

soni Morrison: The Blue Eye

Once upon a Time:
 ↳ h/4 move fr concrete story
 ↳ little girl in house on a hill
 ↳ Chapelton took more abstract
 ↳ later in time / other contexts

↳ example of structure

Keywords

Date

- hélicoptère (Chapelton / Grenada / Sarajevo)
- Adoption (car seat)
- Stephanie abused by Christof?
- Ava - Elizabeth S. - Donald
 ↳ car accidents / letters after she died
- Avatars
- décès de ma mère - letter left after her death
- décès de mon père
 ↳ "d/1/come; if needly to call bk"
 • fumer un crayon
 • Mali
- mon père le juge 40' perjure
 • ma mère
- ma première fois! Friday 8:30
- cockroaches Miquil Bandinha !!
 • lemon norique pie
- weekend trip to NY or was for B
 ↳ met him on flight
 • Bid - Amo
- taught apt of Opera M. Loti
- spent diff. in train conductor
 fucking!

Date

- keep looking @ and a while
 undressing
 - d/1/ know th/ I'm going to turn
 d/ I'm sitting Purcell.

WRITING NOTES (PROPOSAL)

1) influenced by Moten
 ↳ non-identitarian stance ex:
 Blackness i.e. diff in bet
 blkness & blk bodies / blk exper

2) On diff in w/ separability
 (Da Silva)
 ↳ inter'd in non-Afr Amer
 thinkers re: exclusively.

3) Paul Gilroy "Blk Atlantic"
 4) Stuart Hall 6) DeBontz
 5) Edward Glissant 7) McKibick

Date

Defining my blkness:

- hybridity / creolité - Glissant
- opacity
- "regr" of blk being subsumed
 by white culture + values
- rhizomic net.
- diaspora (Hall; Gilroy)
- non-identitarian (Moten)

Blkness + dance:

- Thomas DeBontz

28/06 Photos

- Piedestal
 ↳ let thoughts come fr inside
 + then let express' Δ
 ↳ @ different heights / lengths for
 different views
 ↳ take the time for the
 + form!

Date mosaik

- prismatique de rel^l à fps + espace
- déconstruire la logique des associations
- ✓ random time + space
- use FUCKING this or that!!!
- "le noir est éclaté" → on essaye de mettre morceaux ensemble
- garder silence + lgtps
- 2 histoires plus longues
- Δ hands less stem / only for soul relief!
- keep it in R hand but slow dn!

Sept. 9 **LEARN PURCELL**

other stories that popped up on days 1
(prompt: tell me sth I didn't hear yet!)

Date // //

Sept. 10 Fri.

- leave time bet. sections of final organic transⁿ
- Once upon a Time: stay in new!
- carte postale milestones
- fatigue
- accelⁿ
- if nothing comes / nothing comes!! (text)
- super slow
- allow myself of Δ hands earlier / avoid fatigue too early
- develop some voice more
- give some context / depth
- let it slow dn at end

- Ondulations

- keep tempo longer 70 beats
- then release tempo + continue
- ↳ 70 beats

- Piedestal

- plus de trans entre ondulⁿ / espace de piedestal vers source

Date source

- let piedestal "emerge" fr. intérieur de piedestal.

Ventiloque 1 : l'urne??

- let body escape?
- mb intro à français?
- other material completely?

- Water ⇒ take time after!!

- mb physicality after water??

Ventiloque 2

- longer transⁿ + take surprise openly.

Stack 6

- mb bring the source vers PUNK

Refs:

- Spieds deux Lady Gaga Netflix
- Michael recording

Date // //

Stories:

- François me trouve opportuniste

Dans flic baguettes!

- 1) avec le métronome progressivement moins
- 2) coup simple - coup double DD - GG + alternar
- 3) pied of femme enrou (video)

Tues Sept. 14

- mon rapport à habilles plus naturel
- et plus détaché de l'autre tâche ki en passe

Thurs Sept. 16

OK, so many things I catch up on!!

(A) New C

- 1) ~~new order~~ Drums (+ more) ^{sur pedestal}
- 2) empaquetement batterie + retour à un beat
- 3) démontage du drum
- 4) pédale only
 ↳ incl. stand ↑ give up stool.
 ↳ serpent dress

(B) bijoux protest
 ent enlever robe X3

(C) Once upon a Time
 ↳ Once upon a Time
 1) finish speaking into mic
 "There is a little girl..."
 ↳ start deshabillage?? (w/ mic in hand)

(D) strip tease de la robe serpent.

(E) Purcell

(F) Ondul's ↳ la tauge

(G) Pedestal

Date

(H) ventriloque + robe de bal
 ↳ h/ in? "je préférerais être auteurs"
 ↳ h/ out? "je me shabillie!"

(I) la Grande Traversée
 ↳ les pages archives ^{Achues nattes}

(J) Ventriloque II
 ↳ histoire
 ↳ chant

(K) Encore
 ↳ Nina Simone?
 ↳ Purcell?

- histoire de la fin:
 • source
 • amorce p/c de Once upon a Time?
 • fin ouverte

- wait till AM dealing w/ sock
 ↳ start swearing @ her
 - find trans's in time + date
 - contrasts in confess's
 - mb repeat things in last ventriloq

Date Day 1 Tech Re eg Sept. 21

- h/ keep the island??
 ↳ need space around
 - recorded w/ Françoise: Purcell
 + mullerip + screams + nappes

↳ so much of me in this piece
 ↳ h/ much of this is black??

- end w/ sth sexual in lasso
 b/4 going ↑ house on a hill

- drums: cue AM sits → choir
 let bass drum bring beat slowly

- strip-tease slow but casual.

- WORK ON: slow down beat progressively
 + scream/shout

Day 3 - teaser.

Date

Drums @ début:

- plus long la chass
- plus progressif l'arrivée du beat
- garder beat puis le ralentir
 big plus!
 ↳ plus funky / slow / dark
- la voix plus présente H le long
 ↳ je me fais fouir !!
 jusqu'au bout!!

Once upon a Time:

- take over time in trans's in pen'd e.g. w/ AM gives me mic, let spectators witness the choir ↑ lasso
- "once upon a time, other..."
 ↳ inter'g time shift!
- do "house on a hill" in lasso
 ↳ silence once in fet of mic.
- keep start w/o knowing where I'm headed!!

Date
 Est-ce que c'est évident de moi soit ils ont surpris, soit je fais sens de leur pers. à l'aise à briser l'ange au cue musicale → arriver de après
 → est-ce si je manipule l'ange avant
 - reste 1^{er} au beat!
 - prendre tps de perdre l'ange de l'organiser
Archives nat'l
 • les époques
 • les états
 • les personnes
 • les ancêtres
 • les évènements
 • je suis en receiptacle de l'humanité
 } tout ça me traverse → histoire
 → multiplier les façons d'y aller:
 → parfois ça le devient
 → parfois j'y pense avant

Date
 - la forme est la priorité
 - PAS l'un OU l'autre
 mais l'un ET l'autre ?
 - moi je fais ça puis ça
 → mais une chose se fait forme puis je chape "ce la c'est" en chemin ?
 - la contradiction est ce kel cherche!
 → Δ vitesses
 → spécificité d'une partie du corps
 → est varier impo de la base du corps
 → avancer une histoire en exposé ?
 → sexes différents
 → ages différentes
 → parfois de impo peut revenir
 → TOUT Δ en même tps !!
 → tout le Δ par le centre

Fr. Oct
29/21

Je
ie etang
e

Last Thurs.

+ Archives

Date

- trouver la légèreté de chaque

bonne

- goch à dire ki impose les
silences + le accélère / teste joint

- ralentisse ts → début strip tease
→ more dense

→ une solitude ki s'installe

- arriver rythme + vite après cybales

- démarrer do + tôt après
établissement du rythme

Lasso

- moi mère

- sperme / sexe

- enfant(s)

- sang

- animal

- mon père

- ma mère

- la maison

- anodin

- le marque

- l'ennui

- l'envie

} enfant + adulte

↳ careful w/ lasso in l hand
↳ r/h/cord in ft of my face.

→

diff in bet. the Amerts → Jensei Cor
Chm people) =
→ we dful live in our (formal)
→ critical of creat of sense
of own "independence" (check
Wagner is just!).

→ what reflect in piece?
→ sense of "belonging"
→ to it of belong?
→ Greek goddess of slave
woman for sale

° Ventriloquist = McMillan?
→ mask!

Structure

° Adopt as a theme ??
→ of countries/cultures/children/
events/my family history

thoughts of "authenticity"
→ mine it? → is it? → who
feels it?? (me or audience??)

Date

• I opened my mouth & heard
 at the accent was lower "in
 sync" \rightarrow felt unsure of what to do
 leave it out of sync or Δ it?
 • Next day I opened my mouth
 & it was "in sync"

\rightarrow is my bluntness also about
 being a chameleon? a capacity
 for "form"? for dissimulation?
 (Uri M. Milner / working / strategic
 ambiguity ??)

\rightarrow this also in my art:
 \rightarrow are these bodies??

Winnie again: \rightarrow (place of adoption
 in my life)
 \rightarrow notion of time / history / adapt
 then of + my own personal story
 \rightarrow people talked about seeing
 any different bodies layered
 on top of each other
 \rightarrow is fugitive time??

• w/ a release to speak my own language!

↳ like putting on a jacket that fits

↳ when I realized: no, it's like taking off a jacket... a strait jacket!

• w/ does it mean to "fit in"?

• w/ do we let go of in order to "fit in"?

• w/ is it to speak other languages? the languages of the colonizers?

• Opacity of my own lang. ...
↳ the freedom I feel

• Why w/ it so difficult to speak it in Conf. Pub.??

↳ 'cos noone wd understand?

↳ 'cos I d/nt want to be identified?

• w/ is it like to fit in? to be in b/cos everyone else looks + sounds like u?

→

Date
↳ versus of (try +) blend in
"disappearing" or specifically by
making them invisible => @
least in context of environment
in?

° is it to be "seen" b/cos u'r
like everybody else? i.e.
recogd/seen/appreciated/considered
pretty-attractive etc.

↳ vs to be "seen" b/cos u'r not like
everybody else? In my case
an exotic hypervisibility.....

my "blkness" seen as like all
the "blknesses" (by the dominant
grp) => do only we see our
specificities??

thinking about Winnie → her
in the solo for my life / in
story of bla / in her Jamaican

Date

Knowing w/ close she w/ Hila and I
ing to her understanding + support.
And talking to them w/ Mickey w/ camp.
And good to see Horie too !!

w/ v. glad to see Aunt Cindy +
Miss P. Not sure I'll see Cindy
again....

The bodies I am:

- Caribbean
 - Jamaican
 - historical
 - "effective"
 - decolonial?
 - European
 - Canadian
 - hybrid
- "contemporary dance"
 - "black"
 - chameleon?
 - & unfixable ??
 - diasporic !

Does this body carry?

Is its exp of blkness?

Is it "defined" in the
bn context?

W/ signif. is the diaspora?

[Notes on/from JAMAICA] Date Sept 23/2022

On the flight bk to Cda
Not sure was supposed to be happy
for sure! This is the humorous
escape flight because I can't afford
to fly on Sunday. Had to
buy another ticket - expensive
3-day trip.

Rancon's funeral was on Wed.
It was good to be here at Dio & Maria
→ after all, I was glad Dawn was
here.

Today was H's birthday so 11
yrs ago today I was here in Kyr
for Wallis's memorial. It was good
to see Aunt Sybil (& Mikey + Howie!)
→ I knew it was an email visit
but I was apprehensive too that it was
show in support of H's. I'm thank
ful she was ready to listen/hear me
It meant a lot for me to hear her
say "Angel u d'nt do anything wrong"

Date Sept 24/2022

Structure ideas

- 1) CP → components / my exp^{ce} / concepts ↑ (ing)
- 2) Working fr. posⁿ as perf^r / dramat^g / Bl^k
- 3) bl I got of the questioning
 - ↳ my history as ~~posⁿ~~ perf^r / dramat^g
 - ↳ + w/ O'm fr. / where I lived etc
 - ↳ dramat^g of perf^r : JB + Phic
 - ↳ pilot proj^{ts} (Pia + Marcela)
 - ↳ Summer 2020 : BLM
 - ↳ 2018 : SLAM

↳ My blkness as perf^r

4) Res. ques^{ns} :

→ defining blkness

→ defining my blkness

↳ ~~is~~ is its dramat^g?

→ as a dramat^g / praxis

(⇒ check Wynter Q: bein^g "human" !)

5) the bodies I am ...

look @ methods of story telling / role stories (Hartman?)

[Notes on/from JAMAICA] Date Sept 23/2022

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