

UNFOLDING AND DE-LINKING AGENCY IN DIONNE BRAND'S *A MAP TO THE DOOR OF NO RETURN*

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I'm in words, made of words, others' words, what others, the place too, the air, the walls, the floor, the ceiling, all words, the whole world is here with me. I'm the air, the walls, the walled-in one, everything yields, opens, ebbs, flows, like flakes. [...]inside me, outside me.

Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* (390)

Semantic referentiality: a grammar of prepositionality

1. Starting from the Homeric art of the epic, the pattern of returning home has shaped a vast number of narratives in the West. Picaresque novels, travelogues, coming-of-age narratives, tales of colonial exploration, to glean only a few of the categories revisited by Dionne Brand in *A Map to the Door of No Return*, have been structured as literary journeys towards a sense of closure warranted by a neat, if eventful, return to home and to social order. Even slave narratives, because they catered to a Western audience of abolitionist sensibility, regularly promoted the hope of finding a home in the final pages, substituting an African home briefly, if ever, mentioned with the comfort of an abode somewhere in New England, Britain or Canada. Yet, as has already been famously asked in Derek Walcott's epic *Omeros*, how does one return to a place whose coordinates, let alone memories, one does not possess? How to journey "back" to an irretrievably lost origin? How does one revisit teleological structures of feeling and thought when teleology has been so compromised with Europe's so-called and self-proclaimed *mission civilisatrice*? The clusters of spatial verifiability and self-fashioning with which these master narratives have played do collapse under the weight of epistemic disruption.

2. The impossible return home is described as a map of writerly practices in the second chapter of *In Another Place, Not Here*, a novel published by Brand before *A Map to the Door of No Return* and whose title announces equally openly counter-realistic intentions. The main character's ancestor, Adela, who was captured in Africa and shoved into the hold of a slaveship off West African coasts, loses her ability to return home. The process is imaged by means of a map:

Her powers come small and she done breathe right here. All her maps fade from her head, washing off from zinnia to pale ink, the paper of ways, that she stitch and stick with saliva and breath, rinse as the sky in June come watery; the blue of Guinea, her mark for horizon, wash out; the red dirt under the cart, all the weight and balance and measure, at which point she had ordered the species in grains of sand, thinned to brown; the brocade heft of clouds, the wonderful degrees of light, all that done vanish. She could not hold on to the turquoise sea what bring she here. Everything pour out of she eyes in a dry, dry river. Everything turn to lime and sharp bones, and she didn't catch sheself until it was she true name slipping away.¹

3. The passage is a case-in-point of Black Atlantic attempts at excavating silenced versions of a History told from a Eurocentric point of view for four centuries of transatlantic slave trade. However, the Trinidadian dialect ("sheself," e.g.) superimposes this achievement with a failure: that of retrieving one's roots, linguistic and otherwise ("slipping away"). In a tension between presence and absence, the physicality of the description is opposed to the ghostliness of any tangible body on the page – "sheself" is there and not there, described and missed, at the same time. The body of the deported African exposes an art of map-writing opposed to those charts confiscated by the hegemonic knowledge of the European slave traders and imperialists. New modes of producing meaning and knowledge are sited in a raw physicality. The "dry, dry river" might be traced forward to the opening pages in *Map to the Door of No Return*, with the phrase "a tear in the world"² suggesting both affect and rupture through the double meaning allowed by the term "tear". The "real" reference for that tear is not only ambivalent – it is also multi-directional, with the tear of/from the Middle Passage being redoubled by a diaspora towards Canada which Brand experienced alongside a number of fellow Caribbeans. The fact that "tear" can be differentiated only through pronunciation, not spelling, indexes an indistinctness in the written world which becomes a fluctuating reality appropriated through the vitality of voices. I see this "tear" as a likely site of the decolonial "de-linking" called for by Mignolo and Walsh in their recent endeavours towards leaving Western structures and dialectics behind.³

1 D. Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, 22.

2 D. Brand, *A Map*, 4.

3 See W. Mignolo, "Delinking." See also W. Mignolo and C. Walsh. *On Decoloniality, Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*.

4. A generic *metissage* of essay, autobiography, memoir, travelogue, poetry, and reverie around mapmaking and geographical practices, Dionne Brand's strangely experimental text has mostly been read as a testimony of post-slavery trauma. Brand's own profile as editor, documentarian and "Black Canadian" lesbian activist has done little to invalidate readings connecting the text to the specific context of the transatlantic slave trade and its ongoing consequences. Yet, a number of clues, not least of them the logically impossible title, point to the necessity to "transpose" the apparent subject matter and to nuance its realistic precision. If the "rupture in the quality of being" (5) explored in *A Map to the Door of No Return* hinges, indeed, on the loss of roots and even of memory of the Black Atlantic diaspora, the reader is also confronted with the elaboration of a detached memory in order to replace a History which "should not exist" (90). The tension is constant in Brand's text between sites of enunciation and on the other hand, modes of representing reality. Minor and major referentialities are contrasted in ways that underline the variability of viewpoints. Such an analysis would be lengthy and has partly been carried out by previous scholarship (Brydon, Sturgess). I will focus here on the spatial dimension of such a contrast.

5. Dionne Brand's *Map to the Door of No Return* engages with issues of directionality but also with the possibility of its own detachment. For instance, the long poem enters a dialogue of resistance to the previously mentioned slave narratives, which have been both revived and shunned by authors in the 1980s and 1990s.⁴ While the historical dimension of neo-slave narratives has been foregrounded, William Andrews puts forward the distrust inspired by the realistic agenda of original slave narratives and by extension, the historical accuracy of their rewritings:

we must pay attention to the fact that novelized black autobiographies take an increasingly revisionary attitude toward authority of all kinds, moral, social, intellectual and aesthetic. Dialogizing autobiographies in novel ways may very well have arisen out of doubts about the capacity of the slave narrative in its traditional form to render certain aspects of reality in an authoritative way.⁵

6. Similarly, the representational strategies deployed in Brand's poem/memoir only apparently revisit "real" sites in Africa. The titular "Door of no return" might sound like a poetic creation but happens to be an actual place, diffracted between Goree Island in Senegal and Ouidah in Benin. Not only are these doors "real" and to be found on a map, but they have also become meaningful memorial sites for the African American diaspora wishing to see for themselves where some of their

4 H. L. Jr Gates and Charles Davis, *The Slave's Narrative*; A. R. Keizer, *Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery*; L.T. Murphy, *Survivors of Slavery: Modern-Day Slave Narratives*; A. Rushdy, *Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form*; A.T. Spaulding, *Re-forming the Past: History, the Fantastic, and the Postmodern Slave Narrative*.

5 W. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story*, 276.

ancestors have presumably been forced onto slaveships. In this respect, the referentiality carried out in the text would have to be read as an excavation of lost (hi)stories and places.

7. Nonetheless, meaning remains unstable around these African doors. First of all, their location implies a liminality between land and ocean, between home and rootlessness, between freedom and bondage. Their materiality is also set in contrast with the absence of archives surrounding what took place on their threshold. In alignment with the ambiguity attached to these spaces and with the “re-visionary attitude” pinpointed by Andrews, the persona in *Map* is wary of referentiality, as when it declares: “the door does not exist” (51-52). This statement of fictionality and fictitiousness reverberates throughout the text and opens roads onto other thresholds and alternative charts. The very existence of the I-speaker becomes the site of an empty world, and a full imagination. While never quite letting go of the idea of a reiteration of the African slave trade and its routes (“I had planned to live in London. I had planned to live in New York City”, 74), the persona anchors her reverie into waters that form a mindscape more than an accurate geography.

8. I would like to return briefly to the odd and openly anti-realistic title in order to spot this detour from reality, this de-railing of language from its traditionally signified and even further, from its symbolic links. Amidst a nominal avalanche, it becomes apparent that syntactic strategies are niched in the prepositions. The preposition “to” implies motion, the preposition “of” entails belonging; there is in the phrasing “A Map to the Door of No Return” a tension between open horizons and origins. The two prepositions “to” and “of” constitute in themselves a description of impossible positionality. In actual fact, the persona whom the reader follows in *Map* will travel “to” Northern Canada, to the Caribbean, to Benin, to Australia and Germany, to London, in various attempts at situating her own self in relation to chronotopes⁶ of domination and discrimination. Her journeys “to” and “of” a number of places chart the translationable⁷ nature of the Black Atlantic experience. They de-link the transatlantic slave trade and its discursive and historic existence within the literary Western tradition.

9. A number of spatial gaps undermine other more referential parts in the poem, especially around body politics and the analysis of the race issue in the global North. Charlotte Sturgess was thus able to state that “[s]trong referentiality focuses Brand’s political ethos in the redefinition, re-

6 A literary concept coined by Bakhtin, the chronotope designates a fictional cluster of temporality and spatiality. As such, it circumscribes the whole tradition of Western realism; its combination of time and place is peculiarly revealing of the space of the Black Atlantic.

7 Although developing it falls beyond the scope of the present paper, I understand this term as heavily problematic. One of the possible definitions of “diaspora” is indeed, what cannot be translated. This would constitute one more “tear” in the world and any linkage can only be operated through imagination.

positioning and dismantling of hierarchies.” I would re-direct this emphasis on referentiality and suggest that the process of map-making is construed as a de-linkage from resistances to the loss of roots caused by the diaspora. The map is not a strategy to place what will not stay in place, or to follow geographical lines as a replacement of an irretrievable historical timeframe. The cognitive value associated in colonial times with map-making is turned into a motion of fluid introspection. The monumental status of the map is exploded into fragments of text on the page and the incantatory rhythm of writing and reading. The poetry in the volume becomes a site-specific performance which has been literally “dislocated.” Dionne Brand’s persona does enter a consistent dialogue with reality, a probing of what is real, her everyday life in Toronto, but always collapses this with her/its own problematic inclusion: “What holds poetry together in this city, what holds me together, is the knowledge that I cannot resist seeing; what holds me is the real look of things” (100). The author is turning topsy-turvy her positionality; instead of exploring folds of experiences of her specific reality, she envisions how she herself is “held” by reality, by what she sees, which is also seeing her. She is an inside contained by the outside, containing the outside but also held by reality – a paradoxical knot which trespasses any clear spatial separation. The verb “hold”, repeated three times here, might find its origin in the traumatic space of the slaveship hold, but it also takes its flight from such a noun in order to start conjugating forms of performative present.

10. Challenging referentiality constitutes for Brand an attempt at colliding spaces but also temporalities. The gesture of convoking an imaginative reality instantiates the present time while discursivity is abolished in favour of a poetic embodiment of spatial dislocation. Brand’s versatile book ends on a final note which indicates no teleology but marks a progress and signals a realization triggered by the process of thinking and writing: “A map, then, is only a life of conversations about a forgotten list of irretrievable selves” (224). One sees here, with the terms “only,” “forgotten,” and “irretrievable,” that the aim is to de-link any discursivity.

Referentiality as epistemic structure

11. Referentiality is always already there; it entails a moment and movement of recognition premised upon previous knowledge. The act of describing the world “out there,” of pointing to materiality, the whole “based on fact”⁸ literary practice, is only operated through a translation which is

8 In the case of the Black Atlantic, one might mention as three prominent examples Melville’s “Benito Cereno”, based on the memoirs of Delano, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, loosely adapted from the “true” story of Margaret

compromised with pre-existing structures of designation. Referentiality is therefore inherently correlated with epistemology. Like language, it constitutes itself as a structure. In a way, symbolism is much more illustrative of the practice of referentiality than realism may be. I will start here from the aporia that frustrated Michel Foucault himself at the end of his career, that is to say with the inaccessibility to which he had condemned knowledge, from a minor, subversive, marginal point of view. If knowledge, and language to a larger extent, have been confiscated by power, then their deconstruction leads to a renunciation and to apparently little else into re-casting knowledge in other directions. The problem has been underlined by postcolonial theory and textualities, but the critique of language and referentiality is furthered by decolonial theory. Mignolo and Walsh have indeed undertaken a radical call for de-linking any such grammar of domination in ways that avoid, rather than re-visit, master narratives.⁹ Thereby, the risk that “re-writing” colonial literature might actually be entrenching binarism and, to a certain extent, essentialism, is avoided. In a decolonial, rather than postcolonial, perspective, the reader’s attention is drawn to a literary attempt at forgetting previous forms of representation – in ways that are, perhaps, similar to surrealism. De-linking is meant by Mignolo as a “decolonial epistemic shift”¹⁰ which unmakes the structures of knowledge that have survived from colonial times and have been felt to be confirmed rather than abolished by decades of postcolonial “writing back.”

12. The geographical and intellectual progress outlined in Dionne Brand’s *A Map to the Door of No Return* is one which takes its reader from a curiosity around origins, to an acceptance of dissemination. The text starts with a desire to know a plurality of identities. The opening sentence reads, “My grandfather said he knew what people we came from” (3). The whole text can then be read as a gesture not of anamnesis – quite obviously, such knowledge has been erased by centuries of violent uprootedness, the practices of slave traders having left very little by way of archival traces – but of derouting the patriarchal desire to know of one’s lineage. The collusion in this quote of language (“said”) and knowledge (“knew”), of nostalgia for a community (“people”, “we”) and origins (“came from”) forms a cluster of Western worldviews that will be undermined throughout the persona’s reverie/essay/diary/memoir/poetic digressions. This is collapsed with the persona’s life in Toronto, where a satiric vein is aimed at a multicultural Canada whose citizens yearn for origins and whose storytelling is grounded upon nostalgia:

Garner, and the third section of Caryl Phillips’s *Crossing the River*, which recycles *verbatim* a large amount of John Newton’s actual logbooks.

9 W. Mignolo and C. Walsh. *On Decoloniality, Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*.

10 W. Mignolo, “Delinking”, 453.

Out of a multiplicity of stories, they cobble together a narrative glossing over accident, opportunism, necessity, and misdirection. They uplift aggression and carnage into courage, they exaggerate cunning into pride. In opposition to the calcified Canadian nation narrative we read calcified hyphenated narratives, without exception, from all other groups in the nation which stand outside of that narrative (70).

13. In this respect, Dionna Brand must, I think, be read as a decolonial writer rather than as a post-colonial one. She veers away both from the narratives resisting master versions of History, as well as from the need for subaltern versions which was expressed by such scholars as Peter Hulme:

not because the age of grand narratives has been left behind on epistemological grounds, but rather that the grand narrative of decolonisation has, for the moment, been adequately told and widely accepted. Smaller narratives are now needed, with attention paid to local topography, so that maps can become fuller.¹¹

14. Through a practice which can be read as decolonial, the textuality of *Map* producing itself under our eyes chooses the option of “unknowing.” The prefix “un” here does not suggest a desired ignorance but the project to perceive the world in ways that are no longer placed under the sign of the Western construction of “knowledge.” In *A Map to the Door of No Return* the poetic persona reinvents forms of lyricism and expressions of personal commitment in order to de-link the “knowing” colonial narrative of exploration and self-discovery. Knowledge no longer references the past – it starts indexing the present, and possibly the future.

15. For instance, a ghostly echo of the Empire, both absent and present, manifests itself through the childhood experience of listening to BBC radio programmes. These broadcasts convoke once again the opposition between centre and periphery, between the province and the metropolis. Brand writes, “I found Sundays boring. I could not wait for them to pass to listen again to the world outside. To feel the strange intimacy of coveted estrangement, of envied cosmopolitanism” (15). The dialectics between inside and outside become not an individualistic rejection, but a constitution, of the community: “The whole island pressed its ear against the radio, listening for itself” (*ibid.*). The discourse emerging from the radio through the BBC is another way of “mapping out” an elsewhere which, for Trinidadians, becomes the here and now. Their perception of “reality” becomes mediated through otherness in ways that encapsulate the colonial system of referentiality; this is because, to use Mignolo’s phrasing as he calls for a decolonial disengagement from logocentrism, “what there is depends on how we have been programmed to name what we know.”¹² The grandfather’s unavail-

11 P. Hulme, “The Locked Heart: The Creole Family Romance of *Wide Sargasso Sea*”, 73-74.

12 W. Mignolo and C. Walsh, *On Decoloniality, Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, 148.

ing yet nagging desire to retrieve a piece of knowledge erased by the masters' History of European conquest, or the complex of the colonized manifested by the fascination for BBC programmes, yield in *Map* to a wilful redoubled erasure through the creative, decolonial act.

16. An instance of Brand's renunciation to "writing back" can paradoxically be spotted on page 138 in *Map*, when the persona visits Massacre, the place where, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette takes her husband to the "real" place called Massacre in Dominica.¹³ Jean Rhys's text is quoted, and finds itself accused of a similar erasure as the one committed by Charlotte Brontë, when Antoinette says of the people who died there: "Nobody remembers now."¹⁴ Brand apparently goes on to counter Rhys's version:

When Rochester arrived in Massacre it was raining, "... huge drops sounded like hail on the leaves of the tree, and the sea crept stealthily forwards and backwards." He had feared that it might be the end of the world. When I arrived in Massacre it was gleaming, the sky a glittering blue and the road, which was sea and road at once, was full of people. The rum shop was busy and someone in the van said, "These Massacre people are always on the street, day or night. This town is always lit up." The town had a certain feeling of careening, all bare feet and flowered dresses, all old men with sticks and young ones with soccer balls, all hips held to laugh and children playing fiercely. Rhys would have longed for it even more than she longed for it in *Voyage in the Dark*. (138)

17. Yet, deployed here is a form of de-linking which works toward a deconstruction of any stable perspective. Authorship is anonymous and shared ("someone in the van said"), while the world of immediate feeling ("longed") is pitted against what is expressed in the pages of a book. To return to the grammatical concerns of my opening section, I will point out here the "verblessness" (20) of the phrases starting with "all," in the last but one sentence in the quotation. Brand writes with the full knowledge that decolonial de-linking will entail a renunciation to representations, and an exploration of linguistic enunciations. Although this line of investigation falls beyond the scope of this paper, one of the consequences of this decolonial practice is, I suggest, a redefinition of the community, no longer bound by a shared past, in Africa or even in America, but by a collective experience of meaning.

13 The place bears the name of an early episode of the European invasion of the Caribbean. According to an oral tradition, a group of cornered Amerindians decided to commit a collective suicide rather than to be captured by the Spaniards. The place is also mentioned by Jamaica Kincaid in *Autobiography of my Mother*, the mother's author being a Dominican of Amerindian descent. It must be said that the experience made by Jean Rhys, also a Caribbean woman, in front of *Jane Eyre* is also included in Brand's own text. In *A Map*, when the persona evokes her leaving her island for Canada. On the plane that takes her away from her birthplace she recalls: "I had become dissociated the moment I had read *Jane Eyre*" (116).

14 D. Brand, *A Map*, 138; J. Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 39.

18. The place of Massacre, where meaning is heavily construed both by the colonial settler (Rochester) and by the postcolonial writer (Jean Rhys) bent upon giving her own version, becomes a space of fluid performance and anonymous statement (Brand's *Map*). The journey undertaken by the persona will yield nothing but its own progress and process, its instantiation, its enunciation.¹⁵ This is also operated through the shift from fishermen huts, as mentioned in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, to a rum shop where a *fête* is taking place that attempts to escape its own syntax. From one building to the next, one finds an attempt at unhousing fiction from within the universal house of the White Euro-American domination:

the North Atlantic regional experience, as Trouillot observes, projected itself through its vocabulary onto a universal scale – a universal scale that did not exist prior to the words that created it and that was the creation of the words themselves. Thus, colonial differences did not describe the world but offer a vision of the world, falsely projected onto a universal scale. Like the world map, colonial narratives, descriptions, and arguments appropriated the world and condensed it into a house of universal fictions. We are still inside that house.¹⁶

19. I will retain the image of the house and follow the traces of some deformations of that self-enclosed building in Brand's *Map* – a text which, after all, announces a door.

En/unfolding the world: space as unhoused positionality

20. Spatial referentiality is central to my argument here and I suggest that the “double diaspora” (Hall) of Caribbean authors who have migrated in turn becomes a pattern to decolonial textualities. The very notion of Area Studies is resisted by the fluidity of creolized transculturalism as epitomized by the Caribbean experience of geographies. Brand's *Map* is neither a Caribbean nor a Canadian text, it contains a Whitmanian multitude of trajectories across the American continent and beyond. Caribbean spaces have indeed been long disconnected from the referential demands of accurate map-making, reduced as they have been to treasure island graphs or nautical charts. I wish here to reactivate the baroque legacy perceptible in a number of works from and/or about the Caribbean, and trace how that baroque influence has provoked spatial representations which tended to foreground their own artifice and artificiality.

21. The vision of space as a movement of expansion has been picked up by a number of critics,

15 W. Mignolo and C. Walsh, *On Decoloniality, Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, 143-151.

16 W. Mignolo and C. Walsh, *On Decoloniality, Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, 187.

among which I will isolate two prominent names: Paul Gilroy and Carole Boyce Davies. In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy starts from a circumscription of a space in terms of themes and experiences; although his geographical scale is not infinite, as the title indicates, the volume still extends the migratory creolization which has characterized the Black Atlantic to the whole “blue marble”. It even concludes with reflections on the sublime. By definition, the sublime is what goes beyond the border, and indeed Gilroy’s analyses and notions have gone beyond the Caribbean, broaching onto the Jewish diaspora for instance. Like Gilroy, Carole Boyce Davies sees the Caribbean as a matrix for globalisation, for diasporic cultures around the globe, for creolization under any form and latitude. In *Caribbean Spaces* (2013) Boyce Davies engages with the ever-expanding scope of Caribbean diasporas and turns them, like Benitez-Rojo, into an entropic movement gathering speed. These interventions represented major steps in a critique of the colonial representations of the Caribbean islands as “small” spaces, as fragmented and disconnected spaces, as provincial, as forlorn, as archaic, as reduced to the size of a sugar plantation where nothing prevailed but the violence of greed. Like a number of academics Gilroy and Boyce Davies rejected spatial containment and presented the Caribbean as an anticipation of a global movement, making it a very modern space indeed. From Benitez-Rojo to Boyce Davies, and over the span of thirty years, it is manifest that the issue of Caribbean diasporas became central to this pattern of connection which works against the grain of Western cartographies. Dionne Brand grew up in Trinidad but lives now in Toronto, and she also leads a life of travelling: in *Map*, she goes to various countries in Africa, to Europe, and to Australia. Her experience is one of de-linking knowledges and re-linking spaces in ways that have not been imagined by colonial powers.

22. I will now use these notions of expanding space in order to outline how Brand’s persona projects to imagine space in new ways. *Map* takes its reader into the whirls of a baroque spiral and more precisely, to a notional shape that Gilles Deleuze outlined around his reading of Leibniz: the fold. Gilles Deleuze is a fine example of the ambiguity of spaces which I intend to interrogate here because he is also the critic to whom we owe the concept of rhizomatic deterritorialization, as developed along with Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* – the concept was then adapted to the Americas mostly through the theory of Edouard Glissant (in *Poétique de la Relation*) but also by Benitez-Rojo in *The Repeating Island*. For Benitez-Rojo, the historically attested baroque influence in the Caribbean Basin can be read alongside such modern patterns as the desiring machine, or the entropic chaos.

Thus the Caribbean flows outward past the limits of its own sea with a vengeance, and its Ultima

Thule may be found on the outskirts of Bombay, near the low and murmuring shores of Gambia, in a Cantonese tavern of circa 1850, at a Balinese temple, in an old Bristol pub, in a commercial warehouse in Bordeaux at the time of Colbert, in a windmill beside the Zuider Zee, at a cafe in a barrio in Manhattan, in the existential *saudade* of an old Portuguese lyric. But what is it that repeats? Tropisms, in series; movements in approximate direction.¹⁷

23. Spaces are a case in point of an impossible referentiality even as the Caribbean appears as an early laboratory for globalization; the juxtaposition operated by the syntax here might be understood as an early attempt at de-linking knowledge.
24. As a result, space finds itself expand infinitely in all directions. Brand's earlier text, *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999), should be read as such a dissemination. *A Map to the Door of No Return* builds on dissemination and operates within the scope of a paradox, that of the "visible secret" of one's origin: "For the name he could not remember was from the place we could not remember. Africa. It was the place we did not remember, yet it lodged itself in all the conversations of who we were. It was a visible secret" (16). The paradox of the visible secret reveals a scene where the inside is turned inside out – dissemination is no longer flat, but three-dimensional. The secret is brought out of the fold, becoming visible, but its remaining a secret suggests a resistance to this exposure.
25. A fine example of holographic deterritorialization, Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return* can be read through the prism of *The Fold, Leibniz and the Baroque*, first published in French in 1988. What catches my attention is what Deleuze sees as a paradoxical exploration of interiority at the baroque period. Interiority is seen as containing exteriority, in a very baroque reversal which is never quite collapsed. Visually, the baroque is associated to the spiral: a line and a circle at the same time, an endless line reflecting disturbances of scales and infinite epistemological reversals. Deleuze insightfully points out that the spiral is also a succession of hollowed out forms and I would like to explore this hollowed out form, and space, as a site for creation in *Map* and other decolonial texts.
26. The fold is a useful shape in order to interpret two key metafictional passages in *Map*. In the first one, the persona mentions a book about the Haitian Revolution belonging to her uncle; the book is placed in a drawer (184). The second passage is concerned with her grandmother's Bible, placed in a nook, in a recess above her bed. One might add to these two moments a third one, a description of a dress in a museum, connected to Naipaul's writing (205). The drawer, the nook, the

17 A. Benitez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, 4.

dress: these become literary instances of self-enclosed folds, not endless spirals; places in the world which are both inside and outside, where the vocation of the author is triggered. The fold is a hold, it becomes a vignette for meaning that has been lost but might be retrieved, for roots forgotten but enfolded, and which can be unfolded in turn. These origins have become, literally, a secret, a recurrent word in Brand's text, and a term whose Latin etymology points once more to what is enfolded. It tells of a story which is not possibly told, but whose event, or taking place, is a necessary background. Brand's work interrogates the possibly objectionable necessity to speak only for oneself. *A Map to the Door of No Return* is straddling the fence between interiority, the intimate, the anti-social realm of the individualistic writer, and a resistance to the inside as a space where women have long been relegated. What the baroque pattern outlines is precisely how while the inside is part of the outside, the opposite may be true.

27. I would further my investigation through a chapter in Deleuze's *Foucault* entitled "Les plissements, ou le dedans de la pensée (subjectivation)" ("the enfoldings or the inside of thought (subjectivation)"). In this chapter, Deleuze adapts his analysis of the fold to Foucault, and analyses a passage in *History of Madness* where he describes the Nave of Fools. Deleuze writes, "he is placed inside the outside and reversely, a prisoner amidst the freest and most open of routes, steadfastly tied to the infinite crossroads, he is the paradigmatic passenger, which is to say, the prisoner of the passage."¹⁸ The quote reverberates towards the experience of the Middle Passage. While it begs the question of relationality and positionality, it also interrogates the very notion of "locating" meaning.

28. Brand writes in coordinates beyond binarism, beyond the "world of exteriority (...) where the conjunction 'and' surpasses the interiority of the verb 'be'."¹⁹ The fold makes repeated appearances in *Map*, always in relation to interrogations around belonging. I will compare three quotes for instance:

"One imagines people so stunned by their circumstances, so heartbroken as to refuse reality. Our inheritance in the Diaspora is to live in this **inexplicable** place" (20)

"Nation-states are configurations of origins as exclusionary power structures which have legitimacy based solely on conquest and acquisition. Here at home, in Canada, we are all **implicated** in this sense of origins" (64)

18 My translation. The original reads: "il est mis à l'intérieur de l'extérieur et inversement, (...) prisonnier au milieu de la plus libre, de la plus ouverte des routes, solidement enchaîné à l'infini carrefour, il est le Passager par excellence, c'est-à-dire le prisonnier du passage". Deleuze, "Hume", 104.

19 My translation of "un monde d'extériorité (...) où la conjonction 'et' détrône l'intériorité du verbe 'est'". Deleuze, "Hume", 228.

“To desire may also be to **complicate**” (194)

(my emphases)

29. These emphasized terms share the same root and point to a fold. They are at tenterhooks with the obsessive image of the door in the text, and suggest instead a space which is both closed and open at the same time. The variety of prefixes (“in-,” “ex-,” “com-”) recalls the destabilization of meaning operated by the two prepositions in the title of the volume (“to,” “of”). They articulate the necessity for a collective emancipation from closed identities as well as the impossibility for life narratives to unfold, as it were. I take this image of the fold as a means to probe the temptation to “house” referential knowledge. To borrow Brand’s metaphor of the map as ontology, the diaspora draws a map to a self-knowledge which intersects a creative, future knowledge, and proposes subjectivities demoting referentiality to type, and stereotype.

Performing the reference

30. The sense of physicality produced by emphasis on the body as fold, on the individual perspective as embodiment of the collective, is crucially connected to how the dialectics of inside and outside rules over meaning across the Black Atlantic as it is mapped out by Dionne Brand.

To live in the Black Diaspora is I think to live as a fiction – a creation of empires, and also self-creation. It is to be a being living inside and outside of herself. It is to apprehend the sign one makes yet to be unable to escape it except in radiant moments of ordinariness made like art (18-19).

31. Expressed here is the way in which the “black” body is always already meaningful, in the pseudo-universal and essentially “white” rendering of the world. “Black” subjectivities are inside of themselves, performing their own fluid identity, and outside of themselves, the spectators of “the sign [they] make”, an abstraction. This is another way of phrasing what I had started with, that is to say, the structural dimension of language and its collusion with power. In this quote, the fold becomes a “recess,” where the prefix re- and its repetitive connotations is shattered by the sense of an expectation (“alert,” “may be,” “ambush,” “lurking”) in the following quote: “one must be alert to questions of meaning that may be lying in ambush or bearing down on you, or lurking in the soft recesses of the livingroom” (125-6).

32. De-linking language from the inside (out) becomes a means to re-appropriate one’s own

writerly voice and critical agency. I would contend that the “no return” in the title is primarily metafictional. It addresses the foreclosed but always projected possibility not of an African home, but of writing one’s own language, having “returned” indeed the borrowed colonial one. *Map to the Door of No Return* endeavours to write beyond meaning that has been handed down, and beyond bodies that have been “signified” and turned into meaning through stereotypes. That “something about the new world reality that did not fit”²⁰ is also central in such texts as David Chariandy’s *Brother*, where Dionne Brand figures in the acknowledgements. Just as in Brand’s *Map*, the notion of implication overshadows the coming-of-age of two young Canadians raised by a Trinidadian single mother: “It’s the loss and guilt that’s palpable in him. Implicating.”²¹; “The look I caught earlier in the night returns. A sadness implicating.”²² The body becomes a site for a shifted epistemology to lodge itself and form a secret, in relation to the world, but freed from imperatives of pre-constructed referentiality.

33. Forming another fold where the body is transnationally dislocated across the planet, Brand’s map becomes a privileged site for the literary imagination. The figure of the writer becomes an explorer not of the past but of the future, and the text is its measure. The book which is placed in the drawer, in the Trinidadian house of childhood, might be one that still needs to be written. In a way, the only escape from, and re-invention of, referentiality is a regime of futurity. In Dionne Brand’s *Map to the Door of No Return* writing is not retrospective but prospective. Knowledge becomes metaleptic and is yielded by a practice of imagining an actual thing, event, or place. The place of fiction is located within the imagination: “The door, of course, is not on the continent but in the mind; not a physical place – though it is – but a space in the imagination” (97).

34. I hope to have shown how passages into folds of secreted meaning constitute a leap of the imagination as well as of specific ways of decolonial investigations. The only possible access to a “real” which has been engulfed is through the unhousing of meaning inside a reclaimed “black” body: “A door is a place, real, imaginary, and imagined” (19). In its search for formal newness, the text becomes an inquiry into senses and configurations of social futurity, of a beyondness to historic reality. I would like to conclude this article by briefly suggesting that the dynamic image of the fold might be a way of thinking about creation but also reception. Audience response is a thorny issue and the increasing globalization does little to simplify the question – texts, images, discourses traverse cultures and are bound to be received within a wide array of cultural and individual percep-

20 Boehmer, 213-214.

21 D. Chariandy, *Brother*, 88.

22 D. Chariandy, *Brother*, 112.

tions. That being said, I would argue that the fold is a fruitful representation of reading or hearing a text. It opens a space of enfolding where the intended meaning and the possibly received meaning encounter each other. The self-validation implied by reading can be a way of understanding that references are not so much written as read and recognised. The mediation of reading and interpreting is in itself a reminder that referentiality dwells in opaque transpositions and adaptations of reality. The line of enquiry is made even more complex by the fact that like a vast number of Anglophone writers of the global South, Brand is mostly read in the global North. This issue of readership has been evoked by Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), where he discusses the "imaginative geographies" of colonial conquest and displaces these wanderings onto the mental sphere: "space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here."²³

35. "How do we read these complicated juxtapositions of belonging and not belonging, belonging and intrabelonging. In a place such as this, so full of immigrants, everyone is deeply interested in belonging" (71): in this quote the persona becomes a figure of the reader, her own impossible past narrative colluding with others'. Canadianness becomes a way out of the specificities of the slave trade and back into a wider fold of rootless experiences. I will end with connecting this form of newness with what Derrida has to say about archives as a beginning in *Mal d'Archives*,²⁴ and the way in which Appadurai negotiates migration, archives, and collective memory in the following quote: "The migrant archive is a continuous and conscious work of the imagination, seeking in collective memory an ethical basis for the sustainable reproduction of cultural identities in the new society. For migrants, more than for others, the archive is a map".²⁵ Although Brand would certainly beg to disagree with the notion of "reproduction of cultural identities" her work recasts perceived and conceived ideas of mapping collective memory in the past rather than the future. Referentiality is torn apart and turned into a "tear in the wor(l)d"²⁶ indeed.

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