"How we gonna find my me?": Postcolonial Identities in Contemporary North American Drama and Film

by

Nadine Sivak

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Graduate Centre for Study of Drama, University of Toronto.

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Abstract

This thesis examines how four contemporary North American playwrights and filmmakers respond to the experience of colonialism in their representations of identity. My first chapter identifies the artists I am studying as playwrights Suzan-Lori Parks and Daniel David Moses, and filmmakers Midi Onodera and Julie Dash, defines key terms, and argues that these artists' works constitute identity in the liminal space between physical, historical and cultural presence and the absence or erasure associated with the position of colonial otherness.

The thesis' subsequent chapters each examine one artist's works through the lens of liminality. Chapter 2 applies the notion of liminality to the theatrical language and to the representations of history and the body in Parks' plays. In Chapter 3, I suggest that Moses uses the figure of the ghost to convey the losses suffered by Native North Americans under colonialism, and to begin the process of individual and communal healing by referring to a shared, if idealized, Native past. Chapter 4 argues that Onodera challenges the distinction between self and other in her role as documentalist: in The Displaced View, the filmmaker explicitly occupies both positions in relation to her filmic subject, her Japanese-Canadian grandmother, to demonstrate that the other is always unknowable to some degree. Onodera's next film, Skin Deep, illustrates the dangers of the colonial fantasy of "knowing the other." My fifth chapter examines how Dash's Illusions represents the construction of colonial otherness in Hollywood film through the erasure of African-American body from "America." Dash's 1992 film, Daughters of the Dust, attempts to redress this erasure by reclaiming the physical and cultural space of African-Americans in the national history/mythology. In all the works, geographic space,
history, language and the body are liminal zones in which the tension between presence and absence is played out.

The thesis concludes by asserting the usefulness of liminality for representing the unstable, shifting, divided nature of all identities. Liminal identities reveal the unity and fixity of the colonial subject as a fantasy and offer the possibility for redefining the terms of "self" and "other" or even of conceptualizing identity in entirely different ways.
Biographical Sketch

Nadine Sivak is originally from Montreal. She holds a BA in drama from McGill University and an MA in drama from the University of Toronto. She has worked as a theatre director and dramaturg.
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Chapter 1
Liminality as Resistance

The Postcolonial Context

This thesis examines artistic expressions, in the media of drama and film, by members of cultural groups that have experienced the effects of British colonialism in North America. It poses two broad theoretical questions: 1) Given that colonized populations were historically denied access to subjectivity and that the concept of subjectivity is itself highly problematic and unstable, what are some possibilities for representing contemporary postcolonial identities? 2) How can the notion of performance illuminate postcolonial identities and offer strategies for representing those identities in ways that do not replicate the colonizing relations between spectator and performer, viewer and viewed?

To a large extent this thesis deals with what postcolonial theorists often refer to as "writing in opposition to empire." The question of how artists respond to the effects of colonialism is, of course, a very large one, and my attempt to address a very small part of it will look specifically at the works of four playwrights and filmmakers currently working in North America. Suzan-Lori Parks is a New York based playwright whose plays include Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom (1989), The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World (1992), The America Play (1993) and Venus (1997). Her most recent work, In the Blood (unpublished at the time of writing), ran at New York's Public Theatre in December, 1999. Canadian playwright and poet Daniel David Moses is the author of ten plays including Coyote City (1990), Big Buck City (1991), Almighty Voice and His Wife (1992), Kyotopolis (1993), The Indian Medicine Shows (1995) and Brebeuf's Ghost (1996). Midi Onodera is an independent filmmaker who is based in Toronto. She has made a number of short films, among them, The Bird that Chirped on Bathurst (1981), Home Was Never Like This (1983), and Parallax: Ten

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Cents a Dance (1985), a documentary. The Displaced View (1987), and a feature film, Skin Deep (1995). American filmmaker Julie Dash has made several short films which include Diary of an African Nun (1977) and Illusions (1982), and is best known for her highly acclaimed feature, Daughters of the Dust (1992). All four artists have created works whose central preoccupations may be usefully illuminated from the perspective of postcolonialism.

As is already apparent, my argument owes a great debt to the theorists of postcolonialism upon whose work I am building and whose elaborations of the postcolonial condition as applied to literature and drama have provided me with some extremely valuable definitions of key terms. In particular, I refer to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin’s The Empire Writes Back, Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins’ Post-Colonial Drama and Elleke Boehmer’s Colonial and Postcolonial Literature as key sources. Following Boehmer, I understand imperialism to refer to "the authority assumed by a state over another territory" (2). Colonialism is the manifestation of imperial power in the form of "the settlement of territory, the exploitation of resources and the attempt to govern the indigenous inhabitants of occupied lands" (Boehmer 2). Although the thesis is concerned with the works of contemporary artists, I subscribe to Ashcroft et al’s use of the term "post-colonial" to refer to "all culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (2). Postcolonialism is therefore not defined by chronology but by orientation: it is a response to the experience of colonialism.

The four artists whose works I am studying are united by generation (all are between the ages of thirty and forty-five), and by the degree to which they occupy a discursive position which I identify as postcolonial in relation to the dominant culture of North America. I am well aware of extending the meaning of the postcolonial to include groups, such as Japanese-Canadians, who, as migrants to Canada themselves, did not experience territorial conquest by Europeans in North America, as did the North
American Aboriginal populations. Although not territorially invaded, I suggest that Japanese-Canadians and other non-European populations have historically been positioned as colonial others within North American society.

In explaining what I mean by the position of colonial others, I find it necessary to differentiate between colonialism and colonial discourse. I have already cited Boehmer's definition of the former term. I understand colonial discourse to describe the set of discursive practices whose primary purpose is to legitimize the exercise of colonial power. The need to justify the territorial conquest and exploitation of various populations led to the creation of the category of otherness, a process which I define as the central operation of colonial discourse. In no way do I mean to suggest that otherness is the unique province of colonial discourse or that this discourse invented the notion of the other. As well, I am aware of areas of overlap between, for example, psychoanalytic notions of otherness and colonial ones. In this thesis, I argue that the creation of racial otherness is the defining feature of colonial discourse, a view which does not preclude the circulation of many non-colonial forms of otherness. Chapter 4 offers a detailed account of postcolonial conceptions of the other as formulated by Franz Fanon, Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha. Without entering into too much detail, I wish to highlight the idea that colonial discourse's construction of otherness arises from its need to simultaneously assert and deny the difference of conquered and exploited peoples. Colonized populations must be viewed as different (read inferior) enough to justify their exploitation, while at the same time they must be deemed reformable or "civilizable" to some degree. Furthermore, the other's difference is always intelligible to the colonizer: all three theorists describe the colonial other as "always already" known. The processes by which the other is "known," such as stereotyping, and the development of theories of racial purity, to name just two examples, are discussed at greater length in my fourth chapter.

In this chapter, I suggest that the discourse of colonialism in North America exceeds the actual experience of territorial conquest and I contend that the colonial world view, with
its privileging of white Europe and its marginalization or "othering" of the rest of the world, was imported by the European settlers to Canada, and passed on to their descendants, who applied it in their relations with not just the Native inhabitants but with all non-European populations in this country.¹

In particular, the forcible removal of thousands of Japanese-Canadians (most of whom had citizenship status) from their homes on the Pacific coast and their detention in government internment camps during and after the Second World War (between the years 1942 and 1949, during which time their property was sold), demonstrated the degree to which these Canadians were viewed as colonial others whose basic human rights could be violated by official decree. To the extent that people of Japanese descent and other non-white migrants to North America have been marginalized as others within Canada and the US. I argue that the term postcolonial accurately describes the relationship of those groups to the dominant European-derived culture of North America.

At this point I should state that I am keenly aware of some of the potential dangers of postcolonial discourse, in particular what Elleke Boehmer, Aijaz Ahmad and Anne McClintock and others have identified as the "homogenizing" tendency of postcolonial discourse. To address the artistic expressions of such diverse cultural groups as "a coherent field of knowledge, defined by the unitary forces of history, such as nationalism or anti-colonial struggle." is to subsume cultural uniqueness and specificity to yet another branch of Western theoretical discourse (Boehmer 246). A second, related concern is the degree to which examining history through the lens of colonialism runs the risk of overprivileging the colonial encounter above all others, of viewing an entire people's story as divided into the periods before, during and after European colonization. at the expense of any number of other events in the population's history, thereby reinscribing Western dominance through the imposition of a Eurocentric world picture.

My intent is in no way to suggest that colonization is the defining historical experience for peoples of African, Native or Japanese ancestry whose histories obviously
long precede any contact with Europeans. Nor do I wish to imply that the colonial experience *per se* is the only or even the central preoccupation of the works I am studying. It is, however, indisputable that for roughly five hundred years of North American history, European colonizers and their descendants exploited and denied the essential humanity of the "non-Europeans" on this continent. My interest is in the kinds of plays and films that are created by members of groups whose basic humanity has, within recent history, been denied by another, dominant group. In this context, I perceive a continuity of concerns that have been associated with postcolonialism in the works of the four artists examined in this thesis. Briefly stated, the major concerns in question are: the search for personal and racial/cultural identities and the relationship of the physical body to those identities, the central role of language as an integral part of self-definition, the emphasis on historical revision, and the concern with place and displacement. These very general themes, which provide the basic structuring principle for each chapter (though not all of them are discussed in every chapter), are treated in vastly different ways by each artist and my analysis of each creator's work will emphasize certain themes over others. I do, however, feel it important to draw attention to a body of broadly shared preoccupations which I believe to be attributable, to a significant degree, to the colonial experience in North America.

The playwrights and filmmakers studied here all in some way deal with what Boehmer calls "the theoretical conundrum of colonized self-representation" (168). How, she asks, given the experience of denigration under Empire, are opponents of colonial rule "to articulate their refusal and at the same time to express their own identity?" (168). What strategies are being employed by contemporary postcolonial artists to articulate identities which are critical of colonialist notions of otherness? In the chapters that follow, I argue that the diverse strategies employed by these four artists to articulate identities which simultaneously acknowledge and challenge colonial ideology may be usefully grouped under the broad concept of *liminality*, a term that describes the
condition of existing in between a state of presence, defined in physical, historical and cultural terms, and the absence associated with otherness. I contend that subjectivity in the plays and films I am studying is liminally situated between presence and absence (as well as between ontological categories intimately related to presence and absence including life and death, visibility and invisibility, knowability and unknowability, silence and voice etc.). The four artists are linked in their positing of identities which I define as liminal in order to both articulate historical oppression and to engage in postcolonial resistance.

Defining the Liminal

At the simplest level, liminality refers to what is commonly known as the state of being "betwixt and between," of "belonging to more than one world, but to no one entirely" (Boehmer 240). It describes the sense of dislocation resulting from the ravaging and denigration of one's own culture by another. The concept expresses the postcolonial condition of simultaneous presence and absence, of being here and not here, visible and invisible. This experience of boundary crossing, of a fractured sense of self is described by Fanon alternately as an amputation and as the sense of experiencing one's being through others (109 & 140). The latter characterization is shared by W.E.B. DuBois in his description of the state of "double consciousness" among African-Americans (16-17).

As Fanon, DuBois and many others have noted, two primary effects of European colonization on a global scale were the creation of the racial categories that we as North Americans, or more broadly, Westerners, have inherited (and are in the process of contesting), and the positioning of racially defined groups of people at the borders or margins of colonial societies. The colonial relationship is one of partial inclusion on the colonizer's terms: the position of the colonial object is by definition liminal. Denied subject status, forced to inhabit peripheral positions, members of colonized groups have used their liminal status to challenge the very order that has relegated them to objecthood.
A key strategy in this regard has been the revision of the dominant culture from the perspective of the colonized cultures. The works I am studying all participate in various forms of revisionism in the realms of history, myth, language and aesthetics.

As this chapter, and indeed this thesis, will demonstrate, the precise meaning of liminality is entirely context specific. The liminal describes the oral-scribal hybrid that is Parks' theatrical language, the literal and metaphorical ghosts in Moses' plays, the insider-outsider position of Onodera as documentarist in *The Displaced View* and the experience of passing in Dash's *Illusions*, to name but a few examples. All are transitional phenomena which express different experiences of the fracturing of identity resulting from colonization. Each chapter will examine the particular manifestations of liminality in individual plays and films and pursue the implications of the various specific liminalities for the larger questions of identity, representation and spectatorship that are my central concerns.

At the level of identity, liminality has much in common with notions of hybridity, miscegenation, creolization and other terms which describe the blending of races and cultures. What distinguishes the liminal from these other related concepts is most importantly its resistance to fixity. The liminal is always shifting, partially absent, invisible and therefore unknowable to some degree, and it is because of this refusal of fixity and complete accessibility that I favour this concept over that of the hybrid or other similar notions. Because colonial domination carries with it a belief in the intelligibility of other cultures, the preservation and foregrounding of untranslatable or obscure elements of the colonized culture destroys the illusion of mastery on the part of the colonizer. I will return to the question of the subversive potential of partial obscurity or inscrutability later in this chapter.
Why Liminality?

Liminality's usefulness both for understanding the situation of being or having been colonized and for responding to that situation in an enabling way derives from its simultaneously descriptive and subversive capacities. The concept of liminality effectively expresses the paradox of being for those who have been marginalized by colonial discourse. As I have indicated, liminality conveys simultaneous presence and absence: the existence or appearance of the subject and his/her negation or disappearance. As such, liminality is able to reconcile the historical fact of cultural denigration with the impulse toward self-definition. In addition to its descriptive function, the concept of liminality serves the deconstructive aspect of the postcolonial project. The notion of a liminal identity undercuts the idea of identity as fixed or stable and thereby resists co-option by essentialist, hegemonic discourses, such as that of colonialism. It offers a destabilizing alternative to the Western, humanist conception of the unified subject, a conception which is difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile with the split consciousness that results from the experience of colonial oppression. Liminality constitutes subjectivity as shifting, unstable, and therefore always partially unknowable. The very same terms can be used to describe the constitution of the subject via performance.

The concept of liminality is a natural ally of that of performance: indeed, performance is itself frequently theorized as an inherently liminal activity. In Performance: A Critical Introduction, Marvin Carlson describes one aspect of performance's liminal nature: "Both theatre and performance," he argues "continually play with the boundary between the actual and the imaginary. Objects and actions in performance are neither totally "real" nor totally "illusory," but share aspects of each" (53). He cites the work of cultural anthropologists Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner and Brian Sutton-Smith, all of whom regard performance as a transitional activity occurring between states of "more settled or more conventional cultural activity" (Carlson 20). All three theorists discuss the subversive potential of performance based on the idea
that liminal activities oppose the "structure" of "normal cultural operations" (such as, for example, the colonial system) (Carlson 23). Sutton-Smith, in particular, views liminal situations "as the settings in which new models, symbols, paradigms, etc. arise", and Turner emphasizes the potential of performance and other liminal or "luminoid" activity to participate in social and cultural resistance by providing a space in which alternative structures to the status quo can be explored (Carlson 23-4).

The degree to which the liminality of performance aptly mirrors the liminality of the postcolonial condition may be gleaned from Richard Schechner's view of performance as a "double negativity": "Within the play frame a performer is not herself (because of the operations of illusion), but she is also not not herself (because of the operations of reality). Performer and audience alike operate in a world of double consciousness" (emphasis mine) (Carlson 54). The close, dynamic relationship between the "self" of the performer and the "self" being presented is described by Peggy Phelan as a dynamic of presence and disappearance: "In performance, the body is metonymic of self, of character, of voice, of "presence." But in the plenitude of its apparent visibility and availability, the performer actually disappears and represents something else - dance, movement, sound, character, "art" (150). Because performance inhabits an always disappearing present, Phelan likens its ontology to that of the subject. Performance demonstrates that subjectivity resides in the space in between appearance and disappearance or absence (146). This conception of performance is useful for highlighting the tension between being and non-being, presence and absence that characterizes the condition of postcolonialism. The tension between the here and the not here is, for my purposes, the defining feature of both postcolonial and performing subjects.

As I have indicated, performance's liminality has frequently been linked to its capacity for subversion or destabilization. In addition to the cultural anthropologists cited earlier, Judith Butler refers to performance's construction of cultural norms through
repetition, and suggests that performance, particularly in forms of mimicry or citation such as drag, can demonstrate the unstable, constructed nature of gender identity: "... drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality" (125). For example, a drag queen's replication of the normative sartorial, gestural, and behavioural codes of North American heterosexual femininity can (although it need not) contest the presumed naturalness of such codes by foregrounding, often through exaggeration or parody, those codes' performed or constructed nature. While Butler's arguments concerning the subversive potential of mimicry are made specifically in the context of gender, they are equally applicable to other aspects of identity. The liminality of performance demonstrates the instability of identity.

In the context of both postcolonialism and performance, liminal subjectivity offers possibilities for refusing the fixity and knowability that characterize the colonized position. Performance's ability to shed light on the postcolonial situation and to offer strategies for resistance is embraced by the four artists studied here, all of whom make frequent use of performance metaphors and conventions in their works. The central characters in two of Parks' plays are performers. Act Two of Moses' Almighty Voice and His Wife takes place on a school auditorium stage in a music-hall style. Onodera's The Displaced View examines the performance conventions of documentary film while Skin Deep concerns the performance of a female to male transgendered principal character. Finally, Dash's Illusions is about what might be termed the performance of the Hollywood institution during World War II. In this setting, the performers include the studio boss' assistant who is passing as white and an African-American singer whose voice is dubbed over that of a white on-screen actor. In all these works, the movement between presence and absence that defines performance functions as a metaphor for the position of the postcolonial subject.
As employed by Parks, Moses, Onodera and Dash, performance metaphors both represent and challenge colonial looking relations. The discourses of Western psychoanalysis, postcolonialism, and performance (including cinema) all, in different but often related ways, demonstrate that looking relations are never innocent, arguing that power is almost always on side of those who look rather than those who are looked at. The position of the Western humanist (white male) subject is associated with the power to objectify, to construct sexual and/or racial difference as otherness via the look or gaze. Fanon's description of his own self-alienation resulting from his constitution as a Negro "other" through the gaze (and language) of a young white girl (see Chapter 4), is one notable example of the workings of the colonizing look. The use of performance metaphors in the works I discuss can be read as metatheatrical or metacinematic commentaries which refer to the role of mainstream Western theatre and film in perpetuating oppressive viewing relations, and which disrupt those relations both within the plays and films and between the works and their audiences.

The central characters of Almighty Voice and His Wife, The America Play and Venus all return the gaze to their audiences even as they demonstrate the ways in which race is constructed through performance. In Almighty Voice, this construction occurs primarily through cultural stereotypes and clichés while in The America Play and especially in Venus, the body itself is foregrounded as the site for the intersection of the various discourses (scientific, sexual, social, political, economic) around race. As the plays' characters demonstrate these constructs, they also indicate their refusal to be defined in colonial terms. Almighty Voice's characters encourage each other to "lie" to the audience about what it means to be an "Indian" and Venus' eponymous character expresses her own desires directly to the theatre audience, including, at the play's end, her desire not to be looked at.

Performance metaphors operate in a similar manner in the films. Illusions directly critiques Hollywood's creation of a white America as it demonstrates the erasure of the
black performing body within filmic representation, and Skin Deep examines the destructive effects of colonial looking as the film's central character suffers the consequences of misreading those around her. Like the playwrights, the filmmakers use performance to self-reflexively comment on and destabilize the construction of race and gender through the gaze.

As part of their deconstructive project, the plays and films also use performance to highlight the degree to which identities are always partially hidden regardless of the visibility of the performer. In both Skin Deep and Illusions, for example, the narrative device of passing is used to demonstrate the fallacy of equating seeing with knowing as the "information" gained through looking at the body is revealed as false. The assertion of the invisible aspects of identity forcefully refutes colonial looking relations which equate visibility with knowledge, a point I will discuss at length in Chapter 4. By dramatizing the tension between visibility and invisibility as played out on the performing body, the four artists offer strategies for mobilizing some of the enabling possibilities within the notion of absence.

The shift between visibility and invisibility allows the postcolonial subject to move among different relationships of "accessibility" or "knowability" in relation to different audience communities, thereby resisting the colonizing spectatorial desire to see, to know, to oppress. In this way, liminality gives the object of the spectatorial gaze a significant degree of control over how s/he is seen in a way that challenges the standard paradigm that opposes the powerful viewing subject to the disempowered viewed object.

The question of the accessibility or comprehensibility of postcolonial subjects requires some elaboration. Boehmer argues convincingly for the effectiveness, as a resistant strategy, of an element of "untranslatable strangeness" vis à vis the dominant culture in postcolonial texts (243). Against colonial (and often postcolonial) discourse's faith in the translatability of texts from other cultures, "the permeability of other cultures to Western understanding." Boehmer notes that many postcolonial writers include
representations of specific local cultural practices and histories that may not be fully comprehensible to a foreign reader (or viewer) (245). In a related vein is Phelan's theorization of the strategic power of the unmarked (the absent or invisible) as a resistant technique in the context of performance. Pointing to the correspondence between the position of the colonizer and that of the spectator. Phelan writes. "visibility is a trap...: it summons surveillance and the law: it provokes voyeurism, fetishism and the colonial/imperial appetite for possession" (6). As both Boehmer and Phelan would agree, there can be significant strategic value in remaining partially unseen and/or unknown.

The use of partial opacity or inaccessibility to prevent the easy assimilation of postcolonial texts by the dominant culture is a feature of all the works I am considering and one which exemplifies a resistant use of liminality. Textual strategies include elements of deliberate invisibility and/or silence, the use of languages other than English (native languages and/or idioms) or of creolized or hybrid languages, and specific cultural or historical references which would be unfamiliar to most outsiders. Moses and Onodera include Cree and Japanese language in their respective works, and both Imperceptible Mutabilities and Daughters of the Dust make use of hybrid linguistic forms which combine elements of African-derived vernacular speech with standard American English. The Displaced View and Daughters each make numerous references to specific traditional cultural practices such as Japanese brush painting and African-American hairbraiding rituals. In most cases, an understanding of the particular cultural representations requires specialized or insiders' knowledge of local history, politics, ritual practices or linguistic codes. The tension between intelligibility and obscurity through the inclusion of elements of deliberate inscrutability to cultural outsiders is an important means of resisting reappropriation by the dominant culture which still easily succumbs to a belief in its ability to understand others.
Liminality in Context

The artists I am studying bring widely disparate approaches to their representations of identities which I have characterized as liminal. The four chapters that follow will provide an elaboration of the idea of liminality using specific examples from the plays and films. They will argue for the usefulness of liminality as a concept that expresses the tension at the centre of postcolonial identity and will demonstrate how, informed by notions of performance such as those already discussed, the idea of liminality offers the possibility of an "empowering" position from which to speak that resists reduction to colonial binaries and to coherent or unproblematic subject positions.

Chapter 2 explores liminality in relation to theatrical language, the representation of history and the performing body in the plays of Suzan-Lori Parks. The chapter's central argument is that, in Parks' dramas, liminality is expressed by way of revised repetition, a concept I explain in detail in the context of African American history and cultural expression. In the chapter's first section, I examine how revised repetition (which the playwright abbreviates as "Rep & Rev") defines Parks' use of language through the concept of Signification. Specifically, I focus on the tension between oral and written forms of expression, foregrounded within Parks' dramatic texts, as a means for conveying the African American relationship of revision to standard American English. Section Two of the chapter looks at revised repetition as a technique for staging the simultaneity of past and present in order to re-visit history. In this context, I consider Parks' use of the replica or copy as a device for historical transformation and redress. By marrying the concepts of revision and replication, Parks liberates the replica from the burden of accurately reproducing a stable original and thereby transforms the original itself. The chapter's third and final section examines "Rep & Rev" in the context of performance - looking at performance itself as a type of revised repetition or, as Richard Schechner terms it, "restored behaviour" - and argues that Parks' performing bodies resist a colonizing spectatorial gaze by deliberately remaining partially elusive to their audiences.
Like the three other artists whose works I discuss, Parks makes use of performance's liminality to redress some of the traditional power imbalance between performer and audience.

In Chapter 3, I argue that, in the plays of Daniel David Moses, the liminality of the postcolonial subject finds expression in the idea of the ghostly. Ghosts (quintessential liminal figures, along with tricksters) figure prominently in all of Moses' plays. The ghosts of Indians who died at the hands of white society haunt these plays, reminding the living of their past, exposing the workings of an oppressive culture and using history to guide the way to a safer, healthier, if always necessarily liminal, subject position. In the four plays I discuss, I argue that ghosts mediate between day to day individual lived experience and social institutions: specifically, ghosts represent individual psychological manifestations of North American Native policy and systemic racism. In Coyote City and Almighty Voice and His Wife, the central Native characters are rendered ghostly as a result of their encounter with white society. In these plays, the ghostly is both a symbol of Native physical and psychological destruction and a reminder of the dangers of forgetting on both individual and societal levels. In The Indian Medicine Shows, the white central characters are haunted by the fear and memory of the Indians they and their culture have destroyed. In the two plays that constitute the Shows, ghosts represent the effects of systemic racism on the oppressors. More than any of the others works I am studying, Moses' plays explore the psychological side of liminality on individuals who exist on either side (that is, that of the subject or object) of the postcolonial contradiction of simultaneous presence and erasure. The psychology of Moses's characters is always, however, firmly rooted in (and therefore inseparable from) the social environment inhabited by the those characters.

In Chapter 4, I discuss two films by Midi Onodera. In Onodera's The Displaced View and Skin Deep, I focus on both films' preoccupation with the impossibility of knowing the other. Both films, especially Skin Deep, problematize the relationship
between visibility and knowledge. In The Displaced View, my discussion focuses on the filmmaker's positioning of herself as a liminal subject who is at once inside and outside the world of her film. Although Onodera tells a personal story about three generations of women in her family, one of her chief concerns in the film is the degree to which she is an outsider to her grandmother's language, culture and experience. In recognition of her insider-outsider status, Onodera as filmmaker adopts a relationship to the people she represents, her mother and grandmother, which rejects the "colonial" documentary convention whereby "selves" or subjects represent and interpret the worlds of "others" or objects for a viewing audience.

In Skin Deep, Onodera's story of confused and concealed gender identities, the filmmaker warns of the dangers of refusing a liminal position and presuming to know others based on outward visible characteristics. The film's central character, Alex, an egocentric filmmaker who uses both ethnic stereotypes and other people to advance her career, adopts a position that may be likened to that of the colonizer. In her preoccupation with the use value of others, Alex is unable to see the personal turmoil and dissatisfaction of those who work for her. When those she has exploited turn against her, Alex is taken completely by surprise. If The Displaced View offers a model for exploding the colonial categories of self and other, Skin Deep points to the dangers of adhering to those hierarchical colonial categories. Both films are highly critical of visibility as a means to knowledge as characters repeatedly confound the assumptions and expectations of those who view them from the outside (both other characters and film audiences). Like Parks' plays, Onodera's films resist a colonizing gaze by confronting spectators with the limits of their knowledge.

The issue of visibility and knowledge is also central to Julie Dash's Illusions, one of two films I consider in Chapter 5, and one which examines the connection between race, voice, the gaze and cinema itself. The film offers another perspective on the relationship between visibility and knowledge as the black character's body is erased by
the filmic process while her voice is dubbed into the image of the white female star. The film's central character, a Hollywood studio boss' assistant who is passing as white, is an embodiment of liminal identity to the extent that her "presence" at her place of work is dependent the absence or invisibility of her racial identity. The film points to the role of Hollywood in the construction of the myth of America, including particularly the idea of America as a white nation from which black people are largely absent. My discussion of this film raises some of the issues examined in earlier chapters, such as the dependency of American culture on an unacknowledged African-American presence and the relationship between silence and voice for the performing postcolonial body.

My analysis of Dash's *Daughters' of the Dust* returns me to the subject of history. As will be apparent in my treatment of all the plays and films, history itself can be understood as always in between presence and absence, as Edward Said argues in *Culture and Imperialism* (4). The past lives in the present where it is always being re-invented, re-told, and transformed, as I argue in Chapters 2 and 3. In *Daughters of the Dust*, Dash's cinematic evocation of a mythic-historic paradise provides a liminal setting for a story that is itself about a period of transition in the lives of its inhabitants, narrated by an unborn child who is audibly present but physically absent from the film. Like Parks, Dash seeks to create a cultural (linguistic, musical, spiritual, aesthetic) vocabulary for her characters which both reflects their oppression under slavery and celebrates their strength and resilience through African cultural memory (storytelling, oral traditions, spiritual beliefs, ritual, music, dance) and their creative powers of adaptation and transformation.

Faced with a history rife with omission and erasure, African American artists such as Dash and Parks engage in a re-presentation of history that blends known, documented 'facts' with imaginative or speculative fiction. Such a composite strategy is necessary to the process of narrating the self into being, a process which, to be effective, must draw on a sense of the past which does justice to the rich, diverse, complex and largely unwritten African American inheritance. Like both Parks and Onodera, Dash is concerned with the
constant presence and transformation of the past in the present and the blurring of the line between history and myth as a strategy to for escaping the limitations of the master narratives of colonial relations.

Both of Dash's films point to the power of cinema as a liminal zone in which history is created and remembered. *Illusions* blatantly illustrates Hollywood's erasure of African Americans and ends with a call, voiced by the central character, for black people to take control of the means of cinematic production in order to tell stories which mainstream cinema chooses to ignore. *Daughters of the Dust* effectively answers the call put forth in *Illusions* with its stunning demonstration of cinema's power to revise history and create new cultural memories for people whose past has long been suppressed. Using film as a symbol of memory itself, Dash makes effective use of the medium to recuperate and reclaim the past and celebrate cultural survival.

**Why These Works?**

Recognizing that all selection involves a degree of arbitrariness and an even larger degree of personal taste. I nevertheless believe my choices of materials to be justified on several grounds. First, I believe that the works represent an effective and useful compromise between breadth and depth. By limiting my geographic scope to Canadian and the US and my chronological scope to the present day, I have greatly narrowed the range of colonial experiences to those taking place within a so called "New World" culture, the dominant strains of which are relatively familiar to me. At the same time. I feel that Canada and the United States exemplify sufficiently different experiences of colonial history so as to make comparisons between them valuable and interesting.

Within the two countries (and renouncing any attempt whatsoever at inclusiveness). I have selected artists from several different cultural communities: Parks and Dash are African-American. Moses is a Delaware Native Canadian and Onodera is a Canadian of Japanese descent. In my selection of works by each artist, my hope is to
convey some sense of the variety of styles of representation and perspectives on identity which can still usefully be grouped under the heading postcolonial. A final consideration is that these are artists about whom not much has been written and whom I think merit greater analysis than they have received. With the exception of Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*, the works I am considering have received little or no critical attention. My small contribution to remedying this lack is based on my belief that, through their diverse representations of liminal identities, these playwrights and filmmakers embrace in original, compelling and highly entertaining ways some of the complexities of the contemporary postcolonial situation, thereby making what I consider to be extremely valuable contributions to the still lively and very necessary debates around questions of identity and representation.
Chapter 2

"Tell it like it is; tell it as it was; tell it as it could be":

Liminality and Refiguration in the Plays of Suzan-Lori Parks

The image on the front cover of "The America Play" and Other Works by Suzan-Lori Parks is of the Abraham Lincoln costume worn by The America Play's central character, The Foundling Father. The costume, (which includes a stovepipe hat, black beard, shirt, black tie, white shirt, black vest and jacket set against the background of an American flag), is positioned in a way that indicates that it is being worn by someone seen from the chest up, who is facing the reader. There is, however, no one actually wearing the costume but rather an empty space where the head and neck of the wearer would be, creating the impression that the wearer is absent or invisible.

This cover image is a fitting metaphor for the tension between presence and absence that lies at the centre of Parks' dramas. I have already discussed (in Chapter 1) the degree to which performance can be usefully understood as a liminal activity, embodying the tension between presence and absence. In this chapter, I will examine liminality as manifested in Parks' theatrical language and in her representations of history and the performing body.

Liminality in Parks' dramas takes the form of revised repetition. Revised repetition or repetition with difference is an idea that has been taken up by theorists of performance (notably Richard Schechner), gender (Judith Butler), language (in Bakhtin's notion of citation) and African-American culture (Henry Louis Gates Jr.), among others. In The Signifying Monkey, Gates draws on many of the above discourses and on his extensive background in African-American cultural history to demonstrate the centrality of repetition and revision to African-American culture: "Repetition and revision are fundamental to black artistic forms, from painting and sculpture to music and language use" (xxiv). A function of its historical development, the black tradition in America is
double-voiced, writes Gates; its cultural forms revise their Western and their black antecedents. Citing examples from jazz, literature and, primarily, from African-American language use, Gates argues that African-American culture defines and perpetuates itself chiefly by revised repetition: ". . . the originality of so much of the black tradition emphasizes refiguration, or repetition and difference, or troping, underscoring or foregrounding of chain of signifier, rather than mimetic representation of a novel content" (79). Furthermore, revised repetition is not only a characteristic of individual works but more broadly describes the workings of the African-American literary/artistic tradition.

the relationship among works within that tradition:

It should be clear, even from a cursory familiarity with the texts of the Afro-American tradition, that black writers read and critique the texts of other black writers as an act of rhetorical self-definition. Our literary tradition exists because of these chartable formal relationships.

relationships of Signifyin(g) (122).

Revised repetition is a concept fundamental to Parks' writing:

"Repetition and Revision" is a concept integral to the Jazz esthetic in which the composer or performer will write or play a musical phrase once and again and again; etc. - with each revisit the phrase is slightly revised. "Rep & Rev" as I call it is a central element in my work; through its use I'm working to create a dramatic text that departs from the traditional linear narrative to look and sound more like a musical score . . .

. . . After years of listening to Jazz, and classical music too, I'm realizing that my writing is very influenced by music; how much I employ its methods. Through reading lots I've realized how much the idea of
repetition and revision is an integral part of the African and African-American literary and oral traditions . . . ("Elements of Style" 9-10)

"Rep & Rev" describes not only the relationship of Parks' plays to earlier texts but her representation of history, her portrayal of character and her use of language.

Revised repetition defines Parks' dramatic language through the concept of "Signifyin(g)", a term which requires some explanation. Thoroughly elaborated by Gates in The Signifying Monkey, Signifyin(g) is a mode of African-American figurative language use which defines, among other things, the relationship of the African-American vernacular to standard American English (in both its spoken and written forms). Signifyin(g) operates primarily by the principle of revised repetition, or repetition with difference: language is re-contextualized so that the "apparent significance" of a message differs from its "real significance" (Kernan 120-121). The Signifyin(g) relationship is exemplified by the African-American vernacular revision of the English word "signifying" to convey a range of meanings which are not included in its standard English usage. Whereas in standard English "signification" denotes meaning, in the African-American tradition it denotes ways of meaning, specifically, figurative or indirect language use.

Signifyin(g), in its operation through revised repetition, defines African-American language use as double-voiced. The double-voicedness of the black vernacular, in which both the standard English and its African-American revision are simultaneously heard, results in language that exists liminally between two discursive universes. As Gilbert and Tompkins and others have noted, the creolization of language is a common postcolonial practice, one which results in the liminal position of much postcolonial language use (184-189). Signifyin(g) describes Parks' use of a variety of strategies to express in dramatic terms the complexity of African-American language use. As I will argue in the following pages, an important aspect of this complexity derives from the tension between
spoken and written discourse in African-American (literary) history. The tension between orality and writing creates a liminal space occupied by the play text. By foregrounding orality in the play text, Parks points self-consciously to that text's liminal status, highlighting its suitability as a vehicle for conveying the liminal language of Signifyin(g).

Alongside its emphasis on oral communication, Signifyin(g) defines Parks' use of metaphors, rhymes, musical rhythms, homonyms, riffs and other linguistic devices that foreground the play of the signifier. At the same time, repetition and revision describes the structure and dynamic of Parks' dramas, her technique for forward progression. In the latter part of the section on language, I will examine the usefulness of Signifyin(g) to communicate both the oppressive and expressive functions of language for African-Americans.

In Parks' representation of history, revised repetition functions primarily as a technique for literally bringing the past into the theatrical present in order to redress historical imbalances or omissions and to offer alternatives to official versions of history through theatrical enactment. In this context, I will examine Parks' uses of the motif of the replica or copy as an example of the sort of creative revisionism necessitated by the unrecoverable aspects of African-American history. As Parks states regarding The America Play: "In this play, I am simply asking. "Where is history?" because I don't see it. I don't see any history out there so I've made some up" (King 43).

The notions of revised repetition which inform Parks' view of history and language find their parallels in her representation of the body in performance. Just as "Rep & Rev" allows Parks to stage the tension between historical and linguistic absence or marginalization and a contemporary assertion of presence, so too does this concept point to the tension between absence and presence that defines Parks' staging of the performing body (and, as I discussed in Chapter 1, that characterizes all performance). With central characters who are themselves performers, Parks draws attention to the
degree to which these characters' identities are always partially hidden despite their near-constant stage presence. The assertion of the invisible aspects of identity forcefully refute colonial looking relations which equate visibility with knowledge. a point I will address at length in Chapter 4. By dramatizing the tension between presence and absence as played out on the performing body. Parks offers strategies for mobilizing some of the enabling possibilities within the notion of absence.

My discussion of Parks' "Rep & Rev" strategies will focus on four plays: *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom*, *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*, *The America Play* and *Venus*. *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom*, Parks' first full-length play, is constructed as a series of riffs on the notion of "African-Americans in shadow of the photographic image" (Parks qtd. in Solomon 76). Moving between past, present and the space of the imagination and memory, the play resists easy classification. In Part 1: "Snails," three contemporary African-American women attempt to rid their apartment of cockroaches while under the watchful gaze of a naturalist who observes them through a video camera placed in a large cardboard cockroach. Part 2: "Third Kingdom" and Part 4: "Third Kingdom" (Reprise) are set on a boat in which a group of slaves are being transported from their homes to a new, unknown place. In Part 3: "Open House," a dying ex-slave's life appears to her as a series of tooth extractions. The scene takes place on emancipation day in 1865, although this setting is more atmospheric than literal. Moving between flashbacks or flights of imagination and the setting of a hospital bed, the scene suggests many possible connections between times, places and people without settling on any. Part 5: "Greeks (Or The Slugs)," presents a family through a series of scenes juxtaposing Sergeant Smith, an officer posted on a remote island, with his wife and children who receive his letters and await his return. Over the course of the scene, Mrs. Smith has several off-stage meetings with her husband during his furlough, each of which results in the birth of
another child. At the end of play, an injured Sergeant returns home to find his family impoverished, his wife blind, and his children alienated from him.

Parks' next play, *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* is even more difficult to describe, consisting of an extended series of variations in which the character, Black Man With Watermelon, repeatedly dies, comes back to life, finds himself with a family and dies again. A meditation on the circularity of time and the repetition of history, the play implies that the Black Man's greatest death is his being written out of history, a fact addressed by characters' repeated urgings to write things down so that the future will know of their existence.

In *The America Play*, Parks sets her action in a hole that is "an exact replica of the Great Hole of History," an American history theme park. In this theme park, The Foundling Father, a grave digger and Abraham Lincoln impersonator, narrates the story of his obsession with the life and, even more, the death of the American president, an obsession which led him to create an attraction in which paying visitors "shoot Mr. Lincoln." In Act 2, the Foundling Father's widow and son return to the hole to look for objects and "echoes" of their late husband and father.

Parks' 1997 play, *Venus*, tells the historically true story of a nineteenth-century African woman of extended posterior who was exhibited throughout Europe as a sideshow freak, The Venus Hottentot. In a series of short scenes, the action moves between the sideshow setting where Venus is one among a "Chorus of Human Wonders" and detailed descriptions of Venus' anatomy which, after her death, was dissected and analyzed by the scientific community. As Sander Gilman notes, the nineteenth century Hottentot was seen as an embodiment of the essence of the black female, an icon for deviant sexuality (225-228). The fascination with the Hottentot's body, in particular her buttocks and genitalia, was ideologically justified on the basis of the polygenetic argument: if the sexual parts of the Hottentot "could be shown to be inherently different, this would be a sufficient sign that blacks were a separate (and, needless to say, lower)
race, as different from the European as the proverbial orangutan" (235). Referencing the ideological context of the day, Parks' play boldly exposes the connections among the discourses of race, sexuality and science.

In all of Parks' dramas, "Rep and Rev" strategies enable the playwright's exploration of her themes in a style that links her to a long tradition of African-American self-expression. In the context of theatrical representation, the constant reviewing and re-invention of that which came before effects Parks' mission of staging a continuous and elusive theatrical present. The liminality of language, history and the performing body find their full expression in the liminal theatrical event.

Parks' Liminal Language

Parks' self-stated linguistic project is the creation of a theatrical language for a people historically robbed of language. In other words, Parks faces the post-colonial challenge of using language in such a way as to make it "bear the burden" or carry the weight of African-American experiences (qtd. in Ashcroft 10). As Parks explains:

At one time in this country, the teaching of reading and writing to African-Americans was a criminal offense. So how do I adequately represent not merely the speech patterns of a people oppressed by language (which is the simple question) but the patterns of a people whose language use is so complex and varied and ephemeral that its daily use not only Signifies on the non-vernacular language forms, but on the construct of writing as well. If language is a construct and writing is a construct and Signifyin(g) on the double construct is the daily use, then I have chosen to Signify on the Signifyin(g) (Solomon 75-76).
The central issue is Parks' theatrical representation of African-American language use, which is itself double-voiced. By Signifyin(g) on the Signifyin(g), Parks revises both Standard American English (in its spoken and literary forms) and the African-American revision of Standard American English that is the black vernacular. Explaining her view of the way language works in the theatre, Parks states that, in drama, "language is taken from the world, refigured, and set on the page, then taken from the page, refigured, and set loose in the world again" (Solomon 75). How and to what effect Parks refigures or Signifies on a language that has both excluded and been adapted and appropriated by African-Americans will be explored in the following pages.

An examination of Parks' Signifyin(g) practices may usefully begin with a study of the relationship between orality and writing in her plays. While all playwrights have the task of creating a written document with a view to performance, written words to be spoken aloud, Parks, as the above cited passage reveals, sets herself the doubly challenging task of conveying in writing a primarily oral use of language with a complex revising relationship to both written and spoken English.

The relationship between orality and writing is of great historical significance for Africans in Europe and the New World. The tension between the spoken and written voice is a central concern of the earliest known writing by African-American slaves, writing which Gates marks as the beginning of the Afro-American literary tradition. The reasons for the prevalence of this concern are easy enough to identify: Forced to give up their native tongues, the African slaves were compelled to learn spoken English but were, for the most part, barred from learning to read or write in a culture which, (not coincidentally) since the Enlightenment, regarded literacy as the sign of human reason. And reason, after Descartes, was privileged as the fundamental human characteristic, the quality which defined humanity itself (Gates 129-130; Jones 4-6). If the ability to reason defined humanity and writing was the visible sign of reason, then Africans could demonstrate their humanity by creating and publishing literature. As Gates writes:
What seems clear upon reading the texts created by black writers in English or the critical texts that responded to these black writings is that the production of literature was taken to be the central arena in which persons of African descent could, or could not, establish and redefine their status within the human community. Black people, the evidence suggests, had to represent themselves, as "speaking subjects" before they could even begin to destroy their status as objects, as commodities within Western culture. In addition to all the myriad reasons for which human beings write books, this particular concern seems to have been paramount for the black slave . . . (129)

According to Gates, evidence for this claim is found in the trope of the "Talking Book," a trope which appears in five different slave narratives published between 1770 and 1815.6 Briefly stated, each of these narratives tells a different version of a story in which the narrator witnesses one or more Europeans reading a book which seems to "speak" to the reader. Picking up the same book at a later time, the narrator is dismayed to find that the book does not "speak" to him. The details of the situation and the narrator's response to the Book's silence vary in each narrative, and each version of the trope after the initial one represents an intertextual revision of earlier versions, thereby generating the beginnings of a literary tradition based on the principle of revision (131-169). In Gates' words, "The trope of the Talking Book became the first repeated and revised trope of the tradition, the first trope to be Signified upon" (131).

Faced with the silence of the Talking Book or, more accurately, the non-Talking Book, all five narrators seek a way to make "the white written text speak with a black voice." a project represented by the narratives themselves (some actually written by narrators, some dictated). "The paradox of representing, of containing somehow, the oral
within the written" was of pre-eminent concern for five of the earliest black autobiographers (and many others after them), and is a challenge that Parks, as her earlier cited statement indicates, continues to face (Gates 131). By taking up the challenge of representing black spoken language in her play texts, Parks situates herself in an over two hundred year old black literary tradition.

The anxiety engendered by the paradox of representing the oral in the written is indicated by the recurring concern with writing things down, documenting for posterity in Parks' plays. If a historically complex and largely unacknowledged relationship to writing has allowed African-Americans to be excluded from official history and denied subjectivity by a scribal European culture, Parks' characters are anxious to rectify this situation by (in a tradition that harkens back to the slave narratives) keeping written records of their activities, documenting their lives in writing. In Part Four of Imperceptible Mutabilities, Mrs. Smith and her children keep a detailed inventory of all the correspondence they receive from Sergeant Smith, their absent husband and father (62). In The Death of the Last Black Man, the speakers repeatedly advise each other, "You should write it down because if you don't write it down then they will come along and tell the future that we did not exist . . . ", reflecting the concern for acknowledged presence which has driven African-Americans to record their lives in writing at least since the eighteenth century (104, 115, 130, 131).

Recognizing the need to write one's way into human subjectivity, how is an African-American artist to write, in a culture which privileges written forms of expression over oral or musical ones, in a way that affirms the value of oral communication as a means of cultural transmission and a basis for subject formation? How is it possible to revise, in writing, the Western literary tradition so that it can allow for the ability of non-written forms to confer subjectivity? In other words, how can oral communication be empowered in writing?
To an important degree, this dilemma is addressed by the ontology of dramatic writing itself. The status of dramatic writing as a blueprint for performance means that all play texts are situated liminally in that they embody a tension between spoken and written discourse: all playwrights engage in "writing performance." For Parks, the act of writing for theatre allows her an arena for representing "the oral within the written" as a way of examining the complexity of the speech-writing relationship so central to African-American culture. The performative quality of the African-American vernacular makes it well suited to theatrical representation. Thus, while all play texts are performative to the extent that they are written with a view to performance, Parks takes the performative dimension of dramatic writing a step further by foregrounding what I will call the markers of orality in her written scripts. Parks thereby creates a play text that self-consciously points to its own liminality, making it a fitting vehicle for representing a double-voiced (liminal) language.

Parks' inscription of orality in her play texts begins with the appearance of the words on the page:

LUCY: I know me a faker when I see one. Your Father was uh faker. Huh. One of thuh best. There wuduhnt nobody your Fathuh couldnt do. Did thuh living and thuh dead. Small-town and big-time. Made-up and historical. Fakin was your Daddys callin but diggin was his livelihood. Oh. back East he was always diggin. Was uh natural. Could dig uh hole for uh body that passed like no one else. Digged em quick and they looked good too. You dont remember of course you dont (The America Play 180-181).

This is language that must be sounded out and heard to be understood. language that only really makes sense when spoken aloud. Absent are many of the standard markers of
written texts such as apostrophes and most commas. Capital letters are used for emphasis as much as for punctuation and proper nouns. Through spelling, punctuation and "written sounds" ("Huh"). Parks foregrounds the markers of spoken language in her texts, providing built-in guides as to how the words should be spoken. Describing language as a physical act, involving the entire body. Parks explains: "Each word is configured to give the actor a clue to their (sic) physical life. Look at the difference between "the" and "thuh." The "uh" requires the actor to employ a different physical, emotional, vocal attack" ("Elements of Style" 11-12). In lieu of stage directions, spoken words carry the action as they do in Shakespearean and Greek drama, in which the original conditions of performance necessitated the privileging of speech as the primary vehicle for theatrical communication:

MR. SERGEANT SMITH: I'll have four. Four shots. Four at thuh desk.
Wants em tuh see my shoes as black. Shirt as khaki. Stripes as green. No mop n broom bucket today. I'll sit first. No. Stand. I kin feel it. In here.
Mmm gettin my Distinction today. Thuh events of my destiny ssgonna fall intuh place . . . (Imperceptible 57-58).

In addition to providing the actor with a guide to pronunciation and rhythm, this brief excerpt communicates information about what is happening (Sergeant Smith is having his picture taken, deciding how he should pose), where he is (at his desk, most likely in an office), what he is wearing, his state of mind (anticipation, excitement represented by his splurging on four coloured photographs of himself) and the reason for that state of mind. All the action is contained in the words themselves: Sergeant Smith instructs the photographer to load the film and take four pictures; he goes to his desk; he shows off his military uniform; he sits; he stands; throughout this scene, he anticipates
getting his Distinction. What is said carries the whole action of the scene and of the play: the performativity of Parks' theatrical language. embodied in the idea of "spoken action," reflects a tradition in which culture is transmitted orally: the tradition is spoken.

Parks' spelling of words such as "thuh" and "kin", while providing the actor with a guide to physicality, intonation and emotional life through pronunciation, also represent her vernacular revision of standard English. Included in her preface to her collected plays is a guide to some of the ironically designated "foreign words and phrases" which she uses in these plays. The words include "thuh" (a variant of "the"), iduhnt (a variant of is not or isn't), "heud" (a variant of "he would" or "he'd") and "k" (as in "okay"). While pointing to the tension between the standard English words and their vernacular usage, Parks' word use also reveals that this tension is not innocent for African-Americans: the playwright demonstrates the use of language by white society to oppress, to deny opportunities. For African-Americans, the difference between "the" and "thuh" or "ask" and "ax" "can be the difference between work and unemployment, even between life and death" (Solomon 76). In the first section of Imperceptible, "Snails," Mona, who has been fired from her job for "breaking protocol" by not using proper speech on the telephone and then expelled from her "Basic skills" English class, contemplates suicide from her window ledge:

I diduhnt quit that school. HHH. Thought: nope! Mm gonna go on - go on ssif nothin ssapin yuh know? "S-K" is /sk/ as in "ask." The-little-lamb-folllows-closely-behind-at-Marys-heels-as-Mary-boards-the-train. Shit. Failed every test he shoves in my face. He makes me recite and my mind goes blank. HHH. The-little-lamb-folllows-closely-behind-at-Marys-heels-as-Mary-boards-the-train. Aint never seen no woman on no train with no lamb. I tell him so. He throws me out. Stuff like this
happens every day y know? This isnt uh special case mines iduhnt uh uhnnn . . .

Whole idea uh talkin right now aint right no way. Aint natural. Just goes tuh go. HHH. Show. Just goes to show . . .

They - expelled - me . . .


The performative function of language in relation to African-Americans includes oppression as well as expression. Mona's inability to learn has to do with the failure of what she is being taught to be meaningful to her ("Aint never seen no woman on no train with no lamb"). a failure which results in her expulsion from school.

In order to find in a language used to oppress African-Americans a vehicle for self-expression. Parks' Signifyin(g) serves to validate the vernacular as a communicative tool. Through the technique of self-narration, Parks addresses both the oppressive and expressive functions of language: On the one hand, the women's referring to themselves from the outside (like the Foundling Father's third person narration of his own life) speaks to the alienation these characters feel, the gap or splitting they experience in themselves as a result of living a hyphenated existence. On the other hand, self-narration, from the earliest slave narrative onward, has functioned as a technique for conferring agency, for writing oneself into history, into being. The paradox of self-narration
embodies the tension between the oppressive and expressive functions of language that lies at the centre of African-American usage.

The performative orientation of Parks' writing is equally apparent in the non-linguistic markers in her plays. The playwright's Signifyin(g) on written English is exemplified by the very typography of her scripts. For example, to indicate periods of silence in performance, Parks uses what she calls a "spell":

An elongated and heightened rest. Denoted by repetition of figures' names with no dialogue. Has sort of an architectural look.

LUCY
BRAZIL
THE FOUNDLING FATHER
LUCY
BRAZIL
THE FOUNDLING FATHER ("Elements of Style" 16).

Parks describes the spell as "a place where the figures experience their true simple state." "a place of great (unspoken) emotion." and "a place for an emotional transition." inviting directors to fill the moment "as they best see fit" ("Elements of Style" 16). The spell is a heightened moment of non-verbal dramatic action. The silence of the actors on the stage is here given typographic representation by the absence of words on the page to create a visual equivalent for on-stage silence. Parks' refusal to specify precisely how the spell is to be realized on stage is consistent with her deference to the process of theatrical interpretation even as she creates her own distinctive architecture of words. Her somewhat playful style of writing once again draws attention to itself as performative language while also bearing similarity to the concrete poem. As Solomon notes, "Parks'
plays look like long, dialogic poems." written to be spoken aloud (76). I will return to the matter of Parks' melding of literary and vernacular/performance traditions later in this section.

As apparent from Parks' use of the spell (and also the rest, a shorter version of a spell) as from the textual passages I have cited is the importance of rhythm in her writing. Combining the musicality and texture of jazz and oral poetry, the plays sound like musical scores more than like conventional dialogue. Repeated sounds, words and phrases function as refrains throughout her scripts. Parks' choice of terminology, a "rest" to designate a pause in dialogue is taken from music. The use of musical forms, structures and patterns is an important means by which Parks foregrounds and validates orality and performance in her writing; the playwright's use of non-verbal sounds is yet another.

Included in the "foreign words and phrases" section of Parks' preface are a number of sounds for which she has created written representations. Examples include: "ssnuch" "(Air intake sound not through mouth or throat but in through the nose.) A fast reverse snort, a big sniff (usually accompanies crying or sneezing)"; "thup" "(Air intake with sound placed in mouth: liberal use of tongue.) Slurping": "uh! or uuh!" "(Air intake.) Deep quick breath. Usually denotes drowning or breathlessness." and "gaw" "(This is a glottal stop. No forward tongue or lip action here. The root of the tongue snaps or clicks the back of the throat.)" Parks goes on to suggest a number of possible performance variations for those unable to create the sound as indicated (17-18). In the "Third Kingdom" section of Imperceptible Mutabilities, the slaves on the ship make the sounds. "Gaw gaw gaw gaw ee-uh. Gaw gaw gaw gaw ee-uh." which Shark-seer describes as follows: "This is uh speech in uh language of codes. Secret signs and secret symbols" (56). Not only is this form of communication wholly oral and performative, it is also incomprehensible or "foreign" to those outside the culture who do not share knowledge of the codes. a point to which I will return.
By foregrounding oral communication in her play texts, Parks situates her language within the African-American vernacular tradition and draws attention to that tradition's performative nature. The inscription of the oral dimension of language in Parks' written texts serves as a constant reminder of the liminality of all theatrical language and thereby makes impossible the unproblematic reading of her play texts as written documents, their co-option as dramatic literature, a critical practice of which much of the study of drama has traditionally been guilty.

Parks' accordance of a central role to oral discourse in her plays does not, however, occur at the expense of a concomitant recognition of the importance of writing as a means of transmitting culture, conferring subjectivity, and carving out a place in Western history (I refer back to the emphasis on writing things down in her plays, not to mention the fact that she is a writer). Rather, Parks' language use empowers oral communication within (not against) the written, a practice which demonstrates the degree to which theatrical writing, with its inherent tension between the oral and written realms, is a fitting medium for exploring the relationship between orality and writing in African-American culture. Indeed, as Parks draws attention to the central place of orality in African-American culture, her highly stylized poetic manipulations of everyday speech (by which she "makes music of every day usage") meld the literary and the vernacular in a way that challenges the traditional distinction between them (Solomon 76). In *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*, Houston Baker argues that the African-American vernacular tradition is a major source of the African-American literary tradition (Introduction). Gates elaborates on Baker's contention that the two traditions are inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing, existing in a symbiotic relationship, and he looks to this relationship as the basis for his own project of developing a theory of African-American literary criticism based in the vernacular tradition. Parks' plays might effectively be used by Gates as a model of the sort of writing that exists simultaneously (and therefore liminally) in the realms of the literary
and the vernacular or folkloric, seamlessly welding the two as they represent the speaking black voice in writing (Solomon 76). Parks' writing straddles both discursive universes, opening the way for a critical vocabulary that acknowledges and legitimizes traditionally excluded oral forms of expression.

In the context of her fusion of linguistic traditions, Parks' poetic manipulations of oral discourse in her plays include, in addition to those already discussed, her use of word play techniques (examples below) and her use of revised repetition as the dynamic for forward progression, her version of dramatic action. Within the discursive strategies I have been discussing up to this point, these linguistic practices link her specifically and directly to the African-American tradition of figurative language use.

Among the many ways in which African-Americans Signify, one of the most popular is what can be broadly termed "word play," an umbrella term for a variety of rhetorical strategies that turn on the play of the signifier, in which the materiality of the signifier is foregrounded. In *Talking Black*, Roger Abrahams states that Signifyin(g) refers to a "style-focused message . . . styling which is foregrounded by the devices of making a point by indirection and wit" (52). In a similar vein, sociolinguist Thomas Kochman defines rapping as "a fluent and lively way of talking which is always characterized by a high degree of personal style" (242). (Kochman's broad category, "rapping," includes Signifyin(g) among many other kinds of verbal behaviour.) Both writers' emphasis on the signifier is echoed by Gates who writes that, "Signifyin(g) . . . turns on the sheer play of the signifier. It does not refer primarily to the signified; rather, it refers to the style of language, to that which transforms ordinary discourse into literature" (Gates 78). Among the many varieties of signifier-foregrounding word play within African-American discourse are rhyming, chiasmus, homonymic repetition, riffing, and an emphasis rhythm and cadence.

Parks' plays abound with examples of these formal devices. *The America Play* opens with four examples of chiasmus, the trope of repetition and reversal:
THE FOUNDLING FATHER AS ABRAHAM LINCOLN: "To stop too fearful and too faint to go."

(Rest)  
"He digged the hole and the whole held him."  
(Rest)  
"I cannot dig. to beg I am ashamed."  
(Rest)  
"He went to the theatre but home went she." (159)

In her footnotes, Parks identifies all but the second chiasmus as having been taken from dictionaries, the second being of her own invention. Chiasmus is identified by Gates as "the overarching rhetorical strategy of the slave narratives written after 1845" (172). First developed by Olaudah Equiano in his 1789 narrative, the chiasmus was revised by later writers, notably Frederick Douglass, who made it "a central trope of slave narration in which a slave-object writes himself or herself into a human subject through the act of writing" (Gates 172). 

By beginning The America Play with four chiasmuses (and identifying them as such), Parks self-reflexively signals her connection to the African-American tradition of revised repetition through her own act of revised repetition. The historic function of the chiasmus in African-American literature since Equiano as a strategy of self-definition points to a continuity between Parks' work and the history of African-American subject formation in literature. With the inclusion of her own chiasmus, "He digged the hole and the whole held him." Parks signals her point of departure for the story of self-definition she is about to tell. In addition to demonstrating homonymic repetition, this chiasmus represents a short-hand summary of the life and identity of the play's central character, The Foundling Father, a grave digger who moves west to create an American history.
theme park in the form of a "great hole" where he spends the rest of his life as an Abraham Lincoln impersonator. In the play's second act, the same hole (which represents the Father's "whole" life) doubles as the Father's own grave. Parks' use of the chiasmus represents her connection to the African-American tradition and her revision of it, a relationship which exemplifies the double-voicedness of Signifyin(g) to which Gates repeatedly refers.

In the section titled "Signifying as a form of verbal art" of her book, *Language Behavior in a Black Urban Community*, Claudia Mitchell-Kernan emphasizes the display of verbal skill as a defining characteristic of Signifyin(g). She cites Kochman's definition of rapping (see above), as an example of the kind of verbal dexterity that is an essential part of the African-American vernacular tradition (122-123). While Parks' language manipulations are stylistically more akin to jazz than rap, she does exhibit great verbal dexterity of her own, using puns, rhymes, repeated sounds and phrases to "shift the ground of the world within her words, tugging on the tension between "standard American English" and black vernacular" (Solomon 76).

The names of many of Parks' characters provide examples of the sort of word play described above: the cast of characters of *Imperceptible* includes Kin-Seer, Us-Seer, Shark-Seer, Soul-Seer and Over-Seer as well as Mrs. Aretha Saxon, Anglo Saxon, Blanca Saxon and Miss Faith. *The Death of the Last Black Man* features Black Man with Watermelon, Black Woman with Fried Drumstick, Before Columbus and Old Man River Jordan, among others, while *The America Play* is centred around the life of a character named The Foundling Father. All of these names draw attention to materiality of the signifier, offering variations on a word to suggest the different kinds of "seeing" experienced by the slaves in the Middle Passage, repeating and revising familiar black stereotypes and clichés, and setting up the identity of a character for whom the gap between his aspirations and his lot in life is represented by the letter "I": the difference between the "founding father" and the "Foundling Father" is the difference between the
"Great Man" and the "Lesser Known," the president and the grave-digger, the white man and the black man. With linguistic manipulation, Parks shows how changes in spelling effect changes in reality or at least in one's perception of reality. Indeed, the playwright's entire project of linguistic repetition and revision is based on this relationship between language and reality.

In a related example, the letter "d" in the word "round" is used in *The Death of the Last Black Man* as a symbol to represent the closing off of possibilities for black people by Europeans:

QUEEN-THEN-PHARAOH-HATSHEPSUT: Before Columbus thus worl usta be *roun* they put uh /d/ on thuh end of roun makin round. Thusly they set in motion thuh end. Without that /d/ we coulda gone on spinnin forever. Thuh /d/ thing ended things ended.

YES AND GREEN BLACK-EYED PEAS CORNBREAD: Before Columbus.

*(A bell sounds twice)*

BEFORE COLUMBUS: The popular thinking of the day back in them days was that the world was flat. They thought the world was flat. Back then when they thought the world was flat they were afeared and stayed at home ... Them thinking the world was flat kept it roun. Them thinking the sun revolved around the earth kept them satellite-like. They figured out the truth and scurried out. Figuring out the truth put them in their place and they scurried out to put us in ours (102-103).
The realization that the world was round precipitated the "voyages of discovery" that brought about colonization and enslavement. Again, a single letter becomes a metaphor for the difference between freedom and enslavement.

If language determines reality (just as the "I" in Foundling Father keeps the character from self-realization, the "d" on "round" limits possibilities), then the ability to manipulate language bears the power to alter that reality. The relationship between the word and the world explains both how and why Parks uses repetition and revision to find in the language of oppression the tools for African-American self-expression. Parks' body of work is a self-conscious exercise in revising oppressive language to mobilize its expressive possibilities.

The examples of revised repetition represented by Parks' word-play techniques have their parallel at the level of dramatic structure. As the playwright explains, "Rep & Rev" is the basic dynamic which drives all of her plays:

... Repetition: we accept it in poetry and call it "incremental refrain." For the most part, incremental refrain creates a weight and a rhythm. In dramatic writing it does the same - yes: but again, what about all those words over and over? We all want to get to the CLIMAX. Where does repetition fit? First, it's not just repetition but repetition with revision. And in drama change, revision, is the thing. Characters refigure their words and through a refiguring of language show us that they are experiencing their situation anew. Secondly, a text based on the concept of repetition and revision is one which breaks from the text which we are told to write - the text which cleanly ARCS. Thirdly, Rep & Rev texts create a real challenge for the actor and director as they create a physical life appropriate to that text. In such plays we are not moving from A - B but rather, for example, from A - A - A - B - A. Through such movement
we refigure A. And if we continue to call this movement FORWARD PROGRESSION, which I think it is, then we refigure the idea of forward progression... ("Elements of Style" 9-10).

All of Parks' plays provide examples of individual words, phrases, motifs and entire scenes which repeat and echo each other. Indeed, the structure of the plays themselves is frequently built around principles of repetition. In Act One of The America Play, the ritual enactment of the shooting of The Foundling Father as Abraham Lincoln ("The Death of Lincoln") takes place three times, establishing it in a literal sense as a theme park attraction while also pointing to the Foundling Father's obsession with the event in history and to the attraction's popularity in a culture where shooting (of presidents, of black men) is a potent symbol in the national consciousness.

Structurally, Imperceptible Mutabilities is divided into four parts plus a reprise: "Snails." "Third Kingdom." "Open House." "Third Kingdom (Reprise)." and "The Greeks (or The Slugs)." As the breakdown suggests, the two "Third Kingdom" sections function as a sort of refrain which, despite not being identical in all their words, replay the same situation in which a group of slaves are being transported by boat from their homes to a new place. Through repetition, the scenes suggest a state of perpetual Middle Passage, as described by Greg Tate: "It is, finally slavery that transformed African people into American products, enforcing a cultural amnesia that scraped away details without obliterating the core. We remain in a middle passage, living out an identity that is neither Africa nor American, though we crave for both shores to claim us (70-71). Reflecting Tate's words, the central image in the "Third Kingdom" sequences, "is that of a man, torn from his home and taken to a new place, waving at himself across the expanse that separates the two worlds" (Solomon 77):
KIN-SEER: I was standin' with my toes stucked in thuh dirt. Nothin' in front of me but water. And I was wavin. Wavin at my uthr me who I could barely see. Over thuh water on thuh other cliff I could see my uthr me but my other me could not see me. And I was wavin wavin wavin sayin' gaw gaw gaw geeeee-uh.

... My uthr me waved back at me and then I was happy. But my uthr me whuduhnt wavin at me. My uthr me was wavin at my Self. My uthr me was wavin at uh black black speck in thuh middle of thuh sea where years uhgoh from a boat I had been - UUH! (38)

Liminally situated between Africa and America, the slaves are, as both Tate and Parks write, doubly homeless. Adrift in the water between continents. The image of Africans in the Middle Passage or the Third Kingdom is the source of and metaphor for the double-consciousness (and double-voicedness) that appears in the play's other three sections, a doubling that in turn is expressed by the very principles of repetition and revision. Kin-Seer's experience of divided subjectivity, which he sums up as, "Me wavin at Me. Me wavin at I. Me wavin at my Self." shows the character repeating and refiguring words to indicate a developing awareness of split that the experience of the Middle Passage would produce, an experience which generates the beginnings of self-narration.

If the experience of the Third Kingdom marks the beginning of the double-consciousness of being African-America, represented by the hyphen that separates the two terms. "Snails" examines the manifestations of that double consciousness in three contemporary women to demonstrate the connection between the forcible uprooting of Africans for slavery and the current situation of Americans of African descent. Kin-Seer's double consciousness ("Me wavin at Me . . .") is echoed in the women's practice of
narrating themselves from the outside: "Once there was a me named Mona who wanted to jump ship but didn’t" (26). The double consciousness that began with the trauma of the Middle Passage finds its contemporary resonance in the present day women’s self-perception. By repeating and revising the theme of doubling itself, Parks self-referentially traces threads of continuity between past and present, between the shared historical experience of Africans in America and their contemporary situation. As the suicidal Mona anxiously repeats lines from her failed English class, "THE-LITTLE-LAMB FOLLOWS-MARY-CLOSELY-AT-HER-HEELS-". "S-K" IS /SK/ AS IN "AXE". she demonstrates the frustrating paradox of double-voiced existence as she tries to master a speech with no relevance to her life outside the job she needs (31-33).

As I have indicated, repetition and revision can reveal both the oppressive and the expressive powers of language. The flip side of Mona’s unemployment and low self-esteem at her failure to master the master’s speech is Parks’ valorization of the vernacular through the linguistic practice of Signifyin(g) which, by its very use, connects Parks to an extensive African-American cultural praxis. Of course, the two facets of language use are never really separate: the expressive is always haunted by the oppressive (which gave it rise). Thus, while Parks’ use of the chiasmus situates her writing within a vibrant African-American literary tradition, it is a tradition born out of the need to assert the humanity of a people denied subjectivity by language. The duality of meaning that characterizes the language of Signifyin(g) is what is meant by its double-voicedness and, as I have earlier argued, the empowering value of Signifyin(g) for African-Americans lies precisely in its transformative power to revise oppressive language forms in a way that enables them to reflect the experiences of its users. Bearing in mind the double-voicedness of African-American language use, I would like to conclude this section with some observations on the expressive possibilities in Parks’ Signifyin(g).

The first of these expressive possibilities derives from the quality of indirection that is fundamental to Signifyin(g):
One of the defining characteristic of signifying is its indirect intent or metaphorical reference. This indirection appears to be almost purely stylistic. It may sometimes have the function of being euphemistic or diplomatic, but its art characteristics remain in the forefront even in such cases. Without the element of indirection, a speech act would not be considered signifying (Mitchell-Kernan, "Signifying" 326).

Mitchell-Kernan's words aptly describe Parks' writing. In a language of metaphors, verbal riffs and ever-shifting variations on a phrase or theme, Parks makes definitive interpretations impossible. In *Imperceptible*, for example, the identity of white man Charles is never certain: He might be the father of Anglor and Blanca; he might have been Aretha's owner or husband and she might have been the children's mother. Any or all of these possibilities might be true. In *The Death of the Last Black Man*, the relationships between the characters are even more ambiguous. As Solomon writes, "nothing is spelled out in Parks' liquid writing" (76).

The multiple meanings connoted by metaphors such as "The Foundling Father" and "The Great Hole of History" allow Parks a non-didactic critique of the exclusion of African-Americans from full participation in American society. Signifyin(g), with its obscuring of meaning through indirection, functions as a means of transmitting encoded messages based on shared knowledge within a group (Mitchell-Kernan, "Signifying" 326). Such messages evade surveillance (and hence censure) from those outside the group by virtue of their inscrutability to the uninitiated. The need for this sort of communication among African-Americans slaves for their own self-preservation is described by Douglass:
[The slaves] would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune. The thought that came up, came out - if not in the word, in the sound; - and as frequently in the one as in the other . . . they would sing, as a chorus, to words which to many seem unmeaning jargon, but which, nevertheless were full of meaning to themselves (qtd. in Gates 67).

I would like to suggest that the very fact of Parks' self-identified Signifyin(g) functions as a kind of code within the African-American community, one that would be far more accessible to African-American audiences or to students of African-American culture than to those outside of these groups. Understanding Parks' use of the African-American term "Signifyin(g)," in Solomon's article, requires a familiarity with either the vernacular or the theory, or both. The situation is similar for spectators of Parks' plays: As we have seen, Parks' use of homonymic repetition and other linguistic techniques which foreground the play of the signifier connect Parks to a wide-ranging practice of rhetorical skill from early slave narratives, through jazz to rap. Similarly, while those familiar with the trope of the chiasmus would recognize Parks' use of this device in its historic literary context, its meaning would undoubtedly be different (though not necessarily lost) to those unfamiliar with African-American literary history. The measure of indecipherability in Parks' plays to uninitiated audiences means that the plays privilege an audience that is either African-American or knowledgeable about African-American culture and history, thereby creating a community connected by shared knowledge while avoiding surveillance by those not in the know. Refusing to easily give up their meanings, the plays make it impossible for those who don't know to subscribe to an illusion of knowledge; they resist a colonizing spectatorial position by not being readily accessible to outsiders. This sort of theatre puts the would-be colonizer on the outside, giving him/her a taste of exclusion.
The final aspect of Signifyin(g) I wish to examine relates to its status as double-voiced discourse. As we have seen, Signifyin(g), always operates as a negotiation between two modes of discourse: the black vernacular repeats and revises standard English usage. The resulting double-voicedness enables the user to move freely between two discursive universes. The empowering nature of this practice is significant: Having had English both imposed on them and yet denied them, African-Americans responded by becoming "bilingual" - learning English but also learning to manipulate English in such a way as to develop a usage they could share within their community. Signifyin(g), a demonstration of linguistic skill, is a very powerful gesture for a group of people oppressed by language, one which answers my original question about how to turn an oppressive language into a tool for self-expression: Learn it, repeat and revise it to make it your own. (As Butler argues with regard to gender, repeating language need not repeat oppression). In a review of Angela Davis' recent book, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, Donna Bailey Nurse refers to a section (on Billie Holliday) which "marvelously illuminates blueswomen's ability to mould a hostile language to their own artful purposes" (D10). This is what Parks does so well: By creating a theatrical language that Signifies on the black vernacular and on standard English. Parks mobilizes many expressive possibilities of language for African-Americans.

**The Replica and the Liminality of History**

If revised repetition defines Parks' linguistic practice through the concept of Signification, a similar dynamic also defines her representation of theatrical space and time. At the level of both structure and theme, repetition and revision is, by definition, a way of bringing the past into the present to create a liminal space and time in which past and present exist simultaneously. The co-existence of past and present is by no means a new idea but it is one seized upon by post-colonialists as they engage in historical revisionism. In the opening pages of *Culture and Imperialism*, Said cites T. S. Eliot's
argument that "the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence," and continues with an elaboration of his own:

The main idea is that even as we must fully comprehend the pastness of the past, there is no just way in which the past can be quarantined from the present. Past and present inform each other and, in the totally ideal sense intended by Eliot, each co-exists with the other (4).

Picking up where Eliot left off, Parks capitalizes on the ability of theatre to represent the simultaneity of past and present. Performance, by definition, inhabits an (always disappearing) present. Through repetition and revision, which Parks describes as "a literal incorporation of the past." Parks uses the "now" of theatrical performance to repeat and revise history:

... A play is a blueprint of an event: a way of creating and rewriting history through the medium of literature. Since history is a recorded or remembered event, theatre, for me, is the perfect place to "make" history - that is because so much of African-American history has been unrecorded, dismembered, washed out. one of my tasks as a playwright is to - through literature and the special strange relationship between theatre and real-life - locate the ancestral burial ground, dig for bones, find bones, hear the bones sing, write it down.

The bones tell us what was, is, will be: and because their song is a play - something that through a production actually happens - I'm working theatre like an incubator to create "new" historical events. I'm re-membering and staging historical events which, through their happening on stage, are ripe for inclusion in the canon of history. Theatre is an
incubator for the creation of historical events - and, as in the case of artificial insemination, the baby is no less human ("Possession" 4-5).

With "Rep & Rev." Parks' plays stage the co-existence of past and presence to re-create history anew.

Just as an examination of African-American language use must acknowledge the degree to which oral forms of communication have largely been ignored or dismissed by American dominant culture, the study of African-American history also comes up against the fact of absence: the erasure or marginalization of events from the perspective of African-Americans and the normalization of the "official" historical documents of white society is one important consequence of the privileging of written accounts of History over oral ones which were generally dismissed as myth, fable or memory. As Joseph Roach notes, "The academic preoccupation with textual knowledge - whereby a culture continually refers to its archives - tends to discredit memory in the name of history." where history, as Roach employs the term, refers to "the critical interpretation of written records" (47). Repetition and revision allow Parks to rework and refashion history to include (and thereby validate) cultural memories, "marginal" events or figures and imaginative speculation in an effort to fill some of the gaps represented by the metaphor of the Great Hole of History.

In the next section, I will look at Parks' revisions of "official" History to make it 1) acknowledge its oppressive legacy and 2) accommodate new information necessary for the self-realization of African-Americans. My examination of Parks' historical recreations will focus on the revising strategies of two plays: In Venus. Parks takes a figure from the margins of official history and makes her the heroine of her play. Saartjie Baartman was a young African woman in the early nineteenth century who was taken to London and exhibited throughout Europe as a sideshow freak. The Venus Hottentot, on account of her (reportedly) large posterior. In making Baartman the subject of her drama.
Parks takes a figure regarded as a historical footnote and places her centre stage and centre story. In so doing, she transforms Venus from a grotesque anatomical curiosity to a historical - and human - subject. The playwright's act of historical recuperation creates an alternative to officially sanctioned versions of history by focusing attention on racially based human exploitation in the name of entertainment and science, a subject which has received relatively little attention within mainstream culture.

Like Venus, The America Play also engages in historical revision. Specifically, the latter play uses the metaphor of the replica or the copy to achieve its recuperative ends. Constructing her play as a mythical "what if?" story set in "a hole that is an exact replica of "The Great Hole of History"," an American history theme park where historical characters are impersonated for the viewing pleasure of the park's visitors. Parks centres her drama around "The Foundling Father," an African-American Abraham Lincoln impersonator whose "act" is to impersonate the late president at the moment of his death: customers pay to have an opportunity to shoot Lincoln just as John Wilkes Booth is supposed to have done. By setting the action in a mythical theme park and making her central character an impersonator, Parks problematizes the idea of historical truth. As I will discuss later in the chapter, the playwright uses the replica motif to refer back to historical figures and events while at the same time transforming these through her act of citation: American history is re-presented as an absence, a hole, and Abraham Lincoln is re-configured as a black man.

In both plays, "Rep & Rev" strategies allow Parks to present history as itself situated liminally, between the absence of erasure or discreditation and the presence of theatrical enactment. By bringing both imagined and documented events from the past into the present, Parks tells us that, like Venus and the Foundling Father, we carry our history with us at all times, not just in our memories but also in our bodies, our myths and fantasies, our dreams and aspirations.
In *Venus*, Parks brings the past into the theatrical present. The play opens with the announcement of the Venus Hottentot's death and then goes back in time to trace the story of her recruitment by an early nineteenth-century profit seeker and his brother who convince her to go to London for two years to "make a mint" as an "African Dancing Princess." Once in London, she is turned over to "The Mother Showman" and her "Great Chain of Being," a sideshow act of "Eight Human Wonders" who are exhibited as "the most lowly and unfortunate beings in God's universe" on account of their physical peculiarities. The Mother Showman names her newest "wonder" "The Venus Hottentot". puts her in a cage and invites visitors to pay money to look at (and often touch) "the Great and Horrid Wonder of her great heathen buttocks." After several years as the star attraction in the Mother Showman's "Great Chain of Being," Venus is bought by the Baron Docteur, a French anatomist who takes her to Paris to be both his mistress and object of study. In time, the Docteur succumbs to social and professional pressure to abandon the Venus as lover and have her imprisoned on charges of indecency, leaving the Venus to end her days in solitude, behind bars. Following her lonely death, Venus' body is dissected, her parts scrutinized, measured, documented and preserved in the name of scientific knowledge. The play moves back and forth between scenes of Venus as she is subjected to the abuses of exploitation for the Mother Showman's profit and the Baron Docteur's professional advancement, scenes from the play-within-the-play, "For the Love of the Venus," and detailed descriptions of Venus' anatomy, complete with measurements, which were compiled when Venus' body was dissected and studied after her death (her genitalia are still on display at the Musée de l'homme in Paris).

In its (re)presentation of a little known historical figure, Parks' story graphically depicts racially based human exploitation, putting it centre stage, recouping it from the margins of official history which has traditionally downplayed specific atrocities perpetrated on the basis of race by white society. By bringing the spectacle of racial
abuse into the open. *Venus* forces audiences to confront specific manifestations of the colonial worldview for one individual.

At the same time, Venus' story also demonstrates the complicity among Western discourses of science (biology, anatomy, physiology, medicine), anthropology, sex (notably the stereotypical rampant sexuality of the racial other and the sexual desire for the other on part of whites), commerce and race. The name of the Mother Showman's act, "The Great Chain of Being," refers to the "eighteenth century metaphor" that arranged all of creation on the vertical scale from animals and plants and insects through man to the angels and God himself. By 1750, the chain had become individualized: the human scale rose from "the lowliest Hottentot" (black South Africans) to "glorious Milton and Newton" (Gates 130). As Robert J. C. Young writes, not only did Africans make up the lowest human category, next to the ape, "there was, some discussion as to whether the African should be categorized as belonging to the species of the ape or of the human" (6-7). Within this evolutionary paradigm, individuals, regardless of race, with distinctive or unusual physical traits were believed to be unloved by God, who had punished them with physical malformations. As such, they were placed near the bottom of the human family in the Chain (so that Africans with unusual physical characteristics were doubly cursed), a status which rendered them suitable objects of display for the "horror and fascination" of those higher on the Chain:

Ladies and Gents are you feeling lowly?
Down in the dumps?
Perhaps yr feelin that yr life is all for naught? Ive felt that
way myself at times.
Come on inside and get yr spirits lifted.
One look at thisll make you feel like a King!

...
Ladies and gents: The Venus Hottentot
Shes been in civilization a whole year and still hasnt learnd nothin!
The very lowest rung on Our Lords Great Evolutionary Ladder!
Observe: I kick her like I kick my dog! (45)

As the Mother Showman's sales pitch demonstrates, the display of the "the most lowly and unfortunate beings in Gods Universe" functioned as proof of the spectators' entitlement to a higher rung on the evolutionary ladder.

Furthermore, Young, among many others, notes the degree to which scientific theories of race like that of the Great Chain of Being, "focussed explicitly on the issue of sexuality and the issue sexual unions between whites and blacks," so that, "theories of race were thus also covert theories of desire" (9). Young describes the great lengths to which eighteenth and nineteenth century science went in its effort to determine the "humanity" of non-whites, and the extent to which these debates centred around the question of sex. "namely the degree of fertility of the union between different races" (101). The question of whether or not the different races were of the same or of different species was based on the key question of whether or not the products of sexual unions between different races were fertile. Thus, while the "science of races" "enforced and policed the differences between the whites and the non-whites," it also "at the same time focussed fetishistically upon the product of the contacts between them. Colonialism was always locked into the machine of desire" (Young 180-181).

The tension inherent in this contradictory colonial logic is manifested in a dialectic of attraction-repulsion that operates in much colonial literature\textsuperscript{10} and is very evident in the dual reactions of "horror and fascination" to Venus, whose great success as a freak act is based on the desire of spectators to see, touch and engage in sex with this woman, described as a lowly, wretched creature, "with an intensely ugly figure, distorted
beyond all European notions of beauty" (36). As Venus is characterized as hideously ugly, unintelligent and pitiful, spectators flock to see her in record numbers, hoping to catch a glimpse and, in many cases, a feel (or more) of "the hot Miss Hottentot" (36).

Much has been written about the latent fantasies about and longings for contact with the racial other embedded within colonial discourse.11 The play within Venus, "For the Love of the Venus," comments directly on the desire for the racial other. In this play-within-the-play, the Young Man, betrothed to the Bride-to-Be requests that his uncle procure him "an oddity" before his marriage:

Before I wed, Uncle . . .

I wanna love

something Wild.

. . .

In the paper yesterday:

"In 2 weeks time

for one week only"

something called "The Hottentot Venus"

Uncle. Get her for me somehow (48-49).

Explaining his desire for an "exotic" encounter as a means to self-knowledge, the Young Man states, "When a Man takes his journey beyond all that to him was hitherto the Known, when a Man packs his baggage and walks himself beyond the Familiar, then sees he his true I: not in the eyes of the Known but in the eyes of the Known-Not" (26). The Young Man, as bell hooks argues in Black Looks, wishes to be changed, transformed into more of a "Man" through sex with the Hottentot: "A Man to be a Man must know Unknowns!" (48). Like Venus' eager spectators, the Young Man sees in the racial other a confirmation of his "natural" superiority: "His place in the Great Chain of Being is then to and to all that set their eyes upon him, thus revealed . . . Beholding and Beheld as he is
seen through the eyes of the Great Known-Not - taking his rightful place among the Splendors of the Universe" (26-27). Exhibiting the doubled colonial logic of attraction-repulsion, the Young Man's disdain for the Hottentot whom he regards as "something" to be acquired is matched only by his desire for sexual conquest of unfamiliar territory in the body of the "Known-Not".

Both the Mother Showman and the Baron Docteur, in exploiting Venus, capitalize on colonial fantasies of contact with the other (like those of the Young Man) for the purposes of their own personal gain (in the form of commercial profit and/or career advancement). Hooks refers to the commodification of Otherness which takes advantage of white supremacy's longing for the "primitive." "in a manner that reinscribes and maintains the status quo"(22). The exhibiting of Venus, whether in the name of science or entertainment, plays on this desire for the other while reaffirming the status quo represented by the Great Chain of Being.

By exposing the tension between desire and disavowal of that desire in the form of abhorrence or repulsion, Venus confronts its audience with some of the repressed issues in colonial discourse, exposing some of colonialism's inherent contradictions and personalizing its consequences. Furthermore, Venus demonstrates the ways in which science and capitalism exploit the attraction-repulsion dialectic at the heart of colonialism for their own benefit.

**The America Play**

The exposure of repressed aspects of history through revised repetition also characterizes The America Play. As Toni Morrison argues in Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, official American history has largely ignored the degree to which the very idea of "America" has been defined by its encounter with the black other. Morrison argues that the concepts by which America has traditionally defined itself (since the time of the earliest European settlers), namely, "freedom,"
"individualism," "innocence," and "the rights of man." derived much of their potency from the presence of a slave population that was both not free and visibly other:

The rights of man, for example, an organizing principle upon which the nation was founded, was inevitably yoked to Africanism.11 Its history, its origin is permanently allied with another seductive concept: the hierarchy of race... The concept of freedom did not emerge in a vacuum. Nothing highlighted freedom - if it in fact did not create it - like slavery.

... For in that construction of blackness and enslavement could be found not only the not-free but also, with the dramatic polarity created by skin color, the projection of the not-me (38).

The equation of America with freedom meant that the unfree (that is, the non-white) were, by definition, non-American. "Deep within the word "American." writes Morrison, "is its association to race... American means white, and Africanist people struggle to make the term applicable to themselves with ethnicity and hyphen after hyphen after hyphen" (47). Morrison's argument that "African" is the repressed within "American" is summed up in her statement that, to an important degree, America has defined itself through an "always choked representation of an Africanist presence" (17).

With The America Play, Parks brings this "choked" representation into the open, literally putting the unacknowledged black presence at the centre of her play about the very notion of America. Parks' repetition and revision strategies allow her to draw attention to the African in America. The image of an African-American man as Abraham Lincoln is a potent metaphor for the black presence at the heart of America itself, one which situates the African-American in the "Great Hole" of American history.

If official American history has largely ignored the African whose presence has made possible the concept of America itself, Parks' metaphor also points to the large
degree of unacknowledged cultural borrowing, impersonation, simulation, surrogation and ventriloquism by white America of black cultural forms. As Joseph Roach notes, "... the contributions of other cultures to Western forms tend to become disembodied as "influences," distancing them from their original contexts (and from the likelihood of a contract for their initiators)" (60). At the heart of much American popular culture from Bob Dylan to Madonna are the patterns, rhythms and cadences of black expression from blues to rap:

The voice of African-American rhythm and blues carries awesomely over time and distance, through its cadences, its intonations, its accompaniment, and even its gestures. Elvis Presley... inverted the doubling pattern of minstrelsy - black music pours from a white face - and this surrogation has begotten others (Roach 60).

With the metaphor of The Foundling Father as Abraham Lincoln, Parks reverses the usual pattern of cultural borrowing by having a working class African-American male speak the words and achieve some success from his appropriation of an icon of official American history (who is also, of course, a hero to African-Americans).

The phenomenon of unacknowledged cultural "borrowing" is further explored through the notion of replica or copy. I have previously referred to the setting of The America Play in "The Great Hole of History," an American history theme park which is, in turn, a Western replica of an East Coast American theme park of the same name.

Skillfully layering metaphors, Parks sets her story of impersonation in a replica of a replica. Of course, in Parks' world, the replica does not function separately from the notion of revision, in keeping with Parks' view of theatre as an incubator for the creation (through revised repetition) of new historical events ("Possession" 5). Whereas the idea of the replica is usually concerned with the accuracy or realism of the representation.
Parks liberates the replica from the burden of faithfully or accurately reproducing a stable, pre-existing referent and uses it as a tool for rewriting history: not only is the copy freed from the burden of perfectly reproducing an original, the original itself is re-viewed through the replica. Parks thus shifts the balance of the traditional paradigm which subordinates the replica to the original to make the relationship between original and copy more interactive.

As we have seen, the notion of a pre-existing original history is highly problematic in the context of an African-American history marked by absence and distortion. In this context, Parks' use of the replica destabilizes the notion of historical truth and functions as a technique for revising official history so that, for example, in The Great Hole of History, Abraham Lincoln can be an African-American man. Similarly, the stability of official versions of history is questioned as Parks attaches such qualifiers as "allegedly," "supposedly," "purportedly," and "might have said" in her footnotes to her citations of the words of John Wilkes Booth and Mary Todd (165 & 168).

The status of the revising replica returns us to the idea of liminality. To the extent that it invokes an original referent,\(^{14}\) the copy gives that referent a kind of presence. At the same time, the very fact of revision means that the referent in its original form is always disappearing as it is being replaced by its new(er) incarnation.\(^ {15}\) The stability (presence) of the original is therefore always in question. The final section of this chapter will examine the replica in the context of the body on stage, where it takes the form of impersonation. Returning to the idea of the liminality of performance, I will suggest how the liminality of the performing body offers possibilities for subverting colonial looking relations.

**Liminality and the Performing Body**

In relation to the body of *The America Play*'s central character, the Foundling Father, the replica appears as impersonation. The notion of impersonation implicates the
idea of performance in that of the copy or replica. The complexity of this notion lies in the relationship of the impersonator to the person being impersonated, that is, the doubling of presence and absence that characterizes impersonation: on the one hand the disappearance of the actor into the role renders the impersonated character "present" and the performer absent as performer. At the same time, the physical presence of the actor on stage points to the absence of the person being represented. These two relationships are always in tension within a single performance. The tension is particularly apparent in cases in which an actor moves in and out of character, but is to some degree a characteristic of all performances. One is often simultaneously or alternatingly aware of both performer and character, at various moments being drawn in to the point of forgetting that one is watching a performance and alternately being reminded of that fact.

Impersonation is, of course, central to the identity of The Foundling Father. I refer back to my description of the cover image of the collected edition of Parks' plays as a metaphor for the liminality of the Foundling Father, a liminality which derives from the complex relationship between the Foundling Father (as performer) and his role (as Abraham Lincoln). Although he is unarguably at the centre of the entire play (the play is his story) and he is on stage for the entirety of Act 1 and part of Act 2 (and is the subject of discussion when he is not on stage), throughout the play, the Foundling Father's presence is mediated to varying degrees by his performance of Abraham Lincoln. The play's title page identifies him as "The Foundling Father as Abraham Lincoln" and he never appears without his Lincoln costume. From the beginning of the play, he informs us of his physical likeness to the famous president: "There was once a man who was told that he bore a strong resemblance to Abraham Lincoln. He was tall and thin and built just like the Great Man. His legs were the longer part just like the Great Man's legs. His hands and feet were large as the Great Man's were large..." (159). The Foundling Father's fascination with Lincoln led him to "familiarize himself with all aspects of the Great Man's life"; he even took to "wearing a false wart on his cheek in remembrance of
the Great Mans wart" (163-164). Although he refers to a time in his life before he began performing his Lincoln act, the story he tells always situates the Father in relation to his hero so that he never escapes the late president's shadow. At the same time, however, for all his identification with the president, the Foundling Father never fully or completely inhabits his Lincoln role. He spends most of Act One giving a third person narration of his life, interrupting his story briefly several times to "play Lincoln" for a few paying customers. Because of the extensive narration which both precedes and follows the Lincoln act, the enactment itself functions more as a citation in the Brechtian sense than as a full embodiment of the role. Nevertheless, there are different degrees of performance involved in the Father's talking about playing Lincoln and his actually doing so. The distance between performer and role created by the use of a Brechtian acting style foregrounds the idea of history as a discursive construct which can be, and is, revised (by the Foundling Father himself and by the play as a whole). At the same time, the Father's personal tragedy lies precisely in his identification with a great figure from American history at the expense of his own family and autonomous sense of self. It is this vacillation between different levels or degrees of performance that situates the Foundling Father liminally.

The liminality of The Foundling Father is paralleled by the liminality of Abraham Lincoln whose physical absence from the stage contrasts with the almost constant stage presence of the Foundling Father. Indeed, while the Father's presence is mediated by his Lincoln impersonation, Abraham Lincoln is present in the play only as he is represented by the Foundling Father who recounts details of the president's life and death, quotes the Great Man's words and surrounds himself with assorted presidential paraphernalia. But whereas the Foundling Father is to some degree always absent by virtue of his mediated identity, Lincoln is spiritually present throughout the play.

The irony of the Father's efforts to invoke Lincoln's presence by "trying somehow to follow in the Great Mans footsteps," researching Lincoln's life and perfecting his
impersonation, is that these actions have not closed the gap between the two men. The objects with which the Foundling Father surrounds himself - the Abraham Lincoln bust and pasteboard cutout, the costumes and the box bearing the initials "A.L." - all paradoxically also point to Lincoln's absence, to the distance between the "Great Man" president and the "Lesser Known" grave digger:

A wink to the Great Mans cutout. A nod to the Great Mans bust. (Winks and nods) Once again striding in the great Mans footsteps. Riding on in. Riding to the rescue the way they do. They both had such long legs. Such big feet. And the Great Man had such a lead although of course somehow still "back there." If the Lesser Known had slowed down and stopped moving completely gone in reverse died maybe the Greater Man could have caught up. Woulda had a chance... (172).

Painfully aware of the gap (in both chronological time and Historical "significance") between himself, the "Lesser Known." and the "Great Man." the grave digger attempts to bridge this distance by trying to emulate his role model as best he can:

The Great Man lived in the past that is was an inhabitant of time immemorial and the Lesser Known out West alive a resident of the present. And the Great Mans deeds had transpired during the life of the Great Man somewhere in past-land that is somewhere "back there" and all this while the lesser known digging his holes bearing the burden of his resemblance all the while trying somehow to equal the Great Man in stature. word and deed going forward with his lesser life trying somehow to follow in the Great Mans footsteps footsteps that were of course behind him. The Lesser Known trying somehow to catch up to the Great Man all
this while and maybe running too fast in the wrong direction. Which is to say that maybe the Great Man had to catch him . . . (170-171).

The gaps between the two men are not just spatial and temporal but also racial and economic: "While the Great Man's livelihood kept him in Big Town the Lesser Knowns work kept him in Small Town. The Great Man by trade was a President. The Lesser Known was a Digger by trade. From a family of Diggers. Digged graves . . .", and, "As it had been back East everywhere out West he went people remarked on his likeness to Lincoln. How, in a limited sort of way, taking into account of course his natural God-given limitations, how he was identical to the Great Man in gait and manner how his legs were long and torso short . . ." (160 & 163). The Foundling Father's physical similarity to Lincoln weighs on him precisely because he knows that he will never equal the Great Man in stature, word or deed. Despite or perhaps because of his resemblance to the president, his knowledge of Great Man's life, his ability to cite Lincoln's words and his collection of beards and other objects representing his hero, the Foundling Father is always aware that the "real" Lincoln eludes him.

Of course, in a social and historical sense, Abraham Lincoln has presence, not just to the Foundling Father, but as a figure of History whose life has been well documented and mythologized. It is this social, historical, mythic immortality that the Foundling Father wishes to achieve in his own life: " . . . he wanted to grow and have others think of him and remove their hats and touch their hearts and look up into the heavens and say something about the freeing of the slaves. That is, he wanted to make a great impression as he understood Mr. Lincoln to have made" (166). The Foundling Father records his own life in the hopes of being of interest to posterity (170). His desire for historical immortality leads the Foundling Father to learn everything there is to know about the Great Man and then to begin presidential impersonations, initially just citing Lincoln's
words and then inviting the public to "shoot Mr. Lincoln" (166). With this last act, "the Lesser Known became famous overnight" (164).

The black gravedigger achieves a measure of fame, a degree of social presence in the form of public recognition, through his impersonation of a famous white American president. As we have seen, impersonation, like all performance, necessarily involves a degree of absence or self-erasure even as it attests to the skill of the performer, since that skill is one of disappearance. None of this is to suggest that the Foundling Father's impersonation is wholly an act of self-negation. On the contrary, the notion of impersonation speaks to both the exclusion of African-Americans from the idea of "America" and to the empowering possibilities contained in the notion of impersonation or imitation. Some of these possibilities derive from the subject of the imitation, which is of course highly significant. The choice of Abraham Lincoln as a subject on the part of the Foundling Father results from his obsession with the assassination of the president who put an end to slavery. In this way, the Father's choice to follow in the footsteps of a hero to African-Americans is an empowering one, a point which refers back to my discussion of reverse cultural borrowing in the previous section of this chapter.

A second valuable aspect of impersonation resides in the very fact of disappearance that is inherent in all performance. In my discussion of the liminality of performance in Chapter 1. I referred to the performing subject's shifting between presence and absence, visibility and invisibility as a strategy for resisting objectifying looking relations. It is significant that two of Parks' central characters, the Foundling Father and Venus, are performers. Specifically, within the worlds of the plays, the two characters perform for predominantly non-black audiences, whose gaze objectifies them as entertainments or oddities. By making her two characters performers, Parks sets up a double vision for her audience whereby the process of visual objectification is foregrounded: the actual theatre audience observes the characters being watched by colonizing eyes. Parks thus presents her two main characters in a way that makes it
impossible for theatre audiences to replicate unproblematically the objectifying looking relations shown in the plays.

In both plays, the main characters alternate between performing their roles and breaking out of those roles to address the audience directly or to interact with other characters. The Foundling Father spends most of Act One directly addressing the audience with his third person narration of his own life, interrupting his story periodically to "play Lincoln." From the beginning of the play, the technique of third person narration establishes the distance of mediation between the Father and the story of his own life. Furthermore, as I have argued, because the Foundling Father's presence, including his whole life's story, is always to some degree mediated by his Lincoln character, it is difficult to identify precisely where the performer ends and the role begins. Both types of mediation point to the partial elusiveness of the Foundling Father to the viewing audience: in contrast to his corporeal presence, the character always confronts the audience with reminders of his partial absence. The Father thus exposes the limits of the body as the site of identity. While colonial looking relations reductively inscribe identity on the body, the Foundling Father demonstrates the degree to which the self exceeds the body. As such, the audience is made to confront the inadequacy of seeing as a means to complete or truthful knowledge about the character. As Peggy Phelan writes, "Vision cannot be the guarantee of knowing once one knows that vision is never complete" (14). and, "Identity cannot, then, reside in the name you say or the body you can see . . . Identity emerges in the failure of the body to express being fully and the failure of the signifier to convey meaning exactly" (13). An essential aspect of Parks' postcolonial project involves exposing the limits of body as site of identity.

To the extent that the Foundling Father's (and also Venus') identity as a performer is a constant negotiation between presence and disappearance into his role, the theatre audience is precluded from unproblematically believing in its ability to fully see and hence to know him. As Bhabha argues, because the viewing (colonizing) subject seeks
his/her self-reflection in the other in order to confirm the subject's presence. to "see" a missing person or to look at invisibility in the sense of acknowledging these is to emphasize the viewing subject's "demand for a direct object of self-reflection, a point of presence that would maintain its privileged enunciation position qua subject. To see a missing person is to transgress that demand" (47). By denying theatre audiences a "direct object of self-reflection" by forcing them to look at absence, the Foundling Father and Venus resist the colonizing gaze.

Even more blatantly than the Foundling Father, Venus also forces audiences to confront the fact of her partial absence. In contrast to the garrulousness of the Foundling Father, Venus speaks relatively little for a main character, and is completely silent when she is on display for either entertainment or science. When she does speak, it is usually to request the pay she has been promised or demand better treatment, requests which always go unheeded. For the most part, Venus has no reason to speak since no one in the play is interested in what she has to say. Rarely engaging in any self-disclosure, her only personal revelations come near the end of the play, first when she feels sufficiently secure (albeit misguidedly) in her relationship with the Baron Docteur to fantasize about having control over her own life, and again as she summarizes the story of her life when she is in prison and near death. Meanwhile, other characters frequently presume to speak on Venus' behalf: the Mother Showman concocts, as part of her publicity scheme, a false history about having plucked the Venus from the Fertile Crescent: the English courts portray her as shameful and disgraceful as they debate the matter of her willingness to participate in her own exhibition: the Baron Docteur describes her as a scientific specimen composed of a series of individually identified and measured body parts.

For all the characters in the play, from the business man who "finds" her, to the Negro Resurrectionist who is her prison guard at the end of the play, Venus exists entirely within a visual economy. Her value derives entirely from that about her which can be seen. Even her relationship with the Baron Docteur, which allows her more
opportunities for self-expression, is circumscribed by visibility: despite his affection for Venus, he will not be seen in public with her; his primary interest in her is as an anatomical specimen. Parks foregrounds the relegation of Venus to the realm of the visible by having the character on stage, in view of the audience, at all times. Venus spends much of the play in cages, on display, wearing almost nothing. As an exhibit in the Mother Showman's "Great Chain of Being," Venus appears naked except for "that scrap around yr womns parts" which she refuses to remove (29). When she is let out of her cage, Venus stands, walks or dances centre stage, below a huge banner which reads "The Venus Hottentot," designating her as the star attraction of the "freak" show. After she is bought by the Baron Docteur, Venus is given beautiful dresses, good meals and chocolates, in exchange for which she must have sex with the Docteur and pose naked for him and his fellow anatomists. When she is charged with indecency, Venus is temporarily let out of her cage, to be displayed before the English court (74). Convicted of said charge, Venus lives out her final months in jail, under the watchful gaze of the Negro Resurrectionist. As I have indicated, even in death, Venus does not escape the scrutiny of the scientific community or the public at large.

Naked, caged, and constantly in view. Venus demonstrates the degree to which race has been and continues to be defined primarily in visual terms. Since the body has traditionally been considered to be the site of race, it is a short step to the belief in the ability to determine race through sight. In a scientific context, this belief is manifested in the nineteenth century assumption that knowledge about race could be gleaned from close scrutiny of the body so that the Baron Docteur and his anatomists believe themselves to be advancing the cause of science (and with it, their careers) through their examinations of Venus.

While the people who gaze at Venus in the play believe they "know" her to be a Hottentot, an oddity, a curiosity, a savage, a shameless sex-crazed wild creature, a freak of nature, a genetic anomaly etc. just by looking at her, the actual theatre audience is
prevented from subscribing to any such illusion of knowledge. Venus' silence, juxtaposed with the rare moments when she speaks about herself point to the degree to which she eludes the knowledge of her spectators by keeping most of her identity hidden. That Venus to some degree chooses silence is indicated by the fact that she can and does speak when she wants to. The fantasy she articulates in the privacy of the home she shares with the Baron Docteur indicates that she has not succumbed to seeing herself solely as others see her:

... The Docteur will introduce me to Napoléon himself: Oh.
yes yr Royal Highness the Negro question does keep me awake at night oh yes it does.
Servant girl! Do this and that!
When Im mistress I'll be a tough cookie.
I'll rule the house with an iron fist and have the most fabulous parties.
Society will seek me out: Wheres Venus? Right here!
Hhhhh. I need a new wig.
Every afternoon I'll take a 3 hour bath. In hot rosewater.
After my bath theyll pat me down.
Theyll rub my body with the most expensive oils perfume my big buttocks and sprinkle them with gold dust! (135)

As one of the rare moments of self-revelation by Venus, this passage demonstrates a degree of self-reflection that is not apparent in the rest of the play. As a character whose existence is circumscribed by the visible, Venus does not reveal most of herself to the dehumanizing eyes of viewers who take no interest in her as a human subject. In the context of the over-privileging of the visible, the assertion of invisible
aspects of identity is very significant. The play offers a critique of seeing as a means to knowledge as Venus is seen by thousands of people during her life yet known by none of them. Her private disclosures suggest a degree of human complexity which the theatre audience is permitted to glimpse but not fully witness. Venus thus refutes the colonial reduction of identity to the realm of the corporeal and points to the limits of body as source of knowledge. Not surprisingly, having spent most of her life on the receiving end of a variety of dehumanizing gazes, Venus’ dying request, made to the Negro Resurrectionist who is her prison guard is, "Dont look at me/dont look..." (159).

By exposing the workings of the colonizing gaze, both Venus and The America Play force their audiences to confront the degree to which their central characters partially elude the knowledge of all their viewers, both within and outside the world of the play. To the spectators within the plays, the Foundling Father is no more than a theme park Abraham Lincoln and Saartjie Baartman is an anatomical curiosity, whether she appears in a sideshow or a laboratory. For theatre audiences, both characters challenge this reduction of their identities to the realm of the physical/visible: using contrasting strategies - silence on the part of Venus versus extensive self-narration by the Foundling Father - Parks presents her two performer characters as partially "absent" despite their near constant physical presence on stage. In so doing, Parks disrupts seamless looking on the part of theatre audiences, forcing them to come up against the limits of spectatorial knowledge.
Chapter 3
Haunted by History: The Plays of Daniel David Moses

Invisible things are not necessarily not-there.

Toni Morrison

In the plays of Daniel David Moses, the liminality of the postcolonial subject finds expression in the idea of the ghostly. Ghosts are by definition liminal figures in that they represent the intrusion of the past on the present. As Avery Gordon writes, ghosts are fundamentally about crossing boundaries, about "the merging of the visible and the invisible, the dead and the living, the past and the present" (24). The ghost is a presence that refers to an absence. The ghosts of Natives who died at the hands of white society haunt Moses' plays, reminding the living, both Native and white, of their past, exposing the workings of an oppressive culture and using history to guide the way to a safer, healthier, if always necessarily liminal, subject position. In bringing the past into the present, ghosts refer to an earlier, somewhat idealized, Native culture and also to the violation of that culture under colonialism. As a consequence of this dual association, the ghostly can have debilitating or liberating effects (or often both) on haunted individuals. This chapter examines both functions of the ghostly in Moses' plays.

While certain Native tribes of the Northwest Coast have a belief in ghosts which precedes the European contact, the most common conception of ghosts among North American Native populations arose as a response to the colonial encounter. As Ake Hultkrantz writes, most Native religions "do not provide for a resuscitation of the dead in this life. As an Indian told me, those who are gone are gone forever" (34). The contact with Christianity did, however, bring about some religious movements, most famously the Ghost Dance, in which the return of the dead is possible (Hultkrantz 34; Beck and Walters 176). Briefly stated, the Ghost Dance is a general term to describe a series of
related religious movements that first developed between 1869 and 1872 (and continued to be practiced as late as the 1950's). Central to the movement, the ritual of the Dance was believed to bring about the return of the dead and the elimination of the white man (and in some cases, the end of the world)³ (Beck and Walters, 176; McLerran n. pag.).

Referring to the spread of the movement among the Basin and Plains tribes (including the Shoshoni, the Paiute and the Sioux) in 1890, Hultkrantz cites the appeal of the message "that the spirits of the dead would return and that the old world would be regained, if people danced the round dance and prayed." to "dispirited tribes that had lost their land and independence and were now threatened by political, social, cultural, and religious dissolution" (83). The Ghost Dance is one of the most explicit manifestations of the connection between ghostliness and colonization for Native North Americans.

While the ghosts in Moses’ plays do not call for or engineer the destruction of white society, their presence is very clearly a product of the colonial encounter. In the four plays I am studying, Coyote City, Almighty Voice and His Wife, The Moon and Dead Indians and Angel of the Medicine Show, ghosts represent the physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual effects of colonialism on individuals, both Native and white. For the characters who populate Moses’ dramatic universe, haunting describes the relationship between Native policy as a social institution and the experiences of individuals whose daily lives are circumscribed by this institution.

In Coyote City, the central character, Johnny, is the ghost of a young Native man who, six months before the story’s beginning, is killed in a knife fight at Toronto’s Silver Dollar Bar. In a parallel storyline, the character of Thomas, a middle aged Native minister, meets his untimely death in the same bar after succumbing once again to the alcoholism that has been his nemesis. Primarily through Johnny, Thomas and Clarisse, a prostitute whom Thomas encounters upon his arrival in the city, the play explores the phenomenon of Native destruction in a contemporary urban setting. In this play, both the
city and its microcosm, the Silver Dollar Bar, are represented as places where Natives routinely meet their demise.

Moses' second play, *Almighty Voice and His Wife*, offers a historical account of the nineteenth-century Cree folk hero who, after poaching a settler's cow for his wedding feast and accidentally killing a Mountie, is himself killed by an officer of the law. The play begins on The One Arrow Reserve on the Saskatchewan prairie in the year 1895, with Almighty Voice's courtship and marriage of White Girl, a Cree teenager and product of the residential school system who has all but forgotten her Native heritage. The play's second act takes place on the auditorium stage of an abandoned school where Almighty Voice, who returns as his own playful ghost, and White Girl, playing the role of the Interlocutor, perform a series of vaudeville-style skits and musical numbers which parody the most blatant popular Native stereotypes and clichés. In this play, as in *Coyote City*, the central Native characters are rendered ghostly, through physical death or cultural amnesia, as a result of their encounter with white society.

*The Indian Medicine Shows* examine the ghostly as an effect of the colonial system on its perpetrators. In the two plays that constitute the *Shows*, *The Moon and Dead Indians* and *Angel of the Medicine Show*, the white central characters are haunted by their own fear and guilt around their encounters, whether real or imagined, with Native people. Whereas the ghosts in *Coyote City* and *Almighty Voice* have objective physical stage presence, the ghostly in *The Indian Medicine Shows* takes the form of the private, internal manifestations of fear and guilt experienced as subjective reality by the individual characters. In *The Moon and Dead Indians*, the lives of Ma Jones and her son Jon are haunted by fear and guilt. Ma lives with the ghosts of dead "Indians" in the form of a recurring nightmare that wild bands of Apaches are coming after her. Despite having had little or no contact with Native people during her life, and against all factual evidence¹, Ma is convinced that she hears the sounds of the Apaches' horses late at night and that members of this Native tribe killed her husband and two of her sons by scalping.
Ma's son Jon, meanwhile, is tormented by the hideous memory of having taken part in the gruesome scalping of a young Native boy several years back during a drunken escapade with the object of his homoerotic desire, a young cowboy named Billy Antrim. The scar on the palm of Jon's hand is a permanent visual emblem of haunting in which the ghosts of his barely repressed homosexuality and his horrifying memories of violence are conflated.

The second of the two "Medicine Shows," *Angel of the Medicine Show*, examines Jon's attempt at self-redemption and healing. Twelve years later, still hounded by the ghosts of his past, Jon tries to repair some of the damage by becoming a "doctor" in a traveling medicine show which includes among its performers his sometime girlfriend, Angela Carruthers, and a young Mohawk, David Smoke, whom he both desires and resents in his quest for absolution. Jon's confrontation with his ghosts comes to a head as he finds himself returning to his old family home, now in ruins, to look for a safe haven after he and his troupe are chased out of a nearby town by an angry, Native-hunting mob.

The historical setting of the two *Shows* provides the context for these experiences of haunting. The plays are set in and around the Lincoln County region of New Mexico in 1878 (*The Moon and Dead Indians*) and 1890 (*Angel of the Medicine Show*), an area in which all the "Indians" have been "rounded up or shot" as a consequence of the US government's removal of the Native Americans (primarily the Pueblo, Navajo and Apache tribes) from their land and forcible relocation to reservations during the years 1863-1886 (Ellis 133-147). The physical landscape is itself haunted as a result of the crimes committed against the area's Native people. In their examination of the psychological effects of colonial oppression, the *Shows* suggest that such large scale devastation has left behind a residue which is experienced on an individual level in the form of haunting by Ma and Jon.

All four plays examine ghosts as representations of the extreme physical and psychological losses suffered under colonialism. While each play presents different
experiences of haunting insofar as the particular characters are concerned, the ghostly presence in all the plays functions as a critique of white North America's relations with its Native peoples.

As my short summaries of the plays' plots indicate, the physical death of Natives at the hands of white culture is a feature of all four plays. Almighty Voice is shot by Mounties: Johnny is stabbed in a bar; Thomas dies of alcoholism; and the Native populations of New Mexico have been removed or exterminated following the 1860's American military campaign to resettle the local indigenous population in the Pecos Valley (Ellis 133-138). The assault on the physical body by the forces of violence, disease, alcoholism, and poverty have turned many living human beings into ghosts.

Under European colonialism (and in the period since colonialism's official end), the physical destruction of Native populations has been accompanied by an equally damaging violation of linguistic and cultural heritage. The European encounter has thus rendered many Natives ghostly through a loss of cultural identity. Almighty Voice and His Wife offers the most explicit treatment of this theme:

GIRL: You can't see anything but stones. You can't see anything.
husband. You forget everything.
VOICE: How can you forget everything and be a man?
GIRL: You're not a man then. You're like a ghost. You're lost. (23)

To lose one's (cultural) memory is to become a ghost. As I have indicated, the play's second act shifts the focus away from the tragedy of Almighty Voice's death to offer a bold send up of the colonial stereotypes and clichés that have helped turn the Cree hero, his wife, and by implication other Native Canadians, into haunting figures.

In particular, it is the character of White Girl, who, as her name suggests, suffers most acutely from cultural amnesia. Despite having escaped from a mission school, the
horror of which she vividly recalls, she finds herself guiltily admitting to her husband. "I liked it there" (11). In the play's second act, the ghost of Almighty Voice functions as a catalyst for White Girl's memory and gradual recovery of self, a process which ends with the Ghost's recognition of his wife and his giving her back her name as she wipes off her whiteface makeup. In cases of both physical and spiritual death, the ghost is simultaneously a testament to Native destruction and a call to remember that which has been lost, a warning against forgetting that must be heeded in the interest of cultural survival.

As in Coyote City and Almighty Voice and His Wife, the ghostly in The Indian Medicine Shows operates as both a symbol of loss and a call to memory. Until the end of the second Show, however, the ghostly is inseparable from the debilitating effects of fear (for Ma) and guilt (for Jon). Both Ma and Jon are profoundly disabled by the ghosts that haunt them. Cut off from virtually all human contact, the two live damaged lives consisting of household maintenance, prayer and Jon's occasional trips into town to obtain medicine for his ailing mother. Twelve years after the end of The Moon and Dead Indians, Angel of the Medicine Show reveals Jon as still seriously emotionally dysfunctional. In examining haunting from the perspective of the white characters, the Shows forcefully refute the notion that the presence of ghosts is only a matter of concern to the colonized.

As is by now apparent, ghosts and haunting are something of a double edged sword for both Natives and whites although the nature of this double edge is different for the two groups. For both groups, the memory of the past can be a debilitating force as well as a liberating one. For the Native characters of Coyote City and Almighty Voice and His Wife, the devastation of the past can trap characters such as Johnny and White Girl in a state of ghostly paralysis associated with the loss of self, whether physical or cultural. At the same time, memory recalls not just horror but also the culture that precedes the horror, the source of strength, a heritage that has been severely damaged but not
obliterated by colonial domination. The ghostly points the way to the simultaneous reclamation and revision of that cultural heritage as a necessary strategy for survival.

Similarly, for the white protagonists of *The Indian Medicine Shows*, memories of the past engender profoundly disabling feelings of fear and guilt in response to Native destruction. For these characters, freedom and health reside in the confrontation with the past and the extrication of the paralyzing forces of guilt and fear from a potentially liberating, honest recognition of wrongs and a deep, humble appreciation for that which has been violated.

Through different manifestations of the ghostly, all four plays attest to the power of the physically absent. As I have argued, the ghost's liminality simultaneously asserts presence and absence: the very existence of the ghost is a reminder of that which has been lost. The central characters in all the plays must deal with both the debilitating and the liberating aspects of memory if they are to find a way through the wounds that trap and stymie them. In the context of systemic discrimination, Moses suggests, the journey toward self-realization for both the oppressors and the oppressed almost always involves a necessary, if painful, encounter with the ghostly, in some form or another. The alternatives to such an encounter are, however, exceedingly worse.

*Coyote City*

*Coyote City* uses ghosts to examine the phenomenon of Native destruction in contemporary society. Set in the present (the story takes place "just yesterday on a reserve and then in the city"), the play shows how the residual effects of officially sanctioned white racism continue to haunt the Native community, demonstrating the continuity between the wounds of the past and those of the present. Despite legal equality and compensation packages, despite the recognition of land rights and official apologies, the play argues that the contemporary city is still a death zone for Native people. The play's central character, Johnny, the ghost of "a young Indian man" killed in
a bar fight six months earlier. opens the play with a late night telephone call to his lover Lena. "a young Indian woman" living on a reservation. Desperate not to be forgotten, Johnny tells Lena that he misses her and begs her to come to the city to be with him. The call sends Lena on a journey to the city, specifically to Toronto's Silver Dollar Bar, in the hopes of being reunited with her departed love.

The world of *Coyote City* is a world of ghosts in which personal memories and spirits of the dead, including those of lost loves such as Lena's, appear in the dual context of Native mythology (represented by the story of Coyote and his dead wife) and contemporary urban life. At one level, as its title indicates, the play functions as a contemporary retelling of the Coyote legend, which is narrated over its course: Coyote, having lost his beloved wife, is lured by a spirit to the land of the dead where he spends the nights visiting with the shadows and the days waiting outside in the sun while the spirits rest. After a time, Coyote is granted permission to bring his wife back to the land of the living on the condition that he not touch her until she is wholly flesh again. Deceived by his wife's life-like appearance, Coyote prematurely kisses her, sending her immediately back to the land of the dead for good. The Coyote story is one of many Native myths reminiscent of the Greek Orpheus tale (Hultkrantz 105). As Ruth Underhill notes, among those Native tribes whose belief in ghosts preceded the colonial encounter, it was commonly held that ghosts, reluctant to give up their familial ties, might return from the afterworld to try to take their loved ones with them (63). In Moses' Coyote tale, Lena's unsuccessful quest for reunitification with her departed Johnny takes her on a journey to the "land of the dead", represented in the play's cosmology by the city and its microcosm, the Silver Dollar Bar. In contrast to the familiar safety (but also limitations) of reservation life, the contemporary city is depicted in the play as a place where Natives go to die.

Moses uses his characters to represent the primary means by which urban life turns living Indians into haunting ghosts through violence (Johnny), alcoholism
(Thomas), and economic hardship (Clarisse). In the context of the city-reservation dichotomy he sets up, however, Moses argues that one of the city's greatest crimes against Native people (and by extension a major cause of their downfall) is their social invisibility. Johnny's need for acknowledgment and companionship from Lena stem from his experience of anonymity in the city. The play begins with Johnny, illuminated by a single spot, on a dark stage, repeatedly begging for a drink from the unresponsive surrounding darkness: "(to the darkness) Acting like I'm not here, like he can't see me. Acting like I'm just another drunk Indian..." (10). As Johnny implores Lena to join him, he describes his sense of urban isolation: "JOHNNY'S VOICE: Shit Lena, you know what it's like, this place? Nobody will talk to me. They look right through you, like you're invisible" (11). Johnny's ghostliness results from the dual social crimes of violence and invisibility.

"To be seen is the ambition of ghosts and to be remembered is the ambition of the dead," reads Moses' epigraph to Coyote City (Norman O. Brown qtd. in Moses, n. pag.). The fact that Johnny is placing his call from the urban "land of the dead" bespeaks the plight of those like him who have succumbed to the darkness of anonymity which the city represents for displaced Natives. If Johnny's haunting of Lena is motivated by a desire to have his presence acknowledged on an individual level, the metaphor of Silver Dollar as a resting place for dead souls points to the numbers of nameless "drunken Indians" whose voices are not being heard on telephones or elsewhere, whose calls go unanswered. By asserting the presence of the socially and physically invisible, ghosts warn against adding insult to injury by committing the ultimate crime of forgetting.

The ghost of a young Native man, desperate to be remembered after his life is cut short by accident, represents the communal tragedy of Indians who move to the city and succumb. Similarly, the Native minister Thomas' return to the city as Lena's guardian marks the beginning of the end for a character who is himself haunted by a history of alcoholism which, in turn, overwhelms his efforts at resistance. In an image
that recalls the play's opening scene, the play ends with Thomas, now a ghost, appearing in a single spotlight on a dark stage, asking for a drink, begging to be acknowledged and calling out to Martha (Lena's mother and the object of his affection) for help. The cycle of destruction and failed attempts at salvation thus begins again.

_Coyote City_ is the only Moses play which the author considers a "pure" tragedy (Appleford 22). The first in a cycle of "city" plays (of which there are three so far), it is described by the playwright as his way of "finding out what the wounds were." The play's tragedy resides in its argument that, faced with the isolation and resulting temptations that are part of city life, faith or love on an individual level are not necessarily enough to counter the powerful, destructive social forces that drag Natives down. For Thomas, Johnny and, the play suggests, many others like them, the dark forces of the city are stronger than the individual's ability to resist them. Furthermore, the city's anonymity and hardship frequently turns Native against Native, breaking down the sense of community that was part of reservation life and replacing it with isolated, self-destructive individuals who care as little about each other as they do about themselves. The prostitute Clarisse accelerates Thomas' ultimate demise by tempting a man she knows to be an alcoholic with a bottle of whiskey, and the middle-aged Martha is mugged by a young Indian boy within hours of arriving in the city, as she makes her way toward the Silver Dollar in pursuit of her daughter. In the absence of any shared sense of purpose or communal desire for healing, the play argues, survival is precarious at best.

Moses' ghostly figures enable the exploration of the wounds suffered by Natives at the hands of white society and point to the lingering inheritance of Native oppression in North America. The ghost's representation of loss and destruction is, however, always accompanied by the assertion of presence that is inherent in the notion of haunting itself. If Moses' ghosts clamor for attention, it is because they know that memory is the place where the dead are kept alive. It is within the realm of memory that the ghostly offers possibilities for redemption. As I discussed in the preceding chapter (and will revisit
again in Chapter 5), the bringing of the past into the present serves as both a defense against forgetting and an opportunity for historical revision to enable a healthier, more optimistic future. While Coyote City, Moses' first full-length play, stops short of exploring the redemptive possibilities of the ghostly, this project is taken up in Almighty Voice and His Wife.

Almighty Voice and His Wife

Like Coyote City, Almighty Voice and His Wife uses a story of lovers separated by death to explore the phenomenon of ghosts and haunting as both a symbol of and defense against cultural amnesia. Unlike the earlier play, however, Almighty Voice begins by telling a historically-based narrative "with unavoidably tragic connotations" but then goes beyond what was, according to the playwright, "an insufficient closure that tragedy gave." to examine the broader social questions of how Natives are perceived and to highlight the central place of memory in the context of North American Native history (qtd. in Appleford 22). If Coyote City identifies the wounds suffered by Natives in a white supremacist culture, Almighty Voice takes this exploration a step further, extending the social critique (through an examination of cultural stereotypes and clichés) and offering the possibility of redemption through knowledge (including self-knowledge, memory), understanding and compassion.

The play uses its two generically contrasting acts to explore both the physical and cultural losses suffered under European colonialism. In Act One, the plot is driven by the series of events leading up to Almighty Voice's death at the hands of the law. In the play's second act, the emphasis shifts to an examination of colonial discourse and its ability to render Native people ghostly through objectification and stereotyping. Bridging the two acts, White Girl's loss and gradual recovery of self constitute the play's thematic centre. The character's name points to her identification with the European culture in which she was versed at her mission school. To the extent that this identification has
involved a suppression of her Cree heritage. White Girl exists as a ghost. Despite having escaped from the school, she continues to be haunted by her fear of an omniscient Christian God and urges that she and Almighty Voice call themselves by the Christian names of Marrie and John Baptist. As she tells her reluctant husband, "... that god won't know us if we use their names... Their god won't be able to touch us. Just call me Marrie" (12). Tempted by the promise of safety and salvation offered by the school, she explains. "They said I could live there forever... They said everybody at home had died of the small pox. They said I could live forever but I had to marry their God" (11).

Countering his wife's appeals to the Christian deity as the dangers mount against them. Almighty Voice tries to alleviate White Girl's growing anxiety by invoking the strength of their own Cree cultural inheritance:

GIRL: That god. That God. I'm afraid.
VOICE: That stupid god can't hurt me. That god belongs in that place, in the school. You're here now. I'm here now. He's not.
GIRL: He's everywhere!
VOICE: I told you he's a lie.
GIRL: He's like glass. He's hard. He cuts you down.
VOICE: I'm your husband now. I won't let him hurt you. He doesn't deserve you.
GIRL: I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
VOICE: Listen, crazy one. You married Almighty Voice, who's not afraid to say his name. Let your glass god hear it. Almighty Voice! - who has listened to our fathers and heard what they say. Almighty Voice who remembers our Creator and our people's ways. Almighty Voice knows how to fight for you. Do you hear what I'm saying? Do you?
GIRL: Yes. Yes, I do.
VOICE: Who is saying it?
GIRL: Almighty Voice.

VOICE: Remember who you are. Remember what your mother taught you.

GIRL: Almighty Voice, the husband of White Girl!

VOICE: I'll break your glass god for you (17-18).

White Girl's spiritual death through her internalization of the forces of cultural negation against which her husband warns is represented by her performance, in Act Two, as the cliché-spouting, insult-hurling, whitefaced Interlocutor who leads the grotesque display of racial self-hatred. Fairly early in the act, Almighty Ghost begins to sense his wife's presence within her master of ceremonies persona, realizing that "this is what they've done to you." a statement which White Girl pretends to ignore. Although he encounters initial resistance, the Ghost functions as a catalyst for the restoration of White Girl's Cree identity. Against the Interlocutor's barrage of insults and performance of popular "Indian" stereotypes, Almighty Ghost gradually forces White Girl to a confrontation with the repressed memory of her Native "self" thereby making possible her spiritual rebirth. A symbol of the encroachment of the past on the present, the Ghost ends the play by giving White Girl back her name as she removes her whiteface makeup. As the lovers are reunited and the ghost performs his celebration dance, the play offers the possibility that knowledge, compassion and understanding on an individual level may begin the process of healing on a larger scale.

Moses describes the function of the play's second act in terms of shifting the narrative away from the character of Almighty Voice in order to find out "who the people who were pursuing him were" (qtd. in Appleford 24). According to Appleford, the play demonstrates that the pursuers are not just the angry Mounties and volunteers who kill Almighty Voice in Act One but also the desires of a Eurocentric culture for an
"authentic" "almighty Native voice" (24). Appleford's statement describes colonial discourse's construction of fixed, easily identifiable representations of colonized groups, and the characterization of those representations as authentic and true. As Said states, "anyone employing orientalism . . . will designate, name, point to, fix, what he is talking or thinking about with a word or phrase, which is then considered either to have acquired, or more simply to be, reality . . ." (Orientalism 72). As I noted in the earlier part of this chapter, haunting may result as much from the loss of self and memory as from the loss of a physical body, and the play demonstrates forcefully how mainstream culture's desire for consumable representations of identity turns Natives (and other groups) into ghosts. By putting these fixed, clichéd representations on the stage, Moses forces his audiences to gaze upon what the dominant North American culture has created. The self-referential use of a stage setting and of a genre of theatre with a broad exaggerated style enables Moses to explore the performance of these ghostly stereotypes. As the media-savvy Interlocutor tells the Ghost early in the show:

These fine, kind folks want to know the truth, the amazing details and circumstance behind your savagely beautiful appearance. They also want to be entertained and enlightened and maybe a tiny bit thrilled, just a goose of frightened. They want to laugh and cry. They want to know the facts. And it's up to you and me to try to lie that convincingly . . . (29)

Almighty Voice/Ghost and White Girl/Interlocutor go into show business to give the people what they want and force the play's audiences to face the consequences of their desires.

The style, structure and content of the second act, including the Interlocutor character, the caricatured representations of "Indians," the song and dance numbers, the whiteface makeup, and the comic banter, which includes riddles, puns and one-liners, are
all direct references to the nineteenth century American minstrel show. As Robert C. Toll argues, one of the functions of minstrelsy, hugely popular between the 1830's - 1890's, was to make America's cultural and ethnic diversity seem comprehensible to the largely white Northern audiences who attended the shows (161). The simplification of difference was accomplished through caricature and stereotype, with the inevitable result that the stereotypes became implanted in mainstream American thought (Toll 161). The common mistaking by white audiences of blackface performers for "real" black people eased the acceptance of the caricatures as true, and thus provided justification for racial subordination (Lott 8-9, 23; Toll 38, 119). For much of the nineteenth century, minstrelsy was among the most influential forces in the production of race in America (Lott 6).

Moses' (in)version of the minstrel show, in which White Girl dons whiteface makeup and plays the Interlocutor role, illustrates the character's internalization of the very stereotypes perpetuated by minstrelsy. At the same time, the play's first act, the use of whiteface makeup on a character who has been identified as Cree, and the removal of that makeup at the play's end all serve to denaturalize whiteness and to demonstrate that all racial identities are constructed through performance (Lott 25-26). In the political struggle for representation. Moses uses minstrel conventions both to explore the destructive effects of colonial representations and to suggest that new kinds of healthier, more enabling performances are possible.

Furthermore, Moses' use of a stage setting for the play's second act foregrounds the affiliation between performance and the ghostly. Like the ghostly, performance, understood as citation or as repeated/restored behaviour (as I discussed in Chapter 1), involves bringing the past into the present, thereby providing opportunities for revision and redress. Building on my analysis of this topic in Chapter 2, I examine here how this aspect of the liminality of both performance and the ghostly affords possibilities for redemption and healing. The performance of White Girl/Interlocutor and Almighty
Voice/Ghost is an exercise in citation of the sort described by Butler. By repeating familiar Native stereotypes in the context of a play-within-a-play titled "Ghost Dance," the performance divests these representations of their dehumanizing (that is, their ghost-making) power. The identities of the performers as the two characters from Act One, the broad, parodic music hall style and the act's conclusion with White Girl's reclamation of her cultural heritage and the triumph of love from beyond the grave, all function to send up the clichés even as they demonstrate the pervasiveness of colonialist notions.

Furthermore, the play-within-the-play's title and celebratory ending in which White Girl, her makeup and costume removed, "lifts a baby-sized bundle to the audience" and Almighty Ghost performs his Ghost Dance, suggest the demise of the forces of colonial oppression and point to the ghost's power to help restore individual (and communal) emotional and spiritual health to Native Canadians.

The Indian Medicine Shows

The Indian Medicine Shows represent a shift in focus away from the ghostly figures themselves to the haunting effects of racial oppression upon those who perpetuate it. In the two one-act plays that constitute the Shows (The Moon and Dead Indians and Angel of the Medicine Show), haunting is about the impossibility of forgetting past horrors for members of the dominant culture and the necessity of confronting repressed memory, bringing it into consciousness, for healing to begin. As in the two earlier plays, ghosts represent the personal (emotional and psychological) manifestations of colonial domination. In focusing on the perspective of the colonizer the Shows examine the crippling effects of guilt and fear that are inseparable from the memories of past destruction.

For The Indian Medicine Shows' white characters, ghosts are the manifestation of the fear and guilt that are associated with the position of the colonizer. The plays demonstrate some of the emotionally and psychologically debilitating effects of colonial
domination on its perpetrators. In *The Moon and Dead Indians*, ghosts are wholly disabling forces. The character of Ma Jones, an ailing, Boston-bred, farmer's widow, has not had a restful night's sleep in years. She is regularly awakened by the terrifying sounds in her head of "wild Indians" coming across the valley to kill her. Despite all evidence to the contrary, Ma is also convinced that Indians were responsible for the deaths of her husband and two sons, a conviction that Jon, her one surviving child, unequivocally refutes:

MA: Jonny, you know you're all I got left. Your brothers never came back. The Indians got them. You remember your brothers?
JON: They went off to the war. You sent them to fight in the war.
MA: You were just so high then.
MA: The Indians got Joseph and Seth.
JON: Them stupid Indians had no part in it.
MA: And your father Jonny, think of him.
JON: Stop it.
MA: Apaches scalped your father, didn't they? The Mescalero Apaches? Are you going to answer me? Jonny?
JON: Pa was a drunk. He passed out and froze stiff coming home up the mountain.
MA: No, Jonny --
JON: And you know who got his scalp, Ma? Some coyote. Some skinny little coyote looking for blood gnawed it loose.
MA: Don't say that.
JON: I saw it. Ma (18-19).
Although Ma has had little or no direct contact with Native Americans (the government campaign having successfully removed the area's Native populations), her nightmares and delusions represent her internalization of the dominant cultural conception of the wild Indian. Describing the colonial perception of Native Americans, Roy Harvey Pearce argues in *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind* that the Indian's nature and way of life was regarded as "an obstacle to civilized progress." according to texts by eighteenth and nineteenth century British colonizers in America (41-49). As they set out to establish a new society, these European Americans could find a place in it for the Indian only if he would become as they were - "settled, steady, civilized" - yet their mindset did not allow the Indian to be anything other than roaming, unreliable, and savage. Consequently, they concluded that "they were destined to try to civilize him and, in trying, to destroy him, because he could not and would not be civilized" (53). The threat posed by Indian savagism to "civilized" American life found expression in the archetypal captivity narrative:

By 1800 the narrative of Indian captivity had become a staple source for thrilling and shocking details of frontier hardships. The Indian of the captivity narrative was the consummate villain, the beast who hatcheted fathers, smashed the skulls of infants, and carried off mothers to make them into squaws. This, the reader of a captivity narrative could assure himself, was the price one paid for living in the vanguard of civilization, for trying to be a peace-loving farmer in the presence of bloody savages (Pearce 58).

Ma's loneliness and fears about her own death and safety are projected onto the prevailing cultural symbol of danger and savagery. In a cultural climate in which Indianness is equated with wildness and barbarism, painful personal memories and fears
readily find expression in socially constructed representations of evil such as those described by Pearce.

Ma's paralyzing fear is paralleled by her son's debilitating guilt. Whereas Ma's experience of haunting represents her subjective internalization of colonial discourse and of the ghostly residue of the atrocities committed in its name, Jon's ghosts derive primarily from personal guilt at the knowledge of his own evil. Among the countless crimes committed against Native people in the New Mexican region in which he lives (and in America as a nation) is his own involvement in the barbaric scalping of a young Native boy several years back during a nightmarish drunken spree with Billy, his secret adolescent love.

In an effort to contain his trauma, Jon has cut himself off from virtually all human contact. He lives an emotionally stunted existence, filling his somber days with domestic chores and caring for his consumptive mother who uses regular prayer to try to keep her own ghosts at bay. Like the permanent scar across his palm's life line, Jon's ghosts represent the refusal of the past to be forgotten, to remain in the past. Jon's desperate reassurances to his mother that "There's no Apaches round here no more. You know that. No Apaches, no Commanches, no more God damned wild Indians!" (17) highlight the degree to which, for both characters, the spirits of dead Indians exist as an intensely real, powerful and terrifying presence.

The narrow routine of Ma and Jon's haunted lives is disrupted by Billy's unexpected arrival at their home. Billy, literally a figure from the past, is, in his embrace of the cowboy lifestyle, the very embodiment of colonial aggression. In contrast to Jon's guilt-ridden, terror-filled reality, Billy's universe is one of moral certainty: embracing the violence of colonial conquest as inevitable and necessary, he seems to feel no remorse for the deaths he has caused. For the Joneses, the appearance of the gun-slinging, Indian-hunting cowboy represents the return of the repressed. At the root of both Ma and Jon's
torturous experiences of haunting are the overt racial hatred and gruesome violence their culture has perpetrated against Native Americans.

For Ma, the youthful cowboy's presence is a source of comfort and reassurance. Appearing to her as a brave, strong, active young man handy with his guns, Billy represents for Ma a promise of safety, protection from her "wild Indians." Finding that he reminds her a little of her late husband, Ma appreciates Billy's company and conversation, enjoying his gentle flirting and efforts to entertain her, all of which distract her from her usually overwhelming fears. Indeed, Billy's visit has the effect of temporarily banishing Ma's ghosts, as she herself observes:

In the night a coyote calls.

MA: What's that?
JON: Ma, it's just a coyote.
MA: Just a coyote?
JON: Just a coyote.
MA: Where do they go when Billy's here?
JON: Coyotes?
MA: No. The Indians. There's never any around when Billy's here.
JON: No Indians, Ma?
MA: None at all. Where do they go?
JON: I got no idea.
MA: Do you think they hide from him?
JON: They might (47-48).

Ma's fears stem from the insecurity that is associated with colonial domination. In representing the Natives as lawless, ruthless and uncivilized, colonial discourse constructs dangerous Others that are always to be feared. Whether for revenge or out of
sheer savagery, the Native, as Pearce states, is seen as deeply threatening to and determined to destroy European civilization. Members of the colonizing group are therefore never safe and must always be on the defensive. To the extent that Billy represents the reassertion of colonial power, the ability to destroy the "wild Indians" who she believes are everywhere around her, Ma is greatly reassured by his presence.

If the resurfacing of repressed colonial violence is a source of security for Ma, its effect is quite the opposite on Jon. Whereas Ma's terrors are projected onto a readily identifiable external (if unseen) source of evil, Jon fears nothing more than the evil within himself. Billy precipitates a terrifying confrontation with the ghostly as he makes Jon recall the details of the horrific incident that binds them. Fueling Jon's profoundly intertwined desire and guilt, Billy forces Jon to re-live the nightmare he has been trying to contain for years:

... 

JON: It got real crazy.
BILL: Shit, the little redskin liked white boys. What can I say?
JON: You tried to get him to pucker up and he! *(makes a raspberry)*
BILL: Ya, I decked the fucker. Don't play coy boy with Billy.

*JON cries quietly.*

JON: Why couldn't we just leave him alone?
BILL: Had to teach that *Indio culiado* a lesson.
JON: I didn't want to do it.
BILL: You did it. *Hermano de sangre, mijito.*
JON: It was so easy.
BILL: A sharp edge is all you need.
JON: So weird ... (62-65).
Billy's encouragement forces Jon to re-experience the gruesome details of their dreadful night, driving Jon's ghosts out of hiding and into the open, as they exceed his ability to repress them. As the ghosts take over the stage, their "reality" overwhelms Ma to the point where, in the grip of a particularly vivid, violent and hysterical nightmare, she shoots herself in the head, silencing at last the ghosts inside.

Despite its horrible consequences, Jon's excruciating confrontation with his guilty memory is necessary to shatter his sheltered, emotionally alienated existence. The play's ending finds Jon setting off to find his former girlfriend and a possible career as a medicine showman. While Jon is still reeling from the trauma of events just past and the prognosis for his mental/emotional state is uncertain at best, the play's final scene nevertheless suggests that the apprehension of the ghostly is necessary for Jon to escape the narrow confines of his tortured life.

If The Moon and Dead Indians charts the process whereby ghosts are apprehended and wounds exposed, Angel of the Medicine Show follows one individual's struggle to live in a way that admits past horrors without being wholly incapacitated by them. As in The Moon and Dead Indians, the ghostly in Angel of the Medicine Show gestures toward a past which is inseparable from Jon's guilt over his and his nation's crimes against Native people. Jon's struggle in the play is to find a way to remember the past while simultaneously ridding himself of the paralyzing effects of guilt.

Twelve years after the end of the first play, Jon is eking out a precarious living for himself as a "doctor" in a traveling medicine show. At the beginning of the play, the troupe's members number a mere three: Jon, his childhood friend and sometime sweetheart, Angela, and "the show's Indian." a young Mohawk named David Smoke, the others having recently fled after the troupe was chased out of a nearby town by an angry, Native-hunting mob.
The irony of Jon's job as "doctor" is not lost on Moses. On the one hand, Jon's "Doctor Osage" is a quack pedaling fake medicine, a representative of "the legacy of cultural hucksterism and exploitation" (Appleford, "Medicine Shows in Context" 6). At the same time, it is clear that Jon is the character most in need of genuine healing by confronting the guilt that imprisons him in an emotionally regressive state. Unlike his fellow performers, the injured David and the pregnant Angela, Jon requires medicine of a spiritual rather than a physical sort. His difficult, generally misguided search for a cure for his emotional ills constitutes the thematic spine of the play.

Jon's relationship with David is an essential part of his effort to come to terms with his ghosts. In its melding of sexual desire and guilt, this relationship is the flip side of his involvement with Billy, a need to redress the crimes of the past, a search for redemption. Responding to Angela's anxious questions as to why he insists on keeping David with them Jon explains, "I need him to forgive me. For what we did to the Indians" (123). Against David's accusations that Jon exploits him for his own ends, Jon begs David, "Say you forgive me. Daddy's here. Davy, please. I'm sorry" (121). Jon's anxious pleas reflect the tormented, guilt-encumbered soul of an individual who wants more than anything to be free of the negative side of haunting.

Not surprisingly, David's presence is fraught with contradiction for Jon, torn as he is between his need to remember and his equally desperate need for absolution. Consequently, he treats the Indian with a mixture of conciliation and contempt, alternating between displays of affection and hostility born out of resentment. As the play makes clear, David is himself a ghost, if not in the literal sense, then in the way he represents for Jon the murdered Indians of the past, bringing them into the present, and forcing a continual confrontation with memory.

Jon's regard for David as a symbol of his past is consistent with the nineteenth century's archetypal view of the Indian as representative of the American past. Pearce notes the prevalence of the era's association of the Indian
with an earlier, primitive stage of American history from which could be traced "the evolution of man toward high civilization" (130). "for the Indian was the remnant of a savage past away from which civilized men had struggled to grow. To study him was to study the past. To civilize him was to triumph over the past. To kill him was to kill the past" (49). Pearce continues.

The Indian belonged in the American past and was socially and morally significant only as part of that past. Coming to understand their past as the crucial working out of the law of progress, Americans were able to put him in his place. He belonged in American prehistory or in the non-American history of North America (160).

Pearce's statement parallels Morrison's argument, cited in Chapter 2, concerning the unacknowledged (i.e. non-American) African presence in America. The colonialist view of America as a white nation required that the existence of all non-white populations be repressed, pushed into the American unconscious which, in the case of Native Americans, is conceptualized as an earlier, pre-American period. The presence of Native Americans therefore represents the intrusion of the past on the present, the return of the repressed. As Jon demonstrates, such a return produces a highly ambivalent response in the colonizing culture. Jon (and by extension white America) is torn between his desire to remember an idealized, primitive, uncivilized, pure "Native" past and his guilt over the destruction of that past. Unfortunately for him, the two facets of memory are conflated in the person of David. For Jon, David's presence simultaneously affirms his own "natural" superiority as a member of a civilized culture that has replaced an earlier "state of nature" even as it forcefully condemns him for his (and his culture's) crimes. The relegation of Native Americans to the realm of the "primitive" past is another means by which European culture has transformed living persons into ghostly beings.
David's status as a ghost is highlighted in the context of performance. Like "Almighty Voice and His Wife," "Angel" contains a play-within-a-play (technically speaking as rehearsal-within-a-play) which points to the connection between performance and ghostliness. David's role is that of the "show's Indian" whose function is to give credibility to the alleged healing powers of "Dr. 'Osage' Oswald's Omnipotent Elixir," the "medicine" being sold by Jon. As in "Almighty Voice and His Wife," Moses suggests that Native people are rendered ghostly through clichéd colonial representations such as that of the wise, healing Indian. David's very limited function within the show extends to the narrow place he is permitted to occupy outside it. Despite both Jon's guilt and his sexual attraction (or perhaps because of these), his view of David is nevertheless circumscribed by colonialist notions. There is no question of David's being considered equal to Jon and Angie in terms of "civilization" or "humanity." Despite his injury, David is forced to sleep outside because he "smells." As David reminds Jon, when the audience for their last show turned against the performers and began to attack them. Jon and Angie left David for dead. Because he operates within colonial discourse, Jon does not perceive the contradiction in exploiting the very person from whom he is asking forgiveness.

David's ghostly status is further emphasized near the play's end when the Indian performs a real disappearing act. Following Angela's announcement of her pregnancy, Jon insists that the three players rehearse the show that is to be their ticket back to Chicago where Angela will be able to rest. While rehearsing a sketch in which David plays a ghost, complete with spooky costume and Indian war bonnet, David makes his dramatic escape amid a display of bizarre special effects: "Coloured smoke erupts and pours from the feathers of the war bonnet . . ." Jon and Angela cry out as "the smoke envelops the platform. JON and ANGELA stumble to the ground. The war bonnet ignites" (134). Jon leaps back onto the platform and beats out the flames only to discover that David has vanished, leaving the costume and burnt feathers behind. Moments later.
Jon and Angela hear the sound of hooves on rocks as David rides away on the company's horse.

David's final disappearing act, while ghostly in style, can also be understood as a rejection of his spectral status. By vanishing from the medicine show for good, David signals his refusal to be exploited either for commerce or as a tool for Jon's recovery. The disappearance can therefore be understood as an act of liberation, an escape from the confines of the narrow role assigned to him by colonial society. While the play does not indicate what might become of David, his final, trickster-like, action suggests that he possesses the necessary skills, resilience and cleverness to survive in a hostile environment.

Like David's presence, his disappearance provokes an ambivalent response from Jon. On the one hand, the Indian's departure represents a kind of freedom for Jon, a sense of moving beyond the paralysis that results from living in an oppressive, debilitating guilt-ridden relationship to the past. At the same time, Jon experiences a profound sense of loss due to the commingling of his desire for David as sexual object and redeemer of sins, and as representative of an idealized past. Jon's final statement on the matter of David's absence reflects his equivocal sentiment: In response to Angela's assertion that without David, "... it's better this way," Jon's reiteration of her words suggests that he remains unconvinced by them even as he wishes to offer reassurance and comfort (136). While Jon certainly wants to believe that "it's better this way," his demonstrated effort at self-persuasion leaves the play's ending inconclusive, at least from his perspective. Even as Jon and Angela's immediate plans begin to take shape - they will go to Chicago where Jon says he will take good care of mother and child - the play's larger issues remain significantly unresolved. As Angie sings "Billy Boy" and Jon lies awake, staring at the night sky, the play's final moments suggest an uncertain future for its troubled couple.

Despite its unsettled, open-ended conclusion, Angel does suggest that the guilty side of memory must be relinquished for healing to begin. To a large degree, Jon keeps
David around because he wants to be reminded of his own culpability. So long as he looks to David as his redeemer, he remains imprisoned in his own guilt, dwelling on his pain. As Moses indicates in the Preface to An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English, the phenomenon of white guilt is necessarily antithetical to healing because it involves preserving the wound instead of looking for ways to treat it: "... it is part of our job as Native artists is to help people heal... To me it sounds as if this [white] guilt is the opposite thing: it seems that you don't want to heal, you want to keep the wound..." (Preface xvii). Angel of the Medicine Show suggest that David's departure is a necessary pre-requisite for Jon's self-recovery, which must take place if Jon and Angela are to move forward.

As David Lawrence writes in relation to Morrison's Beloved, Moses "suggests a way through the door of memory, even if it entails a precarious balancing act between the danger of forgetting a past that should not be forgotten and of remembering a past that threatens to engulf the present" (200). While Moses' plays forcefully articulate the perils of forgetting a difficult and painful history, they also warn against an equally dangerous enslavement through guilt to past horrors, an aspect of the ghostly which must be exorcised for the process of restoring individual and communal health to be set in motion.

In this chapter's concluding paragraphs, I will examine the playwright's use of theatrical space in relation to the themes I have been discussing. Specifically, I will consider the question of the ghostly landscape in all four plays. Like ghosts themselves, the spaces they inhabit, or haunt, represent relationships to the past that can be described as crippling or enabling for the plays' characters. The different theatrical genres and styles used (and revised) by Moses (tragedy in Coyote City, vaudeville in Almighty Voice and His Wife, the western in The Indian Medicine Shows) are each linked to a different conception of haunted space. I will examine these spatial representations in terms of the possibilities for redemption and healing contained within them.
The setting for *Coyote City* is as I discussed earlier, divided between the reservation and the city. Within these two places, a number of specific locales are called for: Lena's home, the street, Clarisse's home, and the Silver Dollar Bar's washroom and dance floor. Moses' stage directions indicate that, "the play is set in darkness complicated only by spot lights and by the shadows of the character and the few necessary properties." The dark, abstractly represented setting comments on the equation of contemporary Native people with ghosts. Regardless of where the action actually takes place, the play suggests that Native Canadians are ghosts who inhabit a shadowy landscape populated by the spirits of other Natives whose lives have also been cut short or otherwise damaged by their encounters with white society. All the play's locations are essentially a graveyard, a "land of the dead" for Native people. This setting is appropriate to the tragic genre of *Coyote City*. As the gloomy landscape suggests, the redemptive possibilities of the ghostly are not explored in this play.

In *Almighty Voice and His Wife*, the setting is again divided between two primary locations, the Saskatchewan prairie and the school auditorium stage. Moses' directions indicate that the various specific areas (such as the tipi) are to be represented through the use of projections and limited stage props. Each of the play's scenes has a title, which is to be projected in Act One, and which appears on a placard in Act Two. As in *Coyote City*, space in *Almighty Voice* is defined primarily through lighting with the effect of creating, especially in Act One, a spectral landscape that is haunted by ghosts. The tragic connotations of this setting for Native people are confirmed at the act's conclusion with the death of Almighty Voice.

I have already discussed the use of the performance metaphor in the play's second act as a tool for the postcolonial revision of ghostly Native stereotypes. Moses' stage setting and his structuring of the act as a clearly identified performance the tone of which is overtly parodic, moves the play away from the realm of tragedy, with its dark uncontrollable forces, to a space that foregrounds its own artificiality or constructedness.
In particular, the style of performance with its Brechtian inspired placards and overtly self-conscious role playing can be taken to suggest the Native characters' rejection of the tragic mode of Act One and the taking control over their own self-representations.

*The Indian Medicine Shows* represent a departure from the non-realistic staging style of the two earlier plays. In focusing more squarely on individual psychology than he does in either *Coyote City* or *Almighty Voice* (though the beginnings of this concern are evident in the character of White Girl), Moses has set his plays in a very specific, realistically rendered historical and geographic location. This space provides the defining context for the characters' states of inner psychic turmoil. The playwright's use of the style of realism suggests the determining effects of the particular colonial environment on the play's characters. Scholars of both postcolonialism and performance have argued that realism naturalizes its representations, making them appear true and immutable.\(^9\) If, however, realism necessarily naturalizes that which its represents, the closure associated with this style is undercut by Moses' revision of the western genre. While referring to a familiar realistic trope, Moses subverts the trope's usual constructs by focusing on the damaging effects of the colonial system on the colonizer. The ending of *Angel*, as I have argued, suggests a kind of limited victory for the Native character David as he uses his medicine show performance as a means of escaping the confines of his colonially-determined role. In re-writing the western as he does, Moses de-familiarizes and de-naturalizes its predictable realistic formulations to open the way for an enabling reading of this highly overdetermined genre.

In Moses' dramatic universe, the stories that end tragically show the injurious aspect of memory overwhelming the characters' efforts at self-preservation in a cruel, merciless environment. For these characters, physical death is presented as the inevitable outcome of their profound emotional and spiritual alienation. In the plays which suggest that some form of recovery may be possible, Moses looks to performance as a means of overcoming dehumanizing colonial forces through either historical and discursive
revision (in Almighty Voice and His Wife) or through strategic invisibility (in Angel of the Medicine Show). The ghostly's affiliation with performance points to the enabling possibilities contained in both. Like the phantom limb, which recalls the integrity of the healthy body prior to trauma, the ghost's healing potential lies in its reference to those elements of Native culture that precede the grotesque circumstances of institutional oppression.
Chapter 4

Exposing the Limits of Knowledge: The Displaced View and Skin Deep

Knowledge about often gives the illusion of knowledge.

- Trinh T. Minh-ha

Midi Onodera's films, The Displaced View (1987) and Skin Deep (1995), both address the questions of whether and how knowledge of others is possible or, as Bill Nichols asks, "how do we come to know others and the worlds they inhabit?" ("Getting to Know You" 174). The two films bring very different approaches to this subject. The Displaced View uses a documentary style to, in the filmmaker's words, "tackle the notion of documentary as truth" ("Locating" 23). Centering on Onodera's relationship to her Japanese-Canadian grandmother, an Issei (first generation Japanese living outside Japan) who personally experienced the government internment camps during the Second World War, the film uses a variety of techniques, to be discussed at length in this chapter, which question the idea of documentary as a source of knowledge about others. Onodera's Skin Deep, the filmmaker's first feature length fiction film, examines the dangers of presuming to know the other and points to the unreliability of visual information as a guide to identity. The film tells the story of Alex Koyama, a self-centred filmmaker whose personal ambitions lead her to misrecognize and exploit the people closest to her, with disastrous results. Skin Deep may be read as an answer to some of the questions raised in The Displaced View, a kind of explanation for the earlier film's distrust of the ability to know the other.

In addressing the notion of the other, I draw on the postcolonial formulations of the term as developed by Fanon, Said and Bhabha. To the extent that colonial discourse exists primarily to justify the conquest and exploitation of subject peoples, the construction of the other may be regarded as the central feature of this discourse. The
creation of otherness is colonial discourse's method of dealing with (primarily racial and cultural) difference. As the discursive space occupied by colonized peoples, the category of otherness, according to Bhabha, simultaneously acknowledges and disavows difference (73). Said offers a clear explanation of the workings of this process of recognition and denial. Describing the Western experience of the Orient through the lens of otherness, he writes.

... Something patently foreign and distant acquires, for one reason or another, a status more rather than less familiar. One tends to stop judging things as either completely novel or as completely well-known; a new median category emerges, a category that allows one to see new things, things for the first time, as version of a previously known thing. In essence such a category is not so much a way of receiving new information as it is a method of controlling what seems to be a threat to some established view of things ... The threat is muted, familiar values impose themselves, and in the end the mind reduces the pressure upon it by accommodating things to itself as either "original" or "repetitious" ... The Orient at large, therefore, vacillates between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in - or fear of - novelty (Orientalism 58-59).

The process of familiarizing the unfamiliar, whereby everything new is old again, relies on stereotypes, theories of racial purity and evolutionary development, myths of origin, notions of cultural priority and other such co-ordinates of "knowledge" according to which the other is positioned as "always already" known to be a particular way (Bhabha 74-75, 83). Bhabha's argument for the reading of the colonial stereotype in terms of the Freudian idea of the fetish provides detailed insight into the workings of the process of
recognition and disavowal to demonstrate that both stereotype and fetish exist to allay the anxiety produced by the encounter with difference, be it sexual or racial/cultural (74-79). Stereotypical discourse negates the possibility of real difference by containing that difference in a fixed, familiar category such as that of the savage.1

Fanon describes the experience of the other from the perspective of one who has been so designated. In Black Skin, White Masks, he recounts two primal scenes in which he finds himself clearly marked as other within colonial culture: On one occasion, a white girl, seeing Fanon, turns back to her mother and exclaims: "Look, a Negro! . . . Mamma, see the Negro! I'm frightened! Frightened!" (111-112). Fixed by the words and gaze of white culture, Fanon observes that "wherever he goes, the Negro remains a Negro." The second scene is described as the moment when, as a child, he encounters racial and cultural stereotypes in children's fiction in which "white heroes and black demons are proffered as points of ideological and psychical identification" (Bhabha 76). In the first scene, Fanon's difference is seen and then disavowed as the white girl returns the gaze to her mother. In the second scene, the black child denies his own difference as he identifies with "the positivity of whiteness" (Bhabha 76). Fanon describes the effect of the negation of difference, represented by these two scenes, as the experience of always seeing himself through the eyes of the dominant culture (109).2

The views of Bhabha, Said and Fanon support a view of otherness as "an arrested, fixated form of representation" which denies the play of difference (Bhabha 75).3 Against the formulations of the term as described by these theorists, Onodera's films speak from a position which both acknowledges and challenges colonial notions of otherness. In The Displaced View, the filmmaker's own status as both self and other in relation to her documentary disrupts the usual understanding of these two positions as separate or oppositional and proposes a much more integrated relationship between them. By suggesting that the positions of self and other can be occupied simultaneously by a single individual, Onodera subverts the documentary convention whereby speaking
subjects or selves interpret the worlds of others for viewing audiences. Adopting a liminal position that places her both inside and outside the world of her film, Onodera as filmmaker and narrator deliberately problematizes her higher claim to truth in the film. acknowledges the limits of her own understanding of her filmic subject and allows the "others" in her film to control their own self-representations to a large degree.

In *Skin Deep*, Onodera exposes the dangers of refusing a liminal position and presuming to know the other. Unlike Onodera as narrator in *The Displaced View*, the character of the filmmaker in *Skin Deep*, Alex Koyama, adopts a position of ultimate authority in relation to both her film subject and her collaborators, only to be confronted with her misperceptions and errors in judgment as the film progresses. Determined to always be in control, refusing to admit any lack of knowledge on her part, Alex's position may be likened to that of the colonizer who believes s/he fully understands her/his colonial subject, all the while remaining oblivious to the signs of growing unrest and revolution among the colonized. If *The Displaced View* offers a model for disrupting the fixity of the imperialist categories of Self and Other, *Skin Deep* warns of the hazards of adhering to those very categories.

**The Displaced View and the Limits of Knowledge**

Whereas spectatorial pleasure in narrative fiction cinema has been theorized primarily in terms of the operations of identification and desire, documentary film (whether narrative or not) has tended to align itself with spectatorial pleasure in the form of knowledge, though not necessarily at the exclusion of identification or desire. Nevertheless, while the mechanisms of identification, voyeurism and fetishism may all be mobilized by particular examples of documentary filmmaking, the goal of providing knowledge about the actual, historical world has been a defining characteristic of the documentary form throughout its history (Winston 21).
In particular, the Western impulse in documentary film has been toward knowledge about "others", usually defined in terms of race, class, politics, nationality, sexuality, culture or lifestyle. In Representing Reality, Bill Nichols refers to the "discourse of domination" in documentary, especially in its ethnographic stream, a discourse born of "the desire to know and possess, to 'know' by possessing and possess by knowing" (209). The ethnographic documentary offers the pleasure of knowing what had at first seemed incomprehensible; it demonstrates our capacity to "know" others and thereby confirms our mastery over them (RR 210). As Jay Ruby writes,

The documentary film was founded on the Western middle-class need to explore, document, explain, understand, and hence symbolically control the world. It has been what "we" do to "them." "They" in this case are usually the poor, the powerless, the disadvantaged, and the politically suppressed and oppressed (71).

Ruby observes that. "the documentary film has not been a place where people explored themselves and their own culture": rather, it has traditionally been a medium for exploring "people exotic to your own experience" (72). Whereas documentaries have concerned themselves primarily with the lives and worlds of "others", investigations of the filmmaker's own family, experience, and culture have occurred largely within the realm of the personal art film.

Before launching into my discussion of The Displaced View, some clarification around my use of the term documentary is in order. Recognizing the vast scope and diversity of the field and wishing to avoid generalizations which would deny the presence of a significant body of documentary filmmaking which, like Onodera's, challenges its own status as "truth," I nevertheless begin with the filmmaker's own stated intention which positions the film as a challenge to "the notion of documentary as truth." For the
purposes of this analysis, I wish to qualify Onodera's statement and suggest that *The Displaced View* reacts against what I will call the colonizing impulse in documentary film. This impulse has traditionally found its greatest expression in the documentary sub-genre known as the ethnographic film. To argue that *The Displaced View* resists the colonizing impulse is in no way to suggest that this impulse is common to all, or even to most, documentaries, ethnographic or otherwise. It is, however, to recognize the existence of a body of documentary filmmaking that exhibits colonial assumptions and to argue that these assumptions have informed the Western understanding of the relationship between ethnographic documentaries and the subjects they represent. At the risk of oversimplifying, I suggest that the central colonial documentary assumption against which *The Displaced View* reacts is the capacity of film to reflect, rather than create reality (Edmonds 11-12). This assumption arises out of film's ability to appear to neutralize the distance between its representations and the subjects of those representations. As Susan Sontag writes in relation to the photograph, the filmic image is taken as proof "that something exits, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture" (qtd. in Hastrup 14).

The belief in the camera's ability to accurately reflect external reality has made film a preferred tool for the study of other cultures, commonly known as ethnography. Cinema appears to bring that which is culturally distant closer and in so doing, encourages the spectatorial belief in the illusion of knowledge. Fatimah Rony describes the impulse behind the ethnographic film as the "desire to make visibly comprehensible the difference of cultural "others" (9). Rony's statement attests to the ethnographic documentary's affiliation with the colonial project. *The Displaced View* questions film's capacity to render others knowable, refusing documentary conventions which arise from the ethnographic impulse to explain difference through cinematic representation.

In *The Displaced View*, Onodera challenges the distinction between the personal fictional art film and the "other-centred" documentary by using a documentary style to
tell a personal story about her own family. Although the film has as its subject the relationships among Onodera, her mother and her grandmother, it would be incorrect to describe the film as a documentary entirely about Onodera and her world. Indeed, one of the film's central concerns is the degree to which Onodera's grandmother (and to a lesser degree, her mother) are culturally, linguistically, generationally and sexually "other" to the filmmaker herself. Having grown up in a largely white, English-speaking Toronto community where she was taught to "blend in", Onodera finds herself something of an outsider to her grandmother's cultural, linguistic, social and experiential world which she seeks to understand. Despite the barriers to communication and understanding which separate them, Onodera nevertheless feels a strong familial connection to her grandmother. The tension between Onodera's desire to better know her family and her coming to terms with the limits of her own ability to do so constitutes the film's thematic centre. To convey this tension to her audience, the filmmaker employs a variety of representational techniques which thwart the audience's own impulses toward for knowledge.

**Representational Strategies**

Onodera's representational strategies for challenging the spectatorial desire for knowledge about others in *The Displaced View* produce an overall film style which encourages spectatorial awareness of the film's orientation and apparatus, a style that can best be described as "reflexive." As defined by Ruby, "To be reflexive is to structure a product in such a way that the audience assumes that the producer, the process of making, and the product are a coherent whole. Not only is an audience made aware of these relationships, but it is made to realize the necessity of that knowledge" (65). Reflexivity involves revealing the epistemological assumptions underlying the film as a whole. A slightly different but related perspective is offered by Nichols, who argues that reflexivity means that the representation of the historical world is itself the topic of the film:
Whereas the great preponderance of documentary production concerns itself with talking about the historical world, the reflexive mode addresses the question of how we talk about the historical world . . . Reflexive texts are self-conscious not only about form and style, as poetic ones are, but also about strategy, structure, conventions, expectations and effects (RR 56-57).

"The reflexive mode gives emphasis to the encounter between filmmaker and viewer . . ." (Nichols, RR 60). Reflexive strategies draw attention to film as representation or fabrication: a film foregrounds its own constructedness as text through techniques designed to "bare or show the (filmmaking) apparatus," as the practice is commonly called.

As Ruby and Nichols indicate, reflexive films shift the balance away from spectatorial knowledge exclusively or primarily about content toward knowledge about the assumptions, objectives, processes, and techniques that shape the film. The Displaced View privileges knowledge about the filmmaker, the filmmaking process and the film itself as product over knowledge about the people, objects and events shown in the film. Over the following pages, I will examine the techniques whereby Onodera's film subverts documentary's traditional claim to providing "truth" about the people it represents and gives emphasis instead to the three-way encounter between the filmmaker, her subject and the audience.

I begin my investigation of the film's representational strategies with the question of "voice." While the concept of voice is inseparable from that of style, I agree with Nichols' definition that voice is "narrower than style." It is
that which conveys to us a sense of the text's social point of view, of how it is speaking to us and how it is organizing the materials it is presenting to us. In this sense, voice is not restricted to any one code or feature, such as dialogue or spoken commentary. Voice is perhaps akin to that intangible, moiré-like pattern formed by the unique interaction of all a film's codes, and it applies to all modes of documentary ("Voice" 18).

Central to *The Displaced View's* self-reflexive style, the film's voice is that which argues against a hierarchical (colonial), authoritative presentation of otherness by challenging both the "knowability" of the other and the very category of otherness itself.

My discussion of voice in *The Displaced View* will focus on: 1) the filmmaker's use of different kinds of footage in a manner which draws attention to her control over the filmmaking process, and 2) Onodera's use of a multiplicity of individual voices to tell the story of the film. (Here I distinguish between the spoken voices of the film's characters - Onodera, her grandmother and her mother - and the overall Voice of the film of which these individual voices are a component. For clarity's sake, I will use a capital "V" when referring to the Voice of the film as whole.) In the third part of this section, I will explore the relationship between the spoken words, images and music to produce the film's anti-colonial Voice. I will conclude the section with a specific consideration of the issue of spectatorship, including questions of target audiences and audience-response.

The many kinds of footage in *The Displaced View* include still photography, observational shots of Japanese cultural ceremonies in Vancouver's Stanley Park etc., live action shots of Onodera and her grandmother and mother and imaginative reenactments. The diverse images are organized according to principles of montage rather than of narrative or character development or exposition. Montage, of course, has a history as part of a tradition of reflexive political cinema begun in the Soviet Union of the 1920's (Nichols, *RR* 131-133). The juxtaposition of images from various sources points clearly
to the filmmaker's role as creator by emphasizing the overt or constructed quality of the representation. Montage, while hugely influential, was never fully embraced by North American documentary filmmakers. Onodera's use of montage represents a departure from the familiar conventions of documentary realism in favour of this highly self-conscious technique.

Among the types of footage used in the film are sequences of imaginative reenactment. When, for example, Onodera's mother describes the traditional Japanese ceremony of making "mochi," in which large batches of cooked rice are pounded into a sticky paste, the camera shows a staged enactment of a mochi-making ceremony rather than a representation of the event occurring "as shown" in the "real" historical world. Similarly, a group of Japanese musicians is shown performing throughout the film, providing much of its soundtrack. These musicians are clearly performing specifically for the camera rather than for some other "real world" event which the camera has merely recorded. Detached from what Nichols calls "the indexical realm of historical reference," the images function more like pictorial illustrations than photographic documentation (RR 100). Like Onodera's use of montage, this illustrative use of images foregrounds the deliberateness of the representation, making evident the process of filmic construction.

A second strategy whereby Onodera's film demonstrates the deliberateness of its construction is in the filmmaker's use of multivoiced commentary to tell her story. I will begin with a consideration of the function of Onodera's own voice as narrator and move to an examination of the two other voices in the film, those of her grandmother and her mother.

Onodera's own statement as to the "truth" status of the three voices that provide the spoken commentary for her film is very revealing of the filmmaker's overall orientation. As she writes,
The construction of the film is documentary based, insofar as nonactors perform in stories which are based on authentic oral history - the cultural and familial links between three generations of Japanese-Canadian women. However, the stories are reconstructed and reassembled through a script, and the creation of a fictional family is used as the vehicle by which the audience reads the story. The three generations of women are represented on screen by my grandmother, my mother, and myself. Although elements of our personal relationships are revealed, they are interwoven with the individual histories of other families ("Locating" 23).

While the stories told in the film are "true" to the extent that the events described occurred to actual people, the citation draws attention to the role of the filmmaker in the creation of the on-screen world. Onodera's statement foregrounds the degree to which every representation, even if its referent is the historical world rather than an imaginary one, is necessarily a fabrication. It is in this context that Onodera's voice as principal narrator interrogates the film's function as purveyor of "truth."

From the film's outset, Onodera subjects her own role as filmmaker to scrutiny. At the beginning of The Displaced View, she announces her intentions for the film in a voice-over narration: She states that she made the film for her grandmother, out of love and respect, in the hopes of discovering "shared experiences" between them. Onodera is then quick to identify herself as an imperfectly knowledgeable observer in relation to her film subject: "There is still so much I don't know about you, my grandmother," she says, deliberately undermining the "voice-of-authority" style typically associated with documentary. The filmmaker goes on to take responsibility for her lack of knowledge, admitting that her failure to ask questions in the past allowed her grandmother's life to become a "Japanese fairy tale" in Onodera's own mind. In contrast to an authoritative, omniscient narration style, Onodera's voice is that of an inquisitive, highly subjective
narrator: from the beginning of the film, Onodera indicates that she is not the detached, "objective," all-knowing observer of documentary convention.

Onodera's voice as filmmaker is the primary means by which she situates herself liminally as both insider and outsider in relation to the film. The film's opening shot begins with the camera focused on a Japanese children's television programme in which animated Japanese dolls are playing. As the camera pulls back, we see that Onodera herself is watching the programme. Shortly thereafter comes Onodera's voice-over narration about having made the film for her grandmother. At various points throughout the film, Onodera appears on screen: We see her waiting to board her flight to Vancouver to visit her grandmother, playing cards, games and reading with her grandmother, visiting her grandfather's grave, painting the eye on a Japanese god-doll for good luck, riding the train to Slocan to see where her grandparents were interned during World War II.

At the most literal level, Onodera occupies both sides of the camera: her position as filmmaker places her outside the filmic space, behind the camera, while her on-screen presence situates her within the world of the film. At the same time, her voice-over narration straddles the two realms, blurring the separation between them. Onodera thus challenges the documentary practice that has the filmmaker stand apart in order to represent and interpret what occurs elsewhere. While the off-screen narrator often functions at some degree of remove from the images being shown so as to explain them "from the outside." Onodera's highly personal, subjective involvement in the world of the film, coupled with her deliberate rejection of an omniscient stance work to confound the gap between inside and outside. The filmmaker's presence both on and off-screen supports Nichols' claim that, because in documentary there is no ontological separation between the filmic space and the historical world outside that space, the historical world "locates the filmmaker as much as his or her subject" (RR 79). The world of film in documentary is, fundamentally, also the world of the filmmaker. While many documentaries obscure this fact by rendering invisible the filmmaker and his/her
filmmaking apparatus, adopting a stance that may be described as "absent" in relation to the filmed material, *The Displaced View* makes clear that it is both by and about Onodera.

Onodera's relationship to the camera mirrors her relationship to her grandmother with whom, as we have seen, she shares a very strong familial bond while at the same time feeling like an outsider to her grandmother's life experiences and culture. The filmmaker employs a number of techniques to represent this tension: Although she speaks almost no Japanese, Onodera leaves untranslated her grandmother's spoken Japanese and uses Japanese subtitles throughout the film. She includes footage from Japanese cultural ceremonies the meanings of which she does not fully comprehend. In some of the film's most powerful scenes, Onodera takes a trip to Slocan City, the location of her grandmother's wartime internment camp. As she looks around the postcard-like town and speaks to some of its residents, she finds that she "is still an outsider looking in." Having been raised in an all-white neighbourhood by a mother who taught her to blend with the dominant culture, Onodera feels herself alienated from her past. "Like my mother," she states, "I have denied my history by being white." While she had hoped that her trip to Slocan might give her some new kind of access to her grandmother - she says she wanted to find the part of her grandmother in herself that her mother had denied - Onodera begins to realize that there are aspects of her grandmother that she will never fully understand. Onodera also explains that she feels that her lesbian sexuality, about which she had never spoken to her grandmother until making this film, creates a large gap in understanding between them. Yet despite these differences, Onodera emphasizes that she feels that her communication with her grandmother goes beyond the limits of each other's specific linguistic and cultural knowledge.

Onodera's liminal insider/outsider status equally describes her relationship to mainstream Canadian culture. While the filmmaker writes that before she made *The Displaced View*, "racial identity had played a minor role in my life . . . Unlike my grandparents and parents, I have never been overtly denied access to anything because I
am Japanese-Canadian," she goes on to state that her own "otherness" as a lesbian and the discrimination she faced allowed her "some insight into the struggle for racial identity" ("Locating" 23). Onodera sees herself as both "self" and "other" in relation to dominant western culture. While the subject of Onodera's sexuality is given relatively little attention in the film, she does, in voice-over, refer to her double sense of exclusion from both her grandmother's world and the cultural mainstream as a result of her lesbianism. She uses the otherness of sexual difference as her point of entry into the otherness of racial/ethnic difference (which is not to say that she equates the two).

Onodera's multiple insider-outsider positions in relation to her film, her grandmother and heterosexual Canadian culture are linked through the filmmaker's own voice as narrator. This voice, as we have seen, refuses ultimate authority by drawing attention to the gaps in its knowledge. To represent these gaps in knowledge, Onodera makes use of two other narrative voices, in addition to her own: those of her grandmother and mother. These voices speak directly to the audience on subjects about which Onodera admits considerable ignorance.

As I have indicated, Onodera's grandmother speaks in Japanese voice-overs which are left untranslated. Given the nature of Onodera's own comments, it seems that most of the grandmother's statements are about her early life in Canada, her community and life during and after World War II. The grandmother's history and culture are also given visual and aural representation: family photographs, Japanese musicians, traditional festivities, cultural ceremonies and symbols (such as cherry blossoms and good luck charms) appear throughout the film. The language, images and sounds are presented as symbols of a culture that is other than Onodera's own, a point upon which I will elaborate in my upcoming discussion of the relationship between the commentary and images.

Situated culturally and linguistically in between grandmother and granddaughter is the voice of Onodera's bilingual, bicultural mother. Among the characters in the film, the role of cultural mediator is given to Onodera's mother, who does most of the
explaining in the film. Despite her function as interpreter, however, Onodera's mother is not given ultimate or final authority over truth in the film. Her voice represents just one of several subjective truths presented. Indeed, insofar as she has acted as "interpreter" between grandmother and granddaughter (for words, experiences), she has garnered some resentment from Onodera, who is frustrated at having to rely on her mother to communicate with her grandmother. The filmmaker holds her mother largely responsible for the cultural and linguistic gaps between herself and her grandmother: She blames her mother for failing to pass on her grandmother's heritage and traditions and for encouraging her to culturally assimilate. Onodera wants direct, unmediated access to her grandmother with whom she feels she shares a special bond. She states that there are many things she herself wants to ask her grandmother without going through her mother: "How can I explain it so you'd understand?" she asks, "Because I had to fight for my sexuality. I ended up protecting my culture." The Displaced View represents Onodera's effort to address her grandmother directly and to allow her grandmother a forum for her own unmediated self-expression by allowing the grandmother to speak for herself without translation or explanation. By keeping silent when her grandmother speaks, Onodera allows her filmic subject to generate some of her own meanings independently. This practice is empowering to the extent that it gives the grandmother a significant degree of autonomy over her own self-representation, a power infrequently granted to those in front of the camera.

Of course, the grandmother's words, even in another language, are necessarily contextualized by the film as a whole for which Onodera is ultimately responsible. Although, as we have seen, Onodera rejects the role of all-knowing commentator, her position as filmmaker and narrator means that her perspective necessarily shapes the entire film. While we do not see her do so, we know that Onodera asked the questions, held the camera, recorded the responses, wrote the script, assembled the footage and edited the final product.
Despite the filmmaker's explicitly acknowledged agency over the film, *The Displaced View* nevertheless succeeds in allowing the other voices their independence through its emphasis on private, subjective truths over accounts of factual events. Although the voices of Onodera's mother and grandmother speak within a mise en scène they do not control, Onodera resists subordinating these other voices to her own by having them describe primarily personal experiences and states of mind. The film gives these voices "authority" in that the speakers have privileged, or even exclusive access to that about which they speak - no one can know what Onodera's mother remembers better than Onodera's mother. Consequently, while the film provides the context within which these voices are heard, their specific commentary, by virtue of its personal, highly subjective nature, is fundamentally "out of reach" for Onodera.

The film gives its spectators access, depending on language ability, to the inner thoughts and feelings of all three characters, allowing us to hear their perspectives. This practice can be viewed as a reaction against documentary conventions which focus on the representation of observable, cinematically accessible objects and actions rather than on expressions of private thoughts and emotions. Both Hastrup and Rony refer to ethnographic film's traditional privileging of the visible signs of culture based on a belief in that which can be seen as an accurate, if not complete, record of ethnographic reality (Hastrup 10-17; Rony 197). Consistent with Onodera's stated goal to challenge the notion of documentary as "truth" (in the sense of a master narrative or controlling argument), is her explicit focus on wholly personal, subjective truths, her rejection of the classical documentary presumption in favour of observable facts: All voices, including her own, describe specific, personal experiences, memories and beliefs. Indeed, in the film Onodera refers to the difficulty of setting facts straight as "people only remember bits and pieces". Even in a family, she states, everyone has different memories and tells his or her own part of a story. In recognition of this fact, her film represents history as an accumulation of subjective, personal recollections.
In its attention to subjective processes and inner lives, *The Displaced View* avoids generalizing from the particular and personal to the general or typical. The film's refusal to generalize on the basis of individual experience is reflected in its rejection of documentary's conventional representation of the body. The practice of presenting the body as "an instrument of cultural performance" is a common tendency of documentary filmmaking, especially in its ethnographic stream. Frequently the primary object of the camera's gaze, the body in documentary "is where culture comes to life. Individual physical actions become an embodiment of culture" (Nichols, *RR* 220). The body, according to Nichols, is the "star" of the ethnographic documentary: its actions are valued for their "typicality within the culture in question" (*RR* 220). In a similar vein, Rony notes that the on-screen bodies of indigenous people in ethnographic films are generally "not meant to be seen as individuals, but as specimens of race and culture . . ." (25). By dwelling on the body as the socially significant site from which knowledge is extracted, documentary both demystifies and familiarizes the body of the other so that, "through the body, the domestication of the Other occurs" (Nichols, *RR* 215).

In contrast to documentary's customary emphasis on the body as a source of cultural knowledge about others is the relatively rare on-screen appearance of the body in *The Displaced View*. For a film about three women in Onodera's family, the three family members are physically present in relatively few shots, most of which are quite short: there are less than ten shots of Onodera's grandmother and fewer still of her mother and herself. Furthermore, the film separates the voices from the bodies that speak them: the family members never speak directly to the camera or to each other, and their voices are always heard as voice-overs. Refusing the body as a privileged site of personal and cultural information, Onodera opts instead for a primarily verbal presentation of characters through their own words. The body, the frequent site of cultural typicality, is de-emphasized as a source of information in favour of the voice, a site of individual particularity, a source of specific, highly personal impressions. The lack of prominence
given to the body in *The Displaced View* is in marked contrast to the central place accorded to the body in *Skin Deep*, a point I will develop in this chapter's next section. Whereas *The Displaced View* rejects the positioning of the body as a cultural specimen, *Skin Deep* examines the phenomenon of misrecognition born out of the colonial belief in the body as a reliable guide to identity.

In its presentation of the personally recounted inner lives of its characters, *The Displaced View* avoids subordinating the different accounts, descriptions and impressions to a controlling argument. Onodera's own voice, one of uncertainty, does not attempt to explain, contain or otherwise simplify the other voices (the Others' voices) but rather accepts the limits of the filmmaker's understanding. The idea that the subjective experiences of others are fundamentally unknowable is a consciously anti-colonialist stance which opposes colonialism's practice of claiming to understand and explaining or interpreting the world view and private beliefs of others. In "Outside In Inside Out," Trinh describes the desire, common to both anthropology and ethnographic filmmaking, "'to grasp the native's point of view' and 'to realise his vision of his world'" (133). She elaborates, stating that for Western "experts,"

The final aim now is 'to uncover the Javanese, Balinese, or Moroccan sense of self', supposedly through the definitions they have of themselves. . . . The move from obnoxious exteriority to obtrusive interiority, the race for the so-called hidden values of a person or culture, have given rise to a form of legitimised (but unacknowledged as such) voyeurism and of subtle arrogance - namely the pretense to see into or own the other's mind, whose knowledge these others cannot, supposedly have themselves . . . " (133-134).
By refusing to speak for or on behalf of the other members of her family, Onodera begins to answer the question at the centre of this chapter and indeed of this whole dissertation, namely, how can so-called "others" be represented outside of colonial power relations? As presented in *The Displaced View*, part of the answer has to do with allowing others to represent themselves, without acting as their interpreter, allowing for the possibility that we might not always understand all of their self-representations. In her anti-imperialist role as an inquisitive rather than an authoritative narrator, Onodera allows her mother and grandmother to speak for themselves.

Further contributing to *The Displaced View*’s anti-colonial Voice is the relationship between the verbal commentary and the images in the film. Earlier in the chapter, I described Onodera’s use of images to draw attention to the process of filmic construction. Building on that previous discussion, I turn now to a consideration of the relationship between these images and the spoken words in the film.

Most notably, the spoken commentary in *The Displaced View* usually does not describe or even refer directly to the images, which are left largely unexplained: The people in the still photographs are not identified except in a general way as family members (although the viewer may infer their identity based on the context, it is never specified). More important than the specific identity of family members is the symbolic function of the photographs: Onodera’s voice-over refers to the photos and maps as the tools with which she constructed her own memories of her family’s history. Similarly, the Japanese cultural ceremonies and practices represented in the film are rarely identified or explained (with a few exceptions), while the Japanese musicians are shown playing their instruments but are not in any way acknowledged by the spoken text. As with her use of Japanese subtitles and untranslated spoken language, Onodera’s choice not to explain these images reflects her own sense of exclusion or foreignness, her outsider status in relation to Japanese culture and her lack of knowledge about her own family history. The full significance of the images is not necessarily known to Onodera and she
rejects the role of cultural interpreter for her viewers. Having grown up in an all-white mainly Jewish neighbourhood, Onodera writes that her connection with the Japanese-Canadian community was minimal ("Locating" 23). As she says in the film, "church was the only place where I met other Japanese." Her visual representations of Japanese culture reflect her own sense of experiencing that culture from the outside.

In addition to signifying her own sense of otherness, Onodera's decision not to have the images and commentary explain or illustrate each other (with a few minor exceptions in the name of viewer intelligibility) indicates her refusal to impose a hierarchy on the voices and images relative to each other, allowing each to stand alone. In this respect, her film opposes colonial filmmaking practices in which the "foreign" rituals, ceremonies, customs, habits, practices that are given visual representation (along with thoughts and beliefs) are made intelligible to the spectator through verbal commentary, often in the form of voice-over narration by the filmmaker or other "knowledgeable" authority figure in the role of cultural interpreter. Trinh refers to colonialism's use of "insiders" to act as cultural informants (and interpreters) for Western outsiders who then claim access to the native's point of view, and Nichols cites the example of the trance film, Magical Death, in which the Yanomamö village leader's trance is explained, moment by moment, action by action by the filmmaker, Napoleon Chagnon, in an authoritative voice-over ("Outside In" 135-137; RR 223-224). The effect of the explanatory voice-over "is that the images come to underscore and buttress the commentary," which minimizes the images' difference by putting the unfamiliar in familiar terms, thereby rendering the images intelligible to a Western, English-speaking audience (RR 224).

In its refusal to familiarize (and thereby contain) the unfamiliar by subordinating the many disparate images and voices to a single, controlling, explanatory voice, The Displaced View admits excess. The notion of excess (also sometimes referred to as magnitude), of that which exceeds representation, is essential to an anti-colonial
representation of otherness. At the most basic level, excess describes the gap between representation and the "real" historical world that is the subject of that representation. While still photography and documentary film appear to negate the distance between reality and representation because of the apparent materiality of the signifier, that distance can never be fully bridged (Hastrup 13-14). Both Nichols and Phelan offer theorizations of excess that are useful to my purposes here. Phelan uses the term "unmarked" to describe the space between visual representation (photographs, paintings, films, theatre, political protest and performance art), and the "invisible real" (2-4). Arguing that "representation can never be totalizing," her formulation of excess consists of "the nonvisible, rhetorically unmarked aspects of identity" (2, 26). In the visual media that are the subject of her analysis, excess is that which eludes the eye/l. Phelan posits the power of this excess to escape colonial looking relations: By sidestepping the visual economy, invisibility can avoid "surveillance and the law" as well as the voyeurism and fetishism through which colonialism possesses its subjects (6).

In his application of the term to documentary film, Nichols defines excess as "that which stands beyond the reach of both narrative and exposition" (RR 142). For both theorists, representation is regarded as a containment strategy for the real. To the extent that such containment is always imperfect, excess always remains: no matter how realistic or convincing the representation, there is always a gap between discourse and referent. The admission of excess involves the recognition that the historical world exceeds all attempts to represent it (RR 110).

Excess in *The Displaced View* takes the form of difference - cultural, linguistic, generational, sexual. The film represents difference without trying to contain it by making it familiar through explanation. In so doing, *The Displaced View* refuses the colonial notions of otherness which I discussed at the beginning of the chapter. The film's admission of difference signals the filmmaker's rejection of a colonial model of representation. Onodera's recognition of the impossibility of ever fully knowing either her
grandmother or her mother is represented, as I have indicated, by the filmmaker's decision to leave her grandmother's spoken Japanese untranslated, by the inclusion of Japanese subtitles throughout the film (which Onodera herself, by her own admission, cannot read), and by her choice to refrain from explaining many of the Japanese cultural practices and other images shown in the film. The local, culturally and linguistically specific material in Onodera's film exceeds the representational frame in which it is placed, resisting containment through explanation. The inexplicable aspect of this material is unmarked by virtue of its very inexplicability within the world of the film. Furthermore, as Nichols points out, a documentary portrait of an individual necessarily carries with it excess, as a consequence of representation's inability to ever fully capture a life (RR 145).

The Displaced View does not strive to contain or minimize excess but rather allows the other's subjectivity, the different, the unfamiliar to remain as such without trying to make them conventional and familiar. As we have seen, the voice-over commentary does not function to explain or interpret except in the broadest sense of orienting the spectator as to the film's basic objectives and premises. It is by admitting excess that The Displaced View avoids the colonial arrogance of presuming to know the other. Rejecting the colonizing drive to explain away difference, The Displaced View represents difference while acknowledging the difficulties in communication that are its inevitable result.

It is in the spirit of accepting the other's difference that The Displaced View insists on the specificity of the individual and his/her experience. Against the colonial impulse toward cultural generalization and stereotyping, the assertion of specificity is essential to the recognition of the other's autonomous identity. Although Onodera writes that the raw materials for her film were culled from the experiences of a number of different individuals, the "story" she tells in The Displaced View focuses very specifically on the three women as individuals rather than as representatives of a larger cultural, generational, or social group. With a very few exceptions, as I have indicated, all the
stories told in the film are intensely personal, largely private recollections, accounts of memories, thoughts and reminiscences. The film makes no attempt to generalize from these: the women are not presented as speaking for Japanese immigrants, or Japanese-Canadian women or particular generations because to make one individual a representative or spokesperson for a whole culture or group is to reduce or contain her "difference." Whereas "ethnography uses the actions of the one to signify the actions of the many," *The Displaced View* does not turn the individual into a representative of her community (Nichols, *RR* 218). As we have seen, no one in the film, not even the filmmaker speaks for someone else. While Onodera's perspective clearly frames the film, her commentary providing the continuity necessary for basic audience comprehension, the multiple truths represented by the different voices and images (based on different perspectives and experiences arising from age, culture, language, sexuality, personality etc.) are not resolved. Each voice and image is allowed to stand alone, in keeping with Onodera's recognition that each person's memories, even of the same event, are different.

The different truths compete with one another, inviting the viewer (and Onodera herself) to experience the uncertainty of multiple perspectives, none of which has ultimate claim to truth, and to draw her/his own conclusions. In terms of the film's overall Voice, "what we learn exceeds the knowledge of any one source" (Nichols, *RR* 119). We deduce argument from the weave of many voices and "knowledge" is aligned with multiple sources, both visual and aural, with no clear resolution. As spectators, we are thus prevented from subscribing to any illusion that we "know the truth" about any character or event represented in the film.

The film's mode of spectatorial address is deliberately designed so that most individual audience members would probably lack easy access to some aspect of the film. Because the film is set up across linguistic, cultural and generational lines, it would be a rare audience member who would fully comprehend all the film's content and modes of address. While spectatorial knowledge in relation to any film depends on prior
spectatorial knowledge. This point seems particularly salient in relation to *The Displaced View*, which deliberately sets out to address a number of different spectatorial communities.

Although Onodera is our guide through the world of the film, we cannot say that the degree of spectatorial knowledge necessarily coincides with that of the filmmaker. As we have seen, there are a number of ways in which Onodera sets herself up as other or outsider, in other words, as a less than ideal spectator in relation to her own film (from the perspective of linguistic and cultural knowledge). While, for a young Canadian English speaker, the film's structure encourages identification with Onodera as the English-speaking subject and narrator, the "I" in the film, it is clear that an older Japanese-speaking audience, for example, would have a very different experience of the film.

Onodera directly addresses the question of the audience's degree of familiarity with what the film shows and its necessary effect on their response when she writes.

> ... the film references the art of Japanese brush painting. Again, approaching film as a blank canvas. I use the vertical Japanese script not only as a visual device but also as a communication vehicle for my Japanese-speaking viewers. It was important to me that the film acknowledge the Issei (first-generation Japanese-Canadian) audience members from the position of language ... The motivation behind leaving untranslated the spoken Japanese in the film stems from my desire to place an English-speaking audience in a similar position as myself. I wanted to reinforce the language difficulties between myself as Sansei (third-generation Japanese-Canadian) who does not speak Japanese and my grandmother's generation" ("Locating" 23).
The film deliberately sets up multiple points of entry for the various communities of spectators to whom it is addressed. The multiplicity of independent truths means that, on the one hand, many different audience communities can feel interpellated by the film, while on the other, no single community or individual is invited to adopt a position of mastery in relation to the film as whole.

Onodera's statements in person reiterate and reinforce her written comments around the question of audiences. In a personal interview conducted December 16, 1998, the filmmaker described her desire to make a film that would speak directly (though not exclusively) to/with an intended audience that specifically included her grandmother's generation before it died out. She explained that the Japanese spoken by her grandmother was not the standard Japanese of contemporary Japan but a hybrid language consisting of Japanese from the Meiji period in which her grandmother grew up, and English words for which there was at the time no Japanese equivalent. As such, the very act of recording her grandmother's speech was a way of targeting a particular group of Japanese-Canadians who were in fact in the audience when the film was screened, to very positive response, in the residence where Onodera's grandmother was living.

A second aspect of Onodera's stated intent in relation to audiences involved her desire to discuss the experience of the war and the internment camps. At the time she made the film, Onodera noted, the issue of redress was being discussed in Parliament and there were only two Canadian films about the internment. The subject was not one about which Japanese-Canadian (or presumably other) families usually spoke and Onodera hoped her film would open the topic for discussion in families like her own and raise awareness of this little-known, rarely mentioned part of Canadian history in all the film's spectators. Finally, while Onodera refers to the issue of sexuality as "present but buried" in her film, part of her desire as filmmaker was to raise the topic of sexuality among the generations in a subtle, non-threatening way. To try to achieve this goal, the film opens up its discussion of homosexuality by drawing parallels between racial and
sexual oppression in an effort to present the issue in a way the older generation would understand. Onodera hoped her film might facilitate dialogue among the generations of "visible minorities" by offering a way for people of the younger (i.e. her own) generation to broach the subject with the older generations - their parents and grandparents.

Ultimately, on the subject of a target or ideal audience, Onodera says she makes films for a viewer like herself. She hopes, as do all filmmakers, that the issues, questions and concerns that preoccupy her mind are shared by others.

As a consequence of telling a personal story about people to whom she is intimately connected and yet from whom she feels importantly alienated, Onodera's film complicates the seemingly discreet categories of "self" and "other" and, as a result, raises important questions around the possibility of knowing the other. Insofar as Onodera is a liminal subject, simultaneously "in there" and "out here," self and other in relation to the world of her film, her position may be likened to that of Trinh T. Minh-ha's cultural "insider" who steps out from the inside to communicate with "outsiders" (such as anthropologists). Describing this figure (of whom Zora Neale Hurston was an example), Trinh writes:

The moment the insider steps out from the inside, she is no longer a mere insider (and vice versa). She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside . . . She knows, probably as Zora Neale Hurston the insider-anthropologist knew, that she is not an outsider like the foreign outsider . . . Not quite the Same, not quite the Other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out . . . (145).

As I have shown, Onodera, the "I" in the film, situates herself both within and without the world of her film. Following Trinh's argument, Onodera as insider/outsider
knows that she cannot speak of "them", her mother and grandmother, without speaking of herself because "their" story is also her own story. At the same time, her parent and especially her grandparent are linguistically, generationally, culturally, experientially "other" to Onodera and the filmmaker also knows that she cannot speak for them. As Trinh convincingly states, in cases like Onodera's, the conventional subject-object paradigm simply does not fit; the filmmaker's position undercuts the traditional self-other opposition (147).10

The redefinition of otherness occasioned by Onodera's liminal position as both insider and outsider allows the filmmaker to reconfigure the question of "knowing the other" to and propose a model for representing "the other" which offers an alternative to those based on the illusorily discreet colonial categories of "us" vs. "them." Onodera's chief strategy in this regard is to employ a variety of representational techniques which challenge the documentary impulse toward knowledge. Rather than purporting to reveal its subject, Onodera's family, The Displaced View charts the process whereby the filmmaker gradually comes to terms with the limits of her own knowledge about her mother and especially her grandmother. In a film which, "tackles the notion of documentary as truth," refusing the goal of providing "information" or "knowledge" about others, Onodera creates a representation of otherness that does not replicate hierarchical looking relations of power and control produced by (colonial) distance and voyeurism.

**Knowledge and the Body: Skin Deep**

Like The Displaced View, Skin Deep is concerned with the question of what, if any, kinds of knowledge of others are possible. But while The Displaced View makes an argument for the impossibility of ever really knowing another person, Skin Deep exposes the perils of the colonial fallacy/fantasy that presumes knowledge of the other.
The film's central character, a Japanese-Canadian filmmaker named Alex Koyama, is so preoccupied with making her film that she unwittingly adopts a position that can be likened to that of the colonizer in her relationships with others. Alex sees the other characters, particularly her assistant director and lover, Montana Simpson, and her newly hired transgendered production assistant, Chris Black, entirely through the lens of her film. Like the colonizer, she sees them only in terms of their use value to her project and yet believes herself to really "know" them, deriving much of her information from outward physical, that is, visible indicators. Such is her absorption, in both her project and her self, that she is unable to read, as do the other characters, the signs of Chris' suffering and destructive obsession or of Montana's frustration with their relationship.

For most of the film, Alex succumbs to the trap of believing what she sees, much of which is false, distorted by her own agenda.

In contrast to The Displaced View's refusal to dwell on the body, the body is at the very centre of Skin Deep. Yet, as in the earlier film, the body is an unreliable indicator of identity. The issue of the body's inadequacy at representing cultural identity is raised in The Displaced View when Onodera describes the expectation on the part of her fellow students in a Japanese language class that she was already familiar with the language. Frustrated by the pressure of outside assumptions, Onodera quit after two lessons. In person, Onodera refers to the common expectation that she is knowledgeable about Japanese culture: "People always assume that I know more about Japanese culture than I do," she states, pointing to the discrepancy between how the body is read and the individual's self-definition (Personal Interview).

The limited visibility of the body in The Displaced View can be read as the filmmaker's suspicion of the body as a source of knowledge. Onodera's refusal to privilege the body in this film suggests her recognition that greater visibility does not necessarily lead to greater truth or understanding. This view is eloquently articulated by Phelan, who writes that "the binary between the power of visibility and the impotency of
invisibility is falsifying. There is real power in remaining unmarked: and there are serious limitations to visual representation as a political goal" (6). Furthermore, according to Phelan, visibility can be a trap: Because colonialism is rooted in a visual economy which defines otherness in racial (understood to be visible) terms, the visual realm, and in particular the body, are the primary means through which the colonial other is known. To the extent that classical Western documentary and ethnography have frequently replicated colonial looking relations, Onodera's strategy seems to acknowledge that granting the body too much visibility runs the risk of allowing audiences to think that they "know" the people they are watching. The degree of absence of the on-screen body draws attention to the limits of spectatorial understanding.

As if to provide an explanation for The Displaced View's representation of the body, Skin Deep demonstrates the fallacy of equating the visible body with identity. Alex's faith in the truth of the visible is the source of her undoing. Her misrecognition of Chris and Montana is born of colonial-like arrogant presumption and visualist bias. In The Third Eye: Race, Cinema and Ethnographic Spectacle, Rony documents the colonial obsession with observing the other's body, which has typically been seen as the marker of racial difference: "the desire to see "difference," and to establish iconographies for recognizing difference instantaneously" was a defining feature of the early colonial anthropology (32). Because racial difference was deemed to reside in the body, repeated scrutiny of that body was thought the way to uncover the other's mystery. Skin Deep debunks colonial assumptions around the information value of the body as Alex faces the consequences of her misreadings.

Skin Deep draws attention to false cultural perceptions of the body's relationship to cultural, racial/ethnic and gender identity. The characters of Montana, Penny and Alex each relate to these false assumptions in different ways. Alex attempts to use cultural preconceptions and stereotypes to advance her career, a strategy which ultimately backfires. She uses her physical appearance as a Japanese-Canadian woman and her
family history (her great-grandfather was a renowned tattoo artist who started his own school of tattooing in Japan) to give herself credibility as an authority on Japanese culture and specifically on tattooing. The film makes clear that because of how Alex looks, nobody questions her knowledge of things Japanese. In actuality, Alex learns almost everything she knows about tattooing from Chris, even going so far as to quote verbatim Chris' description of what it feels like to be tattooed without crediting her young production assistant. When the Japanese tattoo master whom she has flown in for her film arrives unexpectedly early due to a scheduling error, Alex's inability to speak or understand even the most basic Japanese is revealed in front her cast and crew. Although Alex loses face, the moment is temporarily saved by the intervention of Montana who, challenging stereotypes of her own, surprises everyone, especially Alex, with her ability to speak Japanese. Discovering Montana's language skills, Alex tries to regain control of the situation by telling her assistant (and now ex-girlfriend) to look after the tattoo master and take him out for coffee, an instruction Montana refuses outright. The scene reveals the degree to which Alex's authority has, until this moment, been largely unquestioned by everyone involved with the film. As the spurned Montana, (feeling manipulated as both an assistant and a lover,) rightly declares Alex to be a fraud and walks out, the scene effectively demonstrates the degree to which bodies are routinely misread and the ways in which such misreadings generate false assumptions around individual internal characteristics and behaviour.

Alex's use of cultural stereotypes around appearance and cultural knowledge to further her own ends does not prevent her from reading others according to their outward physical characteristics. Because she is so self-absorbed, Alex falls victim to the very sorts of lies she perpetuates about herself in her perceptions of others. Alex is interested in Chris solely as an authority on tattooing for her film. She is so focused on his decorated body that she fails to perceive his profound turmoil around his gender identity and his growing obsession with her until these are pointed out by others. Similarly, Alex
regards Montana as her assistant first and her lover second. She cares little about getting to know other facets of Montana's identity and is unaware of Montana's dissatisfaction with their personal relationship until it is over. Despite not being who she appears to be, Alex seems incapable of recognizing that Chris and Montana are also not as they appear.

The costs of Alex's arrogant colonial blindness are great: Alex loses her relationship with Montana and nearly sacrifices her film and her personal safety as a result of her narrow perception of others solely in relation to her film. Failing to recognize Chris' identity crisis or his obsession with her, Alex exploits her production assistant's vulnerability to help her make her film. In addition to using Chris' descriptions of his experiences as unaccredited source material for her film, Alex dismisses the warnings of others, particularly Montana, about Chris' unhealthy behaviour when, for example, the production assistant is found sitting at Alex's desk playing with her hairbrush and pretending to tattoo himself. Alex's insensitivity to Chris leads directly to the film's climax. Her casual breaking of her promise that the two of them would get identical tattoos causes Chris to lose control and behave like a crazed jilted lover. The crisis comes to a head when Chris shows up on Alex's doorstep and demands that she speak to him. Facing Alex's repeated refusals, Chris grabs a knife off the table and tries to cut off his own breast. In the ensuing chaos during which Alex wrestles the knife away from Chris, calls an ambulance and then goes to hold Chris as he lies bleeding on the floor, Alex for the first time hears Chris express his own desires: "I could be the man that you want . . . I just want to be normal." While the signs of Chris' obsessive behaviour and instability are apparent to Montana and Penny from fairly early on, Alex's focus on Chris' usefulness causes her to ignore those signs until she is physically and emotionally threatened. The film makes clear that the explosive crisis with Chris could most likely have been avoided had Alex been just a bit perceptive as to Chris' needs; instead, her misreading of his body leads directly to violence.
The end of the film shows Alex's largely unsuccessful attempt to escape her colonial mindset. Although she does go to see Chris, it is unclear how well she understands what she has done to him. She is surprised to see that he has photos of her and is unsure how to respond to his evident pain. When she mentions her film, Chris reacts with anger and expresses his sense of personal betrayal. Having believed that Alex liked him, he was devastated to realize that she neither knew who he was nor cared to find out. As Chris explains, the question of who he is is a complex one: "You know who you are." he says to Alex. "When I look in this mirror, all I see is a lie, someone I don't even know." Alex, realizing how much she has missed, can only admit the obvious: "I didn't understand that Chris." It is clear that until this moment Alex has never given any real thought to, indeed she has hardly noticed, the conflicts Chris has been experiencing within himself. Her preoccupation with Chris' decorated body has prevented her from ever seeing Chris as a full and complex human being in crisis. Like the colonizer who fails to see the signs of growing unrest and imminent revolution among the colonized subjects. Alex's colonial agenda blinded her to the turmoil, suffering and volatility of those around her.

If Alex and Montana demonstrate the unreliability of the body as indicator of identity, the notion that the body can lie is more fully explored through the character of Chris. The film's opening scene is deliberately ambiguous in its representation of gender: Following a series of long camera pans over various highly tattooed body parts, the camera fixes on a lighter being ignited to burn a tattoo needle which is then dipped into an ink pot which is, in turn, accidentally knocked over. The camera pulls back to reveal a head of long strawberry blonde hair belonging to a person, face unseen, who wipes up the spilt ink. The next shot shows the same individual leaving the building and closing the garage door. The person's face is young-looking and very androgynous. As the garage door closes, a car pulls into the driveway and two people, a young man and woman, step out. The woman says, "Hi Chris," in an insincerely sweet-sounding voice, and the man
spits and threateningly announces, "We've been waiting for you," immediately after which the scene fades to black. The scene leaves the audience with many questions as to Chris's identity, not the least of which concerns his/her gender. As the scene is shot, the physical evidence provides no clear indicators one way or the other as to whether Chris is male or female.

In Chris' next scene, the audience learns that Chris identifies himself as male. What is also quickly apparent is the degree to which Chris' masculinity seems very self-consciously and anxiously performed. After being hired by Alex as her production assistant, Chris arrives for his first day of work on the set dressed in a suit and tie with his hair pulled back. In a later scene, as Alex gives him a tour of the facility and pulls out a cigarette, Chris jumps to light it for her, reaching into his own pocket at great speed to grab his lighter. Moments later, when the two collide with Eunice, a drag queen and friend of Alex's who jokes with Alex about watching where she is going, Chris jumps to Alex's defense and is then deeply offended when Eunice takes him to be lesbian. Later, when Alex's friend Penny, a drag queen with her own complex relationship to gender, suggests that Chris might want to check out the "dyke night" at the bar where she works, he grows angry and defensive and runs away. Chris' tension and sensitivity around the issue of gender point to a great deal of unease and suggest a highly unsettled identity, the source of which the audience can easily guess. This source is suggested by Penny's observations and is confirmed gradually in a series of flashbacks.

As Chris spends more time on set and his obsession with Alex grows, he flashes back to scenes from his youth right through to the recent past which reveal the source of his pain. The flashback sequences demonstrate the degree to which the lying or non-conforming body is subject to punishment in a culture where the body is held to be the source and site of gender identity. As the flashbacks reveal, Chris, the young child whose physical appearance was that of a girl, was verbally and physically abused by his peers, presumably for not behaving "like a girl" or for claiming to "be a boy." The flashbacks
show the young Chris, wearing a dress, standing at the centre of a circle of children, all of whom are pointing large toy guns at him and assaulting him with verbal taunts and threats. Scenes from Chris' teenage years show him kissing a teenaged version of the girl who appears at the beginning of the film. As the two kiss and touch each other's bodies, the young girl suddenly starts to laugh and then pulls away abruptly upon discovering that Chris is physically female, a revelation which prompts her to call him a "fucking freak" and rebuff him with the words "I'm not a dyke," followed by more laughter. It is this girl, presumably Chris' teenage love, who returns at the beginning of the film with her violent boyfriend to beat up on Chris, giving him the black eye which he has on his first day of work.

The punishment to which Chris has been subjected throughout his life points to great social intolerance for what are deemed false or deceptive appearances around gender. The notion of being "trapped in the wrong gender's body" reflects the cultural belief that gender identity and the physical body should be in perfect congruence. Implicit in the notion is of course the understanding that our bodies are given to us rather than chosen. But while it is clear that in the absence of surgery we are stuck with the bodies with which we were born, the film is more ambiguous on the question of gender identity and personal choice. While the film does argue that Chris cannot "choose" not to be male any more than he can choose to have a different body without going through surgery, an alternative to this proposition is provided by the character of Penny, a point to which I will return in detail. The film forcefully avoids the trap of giving the final word on the subject of gender to the physical body. While the "revelation scene" in which Chris's naked breasts are exposed shows him to be physically female, the film asserts the validity or "truth" of his gender identity as male, however complex and socially determined that identity might be.

In this vein, the film argues that the self-consciousness of Chris' performance of masculinity stems from his fear of discovery and punishment and not from any sexual
ambivalence. Indeed, the character makes clear that he fully identifies himself as a heterosexual male. In the scene with Penny, in which the drag queen reassures Chris, who is wearing a jacket and tie, that "it's OK to cross-dress." Chris replies angrily that "this is how I dress because this is who I am." The next day in the film studio, Chris asks Alex's producer, Steve, if Alex likes "real men." Steve's somewhat evasive answer, "She's been known to indulge," provides the already smitten Chris with enough reinforcement to allow himself to believe that he stands some sort of a chance with Alex. Later in the film, as Chris pursues Alex in the scene leading up to the film's climax, he tells her that he knows she likes "real men" and insists that he could be the man for her. While Chris is certain about being a "real man," he struggles against most people's inability to see beyond his female body.

If, for Chris, his female body feels like a trap with which he has been cursed, then tattooing represents one aspect of his body over which he can and does exert control. Chris' elaborately decorated body functions as a kind of escape from the trap of his sexualized physicality. His detailed description of what it feels like to be tattooed - "...it just gets more and more intense. I didn't think I could take it anymore. I thought I would pass out. Then the next second it wasn't me anymore..." - also reveals that he derives an almost sexual thrill from the experience so that tattooing may provide him with a surrogate sexual experience, perhaps the only outlet for his sexual drives that is free from social censure. The film contrasts the positive idea of the decorated body with the destructive impulse toward self-mutilation. If tattooing provides a safe escape from the anger Chris feels toward his body, then Alex's last minute failure to get tattooed with him unleashes Chris' anger against his own body which he then tries to mutilate.

Tattooing allows Chris to love one aspect of his otherwise (as he sees it) loathsome body.

A different perspective on the relationship among gender, the physical body and social/cultural readings of that body is provided by the character of Penny. Penny's identity as a drag queen means that almost everyone with the exception of those people
closest to her, assumes her to be "really a man." Specifically, she is thought to be a gay man, given the fact of her recently deceased (from AIDS) male lover, Werner. Outside of her drag queen performance, however, Penny lives secretly as a woman in terms of both biology and gender identity. Penny's choice to keep her female identity secret from most people began, she explains, as an economic decision when she was broke, living in Germany and felt she wouldn't get the desperately needed job as a drag queen if she revealed herself to be a woman. She describes the dilemma she experienced when she met Werner, who like everyone else assumed her to be male, and feared his rejection when he found out the "truth." While Penny does not explain her reasons for maintaining her male identity, the implication is that she would most likely lose her job and probably suffer social stigmatization if her secret were revealed. Nevertheless, on a personal, emotional level Penny seems to have reconciled herself with her choices. In many ways she is like Alex in that she uses social expectations around the body to facilitate her career. Unlike Alex, however, Penny's own "lies" to society about herself allow her clearer insights into the lies of others. She is the first to immediately recognize Chris' "secret" and she is very perceptive about Alex, including the latter's relationship with Montana. Whereas Alex's own lies have obscured her ability to see others as they are, Penny's experiences have taught her to see through the facades people present to the world. As she tells Alex, "I never did find normal but I found some kind of truth."

Whereas Chris and Alex are, each in her own way, victimized by social assumptions and stereotyping, Penny has managed to distance herself emotionally from those assumptions and live her life on her own terms.

While one of the functions of Penny's character is to provide an alternative to Chris' tragic figure of gender distress, the film does not attempt to equate Penny's situation with Chris'. Whereas Penny's choices were initially based on economic necessity, the film makes clear that Chris, who more than anything just wants "to be normal," cannot choose to be other than he is. Both characters risk social censure for the
revelation of their "real" bodies but Penny does not feel betrayed by her own body in the way that Chris does. Penny is able to find "some kind of truth" because, while she is at odds with social definitions of normalcy, she is not at war with her physical self. Chris' impulses toward self-destruction derive from his inability to find "some kind of truth" for himself and from his perception of his own body as the enemy.

*Skin Deep* is interesting for the questions it raises around identification and spectatorship. The film is unusual among narrative features in that the central character is a largely unsympathetic figure with whom it is difficult to identify. Even at the end of the film, Alex's feeble attempt at some sort of explanation - she never does apologize to Chris - does not create the sense that the character has necessarily learned anything from her mistakes or grown more perceptive as a result of her experiences. Alex has yet to articulate any genuine understanding of her poor treatment of others for her own ends. Her final scene with Chris is filled with missed opportunities for apology and explanation, if not justification, and Alex never acknowledges her exploitation of Montana following their breakup. The closest Alex comes to recognizing her errors occurs when she admits to Penny that she "fucked up" and lied, and offers the explanation, "I guess I was saving the truth for my film ... I don't know if I can make it after this." Even after all that has happened, Alex's primary concern is for her film rather than for the people she hurt, to whom she never expresses genuine remorse. Alex's suffering at the end of the film is so clearly the result of her own actions that it is difficult to feel sorry for her. The film's final scene shows Alex walking on set and greeting her crew in a friendly, welcoming way but this scene does nothing to shatter our impression of Alex that has been developed over the course of the film. Alex has yet to make peace with any of those she harmed and she has yet to demonstrate any real self-awareness or genuine desire to change and become less egocentric and self-serving.

The characters of Montana and Chris exhibit two different responses to Alex's exploitation. To the extent that they are both subjected to Alex's self-aggrandizing
behaviour. Montana and Chris are positioned as the primary objects of audience identification. The hard-working, under-appreciated, taken-for-granted girlfriend is presented as a highly sympathetic figure given her unfair, selfish treatment by Alex. At the beginning of the film Montana is shown celebrating (with Alex and Steven) a film award which Alex has just won and which will facilitate the financing of her current film. In the next scene, as Montana and Alex have sex, Montana's introduction of a dildo is greeted with derisive laughter by Alex. When Alex realizes that her laughter has hurt Montana, she declares her desire for Montana and their lovemaking resumes. The next morning, however, when Montana wants to discuss their relationship, Alex is too preoccupied with reading a letter she has received from Chris to pay attention to her girlfriend. In later scenes, Montana operates the camera and gives Alex script notes but when she suggests that Chris may have an unhealthy obsession with Alex and may need help, Alex accuses her girlfriend of jealousy and possessiveness. When Montana tries again to discuss their relationship, insisting that she wants both "a life and a lover," Alex replies that she doesn't "have time to communicate" and rudely describes their romantic relationship as "a luxury I can't afford right now," a comment which prompts Montana to walk away. While these scenes develop audience sympathy for Montana, the character rejects the role of victim by leaving when she is slighted.

Despite having been poorly treated by Alex, Montana elicits audience respect and admiration when, in an impressive display of proficiency and professionalism, she uses her Japanese language skills to get Alex out of an embarrassing bind as the filmmaker struggles unsuccessfully to communicate with her newly arrived guest across linguistic barriers. Seeing Montana's language ability, Alex does not offer gratitude but practically orders her ex-girlfriend to take the tattoo master out for coffee while she makes arrangements for a translator. The rightly offended Montana refuses, accuses Alex of dishonesty and lousy lovemaking and leaves. In the final scene between Alex and Montana which occurs that same night, Montana's strength of character is demonstrated
by her refusal to see Alex, who appears on her doorstep. Suspicious of Alex's motives, particularly when Alex refers back to her surprise at Montana's ability to speak Japanese, Montana tells Alex to come back "when you don't want anything." The film encourages audience empathy with Montana's situation and succeeds in building a case for Montana as an intelligent, thoughtful woman who rejects an exploitative, "colonial" relationship.

Like Montana, Chris is also presented as a figure for audience identification, although the nature of this identification is different for the two characters. Whereas Montana's refusal of exploitation makes her a model of resistance, Chris is largely overwhelmed, not just by Alex but by social intolerance. From the film's beginning, he is identified as an outsider and a victim of abuse when he is beat up in the first scene. When Chris arrives at Alex's film studio in Toronto, his outsider status is apparent. In addition to his lack of familiarity with both Toronto (he is from Timmins) and the film world, he has a black eye, is formally dressed and looks somewhat uncomfortable. The strain in his performance of masculinity is apparent. To the extent that Chris is a young, naive, fragile, confused person in need to help, he is a highly sympathetic figure. Alex's complete blindness to Chris' struggle has the effect of increasing audience identification with Chris. When for example, Penny tells Alex that "your boyfriend is a girl" and then wonders aloud whether Chris has considered surgery, Alex immediately responds, "I'm not paying for it. We don't even have a dental plan." The comment is a joke but it is revealing of Alex's single-minded focus: whereas Penny and Montana see in Chris a young person in trouble, all Alex sees is someone useful to her film. Throughout the film, the audience observes Chris' growing obsession with Alex. While there is a very disturbing element of danger in Chris' mental state, the young man's self-destructive tendencies tend to overshadow any physical threat he might pose to Alex. As evidenced by the scars on his arms, his attempt to rip off his own tattoo when Alex decides against getting hers and his attempt at self-mutilation near the end of the film, the person Chris seems most likely to harm is himself.
Chris' self-loathing reflects his internalization of socially constructed notions of abnormality. The dominant discourse around gender has produced a psychic splitting in Chris: on the one hand he identifies with "real men," so-called "normal" heterosexual males: on the other, he has accepted society's pathologizing him as deviant. His last desperate action coupled with his cries that he just wants to be normal point to emotional and psychological damage of the sort described by Fanon: it is clear that Chris sees himself through the eyes of others. His position is akin to that of the colonial other who has internalized the colonizer's view of him, a position much like that of Almighty Voice's White Girl. The scope of Chris' struggles, both internal and external, situate him as the central figure for audience sympathy in the film.

It is in the context of audience response to the character of Chris that I spoke with Onodera about some of the reactions of actual audiences who saw Skin Deep. Onodera described the anger of a transgendered audience in London, England when they discovered that Onodera had cast a male actor in the role of Chris. Apparently, the audience interpreted the casting of a male actor as a betrayal of the transgendered idea by Onodera. The filmmaker explained that she auditioned both male and female actors for the role of Chris and had no idea who she would cast until the last minute when the decision was made on the basis of how the actor, Keram Malicki-Sanchez, looked on screen with the actor playing Alex, Natsuko Ohama, who had already been cast. After the London screening, Skin Deep played in San Francisco to a largely transgendered audience who responded very favourably to the film.

Onodera's films have tended to sharply divide audiences and provoke strong reactions. The filmmaker's refusal to be categorized as a "Japanese-Canadian filmmaker" or a "lesbian-filmmaker" or as any other type seems to have resulted in confusion around the kinds of films she makes. The filmmaker has been criticized for not making films that were "lesbian enough" in content: lesbian audiences walked out of her portrayal of gay male washroom sex and straight phone sex in her earlier short film, Parallax: Ten
"Cents a Dance" (1985), and The Displaced View took the focus away from lesbianism except in a deeply buried, indirect way. While response to Skin Deep among the gay and lesbian community was generally positive, the film was not widely shown and, despite its feature length, accessible, fairly conventional style and potentially marketable subject-matter, all part of Onodera's attempt to reach a wider audience, the film was never screened outside festival circuits. While most of the reasons for the film's lack of distribution are probably not inherent in the film itself (this not being the place to enter into a discussion about Canadian film production and distribution), I suggest that Onodera's rejection of reductive labels and constant thwarting of audience expectations is partially responsible for the lack of attention paid to her films. In particular, the two films I have been discussing challenge mainstream assumptions around the relationship between visibility and knowledge and encourage their audiences to recognize that "knowing the other" may be neither possible nor desirable.

By way of conclusion, I wish to emphasize the importance of what I perceive as Onodera's overall project in her films, the exploding of the categories of Self and Other, Us and Them. As a filmmaker who sees herself as occupying a number of positions that place her both within and outside of what is usually defined as dominant western culture. Onodera tries to explore various aspects of this apparent paradox in her films. Her work demonstrates a profound awareness of what Trinh calls "the Inappropriate Other within every 'I'" (148). The filmmaker is interested in the zones where identities overlap, particularly the body and the culture in which it is read. Whether her focus is on race, gender, or sexuality, and it is usually on all three, Onodera's interest in subjectivities-in-between offers the possibility of liberation from the colonial paradigms that continue to govern how we define and relate to each other.
Chapter 5

Revising America: Two Films by Julie Dash

Two films by Julie Dash, Illusions (1982) and Daughters of the Dust (1992), respond to the problem of the invisibility of African-Americans in mainstream American cinema and, by extension, in "America" itself. The films show an important progression around the question of absence: While Illusions examines the process whereby African-Americans are excluded from Hollywood cinema and from America as nation, and ends with the central character vowing to make films that will help correct the omission of African-Americans from official history, Daughters of the Dust is an example of the effective use of film to offer alternatives to the master narrative of American history. The film is a project of imaginative cultural recuperation in which African-American characters control the screen and tell their own stories. In both films, liminality results from the tension between physical and cultural presence and the absence of erasure.

Set in 1942, Illusions tells the story of Mignon Dupre, the assistant to the boss of a large Hollywood studio tellingly named National Studios. While the studio lauds its own role in the War effort as a booster of public and troop morale, Mignon, who is passing as white, tries unsuccessfully to get her employer to make films with greater social relevance. Following a scene in which she is asked to supervise the dubbing of the voice of a hugely gifted black singer over that of the musically unskilled white star, Mignon realizes that her work at the studio is not resulting in the kinds of changes in representation for which she had hoped when she entered the industry. Confronted by a lieutenant who has discovered her racial identity, Mignon vows to stay at the studio and fight to make films that restore the African-American presence to the screen and the nation.

Ten years after making Illusions, Dash made Daughters of the Dust, a film which offers a close-up view of a day in the life of a tightly-knit, culturally vibrant African-
American extended family living on the Carolina Sea Islands at the turn of the century. The story of the film unfolds in a meandering narrative that follows the preparations for the northern migration of several of the family's members. Narrated primarily by the family's eldest member, Nana Peazant, who fears the loss of an ancestral connection for those moving north, and by an Unborn Child who has both the wisdom of the past and a clear vision of the future, the film examines the situation of and the particular challenges faced by African-Americans in the years following abolition.

In *Illusions*, the film's two (on-screen) African-American characters are situated liminally between presence and absence, visibility and invisibility by an industry and a society that try to hide blackness behind the mask of whiteness. For Mignon Dupre, the film's central character, liminal identity results from the experience of passing. While her position as the assistant to National Studios' boss C.J. Forster is an uncommonly prestigious one for a woman in 1941, the character's presence at this level in the industry is dependent on her racial identity being hidden. For Esther Jeeter, absence takes the form of the violent erasure of her body via the filmic process. While Esther's beautiful singing voice is dubbed over that of the white star, her physical presence is literally erased by the film - it is both absent and unacknowledged. For both Mignon and Esther, blackness is made invisible by being hidden behind a white (or a presumed to be white) body, a situation that recalls Toni Morrison's point about the repression of blackness in America and the phenomenon of cultural theft.

In *Daughters of the Dust*, by contrast, the bodies of the African-American characters fill the screen throughout the film. In this film, liminality results from the tension between the horror of cultural destruction through slavery and the celebration of cultural resilience. The tension between slavery and oppression and freedom and expression is played out in the arenas of time and space, and in the bodies of the film's characters.
The two films are importantly linked in their self-referential positing of cinema as a liminal zone where history is created, where the past is kept alive in the present, and consequently, where absence/invisibility can be replaced with presence. *Illusions* addresses this issue directly, while *Daughters of the Dust*’s reference to the power of cinema is more implicit. In *Daughters*, cinema is implicitly allied with memory as a space in which erasure can be remedied (even if it often is not). As *Illusions* forcefully argues, film, in its mainstream Hollywood variety, is itself guilty of many omissions but its techniques can be put to restorative use, as exemplified by *Daughters*. The two films thus participate, albeit in different ways, in the revision of history through representations which demonstrate the presence and participation of African-Americans in the American nation.

*Illusions*

In *Illusions*, the experience of passing situates the film’s central character liminally. The suppression of Mignon’s racial identity means that a number of facets of herself must also be kept hidden from the white people at the studio, notably, the racial identities of her fiancé and mother, her real motivations for entering the movie business (which she does attempt to address in her conversation with her boss, a point to which I will return) and importantly, Mignon must mask her reactions to the industry’s blatant exploitation of African-Americans when, for example, she is asked to supervise a dubbing session in which the voice of the very talented young black singer, Esther Jeeter, is dubbed over that of the unmusical white star. During and after the taping, Mignon must conceal her identification with Esther, and when the two women meet following the taping, their honest communication (Esther immediately recognizes that Mignon is passing) must take place quietly, away from the studio office. Mignon justifies these effacements of self through her naïve belief that Hollywood would soon lead the way in
creating new racial representations and would thereby be at the vanguard of changing
dominant attitudes toward race in America.

For all her rationalizations, the pain caused by this sort of self-abnegation is
suggested by Mignon's telephone call to her mother in the scene immediately following
the dubbing scene. The phone call seems to be motivated as much by Mignon's need to
get back in touch with the suppressed part of herself ("I just wanted to hear your voice," she tells her mother), as it is by her desire to reassure her mother that she is fine and to
say that she won't be home for the holidays. Assuring her mother (and herself) that
despite passing, "I'm still the same person," Mignon works to convince them both that she
is doing the right thing, reminding them of the reasons for her choices: change, she has to believe, will begin in Hollywood, because "if they don't change in this industry then I
don't think they're going to change at all." Given Hollywood's position as one of the
principal machines for the production of knowledge in America, change of the sort
Mignon anticipates would obviously benefit enormously from the active participation of
the film industry and would be far more difficult without that industry's involvement.

Throughout the film, the connection between Hollywood cinema and the idea of
America as nation is emphasized. As E. Ann Kaplan writes.

The opening of Dash's film *Illusions* stages Hollywood's arrogance and
assumption of identity between itself and the American nation. As the
film opens, a revolving object gradually comes into view as an Oscar
trophy - the prize sought after by all because of what it symbolizes about a
"greatness" that Hollywood has assumed for itself. Shortly after this, the
camera closes in on a name for the space the viewer is taken to: not at all
innocently, it is "National Studios" (222-223).
**Illusions** repeatedly identifies cinema as the place where American "reality," both past and present, is constructed. Explaining to Esther why she entered the movie business, Mignon quotes a line about films she heard from a producer: "History is not what actually happened, even if it is written in a book. The real history that most people will remember and believe in is on the silver screen." The notion of Hollywood as America's national history-maker is articulated in the Lieutenant's speech at the beginning of the film, which celebrates Hollywood's important contribution to the war effort and credits motions pictures with building national morale. The speech concludes with the grand statement that, "The fact that no other medium is so adapted to the task of building national morale, on both the fighting and the home fronts, attests to the motion picture's essentiality" (qtd. in Kaplan 223). Similarly, after rejecting Mignon's suggestions that the studio make films about the reality of the war for the average person, studio boss C.J. Forster offers in response, "You want reality? Let's go to the movies." The dubbing scene that follows provides an example of how such "reality" is constructed, blatantly exposing the mechanisms whereby Hollywood exploits African-Americans, erasing their presence from the screen and, by extension, from America. While Esther is vocally present in the film-within-the-film, the cinematic process cuts out her body which is hidden behind that of the white star. The scene demonstrates Cornel West's assertion about the degree to which whiteness is parasitic of blackness and recalls Morrison's argument around blackness as the invisible presence in (white) America (Foster 44). Dubbing is an apt metaphor for the largely unacknowledged white theft of black forms of cultural expression, from music to language to fashion. As *Illusions* repeatedly emphasizes, the erasure of African-Americans from cinema parallels their exclusion from America.

The motif of dubbing raises a number of issues around the relationship between voice and body. Within both patriarchal and colonial discourses (and within the dominant Western cinema which perpetuates these discourses), the sexual or racial other
is typically overly identified with the body, as I have discussed in Chapters 2 and 4. The emphasis on the body as the site of racial and/or sexual difference keeps the other situated firmly within a visual economy. Relative to the high visibility of the body, the other's voice is heard less frequently, and, as Kaja Silverman notes in The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema, within Hollywood film, when the female voice is heard, it is very rarely separated from the female body (165). The emphasis on the corporeality of the other would seem to suggest that to disassociate the voice from body would empower the female (and/or the non-white) subject by allowing her to avoid the trap of visibility. Silverman argues that for a female filmic subject to be heard without being seen.

would disrupt the specular regime upon which dominant cinema relies; it would put her beyond the reach of the male gaze . . . It would liberate the female subject from the interrogation about her place, her time and her desires which constantly resecures her. Finally, to disembody the female voice in this way would be to challenge every conception by means of which we have previously known woman within Hollywood film, since it is precisely as body that she is constructed there (164).

Silverman makes an excellent case, supporting her argument with reference to five experimental films which jettison the symmetry between voice and body. In contrast to these films, however. Illusions does not show the disembodied voice conferring any advantages to the female subject within the diegesis. Although dubbing does keep Esther outside the Hollywood film's scopic regime, the separation of voice and body fails to generate enabling possibilities for her. Most importantly, Silverman's argument is predicated on the film audience's awareness of the voice-body split (I refer here to the audience for Hollywood film that uses Esther's voice). In Illusions, the
separation of Esther's voice from her body is suppressed through the use of the surrogate body of the film's star. The black female voice is disassociated from the black female body but is forced to speak through a different, white female body which operates within the dominant scopic regime. The disembodied voice is stripped of its power through re-embodiment. Esther's songs do not disrupt the diegesis in any way; the audience for the Hollywood film would assume that the white star's voice was her own, this being one of the many illusions to which the film's title refers. For the audience of Illusions, the representation of the mechanism whereby mainstream cinema conceals its reappropriation of the black voice offers a forceful deconstruction of the apparent unity of voice and body within Hollywood film.

The dubbing metaphor is applicable in a different way to Mignon. Although Mignon's voice is her own in that it visibly originates from her body, the voice is to some degree disembodied because its body is misrecognized. The black voice speaks through a body that is read as white, with effects that are both enabling and disempowering. On the one hand, Mignon's "white" body allows her voice to reach the otherwise inaccessible ears of Hollywood studio executives. On the other hand, the same misread body imposes important limits on the kinds of things the voice can say. Despite Mignon's efforts to influence film production at the studio, her words must be spoken with tact, delicacy and restraint, in such a way as not to betray what those around her would understand to be her "true" identity.

As a "white woman," Mignon has attained a degree of power as someone working "within the system" but still lacks any real influence over the kinds of pictures made by the studio, as her discussion with her boss reveals. Although she suggests to C. J. that the studio make a film about the use of the Navajo language as a secret military code vital to the war effort and that National Studios be the first "to pay attention to the effects of the War on the average person," Mignon's suggestions are quickly dismissed on the grounds that nobody is interested in the kinds of stories she proposes (Kaplan 223). Despite her
proximity to the seat of power, Mignon has little real power herself: she still has to follow her boss' orders and tolerate the advances of the Lieutenant.

Having hoped to participate in the telling of new kinds of stories about America, Mignon speaks to Esther of her disillusionment with the Hollywood machine:

Movies are nothing but props, musical props, dancing props. I came into this world of moving shadows, and I made it work for me. But I made what work? There isn't anything here for me. There's no joy in the production of images. Now I've become an illusion just like the stories made here. They see me but they can't recognize me.

Mignon's presence at the studio has thus far not resulted in the production of any new kinds of images or in the altering of dominant perceptions around race. Rather than telling the stories she wants to tell, Mignon finds herself supervising the dubbing of a black woman's voice in an escapist musical fantasy with an all-white cast.

Mignon's disclosure indicates her new recognition that keeping her racial identity hidden has and will ultimately compromise her ability to do work she believes in. By the time the Lieutenant discovers "the truth" about Mignon, she has resolved that her current position within the studio is untenable. The Lieutenant's confrontation forces her to articulate a decision she made while talking to Esther, regarding the direction she wants her career to take: she resolves to stay and work "within the system" to make films that will rectify some of History's omissions. As the camera shows Mignon at her desk on which stands an Oscar statuette, the film closes with Mignon's voice-over narration telling of her intent "to use the power of motion pictures; for there are many stories to be told, and many battles to begin."

"Illusions," writes Gwendolyn Foster, "interrogates erasure" (44). Specifically, the film examines passing as both a potential source of power for marginalized
individuals but also as a phenomenon which is necessarily wedded to the ideology of racism. On the one hand, passing is presented as an empowering act of selectively withholding information from the dominant group to gain advantage for members of colonized groups. On the other, the film argues that passing must ultimately be abandoned and a racial identity asserted (even if provisionally) if the dominant regime of power/knowledge is to be effectively challenged.

Passing sets up unequal looking relations between the races. The film contrasts inter- versus intra-racial looking when Esther immediately recognizes Mignon as black, and reassures her that the white people around them "can't tell like we can." Through the narrative device of passing, Dash gives the privileged viewing position within the film to the black characters, reversing the hierarchy of looking relations that prevails within Hollywood film. Through the interactions of the African-American characters, the film's spectators are given access to information which the white characters in the story lack. In the midst of a regime that actively erases their presence, the African-American characters hold a position of privilege within the film through shared knowledge from which the non-black characters are excluded.

The exclusion of the dominant group from the knowledge of racial identity is used to advantage by individuals such as Mignon, whose ability to pass allows her entry into the studio where, despite her frustrations, she learns what she needs to know to make the kinds of films she wants to see. Mignon's personal discovery and determination of her mission would have been far less likely, if not impossible, without the insider's knowledge she gained from her first hand experience of the studio system, an experience that would have been denied her had her racial identity been known. Passing is thus presented as a way for members of marginalized groups to infiltrate the seats of power and obtain the kind of information that is required to successfully subvert "the system."

Despite giving certain individuals access to power, passing is still, of course, always ultimately circumscribed by the dominant regime of knowledge/power around
race: only those who "look white" to white observers can pass. Passing can only function in a context in which race is considered to be a visible characteristic, observable to the naked eye. There is no question of Esther being able to pass - she is simply "too dark" - whereas the light-skinned Mignon is permitted a degree of access to the sphere of white power. Given that passing is necessarily bound to a discriminatory regime (within which permission to pass may be granted or withheld by those who have power), the question is whether passing can offer the possibility for subversion from within, or whether it is irrevocably trapped within the regime's supremacist ideology?

*Illusions* argues that the subversive potential of passing is most effectively realized if Mignon uses the knowledge she gained while passing to undermine the very regime that made her passing possible. For passing to be a truly effective tool of subversion in the long term, it must be used strategically, tactically, which also means temporarily - as a way to gain the knowledge that will facilitate the overthrow of the discriminatory system; in other words, it must ultimately be rejected. While Mignon is passing, she still seems to operate within dominant racist ideology (although she is beginning to challenge it from within, as I will explain). Despite her aspirations, she discovers the limits of her ability to initiate any real systemic change so long as she is believed to be white. She comes to realize that it is only by rejecting passing, and claiming her black heritage that she can pose any real challenge to the system itself.

Before concluding this section, I would like to pursue some additional implications of passing which exceed the film's diegesis but which are implied by the film. While the film's story makes an argument for the eventual rejection of passing in favour of a more overt challenge to dominant ideologies, there is an implicit endorsement of passing's effectiveness at disrupting such ideologies while they are still firmly in place. Although Mignon abandons "whiteness" to openly pursue her filmmaking goals, I suggest that Mignon's passing nevertheless has a profoundly destabilizing (if diegetically unacknowledged) effect on the colonial regime represented by the Hollywood studio. In
Passing and the Fictions of Identity. Elaine K. Ginsberg argues that black to white passing is deeply threatening to the security of white identity in a racially stratified society (8). Citing Marjorie Garber, Ginsberg writes that passing produces a "category crisis" by disproving the visibility of race (8). If race is no longer visible, it is no longer intelligible: "if "white" can be "black", what is white?" (Ginsberg 8). Racial categories are further destabilized through passing's demonstration that ethnicity (like gender) can be performed or enacted (and also, by extension, discarded). Passing thereby challenges the idea that identity is based on unalterable essences: if a black person can pass as white or a woman can pass as a man, then the distinction between what one "is" and what one enacts begins to break down and the performed, shifting nature of identity is foregrounded. In societies in which whiteness and maleness are sites of power, passing "destabilizes the grounds of privilege" founded on racial and sexual identity (Ginsberg 8). The Lieutenant's exposure of Mignon's "true" race demonstrates that, from the vantage point of the dominant culture, "passing is deception, an attempt to claim status and privilege falsely" (Ginsberg 8). Even before Mignon articulates her desire to take control of the means of cinematic production to produce different kinds of films, her very presence at the studio, under false pretenses, disrupts the visibility-race-power regime according to which the studio (and the nation) operates. Mignon uses her presumed whiteness to infiltrate and thereby begin to transform a system based on racially exclusive privilege.

If passing can be used strategically to gather information and learn about the workings of institutional power, cinema is posited as a medium in which such knowledge can be put to use by disenfranchised groups. The film's closing points to cinema as a liminal zone which has significantly contributed to but can also be used to help remedy erasure. If, as we have seen, "America," with the involvement of Hollywood and other producers of mass culture, has denied the presence of African-Americans. Illusions argues for the mobilization of cinema's tremendous power to create new, more inclusive
representations. After Mignon tells the Lieutenant at the end of the film that, "Your scissors and your paste methods have eliminated my participation in this country," she vows to stay at the studio and work with him "shoulder to shoulder" to make films that will reclaim the rightful place of African-Americans and other disempowered groups in America. While Mignon's own story ends with her impassioned pledge, the character's closing words can no doubt be attributed directly to Dash herself, who went on to make Daughters of the Dust, a film which is every way realizes Mignon's vision for a new kind of American motion picture.

*Daughters of the Dust*

The world's earliest archives or libraries were the memories of women.

- Trihn T. Minh-ha (qtd. in Gibson-Hudson 43)

If *Illusions* interrogates the exclusion of African-Americans from official history, *Daughters of the Dust* makes a significant contribution toward restoring a degree of African-American presence to the screen and the nation. In this film, in which African-American characters own the cinematic space and drive the action, liminality results from the tension between the horror of cultural destruction through slavery and the celebration of cultural resilience and vitality for a community of turn of the century island dwellers, the Peazant family. In this context, liminality usefully characterizes time and space as zones in which the slavery/absence, freedom/presence opposition is played out. In particular, memory and cinema are liminal spaces which, the film argues, can be used to ensure cultural survival. Liminal identity in the form of the "double consciousness" of African-Americans is simultaneously a result of historical experience and also a key to survival.
Time

a) Historical and Familial Time

The action of the film takes place over the course of one day in the year 1902. The setting of the film in this year situates the story at a liminal moment in American history for both blacks and whites. As Clyde Taylor notes, "slavery had ended within living memory and Reconstruction had set mean obstacles against the realization of Black freedom" (278). The very meaning of the term "American" is being negotiated as the country deals with the contradictions of having been a slavery-based "democracy". Taylor also notes that the year was roughly the time of W.E.B. DuBois' landmark book, The Souls of Black Folks in which the author refers to the "double-consciousness" of African-Americans (see Chapter 1). On a national level, the country is at a major crossroads.

For the film's Peazant family, it is also a day of transition. More than half the population of this small community are to migrate to the North in search of a better life. For those leaving, the migration represents a shift from an agrarian culture rich with old, persisting African traditions to an assimilated, urban capitalist society. The family members going North, particularly their leader, Haagar, Nana's granddaughter by marriage, are eager to give up what they consider to be the old, primitive traditions, the "Hoodoo mess," practiced by Nana and other family elders, and to embrace a new, urban, materialist African-American identity as represented by the Sears catalogue which Haagar's children peruse in anticipation of their journey. Nana opposes the move, wanting to keep her family together by her side and fearing the dangers that await them on the mainland. As she tells her great-grandson Eli, early in the film,

Eli, never forget who we are, and how far we've come.

...
Eli. . . I'm trying to teach you how to touch your own spirit. I'm fighting for my life, Eli, and I'm fighting for yours. Looks in my face! I'm trying to give you something to take North with you, along with all your great big dreams (Dash, Screenplay 22).

Eli, I'm putting my trust in you to keep the family together up North. That's the challenge facing all you free Negroes. Celebrate our ways (Dash, Screenplay 23).

Nana mobilizes all her inner resources against what she views as a dangerous and misguided journey. It is Haagar and Viola's totalizing rejection of the African part of their heritage and their misplaced worship of "modern" American culture that Nana fears most. Against Haagar's blanket condemnation of all things traditional, Nana has the wisdom to recognize that while she cannot keep her family on the Islands against their will, she can try to impress upon them the importance of maintaining some sort of continuity with their past. Nana's farewell ritual of "spirit regeneration," in which she asks that all the family members gather and kiss her traditional Ibo charm bag or "Hand" containing locks of her own and her mother's hair and other "scraps of memories," around which she has wrapped Yellow Mary's St. Christopher's charm and which she then places on Viola's Bible, represents the kind of cultural syncretism that is necessary to the endurance of diasporic peoples (Dash, Screenplay 78 & 87). Nana's actions and words posit a liminal identity as a strategy for cultural survival:

Now, I'm adding my own hair. There must be a bond . . . a connection between those that go up North, and those across the sea. A connection!

(a few beats, then)
We are as two people in one body. The last of the old, and the first of the new. We will always live this double life, you know, because we're from the sea. We came here in chains and we must survive. We must survive. There's salt water in our blood . . . (Dash, Screenplay 77).

Recalling DuBois' "double consciousness." Nana's words speak to the need to preserve the "African" in "African-American," while her inclusion of the Christian symbols as part of her "Hand" indicates her recognition that cultural survival also requires the accommodation of new and varied influences and the refusal of any fixed idea of racial or cultural purity. Holding up the "Hand," Nana proclaims, "We've taken old Gods and given them new names. They saw it all here that day, those Ibo" (Dash, Screenplay 85). Nana's plea, which is taken up by Eula near the end of the film, also makes the case for the acceptance by the family of the two women who have been "ruined" by white men: Yellow Mary, who has been a prostitute and a wet-nurse, and Eula and her Unborn Child who may be the product of Eula's rape by a white man. The type of liminal identity advanced by Nana reflects her conviction that cultural strength for African-Americans can only be preserved through a combination of strong historical consciousness and adaptability to certain realities, no matter how ugly, of American life.

b) Cinematic Time

The concept of liminality is equally useful for understanding Dash's approach to cinematic time. While the filmic present is identified as the year 1902, the film flashes back to a number of scenes, among them the indigo plantations of the 1860's, where Nana and her late husband Shad were enslaved, and forward to scenes of industrialized Northern cities, wars and the birth of cinema itself. From the point of view of the Unborn Child looking through a stereoscopic viewer, the film shows us images of the future:
POV - THE UNBORN CHILD WITH STEREOEOPIC VIEWER
We see black and white moving pictures of the overcrowded cities of the North. We HEAR the voice of the Unborn Child narrating.

UNBORN CHILD (V. O.)
(recollecting)
It was an age of beginnings, a time of promises. The newspaper said it was a time for everyone, the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless (Dash. Screenplay 32).

The multiple time periods shown in the film are represented by four generations of Peazants, with particular emphasis on Nana, Yellow Mary, Eula and the Unborn Child as the main representatives of each generation. Of these, the characters of Nana and the Unborn Child have a special status in the film, a tribute to the place of privilege accorded to elders and children in Gullah culture: in addition to being the film's principal narrators, they are not bound by linear temporality but travel freely through time. As such, they are the characters who most embody temporal liminality, moving as they do among the realms of past, present and future.

While Nana does have a physical reality as an eighty-eight year old woman in the filmic present of 1902, Dash's screen directions describe the character's spiritual transcendence of linear temporal boundaries. As Nana initiates her ritual of "spirit regeneration" by offering her "Hand" to her family, she transforms herself into a spirit guide to watch over and protect those who are going North.

ANGLE ON - NANA PEAZANT
And like those old Ibos, Nana Peazant calls upon the womb of time to help shatter the temporal restrictions of her own existence - to become a being who is beyond death, beyond aging, beyond time (Dash, Screenplay 86).

As the family members kneel before Nana and kiss her "Hand," the elder Peazant urges them to, "take me wherever you go. I'm your strength" (Dash, Screenplay 86). For Nana, the "Hand" is an actual embodiment of herself and what she represents (Taylor 283). The following morning, as the family board the boat that will ferry them to the mainland. Nana narrates, "Morning would bring a new life for my children and me. They would carry my spirit. I would remain here, with the old souls" (Dash, Screenplay 89).

Of course, the type of "time travel" experienced by Nana makes sense only in the context of a cosmology in which the earthly and spiritual realms are wholly interconnected. An important part of this world view is the belief that the ancestors inhabit the earthly realm alongside the living, a notion that recalls the status of the ghost in the dramatic universe of Daniel David Moses. It falls to the living to worship and honour the ancestors who, in turn, offer spiritual guidance and protection.

As a character who exists at the intersection of the physical and the spiritual realms, Nana uses her power to "call on the old souls" to help keep her family together and to guide them in their new lives in the North. Nana's belief in this traditional cosmology with its lack of separation between worldly and spiritual planes of existence and multiple time frames is another aspect of the film's argument for liminality as a strategy for cultural survival.

Even more than Nana, the Unborn Child represents what Taylor calls "the connectedness of the reality levels" (281). In this character, who both speaks and appears on screen, past, present and future are collapsed. The Unborn Child appears in scenes from the past and present, and shows us scenes from the future, all of which she narrates with authority. In so doing she manifests the Gullah belief in the continuity between the
ancestors and the unborn, a belief voiced by Nana as she reminds her family that, "the ancestors and the womb are one." As Taylor notes, "In many West African cosmologies, the ancestors whom it is the obligation and joy of the living to honour and celebrate, include the generations yet to come as well as those who have gone before" (281). The Unborn Child's visible and audible "presence" on the screen thus illustrates the Gullah belief in the ancestral presence in the earthly realm.

Like the ghosts in Moses' plays, the Unborn Child serves as a reminder of loss and trauma, on the one hand, and cultural vitality and resilience, on the other. A product of rape, the Unborn Child is fundamentally associated with brutality on both an individual and societal level. As the film makes clear, Eula's violation is not an isolated incident and the history of black women in America is also a history of their rape by white men. For much of the film, Eula and Eli's relationship to their Child is circumscribed by their knowledge of the Child's violent conception. At the same time, through her association with her ancestors, the Unborn Child has inherited knowledge of a communal past, a collection of shared beliefs, rituals, stories and traditions which Nana struggles to impart to her family. This collective history is presented in the film as a source of cultural strength even as its role in the lives of the family members is a highly divisive issue. Finally, the Unborn Child's ability to look ahead to the first decades of the twentieth century gives her insight into how her family can successfully balance the wisdom of a complex, simultaneously beautiful and exceedingly painful past with the demands of an equally complex and challenging future. The Unborn Child uses her unique, multi-faceted, multi-temporal perspective to help heal, enlighten, and orient her family toward long term physical, emotional and psychic health.

This omniscient, omnipresent child of the future, who is also one of the film's principal narrators, exists, along with Nana, to provides spiritual guidance to her family. It is she who leads Eula and Eli to the graveyard where the ancestral spirits take possession of the couple, leading them to a resolution of their deep personal crisis around
the possible implications of Eula's rape and to a peaceful acceptance of the Unborn Child as their daughter (Dash, Screenplay 65). Through the Unborn Child, Eula recognizes the need for the collective healing of the most painful wounds of slavery, beginning with the tolerance and acceptance of women such as herself and Yellow Mary who may have been "ruined" by sexual abuse but whose participation in the community should be welcomed as a source of strength, "because we're all good women" (Dash, Screenplay 83). To shame or condemn slavery's victims is to allow the oppressors the upper hand. Realizing that the past, no matter how horrible, can and must be a source of strength rather than a burden of shame, Eula appeals to the women of the family:

Hugging an older woman,

**EULA**

Do you . . . do you understand . . . who we are, and what we have become?

She picks up Nana's tin can.

**EULA**

We're the daughters of those old dusty things Nana carries in her tin can . . .

(pausing)

We carry too many scars from the past. Our past owns us. We wear our scars like armor, . . . for protection.

. . .

Let's live our lives without living in the folds of old wounds (Dash, Screenplay 83)

Through Nana and the Unborn Child, the film argues for an African-derived cosmology with its temporal continuity as a survival strategy for African Americans. This world view of the interconnectedness of the plains of existence, for which Nana and the Unborn
Child are the main representatives, is put forth by the film as a means to combat the sense of rootlessness and alienation to which colonized peoples are particularly susceptible when faced with the anonymity and spiritual impoverishment of contemporary urban life with its individualist, capitalist ethic.

Space

Like time, space in Daughters of the Dust carries with it a dual legacy of oppression and freedom. Also like time, space in the film is transitional and marks the intersection of the sacred and the mundane. The film's central story is set in the liminal space of the Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia, a place, as Toni Cade Bambara writes, "that is both bloody and blessed" ("Reading the Signs" 121). The Islands' port of entry, known as Ibo Landing, was used by European slave ships which brought captured Africans to the Islands to be "seasoned" for slavery. Even after the slave trade was outlawed, explains Bambara, "the dense marshy area was used by traffickers to hide forbidden cargo" ("Reading the Signs" 121). At the same time, the Islands were a haven for self-emancipated Africans and indigenous peoples. As Dash's text at the beginning of the film informs us.

At the turn of the century, Sea Island Gullahs, descendants of African captives, remained isolated from the mainland of South Carolina and Georgia. As a result of their isolation, the Gullah created and maintained a distinct, imaginative and original African American culture.

Historically, the Islands were a transitional space between Africa and mainland America. During slavery the Islands were a "dropping off point" on the forced journey to slavery. At the time of the film, these same Islands are a liminal space for those inhabitants who are about to migrate North in pursuit of what they believe will be a better
life. Culturally, the Islands are a liminal space where a unique African-American culture developed, a place where, "because of isolation and the high proportion of African slaves to White slavery proprietors, the retention of African cultural qualities is highest in the US" (Taylor 278). The space is one in which African, Native and European-American cultures intersect. It is a place where Viola's Christianity co-exists with Nana's ancestor worship and Bilal Mohammed's Islamic beliefs, where the languages spoken are a mixture of African, French and English words and phrases, and where children treat a Sears catalogue like an African "wish book." Most significantly, it is a space where a vibrant, flourishing, highly resilient culture thrives in the shadows of a brutally oppressive and violent regime. From this site begins the journey which will shift the balance from a largely African-derived culture to a more "American" one (defined in the film in terms of consumer capitalism, Christianity and the technologies of the industrial and post-industrial ages).

The dualism that characterizes the Islands as a space of African-American cultural sanctuary circumscribed by a history of brutal oppression is thoroughly explored in the film. Although Daughters of the Dust presents the Islands as a kind of secluded paradise, the spectre of slavery's atrocities continues to loom very large in the lives of the Islands' inhabitants. The film regularly flashes back to Nana Peazant's memories of forced labour on indigo plantations and uses the blue stained hands of the older members of the family as a visual reminder of the slaves' bondage to the highly toxic blue dye† (Dash, Screenplay 31-32). Like the image of the indigo dyed hands, Dash uses visual symbols such as the figurehead floating in the water at Ibo Landing and the lock of Nana's mother's hair which Nana carries with her to refer to the horrific legacy of slavery.

Although slavery has been abolished since 1863, its after-effects continue to haunt the lives of the film's Sea Island Gullah: Yellow Mary's return to the Islands following her experience as a prostitute and wet nurse for a wealthy family who would not let her leave until she dried up her breast milk using an old folk remedy, and Eula's pregnancy which
may or may not be the result of her rape by a (presumably) white man serve as potent reminders that the inhabitants of this small, vibrant community are still always at risk.

Despite the history of violent oppression and the persistence of outside threats to the community, much of the film is devoted to portraying the Islands as a space of plenty, rich with food, folklore, family, and cultural history. In its sumptuous depiction of the abundance of Island life, the film enchants the senses with the richness and variety of its colours, sounds and textures. The camera is very attentive to the details of cultural expression: food, clothing, hairstyles, games, gestures, languages and religious practices are presented in long, lingering, highly aesthetic shots:

**EXT. PEAZANT SHANTY - DAY**

... Not too far from the front door there is a tree covered with glass JARS and BOTTLES.

**ANGLE ON - BOTTLE TREE**

Protecting the Peazant household from evil and bad luck. The bottles are of various shapes, sizes and colours. Sunlight radiates through the bottles, throwing a rainbow of hues across the Peazant family shanty.

**INT. PEAZANT SHANTY - DAY**

There is a frenzy of washing, dressing and general preparation. The women are relating to their personal BOXES, BASKET, or CANISTERS which contain "scraps of memories"; inside their boxes we find toiletries, secret items, and intimate possessions. In a series of shots we see:

Teenage GIRLS press their hair with a HOT KNIFE, and use burnt match sticks to darken their lovely eyes. FLOWERS soaking in water are used
as perfume. STRING and STRAW, used to keep their pierced ears open, are now replaced with GOLD EARRINGS.

A WOMAN WITH A BABY is having her hair CORNROWED into sections by the family HAIRBRAIDER (Dash, Screenplay 12-13).

... EXT. WOODED AREA LEADING TO THE BEACH - DAY
We see the Peazant Women carrying baskets of FOOD, POTS, PANS and QUILTS on their heads. They are walking African style, heads held high, arms akimbo in a single-file procession. One woman has a child holding on to her skirt as they enter upon the sandy beach searching for a picnic site (Dash, Screenplay 15).

... CLOSE ON
Bowl full of a long stemmed green vegetable. A woman with BLUE-STAINED HANDS is chopping OKRA (Dash, Screenplay 30).

... ECU ON - PEAZANT WOMEN COOKING
Women pluck chickens, chop cabbage, onions and prepare shrimp for the gumbo. One woman is poking a knife into a basket of LIVE CRABS (Dash. Screenplay 39).

These images and others like them as well as the representation of multiple languages (including ones composed primarily of physical signs) and religions (African, Christian, Islamic) create an Edenic portrait that celebrates abundance, cultural vitality and the diversity of Island life. Without glossing over the most horrific aspects of their history, the film honours the land and its inhabitants and pays homage to rich, beautiful
and satisfying aspects of the agrarian lifestyle. Defined by the tension between freedom, fortitude and cultural retention on the one hand and the forces of destruction, debasement and cultural negation on the other, the Islands are a liminal space in which the multiple meanings of "African" and "American" are played out in the context of an ever-evolving African American culture.

The Sea Islands' dual significance as a place of both terror and cultural sanctuary finds expression in the myth of Ibo Landing which tells of the African captives of the Ibo tribe who were brought to the Islands and chose to turn around and walk on the water rather than be sold into slavery. In one version of the myth, the Africans walked on the water or flew all the way back to Africa. In another (possibly historically true) version of the story, the Ibos walked into the water wearing their chains and drowned themselves in front of their captors. The myth celebrates tremendous collective human strength and courage in the face of unspeakable atrocity. Dash gives the mythic place a visual representation in the form of a rotting figurehead, broken off years ago from the prow of a slave ship. which floats in the waters at Ibo Landing. The story of Ibo Landing is recounted by Eula in a voice-over narration to her Unborn Child as the camera shows her husband Eli walking on the water toward the floating figurehead. In Eula's telling, the Ibo captives walked all the way back to Africa, despite the iron chains that weighed them down:

... Every last man, woman and child. Now you wouldn't think they'd get very far seeing as it was water they were walking on. They had all that iron upon them. Upon their ankles and their wrists, and fastened around their necks like dog collars. But chains didn't stop those Ibo. They just kept walking like the water was solid ground. And when they got to where the ship was they didn't so much as give it a look. They just walked right past it, because they were going home (Dash, Screenplay 68).
As Eula speaks, Eli emerges from the water soaking wet, kneels before his wife and embraces the fullness of her belly. Under the guidance of his "ancestral spirit-rider," he has experienced a personal transformation which allows him to recognize the Unborn Child as his own. The sequence suggests that Eli's new found understanding and acceptance are inspired by the strength of his Ibo ancestors and also recalls the Gullah belief in the continuity between the ancestors and the unborn discussed earlier in the chapter.

In contrast to Eula's wholly inspirational account of the Ibo, the tragic version of the story is told by Bilal Mohammed, one of the few Muslim inhabitants of the Islands, who came over with the Ibo via the French West Indies:

... Some say the Ibo flew back home to Africa. Some say they joined hands and walked on top of the water. But, Mister, I was there. Those Ibo, men, women and children, a hundred or more, shackled in iron... when they went down in that water, they never came up. Ain't nobody walk on water (Dash, Screenplay 78).

Like the dual nature of the Islands themselves, the two versions of the myth point to the constant tension between tragedy and triumph that characterizes the life of the community. In conversation with bell hooks, Dash states that in her research, she found that almost every Sea Island has a little inlet or area which the inhabitants refer to as Ibo Landing where the story is said to have taken place. The filmmaker identifies the power of the myth as the reason for its prevalence:

It's because that message is so strong, so powerful, so sustaining to the tradition of resistance, by any means possible, that every Gullah
community embraces this myth. So I learned that myth is very important in the struggle to maintain a sense of self and to move forward into the future (Dash, Dialogue 30).

Highlighting the area's significance is its use by the Peazants as the location for their farewell picnic and in particular by Nana for her ritual of regeneration and protection. Like the characters of Nana and the Unborn Child, the space of Ibo Landing is one in which the two planes of existence, the earthly and the spiritual, meet. Dash's quote references the area's importance as both a real and mythic place. In his chapter on Daughters of the Dust, Taylor uses the Portuguese term terreiro to define the Ibo Landing of Dash's film (280). Terreiro is a word from the Nágo of Brazil, the African population surviving slavery in that country, coming mainly but not exclusively from Yoruba society (Taylor 281). Like the Gullah, the Nágo maintain "a belief system heavily centred on the worship of ancestors, the will and determination for that population and its values to survive, and a spiritual way of life: Candomble" (Taylor 281). The terreiro is a point "where the mundane and the sacred intersect" (Taylor 281). According to Muniz Sodre, an authority on African religion in Brazil, the terreiro is a sacred territory that breaks with Western territorial claims. It is an openness that makes possible contact between different levels of existence . . . Politically, the terreiro is a Black territory in a space controlled by White men . . . The terreiro in an Africa concentrated. The terreiro contains all the gods: it's an African digest (qtd. in Taylor 281 & 282).

As Taylor writes, Nana's ritual, which links the spiritual and natural worlds, transforms "the dust, the space where the group is gathered, into terreiro" (282). The liminal
terreiro of Ibo Landing represents the potential for cultural empowerment in the "dust" of a hostile environment.

The space of the Islands in general and of Ibo Landing in particular exists within the larger space of Dash's story, which is situated liminally between the realms of history and myth. Like the film's physical setting and central characters, its mythic-historical story exemplifies the interconnectedness of the worldly or "real" (the historical) and the spiritual or fictional (the mythic) planes of existence. The film takes historically accurate information (including many ethnographic details) and places it in a fictional context which hooks terms "mythopoetic" (Dialogue 29). While Dash states her desire to "bring an integrity to the historical events," her recognition of the gaps within official History where African-Americans are concerned and her desire to tell a different kind of African-American story from the type usually told in American popular culture, particularly in Hollywood film, led her to a notion of film as speculative fiction (qtd. in Dialogue 28). As she told Houston Baker Jr., "I think we need to do more than try to document history. I think we need to probe. We need to have the freedom to romanticize history, to say, 'what if,' to use history in a speculative way and create speculative fiction" (qtd. in Foster 49). Dash built her film, with its imaginatively enhanced version of history, around a series of "what if" situations, as she explains.

... what if we could have an unborn child come and visit her family-to-be and help solve the family's problems.

What if we had a great-grandmother who could not physically make the journey north but who could send her spirit with them.

What if we had a family that had such a fellowship with the ancestors that they helped guide them, and so on (Dialogue 29).
The filmmaker's research led her to oral histories from family and friends, records of pre-World War II oral histories, letters, poems and other written sources both "official" and folkloric. Her cinematic style reflects her varied sources to the extent that it makes use of narrative, documentary and ethnographic techniques of filmmaking, blurring the boundaries between these categories. Importantly, by clearly identifying the cinematic space as owned and controlled by black women (who not only fill the screen but also narrate and drive the action) and by adopting techniques such as the use of multiple narrators and the narrative structure of African storytelling rather than a linear, authoritative unfolding of events, Dash challenges the objectification of African-Americans that characterizes the majority of mainstream American filmmaking in both its fictional and documentary forms.

Referring to the "tension between the notion of history and a kind of mythobiography," hooks says that Daughters of the Dust constructs "an imaginative universe around the question of blackness and black identity" which the filmmaker situates historically (Dialogue 28). Stated differently, Dash's film offers an empowering mythopoetic revisualization of history within which is presented a new and enabling representation of Blackness that challenges stereotypes with its display of African-American diversity and its offering of alternative images to those of bondage and of black people caught in inescapable cycles of violence. Situated liminally between the representation of historical fact and imaginative fiction, Daughters of the Dust participates in a project of cultural recollection which, for colonized people, must necessarily include a degree of invention or speculation as a means of transcending the reductiveness of the master narrative of official history.

Of all the liminal spaces necessary for the cultural survival of colonized populations, the most important, the film argues, is the space of memory. Memory is the place in which the past is kept alive in the present. From the film's first audible line, "Remember," to Nana's insistence on the importance of preserving continuity between
past and present. to Mr. Snead's impassioned call to the family members to "Look! Look up! . . . And remember . . . Ibo Landing!", as he photographs their group portrait, the film's central message of the vital role of cultural memory is emphasized. In a voice-over narration, Nana explains the necessity of keeping mental records of family relationships during slavery as a means of guarding against forced or inadvertent incest:

They didn't keep good records of our births, our deaths, or the selling of slaves back then. A male child might be taken from his mother and sold at birth. Then, years later, this same person might have to mate with his own mother or sister, if they were brought back together again (Dash, Screenplay 66).

. . .

So it was important for the slave himself to keep the family ties. Just like the African Griot, who would hold these records in his head, the old souls in each family could recollect all the births, death, marriages and sales.

. . .

Those 18th-century Africans . . . the watchers . . . the keepers . . . the ancestors (Dash, Screenplay 73).

With her tin cans full of "bits and scraps of memories," her lock of her mother's hair (her sole connection to a woman she never knew) and her head full of stories and information from the past. Nana fears that all her knowledge of the family and its history will be lost as the younger generation dismisses her "old ways" in their eagerness to embrace the new capitalist American dream. A contested terrain, the space of memory is presented as a battleground for competing, often contradictory sets of values. Collective memories of heritage are held up as a source of strength for diasporic Africans and their descendants trying to negotiate a hostile cultural climate.
Extending the idea of memory as a liminal zone essential to cultural preservation is Dash's self-conscious definition of the camera (both photographic and cinematic) as a tool for the recording and indeed for the generation of collective memories. The filmmaker's screen directions make explicit the connection between Mr. Snead's photographic equipment and Nana's methods of recording the past:

ANGLE ON - NANA PEAZANT AND HAAGAR

They too are watching the photo session. Nana is curious. Snead is able to capture and hold "memories" with his camera. Nana relied on her "scraps of memories" and the "bottle tree". . . (Dash, Screenplay 74).

Likewise, Daughters of the Dust is most importantly (by the filmmaker's own admission) a project of cultural recollection, the creation of a mythic memory. By drawing attention to the function of Mr. Snead's camera within the film, Daughters of the Dust self-reflexively makes the link to cinema itself as a space which functions in much the same way. As she states directly in Illusions and makes manifest in Daughters of the Dust, Dash's primary interest in film as a vehicle for social transformation lies in its power as a creator of and repository for history and memory. Throughout Dash's consideration of the relationship between memory, history and cinema, the filmmaker looks to the body, particularly that of the black female, as a major locus for cultural recuperation and societal revision. The suppression of the African-American body in Illusions is in marked contrast to Daughters of the Dust's insistence on the body's aesthetic beauty, sensuality and diversity and on its function as a bearer and transmitter of culture through clothing, hair and gesture. With an emphasis on the cultural value of the body, Dash uses cinema to generate new kinds of memories of and for African-Americans, extending the normally limited range of historical events usually given representation in the Hollywood mainstream, to include stories from which black
Americans can draw strength and escape the confines of an other-defined identity, and from which all Americans, regardless of race, can gain different perspectives on their national narrative.
Conclusion
Looking at Liminality

I don't think history is the past . . . History is the present.

-James Baldwin (qtd. in Rony 193)

If, as Baldwin suggests, the distinction between past and present is permeable or even illusory, what of the difference between self and other that is the very foundation of colonial discourse? As is by now well-known, the Western idea of a coherent humanist subject has faced numerous challenges from colonized (and other) groups that have traditionally been barred from this privileged position. Throughout this thesis, I have cited works by theorists who have examined the processes of subject and object formation through the gaze and who have called for a dismantling of oppressive looking relations. In proposing a conception of a liminal identity, I have attempted to offer a notion which both addresses the losses inherent in colonial objectification and which allows for the recuperation and revision of that which has been lost.

Baldwin's words address both the descriptive and the deconstructive functions of liminality. His statement suggests that colonized populations whose history has been ignored or denied have a vested interest in calling attention to the forms in which the past inhabits the present. The works examined in this thesis exhibit shared preoccupations with the body, language, memory and performance as zones where past and present are conflated. Parks and Dash in particular emphasize the body's role as a bearer of the past, a place where, as Baldwin states, history was "written in the color of my skin" (qtd. in Rony 194). The observation both acknowledges racial oppression based on Fanon's "epidermal schema," and looks to the body as a site of historical recuperation, a function stunningly represented in Daughters of the Dust. Similarly implicated in both the loss and recovery of history, language is a vehicle which not only recounts history but which
also embodies the past in its very structure. Nowhere is this embodiment more effectively realized than in the complex Signifyin(g) practices of Parks' densely poetic dramas.

For historically preoccupied artists, the role of memory is, of course, crucial in reconciling past and present. Moses' ghostly figures call for careful scrutiny of both the enabling and disabling aspects of memory as part of the movement toward enhanced cultural health. Importantly, the four artists all look to the role of theatre and film as memory-like liminal zones where, through performance, the past is kept alive in the present. Dash and Onodera offer the most explicit treatment of this notion which is shared by all the works to varying degrees. Within theatrical and cinematic representation, the historically, culturally marked body expresses itself through language, sound (or silence), and gesture to blur temporal boundaries in a liminal, always disappearing performative moment.

Representations of liminal identities also reveal that the assertion of physical, historical and cultural presence is often usefully accompanied by a demonstration of the enabling value of deliberate absence or invisibility. By stepping outside the visual colonial economy, characters in the plays and films strategically resist objectifying looking structures and confront the bearer of the look with his/her own inability to see or know. To recognize the other as partially invisible and thus incapable of being mastered suggests that it may be possible to rid the relationship between self and other of the hierarchy that separates the two terms. The idea that racial and sexual difference need not be construed in hierarchical terms represents a potent destabilization of colonial discourse. Taken a step further, liminality raises questions around the possibility of conceptualizing identity in altogether different terms: if the other is merely projection of the self, then in what sense, if any, are the two concepts separate or distinct? Echoing Baldwin's view of history, perhaps we should begin by asserting that the other is also the self.
Notes to Chapter 1

1 I am aware of simplifying for the sake of argument. The category of "European" was never (and still is not) monolithic or homogeneous and was (and is) hierarchically organized, although the power of different national or cultural groups relative to each other has continually shifted over time.

2 DuBois writes.

   It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness. this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels this twoness—an American, a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (16-17).

3 It has been estimated that two-thirds of the world's nations have experienced some form of European imperial domination. See Ashcroft, et al. 1-4.

4 See, among others, Fanon, Mulvey, hooks, Kaplan, Foucault, Phelan, Ruby, and of course, the groundbreaking work of Freud and Lacan.

5 For my purposes here, I use these terms interchangeably.
Notes to Chapter 2


2 To quote Ralph Ellison,

It is not skin color which makes a Negro American but cultural heritage as shaped by the American experience, the social and political predicament; a sharing of that "concord of sensibilities" which the group expressed through historical circumstance and through which it has come to constitute a subdivision of the larger American culture (131).

The idea of "African American experiences" is based on this sense of a historically shared "social and political predicament."

3 According to Gates, Signifyin(g) is the master trope for African-American language use. As such, it encompasses a myriad of linguistic practices, too extensive to identify exhaustively, but exhibiting certain prominent characteristics which include: the foregrounding or privileging of the signer, the communication of indirect or encoded meanings, a high degree self-consciousness in the use of language. The many sub-tropes or sub-categories of Signifyin(g) include parody, pastiche, metaphor, word play (such as rhyming, repetition, rhythmic fluency, riffing, chiasmus, the use of homonyms etc.), verbal insults, metonymy, allegory, and others. None of this is to suggest, of course, that figurative language use is the exclusive province of African-Americans but rather that the term Signifyin(g) and its rituals were invented by African-Americans to describe and define their own use of language. Gates traces the genealogy of the term and its practices to the tales of the Signifying Monkey which stand as "the canonical poems from which what I am calling the language of Signifyin(g) extends" (88). His book contains a detailed elaboration of the history, definitions, and practices of Signifyin(g) in both the oral and literary African-American traditions.

4 As Gates writes,

The process of semantic appropriation in evidence in the relation of Signification to signification has been aptly described by Mikhail Bakhtin as a double-voiced word, that is, a word or utterance, in this context. decolonized for the black's purposes "by inserting a new semantic orientation into a word which already has - and retains - its own orientation" (50).

5 This is not to say that the vernacular is not represented in African-American literature. Indeed, Gates cites several examples of early Signifyin(g) practice in written documents dating back to the late sixteenth century, and devotes an entire chapter of his book to the relationship between oral and written language. Nevertheless, as Gates explains, the African-American vernacular tradition is, at its base, primarily an oral one (90). Gates demonstrates the ways in which this oral tradition has found its way into and influenced African-American literature and looks to the vernacular as a basis for a theory of black literary criticism. The ambiguity and openendedness privileged by Signification is in keeping with a largely oral linguistic practice.


7 Douglass' most famous chiasmus, "You have seen how a man became a slave, you will see how a slave became a man," defines the rhetorical function of the slave narrative itself as a literary genre (qtd. in Gates 172).

8 Between 1810 and 1815, when she died at the age of twenty-five, Saartje Baartman (also called Sarah Bartmann) was exhibited in London and Paris. Caged and naked, Baartman caused a public scandal in London as much due to her lewdness as to her indentured status. Following her death, an autopsy was performed on her and written up, first by Henri de Blainville in 1816 and then most famously by Georges Cuvier in 1817. Cuvier's description, reprinted at least twice
during the next decade, compared the female of the "lowest" human species to the highest ape and focused great, detailed attention on the anomalies of the Hottentot's "organ of generation" (Gilman 232). While Baartmann was alive, she was displayed to show her buttocks, so that in life and death, "the figure of Sarah Bartmann was reduced to her sexual parts" (Gilman 232). Gilman notes that, "Sarah Bartmann's sexual parts, her genitalia and her buttocks, serve as the central image for the black female throughout the nineteenth century" (235).

9 This metaphor is itself a citation of the Renaissance concept of the same name.

10 Young writes, "The repulsion that writers commonly express when describing other races, particularly Africans, is, however, often accompanied at other points, with an equal emphasis, sometimes apparently inadvertent, on the beauty, attractiveness or desirability of the racial other" (96). Young cites as an example Thomas Hope's An Essay on the Origin and Prospects of Man (1831) in which the author's description of some of the "black varieties of human races" as "disgusting," "repulsive," "preposterous" and "hideously ugly," is succeeded (within the same chapter) by the following paragraph:

There are in Africa, to the north of the line, certain Nubian nations, as there are to the south of the line certain Caffre tribes, whose figures, nay even whose features, might in point of form serve as models for those of an Apollo. Their stature is lofty, their frame elegant and powerful. Their chest open and wide; their extremities muscular and yet delicate. They have foreheads arched and expanded, eyes full, and conveying an expression of intelligence and feeling: high narrow noses, small mouths and pouting lips. Their complexion indeed still is dark, but it is the glossy black of marble or jet, conveying to the touch sensations more voluptuous even than those of the most resplendent white (qtd. in Young 96-97).

Similarly, in Josephine's Baker's film, Zou Zou (1932) Baker's eponymous character is the object of both hostility and desire. Rony describes a scene in which Zou Zou is gazed at through a window by a group of French boys as she powders her face (200). The scene's eroticism is disavowed as Zou Zou is rejected as an object of desire by the white French boy Jean with whom she has fallen in love (Rony 200). Like Venus, Zou Zou is a circus exhibit, the object of a gaze that both exoticizes and eroticizes.

11 See, for example, Young (Colonial Desire), Bhabha (The Location of Culture), Said (Orientalism), hooks (Black Looks).

12 Morrison's use of the term "Africanism" parallels Said's notion of Orientalism. Africanism refers to

the denotive and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people... Africanism has become, in the Eurocentric tradition that American education favours, both a way of talking about and a way of policing matters of class, sexual license, and repression, formations and exercises of power, and meditations on ethics and accountability (6-7).

13 See Timothy Mitchell's discussion of nineteenth century world exhibitions and, in a contemporary context, witness James Cameron's model of the Titanic.

14 In order to function effectively as (revising) citation, the replica must, of course, initially point to a recognizable referent. For example, the Foundling Father's costume and props would have to be clearly identifiable as representative of Abraham Lincoln. Although not explicitly called for, a high degree of visual realism is suggested by Park's references to specific items of Lincoln's clothing and appearance (hats, boots, beards etc.). These realistically rendered items are then revised through their recontextualization.

15 As Steven Druckman writes, in relation to jazz tenor saxophone master Dexter Gordon, "If, during a solo, Gordon blows the main motif from "Pop goes the Weasel," the strain is completely revised in the new context" (Interview 57).
16 A note on audiences: In referring to theatre audiences, I am not in any way attempting to define or speculate as to the actual composition of any real life audiences who might attend these plays. Rather, I am suggesting that the plays set up certain viewing relationships in response to the ways in which African-Americans have been historically positioned within white supremacist culture, that is, in response to colonial looking relations.

17 Young discusses several nineteenth century texts that deal with the physiology of race, among them, W. F. Edwards' *Des caractères physiologiques des races humaines* (1829), Robert Knox's *The Races of Men* (1850), and John Beddoes' *The Races of Britain* (1885) (72-82). See also Ruby, 30-43 and Gilman, 223-261.
Notes to Chapter 3

1 Examples include the Kwakiutl, the Haisla, the Heiltsuk and the Oowekeeno (Harkin 202-203).

2 Because most Native cultures view time as cyclical rather than linear, death is not thought of as an end but rather as a movement to a different realm, a beginning of a new life. "either on this earth (reincarnation as another human or transmigration into some animal, most often an owl) or in a transcendent hereafter" (Hultkrantz 33). Chief Seattle is quoted as having said, "There is no death. Only a change of worlds" (Beck and Walters 206). Consequently, in traditional Native cultures, it was unusual for the dead to revisit the earthly realm as human ghosts.

3 Citing S. A. Baret. Beck and Walters write, At the (beginning) prophets of the Ghost Dance emphasized the giving up of white man's culture completely, so that the earliest dance houses were built in an entirely aboriginal way without nails or other material derived from whites (176).

4 Specifically, the extremely successful policy of Native dislocation and annihilation that has resulted in the absence of all Indians from the Lincoln County region of New Mexico by 1878.


6 It should be noted that minstrelsy's representations were not limited to black characters. Caricatures of Native Americans, Germans, Irish, Chinese and Japanese, among others, appeared in minstrel shows, although non-white characters were portrayed more negatively than white characters (Toll 164-180).

7 For example, the act begins with the following exchange:

INTERLOCUTOR: Here. here? I said 'Here. here.' Hey dead man! Hey red man! Hey Indian!
GHOST: Awas. Si-pwete. (Go away. Go on.)
INTERLOCUTOR: 'Here. here', I said. What's the meaning of this? Come on.
use the Queen's tongue, or I'll sell you to a cigar store.
GHOST: Awas kiititon ni-nimihiton ota. (Go away. I'm dancing here.)
INTERLOCUTOR: You dare call these furtive foot steps. these frenzied flailing of arms like wings dancing! Stop it. It's nonsense (28).

8 In the original production of The Moon and Dead Indians, produced by Cahoots Theatre Projects in November 1993, the casting of Doris Linklater, a Native actor, in the role of Ma, highlighted the dimension of the character's racial self-hatred and thereby drew attention to the phenomenon of internalized racism within colonized populations. With a Native Ma, the play was also a study of what happens when members of colonized groups start to identify with their oppressors and to see themselves as their colonizers do. The second production of the play at Theatre Passe Muraille in January 1996 cast a white actor, Barbara Gordon, as Ma.

9 I refer specifically to Elin Diamond's article, "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory" (121-122) and to Edward Said's assertion that realism is the mode of colonialism (Orientalism 72).
Notes to Chapter 4

1 It is beyond the scope of this chapter to relay the entirety of Bhabha's analysis. For a complete account of his argument, see Chapter 3 in "The Other Question: Stereotype Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism." in The Location of Culture.

2 As I noted in Chapter 1, DuBois uses similar terms to describe his experience of otherness (3).

3 To the extent that the notion of the other is a product of colonial power relations, it is tempting to argue, as does Yoshimoto Mitsuhiro, that questions around "knowing the Other" are "imperialist and assume a power relation privileging the West" (Kaplan 155). While there is no denying the validity of this position, I believe, following E. Ann Kaplan, that to dismiss entirely the question of knowing the other is to deny ourselves a useful starting point for exploring the problems of knowledge among different cultural groups. Like concepts of race, gender, sexuality and so forth, the notion of otherness is a product of hierarchical, oppressive power relations. Nevertheless, I believe we need to acknowledge and address the ideological power of the concept of otherness before we can begin to disrupt it.

4 Brian Winston cites Grierson's use of the word "documentary" in his 1926 New York Sun review of Flaherty's Moana, as the first recorded instance of the word's use in connection to film, although the term itself preceded Grierson's application. In this initial context, Grierson's statement: "Of course Moana, being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth and his family, has documentary value," allies the idea of documentary with the provision of information, the purveying of knowledge (21).

5 For the sake of readability, I will, throughout the rest of this chapter, abbreviate this source with the initials "RR".

6 See, for example, Jay Ruby's "The Image Mirrored: Reflexivity and the Documentary Film," and Peter Crawford's "Film as Discourse: The Invention of Anthropological Realities," for further discussion of this subject.

7 Ethnography literally means writing about or describing ("graphos") a people ("ethnos") (Rony 8).

8 In practice, as Rony explains, the term . . . although at times used by anthropologists as a synonym for the objective description of a people, instead is a category which describe a relationship between a spectator posited as Western, white, and urbanized, and a subject people portrayed as being somewhere nearer to the beginning on the spectrum of human evolution (8).

9 Trinh's statement may at first appear to contradict Nichols' contention that documentary is largely unconcerned with subjective, interior states of mind. On closer examination, however, I find the two writers' positions complementary. The documentalist in Trinh's formulation is equally negligent about truly "giving voice" to the other, favouring cultural generalizations about the other's point of view and ultimately failing to represent the unique, subjective experiences of individuals defined as culturally or otherwise "different" or "other". These generalizations are usually derived from the observation of the other's outward actions and words, which are then "expertly" summarized and interpreted for the audience. Both Trinh and Nichols are rightfully critical of documentary's (especially ethnography's) (re)presentation of the words and actions of one or several individuals as supposedly typical of the culture as a whole ("Outside In Inside Out" 133-135).

10 The internment of Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War is one of the most blatant twentieth century examples of the official "othering" of non-white Canadians. In the early months of 1942 British Columbia's Japanese-Canadians were evacuated from the Pacific Coast. The province was home to most of the country's people of Japanese descent who numbered nearly 23,000 on the eve of Pearl Harbour. The evacuation proceeded swiftly as the federal government bowed to west coast pressure and began the relocation of Japanese nationals and Canadian citizens alike. Families were immediately divided: Males were sent to road camps in the BC interior, to sugar beet projects in the Prairies or to internment POW camps in Ontario, while women and children were moved to six inland BC towns (including Slocan) created or revived to house the relocated population. Living conditions were so poor that citizens of wartime Japan sent additional food supplies through the Red Cross. During the period of detention, the Canadian government spent one-third the per capita amount expended by the US government on Japanese-American evacuees.
In 1949, four years after the Japanese surrender, the majority of Japanese-Canadians were granted permission to return to BC. By that time, most had chosen to begin a new life elsewhere: their property had long before been confiscated and sold at a fraction of its worth. The injustices suffered as a result of these policies fueled a redress movement in the 1980's which coincided with a similar movement in the US. Although these efforts were not uniformly supported by the Japanese Canadian community, they resulted in a formal apology in 1988 and the provision of $21,000 to each survivor of wartime detention. For further discussion of the internment, see Adachi, Ken. The Enemy That Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians. Toronto: McClelland & Stuart Ltd., 1972.; Daniels, Roger. Concentration Camps, North America: Japanese in the United States and Canada During World War II. Malabar, Fla.: R.E. Kreiger Pub. Co., 1981; Takata, Toyo. Nikkei Legacy: The Story of Japanese Canadians from Resettlement to Today. Toronto: NC Press, 1983.

10 Trinh writes, "The subjectivity at work in the context of this Inappropriate Other can hardly be submitted to the old subjectivity/objectivity paradigm" (147).
Notes to Chapter 5

1 I refer here to the idea of "America" or the American nation, the mythic construct as discussed by Toni Morrison, rather than to the actual geographic entity. See Chapter 2.

2 The films are Yvonne Rainer's *Film about A Woman Who* . . . and *Journeys from Berlin/71*, Bette Gordon's *Empty Suitcases*, Patricia Gruben's *Sifted Evidence*, and Sally Potter's *The Gold Diggers* (Silverman 165).

3 See W.E.B. DuBois (16-17) and my citation of Greg Tate (70-71) in Chapter 2.

4 Dash explains that while she is well aware that the indigo stain would not, in fact, have remained on the hands of those who had worked the indigo processing plants years before, her interest was in the image of the blue stained hands as a symbol, "to create a new kind of icon around slavery rather than the traditional showing of the whip marks or the chains. Because we've all seen those things before and we've become very calloused about them. I wanted to show it in a new way" (Dialogue 31).
Selected Bibliography


Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture.* London and New York: Routledge, 1994.


