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Ghosts in the Phonograph
Tracking Black Canadian Postbody Poetics

Sound technologies enact cultural interventions and enable radical experiments of identity through the practice of stripping away, spinning, and splicing sounds—especially the sound of the human voice. Phonographic revolutions disrupt temporal and spatial topographies by untethering sound from an original site of emergence to interrupt the here and now—ghostlike voices are severed from the body and travel through time and across space, rising from the grooves to offer sonic interference and intervention. This capacity for acoustic delay, repetition, rupture, and mutation—as when the voice is cut with other (human and non-human) sounds on the turntable—has implications for identity, and can even shape national identities, which are partially constructed from auditory culture.[1] Because Black Canadian writers often characterize their experience as one of a battle against erasure and elision in the Canadian cultural imaginary, sound technologies can be particularly powerful here; Vancouver writer Wayde Compton negotiates the experiences of erasure and elision at the specific site of the dub plate, using these very functions to cut up and reassemble sounds with "The Reinventing Wheel" of his sonic schema. The poem of that name, published in *Performance Bond* (2004) and performed in various articulations and collaborations, will be the central focus of this paper, alongside Compton's essay "Turntable Poetry, Mixed-Race, and Schizophonophilia" from his critical work *After Canaan* (2010). I will position Compton's dub revolutions alongside Antiguan Québécoise performer Tanya Evanson's poem "The African All of It." A consideration of the embodied auralities and antiphonal logic of Evanson's poem allows for a

comparative engagement with the role of the sonorous body in Compton and Evanson's temporally, spatially, and culturally transboundary transmissions.

As well as shaping his creative, critical, and anthologizing work, the practices of reinscription, recuperation, and recovery form an essential part of Compton's cultural activism. Informed by posthumanism and musicology, this paper argues that Compton uses sonic schemas to challenge metanarratives of race and landscape in Canada, and that the turntable forges a portal through shifting and ultimately porous borderlines of nation and identity. In this way, Compton's sound-texts intervene in the social world, resignifying spatial and temporal meanings and establishing alternative interpellations through cultural innovation. "The Reinventing Wheel" demonstrates Compton's interest in sonic possibilities for enacting such cultural interventions: invested with allusions to works from multiple canons and genres, from modernists like Ezra Pound, to Gil Scott-Heron's "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" (1971), and Yoruban figures like Shango, the poem attempts to "take apart hip hop and rebuild something," collecting "shards of culture" to assemble a usable history for those of mixed-race and Black identity on the West Coast of Canada—an outpost of diasporic experience ("Reinventing" 00:33:46-53, 00:17:05-08).[2]

This work is vital because Canada's enduring reputation as a refuge from racial tyranny obscures its anti-Black racism, while limited conceptions of Canadian identity work to other Black Canadians from the nation's histories and cartographies. In *After Canaan*, Compton argues that the experience of diaspora in Canada has "long been defined by and against a bigger, continental historical saga," and cites African American spirituals as an example, in which "the psalmic land of longing and the home of the captured Israelites was Canaan—the north, the land of salvation" (15).[3] Through his mapping of Black BC's archive of literature and orature, Compton responds to what Heather Smyth describes as a "cultural need to . . . fill in a diasporic gap—to 'extend' a 'sounding line . . . backwards into history,' as he says in *Bluesprint* (14)—and measure the translations of African, Caribbean, and African American diasporic cultures as they migrate, drift, and echo across the sound waves on their journey to Vancouver, Canada" (Smyth 390). The "sounding line" Compton describes in the anthology *Bluesprint* (2001) is capable of movement beyond the linear into unexpected territories (14): it can act as time machine, invoke the dead, break down spatial and temporal walls and barriers, and constitute interconnection between the (post) body and landscape. In *After Canaan*, Compton directs a revolutionary

multimodality in his description of the interaction between body and art-object as he manipulates his recorded (disembodied) voice with his hands, spinning, scratching, and cutting it with samples in a poetic practice he defines as sonic enjambment (198) and a process he likens to the situationist practice of *détournement* (192).[4]

Posthumanism is significant to this discussion because its proponents regard human subjectivity as embedded and embodied in an extended technological reality, enlarging the dimensions and possibilities of human experience. More specifically, Rosi Braidotti positions critical posthuman thought as a "genealogical and a navigational tool" for supporting new forms of subjectivity, in which the "human organism is an in-between that is plugged into and connected to a variety of possible sources and forces" (5, 139). As with Braidotti's figuring of the human organism as "an in-between," posthumanism typically questions the notion of the discrete human body, and recent scholarship continues to develop this position, influenced by feminism, anti-racism, and environmentalism. In her *Posthuman Blackness*, Kristen Lillvis stresses that "[m]ore than simply linked to the surrounding world," the body and mind of the posthuman subject "travels 'across and among' the borders of self and other, the 'other' including people, communities, regimes, and technologies" (3). Astrida Neimanis emphatically figures embodiment as rebelliously fluid: "[R]egimes of human rights, citizenship, and property for the most part all depend upon individualized, stable, and sovereign bodies," but "as bodies of water we leak and seethe, our borders always vulnerable to rupture and renegotiation" (2). Further blurring the stability of these body boundaries, posthuman life forms can be cyborgs, ghosts, or non-human entities such as monsters or zombies. Such figures manifest throughout Compton's work.[5] Indeed, both the spectral figure and sound technologies act as what I call postbody projections, a term I will continue to work with here: they exist beyond, but can be an extension of, the body and its capacities. Like Cary Wolfe's theorization of posthumanism, which urges that it "isn't posthuman at all—in the sense of being 'after' our embodiment has been transcended—but is only posthuman*ist*, in the sense that it opposes the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy" (xv), my sense of the postbody does not necessitate disembodiment or loss of materiality: as we will see later in the paper, even the ghosts that haunt Compton's work are seemingly quasi-material.

Lillvis notes that the *post* prefix speaks to posthumanism's emergence from critiques of liberal humanism's hegemonic conception of subjectivity—which excludes women, people of colour, and people experiencing poverty or any

kind of disability, raising issues of power and discrimination (Lillvis 5; see also Braidotti 15). Importantly, the *post* in Lillvis' term "posthuman blackness" denotes a "temporal and subjective liminality that acknowledges the importance of history . . . without positing a purely historical origin for black identity" (4); it allows not only for reinvention of subjectivity but also for an imagining/activation of potential futures, and this temporal liminality is compatible with what Phanuel Antwi recognizes in dub poetry as "an unfinished phenomenological history of moments of embodied blackness" highlighting "the work of freedom as ongoing" (71). For example, Compton rejects the notion of a purely historical origin for Black identity when he recombines and reinvents a history of moments on the turntable, mixing samples with a vocal recording of his poem to create something new. These diverse sources—a podcast addressing the phenomenon of pareidolia, *Alex Haley Tells the Story of His Search for Roots* (1977), a recording from 1971 entitled "Vancouver and Racial Violence (1886-1907)"—resist chronology in favour of simultaneity and multiplicity (*After* 183-187). Similarly, Evanson—a whirling dervish and student of Sufism—embodies her spoken-word poetry with a phenomenology of presence, stressing the kinetic and the sensory, the physical manipulation of muscles and rhythmic movement of limbs. As Antwi reminds us, the body, "lacking foundational given, does not, after all, allow for completion" (71). Accordingly, Evanson's work also gestures towards the porousness of the boundary between the body and the world beyond it, forging an interstitial threshold, a vortex for radical experiments of identity.

Gesturing towards postcolonialism and postmodernism, Lillvis observes that "[t]he complexity of 'post,' as outlined by Kwame Anthony Appiah and Stuart Hall, applies to the 'post' of posthuman-ism as well: posthuman bodies—and bodies of work—cross boundaries of time, place, and culture" (5). This paper articulates the post*body* in two crucial, sometimes overlapping, ways. Firstly, I am interested in fusions of the physical and the ghostly, a synthesis that can be better understood alongside Kwasi Wiredu's concept of quasi-materialism. Wiredu explains how in West African ontologies—such as in Dogon and Akan systems of thought—the ancestor is a "quasi-material" presence unconstrained by "the laws that govern human motion and physical interaction" (125). The ancestor lives beyond the river (separate from, but sharing the same earthly realm as, the living), can cross great distances in space and time, and is able to inhabit the body of the descendant. Wiredu's work is significant to my discussion of diasporic identity because these spectral projections can be invocations of ancestral memory, invocations

that echo in the call and response of Evanson's "The African All of It" and Compton's use of liminal states such as "Zombification. / Dancing in the low-ceilinged cargo hold," a reference to the Middle Passage (*Performance* 106). Secondly, sound technologies serve as a kind of material postbody that transmits across and acoustically challenges spatial, temporal, and body boundaries. My reading is influenced by the work of N. Katherine Hayles, who in "Voices Out of Bodies, Bodies Out of Voices" compares the technological manipulation of sounds to the aleatory Burroughs/Gysin cut-up technique. Indeed, an overlapping of these incarnations of the postbody can be traced in Compton's work as he overtly connects the supernatural with the open "body of a phonograph" that produces "visceral" sound, and these sounds are able to seep through fissures in time and space (*After* 199).

In his 1969 work, *The New Soundscape*, R. Murray Schafer invents the term "schizophonia" to explain the anxiety of the severance of sound from its place of issue. This severance is inherent to sound recording technologies through their capture and preservation of "the tissue of living sound" (44). Of this dissociation, Schafer writes: "[v]ocal sound . . . is no longer tied to a hole in the head but it is free to issue from anywhere in the landscape" (44). Schafer considers the disjunctive effect on identity of hearing one's own recorded voice, noting "[y]ou can get outside yourself and critically inspect your voiceprint. Is that stammering and quirky sound really me, you say?" (46). The notion that you can "get outside yourself" bespeaks the liminal coordinates of the disembodied human voice, and Schafer conceives the implications for a sonic construction of identity in the question that immediately follows—is that sound really me? In *After Canaan*, Compton adapts and challenges Schafer's concept of "schizophonia," which focuses on the negative consequences of such a dislocation,[6] to reflect the more positive attributes of the experiment: the definition he offers for his "schizophonophilia" is "the love of audio interplay, the pleasure of critical disruptions to natural audition, the counter-hegemonic affirmation that can be achieved through acoustic intervention" (199). While Schafer reinforces the value of sound's emergence from the body, and worries about the psychological impact of dissociating voiceprint from voice box, Compton details the potential for liberation from the dominant discourse in such an exercise.

Indeed, a number of critics have responded to Schafer's negative casting of the splitting of sound from its original site of emergence. Steven Feld reminds us that the splitting of sound from its source implicates "music, money, geography, time, race, and social class" (262), and criticizes Schafer

for "the many social complexities [he] ignores, such as the occasional hijacking of musical technology to empower traditionally powerless people" (259). The emerging concern in the work of Schafer and Hayles is the question of what happens to the body when the voice is severed from a phenomenology of presence. But the more significant nodes of inquiry for this paper involve a consideration of what is at stake in this severance for racialized and diasporized bodies. From his Black humanist position, Alexander G. Weheliye directs us to the "vexed interstices of race, sound, and technology," reminding us that within Enlightenment discourses of the human, "blackness is the body and nothing else" (22, 28). He urges us to consider "what happens once the black voice becomes disembodied, severed from its source, recontextualized and appropriated?" (28). Compton's work allows for an engagement with this very question in the context of Black identity in Vancouver; his experiments with posthuman sound and practice of hip hop turntablism enable both a deconstruction and a reconstruction of Black Canadian identity, producing a new kind of subjectivity by interrupting culturally constructed boundaries.

For Compton, the phonograph is a tool for celebrating the denaturalization of sound, "a Brechtian machine in its very making" (*After* 199). He elaborates:

> Radios, CD players, and laptops are boxes—devices of enclosure—whereas the phonograph always seemed to me to be a machine turned inside-out; a machine whose workings are always visible, whose interface is literally tangible, and whose production of sound is visceral. The body of a phonograph, like the body of a racialized object, can never close. (*After* 199)

Compton's interest in the open body of the phonograph is evident in his poetry, as when the speaker in "The Reinventing Wheel" asks: "Is the hole in the machine ghostly, / the lapse in the record?" (*Performance* 102). This haunting develops his use of the liminal figure of Osiris; supernatural imagery and references to the afterlife are found throughout the poem and are connected to a kinetic configuration of sound. Compton's ghosts are quasi-material, zombies dancing in cargo holds, a sonic impulse capable of "moving the text": "The drum / has gotten ghost. But where was the death?" (103). Such mobility is temporal, too: Compton maximizes the capacity of the turntable to uproot and unfix the sonic, reinscribing an archive of sounds that originate from multiple temporal moments by manipulating the dub plates with his hands. This unfixing and remixing is important for his project of reinvention, because the human voice has long "signaled presence, fullness, and the *coherence* of the subject" (Weheliye 31; emphasis mine). Lisa Mansell notes

that "mergers of the ghost and the physical not only demolish culturally constructed binaries but create a blended conceptual space in between these positions—a post-body, a hyphen, a both." I want to emphasize Mansell's figuring of the "post-body" as a blended conceptual space between the physical and the ghostly, especially her rendering of that postbody space as a hyphen, a "both." This spatial blending—this bothness—is at the heart of my understanding of how the postbody in all its networked spectrality operates. While the trope of the ghost, the spectre, or the apparition is often read as a "sinister manifestation of a destabilized identity"—much like the uncanny sound of a human voice untethered from the body—it can also have positive ramifications, celebrating "our plural, fragmented and interconnected position as subjects" (Mansell). In Compton's description, the paradoxical juxtaposition of the tangible and visceral phonograph to the ghostliness of postbody sounds moving through the grooves of the record further demolishes culturally constructed binaries and forges a blended space for the expression and celebration of plural, hybrid, and mobile sounds/identity formations, in an episode of schizophonophilia.

Compton's essay describes his performances as part of the Contact Zone Crew, a ten-year project in hip hop turntablism with musical collaborator Jason de Couto.[7] The name of the collaboration emerges from an engagement with Mary Louise Pratt's influential work on pedagogy and culture under colonialism, "Arts of the Contact Zone" (1991). Pratt writes of the contact zone as a crossroads, a site of learning, and uses the term "safe houses" to refer to socio-cultural spaces affording "temporary protection from legacies of oppression" (40). We can interpret this homage to Pratt as indicative of Compton's vision for the function of dub poetry in Canada. More specifically, the recuperative function of the contact zone is exemplified by Compton's cultural activism, especially his project to restore and remember Hogan's Alley. Historically an ethnically diverse neighbourhood and the hub of Vancouver's Black community in the city's East End, Hogan's Alley was subject to demolition and erasure from the late 1960s onwards, initially to make space for a planned interurban freeway. The Hogan's Alley Memorial Project forges a space for engagement, a safe house where Black history is not just memorialized but recovered and reinvested in the contemporary Black Canadian poetry scene and community: counter-hegemonic affirmation through acoustic and narrative intervention. Compton explains Hogan's Alley—its "chicken houses and church and dormitory"—as "what we have to look to for a foundational

narrative of presence . . . as something that grounds us in Canada" (*After* 109). Furthermore, Hogan's Alley is positioned as an intermediate site of interpretation and exchange between African American cultural touchstones and a need for a distinctly Canadian identity: "We need Hogan's Alley because Motown songs and Martin Luther King are from another, different place. They come through the TV. They come through books. Hogan's Alley, however, ran between this and that side of *right here*" (109-10). By attempting to restore what is lost through the razing of Hogan's Alley, Compton seeks to ground Black presence in Vancouver, a project that spatializes his ethos of "[e]mbracing . . . unusual black experiences, rather than trying to return to the imagined essence of a past blackness" (14-15). Compton's "assertive Afroperipheralism" (15) not only battles erasure and elision, asserting the right for Black Canadians to exist, but encourages vitality, growth, and diversity through "radical experiments of identity" (13). We can trace this Afroperipheral drive in Compton's conception of "The Reinventing Wheel"—the name suggesting the transformative power of the turntable. His three initial aims were to "make the voiced poem an art-object, outside of my body"; "to let the body perform *upon* the work," "rather than performing *from* the body"; and to view his own poem as "an object of *détournement*" (*After* 191-92). Here, Compton explicitly experiments with the posthumanist "possibility that the voice can be taken out of the body and placed into a machine" (Hayles 75). His situationist ambitions for the poem underscore a concern with cultural reinvestment and suggest a synthesizing interface between creative materials, the human body, and movement through contested city space.

Whilst one of Compton's goals is to dislocate the poem from his body, Evanson's description of performing without referring to a written text suggests the opposite: "There's something to be said about taking your own work into your body, and then offering it, fully, with your body and your voice."[8] Her embodied practice blends the written and the oral (absorbing the work from the page into the body), a practice that kinetically responds to, relates, and transposes the poem. In her performance of "The African All of It," Evanson first commands the audience to close their eyes, then take a deep breath.[9] She audibly exhales before she recites:

> I polish myself to be bright and blinding
> Some can see me, from others I take sight
> When I speak in tongues, none work better than silence
> I am listening. I am listening.

> The voice can lock but instruments unlock
> With the swing of an arm, a pendulum hips
> To manipulate breath, control internal chords takes faith
> I am listening. I am listening. (147)

With the opening lines of the poem, Evanson appeals to light and visibility—she is "bright and blinding." Her insistence that she "takes sight" indicates her agency and power as the audience close their eyes on Evanson's command. Yet she also imbricates the bodily, the visual, and the aural. The poem is formally suggestive of the spirituals, following a hymnal structure. Its tetrameter of four lines, found in the spirituals and influencing the sixteen-bar blues, emulates the patterns of Black music. Additionally, Evanson's repetition of "I am listening, I am listening," followed by a silent space, is redolent of antiphony, a call and response that is silenced as the orator performs both parts of the refrain. In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy contends that antiphony "symbolises and anticipates (but does not guarantee) new, non-dominating social relationships. Lines between self and other are blurred and special forms of pleasure are created as a result of the meetings and conversations that are established between one fractured, incomplete, and unfinished racial self and others" (79). Although Evanson enacts both the call and response of the poem, silencing the antiphonal impulse, the performer is not necessarily dominant, signified by the phrase "I am listening" and the inclusion of a gap in which the audience may "speak" or even "think" a response. Despite the tension between the refrain "I am listening" and a lack of audible response, it can be argued that the interior responses of the audience debinarize the relationship (Evanson can speak in the silent tongue that her audience responds with), closing the gap between audience and speaker.

Similarly, the lines that conclude the first stanza are followed by a silence lasting seventeen seconds.[10] In the middle of the following line, Evanson turns the poetic verse into song on the word "but," suggesting the rhythm of the body's movements and highlighting the voice as instrument. The acoustic power of her interaction with the audience brings them into the physical expression of the poem, further shattering any idea of a binary between the two, as we close our eyes and listen—in faith; Evanson both takes the audience's sight and manipulates their breath, implicating their bodies in the poem's visceral quality. Furthermore, Evanson shifts roles with the audience—not only can they no longer watch the performance, but they must share their role as listener with the poet, whose refrain "I am

listening" is followed by silence in which the audience may also be listened to and scrutinized without their knowledge in a panoptic revolution of the performer-audience dynamic. Evanson's structured silence creates a space of apparent sonic absence buttressed on each side by aural (I am listening) and oral (the voice) references, making it a blended dialogic space, filled with the aural activity of listening. The oral here can also be carceral, the voices locked within the body and requiring free movement in order to be expressed. In the second stanza, Evanson highlights the physicality of language and the sonority of the temporal: the kinesis of the body, arms and hips moving rhythmically like a pendulum measuring time, manipulating breath and controlling the vocal chords, positioning the body as an instrument of sonic inscription.

Although Compton and Evanson may appear to take opposite approaches in their performances, each achieves "a different expression of agency" by revolutionizing the performer-audience dynamic through a critical repositioning or rerouting of the somatic relationship between them (*After* 193). While Evanson does this through a kind of sensorial exchange, Compton harnesses sound recording technologies—not to supplant the body in performance, but to highlight the work and consideration of the artist in the creation of the art-object, to turn the workings inside-out, make the poem visible and tangible, like the open body of the phonograph. In "Voices Out of Bodies," Hayles questions whether the tape recorder can "be understood as a surrogate body," and if so, "does the body become a tape recorder?" (75). This question began to emerge after 1950 with the *audio-poème* compositions of Henri Chopin and in the writings of William S. Burroughs (Bök 132). Compton's work continues to experiment with this notion. In *After Canaan*, he writes:

> My pre-recorded voice and poem is broken and re-broken, arranged and re-arranged, combined and re-combined with a shifting repertoire of other sources. Between us, the artists, and you, the audience, is the material poem—on the tables, under discussion, and subject to revision by the nature of the performance's form. The poem is not inside me, waiting to be expressed. It is in our crate, waiting for us to position it. (194)

Compton's postbody poetics break the historical link between vocal and bodily presence. Not only can the voice "persist through time outside the body, confronting the subject as an externalized other" (Hayles 78), but, as Compton's articulation of his work suggests, the "material poem—on the tables" and in the "crate" works as a positionable, material postbody that can

be (re)broken, (re)arranged, and (re)combined in Compton's sonic schema, in a "play of reproduction and displacement" (Hayles 83). Compton's descriptions of the spatial coordinates of his performance are strikingly similar to that of a medical operation, with the body of work "on the tables," waiting to be positioned. The storage of the materials in crates, along with the activity described as crate digging for sample tracks, intimate something both corporeal and carceral, even suggestive of the grave. Compton's language is reminiscent of Hayles' discussion of Burroughs' *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962), in which a doctor extracts parasites from the narrator's body in a graphic scene wherein the parasites stand for "pre-recordings" that are "[e]ntwined into human flesh . . . [and] may be thought of as social conditioning" (Hayles 86). The material manipulations of Compton and de Couto resituate these "pre-recordings"—through acoustic delay, repetition, rupture, and mutation, they proliferate multiple meanings that interrupt and dissonate prevailing discursive formations/inscriptions.

Despite enacting the severance of sound from the body through his use of sound technologies, Compton's turntable poetry exerts a phenomenology of presence as he manipulates his voice by scratching, spinning, and splicing it with sounds in a practice that echoes the materiality of what Antwi calls the "unfinished yet lived-touched sensibility" of dub poetry. Antwi's understanding of the materiality of dub extends to the manner in which it is read/heard and felt by the audience: "[T]he poem travels in your mind, reminding us that what is done here is not complete in its moments of performance, it takes material route, requires contingency of reception" (72). The sensibility Antwi identifies can be traced in the silent space of Evanson's "The African All of It," which amplifies her audience's sensorial implication in the performance: each audience member's (fractured, incomplete, unfinished) interior responses become a part of a larger poetic dialogue within the silent space of the performance, further blurring lines between self and other (Gilroy 79). Dub poetry's "unfinished yet lived-touched sensibility" can also be traced in Compton's description of handling the dub plates, which creates a contact zone between the body and the disembodied voice—"my fingers touch a physical impression of my voice" (*After* 192)— whilst de Couto scratches the threshold between them. The tactile nature of the dub plate expressed here underscores a sense of temporal erosion: dub plates degrade more quickly than vinyl records, but are cheaper and quicker to press. Compton notes that it is "a kind of auto-destructive art . . . the acetate corrodes rapidly after continued contact with the oils and

acids naturally found on human fingers. . . . I think of this impermanence as part of the performance, yet another echo of instability, mutability, and temporality" (192). This embrace of impermanence is compatible with Burroughs' belief in the revolutionary potential of sound technologies like the tape recorder: according to Hayles, "[t]he inscription of sound in a durable medium suited his belief that the word is material, while its malleability meant that interventions were possible that could radically change or eradicate the record" (91). Compton's use of the dub plate to remix and "cut up" sound extends this sense of malleable interventionism. If we think of recordings as permanent imprints of something temporary or fleeting in nature, Compton's temporizing of the permanent through his use of dub plates as positionable postbody reverses this process: the body corrodes, destroys, and degrades the postbody incarnation of his voice.

As noted above, Compton's goal of dislocating or decentering the body in the performance is achieved through placing the material poem—on the tables, in the crate—between audience and performer. This is an attempt to create "a different expression of agency" and subvert the "consumption of racialized bodies . . . a central part of the capitalist spectacle, [in which] consumers favour 'authentic' racialized creators . . . seen as less than artists, but instead as individuals who embody their culture intuitively and without meta-artistic consideration" (*After* 193-94). Compton's repositioning of artist and art-object works to denaturalize the "binary opposition between '(black) orality' and '(white) literacy,'" which figures musical and oral forms as "immediate, authentic" modes of Black expression (Lordi 18).[11] The poem also achieves a kind of geographical debordering, challenging the notion of authenticity by marshalling the processes of defamiliarization and deterritorialization. In "The Reinventing Wheel," Compton recites:

> I echo New York back
> like a code-cracker.
> Reality hacker. A Crusoe.
> Cuts cued.
> I intervene
> by plugging in
> code, tapping
> Babylonian routes. My cuneiform. (*Performance* 108)

Hyphenation syncopates the lines of the poem and offers a blended and unifying space, inverting the breath in a sprung rhythm. Rather than viewing US cultural influences as colonizing Canada, a common perception, Compton positions North American culture within frameworks of

defamiliarization and communication, as he echoes "New York back like a code-cracker," able to read, respond to, explore, and penetrate—or "hack"— the language of the American metropolis. I turn again to Antwi's essay "Dub Poetry as a Black Atlantic Body-Archive" to elucidate the transboundary power of dub:

> [T]he cultural, aesthetic, and political horizons of dub poetry do not begin or end at national borders, nor do they assign a privileged, mediating position to one nation. Here, in its collaborative interdependence across multiple borders (temporal, national, 'performance/poetry/politrix/roots/reggae,' of textuality and orality, of African and Western cultural traditions), dub stresses its geohistorical matrix. (71; Antwi quotes from d'bi young's *art on black*)

Compton articulates dub poetry's dexterous border-crossing capabilities by harnessing symbols of inscription, "plugging in code" and "tapping Babylonian routes," the "cuneiform" of the final quoted line. Evanson's "The African All of It" also harnesses this symbol of inscription, asserting: "Whatever your appearance I am listening / Be it air or cuneiform I am listening" (147). Here, Evanson both listens to sounds that are communicated through air (or breath), and subverts the binary between visual and oral modalities by *listening* to, or subvocalizing, a system of writing inscribed into stone or clay. Additionally, the scratching of records is reminiscent of the activity of scratching cuneiform on stone, which both Compton and Evanson use to articulate a heightened critical receptivity to sound.

A synaesthetic understanding of cuneiform is uncovered by Compton's use of the ideogram. Compton conjures the *vévé* for Legba in a number of works, including his long poem "Rune," collected in *Performance Bond*. In Haitian voodoo, Legba opens a metaphysical doorway for communion between humans and spirits, facilitating communication in all human languages (*Bluesprint* 274)—providing a contact zone. "Rune" features a conversation, subtitled "Vévé," between two modes of recording technology, personified as Analogue and Digital, in which Compton references Barbadian poet and theorist Kamau Brathwaite's contention that voodoo marks the emergence of an Afro-Caribbean language "after the Middle Passage blotted the African languages out" (*Performance* 116).[12] About the *vévé* signifying Legba, Analogue states: "It's magic. It's more than language, it's sorcery, or worship. It's a portal between worlds" (118). There is a tension perhaps between the longing for "an ephemeral language that can drift away in the wind or be eaten by birds" expressed in Compton's "Rune" and his embrace of sound technologies, which preserve and reproduce sound (121).[13] This tension is partially resolved by Compton's use of the dub plate, which corrodes as it

is handled and played, and by his experimentation with the processes of deterritorialization and defamiliarization, which estrange works from the cultural-spatial specificities in which they were originally produced. In his essay "The Reinventing Wheel: On Blending the Poetry of Cultures through Hip Hop Turntablism," Compton contextualizes this tension through the use of a postbody poetic and his own self-referencing:

> The idea is not to break, or even to preserve, but to repeat; and to celebrate repetition. . . . Where is agency? Perhaps in the doubling: I enjoy the idea of transforming my voice (myself, that is) into a static disc to be manipulated by the later me, the next me, from above. The remix is a way of—in one moment and one performance—re-enacting the manipulation of history and source culture. In *The Reinventing Wheel*, this happens in the body of one man made into two voices by the turntables.

Compton's schizophonophilic experiments with the dub plate can be interpreted as an effort to externalize, rewrite, and recodify prevailing discursive formations through a process he likens to *détournement*, in which the pre-existing artistic (cultural, historical) sources lose their importance in the creation of a new, meaningful ensemble (Debord 55). In the poem, Compton addresses the generative effect of splicing:

> The word is the body
> of Osiris, it's spliced. A communion
> is happening worldwide, a whirlwind
> of performances, black English, black expropriation
> scattered to the four corners. Every ear shall here.
> The words of the prophets are written in graf.
> James Brown never said, "Say it loud,
> I'm mixed-race in a satellite of the U.S. and proud."
> (*Performance* 106)

Compton's appeal for the representation of oblique kinds of Blackness—his Afroperipheralism—is articulated in this ironic utilization of African American icon James Brown, and he characterizes his art here as defamiliarizing a culture of identity politics, supplanting Brown's "black" with a hybrid and psychogeographic locus. The line "every ear shall here" phonetically combines place and sound, splicing sonic and spatial dialectics and suggesting a diasporic invocation of Blackness, "scattered to the four corners," audible everywhere. This conceptual blending of aurality and geography is analogous to Schafer's understanding of a landscape able to speak with the human voice, but Compton completes the dialogic transaction by highlighting the processes of aural receptivity to such a voice, suggesting the antiphonal impulse. Further, the ear becomes a portal for the

entry of "black English, black expropriation" in the spliced body; Compton's invocation of Osiris, the Egyptian God of the afterlife and resurrection, casts language as a metaphysical hinterland, positioning Black sounds as a revolutionary, transformative, and transportive sonic lexicon. Compton's characterization of this recasting of his poetry within a new ensemble "in light of later dialectical turns" (*After* 195) as a process of *détournement* is also interesting because his choice of language suggests that other situationist paradigm, the *dérive*. Like the Burroughs/Gysin cut-up method, situationist Guy Debord's art practices have influenced digital remixing. The psychogeographic text-art project *Mémoires* (1959), for example, is famous for its sandpaper cover, signifying the use of found objects and the abrasive textured-textuality of the work, akin to de Couto's method of scratching spoken samples as commentary. Thus splicing becomes a tool for liberation, freeing the Black voice and Black subjectivity from conventional sensory, spatial, and temporal boundaries.

Schafer's work offers a paradigm for the blending of sonic and geographic landscapes, in which sound technologies enact a severance of the human voice from the body, so that the voice emerges from the landscape itself. In Compton's work, the sounding line travels across North American landscapes and beyond, exerting a phenomenology of presence through electroacoustic amplification and simultaneity. Schafer's predictions that these postbody projections, as I call them, would have implications for human subjectivity were well founded, but not necessarily negative, and they in fact can be liberatory. Compton's exercises in schizophonophilia reveal the postbody voice as a resource in the rewriting and reconstitution of inherited and oppressive notions of identity and subjectivity: counter-hegemonic affirmation through acoustic intervention. Dub poetry in Canada acts as a contact zone or blended conceptual space in which to reimagine subject positions, and further complicates a phenomenology of presence through the spectre of the ghost in sound. The ghost in the track is a manifestation of the postbody, released from the social, spatial, and temporal boundaries, the usual earthly rules that must be negotiated by the body.

In the work of Compton and Evanson, sonic inscription is represented as a sort of cuneiform, further demolishing binary oppositions between the oral and the written, and underscoring the materiality of the positionable, postbody art-object. Like sound recordings, texts are quasi-material: half artifact, half ghost, requiring human imagination to interpret orthographic markings and invest them with meaning. This interstitial threshold acts as a Legba-like

vortex or contact zone in which radical, paratactical experiments of identity can be tried, forging an innovative and formally hybrid space. Ultimately, the versatile ambulation of the ghost in the track challenges geographical and historical paradigms that work to enclose and encode Black Canada.

NOTES

1 Auditory culture develops from the natural world, local industry, percussive sounds, the human voice, or the proliferation of sound technologies (Collins 169-70).

2 Talking about these allusions, Compton states: "I'm plugging myself into those . . . revolutionary inheritances and they don't always fit, and I'm trying to turn them in some kind of way that makes them fit more" ("Reinventing" 00:30:13-24).

3 Compton quotes from Frederick Douglass' *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) ("We meant to reach the north—and the north was our Canaan") to evidence this connection between the North, freedom, and "psalmic" Canaan (*After* 15).

4 Guy Debord defines *détournement* as "the reuse of preexisting artistic elements in a new ensemble," governed by two "fundamental laws": "the loss of importance of each detourned autonomous element . . . and at the same time the organization of another meaningful ensemble" (55).

5 Donna J. Haraway reminds us that the cyborg is "a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (5).

6 For example, Schafer writes that schizophonia is "supposed to be a nervous word" (47).

7 In particular, the essay details a performance in which Compton mixes a voice recording of "The Reinventing Wheel" with other recorded samples. This version is the "Rolling Wave Mix," arranged on four turntables.

8 Evanson speaking at a performance of "The African All of It" on October 26, 2013, at the Vancouver Writers Fest.

9 The analysis that follows is based on my experience as an audience member at Evanson's 2013 performance at the Vancouver Writers Fest. A later performance of the poem, at the Words Aloud Spoken Word Festival in Durham, Ontario, in November 2014, can be viewed online for reference (00:30:48-32:45).

10 In the recorded version of the piece, from her album *Language for Gods* (2012), Evanson sings the verses, and this silence is filled by soft percussive instrumentals.

11 Pratt posits that the "redemption of the oral" is a function of the safe house (40).

12 Using Derrida's work on the trace, Wolfe explains that the "living present" is "haunted by the ghosts or specters of what will have been once any kind of archive, analog or digital— or the most fundamental archive of all, language itself" (293).

13 In conversation, Evanson expresses a similar desire to Analogue's longing for an ephemeral language "able to say things we can't think of" (*Performance* 121). She challenges herself to use language "as a launching pad, and [to] kind of leave it . . . can I create work that can transcend language, even while using it?" (Evanson and Kellough).

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